

~ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS ~

An e-newsletter supporting effective adult learning practices

December 2011

MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT

Issue #33

Resources: Essential Tools for Lifelong Learning

Written by Susan Harper-Whalen and Sandra L. Morris

Lifelong learning is the provision or use of both formal and informal learning opportunities throughout people's lives in order to foster the continuous development and improvement of the knowledge and skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment. ~ Harper Collins Dictionary

INTRODUCTION

The ability to identify, locate, and use resources is a critical skill in the early childhood profession. For trainers, developing a solid understanding of the resources available to support both adult learning and early childhood practice is important on two levels.

First, familiar resources facilitate your personal commitment to lifelong learning. You have the tools at hand to increase your own knowledge base as personal need and interest arises. You also can easily admit that you "don't know everything" when you have an idea of a referral source for the information.

Second, familiarity with reputable resources helps you support the lifelong learning of the early childhood professionals you teach. Not only can they acquire knowledge and skills from professional resources but they become better acquainted with notable experts in the field of early childhood. When you offer a few suggested readings, identify local people to contact, and give out web site addresses, you encourage providers to take ownership of the process of continued learning.

ADULT LEARNING RESOURCES

Resources that expand knowledge of adult learning are everywhere. The trainer's job is to scrutinize these resources carefully. The best ones are 1) evidence-based; 2) useful in your current circumstances; and 3) actually contribute to—and not detract from—

learning in early childhood training. What might be appropriate for business training may not apply to early childhood training. For example, throwing small nerf balls at individuals who speak out of turn or do not contribute positively to the discussion has been used in business meetings. More appropriate to early childhood practice might be the use of a "talking stick" to achieve the same outcomes in a more positive way. In case you are wondering what a "talking stick" is, here is an explanation from Carol Locust at the North American Indian Research and Training Center in Tucson, AZ.

"The talking stick [or feather or other chosen object] has been used for centuries by many American Indian tribes as a means of just and impartial hearing. The talking stick was commonly used in council circles to designate who had the right to speak. When matters of great concern came before the council, the leading elder would hold the talking stick and begin the discussion. When he finished what he had to say he would hold out the talking stick, and whoever wished to speak after him would take it. In this manner the stick was passed from one individual to another until all who wished to speak had done so. The stick was then passed back to the leading elder for safe keeping."

The principles of adult learning have been described in different ways by various authors and researchers. While they essentially address the same elements, it is the trainer who must apply those elements to active learning experiences. For example, it is a com-

mon adult learning practice to have introductions accompanied by a warm-up or icebreaker activity. This type of initial activity can build connections and break down barriers to subsequent participation. However, some introductory activities are more meaningful than others. If you are going to play Bingo, at least let it be early childhood bingo or whatever-the-topic-is bingo. "Getting to know each other" should be an identified outcome of the training session if that is all the bingo activity achieves.

"Regardless of your level of expertise in presenting, in the pursuit of excellence your own best resource is your commitment to lifelong learning and your willingness to take risks and experiment with new approaches that expand your repertoire." ~ Paula Jorde Bloom

EARLY CHILDHOOD RESOURCES

Resources on early childhood practice also proliferate. Your job is to focus on 1) evidence-based practices; 2) quality indicators; and 3) what is currently being researched about growth, learning, and brain development. Nationally recognized professional organizations are a tremendous source for the most current resources, research, and direction.

Staying current is essential. For example, in the last few years, the idea of young children sitting quietly and listening for long periods of time has not only been shown likely to be impossible for active bodies but movement, even fidgeting, is now accepted as a way to stimulate the brain and enhance learning.

Finding and selecting up-to-date resources for a specific early childhood topic helps you stay current on the topic as well. It can lead to the discovery of a new edition of a favorite book or a web site that was previously unknown to you.

TYPES OF RESOURCES

Resources include books and articles, individuals and organizations in your community and state, national groups that support adult learning and evidence-based early childhood practice, and so on. The Internet has become a tremendous resource for both in-

formation and organizations' web sites. The Internet also has collections of useful resources on sites such as youtube.com and ERIC.ed.gov.

Surprisingly, children's books appear to be an overlooked resource and could be used more effectively in professional development. Videos and DVDs are invaluable resources for illustrating learning content.

Other resources to consider more frequently include colleagues, practicing early childhood teachers, and other professionals with relevant experience that applies to early childhood practice. "Building professional networks is not only important for staying current and connected in the early childhood field, but also serves as a mechanism for problem solving, collaboration, and creativity" (Carter and Curtis, 1994).

The development of a resource library and organized files is part of a lifelong learning process. You can use the Internet as well as networking opportunities to collect names and contact information for local, state, and national resources. You can gather and bookmark reliable web sites at every opportunity. Carter and Curtis "flag valuable articles as [they] come across them in journals, and keep a topical filing system."

Let's look more closely at the types of resources available to early childhood trainers, how and when to use each type of resource, and a few examples within each type. At the end, there is a list of basic resources specifically for Montana trainers.

~ Books and Articles

Everyone is likely to have a favorite author and reference for a particular early childhood topic. For example, you may rely on Dan Gartrell's approach to behavior guidance or Becky Bailey's work with conscious discipline as the basis for your training about guiding young children's behavior. Topical references on most subjects proliferate, so it falls to trainers to take responsibility for choosing resources that are current and relevant in each area.

If your favorite reference is more than 10 years old, such as *So This Is Normal Too?: Teachers and Parents Working Out Developmental Issues in Young Children* by Deborah Hewitt (2002), it helps to let participants know why you still think the content is

relevant (which it is). And always make sure the author has not written an updated version! For example, NAEYC's *Code of Ethical Conduct* (2005) has recently been "reaffirmed/updated" (2011).

"When building a training session around the ideas of a particular book, we purchase or make consignment arrangements with a bookstore or publishing company to have copies on hand to sell."

"Several excellent early childhood professional journals permit reproduction of articles for in-service training." ~ Margie Carter and Deb Curtis

~ *Web Sites*

Trainers are also likely to have favorite web sites. Actually, using a "tried and true" web site is more reliable than searching the Internet for just anything you can find on a given topic. Trustworthy web sites, including NAEYC (www.naeyc.org) and CSEFEL (<http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu>), are frequently reviewed, updated, and naturally field-tested by practitioners in the field. One or two excellent web sites are more likely to be used by providers than a whole list. And make sure the web site still exists. For example, circleofinclusion.org was recently taken down.

Knowing where to go for the best research and evidence-based practice is critical, and professional web sites are ready resources. For example, the process described for responding to a biting incident in a proposed chapter on behavior guidance was compared to the process found in a quick search of the Zero to Three web site (www.zerotothree.org). It quickly became obvious that the chapter was not describing evidence-based practice and needed to be revised. For the most part, try to stick to web sites that end in .org, .gov, or .edu, and avoid sites with .com.

~ *Videos and DVDs*

Due diligence needs to be taken by vetting early childhood videos and DVDs. Using dependable publishers takes away some of the onus on you for proof that the content is developmentally appropriate and evidence-based. Videos always need to be previewed to ensure that they meet your standards. A good

video can take training to a whole new level as participants get to see early childhood practice in action.

You may be able to discover and preview DVDs and other Internet resources (streaming videos, youtube images, etc.) at early childhood conference exhibits and during professional development opportunities. There are also a few resource libraries with loan programs that are more able to bear the expense of videos, DVDs, and other costly resources. A few distributors allow rental or preview.

Feel free to use portions of a longer video to make your point. Occasionally, these excerpts can be found online. Also, it is recommended that you focus primarily on positive examples knowing any visual representation, for better or worse, is likely to be remembered better than the discussion following viewing.

~ *Youtube.com and the Internet*

Many professional organizations are publishing videos and short vignettes on early childhood topics using youtube.com. For example, Simply Parenting has uploaded a whole series of short videos on child development and parenting topics.

Another excellent resource is PBS Child Development Tracker at www.pbs.org/parents/childdevelopment. This web site offers a quick look at stages of growth and key milestones for young children ages 1 to 9 years old based on eight different curriculum areas. You can't beat free resources when they are also trustworthy!

~ *Children's Books*

Training events provide a grand opportunity to showcase the best children's books as well as demonstrate how to integrate them within curriculum areas. Quality children's books can be especially applicable to social/emotional learning topics.

Too few trainers think of children's books as a training resource. But if using children's books is encouraged in early childhood settings, they should be used whenever appropriate in early childhood training.

It's not that hard to find a good reference list for children's books by early childhood topic. For example, Janice J. Beaty includes numerous children's

books applying to the thirteen CDA Functional Areas in her book *Skills for Preschool Teachers, eighth edition*. A few children's books have been put online. For example, Dr. Seuss' "Oh, the Places You'll Go" can be found in entirety on youtube.com read by John Lithgow.

"We always bring books with us to training sessions - favorite adult and children's titles related to the training topic. Bibliographies are useful, but seeing, touching, smelling, and browsing through books will more likely invite teachers to see them as resources." - Margie Carter and Deb Curtis

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REFERENCES 101

In the next section, you will find a short list of indispensable references related both to adult learning in early childhood education and to developmentally appropriate early childhood practice in general. This list of resources could easily be titled "resources everyone should know about" and together they form a solid foundation for promoting quality early childhood training, especially in Montana.

~ Carter, M. and D. Curtis (1994). *Training Teachers: A Harvest of Theory and Practice*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

~ Carter, M. and D. Curtis (2010). *The Visionary Director: A Handbook for Dreaming, Organizing, and Improvising in Your Center, Second Edition*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

~ Copple, C. and Bredekamp, S. (Editors). (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs: Serving children from birth through age 8 (third edition)*. Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

~ Jones, E. (2007). *Teaching Adults, Revisited: Active Learning for Early Childhood Educators*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2007.

~ Jorde Bloom, P., Hentschel, A., and Bell, J. (2010) *A Great Place to Work: Creating a Healthy Organizational Climate*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

~ Jorde Bloom, P. (2000). *Workshop Essentials: Planning and Presenting Dynamic Workshops*. New Hori-

zons Educational Consultants and Learning Resources, PO Box 863, Lake Forest, IL 60045-0863.

~ *Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base (January 2008)*. A guide to early care and education professional practice: What early childhood practitioners who work with young children and families need to know, understand, and be able to do. Early Childhood Project, MSU, PO Box 173540, Bozeman, MT 59717-3540. Available at www.mtecp.org.

~ *Montana's Early Learning Guidelines 2004: What children ages three to five need to know, understand, and be able to do*. Available at www.mtecp.org.

~ *Montana's Early Learning Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers 2009: What infants and toddlers birth to 36 months need to know, experience, and be able to do to reach their individual potential*. Available at www.mtecp.org.

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether this happens at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps on learning not only remains young, but becomes constantly more valuable regardless of physical capacity." ~ Harvey Ullman

CONCLUSION

Resources, of course, include anything that enhances your ability to achieve learning outcomes in a training event. Whether it's a resource you use to support your preparation or to enhance the presentation and learning activities during the session, resources are essential to effectively teach. In addition, resources are fundamental to lifelong learning.

You can further promote resource development by deliberately putting participants in a leadership role. Let participants identify the support and resources available to help them work toward their goals related to session outcomes. Being able to identify existing support and resources is a critical skill for lifelong learning.

Finally, learn to be a bold information seeker rather than worry about appearing foolish—make contact, ask questions, search for proven practice, and demand quality. It is the foolish who do not. ~

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS was established by the Early Childhood Project at Montana State University in 2004 with monies from the federal Child Care and Development Fund administered through the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Early Childhood Services Bureau (ECSB). It is designed to support positive and effective training strategies for use in early childhood professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS is published four times a year. Individuals who have applied and been approved on the Montana Professional Development Specialist (PDS)/Trainer Directory receive the e-newsletter as a benefit. If you are not currently on the PDS Directory, please go to www.mtecp.org and click on Trainer Directory for more information.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS is available under Publications & Reports at www.mtecp.org. Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include proper citation. If you have comments about the topic of this newsletter or ideas for topics to address in future issues, please contact:

Sandra Morris, Editor

1-800-235-4122 or (406) 243-6355

sandra.morris@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

EDITORIAL TEAM: Sandra Morris; Libby Hancock; Ann Klaas; Julie Gilchrist; Brandi Johnson