
~ TRAINING SOLUTIONS ~

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MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT

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DEVELOPING MEANINGFUL LEARNING GOALS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAINING

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When trainers know about and value the principles of adult learning, they complete the process by trying out and finding new ways to do their training. ~ Susan Harper-Whalen

INTRODUCTION

Approved early childhood training in Montana (and most other states) requires learning objectives or outcomes for each workshop or training session. What these learning goals look like varies with the topic and the trainer. The best goals describe—in observable terms—what participants will be able to do as a result of participating in the training session.

While the goal statements may not look that different, it changes trainers' thinking and overall approach to a session and its topic when they identify "learning" goals instead of "training" goals. A session based on "learning" goals is more likely to focus on one or more meaningful aspects of a given early childhood topic and lead to active learning processes.

One method for developing professional development goals uses 1) a primary learning goal, 2) several essential participant learning goals, and 3) a number of related "know-be-do" goals. This method uses a linear process to organize participant learning goals into outcomes that can be observed and measured both during and after the session. What has been delightfully termed the "know-be-do" format is used to describe competencies directly related to the participant learning goals. This format is particularly valuable in subsequent planning of critical learning activities for the session.

The sequence of goal development for a training session or class using this method goes like this:

- 1) Specify a primary learning goal.
- 2) Articulate relevant participant learning goals or outcomes.
- 3) Formulate "know-be-do" goals that identify what participants need to know, to be, and to do during the training session—and when they return to the early childhood setting—to apply the early childhood practices or particular skills described in the participant learning goals.

Following is a more detailed description of each of these components for developing learning goals.

PRIMARY LEARNING GOAL

The first question to ask yourself is why am I taking the time and effort to plan a training session on this topic? The answer needs to go beyond the usual responses such as "people need/asked for this topic" or "it's required." The primary learning goal is a single, brief statement describing the overall purpose of the training. This statement expresses the trainer's intention or, in other words, why training on this particular topic is being offered at all.

Examples of **primary learning goals** for the underlined workshop topics below include:

Topic: Building Partnerships with Parents and Families

Primary Learning Goal: to help early childhood profes-

sionals develop partnerships with parents and families which allow them to more effectively meet the needs of young children in their programs.

Topic: Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment

Primary Learning Goal: to help early childhood professionals establish and maintain a healthy and safe environment for each child.

Every good workshop starts out with a clear understanding of what you want to accomplish. In other words, why are you giving this workshop?
~ Paula Jorde Bloom

PARTICIPANT LEARNING GOALS

The second question to ask yourself is what do I want participants to be able to do (or be capable of) as a result of participating in this training session? You may come up with a number of different answers depending on the length of the session and the topic.

Try to distill the answers into participant learning goals. The number of participant learning goals for a two-hour workshop will most likely be less than the number for a full-day session. Each participant learning goal should describe specifically what participants will be capable of doing as a result of participating in the training session. Participant learning goals should be observable and measurable. Developing participant learning goals ensures that you will be able to plan activities with clear learning outcomes in mind.

To develop participant learning goals, use the following statement: "Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to" When learning goals are developed this way, you are already planning what participants will be able to do after the session and you can readily communicate these outcomes to participants. Examples of **participant learning goals** for the same topics previously used include:

Topic: Building Partnerships with Parents and Families

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

~ use a variety of effective parent communication strategies.

~ describe parent participation on a continuum of involvement.

~ apply this information in their individual programs.

Topic: Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment

Upon completion of this session, participants will be able to:

~ eliminate health and safety hazards.

~ properly wash their hands.

~ disinfect play surfaces and toys.

~ teach health and safety practices to young children.

KNOW-BE-DO GOALS

The third question to ask yourself is what are the essential competencies related to each of the participant learning goals I previously identified? The answer to this question is likely to result in review of the session's participant learning goals to add or, in many cases, to eliminate one or more goals. Identifying related competencies often helps trainers sharpen the session's focus, fine-tune training content, and eliminate the unessential.

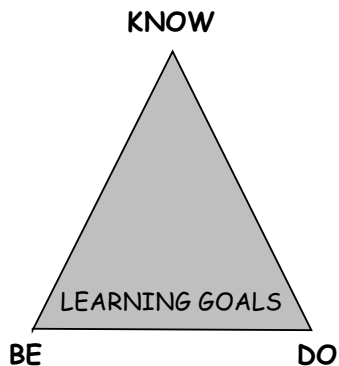
Specific competencies can be further examined by asking yourself what you want participants to know, to value/believe, and to do. Training that enhances the quality of day-to-day early care and education practices involves learning on three levels. The know-be-do format addresses three critical aspects of learning: a) background knowledge and information, b) attitudes and beliefs, and c) hands-on practice. Each of these aspects of learning are important in and of themselves but by considering them together, the impact of the training is enhanced.

First, growth and change begin with the development of a knowledge base. For example, to fully support early childhood professionals in practicing health and safety with young children and to apply effective learning principles to training about health and safety, trainers must be knowledgeable about both health and safety and adult learning principles.

Second, change must include examination of associated attitudes and beliefs. For example, to commit to the hard work needed to enhance training on inclusion or to

change training practices, trainers must value inclusion and explore their attitudes about adult learners—now as well as on an ongoing basis.

Third, change requires the development of skills to put new ideas into practice. For example, when trainers know about and value the principles of adult learning, they take the next step of finding and trying out new training approaches. Thus follows the birth of a new term that describes a three-point foundation for effective teaching/learning opportunities—know-be-do.



The know-be-do approach applies to both trainers and training participants as learners. Let's explore more deeply the development of know-be-do goals.

~ To Know

The learning goals listed under "to know" for each learning experience include statements about acquiring important background information and instruction about specific topics addressed during the session. These goals are chosen because they are viewed as essential to participants' learning and completion of further activities. The learning goals for "to know" might be achieved by reviewing a handout, reading chapters of a book, or listening to a mini-presentation.

Words or phrases to use in writing "to know" learning goals include: know, learn about, learn how, review, read, etc. Examples of learning goals related to knowledge for the same topics previously used include:

Topic: Building Partnerships with Parents and Families

~ to learn that communication is more than talking.

~ to learn about a continuum of parent participation.

~ to learn how to use this information in programs.

Topic: Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment

~ to learn how to eliminate health and safety hazards.

~ to learn recommendations for proper handwashing .

~ to learn how to disinfect play surfaces and toys.

~ to learn methods to teach health and safety practices to young children.

Participants may need less information, not more, to jumpstart the application of new knowledge.
~ Paula Jorde Bloom

~ To Be

The learning goal for "to be" is a simple statement about shifts in attitudes and beliefs—or awareness of attitudes and beliefs—relating to the topic. If you have ever come up against differing values/beliefs or resistant attitudes, you know that changing them takes much more than one or two training sessions. It is most effective to focus on a single issue related to the topic of the training. What participants are learning "to be" is then developed as they use resource materials, participate in learning activities, and reflect on their own feelings and actions during the session.

Words/phrases to use in developing "to be" learning goals include: reflect, value, appreciate, examine personal beliefs about, become aware, explore, understand, respect, etc. Examples of learning goals related to attitudes, values, and beliefs for the same topics previously used include:

Topic: Building Partnerships with Parents and Families

~ to acknowledge the mutual benefits of building partnerships with parents and families.

Topic: Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment

~ to value consistency in health and safety practices, particularly handwashing.

Objectives relating to attitudes are essential, if the purpose of the workshop is to offer opportunities for participants to challenge their assumptions about different issues and embrace new ideas and thought patterns that will result in change. ~ Paula Jorde Bloom

~ To Do

Learning goals for "to do" include statements about actively performing/completing important practices and skills. These are always hands-on learning activities and whenever possible, use materials that are immediately relevant to each participant's own program. These goals are reflected in the types of individual and group learning activities you choose to use during the workshop or course. These goals need to be specific and measurable through observation.

Words/phrases to use in developing "to do" learning goals include: practice, describe, discover, apply, develop, assess, implement, articulate, list, compare, demonstrate, identify, create, complete, illustrate, write, etc. Examples of learning goals related to "doing" for the same topics previously used include:

Topic: Building Partnerships with Parents and Families

~ to practice effective family/provider communication strategies.

~ to develop a procedure for acquiring written parent permission.

~ to assess parent involvement in their programs.

~ to develop and use a process designed to gather information from families about the strengths, interests, and needs of their children.

Topic: Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment

~ to assess the health and safety practices used in their programs.

~ to articulate ways to promote handwashing with children (and staff) through example, education, expectations, arranging the environment, and program activities.

~ to develop a plan for implementing strategies which maintain a safe and healthy environment.

Individualized action plans are easily developed when trainers help participants acknowledge and address their know-be-do learning needs. To do this, the action plan would direct participants to respond in detail to questions such as the following:

~ What do I need to learn, value, and practice in order to work toward my goal?

~ What kind of time and support will I need to reach

my goal?

~ How will I know when I have reached my goal?

Workshops in which participants learn new skills need to include plenty of opportunity for participants to practice the new behaviors as part of the workshop . . . ~ Paula Jorde Bloom

CONCLUSION

Participants are often curious about exactly what they will be learning during a particular training session or workshop. Well-written goals help trainers and participants alike find meaning, direction, and purpose in the time spent learning together. Of course, what individuals learn and how much detail they explore within a given topic is driven by their own interests and needs. Meaningful learning goals provide them with opportunity to go as far as they can.

Time and effort spent developing meaningful learning goals keep the presentation on track. Using an effective method for creating learning goals means that training content and learning activities are likely to remain focused and interconnected. ~

RESOURCES*

* Guiding Principles for Training Approval. Available at www.montana.edu/ecp.

* Child Care plus+ Curriculum on Inclusion: Facilitator's Guide (2000). Child Care plus+: University of Montana-Missoula. Section One includes ideas for facilitating effective training on inclusion. Section Two includes examples of primary learning goals and participant learning goals in the know-be-do format.

* Workshop Essentials: Planning and Presenting Dynamic Workshops by Paula Jorde Bloom (2002). Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons. This book will help you ignite a passion for learning and engage your participants as active partners in the learning process. It provides the tools you need to design and deliver high content, high involvement, and high-energy training.

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