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***Writing Curricula at the Skill Level as a
Foundation for Embedded Evaluation***

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PART A: A MODEL FOR TRAINING TO THE SKILL LEVEL

Teaching skills in child welfare work involves the integration of competencies at various levels, including:

- *Knowledge* (e.g. about child abuse dynamics and laws and agency procedures)
- *Cognitive strategies on how to apply knowledge*, i.e., using knowledge to guide behaviors/actions. An example is considering/weighing information in light of a theory of behavior or a framework of practice.
- *Behaviors or actions*. Typical behaviors/actions in child welfare include assessing, planning, documenting and decision-making. Many behaviors/actions are inter-personal (such as interviewing, participating in planning meetings, testifying in court). Others are individual, e.g., observing, reading records, documenting.

Different skills involve various mixes of all of these competencies. Whatever the mix, a useful way to train to skills is with the following steps:

Step 1	Explain (and discuss)
Step 2	Demonstrate (and discuss)
Step 3	Practice
Step 4	Feedback
Step 5	Discussion

These steps need not always be completely sequential. For instance, you might want to go back and forth between explaining and demonstrating if there are several aspects to the skill.

PART B: SKILLS TRAINING ‘ STEPS’

STEP 1: EXPLAIN (& DISCUSS)

In writing curricula keep in mind what the behavior/action should look like and what knowledge and cognitive strategies go into it (these we often frame as learning objectives).

Formative criteria include the following:

- ➔ Are the competencies and objectives at the right level and are they both comprehensive and specific enough to “nest” the information we want to impart?
- ➔ Is the information accurate, as well as sufficiently comprehensive and specific to the roles of the trainees?
- ➔ Is the information imparted during training in ways that support interest and learning by a range of learning styles (including time for discussion and clarification).
- ➔ Is the relevance of the information to the focal skill made clear?
- ➔ Are the key points emphasized so that the trainees are ready to focus on them during step two when the skill is demonstrated?
- ➔ If there is an assumption that trainees already have some or all of the information (e.g., from previous training), is that confirmed/reinforced? Is the information reviewed at the right level of detail during this step?

STEP 2: DEMONSTRATE (& DISCUSS)

Demonstration of a skill helps people to see what the skill actually looks like. Often this component of skill training is minimized or even left out. Sometimes it is covered but only in the negative e.g., “watch this interview (on tape or by trainers) and critique what is wrong with it”.

Demonstration can be provided in a variety of ways including:

- ➔ Video or audiotapes (audio tapes work well for training phone screeners). There is a dearth of good tapes and so we often have to use them in a negative/positive mode (“some of what you will see/hear is good practice, while some could be better”).
- ➔ Trainers demonstrate the skills. A demonstration with two trainers is better than one with a trainer and trainee, but often we try to involve a trainee in the role play. It is much more effective for two or more trainers/coaches to demonstrate using a script – this insures that the skill will be demonstrated as you want it to be.
- ➔ Written material – a case plan and/or a case study.

Formative criteria include:

- ➔ Is the demonstration primarily positive, i.e., shows the skill(s) as we want them to be done?
- ➔ Does the demonstration cover and highlight the key components of the skill?
- ➔ Does the demonstration attempt to exclude extraneous information so that the trainees can focus on the important components?
- ➔ Does the content, timing and method of discussion help trainees to identify the following:

- Key relationships between knowledge, cognitive strategies, and action/behaviors
- What makes for an effective use of skill
- Common barriers to effectiveness and strategies to overcome
- What might be variations of trainee approach and style that are congruent with the skill

STEP 3: PRACTICE

This step is the opportunity for trainees to practice the skill. Clearly, in the classroom practice is in a hypothetical situation and usually only one portion of the skill can be practiced, and only for a limited time. This step needs to be highly structured so that the key components can be practiced and so that the next step (feedback) can be useful. It is necessary that trainees have an opportunity to practice the skill before the embedded evaluation.

Formative criteria include:

- ➔ Is the practice focused on the key components of the skill?
- ➔ Are there sufficient directions and support materials to target and standardize the practice?
- ➔ Is there a component built in to the practice that creates a role for someone (preferably a trainer or coach but at minimum another trainee) to observe and give feedback and is there guidance on this role so that the feedback is meaningful?
- ➔ Is there sufficient time given to allow each trainee practice?

STEP 4: FEEDBACK

This is the step that gives each trainee the opinion of the person(s) charged with the role of observer/critiquer.

Feedback is most effective when it:

- ➔ Targets the key skills
- ➔ Is individualized, i.e., each trainee receives feedback about his/her practice
- ➔ Identifies both strengths and challenges of each trainee, giving examples illustrating actual behaviors
- ➔ Helps each trainee integrate knowledge, cognitive strategies, and behaviors
- ➔ Gives suggestions for improvement and strategies that can be implemented on the job
- ➔ Is both oral and in writing
- ➔ Uses a standardized written format that identifies items, strengths, challenges, suggestions for improvement, and strategies for transfer.

Formative criteria include:

- ➔ Is there a format for giving feedback that includes a standardized approach and instrument?
- ➔ Is there an opportunity for trainees to receive feedback from a trainer or coach? Have the trainers/coaches been taught to perform this skill?
- ➔ If the feedback will be provided partly or solely by other trainees, have trainees been prepared to give feedback? This can be done by training them to do so early in the training, i.e., by including a mini-training on observing and giving feedback. This mini training would itself be a skills training: it would include the steps of Explanation, Demonstration, Practice,

Feedback and Discussion of Transfer (“transfer” being conducting feedback as part of training exercises). Thus, the trainer would:

- Explain and then demonstrate observation and feedback
 - Provide an opportunity for trainees to practice giving feedback to each other
 - Facilitate discussion of their experience and how they will use this to conduct feedback throughout the rest of the training (combining the steps of Feedback and Discussion). This would provide some preparation for trainees in giving feedback to each other during the subsequent skills building sessions.
- ➔ Is sufficient time given for feedback?

STEP 5: DISCUSSION

This last step is an opportunity for the group as a whole (or small groups) to discuss the skill, the practice session, and what might be transfer implications. Again, the discussion session should be sufficiently structured to cover these issues.

Formative criteria include:

- ➔ Do the instructions to the trainer provide sufficient detail to cover the key issues:
- Review of the skill
 - Experiences in practice including typical strengths, challenges, obstacles and strategies
 - Transfer implications, e.g., barriers and supports to using the skill on the job