GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EXPERIENTIAL TRAINING PROGRAM

Experiential training is based on the philosophy that people learn best through active learning and personal experience. Experiential training involves activities which require trainers to interact, carry out tasks, and participate in problem-solving. What follows are some guidelines to frame the development of an experiential learning training program, as suggested by Torkington (1992).

■ THE TRAINEES' SELF-DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE SEEN AS ONE OF THE MAIN TRAINING OBJECTIVES.

As a result of training, trainees should have an understanding of themselves as people and the kinds of skills, competence, and knowledge that they can share with others. Through the training process, trainees should be able to create their own materials and methods for working with others—whether that be children, parents, other caregivers, and/or their peers.

■ BEGIN WITH WHAT THE TRAINEES KNOW AND CAN DO.

The trainer needs to find out as much as possible about each of the trainees. Through this process the trainer should convey to the trainee that her experience is valuable and important for others in the group. The trainee's background can then be drawn on in the training. Group sessions should be an opportunity for trainees to get to know one another, to share expectations and self-doubts, and build self-confidence as well as confidence in other members of the group and in the facilitator.

■ PRACTICE, RATHER THAN THEORY, SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF THE TRAINING.

There are two kinds of practice:

- the practice the trainees already have as a result of relating to and understanding young children in their everyday lives (*natural* practice);
- the practice (practicum) that is arranged for them or that is provided by their present situation as a worker in a centre, as a child caregiver, or as a village health worker (*constructed* practice).

The task of the trainer is to use both these forms of practice to further develop the trainee's skills.

■ AVOID BEGINNING COURSES WITH THEORY.

Presentation and discussion of theory makes trainees feel ignorant and reduces confidence. It is important to find ways to interweave theory into practice and draw the theory from observation and practice. Theory makes sense to trainees when it is interwoven, as the situation presents itself. For example, this interweaving can occur when analysing or reflecting on practice in the group sessions or during the supervision of practice.

■ ENCOURAGE PEER SUPPORT.

As the training proceeds, trainees should gain confidence, which will allow them to reflect together on their practice. If problems arise in practice, trainees can begin to support one another with ideas and encouragement and even confront problems collectively. The support that is created during training can be continued once people begin their work.

■ SPEND TIME WITH TRAINEES IN THEIR PRACTICE SITUATION.

There are difficulties with having to travel long distances in the Majority World. Yet one day working alongside a trainee in her practice situation is worth many days of presenting theory. Trainers should always comment and build on the positive aspects of the trainee's work. If there are negative aspects, these should be noted, but rather than dwelling on them, suggest alternative ways of working.

■ BE SENSITIVE TO AND BUILD ON CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL PRACTICES.

In the same way that program content needs to be based on an understanding of and respect for traditional ways of doing things, this applies to the training process itself. Training is concerned not only with knowledge, understanding, and skill development but also with confronting values and attitudes. Positive practices should always be commented on and used as starting points for discussion of more negative practices. If cultural practices are not dealt with sensitively, there will be resistance to learning on the part of those whose culture seems to be threatened or attacked.

■ DEVELOP MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE TRAINING.

It is important to benefit from the experience and new ideas acquired in training to promote the development of culturally-relevant materials, rather than to work through the activities just as they are. For example, photographs, pictures, and videos can be used effectively to stimulate discussion of child development issues. They will be doubly effective if the photographs are taken, the pictures drawn, or the videos made in the community where the training is taking place.

Kate Torkington, (1992). "Experiential Learning in Action", in Training Programmes Enhancing the Skills of Early Childhood Educators,* Coordinators' Notebook *No. 12.

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