
~ TRAINING SOLUTIONS ~

An e-newsletter supporting effective adult learning practices

September 2005

MONTANA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROJECT

Issue #7

USING GAMES IN TRAINING

Written by Sandra Morris and Susan Harper-Whalen

Ultimately, it's hard to genuinely value play for children if we as adults don't have it in our own lives. Thus, at the heart of our planning for any training are the following questions:

- ~ How can we set up playful ways for the adults to explore this topic?
- ~ What experiences will not only deepen their understandings, but also renew their spirits and desire to play?

Margie Carter and Deb Curtis

INTRODUCTION

Games are a wonderful and effective training strategy that can help adults revisit the ways of learning inherent in play. Because one of the goals for using games in a training session is to have fun, games promote a positive disposition toward learning. Training games can be modifications of popular childhood and adult games or those developed specifically for training sessions.

GUIDELINES FOR USING GAMES

When using games, it is important to make them meaningful and purposeful for participants as well as relevant to the topic. As you plan to incorporate a game into your training session, ask yourself the following questions to make sure you are using the game wisely.

- ~ Does the game clearly support the participant outcomes you have identified for the session?

Games offer a playful way to introduce or review specific information during a training session. Avoid the trap of working so hard to make training "fun" that important content is sacrificed. Training time is precious for both the trainer and the participants. You must weigh the amount of time it takes to explain and play the game with the benefits in learning.

A game can be used to introduce or review key con-

cepts. For example, a simple crossword puzzle might include one-word references to the key concepts you have identified for a session about observing young children. The Observation Crossword clues and completed puzzle graph might look like the following:

			² T											
			R			³ W	⁴ R	I	T	E				
			U				E							
¹ O	B	S	E	R	V	A	T	I	O	N				
			T				L							
					⁵ A	G	A	I	N					
							S		⁷ U					
							T		S					
⁶ O	B	J	E	C	T	I	V	E						
							C							

Observation Crossword Clues

Across	Down
1. Gathering of information	2. Have faith in
3. Compose	4. Possible
5. Again and _____.	7. Apply
6. Nonsubjective	

This crossword could be completed at the beginning of the session to introduce the topic you will address or as a review at the end to help participants remember key points you have already discussed.

~ Have you planned an introduction to the game that includes clearly explaining the purpose and goals of the game to participants?

As described in the previous e-newsletter (Training Solutions #5), clear instructions are an essential part of an effective learning activity. When using games, clear instructions about the "rules" will help participants feel comfortable joining in.

In addition to helping them understand how to play the game, an effective introduction will also help participants understand why the game is being used in the session. The game is more likely to go well and to remain in participants' minds if they clearly understand the reasons for playing it.

Many adults have not yet had the opportunity to learn that fun, playful activities can be a meaningful part of serious learning. The value of playing the game is also enhanced when you engage participants in discussion of what was learned, what new information was discovered, and/or how the game relates to the learning outcomes of the session.

~ Does the game minimize the risk of putting one group member in an uncomfortable situation?

Games that allow participants to pass rather than take a turn or require group efforts to solve problems are most likely to promote a safe learning environment. While making mistakes is part of the learning process, certainly most people would rather make mistakes in a less public setting. If there are correct answers related to completion of the game, provide a way to self-correct, if possible.

~ Have you minimized competition in the game?

While competition can enliven a game, a frequent side effect of competition is a reduction in learning. Many participants subtly withdraw when the contest becomes intense; others choose not to respond rather than risk making a mistake and jeopardizing their team, which leaves the few who are left to carry on the activity.

Since competition discourages many participants' inclination to fully participate—and individuals who are not fully participating are less likely to be learning—

competition limits the effectiveness of the activity as a learning tool. The development of networking relationships and collaboration skills in workshops can also be inhibited with too much focus on competition.

If you feel the need for incentives, the entire group can applaud themselves to celebrate the learning they have accomplished. Or you can provide a treat to celebrate the "sweet taste of learning" for all participants. Incentives might include a discussion of the most important knowledge gained through the process, an offer to type up the results of the game and mail them to participants, or a piece of candy or bag of herbal tea to celebrate learning.

JEOPARDY GAME

Many games allow you to use the rules for the game but change the content to fit the training topic. For example, the rules for a jeopardy game are that participants are given a brief answer in a specific topic area, and they must come up with a simple question. This game can be used in many ways but is quite effective for getting participants familiar with a handbook or a publication of guidelines. You provide the answers (which is most likely the basic content of your training session anyway), and participants work by themselves or in teams of two or more to find the "questions" in the different sections of the handbook. A variation of these rules is to have both answers and questions. Participants must match the correct answer with the correct question by searching the handbook.

PICTIONARY GAME

Pictionary is a popular parlor game that lends itself to varied content. To play Pictionary, make a list on index cards of important words or concepts related to your training topic that could be represented in pictures. For example, in a session on working with early intervention professionals, the list might include occupational therapist, pediatrician, family, team meeting, collaboration, and early childhood professional. Divide the large group into groups with 5-6 members. Give each a stack of word cards. One person in the group privately selects a word card and draws clues so team members can guess the word. The team is allowed one minute to figure out the word. Once the word is guessed (or is

provided, if time runs out), the team works together to develop a clear definition of the word. Note that teams are not working in competition with each other. Rather, the competition is with the clock, and the goal is learning.

DANCE THE WHIRR, WHIRR, WHIRR

Margie Carter and Deb Curtis made up a game they use to create an immediate experience of adult learning theory in action. They created a dance for people to learn in four different ways. Following are the dance instructions for dancing the WHIRR, WHIRR, WHIRR excerpted from *Training Teachers, A Harvest of Theory and Practice* (1994):

- ~ Clap your hands together in front of your body eight times.
- ~ Stomp both your feet four times.
- ~ Clap your hands over your head eight times.
- ~ Clap in front of your body five times, stop for two beats and then clap ten times.
- ~ Shake your head back and forth eight times.
- ~ Twirl around three times, saying WHIRR WHIRR WHIRR as you twirl.
- ~ Repeat sequence two more times.

Here are the instructions for the four different ways to learn the dance. Tell participants to read the dance instructions silently for a few minutes. Ask them to turn their papers over, and you read each of the following instructions to them one at a time.

- ~ Ask participants to stand and dance the WWW without reminders from you or the paper.
- ~ Have participants listen while the full set of instructions are read and then ask them to dance the WWW.
- ~ As participants watch, demonstrate the instructions as you read them. Then have everyone do the dance.
- ~ Have participants work with a partner to discuss the directions, share strategies, and teach each other the dance. When they feel ready, ask the whole group to do the dance together.

This game would most likely kickoff an animated discussion about how each of the strategies they experienced relates to learning theory; how this experience relates to the role of play and active learning for children; and how the way we think people learn influences the way we support children's development.

CONCLUSION

When you include playful activities such as games in training sessions, you

- ~ enhance the potential that participants will remember the key concepts you present.
- ~ foster the disposition to value play as a learning tool.
- ~ increase the likelihood that participants will enjoy the learning process.
- ~ reinforce the value of play for young children.

The types of games and their use are seemingly endless! When you follow these guidelines for using games, you increase the likelihood that whatever game you select (or create) will provide opportunities for meaningful learning for participants in your training session. ~

RESOURCES*

- * *Teaching Adults: An Active Learning Approach* by Elizabeth Jones (1997). NAEYC: Washington, DC.
- * *Workshop Essentials: Planning and Presenting Dynamic Workshops* by Paula Jorde Bloom (2000). New Horizons: Lake Forest, IL.
- * *Training Teachers: A Harvest of Theory and Practice* by Margie Carter and Deb Curtis (1994). Redleaf Press: St. Paul, MN.

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

TRAINING SOLUTIONS is published six times a year. Individuals on the Montana Early Childhood Trainer Directory receive the e-newsletter as a benefit through the ECP Trainer Listserv. If you are not currently subscribed to the listserv, or are unsure if you are or not, please check your status by e-mailing ecp@montana.edu. **TRAINING SOLUTIONS** is also available at www.montana.edu/ecp. Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include reference.

If you have stories to share about implementing the ideas described in this issue, please address your comments to your training colleagues at trainerdirectoryexchange@listserv.montana.edu. If you have comments about the topic of this newsletter or ideas for topics to address in future issues, please contact:

Sandra Morris, Editor - Training Solutions

Child Care plus+, The University of Montana Rural Institute, 634 Eddy Avenue, Missoula, MT 59812-6696

1-800-235-4122 or (406) 243-2891

sandra.morris@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

EDITORIAL TEAM: Sandra Morris; Susan Harper-Whalen; Libby Hancock; Sara McCorkle