Skill Building Learning Lab
for Trainers
Online Pilot
Evaluation Findings

Presented to:
Ohio Child Welfare Training Program
Steering Committee

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Institute for Human Services
Overview

The Skill-Building Learning Lab For Trainers was first developed and piloted in 2003. It was designed to help trainers develop and implement workshops that facilitate learners’ application of newly learned skills. The learning lab includes two half-day classroom sessions with time between sessions to allow trainers to complete the assignments and practice applying new skills. Although the original pilot was successful (see Final Report submitted June 2003), replication was hampered because trainers could not travel to classroom sessions.

Online Pilot

Because of the positive outcome of the in-classroom pilot and subsequent inability to easily replicate the design, it was decided to pilot the learning lab as a distance learning course for the 2008-2009 contract years. The original design was revised as an instructor-facilitated, blended distance learning course that had the following features:

- A pre-training readiness assignment notebook was emailed to participants asking them to develop a plan to enhance their online experience; review training principles and key concepts; and identify personal learning needs.

- The learning lab had a primary facilitator (Renee Resnik) and two IHS staff who provided technical assistance on technology use and helped provide feedback on participants’ assignments.

- Three, two-hour synchronous online sessions were held in the evening – when trainers were most available - via an online meeting format with time between sessions when participants were to complete assignments.

- Between sessions one and two, participants identified parts of a training they designed they wanted to strengthen. These training challenges were posted on a wiki (a website that allows multiple users to create, modify, and organize web content in a collaborative manner) so that lab facilitators and fellow participants could easily access the material and provide written feedback and suggestions.

- Between the second and final session, participants were instructed to revise their training outlines based on feedback from lab facilitators and fellow participants posted on the wiki and come prepared to present and discuss their revisions at the next online session.

- A thirty-minute phone coaching session was offered to each participant between sessions two and three.

For this pilot, synchronous sessions were held 4/23/09; 5/11/09; and 5/27/09.

Methodology

Recruitment: Potential participants were identified from a pool of trainers who had completed most coursework in the OCWTP Training of Trainers (TOT) Series and were actively training their own curriculum in the OCWTP.

Instructions: They received email instructions to complete the pre-training readiness assignments along with information on how to link to the online synchronous sessions. During the first session they were provided instructions on how to access and participate in the wiki.

Evaluation/Feedback: Following sessions one and two, participants completed an interim survey about what they liked, would like to see changed, and suggestions for the next session. A final, more detailed online evaluation survey was completed at the end of the third session. Feedback from the learning lab facilitator was received through emails and phone conversations.

Summary of Findings

Participants: Of the eight identified, five OCWTP trainers agreed to participate. Participants represented trainers who train supervisors and managers, foster caregivers, and caseworkers. Upon reflection, a class size of no more than five or six was ideal given the time needed for each
participant to present and receive feedback on their assignments. The group was large enough to offer rich dialog, but small enough to allow facilitators to actively engage everyone.

One participant’s community only had dial-up connectivity. As a result, she accessed online resource materials and completed between-session assignments at her local library. She joined the synchronous portions of the lab via the phone and had hard copies of all PowerPoint presentations.

**Participant Feedback:** Participant feedback for this pilot was very positive. The one participant who was not able to join the online synchronous sessions shared her appreciation to be allowed to participate despite connectivity issues and believed she gained knowledge and skills even from her more limited participation. All participants agreed instructions were clear and log-in procedure was easy to follow. All participants indicated they learned valuable skills; that their training designs were significantly improved; and that they would register for another online course.

Participants had the following recommendations:

- Allot more time for participants to post data on the wiki and to review and give feedback regarding the work others have posted. Participants also need more time to review and respond to the feedback others have given to them.

- Structure assignments to encourage more intentional interactions between course participants between sessions.

Detailed evaluation findings from participants are found on the following pages.

**Facilitator Feedback:** In general, facilitators were very pleased with the outcome of the learning lab. Training designs and outlines submitted for review at the beginning of the lab showed significant improvement by the end. Additional feedback included:

- Participants were happy to participate in the pilot and willing to share their feedback about the method of training and content.

- The orchestration of the three sessions was effective - each session built upon the previous and became more sophisticated in expectations and outcomes.

- There were concerns after the second session about whether or not the participants were actually recognizing the many requirements of a successful training, but the decision to offer a 30-minute phone coaching session helped. It gave insight to those who were struggling with their training materials. This should become an ongoing component of the learning lab.

- Facilitators were disappointed regarding the lack of participation by one participant. A decision is needed regarding how lack of participation should be addressed in the future.

- The facilitators believed participants gained knowledge and understanding of how to strengthen their training designs and materials.

**Conclusions/Recommendations**

This distance learning pilot was very successful. Trainers have consistently indicated a desire for ongoing training to help strengthen their course offerings, but have also indicated unwillingness and ability to give up a work day to attend training (many already have to use vacation days in order to train) and cannot travel to a central location in the evening. Offering the learning lab as a synchronous distance learning option proved to be a good fit.

The 30-minute phone coaching sessions should become a standardized component of future learning labs for trainers. These sessions were valued by facilitators and participants alike.

Deadlines for posting and responding to comments on the wiki need to be stressed and time between posting and responding needs lengthened. Pilot feedback indicates that developing this community of practice was valued but requires more time to implement.

In the future, the OCWTP will need to consider:
• Purchasing an account with a wiki server to protect intellectual domain: Trainers do not want others to have free access to their material and an account will limit who can access and view material posted.

• How to allow for easy audio-conferencing: The current pilot used the IHS bridgeline for audio coverage which could become cost prohibitive. The Skill-Building Work Team has recommended that the OCWTP begin to experiment with VoIP (short for voice over internet protocol) that allows use of the internet for phone calls. This requires a headset for learners, but would free them from holding the receiver for extended periods of time.
Evaluation Data Summary

5 Participants

- Do not work for a PCSA .................................................. 19 years
- Administrator, Adoptive Parent, Trainer ........... 18 years
- Contract Mental health Therapist & Trainer ........ 18 years
- Independent Contractor ............................................. 7 years
- Retired from a PCSA .................................................. 5 years

Licensure Status:

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Reason for Taking the Skill Building Learning Lab

- I can do the class a little at a time (2)
- Agreed to pilot project (2)
- I can take the class at the best time for me
- Too far to drive for classroom training
- More structured interaction with peers and instructors to learn about online and interest in the course

If yes, how many online courses have you taken?

- 4 graduate level psych-related courses, one or two online classes for licensure renewal
- At least three for license credit
- More than 5

All participants reported that they would register for another online course

Have you taken an online course before:

- Yes
- No
Were new concepts introduced in this course? If yes, were they satisfactorily explained?

- Yes, lots of new ideas for training.
- Learning objectives were clearly presented at the beginning of the learning process -- explained well at onset of program, with more detailed explanations as the course progressed.
- In that this was a highly individualized course for each participant, I was able to learn new ways to apply learning in the classroom setting. Many ideas were presented that would trigger future concepts that I could envelope in new trainings as I develop them.
- The use of internet learning with group discussion was new. My other courses were about reading and taking a test and submitting. The use of looking up ideas and content on the internet and then applying to the class was new, even though some of the resources were known previously. Suggestions about how to further use the internet were new.
- Yes. They were explained in the detail needed for all participants to grasp the content.

Please identify two most important things you learned from this course and how you will apply them to your work with children and families.

- Ideas on how to trim back content and to always bring the training back to the needs of the learner (Case worker, foster parent etc.)
- The importance of creating meaningful participant learning exercises and activities to enhance learning was reinforced; the value of peer evaluation and support leading to a finished product. As a result of this training experience, participants in my training programs will learn specific, practical techniques and skills that they can take to their workplace, foster home setting, or other work with children and families.
- Relearned how different people are and how they bring different awareness and state of mind and being and style to the class. Relearned how the instructors or consultants have an ability to see the patterns of your thoughts and practice, as in therapy, and help to bring these to your awareness to do or not to do anything about them. I learned how much I overdo some times.
- I learned that with the right tools; trainers can access an extremely supportive environment. I was given wonderful resources to explore.

1) Better development of competencies and 2). Utilizing case studies in appropriates courses
In what ways did this course meet your needs?

- I got a chance to learn from other trainers.
- I feel more skilled in program and curriculum development; more skilled in developing training programs and allowing for/encouraging transfer of learning.
- I was able to get more work done on my projects, learn about myself and got new resources and contacts.
- It spoke directly to me about how to better create a learning situation for participants; how to expand a course, different perspectives from which to evaluate the mode of training.
- I received great information and assistance on improving the two areas I noted in the above question.

What did you like best about the online course?

- Being able to access training from home, and opportunity for active online, real time interaction with peers in the field
- Learning new skills, getting some work done on projects I am working on, personal awareness, getting new resources, support from the project sponsors
- The support of fellow participants
- Trainer interactions and trainer-instructors interactions and feedback
- It was at night. I could not do this during the day

What did you like least about the online course?

- The participation of the others fell off for the third session and/or my internet access issues on the last 24 hours did not let me see their work the last day of class.
- Holding a phone to my head for two hours.
- A little feedback on the phone.
- There was not a downside for me.
- Not being able to see people. Live video streams would be great. Would be nice to see all participants. If had to choose, would vote for seeing trainers first as a priority.

What improvements would you make to this course?

- Perhaps add an additional session or two to further enhance the acquisition of information and concepts. Perhaps more structured interaction, assignments to encourage more intentional interactions between course participants between sessions.
- Continued periodic re-doing when time and interest permits
- I would help people to have DSL - the class would be too hard and slow with dial up. The Mac/PC thing is also a bit of a problem.
- I would just want more time to respond to others in the group.
- The last date for posting material for others to comment on should be the first day of, perhaps, a week to respond to the material posted.
Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

- Yes, before going into a classroom it is always good to get an extra set of eyes on the training.
- I would recommend this course to all OCWTP presenters -- perhaps it could become part of mandatory training to qualify as a trainer.
- Most definitely.
- Yes, if you have the time and interest and -- internet access helps.
- Yes, it is so individualized for the particular needs of each trainer it can be invaluable if used correctly.

How did you get your questions answered about course content?

- By asking facilitators and peers online. By interaction between meeting through online posting of questions and comments. By accessing new resources presented by course facilitators and/or peers during the course of the training.
- Participation. listening, watching, viewing, reading, multi- sensing, feeling, reviewing, rethinking, spacing the learning
- I could e-mail or call beforehand or just talk to the instructors during the class.
- Called Sally Fitch for help; as well as, had a wonderful consultation with Renee Resnick.
- Through the live training, wiki responses, telephone conversations, e-mail.

Were you able to interact with other participants using the discussion board? If yes, was this helpful? If you were not able to interact using the discussion board would you like this ability in future online courses?

- Yes and was not used too much but it was good to have the option.
- I think this is an invaluable part of the training.
- Very helpful.
- I think the notes from others were very valuable and the lack of notes or info to offer was also a lesson.
- Yes, and I found it to be very helpful. Could think about the material in "my own time".

What tips would you give to people who are going to take this online course to maximize their learning?

- Send your family away, make sure your phone and computer are charged.
- I pre-arranged a space; had two computers; had internet backup; pre-read and printed the course material; had time to do the homework; applied it to a project that I was working on; had trust in the instructors; had relationship with one of the participants and liked her; believed that the sponsors had done and did good stuff and would do it again; had the additional resources from them to participate.
- Get on line early, find a quiet place, print materials ahead of time, and familiarize yourself with technology being used -- such as wiki.
- Have the ability to use the computer while talking on the phone. Also, having a quiet uninterrupted space in which to work is extremely helpful.
- Print material ahead of time, check wiki responses daily, and give other participants enough time to respond to your posts.
Why did you take this course topic?

- I wanted to gather feedback on my training and a chance to work with other trainers.
- Directly applies to the work that I do. Helped me address my need to take my training to another level.
- Personal interest in content and interest in online

- Improve my skill as a trainer; get updated on the newest technology; to try to stay current with new trends; to bond more with other trainers; to improve my resource list
- To improve my workshop development skills

Did you need technical support? Who did you contact? Did you get the help you needed?

- They want out of their way to make the tech support easy
- On line technical support was available and satisfactory.
- I needed some support to put things into the place online. The staff was great.

- Sally Fitch helped me greatly as I am not able to be online and on the phone at the same time (only have dial-up). Sally went out of her way to try to keep me current with material.
- Sally Fitch assisted me with initial connection problems and Wiki questions

Additional Comments from Participants

- Where might we go from here? This had been a valuable experience. A final thanks to sponsors and participants. It is apparently much harder to hide lack of participation in online classes.
- None

- The instructors were wonderful. All were responsive, candid, and encouraging.
- Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of this curriculum.

None
Interim Feedback – Post Session I

Something I really liked about tonight’s session:

- The opportunity for trainers to share our experiences and challenges.
- I like the free flowing interaction between participants.
- Good opportunity to share concerns and questions. I am often just out here as an independent without a support group; however, Lois is always great. Sometimes talking in a group helps me frame the issues sooner. Thanks for the opportunity.
- Interacting with other trainers.
- The camaraderie among trainers. Felt supported. Liked knowing that this would be valuable for me; and hopefully improve my performance either training or writing curriculum.
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Something I would like to see changed:

- 2 hours is a long time to stare at a screen.
- Not have to hold the telephone headset. Why can’t we use computer mics?
- Don’t know yet. I want to know how to get ear plugs and where do you plug them in so you don’t have to hold the phone. Also, really aware of my workspace and bi-focals! And the computer!
- I can see that not having a computer to look at in the future may be problematic. Sometimes it was harder to follow. I think I will definitely have to invest in satellite hook-up.
- I liked the format as presented.
- I have no suggestions for next session.

A suggestion for next session:

- Perhaps a little more structure to assure we get the feedback on our challenges, etc.
- I will know better when I have completed the assignment.
- Is there an outline? I am not sure what to expect in the next session. Will we be discussing the homework assignment the majority of the time?
Interim Feedback – Post Session II

Something I really liked about tonight’s session:

- We had a clear plan, which was clearly presented and we followed it. I learned some more about the WIKI process and clearly stating training objectives. I got some work done on one of my projects so I got additional benefits. Another benefit was recognizing my conscious incompetence. It was interesting to hear the three experts coach and reinforce the language and philosophy of the OCWTP. I was inspired to re-read and organize the recent printouts of the trainer material. I wasn’t in the mood because I worked all day and found that it was energizing like physical exercise. I am aware of learning at many levels about a number of things. Imagine what I don’t have awareness of as yet. Still waters run deep.

- Sharing of resources. Assistance in thinking deeper about workshop objectives.

- I liked the open discussion and practical, applicable, constructive recommendations offered by leaders as well as peers. I liked leaders willing to suggest other online resources to participants.

- Because we all work alone, it is nice to hear that other people are dealing with the same questions. The time was really watched closely. I think that was good and will help trainers who tend to tater on.

- I realized in this session what a valuable tool this can be. I am glad to be a part of the pilot. I have always said that the more brains you have around an issue the better the assessment or solution would be. This venue provides this wonderful opportunity. It is not often that you can find people who will support you and your work in this respect and it is greatly appreciated. I feel that as a result, my course development will be much improved.

Something I would like to see changed:

- Sometimes hard to follow the conversation when people are talking.

- I think this is a process I would like to engage in more than once. I wonder if this could be done quarterly and or, since learners have self identified, I wonder if members of the group will elect to continue or do it quarterly so its more than a one time experiment. I am aware of not liking the idea of one time exposure so I think I will check with you and others to repeat for practice. I am acutely aware of the stress and danger of not having regular peer contact with regular peers and how much I need some as an independent practitioner, so I want a way to promote this contact without intruding on others time and good will. Do we get trainer hours for this (i.e., CEUs?)

- Nothing – I felt the session was well planned, you kept us on course, and encouraged open dialogue.

- Sometimes the sound is bad.

- Obviously, I need to see a computer and be a fully fledged member, if you will. It might be helpful to have some guiding principles about how to respond to close ended questions. If the answer is no, do you want people to say no, or stay silent. I think it might be helpful for the facilitator. It may also be helpful to set dates a bit differently. For example, we are to post by May 22, and respond by the 27 (several of those days include Memorial Day Weekend). It does not leave a lot of time for people to give thoughtful input to those who post late. It might be helpful to give a week after the last post date.
A suggestion for next session:

- Have us practice using the controls, so it’s easier to follow.

- My suggestion to myself is to have contact with others during the week as soon and often as possible and keeping working to enhance the product. Practice, practice, and practice parts of the process to get a better product. Celebrate the uniqueness of the participants and leaders.

- None.

- I liked how, maybe it was Carol, provided an outline of her presentation. I found it difficult to try to navigate through my full PowerPoint when I was making my 15 min. presentation. So, as for me, I am going to try to be more organized to provide more clarity and to maximize value of my presentation to others.

- Can you send the PowerPoint to our e-mails, so we can have a clearer understanding of the agenda before the call? At least for me, that would be helpful. It is hard to only listen, and I know that is my issue alone here.