



VT-HEC Expectations for Ensuring Quality of Professional Development Activities

The Vermont Higher Education Collaborative (VT-HEC) recognizes the importance of continuous assessment and refinement of our practices to ensure quality across all our professional development activities. In this effort we have looked to a variety of sources of research for guidance on the principles and practices that will best ensure our learning opportunities and supports consistently result in the outcomes they are intended to achieve. These areas of research include:

- How People Learn: the latest research on the brain and learning,
- Adult development, teaching and learning,
- Design and delivery of effective professional development,
- Changing systems and cultures in schools,
- Effective practices in: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Collaboration;
- Utilizing technology in instruction, practice, assessment and collaboration

From these various research perspectives some common themes are emerging that overlap and reinforce each other. These themes and principles inform our expectations about what quality professional development looks like. The VT-HEC expects these findings, principles and practices to be applied in the design and delivery of the professional development opportunities and efforts it sponsors.

Effective Professional Development – that results in the transfer of skills and knowledge into the work place includes these components based on the objectives of the professional development being offered:

1. **Knowledge and Theory** - Mastery of the theory, content and concepts is critical to consistent application and the problem solving that comes with it. To develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application.
2. **Modeling and Demonstration** - training needs to involve multiple demonstrations and modeling of the new knowledge and skills, ideally, shown in settings that approximate the workplace.
3. **Targeted Practice** – Practice is critical and is commonly underestimated; it also assumes the use of ongoing formative assessment, frequent feedback and clear learning objectives.
4. **Coaching/Peer Coaching** –Peer coaching here is a group collaboratively working and supporting each other in the planning, developing and implementing the new learning in the work setting. It may be easier to think about as a collective effort to transfer the new knowledge and skill to make significant changes in the school, classroom or work setting that is sustained

over time. ***Adding sufficient practice and collaborative application opportunities make a dramatic difference in the successful transfer of new knowledge and skills into the work setting.***

Teaching & Learning Principles

- 1. Respect for Learners** – Participants in VT-HEC programs are adults who are active decision makers and learners in all aspects of their lives. They have a history of learning and experience which needs to be recognized, respected and taken into account. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught. Numerous research experiments, for example, demonstrate the persistence of preexisting understandings among older students even after a new model has been taught that contradicts the previous understanding.
- 2. Accountability** - Adult learners are accountable first to themselves. It is their responsibility to engage in the work and participate in evaluating their progress and mastery of course objectives. Educators must do all they can to be accountable to learners by conducting needs assessments, preparing achievement-based objectives and designing feasible learning programs and evaluation systems that measure progress, mastery and the application of course objectives. The use of frequent formative assessment helps make students' thinking visible to themselves, their peers, and their teacher.
- 3. Immediacy, Relevance and Congruence** - All learners need to perceive the usefulness of new information. Because time is a valuable commodity, studying those skills and theories that will make a tangible difference to them becomes crucial. If they do not see the relevance of the content, the learners quickly determine that they do not need to know it.
- 4. Learner Engagement** - Effective education is an ongoing process best accomplished in a setting where there is an exchange of ideas and opinions. Learning should be designed to engage students in active, collegial learning that allows them to try out ideas in their workplace and make sense of what they are learning in meaningful ways. Students working together to understand and apply the content is an important and effective strategy.
- 5. Depth of Understanding** - Some subject matter must be taught in depth; providing many examples in which the same concept is at work and providing a firm foundation of factual knowledge. This requires that superficial coverage of all topics in a subject area must be replaced with in-depth coverage of fewer topics that allows key concepts in that discipline to be understood, practiced and applied.
- 6. Better Learners** - Every effort should support the participants to become better learners. Learning how to be better learners can be just as important as the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. A "metacognitive" approach to instruction can help students learn to take control of their own learning by defining learning goals, organizing the content in meaningful ways and monitoring their progress in achieving them.
- 7. Learner Diversity**- Educators must understand the conditions and actions which would tend to discriminate against students on the basis of sex, race, color, creed, age, sexual orientation, disability, or national origin, and take proactive steps to address discrimination. Educators working with children in educational systems must have an understanding of the laws related to student and educator rights and responsibilities as well as how these rights are applied in current state and federal laws and regulations.