Chapter 13

Developing Academic Writing Skills of In–Service and Pre–Service Teachers: Approaches, Outcomes, and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on services created and implemented by a writing center in a large public university in the USA to assist to pre-service teachers and in-service teachers with academic writing as professional development activities while they are pursuing their degrees. Academic writing is a style of written communication that has become acceptable in institutions of higher education (Craswell, 2005). The services include: 1) a series of workshops to teach the requirements of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010), 2) a series of workshops around conceptualizing a research project and submitting a paper to a conference, 3) writing support circles, and 4) individual consultations. The chapter provides a description of each of this service, including the purpose and the design, highlights outcomes of these professional development services, and discusses challenges in its design and implementation.

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Writing can be a miserable chore, a difficult undertaking, and a challenge that produces growth and satisfaction – all at the same time. (Rocco, 2011, p. 3)

INTRODUCTION

A professional is a person who has extensive knowledge base and training in the subject area and also seeks for opportunities to continue developing new knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the area (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In addition to people’s motivation for and interest in continuous learning, new technologies, innovation, competition, career progression, or a salary increase are just a few factors that might prompt people to improve their knowledge base. Professional development refers to a number of activities that foster the development of additional skills and experiences that could lead to a career progress. Professional development is a form of activity in an organization directed to introducing and teaching the staff newly designed programs, changes in the company policies, or new competencies to ensure effectiveness and productivity of employees and ultimately the organization (Gilley, Eggland, & Gilley, 2002). Employees could also seek for professional development opportunities on their own, for example by reading, attending webinars or seminars, joining professional communities, or learning a software by trial and error. Professional development activities could be narrowly focused and target gaps in knowledge or skills that demand immediate improvement (e.g., skills training, literacy training, or retraining; Desimone, Werner, & Harris, 2002). They could also be long-term oriented and focus on present and future needs of employees (e.g., coaching, mentoring, or counseling).

Professional development has become “an integral part of the life of schools and teachers” that promotes implementation of educational reforms and improvement in schools (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 702). Professional development initiatives foster development and improvement in pedagogical knowledge and skills, understanding of new standards, policies, or reforms, understanding of new generations of children and their parents and of the demands of the global environment where the students live and will work in the future. Professional development activities have also become tools for providing graduates of teacher education programs effective transition into the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1998). For more than two decades, researchers have been investigating different aspects of the concept of professional development, including the history of teacher professional development (Desimone, 2009, 2011; Grimmett, 2014; Guskey, 2003), its content (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Ost, 1976), or its relation to teacher change (Little, 1989) and to school reform (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Little, 1993; Thompson & Zeuli, 1999), to name a few.

Professional development opportunities for teachers are provided by different entities, including schools, state and local governmental agencies, libraries, and universities. This chapter reports on services created and implemented by a writing center at a large public university in the USA to assist pre-service and in-service teachers with academic writing as professional development activities while they are pursuing their degrees. Academic writing is a style of written communication that has become acceptable in institutions of higher education (Craswell, 2005). This writing has specific expectations for the audience, mechanics, logic and organization, support of an argument, critical thinking, and use of literature (White, 2000). Teachers are responsible for developing writing skills of their students (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; National Commission on Writing for America’s Families, Schools, and Colleges, 2003,