Best Practices for Training Early Childhood Professionals

SHARON BERGEN

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Acknowledgments

The development of this book has been inspired by so many people that it is difficult to thank them all on this page. First, I want thank my always-inspiring family. Jamie, you, before anyone else, believed I could do this and waited patiently for many hours while I typed and typed. This is for you, above all. Next, there is the obvious inspiration—Allison, a most gentle and patient editor. Thank you for all your hard work in making this book better in so many ways. Finally, I want to thank David Heath and the entire Redleaf staff. Your encouragement and patience helped me to persevere, and your collaboration was essential to everything that shines in the final product.

Two other groups of people deserve thanks for their continuing inspiration. To all of the teachers, program directors, and trainers in the early childhood profession—you are a constant inspiration to me and to the families you serve. Thank you. Your work is rarely glamorous and often unrecognized, but always important.

And, finally, special thanks go to the Education and Training Department at Knowledge Learning Corporation. All of you hold special places in my heart; you are inspirations to me both personally and professionally. This book would not exist without your constant demonstration of everything that defines best practices. I never tire of learning from you.

Sharon Bergen

Introduction

Carol stared at the blank page. Tomorrow night she would conduct her monthly staff meeting and training session. She wondered aloud, "Why is it so hard to plan these meetings?" Mentally she reviewed the last few meetings, and each had been disappointing. Carol shook her head and thought, "I was a good teacher. Planning learning activities was one of my strengths. Why is planning for my teachers so challenging?"

Does this scene sound familiar? Across the early childhood profession, great teachers become program directors and suddenly become responsible for supervising adults and planning learning experiences for teachers rather than young children. If you are reading this book, you have either decided to become a trainer or, more likely, your job duties already include training. One of the interesting realities of the early childhood education profession is that the training of teachers is conducted by many individuals in a variety of capacities, few of whom have prepared professionally to work with adult learners.

Many of the skills that have helped you to be successful as a teacher or program director will also be useful in planning and delivering training sessions for your staff members. In fact, one of the goals of this book is to help you use the skills and knowledge you have developed as a teacher to plan and implement training for adults. You should see many parallels between what you already know about early childhood education and the skills and concepts you will use to train teachers.

Throughout the text, the term *teacher* is used to refer to staff members of all levels in the program. The term *director* is used to refer to the person responsible for planning the program's training and staff development.

Although there are certainly men in the field, the overwhelming majority of early childhood teachers and directors are

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women. Throughout the book, the pronouns *she*, *her*, and *hers* are used to avoid the more awkward *he or she*, *him or her*, and *his or hers* usages. There was no intent to ignore or diminish the positive role male teachers and directors play in early childhood settings.

The first section of this book describes a framework to organize your thinking about training. This framework uses what you already know about developmentally appropriate practices for working with young learners. In this section, we will also look at the role and goals of training within early childhood programs.

The second section of the book is intended to help you understand the task of working with adult learners. Like children, adults have some characteristics as learners that we can expect and plan for as we design training sessions. Teachers also progress through stages of development as they gain professional experience and tenure in the field. Understanding these stages helps you plan learning activities to best meet the needs of the adults with whom you work.

The final section of the book provides a methodology for designing training experiences and tips and techniques for implementing training activities. Mastering these methods will help you use your planning time wisely and will increase your comfort and confidence as a trainer. These best practices are used by trainers in a wide variety of professions and are used by many early childhood training programs to develop employees and to create high-quality programs.

Throughout all of the sections of the book, you will find activities and exercises to enhance both your training skills and the organization of your center's training plan. These activities and exercises are designed to help you to employ the best practices described in the book and to develop and implement an overarching training plan in your program. In the early childhood classroom, we use a curriculum and lesson plans to guide our teaching and ensure that the children in our care receive a well-rounded early education. Similarly, directors or trainers should develop a plan for training to ensure that teachers receive well-rounded professional development. The information, tools, and examples included in these pages can be used to support your continuing development as a trainer and to begin your work in developing specific plans for the training programs you administer and the professionals you serve.

A Note about the Audience for this Book

In most early childhood programs, directors are responsible for the planning and implementation of staff training and professional development. Therefore, this book was written with program directors in mind. At the same time, assistant directors, trainers, and others who support the training of teachers will find this information equally helpful.

SECTION 1

Establishing a Framework

The Role of Training in Teacher Development and Program Quality

Fran stared at the agenda for her Super Saturday teacher training day:

- *thirty minutes for welcome and introduction of new teachers*
- *two hours to introduce the new assessment tool*
- *one hour for lunch*
- *two hours to renew the first aid training*

Fran worried. Only two hours were left to teach everything else her teachers needed to know, and she wasn't sure where to start. "I guess I'll focus on discipline—they always ask for that topic."

Every year, early childhood programs devote valuable time and resources to teacher training. You have probably planned and implemented a variety of teacher training experiences already—some were great while others were disappointing.

All too often, training plans are developed with one goal in mind—fitting the most-requested topics into the number of hours required or available for professional development.

If you are reading this book, you probably have an interest in improving the results of your training and in capitalizing on the investment you are making in the teachers' professional development. Perhaps you would like your training efforts to do more for your program than merely meet regulatory requirements or fill up the time allocated for training at teacher meetings and other functions. Fortunately, a number of best practices exist that can help you to improve the effectiveness of your training efforts. Most of the changes you can make will not increase the expense of the training you are offering, yet they will make the investment more worthwhile and effective.

In this chapter, we will look at a simple definition of training, your role as a trainer,

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and some of the reasons for conducting training programs. This foundational information will set the stage for the development of your training plans and the evaluation of your training efforts.

A Definition of *Training*

Many terms associated with the development of employees are used interchangeably—for example, many people use the term *professional development* instead of the term *training*. Or you may see terms such as *in-service training* and *pre-service training* used to describe various teacher training requirements. Unfortunately, a wide variety of terms are used with little consistency throughout the early childhood literature and across varying agencies and regulatory bodies. As a trainer for your program, you must familiarize yourself with the terms used by your program and the regulatory agencies in your area. Familiarizing yourself with terms enhances your credibility and helps eliminate confusion for you and your trainees.

In general, *professional development* refers to a broad category of activities and includes training, credit-based coursework, mentoring, and other activities designed to support professional growth. For example, a teacher might attend a specific conference or volunteer as a participant in a professional task force as part of his professional development. *Training* is a more specific

term that is used to describe an activity designed to improve employee knowledge, skills, or attitudes and to change behavior on the job. A teacher might attend a training session designed to introduce a new preschool curriculum and then implement that curriculum in her classroom. Remember that training always has the ultimate goal of changing behavior to improve job performance. Therefore, training has a practical application and a link to the participant's job expectations.

When we think of training, we usually picture a classroom with an instructor (or trainer) leading a group of participants (or trainees). While instructor-led or facilitated training is certainly one method of training, there are many others. Trainers, like teachers of young children, use a variety of methods to meet the learning needs of their trainees. Training might take any of the following forms:

- individual coaching or mentoring
- self-study using print or electronic media
- action learning, study groups, or communities of practice
- on-the-job training, including demonstrations, shadowing, and guided practice
- online (Web-based) training or distance education
- computer-based training

These training methods, along with the many forms of instructor-led experiences, are appropriate solutions for differing

Spotlight on ASTD

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has researched and described the competencies and practices associated with training excellence. Its Web site, conferences, publications, and certification programs are excellent sources of information and professional development for anyone choosing a career path as a trainer. Trainers from a wide variety of professions participate in ASTD. Many also choose to pursue certification to enhance their credibility and professionalism. For more information about the organization, local affiliates, conferences, or certification courses, see the ASTD Web site: www.astd.org.

training needs. The challenge is matching the right teaching or training method to the learning need—as you do when teaching young children.

Regardless of the training methods used, many regulatory agencies differentiate between pre-service training and in-service training. Typically, *pre-service training* refers to education or training requirements that must be completed to qualify to work in a specific capacity. For example, a state may require twelve hours of pre-service training in early childhood education to qualify as an assistant teacher. *In-service training* refers to training that is completed while holding a particular position. A state may require a certain number of hours of in-service training for teachers employed in child care programs. These requirements vary from state to state and

many even vary within states, based on the licensing agencies involved. Often, in-service training is measured by the number of hours per year each employee must complete. Trainees expect you as the trainer to be knowledgeable about training requirements, so it is important to be aware of the pre-service and in-service requirements of the regulatory agencies that govern your program.

In addition to knowing the training requirements, it is essential for you to understand the theories and professional guidelines associated with training. Training has its own set of professional guidelines, associations, theorists, and well-known and respected practitioners (again, just like early childhood education). To be successful as a trainer, you need to combine your knowledge of early

childhood education content with the principles and methods used in expert training practices for adult learners.

The Many Reasons to Conduct Training

The purpose of a training session guides its development and the methods used to implement the training. You may conduct training for any of the following reasons:

- to comply with regulatory requirements
- to change teacher behavior
- to implement new policies, programs, or teaching methods
- to change attitudes
- to develop teamwork and build a sense of community among teachers
- to improve program quality

Comply with Regulatory Requirements

Most programs have some requirements for orientation training or for annual training of employees. For example, your state may require three hours of training on a variety of health and safety topics for each new teacher.

Change Teacher Behavior

One of the most universal purposes of training is to change on-the-job behavior, usually to improve practices or to enhance the quality of the program. For example, you may conduct a training session designed to increase the quantity and quality of teacher-child interactions during outdoor play.

Implement New Policies, Programs, or Teaching Methods

The way we do things in early childhood programs changes regularly. Because research continually informs our practice and often sparks the use of new teaching techniques or program ideas, trainings that support change are continually needed. For example, if your program is changing its curriculum to reflect a project approach, you might conduct a training to introduce this method to the teachers. When your program changes its procedures, another training is usually involved.

Change Attitudes

How teachers think about their practice is as important as their skills and knowledge base. Common sense tells us that teachers are more likely to implement practices they believe are effective and avoid those practices they do not believe in. Research consistently shows that teachers' beliefs about practices influence what they do in the classroom (National Research Council 2001, 264–265). Sometimes training is used to influence teachers' beliefs and attitudes in favor of particular methods or practices. Imagine that you are planning to implement a series of training sessions to introduce elements of language and culture among the families who participate in your program.

The goal of these sessions may extend beyond providing information to promoting openness between teachers and families and appreciation for other cultures. Your real goal may be to change attitudes as well as behaviors.

Develop Teamwork and Build a Sense of Community among Teachers

Teachers rarely work in isolation. Even teachers who work individually in a classroom depend upon others in the program to meet the complex and challenging needs of the children they provide care for. Teamwork is an essential component of quality early childhood environments. Therefore, it is logical to expect that some portion of the program's overall training plan would be devoted to building teamwork among its teachers. To illustrate this idea, suppose you are planning a training session about parent communication and teachers' roles in parent events. During this training session, you might introduce information about interactions with families or reinforce the program's principles for customer service. You might also conduct activities to build the kind of communication and team spirit among your participants that would be necessary to plan and implement a program-sponsored event.

Improve Program Quality

A great deal of research points toward the belief that training can influence program quality directly and indirectly. This topic will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

Keep in mind that the underlying reasons for training are not mutually exclusive. A training session may touch on several of the reasons listed on page 8. For example, a training session might begin with an ice-breaking activity that promotes teamwork and include information and activities designed to build skills and influence teachers' attitudes. At the same time, this session might also fulfill a regulatory requirement for training hours for those participating.

Training Priorities: A Delicate Balance

Despite the many reasons to conduct training, most early childhood programs cannot realistically provide all of the training desired because of budget and time constraints. Even if it were possible to provide unlimited training opportunities, trainers must work to balance training priorities with program needs. Teachers working with young children conduct a similar balancing act. When they plan a curriculum, teachers balance planning for children's individual needs with their need to be ready for school, to learn about certain subjects and content, and to flourish in social situations. Later in this chapter, we will explore two of the training priorities you will address as part of your overall program training plan, starting with compliance

training and moving on to program goals. In chapter 4, we will discuss the third area of training priorities: individual teacher training. Before we consider each of the priorities that will shape the content of your training, we must consider the importance of planning.

Developing Training Plans for the Program

Most teachers use a curriculum and lesson plans to guide their teaching. These tools help teachers cover a broad range of content and make the most of learning opportunities in the classroom. Similarly, trainers create plans to ensure that they have identified the goals of their training program and to support effective, high-quality implementation of that information. Before you begin crafting training activities, you should identify the priorities and goals you have for your training.

As a trainer, you are constantly balancing the three priorities of your program's training plan: compliance training, goal support, and individual needs. First, you must provide for required compliance training. Although you may not present all of this training yourself, you must include it in your overall plan. Second, you must plan for training that is needed to support your program goals. This might include training on a new curriculum you are introducing or training to address weaknesses in your

program's quality. Finally, you must plan for the training needs of individual teachers. This part of your training plan involves creating individual professional development plans for each of the teachers you support.

Throughout this book, you will complete activities to help you build a training plan. Completing each form as it is introduced will lead you through the process needed to develop a well-rounded, step-by-step training plan. If you serve more than one program, you can use the blank forms in the appendix on page 147 to develop additional planning documents.

Compliance Training Requirements

Early childhood programs are highly regulated by a number of agencies. For example, Head Start programs are part of a federally sponsored program and are required to meet the standards of the national Head Start governance agencies as well as the regulations of local child care licensing agencies and the local health department. As a trainer, you must understand the regulations and training requirements that affect the programs you work with. Always remember that you may need to meet requirements from a number of federal, state, and local agencies.

The sample form that follows will help identify and document the compliance training that must be part of your program's

Training Plan: Compliance Training

Program name _____

What agencies govern the program? _____

_____

_____

What other programs, such as accreditation, quality rating systems, or special funding sources, affect the training requirements?

PROGRAM	IMPACT

Briefly list some of the training requirements with which the program must comply.

New employee orientation _____

_____

Annual training requirements _____

_____

Special topics (first aid, CPR, blood-borne pathogens, child abuse detection and reporting, shaken baby syndrome, food handling, medication administration). List each topic and the training requirements.

TOPIC	TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

training plan. Use licensing regulations, accreditation standards, and other program regulations to help answer each question and develop a complete inventory of the training priorities imposed by various agencies and accrediting bodies. For a reproducible copy of Training Plan: Compliance Training, see form 1 in the appendix.

Training to Meet Program Goals and Enhance Quality

Think about the goals you have for your program that may need to be supported by your training plans. Consider your program's mission and any plans you have for program changes or growth. These are helpful starting points for your plans. Not every goal you have for your program affects your training plans. As you think about your goals, ask yourself, "What training do teachers need to reach this goal?"

Developing Goals

Writing goals can be a tricky task. Goals can quickly become a list of to-do items that never quite get done. Using a tool known as the SMART formula will help you clarify your goals and create a deadline for achieving each goal (Loo 2006). SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time sensitive; you describe each goal in a statement including each of these characteristics.

Ask yourself the following questions to SMART-test each goal:

Specific	Is it clear what is to be accomplished?
Measurable	Will you be able to measure whether the goal has been accomplished?
Attainable	Is this goal realistic for this program? Will the program be able to accomplish this goal with effort and focus?
Relevant	Does this goal match the needs of this program? Will accomplishing this goal energize employees?
Time sensitive	Is there a clear time line for accomplishing this goal? (While it is sometimes hard to commit to a deadline, picking a date for achieving a goal greatly increases the likelihood that you will do so.)

Consider the following goal: to use teacher training on literacy programs to support obtaining three stars in the state quality-rating system by the end of this year. This goal meets the SMART criteria because it identifies a specific goal (obtaining three stars in the quality-rating system). Presumably this goal is attainable for the program and is relevant to its success. The goal is measurable, and it identifies a specific time frame.

You can use the form on the following page to practice using the SMART formula to write program goals that will affect your training plan. Remember, goals are important because you need to know what your training must accomplish so you can prioritize your efforts and plan for all of the training that teachers will need. For a reproducible copy of Training Plan: Program Goals, see form 2 in the appendix.

Training and Program Quality: A Special Relationship

Keesha felt lucky to be involved in a project to help her program achieve accreditation. The specialist who visited the program had been very encouraging about the program's chances of achieving accreditation. Then Keesha reviewed the list of program improvements the specialist left on her desk. She realized that although the visit went well, she certainly had some work to do before the next visit. Optimistically, Keesha told the assistant director, "Looks like we'll have plenty to cover at our next training day!"

Many of your training goals are probably related to improving or maintaining the quality of your program. In early childhood education, we often have used training to improve program quality and to guarantee satisfactory services for the families enrolled in our programs. The belief that training supports quality has a long history

in our profession and is, in most cases, well supported by our professional research (Tout, Zaslow, and Berry 2006, 91–92). This is such a common practice that you already may be using training as a means to improve quality within your programs.

The link between training and quality exists for a number of reasons. First, teachers with enhanced knowledge and skills perform better in the classroom and therefore provide a higher-quality program. This commonsense argument is based on the belief that teachers do, in fact, learn new knowledge and skills in training and that afterward they apply their new knowledge and skill set in the classroom. While this is not always the case, as we will explore later in the book, quite often this is what occurs.

Second, the link between training and quality is reinforced by the expectations of our regulatory agencies and accrediting bodies. In many states and among many agencies, training is required to support program quality, and teachers are required to participate in training prior to and during their tenure in early education programs. These requirements are based on the research that describes the impact of training on the care that children receive and the services teachers provide.

Third, early childhood research supports the link between training and program quality. The highly regarded *Eager to Learn* report summarizes the literature on education and training of the early

Training Plan: Program Goals

Program name _____

Use the space below to draft two or three program goals that will affect your training plans in the next two or three months.

1. _____

_____

_____

_____

2. _____

_____

_____

_____

3. _____

_____

_____

_____

Now, review each goal. Does it fit the SMART formula—is it Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time sensitive? If not, revise your goals to incorporate each of these elements.

childhood workforce (National Research Council 2001, 270–276). Among other conclusions, this summary demonstrates that well-designed training programs can and do positively influence teachers' skills in supporting literacy and math development, providing sensitive care, adhering to principles of developmentally appropriate practice, and enhancing the overall quality of program environments.

At the same time, we can all think of programs that provide a great deal of training but do not reach high levels of quality. How can this happen? Despite all of the evidence supporting the positive influence of training on program quality, the case for training is still inconclusive for a number of reasons. First, while much of the research provides evidence of the effectiveness of training on overall program quality, less evidence supports the effect on outcomes for children. Many studies rely on the assumption that improving the program quality naturally results in improved outcomes for the children who participate in the program (Fukkink and Lont 2007, 294–311). While it seems logical that a quality program will have a positive effect on the children who participate, child outcomes are influenced by other factors that cannot be improved by training, such as the children's home environment or health.

Second, training, while valuable, is not the cure-all for program quality because it does not affect all of the processes and structural elements in programs that influence overall quality. For example, training may positively influence a teacher's behavior, but it does not change the materials a teacher has access to—and available materials can directly affect the breadth and depth of a program for any teacher, no matter how well trained.

Finally, the influence that training can have on program quality is limited by the design and implementation of the training. While the research supports the positive potential of well-designed and expertly implemented training, it also notes that much of the pre-service and in-service training in which teachers participate is uneven in quality, often isolated from program goals, and frequently ineffective in influencing teaching practices (Maxwell, Feild, and Clifford 2006, 21–48). Think back over your own experiences as a trainee: you may be able to recall a number of training experiences that failed to advance your teaching skills or your professional knowledge.

While the inconclusive nature of the early childhood research on teacher training might appear discouraging, it actually is very consistent with the beliefs that pervade the training profession. Throughout the training profession, regardless of the industry it serves, researchers, experts, and well-known practitioners emphasize the limitations of training and its impact on employee behavior and argue against the notion that training is the solution to all performance problems (Brinkerhoff 2006, 12).

Training Challenges and Misconceptions

Training can have a powerful affect on employee behavior and on the quality of a program. At the same time, we should be cautious about overstating the potential impact training can have on teacher behavior, program quality, or child outcomes. In the 1970s, Thomas Gilbert, a performance engineer, developed an approach to understanding employee performance that he called the behavior engineering model (Gilbert 2007, 88). While still widely used and acknowledged today, Gilbert's succinct way of characterizing the influences on employee behavior sparked a new way of thinking among trainers and human resource professionals.

Gilbert's model simply declares that employees are influenced by a range of environmental and individual factors including the availability of information, resources, and incentives, as well as the their own knowledge, capacity, and motives. Gilbert's work is important to all trainers because it supports our understanding of training's potential and limitations. The following principles are based on the work of Thomas Gilbert and his successors.

Training Addresses Employees' Lack of Knowledge or Skills

Resist the temptation to use training as the remedy for every employee challenge. Although teachers may fail to perform as expected for a variety of reasons—for example, lack of resources, low motivation, and little incentive for excellence—training is best utilized when poor performance is the result of absence of knowledge or skills. For example, training is helpful when implementing new programs, procedures, or policies because teachers probably lack knowledge about these new developments. On the other hand, if a teacher knows how to implement a new procedure involving, say, administering medication, but lacks the equipment to do so, all of the training in the world won't change her ability to administer medication in the way you have demonstrated during training.

Training Alone Is Rarely Effective in Changing Behavior

It makes sense that it takes more than training to really change employee behavior. Recall the teacher mentioned in the previous example who has received training in implementing a new medication administration procedure. What would happen if, along with the training, the teacher administering medicine also received the necessary forms and supplies as well as encouragement and support from her director during the early days of using the new procedure? As you can imagine, this combination of training, resources, and manager support would greatly increase the likelihood that she would try and continue to use the new procedure in the classroom—a permanent change in behavior.

All Training Is not the Same

Like all instruction, training should conform to principles of instructional design and use what we know about effective adult learning. Good training involves much more than simply showing a trainee a new skill or explaining a new concept. If changing behavior were as easy as seeing the skill done well, then everyone who has watched championship golf on television would be an excellent golfer! The chapters that follow will introduce you to many of the principles and practices that guide effective training practices. Implementing these ideas in your training sessions will help you increase the chances of your trainees learning and applying the information.

Training Is the Means to an End, not the Goal

Those of us who enjoy training and believe in its effectiveness also need to remind ourselves regularly that the true goal of our work is to improve the on-the-job performance of our trainees. No matter how creative, enjoyable, or well-liked a training session might be, it is only truly effective if the trainees use the knowledge, skills, or attitudes developed in the training to advance classroom quality, enhance child outcomes, or otherwise improve their teaching performance. Keeping this principle in mind helps trainers resist the temptation to use training gimmicks, games, or other methods that are not supported by the training session's instructional goals or objectives.

Before we move on to consider the principles that surround the design and development of training, it is important to consider your role as a trainer. Although a complete review of trainer development and competence is beyond the scope of this book, a short introduction to your role may help you make the best use of the best practices shared throughout the remainder of the chapters.

Becoming a Trainer: Opportunities and Responsibilities

Pilar looked across the group of participants in the conference room. Then she looked up at the trainer in the front of the room. To herself she whispered, "I sure wish I were standing up there instead of sitting here." Pilar wondered what it would take to become a trainer and influence so many teachers.

Much of the responsibility for the success of your training programs and sessions rests with you. You have a significant opportunity to use training to improve quality in early childhood programs and to enhance the experiences of children and families. At the same time, assuming training responsibilities also means that you must focus on an additional set of professional principles, skills, and obligations. In your capacity as the supervisor of teachers, the subject matter expert, or the training professional

in a program, you will find opportunities to strengthen and use your training knowledge and skills.

Director as Trainer

In early childhood education, directors are often the head trainers for the teachers in their program. This is true for a number of reasons. First, if you are a supervisor of teachers, you are in a unique position to understand the development needs of your teachers. When you conduct classroom observations or otherwise interact with teachers, you are able to gather information about their challenges and successes. This information will help you select training topics to support their developing knowledge and skills.

Second, as a director, you are often the person responsible for setting the program goals requiring training support. For example, you may be the one who chooses to implement a new policy or procedure that will require training to get started. In this role, you must look beyond the needs of individual teachers and consider the needs of the entire program and the families it serves. Some of the training needs you identify in this area will come from the mission of your program; others will come from your goals for growing and improving your program.

Third, you probably enjoy teaching others and find the time you spend supporting teacher development worthwhile and personally fulfilling. Many directors,

especially those who began their careers as teachers, find a great deal of satisfaction in continuing their teaching role through teacher training. Although adult learners are different from young children, much of the satisfaction you derive from helping others learn new skills can be found in your role as a teacher trainer.

Finally, in many programs, it is financially impractical to hire a person to conduct all of the training for teachers or to send teachers to training sessions outside the program. Even in programs with dedicated positions for trainers, directors often conduct part of the overall training plan.

Subject Matter Expert

Trainers often begin their careers as subject matter experts or supervisors and later develop and hone their training abilities. For example, the trainer at a bank probably started in one of the jobs he now trains others to perform. Stretching your skills as a supervisor and a subject matter expert is one of the opportunities that training presents for you as a program director.

Supervisors generally have some training responsibilities as part of their job descriptions. In coaching and mentoring the teachers who report to you, you are already doing some of the work associated with training. Still, not everyone who supervises others or has training responsibilities is equally skilled at conducting training activities or events. Perhaps you

Spotlight on Training Registry

In some states or for programs under some auspices, training may need to be conducted by a registered or approved trainer. In these instances, trainers are often required to have specific credentials or participate in train-the-trainer programs to develop training skills and to ensure consistently high quality of training development and delivery. Check your local regulations to understand any requirements for hiring registered or approved trainers for your program.

have participated in a training session with a trainer who was extremely knowledgeable and a true expert in subject matter, but she was not a very engaging trainer. This experience illustrates the often-overlooked obstacle that knowledge about a topic does not guarantee excellence as a trainer.

Training Expertise

If you have already conducted training sessions with individuals or groups of teachers. you may have some ideas about your talents and your opportunities for improvement as a trainer. The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) has a well-developed and comprehensive list of trainer competencies. Let's examine some of the basic attributes you will need to be successful as a trainer. Consider how well each of the following phrases describes you:

- ☐ assertive in group situations
- ☐ comfortable as the speaker in front of groups of varying sizes
- ☐ confident in presenting ideas
- ☐ able to address conflict and disagreement
- ☐ organized in developing learning experiences and planning training events
- ☐ comfortable creating and using a variety of audiovisual aids, including computer-based applications
- ☐ flexible and able to adapt plans in progress
- ☐ verbally articulate and able to speak professionally in scripted and unscripted situations
- ☐ enthusiastic and engaging, able to make the learning experiences fun
- ☐ open to change and embracing of innovation and improvement
- ☐ interested in research and learning about and trying new things—a lifelong learner

☐ willing to be scrutinized as a role model

☐ genuinely concerned about the learning of others

In addition to these personal attributes, trainers need adequate subject matter knowledge and skills in designing and implementing training for adults. Most trainers develop these with time, study, and practice. Crafting your own professional development plan to enhance your knowledge and skills as a trainer is an important step toward success.

Use the Trainer Self-Assessment on the following page to understand the knowledge and skills you now possess and some of your opportunities for development. Complete the assessment and use it to begin your professional development plan. For a reproducible copy of Trainer Self-Assessment, see form 3 in the appendix.

Summary

Training can be a powerful ally for any program director and an effective means to enhance teacher performance and program quality. Very few programs have no training requirements, and even if that were the case, wise directors would continue to use effective, well-designed training to get the most from their teachers.

So far we have looked at the definition of *training* and considered some of the reasons why you might implement training in your program. We also have reviewed some of the personal attributes needed in a trainer and have identified some opportunities to enhance your skills.

Trainer Self-Assessment

Name _____   Date _____

Check the box that best describes your abilities and attributes at this time.

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES	Not at all	Somewhat	Mostly	Always
I am considered an effective communicator.				
I respect confidences and personal information.				
I am able to be fair in handling conflicts and disputes.				
I convey respect for others, including those with different perspectives from my own.				
I enjoy learning new things.				
I usually consider change to be positive.				
I am flexible and can adapt quickly to changing circumstances.				
SUBJECT MATTER KNOWLEDGE				
People often seek my input on concerns or problems related to the program.				
I regularly attend trainings or otherwise update my knowledge about early childhood education.				
I value diverse points of view about program goals, procedures, and outcomes.				
TRAINING METHODS				
I am comfortable in front of others.				
I can present information forcefully and clearly.				
I am a good listener.				
Others find me motivating.				
I am able to recognize anxiety or discomfort in others.				
I know and can use a wide variety of training techniques.				
I am interested in what others think and say about my training abilities.				
STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP				
I am able to link program concerns or goals to training solutions.				
I am able to prioritize the needs of teachers.				
I often am selected to lead groups or projects.				
I am aware of a wide variety of resources available in my community.				

List each item to which you responded "not at all" or "somewhat." These are your areas to concentrate on when creating your professional development plan.

2

A Framework for Organizing Knowledge about Training

Leisha stared at her accreditation paperwork. How could she ever create a professional development plan for her center when every teacher seemed to need something a bit different? She thought, "When I was a teacher, we all went to the same training session every month. That simple plan worked for us; we did fine. Why does this have to be so complicated now?"
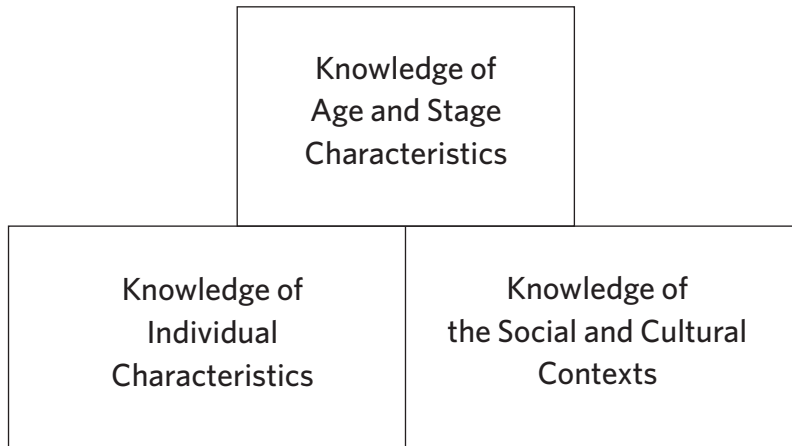
In addition to planning training activities that meet the compliance needs of your program and help advance your program goals, you will need to plan for the individual needs of the teachers you support. Organizing what you know about the developmental needs of teachers can appear to be a daunting task. Early childhood teachers struggle with an equally challenging task when they think about the individual needs of the children in their classrooms. Teachers must balance what they know about children's development,

the demands of school readiness and parent preferences, and program goals to construct classroom curriculum and activities that are effective and worthwhile. Your task as the trainer for your program is similar. In many respects, your role as a trainer could be described as the lead teacher in your program's adult learning classroom. Thinking about your role in this way will help you use much of what you know about good teaching to create high-quality training experiences for your teachers.

Using Models to Understand Practice

Mental models, or visuals, help us organize and remember information. Adults naturally create mental models of information to assist in organizing and remembering the information they encounter (Clark and Lyons 2004, 22–24). For example, when you read the ingredients for a recipe, you

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Three Dimensions of Knowledge

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┌─────────────────────┐
│    Knowledge of     │
│   Age and Stage     │
│   Characteristics   │
├──────────┬──────────┤
│Knowledge of│Knowledge of│
│Individual  │the Social and Cultural│
│Characteristics│Contexts│
└──────────┴──────────┘
```

may quite naturally imagine each ingredient on a shopping list. By doing so, you can then recall your shopping list when you gather the ingredients to begin cooking.

Many texts, job aids, and training sessions use mental models to organize information and to enhance memory. In the chapters that follow, we will use a simple mental model based on three dimensions of knowledge introduced in the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) developmentally appropriate practice guidelines (Bredekamp and Copple 1997, 9).

These building blocks will help you visualize the pieces of knowledge on which you will build your program's training plan. Each area will be briefly described in the sections that follow and will be covered more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

The Developmentally Appropriate Practice Model

Since their original publication more than twenty years ago, NAEYC's guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice, or DAP, have supported and influenced early childhood education. Teacher preparation courses, training sessions, and a wide variety of other programs refer to and support the understanding of developmentally appropriate practice. While elements of DAP are often misunderstood or misapplied, the guidelines and principles as a whole are well-known and embraced throughout the profession.

The Three Dimensions of Knowledge Fit Adult Learning

As you will see in the following sections and subsequent chapters, the DAP framework is broad enough to fit easily