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Contents

TRAINING

Training Intervention Strategies to Promote Application of Ethics Learning in Practice Settings

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This is the final article of a series of seven articles focusing on ethics in child and youth care worker training and development. The previous articles provided an introduction to the National Staff Development and Training Association's Code of Ethics for Training and Development Professionals and discussion regarding core values and principles and ethical responsibilities as professionals to clients, colleagues, the profession and society. The final two articles (including this article) focus on developing training intervention strategies to promote ethical practice on-the-job.

Baldwin and Ford (1988) present a useful framework for examining transfer of learning that can help to promote ethical competence in child and youth care practice situations. They emphasize the importance of individual trainee characteristics, the work environment, and the training design. This article will emphasize the training design component, but the reader should recognize the importance of individual and environmental factors in promoting or hindering ethical practice. For example, research consistently indicates a .30 to .40 correlation between individual cognitive moral development and ethical behavior (Wells & Schminke, 2001). Similarly, environmental factors such as organizational support, the organizational value of training, administrative support, supervisory support, coworker support, and opportunity to use training have been found to promote transfer of learning (Brittain, 2001; Curry, 1996; Holton, Bates, Seller, & Carvalho, 1997; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995). Effective interventions to promote ethical practice on-the-job will incorporate individual and organizational/environmental elements into the training design.

Training Design

A large body of research has been conducted on four areas of training design (identical elements, general principles, stimulus variability, and response availability) that are relevant to training in ethics (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Curry, 1996; Goldstein, Lopez, & Greenleaf, 1979). Salomon & Perkins (1989) condense these four transfer principles to two major areas: (1) low road transfer and (2) high road transfer.

Low Road Transfer

This type of transfer occurs via incremental learning involving varied and extensive practice that gradually extends to ever-widening situations. The learner may “overlearn” certain crucial ethical content to the extent that it is displayed almost “automatically” when cued by the appropriate ethical situation. The training and development professional may initially design the training and the transfer situations to be as similar as possible (identical elements) but gradually extend the learning and practice opportunities to include a wide variation of potential ethical situations.

Unfortunately, it would appear that most training programs rarely design training that would involve this type of approach (it is usually very difficult to get administrative support to provide the required amount of learning and practice time), even though it is essential for certain types of skills (e.g., physical restraint). Much existing training (including ethics training) appears to involve little opportunity for practice. Even when “role plays” are included in training, they are often not used for skill rehearsal by all of the participants. Learning a skill to the level of “automaticity” usually requires extensive practice time.

Other implications for ethics training based on this approach include:

1. *Identify concrete ethical problem solving skills that can be practiced in the training and work environments.* Practice the demonstration of ethical problem solving with real case scenarios (or as close to real as possible). Learners need the opportunity to demonstrate skills and not just discuss ethical cases.
2. *Identify and practice “key” ethical skills to the level of automaticity.* Some behaviors can be “overlearned” to the extent that a worker routinely employs them with little conscious effort. For example, a worker may routinely discuss a client’s rights as part of the admission procedures. A child and youth care trainer may routinely initiate training sessions by clarifying roles and responsibilities including the organization’s policy and professional standards regarding confidentiality.
3. *Practice with application in mind.* Make connections between the learning and doing situations. For example, ask a learner to adapt a role play to make it as similar as possible to a typical work situation. You may ask them to choose another role player that most reminds them of someone in their work situation.
4. *Use instructional strategies that closely approximate the ethical assessment, decision making, and implementation process that will occur on the job.* For example, a worker may rehearse in training a consultation session regarding an ethical issue with a supervisor or colleague.
5. *Increase the types of ethical practice scenarios to include increasingly ever-widening situations.* This may involve the use of a variety of individuals and settings that workers encounter. Since the amount of time permitted in training is limited. A practice and participant feedback plan must be developed and implemented that extends beyond the training setting.
6. *Use distributed practice with gradual removal of practice.* Integrate the practice into the

work environment. This may involve the use of trainers and coaches in team meetings, etc. Encourage supervisors and others within the work environment to promote ethical practice through discussion and ethical problem solving in team meetings.

High Road Transfer

While low road transfer strategies encourage the learning of key skills to the level of automaticity (to the extent that a behavior occurs almost automatically, with little conscious effort), high road transfer involves very deliberate, conscious (mindful) thinking about the learning and implementation of an ethical skill. The ability to think about, monitor, and guide how one learns and applies learning on the job has been described as metacognition or meta-competence (Bernotavicz, 1994; Curry & Rybicki, 1995). Learning skills to the level of automaticity frees up the limited amount of conscious short-term memory available to an individual and potentially increases the opportunity for learners to use metacognitive skills to promote application of ethical problem solving. However, more frequently, the tendency for most individuals is that automaticity inhibits analytical reflection. Examples in everyday life include learning about culture and family. Family and cultural knowledge are usually learned so “well” (to the level of automaticity) that most of us lose conscious awareness of the powerful family and cultural norms and values that guide our day-to-day behavior. This often becomes a barrier for many professionals in their attempts to become culturally competent. This “invisible” learning can also affect how child and youth care workers deal with ethical situations. For example, Mattison (2000) describes how workers may establish deontological (adherence to ethical rules) or teleological (an emphasis on the consequences of proposed actions) value patterns when dealing with ethical problems. This kind of mindfulness is characteristic of high road transfer of learning.

High road transfer also involves the use of abstract principles (e.g., rules, labels, prototypes, schematic patterns). Transfer occurs by purposefully using general rules or principles that underlie the subject matter. A basic assumption behind the development of ethical codes is that individuals will recognize and transfer the appropriate general ethical principle to the specific situation/case in the actual practice situation. This is also the concept behind the use of ethical assessment and decision making models.

Implications for transfer of ethics learning based on the high road approach include:

1. *Train underlying principles of ethical practice in child and youth care that transcend context.* Help learners recognize these underlying ethical principles (mindful abstraction).
2. *Train ethical assessment and decision making strategies that can be used with many different types of ethical problems.*
3. *Utilize parallel processing.* For example, have the learners examine how the trainer-trainee, the supervisor-supervisee, the worker-youth relationship, and the parent-child relationships are similar regarding the ethical use of power.
4. *Use a variety of case examples for each ethical principle to strengthen a learner’s understanding of the principles.*
5. *Provide examples of when an ethical principle applies and when not.*
6. *Help learners cognitively store ethical information with retrieval in mind. Identify situations where ethical problems are likely to occur.* Help learners identify cues that will signal the worker that an ethical problem may exist.
7. *Teach metacognitive skills.* Help the training participants learn how to learn and apply application principles regarding ethics. Help them learn to use the ethical codes to monitor

and guide their practice. For example, provide suggestions and application aides that can serve as reminders to workers on the job that a case situation may have ethical implications similar to one that was previously discussed in training.

8. *Help participants plan for application of learning.* Help them think about how to overcome barriers to application as well as strategies to prevent or reverse the process of backsliding into old habits.

To effectively promote the application of ethics learning in child and youth care practice settings, training and development professionals will need to incorporate both low and high road transfer approaches. In addition, interventions will need to extend beyond the “classroom” setting and involve key persons within the transfer milieu.

A Practical Model for Promoting Application of Learning on-the-job

Curry, Caplan & Knuppel (1991; 1994) describe a basic but comprehensive model that can be used to guide individual, environmental, and training design transfer interventions (including low and high road approaches) into a comprehensive transfer plan. Broad & Newstrom, (1992) and Wentz, (2002) also advocate a similar approach. They emphasize that key persons (e.g., worker, coworker, supervisor, trainer) at key times (before, during and after formal training) can help or hinder transfer effectiveness. They suggest the utilization of a transfer matrix for transfer assessment and intervention that can be applied to any training, including ethics training. Figure 1 provides a brief illustration of how the model could be applied to ethics training. Many additional before, during, and after transfer strategies that incorporate both low and high road approaches can be included to help a child and youth care training and development professional achieve one’s ethics training and transfer objectives.

The total number and strength of transfer factors in each cell promoting transfer (driving forces) and hindering transfer (restraining forces) determines the amount of transfer. The transfer matrix can be used as a template to place over any existing training program to assess factors that affect transfer and develop an effective plan for transfer intervention and evaluation by increasing transfer driving forces and decreasing transfer restraining forces. This approach involves a paradigm shift from viewing (ethics) training as an event that occurs during the training session to an intervention influenced by key individuals before, during and after training.

Conclusion

This series of articles has provided an introduction to the National Staff Development and Training Association’s Code of Ethics for Training and Development Professionals in Human Services. The importance of the child and youth care worker training and development professional in promoting ethical child and youth care practice was emphasized throughout. Conceptual models, professional responsibilities and practical strategies to promote ethical practice through training were discussed. Continued discussion and development in this area is needed.

Person	Before	During	After
Learner	Identify relevant cases	Think about how	Meet with your

	ethics discussion.	ethical dilemma when you are on the job.	identify your value pattern tendencies (e.g., deontological – teleological).
Trainer	Meet with child welfare personnel to identify relevant ethical case scenarios for later use in training.	Help learners make cognitive connections from in-class discussion to real work situations by helping them identify a case to use the ethical decision making model.	Send an email reminding learners to work on their ethics action plans. Meet with learners for a follow-up “booster shot” session to discuss application of ethics learning
Supervisor	Meet with worker to emphasize the importance of ethics training for the organization. Communicate the value of training and the integration of the NASW Code into everyday practice	Attend the ethics training with the entire team.	Lead a discussion during a team meeting regarding ways that the ethics training could be incorporated into daily practice.

Figure 1: Ethics Transfer Matrix

Adapted from: Curry and McCarragher, (2004). Training ethics: A moral compass for child welfare practice, *Protecting Children*, 19, 37-52.

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