

Formative Evaluation of Adult Protective Services Curricula

Introduction

Writing curricula is a lot of work. It takes time, resources and teamwork. Due to the fact that Adult Protective Services are state, not national, programs, the states have carried the burden of developing and delivering curricula for training local staff and administrators. Only 19 states have specific annual APS training budgets, and of these, 13 have allocations of less than \$100,000. Given such limited funding, it has been virtually impossible for most states to develop comprehensive training programs. As a result, many states have shared each other's training materials.

In order to assist APS program administrators in developing and/or evaluating curricula, NAAPSA has developed a Formative Evaluation for APS Curricula. A Formative Evaluation is one that provides criteria with which to guide the development of a curriculum as it is being written, and may also be used to evaluate completed curricula. The checklist which accompanies this document is intended to be used as a guide for (1) the steps needed in developing a curriculum and (2) quickly evaluating an existing curriculum to see if it meets your particular training needs.

While little has been written about evaluating APS curricula, there is information from the field of child welfare which is relevant to curricula writing and evaluation in general. One excellent resource is *Training Evaluation in the Human Services*, which was developed by the National Staff Development and Training Association of the American Public Human Services Association. You can order it by calling 202-682-0100 X 276 or by going to their website at <http://www.aphsa.org>. The cost is \$25.00 check or credit card. Another good resource for training material is the Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention technical assistance center at <http://www.nttac.org/TtaGuides.cfm>.

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Joanne M. Otto
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Things to consider when you are developing or evaluating curricula

Levels of learning

There are four levels of learning. The level of learning that you are trying to achieve through developing the curriculum will determine the curriculum design.

Level 1 Participant satisfaction. The information was relevant, and the instructor was helpful and informative. Participant satisfaction does not assure that learning has taken place.

Level 2. Participant knowledge. As a result of the training, participants' knowledge, skills and attitudes have changed while they are in the learning environment (classroom).

Level 3, Participant performance. The worker's performance on the job has changed as a result of the classroom learning experience. As an example, in APS this could mean that a worker's interaction with a client has been modified from controlling to supportive.

Level 4 Work outcomes. As a result of changes in the way the participant works with the client, the client's behavior has changed. As an example, the result of an APS worker being more supportive might be a client who is more cooperative.¹

Target audience

Who is being trained?

In order for training to be effective, it needs to be tailored to the educational background and level of experience of the trainees. New APS staff, for instance, might need basic communications skills as well as statutes and regulations specific to their program while more seasoned workers might want in-depth training on subjects such as evaluating clients' capacity to make informed decisions.

If the training is intended for non-APS professionals, it is important to consider what their experience is in relationship to APS, why they have requested training, how much time they have available for training, as well as who would be the most effective trainers. Often, professionals respond better to material that is presented by someone in their own field—lawyers are more likely to listen to lawyers, and physicians to physicians, than to social workers. In some situations a team of an APS person who knows the subject of elder/adult abuse and someone from the professional group being trained is an effective teaching approach.

¹ Berdie, Jane, and Parry, Cynthia F. 1999. *Training Evaluation in the Human Services* APHSA, Washington, D.C. pp 2-3

Other considerations to be aware of are the special needs of trainees—are there language barriers or cultural differences which may be barriers to effective communication? Do members of the audience have special needs due to disabilities? What is the typical socio-economic and educational level of the audience?

The number of people to be trained

How large the audience is will affect the type of training materials to be developed as well as the level of learning to be achieved. Training for groups over 20 participants can be useful to impart information, but has limited value in actually transferring knowledge and improving skills. Whenever possible it is preferred to have small, interactive groups of 8 to 12 participants.

The length and frequency of training events

Will the training be for a few hours, a day, or a series of days? Naturally, the more complex the information, the more time will be required to present it in ways which will enhance participant learning. If a large block of time is required, such as 5 days, you may need to break up a week's worth into smaller blocks of time, in order to accommodate staff schedules. Sometimes it is not possible to have all the staff attending a training event at one time. Training may need to be repeated in order to have everyone learning the same material. Training which is repeated must include clear instructions for the trainer, so that the information that is presented and the way it is presented are consistent.

Location of the training

Where the training occurs will impact its effectiveness. The size and temperature of the room, seating arrangements, lighting and food all make a difference. A large, cold room with poor lighting, no coffee, classroom seating, and little or no audience interaction may provide information, but will not change the participants' job skills. In fact, such a setting may cause them to be restless, cranky and bored. A small, comfortable, well-lit room with U shaped or round table seating will encourage participant interaction and increase retention.

Cost is always a factor in deciding whether to hold a large training event in a central location, or to bring the training out into the field where people work. Local or regional training means that participants are more rested, having not had to travel a long distance. However, if the training is local, it should be in a location away from the office, and with the understanding that participants' time will not be interrupted.

Learning Objectives

The learning objectives of any training should be:

Tied to the levels of desired learning

Is the purpose of the training to inform the audience, to change the way participants think, to change the way they do their work or to change the way that clients behave?

Based on a thorough needs assessment

What training needs have been identified by the target group themselves, through workers' evaluations by supervisors, by feedback from other professionals and the community?

Identified, clearly stated in behavioral terms, and relevant

How will this training make a difference? What behaviors are you trying to change, and why?

Measurable and observable

Level 1 learning objectives can be measured by participant satisfaction questionnaires completed at the end of the session.

Level 2 learning objectives can be measured by pre and post-tests.

Level 3 objectives can be measured by interviews with workers or supervisors, observation of workers in the field and reviews of client records.

Level 4 learning objectives can be measured by developing a research design that demonstrates a causal relationship between the worker's knowledge and skills and the client's behavior changes.

Addresses

Cognitive learning, (knowledge, facts): "Now I know three indicators of elder/adult sexual abuse."

Skill acquisition (how to): "Now I know how to ask an elderly woman if she has been sexually abused."

Affective learning (options, attitudes of trainee): "Now I feel more comfortable talking about sexual abuse with an older victim."

Outcome based

Outcomes must be measurable. It is not enough to say that a presentation to physicians on elder/adult abuse will increase reporting. You need to quantify what the increase will be: "Outcome will be an annual 10% increase in reporting of elder/abuse by physicians in Colorado."²

Content

Reflects best practice

The information that is being presented represents the state of the art in this subject. Good content depends on thorough research and extensive field experience.

Is relevant to job needs of target audience

Training that is too theoretical will cause the audience to tune out, since it is not seen as relevant to their daily work. Training that depends too heavily on "war stories" does not increase knowledge about how and why certain methods are or are not effective.

² APHSA pp 2-3.

Stresses transfer of learning on the job

What is learned in the classroom needs to be practiced and observed in the field.

Communicates any necessary policies and legal requirements

Statutes and regulations are the basis for APS work. Staff who are unaware of them put clients at risk, and are a potential liability problem for the agency.

Takes into account cultural, regional, and other diversity issues

Staff, as well as client diversity are important considerations. Staff who recently have emigrated from other countries may not be aware of community cultural norms in the United States regarding abuse. Clients from other cultures, on the other hand, may have practices which to them are culturally appropriate, but may be seen as inappropriate in this culture. For example, the Asian medical practice of “cupping” is an accepted procedure for some Asians, but the bruising left by the procedure might be interpreted as abuse by a worker unfamiliar with the practice.

Is consistent and congruent within the curriculum

As an example, if the APS reporting statute requires that workers always make a report of physical abuse to local law enforcement, the case example used in the training should reinforce that requirement, as should all the material within the curriculum.

The scope (breadth of coverage) and depth (detail) of the content to meet learning objectives needs to be:

At an appropriate learning level to meet learning objectives

If the learning objective is to change workers’ behavior, the learning must be experiential. As an example, a large lecture presentation on signs of dementia will not be sufficient to change the way workers relate to clients with dementia. They will need not only to receive information on signs of dementia, but observe someone who is simulating dementia, identify which behaviors may be indicators, and practice their communication skills with the person playing the part of a demented elder .

Sufficiently complete so that the trainer has all information needed to train from it

Unless you are the person who wrote the curriculum, you may have difficulty replicating it unless you have very clear directions on how to do so. And, in the event that there are multiple trainers using the same material, it is important that they all conduct the training in the same way, in order to assure consistent learning for different audiences.

Organization

Trainer instructions should include

- Timed outline, clear table of contents, agenda, labeling of activities, labeling of materials.
- Broad overview provided early in the training and before each major module.
- Summaries and segues (transitions) at appropriate points, including a final summary.

- Training instructions for trainer which are sufficient to guide training delivery and promote consistency.
- Potential areas of differences in regional practice and how curriculum can be flexibly used.
- Content that is well sequenced, from simple to complex, universal to exception, fundamental to more advanced and by logical steps suggested by the content.

Trainee materials should be:

- Clearly labeled, numbered and easy to locate
- Have directions for each activity
- Are professional and attractive

Training Methods

Reflect adult learning styles

Experiencing: Concrete Experience

Make use of experience that people have (talk about it). Provide them with an experiential activity which produces data for further learning.

Examples: self-awareness questionnaire, guided fantasy

Processing: Reflective Observation

Discuss the experience people have.

Share reactions and observations of the experiential activity.

Examples: report reactions to game or other activity, brainstorm, problem solving discussions

Generalizing: Abstract Conceptualization

Discuss general trends, truths found in the experience people have.

Bring together experiences and reactions into conclusions, new concepts and theories.

Examples: brief lectures, overheads, hand outs

Applying: Active Experimentation

Modifying old behaviors or testing new behaviors

Practicing them in everyday situation.

Preliminary demonstration and/or coaching may be helpful.

Include a mix of training methods to reflect learning styles

Lectures

Demonstration of skills

Opportunities for practice in applying knowledge and skills

Large and small group discussions

Individual, dyadic, small and large group activities

Case Studies

Role Plays

Simulations

Questionnaires
Audio-visual materials

Are consistent with learning objectives

Reinforce use of knowledge and skills on the job

Are doable in the time frames allotted

Training Materials

Handouts

- Reinforce training content
- Are clear, visually appealing, and varied in format
- Can be used as tools and references on the job
- Provide clear and complete instructions for all training activities

Overheads/ Power Point/ Flipcharts

- Use only key points
- Use simple visual models
- Are appropriate to the size of the training group

Audio-visual materials

- Are carefully chosen for length, content and quality
- Are relevant to the learning objectives
- Include time for processing

Props

Are integrated into the content
Are easy to use³

Post Training Evaluation

The day you start developing or adapting any training curriculum you should be thinking about how you will evaluate the effectiveness of the material once the training has occurred. Some of the training curricula developed by the states have been done by ad hoc committees made up of APS line workers and supervisors. As a rule, these materials have not included adult learning techniques, nor have they been evaluated. The U.S. Administration on Children, Youth and Families has determined that from 15 to 20% of any project budget should be earmarked for evaluation.⁴ However, for most APS programs, which lack training budgets of any kind, evaluation has not been a priority. Being able to show improvement in trainees' knowledge, skills, attitudes and

³ Berdie, Jane. 1995. *Five Domains of Effective Written Curricula*

⁴ APHSA p.8.

performance is a powerful way to demonstrate program viability. A comprehensive and useful post training evaluation should include the following:

An identified goal: what you wanted the training to accomplish

- Provide information
- Transfer knowledge
- Change behavior
- Change outcome

Feedback: how the trainee liked training program

- Desired information included in comment sheet
- Questionnaire is easily tabulated and quantified
- Anonymous
- Room for comments

Learning: what trainees learned as a result of the training

- Needs to be measured in a quantifiable manner and on an objective basis
- *Types of evaluation of learning
- Pre-post tests for principles, theory, facts
- Demonstration or presentation for skill learning

Behavior: changes in on the job behavior

- Requires before and after appraisal of trainee's job performance
- Relates to job performance

Results: whether training has achieved specific, ultimate results desired

- Before and after assessment advisable
- Can be evaluated by supervisor⁵

⁵ Berdie



Checklist for Formative Evaluation of Adult Protective Services Curricula

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I. Target audience

Number of persons to be trained

Length and frequency of training events

- | | | | | |
|---|-----|-------------|-----|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> APS line workers | ___ | Specialized | ___ | Generic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> APS Supervisors | ___ | Specialized | ___ | Generic |

Educational backgrounds

Levels of experience

Expectations of training

- | | | | | | |
|-----|-------|-----|----------|-----|----------|
| ___ | Rural | ___ | Suburban | ___ | Urban |
| ___ | State | ___ | Regional | ___ | National |

Other professionals

Who requested this training

Why it is needed

Special needs of trainees

Learning Objectives

- Are based on a thorough needs assessment**
- Are identified, clearly stated in behavioral terms, and relevant**
- Are measurable and observable**
- Addresses cognitive learning, (knowledge, facts)**
- Addresses skill acquisition (“how to”)**
- Addresses affective learning (options, attitudes of trainee)**
- Are outcome based**

Content

- Reflects best practice**
- Is relevant to job needs of target audience**
- Stresses transfer of learning on the job**
- Communicates any necessary policies and legal requirements**
- Takes into account cultural, regional, and other diversity issues**
- Is consistent and congruent within the curriculum**
- Has the scope (breadth of coverage) and depth (detail) of content to meet learning objectives**
- Is at an appropriate learning level to meet learning objectives**

- Is sufficiently complete so that trainer has all information needed to train from it

Organization

- Trainer instructions include
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 - Examples: self awareness questionnaire, guided fantasy
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Examples: report reactions to game or other activity, brainstorm, problem solving discussions

- Generalizing: Abstract Conceptualization**
Discuss general trends, truths found in the experience people have
Bring together experiences and reactions into conclusions, new concepts and theories
Examples: brief lectures, overheads, handouts
- Applying: Active Experimentation**
Modifying old behaviors or testing new behaviors
Practicing them in everyday situation
Preliminary demonstration and/or coaching may be helpful
- Includes a mix of training methods to reflect learning styles**
- Lectures**

Demonstration of skills

Opportunities for practice in applying knowledge and skills

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Audio visual materials

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