Going Online? Professional Development for Teachers in Inclusive Settings

Effective professional development for educators focuses on attitudes, knowledge and skills that will assist all students (Pryor, 2003). Teachers' readiness for the profession occurs in different stages.Training for teachers given before they enter the profession is called pre-service , while training that occurs after they become teachers is called in-service. In-service training can take place in different locations. All public school teachers are required to complete 100 hours of professional development every five years. The words in-service workshops, professional development, and staff development are often used interchangeably to identify opportunities for continuing education for teachers (Pryor, 2003).

Educational reform has had a major influence in challenging the ways schools view the role of training and workshops for their teachers. No Child Left Behind, enacted in 2001, stresses the need for schools to place a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom by 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). The U.S. Department of Education (2003) reported a 35 percent increase in funding for schools and districts to seek out, train, and be able to retain good teachers in every classroom. An aspect to consider in creating effective professional development programs is the wide range of training received by teachers. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) reported more than 50,000 people enter the teaching profession annually without the necessary background or training for their jobs. In their report: "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future", the National Commission on Teaching and America's future (1998) noted that no more than 75% of America's teachers can be considered fully qualified and prepared to teach, lacking readiness in the area of child development and teaching methodologies. Foster (2004) explained that many teachers feel all students can achieve , but some are not sure as to how to assist students of diverse needs and feel unqualified to provide for the individual needs that may arise in the classrooms. Due to the increase of diverse needs in the classrooms, schools have an urgent need to assist teachers in understanding diversity and the use of collaborative approaches with colleagues (Tomlinson, 1999).

An important challenge is for schools to provide training that will prepare and support teachers and staff in feeling comfortable and knowledgeable when implementing

educational experiences for students with a wide range of needs (Sullivan & Glanz, 2000). Training in an area of need that will improve teachers' daily practice can help in their motivation to become fully engaged in their training experiences. Adult learners tend to personalize their learning and want to be able to connect training to real life experiences (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddle, 2000), and in today's inclusive classrooms collaboration between general and special educators is essential.

Opportunities for teachers to work together and learn new skills is usually provided in the form of professional development at their schools. Traditional classes offer some limitations such as scheduling issues, physical location, and attendance rate affecting the way general and special education teachers learn together and collaborte. Online seminars and workshops can provide educators with the opportunity to cross boundaries that may limit their participation in collaborative professional development. What role does technology play as a medium to assist educators working in inclusive settings? Can an online course assist educators in creating a constructive approach to learning? What are some of the challenges when developing and implementing an online professional development course?