LESSON 9
COLLECTION OF ARTICLES

Thoughts on Effective Training

One commonality found in Deaf-Blind Projects throughout the county is the provision of training to both parents and service providers alike. Although this training varies in its content, format and delivery methods, it shares the common intent of developing skills that will transfer into the classroom, home and community.

Current literature in the field of school reform has identified three concepts that influence professional development activities and effective training.

- Results driven education, meaning that the success of staff development should be measured not only in changed practitioners behavior, but also in its impact on child outcomes.

- Systems thinking, the recognition that staff development must be approached from a systems perspective, recognizing that change to one part of a system impacts other parts of the system.

- Constructivism, the belief that learners build their own knowledge structures rather than just receive them from others. In response to constructivism, staff development activities must involve practitioners in the learning process and include a variety of participatory activities.

One result of incorporating these attributes into project training activities will be an increase in the likelihood of achieving identified training outcomes and positively impacting training recipients.

It is also important to recognize the unique needs of adults in a learning endeavor. These include the need to have:

- Meaningful information
- Expectations known
- Experience respected
- Reinforcement provided
- Feedback given
- Diverse teaching styles used
- A sense of relevancy
- Self-direction
- Freedom from anxiety
- Immediate application

This Project is supported by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the US Department of Education.

Elements of Quality Training

Inservice training and professional development activities are extremely resource intensive, both in personnel time and actual dollars. Yet, the major activity of many training projects is the provision of training to a variety of audiences on a multitude of content and topic areas.

As such, projects must strive to provide training that is meaningful, relevant and effective.

However it must acknowledge that on occasion trainings are not what the participants had hoped for and occasionally the training has missed the mark!

The current literature describes several key elements that are critical to the design and implementation of effective inservice training and professional development activities. These elements consistently appear in time-tested professional development models and contribute to both the models effectiveness and longevity.

One such nationally validated model, the Teaching Research Inservice Model (TRIM), has combined these elements into a sequential process, which has been successfully used for the design and implementation of both short and long-term training activities that have addressed a variety of content and topic areas. The six elements that comprise the Teaching Research Inservice Model are:

- Identifying needs
- Determining training outcomes
- Determining training objectives
- Developing training activities
- Designing and implementing evaluation measures
- Providing follow-up technical assistance and support

Incorporating these elements into training activities may not only increase the participant's skill acquisition, it will also increase the effectiveness of the project's training activities

1. Identifying Needs

Identifying needs is the first step in designing effective training activities. Needs assessments identify the specific topical/skill areas that recipients of the training perceive as their greatest, or one of their greatest, areas of need. Needs assessments should be focused on specific skills or competencies identified as relevant rather than being open-ended. Open-ended assessments, or assessments designed for other programs, do not provide the information needed to design effective trainings.

A thorough needs assessment builds consensus and ownership in the training activities.

Training participants are most receptive and interested when the content is relevant and meaningful to them. A needs assessment approach relies heavily on the perceptions of practitioners and does not counter balance or weight these responses with the training needs perceived by others. As a balance to the perceived needs of staff, it may be useful to also complete an assessment using a tool designed to measure program performance.

2. Determining Training Outcomes

In effective training activities the desired outcome(s) of training is clearly conceptualized and articulated. A well-conceptualized and articulated outcome is needed to drive the remainder of the training plan. The outcomes impact the intensity and pedagogy of the training activities, as well as the design of the evaluation of the success of the training.

3. Determining Training Objectives

Effective training occurs when the expectations of training are clearly defined. Your objectives should identify the expected competencies or behaviors to be demonstrated by the participants at the conclusion of the training experience. Your objectives should also prescribe the "who, what and how" in observable and measurable terms. Your objectives should logically lead to attainment of the desired outcome(s). When the desired outcome is stated as knowledge, the objectives relate to varying ways in which the participant can demonstrate his/her increased knowledge, but since our ultimate outcome is only knowledge, it would not be necessary to engage participants in elaborate and time-consuming practica or role-play activities in which they demonstrated certain skills.

4. Developing Training Activities

Training activities are the vehicle by which participants achieve the desired competencies stated in your objectives. The activities comprise the content and pedagogy of your trainings.

Training activities should be designed to accomplish one of three possible outcomes:

- Increased **awareness** of the topic being taught
- Increased **knowledge** of the topic being taught
- Mastery of the skills needed to **implement** the topic being taught

The outcomes you are attempting to achieve dictate the level of complexity of your activities.

If the outcome is merely to increase awareness, a much simpler activity may be offered than if the outcome is skill implementation. If the outcome of the training is skill implementation, research confirms that the following four attributes should be included within the training activities:

- A knowledge of the theory supporting the content of the training
- Demonstration and shaping of the skills to be learned
- Guided and independent practice of the skills
- Feedback on the performance of the skill

Although it may be necessary to rely on the standard lecture/listen format for parts of the training, participants will be far more engaged in the content if varying methods of presenting information are utilized. Adult learners have preferred modalities for acquiring new information. Some find auditory input to be the easiest way to learn, and they become confused by visuals. Visual learners take in new information most efficiently through their eyes and absorb minimally from auditory input. Others prefer to see a concrete demonstration of the new concept. Remember, our audiences will benefit most from presentation of the new information in a variety of ways, one building upon or reinforcing another.

5. Designing and Implementing Evaluation Measures

Evaluation occurs at several levels and must go beyond the traditional measure of satisfaction to demonstrate the trainings effectiveness and to provide the information to revise and refine your training activities. Evaluation systems should include:

- Measures obtained during training
- Measures obtained at the completion of training activities
- Measuring implementation of the knowledge or skills presented after the training has occurred

By carefully weaving your evaluation components before, during and after training, it is possible to evaluate on an ongoing basis the strengths and needs of your activities (both formative and summative). Trainers are able to revise and adapt the training on a timely basis and make necessary accommodations to assist participants to successfully complete the objectives.

6. Providing Follow-up Technical Assistance and Support

To be effective, programs must provide follow-up support to participants as they implement newly learned skills. The traditional, one-shot workshop continues to be utilized even though we know that little implementation occurs without follow-up TA and support. When the intent of training is implementation of new knowledge and skills, specific plans for providing follow-up support to the participants must be woven into the training, not tacked on as an afterthought.

Effective training assumes that the support provided to assure implementation is the second, but equally important, component of the training activity.

How support is provided takes many shapes and depends upon your outcome (awareness, knowledge or skill) and the resources. A variety of approaches have been demonstrated as effective and include:

- On-site visits
- Mentoring or coaching
- Video review
- Live video interactions
- Product review and feedback
- Observations

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The Search for an Effective Training Model for Adults Moving Off Welfare Moving families off welfare roles is just the beginning of their journey into the mainstream work economy and social system. For many heads of household, life management skills and positive social and financial experiences are needed to supply the courage and confidence to face such major life changes.

Many educators both within and outside of Extension have looked at ways to make this process more effective. Seaman and Fellenz (1989) and Levine (1992) defined learning characteristics distinctive to adults and suggested ways to engage the adult learner. Griffore, Phenice, Walker, and Carolan (1999) looked at life-issue priorities that might motivate learning. Van Tilburg Norland (1992) identified individual characteristics associated with Extension participation in learning processes. Jones (1992) stressed the importance of creating a learning environment that fosters critical thinking. Richardson (1994) noted the preference of Extension clientele for learning through experience.

A number of additional researchers have focused specifically on training methods for welfare audiences. Couchman, Williams, and Cadwalader (1994) outlined process-related tenets for successful community-based adult education programs including the importance of understanding the audience. DeBord, Roseboro, and Wicker (1998) noted the importance of involving parents in their own learning in parenting education. Borden and Perkins (1999) stressed the need for community collaboration and provided methods for accessing that collaboration. Lackman, Nieto, and Gliem, in developing an instrument to evaluate programs for low-literacy audiences, validated a number of teacher characteristics that generated high reliability in teacher evaluation.

Finally, the theoretical framework for a collaborative effort similar to PACE, the Montana State University Extension Services' EDUFAIM program (Duncan, Dunnagan, Christopher and Paul, 2001) provides insight into theoretical and practical issues in the learning process.

In general, extant writings support the work of Malcolm Knowles' (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2000) andragogical approach to adult learning. Andragogy is based on the following assumptions:

1. Adult learners bring life experiences to the learning process that should be acknowledged.

2. Adults need to know why they need to learn something, and how it is relevant to their lives.

3. Experiential, hands-on learning is effective with adult learners.

4. Adults approach learning as problem-solving.

5. Adults learn best with the topic is of immediate value to them in their lives.

Although the PACE development team had access to a wealth of information on adult learning, team members felt that they lacked a clear mandate from the Department of Human Services for training facilitators in the learning process. The University of Tennessee's PACE team had the following objectives for the training model that would articulate that process.

• The effective training model would be simple, so that upon repetition and training over several months, facilitators could commit it to memory.

• The PACE team would need to be able to present the model within the time constraints available for training— approximately 1 hour for the initial workshop.

• The model would have the capacity to be developed and expanded at future training sessions.

• The practical application of the model would be easily understood.

• The model would be specific to, and build upon, the insights of experienced Families First Facilitators.

• The Families First program would feel ownership of the model.

Methods for Developing the Training Model

Not long into the discovery phase of servicing the contract, the Parenting and Consumer Education (PACE) Extension development team realized that the Department of Human Services had not yet formally identified or communicated to its facilitators what it considered to be the characteristics of effective training. One of the first tasks of the development team was to develop consensus among administrators and experienced facilitators on the characteristics of effective training and to design a training model that represented that philosophy.

The PACE development team consisted of Extension state specialists in family life, family economics, and staff development. This team requested that TDHS administrators identify groups of managers, specialists, case workers, and experienced facilitators within the organization who reflected the best of the department's intrinsic standards and training philosophies to provide input into the development process.

Although the PACE team used a variety of methods to gather information during the discovery process, the bulk of information about training expectations and standards were gathered using a group facilitation process called the "Workshop Method" developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (Spencer, 1989) and through a series of focus group sessions. The initial workshop session was held with a group of TDHS employees selected by TDHS administration. The group included assistant administrators, state program specialists, district managers, local managers, and case workers. An Extension District Program Leader led the session.

In addition to the workshop session, focus group sessions were held in each of the four Department of Human Services districts across Tennessee. Participants were selected by the district administrative staffs working with the DHS state staff and members of the PACE training team assigned to each district.

Focus group format and questions were designed to be consistent among all four sessions. Sessions were led by state Extension specialists and Extension PACE trainers, and were videotaped for analysis by the PACE development team. Questions centered on experienced trainers' perceptions of the characteristics of effective training. The PACE development team also conducted both phone and written surveys of contract providers and Extension field staff that had experience working with similar audiences.

Extension Specialists on the PACE team integrated the findings from the workshop and focus group into a model that served as the basis of PACE curricula and training conducted under the DHS contract.

Findings Regarding an Adult Training Model

Basic Findings

Information collected during the discovery process supported the assumptions of the andralogical approach of Knowles and others regarding the training process. In addition, the following basic premises were advanced.

1. **The training process is important.** Although quality, accurate information and curricula are important to the success of training, experienced Families First training facilitators agreed that the training process itself is of equal importance. Sessions with facilitators verified the importance of not just delivering information to participants, but also providing them with "hands-on" experiences in applying new learning and practicing new skills.

2. **Participants in training programs need experiences that require progressively more active participation in, and responsibility for, their own learning.** Learning should include opportunities for practicing decision making, recognizing one's own learning needs, identifying resources to meet those needs, and planning and organizing one's own learning.

3. **Participants need opportunities to broaden their networks in the mainstream work community.** This includes development of social skills and strengthening self-efficacy to broaden their comfort zone in a variety of community work settings and volunteer activities.

Training Model

In addition to the basic premises above, Families First training providers and staff identified specific criteria for good training. The characteristics identified by facilitators and TDHS staff were synthesized and organized into a model (Figure 1) by a member of the state PACE leadership team. The resulting model of effective training has four major criteria.

1. **Effective training is learner focused.** Effective training identifies and addresses issues important to the learner, while building on learner strengths. It includes opportunities for active participation by the learner, while recognizing and drawing on the knowledge and experience of the learner. Learning is facilitated through peer exchange, and is culturally and ethnically meaningful. All participants are drawn into the discussion.

2. **Effective training demonstrates productive behavior and effective life skills.** Effective training integrates decision-making, planning, organization and implementation skill building. It models and reinforces workplace ethics and productive use of time. Local and community resources are an integral part of the learning environment. Opportunities for learners to expand social networks are provided. Learners are challenged to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

3. **Effective training inspires and motivates.** Effective training increases the learner's knowledge about the subject matter, and reinforces worthwhile values and principles. It provides opportunities for humor and fun during learning, while maintaining a positive focus. Learners leave the session with a feeling of accomplishment.

4. **Effective training celebrates personal and group achievements.** Incentives to mark learning milestones are incorporated into effective training. On-going assessment and learner-based feedback is critical to the success of any training session. Learners are acknowledged and recognized for their contributions by the larger community. Opportunities to include children and other household members in the learning process are also made available. Community leaders who can bring other resources to bear on the issue at hand are included as an integral part of the learning process.

Figure 1.
Training Model

Application

Experienced trainers develop their own effective strategies to facilitate participant growth through innovative teaching methodologies and group dynamics. As part of the training of Families First PACE facilitators, the Extension PACE team gave trainers an opportunity to share effective techniques they had gained from their own experience, underscoring the value of the knowledge, skills, and expertise they contributed to the learning process.

Facilitators were then presented the training model. After a brief explanation of the model, facilitators were asked to join a discussion group focusing on one of the four model criteria. After self-assignment to discussion groups, the groups were given prompt posters (Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5) and asked to brainstorm additional ways to implement criteria from the model in their classroom.

Figure 2.

Prompt Poster 1

Effective training is learner focused. It:

- Identifies and addresses issues important to the learner.
- Identifies and builds on learner strengths.
- Includes active participation by the learner.
- Recognizes and draws upon the knowledge and experience of the learner.
- Facilitates learning through peer exchange.
- Is culturally and ethically meaningful.
- Draws everyone into the discussion.

Examples of specific ways to implement these criteria:·

• Ask participants to list issues which are particularly important to them. List them on the board and explain when and how you will address them in class.

• Provide a "question box" for participants to drop in questions or issues that are important to them, yet they are hesitant to ask during class.

• Have participants graph their family trees. Use these as a basis of discussion about parenting or financial management styles and practices.

• Have a covered dish luncheon. Participants bring food they consider an important part of their family culture.

• Generate "round robin" answers in which everyone in the group responds to a question or issue in turn.

Figure 3.

Prompt Poster 2

Effective training models productive behavior and effective life skills. It:

• Integrates decision-making, planning, organization and implementation skill building.

• Models and reinforces workplace ethics and productive use of time.

• Integrates local and community resources.

• Provides opportunities for learners to expand social networks.

• Challenges learners to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

Examples of specific ways to implement these criteria:·

Start and end classes and activities on time.

• Identify one or more days each week when participants wear "professional" dress.

• Ask participants to identify a topic they'd like to learn more about. Help them develop a plan to research their topic using community resources (people and information). Follow up with a report to the class.

• Ask participants to interview someone who works at a job they would enjoy doing. Provide guidance in developing the right approach and questions to ask.

• Ask participants to make a "time line" from birth to age 80, dividing the line into 8 segments representing 10 years each. Have them list, in each segment, some new things they needed (or will need) to learn to live well during that period in life.

Figure 4.

Prompt Poster 3

Effective training inspires and motivates. It:

• Presents accurate information.

• Increases learner knowledge about the subject matter. o Reinforces worthwhile values and principles.

• Provides opportunities for humor and fun during learning.

• Maintains a positive focus.

• Gives the learner a feeling of accomplishment.

Examples of specific ways to implement these criteria:·
If you have a "permanent" classroom, fill the walls with inspirational posters and art. If not, write a new or funny saying on the board before each class.

• Collect inspirational or humorous stories pertinent to the topics you discuss and share them with participants.

• Collect amazing and interesting facts for generating discussions.

• Bring in an expert to talk with the class about a related topic. Make sure that this visit involves *discussion* with the class rather than a "lecture."

• Discuss how participants might tell the difference between reliable information and hearsay.

Figure 5.

Prompt Poster 4

Effective training celebrates personal and group achievements. It:

• Incorporates incentives to mark learning milestones.

• Provides for assessment and learner-based feedback.

• Is acknowledged by the larger community.

• Provides opportunities to include children and other household members.

• Include community leaders who can bring other resources to bear for participants.

Examples of specific ways to implement these criteria:·

• Pin small ribbons on participants who have reached a milestone or performed with excellence. Different colored ribbons can denote different accomplishments.

• Invite local officials or leaders to present "graduation" certificates and attend a reception to mingle with participants. (Candidates for political office are usually particularly eager to do this.)

• Recruit a committee of community volunteers to develop a plan for incentives and awards.

• Have a local civic or community club "adopt" your groups, providing both support and incentives.

• Involve community volunteers in planning a "graduation" reception or tea.

Ideas were collected from groups in training sessions across the state and compiled into a booklet for follow-up training sessions. Input from the learners (facilitators) became an integral part of the training process, leading to real "buy-in" from most program participants.

Results
As the Extension training team developed training for PACE facilitators, they were careful to model criteria identified for effective training and include activities to increase facilitators' skills in training. The effective training model has been used in 14 training sessions with more than 300 PACE facilitators. The use of the model as an inherent part of the PACE facilitator process has resulted in successful outcomes for facilitators as

well as Families First clientele. The following quotes are representative examples of reactions.

"Thank you. This was one of the best training sessions I have been to since I began my job."

"The demonstration of facilitating activities and how to implement them was one of the most helpful parts of the training."

"In regards to the PACE training...we thoroughly enjoyed the atmosphere and training methods presented. This has been the first training seminar in awhile that actually produced quality results. If felt as though the University of Tennessee Extension Service...actually feels the way we, as facilitators, do with regards to our customers....We left this training ready and willing to facilitate the PACE curriculum."

"The ability to use hands-on activities and the excellent use of communication skills was a most helpful part of the training."

"The training was a wonderful example of teamwork."

Table 1 summarizes the evaluation response from Families First facilitators at the first six sessions at which the training model was used and presented. Additional data is currently being collected to more completely evaluate the effectiveness of the training methods.

makes the organization unique. Rather, Extension's organizational strength and uniqueness lie in the experience and capability of its professionals to motivate individuals and groups to action.

It is important for Extension educators to develop and field test useful models for program design and delivery that include behavior change. It is equally important for the models to be linked to sound educational theory that will be valued by partnering agencies and understood by the targeted clientele.

The process described in this article accomplished these objectives and resulted in information that now provides a framework for quality training in a broad range of FCS programming. The criteria in Table I list standards against which training in a variety of subjects can be measured. Descriptions of training model components in Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 provide practical ways that the findings can be applied in any training situation. Further development of the model has resulted in additional insights with practical application beyond the scope of this article.

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Table 1.
Summary of Perceptions of Facilitators from 6 PACE Training Sessions as a Percentage of Total Response (Ranked on scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating "Not at all" and 5 indicating "To a great degree")
n = 216

Criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Training was learner focused	0	0	6.9	38.4	54.6
Training included active participation by learner	0	0	2.7	29.6	67.6
Learning was facilitated through peer exchange	0	0.4	9.2	29.2	61.1
Training was culturally and ethnically meaningful	0	1.3	13.0	38.9	47.2
Training encouraged learner to assume active responsibility for learning	0	0.4	5.5	36.6	57.4
Training modeled productive behavior and effective life skills	0	0	6.5	39.3	54.6
Training inspired and motivated	0	0.4	9.2	26.8	63.9
Training acknowledged individual and group achievements	0	0.4	7.9	34.7	57.4
Flow of learning was appropriate	0	0.4	10.2	36.6	53.2
Training addressed the needs of Families First participants	0	0.9	6.9	30.5	62.0

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is naive for an Extension professional to feel that if information is delivered during a learning activity, the educational mission has been accomplished. The broader mandate that learning generate change in behavior, practice, or belief requires a much more sophisticated science and art. In today's information-rich culture, Extension's store of information no longer