

Trainer's Corner



What Difference Does Training Make?

by A. Clay Shouse, Vice President

Welcome to the inauguration of the Trainer's Corner. This column will appear periodically to provide High/Scope trainers with suggested training activities and strategies as well as information about special events on the Foundation's training calendar. However, to get the ball rolling, it seems worthwhile to give some definition to the word *training* and to explain the Foundation's position on this important work.

The age-old debate over whether teaching is an art or a science is discussed in *Models of Early Childhood Education* (Epstein, Schweinhart, & McAdoo, 1996, High/Scope Press). Some espouse teaching as an art involving the creative response of individual teachers to individual children without clear links to theory or research. Others argue that teaching is a science that directs teachers in procedures established through theory and research findings. High/Scope views good teaching as both an art and a science, involving the creative but disciplined application of research-based knowledge to working with children or adults.

We use the words *teach* and *train* synonymously. The American Heritage Dictionary (1985) defines the words *train* and *training* without use of the word *teach* or *teaching*. However, it does employ the

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terms *focus*, *direct*, and *aim* in its definition of training. These words imply movement or departure from one position, point, perspective, or practice to another. For High/Scope, curriculum has not only helped articulate the current status of practice—the “from”—it has also identified the direction in which change and improvement should be headed—the “to.” Without the curriculum and the content that it provides, there could be no training as we understand it.

As you read upcoming Corners, keep in mind that High/Scope Foundation's work in training and staff development is in many ways set apart from other models. The primary reason for this is the very close relationship between the strategies used in the curriculum with children and those used in training situations with adults. For example, seminar and workshop sessions include active learning experiences that blend both physical and intellectual activity. Further, consultants make sure that, whenever possible, there are materials

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for each participant and that participants have choices, manipulate the materials, and use their language and communication skills. Moreover, High/Scope consultants are supportive of adults rather than directive or laissez faire.

We also know that training is challenging, if not downright *hard*. It isn't like filling out a stack of forms and being rewarded by getting to the bottom of the pile. And it isn't like entering data in a spreadsheet and having the software do the calculations and line up all the columns and rows accurately. Despite what most of us say, we don't change easily, we are not open to new ideas, and we are not always willing to even listen to suggestions. This is not to say that we cannot change, that we cannot learn, grow, and improve our practices. Good training can help us accomplish this. As you face the challenges of training, remember this: **providing inservice training does improve teaching practices.**

This affirmation is a small part of what has turned out to be a very influential force in the Foundation's evolving training and professional development programs—*Training for Quality: Improving Early Childhood Programs Through Systematic Inservice Training* (Epstein, 1996, High/Scope Press),

which documented the results of the High/Scope Training of Trainers Program. This study looked at, among other factors, the type and level of training provided to teachers, what teachers gained from their participation in training, and whether there were developmental differences between children in High/Scope and comparison programs. Perhaps one of the most important lessons to come from the study was the positive effects of inservice training on program quality:

Inservice training can make a good program even better.

- Good programs provide safe and well-equipped physical environments monitored by nurturing adults.
- Inservice training results in better programs that also provide the following:
 - Improved access to materials
 - More opportunities for children to exercise choice
 - Extended sequences to carry out and review self-initiated activities
 - Enhanced observational and questioning skills that enable adults to support children's reasoning and language development

Inservice training as a supplement to education and/or experience can be an effective and viable option for further improving program quality.

- The benefits of teachers' formal education are enhanced by inservice training.
- Experience will not improve teacher skills unless it is accompanied by inservice training in the context of a good program.
- Inservice training targeted at top-level teachers is an effective strategy for upgrading professional skills at all staff levels.
- Trained teachers establish good learning environments for colleagues.
- Training allows experienced teachers to mentor less experienced peers.

Inservice training can improve teaching practices if it includes the following:

- Workshops presented by in-house trainers with an emphasis on active participation by adults
- Specific coverage of curriculum issues and teaching practices
- Classroom visits to observe and give feedback to teachers as they turn ideas into practice
- Follow-up sessions that encourage staff to share problems and solutions

So keep in mind that done properly, inservice training can be a powerful tool in your work to provide high-quality programs for children and families.

Inservice training does improve teaching practices.

In future columns we will examine topics such as designing, planning, conducting, and evaluating workshops; conducting classroom observation; using feedback techniques; and going through program accreditation. We'll examine more about what research has to say on effective training and how it influences program quality. We also plan to solicit pieces from High/Scope field consultants and certified trainers who want to share their own success stories. So keep watching this space!

To order *Training for Quality: Improving Early Childhood Programs Through Systematic Inservice Training* (SP-R1033, \$19.95), order online at www.highscope.org/welcome.asp, use the order form on p. 33, or call 1-800-40-PRESS. ■