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Adult development and career stage theories: Their application to staff development of teachers in midcareer

Margaret Mary Weigel
University of Northern Iowa

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Abstract

State policies, local policies, A Nation at Risk. The Carnegie Task Force and the Holmes Group are among the wave of school reports and reforms that have caught schools in a cross-fire of conflicting demands to be more effective. The approaches of school reform range from state-mandated teacher accountability programs, professionalized training, philosophical questions about schooling's structure, mission and methods. The "second wave" reforms have stressed the need to enhance teacher morale, motivation, and participation (Mitchell & Peters, 1988).

ADULT DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER STAGE THEORIES: THEIR APPLICATION TO STAFF DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS IN MIDCAREER

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Margaret Mary Weigel

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Norman McCumsey

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Date Approved

Adviser/Director of Research Paper

Robert H. Decker

4-4-90
Date Approved

Second Reader of Research Paper

Dale R. Jackson

4/7/90
Date Received

Head, Department of Educational Administration and Counseling

State policies, local policies, A Nation at Risk. The Carnegie Task Force and the Holmes Group are among the wave of school reports and reforms that have caught schools in a cross-fire of conflicting demands to be more effective. The approaches of school reform range from state-mandated teacher accountability programs, professionalized training, philosophical questions about schooling's structure, mission and methods. The "second wave" reforms have stressed the need to enhance teacher morale, motivation, and participation (Mitchell & Peters, 1988).

Evans (1989) claims the "second wave" reforms, which emphasized teachers themselves and stress the need to enhance their morale, motivation, and participation, are closer to the immediate practical problems of schools than earlier efforts of reform. These reforms are based on sound theory about organizational behavior; however, they lack an appreciation of teachers' changing characteristics and needs over the course of their careers. Looming behind the reform movements and debates about schools is a demographic change among teachers. Most elementary and secondary teachers are just entering middle age. Their average age is 41. Forty-eight percent of all teachers

have taught at least 15 years and 27% have taught for 20 years or more. Eighty-one percent of our teachers are tenured (Feistritzer, 1985). Teachers tend to remain in their current school district; 50% have taught in only one or two schools. Teaching is still an occupation for women. Seventy-six percent of public school elementary teachers are women (Feistritzer, 1986).

Data on job satisfaction for teachers is mixed. The 1985 Carnegie Report, Feistritzer's 1986 analysis of the National Center for Education Information Survey, and the 1987 Metropolitan Life Survey indicate an overwhelming majority of teachers love to teach and are satisfied with almost all aspects of their teaching careers. Even though 81% of teachers are at least somewhat satisfied with their job, nearly half of them say if they had to do it over again they would not go into teaching. This compares to 13% of teachers in 1983 who said they would not want to become a teacher again. According to Feistritzer (1985), these statistics are relatively high compared with the 1966 report when only 9.1% of teachers said they would not chose a teaching career if they had to do it over again.

Data from these reports, along with Kottkamp, Provenzo and Cohn's (1984) follow up of Lortie's (1964) sociological study, indicate overall satisfaction rates remain relatively high. However, slight declines occurred in levels of teachers' satisfaction with both job and work place. A number of researchers (Evans, 1989; Kottkamp, Provenzo and Cohn, 1964; Krupp, 1987; and Lortie, 1986) conclude trends toward greater age, more experience, and more formal education may contribute to some disenchantment among teachers. Evans suggests changes in perception may reflect typical dilemmas of midcareer that are common to veteran professionals generally. Therefore, knowledge of adult developmental characteristics and life span research is essential to understanding teachers' morale, performance problems, and to implementing effective efforts at school improvement.

A trend has begun to emerge toward applying a growing understanding of adult development to adult education. Christiansen, Burke, Fessler and Hagstrom (1983), Krupp (1987), and Levine (1989) represent some of the researchers who believe an understanding of adult development and the stages of teachers' growth will strengthen performance in the classroom.

Christiansen et al.'s (1983) review of literature, citing Oja, suggests three basic models of adult development: (1) the biological/maturational models of Freud, Gessel, Allport, and Rosseau; (2) developmental-task models which include the "life-age" theories of Gould and Levinson which include roles, tasks, and coping behaviors typical at certain times of life; and (3) developmental stage models of Harvey, Hunt and Schroder, Kohlberg, and Loevinger describing the growth of personality and intellect as a sequence of hierarchial stages.

It is important to keep in mind that research in the area of adult development, its application to staff development and school development, is in its infancy. According to Christiansen et al. (1983), and Krupp (1987), many more studies are needed. However, researchers have spent a number of years studying the intellectual and emotional growth of children. Much of what is important to know and do about supporting adults in schools comes from what we already know about children's development. Educators know it is important to take account of the whole child, and competent educators recognize the relationship between cognitive and social growth. In the same way, we must attend to the professional and personal lives of adults.

Teachers' career growth can be viewed as a corollary of adult growth (Christiansen et al., 1983; Krupp, 1987; and Levine, 1987, 1989a, 1989b).

Life cycle theorists describe and explain age-related change from birth to death, study both the person and the person's environment in order to understand the evolution of development. On the broadest level phase, theorists describe the ongoing nature of growth by identifying specific turning points. They are interested in determining concerns, problems, and tasks which are common to most or all adults at various times in their lives. An attempt is made to explain why those concerns, problems, and tasks are more prominent at one time of life rather than another.

Erik Erikson (cited in Levine, 1989a) was one of the earliest developmental psychologists to deal with the phases of adulthood. Development was described as series of turning points or crises. He described three turning points which take place in adulthood: intimacy vs. isolation, which occurs between the ages of 20-40; generativity vs. self-absorption, which occurs between the ages of 40-60; and integrity vs. despair, which occurs between the ages of 60-65.

Levinson (cited in Levine, 1989a) expanded Erikson's work by identifying specific tasks that adults must accomplish as they go through adulthood (Levine, 1989a). Levinson also describes development as an interactive process which continues throughout life. Key life tasks, according to Levinson's theory, indicate growth and major psychological conflicts which initiate growth in Erikson's life cycle theory.

Levinson's (cited in Levine, 1989a) research focused on men's development. The life cycle is divided into four areas: childhood and adolescence, early adulthood (ages 17-45), middle adulthood (ages 49-65), and later adulthood (age 60+). The task of men during the first part of early adulthood revolve around leaving family, exploring career options, and developing relationships. During the second phase of early adulthood, men attempt to advance their work and establish a place for themselves in society. Ages 40-65 are classified as middle adulthood. This is the time men begin to deal with paradoxes and polarities of life, struggle with their mortality, and attempt to build a legacy. Issues of health and retirement become prominent during late adulthood (Levinson, Dorrow, Klein & McKee, 1978).

Roger Gould (cited in Levine, 1989a) also identified a series of life phases similar to Levinson's. Gould identifies sets of assumptions that adults carry with them throughout life. Issues were identified which preoccupy adults at different ages and the feeling or tone of each phase of development was described. According to Krupp (1987), Gould's idea that issues change over the life cycle and a dominant conflict is the medium through which other issues are addressed parallels Erikson's theory.

Levine (1987, 1989a, 1989b) applies the theories of Erikson, Levinson and Gould to adults in schools. She suggests implications of a life cycle perspective for understanding and responding to teachers and administrators. Erikson's phase theory highlights the conflicts and concerns of adults. This offers school personnel insights into their own lives and the lives of their colleagues. Thus, conditions can be tailored to the developmental needs of the group or the individual. Levinson's phase theory gives more detailed clues for educators to use in their efforts to cope with developmental issues.

Gould's (cited in Levine, 1989a) life cycle theory can also be used as a guide. Adults who work in

schools can begin to explore their own assumptions and work to understand the assumptions of colleagues. Levine (1989a) suggests this theory can be applied when identifying the key terms and subjects educators use in their work. This can protect against misunderstanding of terms used within a school and is fundamental to collegiality and continuous school improvement.

Krupp (1987 and Levine (1987, 1989a, 1989b) have applied life span research to teachers which emphasizes the school as a context for adult growth. Levine has outlined the works of Erik Erikson, Roger Gould, Daniel Levinson (cited in Levine, 1989a), and other life cycle theorists. She raises questions about developmental issues, career growth and staff development of teachers. Levine posits career stages on the basis of case studies.

Judy-Arin Krupp's (1987) development-task model provides helpful perspectives on adult and teacher development. Krupp's model is similar to Levinson's (cited in Krupp, 1987). Her life age theory depicts adulthood as a time of continual change. Growth is described as a sequence of overlapping stages.

Krupp's study between 1979 and 1986 sought to determine the developmental themes of various ages. In

a recent review of this research, she focuses on the second half of life in an attempt to determine how school personnel utilize these tasks to increase productivity and what interventions educators have tried which link developmental needs of employees to school goals.

Krupp (1987) presents four major themes or tasks of midlife and suggests ways of using this knowledge. The four themes are: de-illusionment, which ushers in midlife for many people; individuation, which describes the constant search for self and the relation of that self to the world; career; and family.

Career-oriented women and men work to create their career dream throughout their 30s. In midlife, successful adults face the illusion under which they functioned. Successful midlifers begin to reevaluate their priorities after they realize gaining their goal did not solve all life's problems and those who fail to gain their ideals begin to question their abilities, sense of self and the future. Sometimes these people blame others for not recognizing their potential. These midlifers also reevaluate priorities.

De-illusionment links termination and initiation. Adults recognize they will never do certain things.

This may be accompanied by bitterness and grief and, at the same time, the new realization may result in freedom and creativity.

De-illusionment can also result in poor adjustment if people focus on themselves as failures, or talk constantly of how to succeed while unconsciously seeking defeat, or if they fantasize or postpone facing life's illusions. Chronic depression results when these people spend the second half of life searching for an unattainable goal.

Krupp (1987) has suggestions for administrators and staff developers in assisting teachers in this developmental stage. Employee productivity raises as the stress lessens. Leaders can offer support. Women in their late 30s and early 40s often need opportunities to expand their roles and may need to be encouraged to try ideas. Personnel struggling at this stage also need help in seeing options. They need to be encouraged and sent to professional meetings, visit other schools and teachers' classrooms, or be put on committees to brainstorm changes in curriculum.

The 40s also bring an opportunity for a second growth when the individual attempts to reassess and reorder their past. Jung (cited in Krupp, 1987) coined

this reassessment and reordering individuation. According to Krupp, the individuation process brings about four polarities during the time a person is questioning and redefining the self and how it relates to the world. The first polarity is young and old. Krupp refers to midlife people as the sandwich generation because they feel caught between the young and the old. The second polarity is destructive-creative. Adults not only create but also destroy. Individuation requires taking responsibility for the need to gradually accept one's own destructive side, to confront one's inner faults, and to accept these faults.

Adults who have admitted their destructiveness generally emerge with three different views. Some become laissez-faire employees, some react to destructiveness by expressing generativity as an overbearing concern for others, and some balance achievement through effort with understanding, sensitivity, and caring. When adults integrate the destructive-creative duality, they become more generative (Erikson's model). They also become more tolerant and understanding (Krupp, 1987; Levine, 1989a).

School leaders can assist individuals dealing with this duality by building these adults up whenever possible. One way is to express verbally and in writing how the individual teacher's skills enrich the school and tell others about their expertise. If the person needs critical feedback, meet individually with him or her to develop a plan of growth.

The third polarity of individuation is attached-separate. Midlife adults seek alone time to foster growth and adaptation. One way school leaders could use this knowledge as a motivational tool is by providing personnel with a place and time for solitude, perhaps a walled-off section of the teachers' lounge.

The fourth polarity is male-female. During midlife, adults integrate their nurturing and assertive tendencies; men become more nurturant while continuing to assert, and women become more assertive and continue to be nurturing.

Knowledge of this motivation tool can be useful for school leaders and the school improvement. Men who want to nurture will need opportunities to nurture students. Assertive women enjoy developing new curricula, starting new programs, or fighting for the

rights of students. If their ideas support school goals, they should be supported and encouraged.

Women may also combine assertiveness with career disenchantment. It would be helpful for leaders to listen to their critical statements, determine if the criticism has validity, and clarify if implementation of the suggestions would improve the learning environment. If so, the employee should receive assistance in bringing suggestions to fruition.

The third major theme or task of midlife is career. Adults who worked hard in their 20s and 30s often feel disillusioned about their jobs. Men and career-oriented women begin to question time spent in advancing their career at the expense of family and self. Career begins to assume a less important role in the life of these adults. They may execute the job with an expertise drawn from the past and they put their emotional energy into family or leisure pursuits. Some may do as little as possible and work becomes a means to earn money more than a vehicle for personal satisfaction. Adults who adjust poorly to this polarity often become on-the-job retirees.

Another career-related theme that emerges is that women who focused on family the first half of life

return to work. Those who have difficulty removing the illusion that others will always need them and have not learned to include themselves in the ethic of care have more difficulty adjusting to the school environment.

Women who focused on family the first half of life often have a low self-concept. Those with healthy self-concepts adjust quickly, are self-motivated and enthusiastic workers (Krupp, 1987).

Career is also a career-related theme at midlife. Many midlife adults, especially men, feel a loss of control over their bodies, children and jobs. Some of these men gain control by dominating committee work or overruling decisions made within the school. This brings about more dissatisfaction among others within the school.

Evans (1989) also suggests most problems midcareer teachers encounter and present are typical dilemmas of midcareer. These teachers are prone to de-motivation, loss of enthusiasm, and level of performance. The career growth course flattens out, especially for those who do not move into new jobs or new roles. Levine (1989a) suggests we are dealing with the four major themes Levinson identified as well as with other realities and polarities. In the work place, these

shifts in attitudes are reflected in: a shift in the primacy of the work role towards personal roles; a perception of reduced career opportunity, a growing focus on material job rewards, loss of experience of success--one's competence is taken for granted and feedback of all kinds is reduced, a growing isolation and experiencing a unique dilemma because the above issues are rarely shared or acknowledged. Teaching is complex, draining, and isolating and the problem becomes more complex in midcareer (Jackson, 1968; Krupp, 1987; Leiberman & Millar, 1984; Levine 1987, 1989a; and Sarason, 1982).

Levine (1989a) notes, citing Phillip Jackson, that the elementary classroom teacher engages in as many as 1,000 interpersonal interchanges each day. There are 200-300 interpersonal exchanges each hour and the number remains fairly stable from hour to hour, although the context and sequence of events can not be accurately predicted or preplanned. The classroom is busy, and rapid changes and multiple roles are required of the teacher. Sarason (1982) says teaching requires constant giving of oneself and provides little in the way of rewards. There is a sharp disparity between giving and getting.

For all its interaction, teaching is cellular--it occurs in isolation from peers because daily schedules, lunch duties, recess duties, 15-minute lunch breaks, and few preparation times for elementary teachers offer few opportunities for interaction with one another. Teaching breeds loneliness (Levine, 1989a, 1989b), and denies recognition commonly available to other professionals. Furthermore, Raphael (1985) concludes daily tensions wear teachers down because no attention is paid to the interaction between the teacher as a flexible human being and the institutional setting in which he or she works.

Barth (1980) claims institutions, like individuals, pass through critical life stages. Schools, according to Evans (1989), are increasingly ill-situated to reduce the stresses of teachers because as organizations, they themselves are so stressed. The disparity between giving and getting also applies to schools, where high demand and low support is a chronic fact of life. Barth also suggests we have passed through a decade where the macro realm of public policy is important. Schools have contended with relentless expansion of their roles. A few examples of this are: rapid growth in curriculum, greater responsibility for

the overall care and development of children, and growing numbers of students who come from poor and single-parent and blended families. Some schools across the nation are also suffering the strains of organizational decline. When this occurs, employee morale, job satisfaction, and performance usually deteriorate. This creates further problems because the school organization most likely will be unable to attend to conditions that are not conducive to professional growth (Evans, 1989).

However, Barth (1980) says the macro reality of public policy is important because we have learned much about the systemic constraints on schools. He also maintains "macro talk is counsel of despair" and the "source of most of the problems that afflict schools lies within the schools themselves--in the quality of their human relationships. and the source of most solutions resides within the schools as well" (Barth, 1980, p. 219).

Schools will need to focus on their ongoing development of human resources. Staff development literature suggests the time and content of professional development programs should be planned with sensitivity to the evolution of teachers' needs

and concerns (Christiansen et al., 1983). Barth (1985) maintains relationships among adults within a school has much to do with the success and quality of a school. He also suggests "everything that happens with teachers in a school has potential for promoting teachers' personal and professional growth" (p. 147). The theories of Erikson, Krupp, Levinson*, and others reflect the importance of certain needs in adult lives: to share with others, to engage in a meaningful occupation, and to understand oneself.

Staff development researchers have begun identifying effective inservice strategies at each stage of a teacher's career. This research is still in its infancy; however, suggestions have been given for inservice education.

Generally, career-stage researchers suggest a relatively structured inservice for beginning teachers consisting of basic, technical on-site support. After teaching two to five years, teachers need continued on-site assistance from colleagues and consultants, and workshops and visits to other schools. Teachers in career stages respond to more nondirective, self-initiated inservice programs. For example, they

may chose to participate in degree programs or conferences.

One should note a teacher's middle years are variously defined in literature. It is sometimes based upon the number of years the person has been in the profession. In this context, a teacher's middle years are variously defined as the 4th to the 20th year. Using this approach, researchers suggest the following progression in a teacher's career. Beginning teachers experience uncertainty and trepidation and after the fifth year there is a period of building security. Some call everything after the fifth year the mature stage. Maturing teachers test their perceptions of education and of themselves as teachers. Studies cited by Christiansen et al. (1983) show teachers of 20 to 30 years' experience expressed discouragement and dissatisfaction with teaching; some want to leave the profession and complain of professional boredom.

Staff developers must be aware of the stages of teachers' career growth. This may be the key to improving inservice growth. The stages of teachers' careers parallel findings about adult development. Researchers have described teachers as progressing from early insecurity and uncertainty, to midcareer

stability and deepening professional commitment, and finally to mature confidence and commitment. One of the keys to staff development is to provide teachers with information about the predictable stresses of life and career and give them the opportunity to share professional and personal concerns (Evans, 1989).

There has been some research showing the process teachers in all stages tend to undergo when innovation is being instituted. Findings show a teacher's concerns progress from self to task to impact. The literature reviewed by Christiansen et al. (1983) indicates it is important to create a supportive atmosphere in inservice programs. Inservice programs should help teachers understand and reduce job-related tension, encourage teachers to reflect on their career development, and there should be emphasis upon the individual teacher. Teachers should also participate in planning and implementation of programs within schools.

Problems in Career-Stage Professional Development

Researchers have begun identifying affective research strategies for each stage of a teacher's career development. One problem is the limited knowledge about assessing teachers' needs at the

various stages of career development. Another problem is the tendency of teachers to stabilize at midcareer.

Dresdan-Grambs (1987) found most research in teacher characteristics has avoided both age and gender. She also emphasizes the fact that men's careers are established as the norm. This distorts the evaluations and assessments made of women's careers. Researchers have not identified changes over time in role, personality, or behavior of individual teachers. We also have no evidence to compare a female teacher at age 31 with 10 years experience to a teacher at age 51 with 10 years experience.

Much of the literature on career growth of teachers has dealt with limited samples, or has addressed specific concerns with career-stage theory. Therefore, application of these findings is limited. Small numbers of people from limited geographic areas were interviewed. Some reports do not include a firm research base; they posit career stages solely on the basis of observation and impression (Christiansen et al., 1983).

Problems with an Adult Development Perspective

The adult developmental task models discussed earlier also present some problems. Only a few

researchers have applied life-span research to teachers. Most of the research consists of a few case studies. None of the studies seem to have been replicated. The author found no evidence of quantitative research. The studies seem to rely on the impressions that researchers glean from interviews and the impressions of his or her own experience. Levine's (1989a) study is an example of this.

Most of the theory on adult development is derived from the study of men. The number and range of systematic studies of women's lives necessary to establish a firm research base is still lacking. The 1988 ERS Survey found 68% of classroom teachers in the United States are women. Grade level distribution of teachers indicates 87% of the elementary teachers are women. Erikson, Gould, Kohlberg, and Levinson (cited in Levine, 1989a) are examples of work done by men on male samples. Thus, the application of these adult development models represents only a rudimentary data base in the professional development of teachers. Much of the literature cited represents a first attempt to understand application of adult development models to staff development with the school setting.

Research has not examined the difference in development needs between elementary, middle school, and secondary teachers; between male and female teachers; or among teachers of varying cultural backgrounds. We also do not know the effects of reassignments or relocation on teachers' growth.

Researchers also need to clarify how adult development correlates with career-stage theory and vice versa. Occasionally it is difficult to determine which approach the authors are referring to, especially when they are applying those studies to school improvement.

Future Direction

As research begins to focus on the role of teachers in schools, application and knowledge of adult development and career-stage theories will become more important in planning for school improvement. There may be more emphasis on individualized instruction and staff development for adults.

Colleges and universities have begun to consider the individual needs and developmental differences of adult learners. Eighteen institutions have developed model programs in this area (Lynch, Doyle & Chickering, 1985). This may influence the direction of staff

development and inservice programs within the elementary and secondary schools.

Current educational reports, such as those of Fiestritzer (1986) and Goodlad (1984), insist on the importance of professional status of educators and the need to enhance their working conditions. Thus, interest in professional development programs that disseminate information about the lives and psychology of adults may increase.

We must attend to the needs of teachers as well as students if schools are to improve. Schools exist to enhance the learning and developmental needs of students. Barth (1985) suggests that probably nothing has more effect on student learning than the personal and professional growth of their teacher. If inservice programs incorporate new knowledge on adult development and make it a component of staff development in schools, the aging teaching population may be motivated to continue lifelong learning.

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