Module 3C: Session Handouts

Teamwork

Contents

Pre- and Post-Assessment

Module 3C: *Teamwork*   **Date:** _____

Trainer's Name: _____ **Participant's Name:** _____

Job Title: Teacher   Assistant Teacher   Director   Other: _____
(circle one)

Ages you work with: infants   toddler: ones   toddler: twos   preschool   pre-k
(circle all that apply)   6 weeks to 12 months   13 to 23 months   24 to 35 months   3 to 4 years   4 to 5 years

Instructions: Think about the following statements in relation to what you understand BEFORE and AFTER the training. Please check the box that best describes how you would rate your level of knowledge and skills based on the training topic: 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

STATEMENTS	BEFORE THE TRAINING						AFTER THE TRAINING					
	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Basic human needs												
Impediments to teamwork												
Ways to overcome the impediments to teamwork												
Difference between empowerment and delegation												
Importance of staff and teacher development												
Importance for leadership to be conscious of the working environment												
Importance for leadership to be cognizant of adult learning strategies												

"Indicators of Effective Teamwork"
by Margie Carter

In the past few months I've received a number of calls from directors and teachers asking for help with team building on their staff. The problems they describe vary from site to site: a Head Start teacher with a decade and a half of experience finds she can't work with her new assistant; a director of a child care program is concerned that some staff are highly involved in decision-making, while others under participate and don't lend their voice or time; another director worries about constant bickering among her teachers over what seem like petty issues; a Reggio-inspired program is struggling to understand what the Italians really mean by this concept of collaboration among teachers, children, and families.

The language of teamwork and collaboration is taken for granted in our professional discourse, but walking the talk is quite another thing. These accomplishments require time to build relationships, an ability to take multiple perspectives, and a willingness to hand in there when tensions escalate. The typical child care setting has difficulty providing time for meaningful adult interactions away from the children. Directors and other program supervisors have many demands on their attention and find it difficult to be proactive in building a cohesive team. Many lack the experience to know how to specifically nurture the dispositions and mentor the skills of being a collaborator and team player.

Beyond the nice gestures of birthday acknowledgments and creating a secret pals activity, directors often overlook the importance of team building work until faced with a significant problem. Then the task becomes remediation, akin to weeding a garden that has gotten out of control, rather than a thoughtful plan of fertilizing and cultivating harmonious growth.

Working with programs to build strong teams and the ability to collaborate, I focus on recognizing key indicators that can be found in a program. Getting each person to identify what they look for in each of these areas begins an important dialogue where mutual understanding and accountability can be shaped.

Clear Communications

It goes without saying that people have different communication styles and skills, but these often go unacknowledged and become the source of growing tension on a staff. Part of our new staff orientation and ongoing development work needs to include guidelines for effective communications and clarity on the communication systems and policies of the program.

STRATEGY:
Develop, distribute, and role play communication guidelines

Take time in a staff meeting or retreat to brainstorm and develop written guidelines on what people want from each other in the way of good communications. Make sure each person states her or his view and that concepts such as listening, talking, writing, and body language are discussed. Choose the ideas that everyone agrees on to begin your list and then negotiate what to write for areas where there are different views. Remember to include something about how you want communication channels or protocol to work in your program.

To be sure everyone understands and agrees, develop some short role plays for people to practice using the guidelines. As you debrief the role play, review your written guidelines to see if they need more clarity. If your role plays reveal that staff need more communication skills, build that into your staff development plans.

Distribute, post, and periodically revisit your communication guidelines and make sure they become part of your new staff orientation packet and are referenced in your annual staff evaluation process.

Respectful Interactions and Demonstrations of Trust

Respect and trust are words easily thrown about in conversations, but what do they look like in the day-to-day life of a child care program? Taking the time to identify the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of respect and trust is a wise investment of your previous staff meeting time

STRATEGY:
Identify the elements of respect and trust

Using a process similar to the one described above, devote some of your staff development hours to getting everyone's views on what respect and trust specifically look like in given situations. To launch the discussion, ask people to first read and finish the following sentences with their own ideas:

A person who shows me respect is thoughtful about…

A person I give respect to knows how to…

I feel trusted by someone when she or he…

I will trust someone after she or he…

From the ideas generated, make a list of specific behaviors that generate trust and respect. Then present several short scenarios of typical encounters in a program where trust and respect can become an issue (i.e., arriving late to work, sharing personal information, giving a criticism, asking for help, or taking a different approach than your co-workers).

Divide into two groups with one developing a list of things that a staff member could do that would erode the possibility of trust or respect in this situation, while the other group identifies actions that could build trust. As a whole group, compare your lists to give staff a mirror on how their own ideas might play themselves out in real situations. Review your beginning list one more time for any additions or changes before it gets written and posted as a reference point for future interactions.

Using Conflicts to Discover and Negotiate Different Perspectives

Whenever a group of people come together, especially with the conscious intent of influencing a group of children, the personal and professional growth available to them in enormous. This benefit of the work is worth stressing again and again, especially as your enter areas of conflict. Having some initial practice in consciously naming and working with different viewpoints establishes a foundation before the going gets rough.

In many early childhood programs, there are policies and practices that are taken for granted with little discussion or questioning. Someone in the past may have set these up according to a personal preference, or the policies may have

been adopted from professional definitions of best practices. In any case, it is useful to periodically explore the assumptions underlying certain practices so that everyone is clear about why the program has specific policies. A chance to discuss these issues also provides an opportunity to identify and negotiate any conflicts of values among staff, and possibly between a teacher and parents.

STRATEGY:
Explore different values

Teachers and caregivers benefit from the opportunity to examine and name the influences on their own values and preferred practices. A simple way to do this in a staff meeting is to write on separate pieces of paper possible opposing viewpoints on policies and then post them around the room. Ask everyone to find one viewpoint they wish to discuss, go to that paper, and talk with others there. They don't have to agree with the viewpoint, but they should at least have strong sentiments that they would like to discuss. Things you write on these papers could include:

- Children should primarily be allowed to make choices and negotiate with adults.

- Children should primarily be offered limited choices and non-negotiable guidelines from adults.

- Children should call adults by their first names.

- Children should address adults by Mr. or Ms. or Teacher with her or his name.

- Children should be separated from the group or put in time-out when they don't follow the rules.

- Children should be required to try at least one bite of all the food served.

- Children should be allowed to follow their own food preferences when eating.

- Children should be allowed to get messy and dirty when they play in our program.

- Children should be guided to keep their hair and clothes clean when they play in our program.

Some of these statements reflect or contradict prevailing views in our professional literature. This is a good place to acknowledge that our standards have been primarily shaped through a white middle-class lens. we need to open the dialogue and negotiate conflicting beliefs.

In the debriefing discussion ask whether people found similarities or differences with others in their group. Were they there because they agreed or disagreed with the viewpoint? When teachers are asked to carry out practices different from their own belief systems, the situation is ripe for resentment and subversion. On the other hand, when you create a climate to discover and negotiate different perspectives, you can often avoid the good guy/bad guy mentality and develop acceptable compromises.

STRATEGY:
Play with different communication styles

Sometimes people make judgments about each other based on differences in communication styles. This could be a personal or cultural issue, but in either circumstance, it's useful to understand what's happening. Here's a playful way to explore how we send and receive information and feelings.

Ask your staff to consider possible labels for acceptable communication styles and then choose four or five to work with. The term "acceptable" is a subjective one. Our intent here is to avoid negative labels such as caustic, attacking, manipulative, or defensive, and identify a variety of other styles that have a useful place in communicating. For instance, friendly, humorous, creative, decisive, analytical direct or indirect could be selected as styles for exploration.

Spend a minute defining what is meant by each of these styles. Then divide the large group as many small groups as there are styles, and assign one style to each small group. Ask each group to generate a list of common phrases that you might hear someone from that style use. For example, the lists might look something like this:

Friendly Style:

- You have great ideas.

- I like what you said.

- They might not like that.

Creative Style:

- Anything is possible.

- Let's keep brainstorming.

- What if we flipped that around?

Decision Style:

- Let's not waste time.

- We have to decide one way or another.

- I want to know what we're going to do.

Analytical Style:

- I think we should do a survey.

- The facts speak for themselves.

- We need more evidence.

Once you've given each group the time to come up with a list of three or four phrases, ask for a volunteer from each group and conduct a communications role-play. Choose a topic that isn't emotionally loaded for the volunteers to discuss. An example might be what color the center should paint its walls, what kinds of plants to get for the lounge, or what software should be purchased for your computers. As you facilitate the brief discussion, ask each volunteer to try to use as many of the phrases on their list as possible in the situation. Along with being able to laugh and get a new perspective on how style might look in a group setting, you can debrief this activity to explore the strengths and weaknesses of each style and the barriers that can occur when we judge a person's contribution by their communication style. Staff members might enjoy identifying their own style and exploring how it can potentially conflict with another.

Building on Each Other's Ideas and Strengths

As with children, adults need coaching on how to participate in collaborative thinking and work projects. It doesn't come automatically. Activities such as the above can help identify the strengths that each person's style brings to the process. These should be named and celebrated. From there you can practice finding ways to get everyone's perspective, experience and skills acknowledged and involved.

STRATEGY:
Pass the paper to build on ideas

Whatever the topic, you can divide your staff into small groups so that there is more time for everyone to offer their ideas during your staff meetings. Give each group an identical piece of chart paper, divided into three columns. If the topic is an anti-bias issue, a child guidance issue, health and safety, or a parent concern, label the three columns, Issues Identified, Immediate Response, and Further Plans.

Give each group a scenario related to the topic to discuss and write out their responses to the first column. After some time, have them pass their papers and scenario to the next group and, after reading what the previous group wrote in the first column, begin working on the second. Pass the paper and repeat this process for the third column. Then give each group their original paper to get the benefit of all the other groups' thinking and consider additional perspectives.

Reliability and Responsibility

You can be a thoughtful, sensitive person with terrific ideas, but if you don't show up on time for work, forget to fill out your paper work, or neglect to make that critical call to a parent, you can hardly be called a team player. Reliability and responsibility are the ultimate behaviors that indicate whether clear communications, respect, trust, negotiating different perspectives and building on each other's strengths are alive and well and reflecting effective team work in your program.

"Who's Responsible for Making Your Team Work?"
by Roger Neugebauer

"The highly effective work group has the capacity to mobilize fully all the skills and abilities of its members and focus these resources efficiently on the jobs to be done. Each member of this group feels responsible for assuming whatever role is necessary to keep the group operating in an efficient manner."

In the above quote, Rensis Likert captures a key ingredient of an effective team – all members of the team accept responsibility for making the team work. All too often this does not happen. Instead, members of a child care center team assume that it is the job of the director or head teacher to keep the team on track. When problems arise, they sit back and wait for their leader to solve them.

In many cases, directors and head teachers share this view as well. They start believing is on their shoulders. When the staff is functioning poorly, they blame themselves for not being able to handle all the many burdens of leadership.

Yet, numerous studies of work groups confirm that in groups that are effective these burdens of leadership are not all dumped on one person, but are shared widely (Likert). All members of these teams are sensitive to what needs to happen for the team to perform well, and all feel responsible for making it happen.

This is not to say, of course, that a leader can wash her hands of any responsibility. In the final analysis, it is the leader that is ultimately responsible for the team's performance. She must see to it that the team meets the demands placed on it by the organization of which it is a part. But she will never be effective unless she gains the cooperation, support, and commitment of all the members of her team.

Roles of Team Members

There are many different roles that must be played by team members on an effectively functioning team. A number of these roles have been described below. Those listed have been identified by organizational consultants as essential roles that must be performed in order for a team to work well together (Benne). These roles may at times be performed by one or more team members and at other times by the leader. Each team member may carry out more than one role in any particular situation and may play different roles in different situations. What is important is not so much who performs what roles but that all roles are performed and that participation is widespread. No team member should be required to fill too many roles at one time, and no team member should be allowed to avoid playing any of these roles at any time.

The functional roles of team members fall into two general categories. Some of the roles are **team task roles**. These are roles that are directly related to the tasks which the team is deciding or has decided to undertake. Other critical roles are **team maintenance roles**. These are roles that are concerned with the emotional life of the team, with how individual members relate to each other as a team.

Team Task Roles

Team tasks in a child care center involved either efforts to solve common problems or to achieve common goals. Figuring out how to reduce the noise and disruptive behavior in the toddler room would be an example of a problem solving task, and deciding whether or not to open an infant program would be a goal setting task.

The following team task roles must be performed in order to identify, define, and make decisions about such problems and goals.

- **Initiating.** Someone must get the ball rolling. The initiator identifies a potential problem or goal and brings it to the attention of the team. This person initiates action by stating the goal or problem and by making some proposal as to how the team might address it. For example, the person playing this role might say, "I think the activity level in the toddler room is far too high. Let's brainstorm about some ways to bring it under control."

  In a newly constituted team, or one that is functioning at a low level, this role often falls to the leader. However, as the team grows and gains in confidence, the initiating role will increasingly be played by a broader range of members (Schein).

- **Information gathering.** Once an issue is addressed for team consideration, factual information about the issue needs to be collected and brought before the team. Some of this information is about the problem or goal being investigated. For example, with the problem of the chaotic toddler room, information would need to be sought and shared about when the activity level was at its highest, whether there is any evidence that the teachers or the children were negatively impacted by the commotion, and what other centers had done about this problem.

  In addition, information is needed about proposed goals and solutions – "Will this really solve the problem or address the need? Exactly how will it be implemented? How much will it cost?"

- **Opinion seeking and giving.** Someone also needs to be sure that team members' beliefs and opinions about proposed goals and solutions are brought out into the open. It is important that a distinction be made between facts and opinions and that bought be sought out and considered.

- **Clarifying.** When proposals are brought before the team, whether they are suggested solutions to existing problems or proposed new directions for the center, someone needs to [e]nsure that the proposal is clear to everyone. The person playing this role helps the initiator clarify her proposal by asking questions about it and by restating her understanding of it. This role is especially important in the child care setting because team members often react emotionally to the ideas of others and form opinions about these ideas before they fully understand them.

- **Elaborating.** When a proposal is before the group, it is also helpful to have one or more team members concerned with exploring this proposal from all angles, considering all its possible ramifications, and building it into an even more creative idea. This would also involve trying to deduce how an idea would work out in practice if adopted by the team (Likert).

- **Energizing.** The person playing this role is concerned with prodding the team into action, attempting to stimulate the team to greater activity or to activity of a higher quality.

- **Summarizing.** When a team has been struggling with a problem or with a new idea for a long time, whether this be in a long drawn out staff meeting or in a process that takes place informally over a period of weeks, relevant information and views can often get lost due to the length of the discussion. In these situations, it is vital to have

someone periodically summarize what has gone before. Effective summarizing will include a review of the points the team has already covered and what ideas have been stated, so that as decision points are reached the team is operating with full information (Schein).

- **Consensus testing.** Every once in a while someone on the team needs to test the water to see if the team is ready to make a decision about a proposal under consideration. For problems that are particularly complicated and for goals that will require a lot of work or risk if adopted, team members can procrastinate for weeks to avoid making a decision. Someone needs to step forward periodically and ask, "Are we ready to decide?" Or the person playing this role could be even more assertive and say, "I can see that we have some strong reservations about opening an infant component, but that, basically, we are prepared to go ahead with it. Am I right?" The success of the consensus tester will depend largely on her sensitivity in choosing the right time to test, although ill-timed tests are still useful in reminding the team that it has some more issues to work out before deciding (Schein).

Team Maintenance Roles

Team maintenance roles are those concerned with building team loyalty and increasing the motivation and capacity of the group for candid and effective interaction and problem solving (Benne). The main focus of these roles is on avoiding damaged relationships. In a team environment, individuals can be alienated from the group in many ways – when two members angrily disagree about a team issue, when one domineering team member turns off others, when team members' views are ignored or outvoted, and so on. These situations need to be avoided or handled with sensitivity in order to maintain the commitment of all team members to the team.

- **Encouraging.** The person playing this role does all she can to ensure team members that there exists a climate of acceptance. She praises, shows interest in, agrees with, and accepts the contributions of others. She demonstrates warmth and solidarity in her feelings toward other team members. She gives full attention and consideration to the contributions of others even though she may not fully agree with them, conveying to them the message "What you are doing or saying is of importance to me" (Likert).

- **Harmonizing.** Someone needs to be concerned with reducing destructive types of disagreement between team members. Conflict can perform a useful function in generating a variety of ideas and alternative proposals. However, when two or more members of the team are fighting or taking positions because of selfish reasons, such as maintaining their own status on the team, it may be necessary for someone to step in and harmonize the conflict before it becomes too destructive. The harmonizer may attempt to mediate the differences between team members in conflict; she may attempt to relive tension in conflict situations through the use of humor; or she may assist each member in taking stock of her own behavior as a way or reestablishing good communication (Schein).

- **Compromising.** Whereas the harmonizer is a third party seeking to establish peace between two or more other members in conflict, the compromiser is someone is willing to promote agreement by backing off from her own position. A person playing this role may offer a compromise by yielding status, admitting error, or meeting the other team members "half way" in a disagreement (Benne).

    In a child care setting, where the interactions between adults are so intense, it is inevitable that conflict over team task issues will arise frequently. It thus becomes vital that compromising be a role that many team members be willing and able to play in the interests of team harmony. If all the compromising is always done by

one or two team members, these members will inevitably resent their role and lose their commitment to the team.

• **Gatekeeping.** The gatekeeper is the team member who keeps her eye on the level of participation of team members. She ensures that those who have a contribution to make get their day in court. In a staff meeting, a gatekeeper might take steps to ensure that the less assertive team members have a chance to express their views on the matter under discussion. In a daily work situation, the gatekeeper might see to it that all team members have an opportunity to try out their skills and ideas.

• **Observing.** Someone on the team needs to be keeping tabs on the overall functioning of the team. This person must be alert for and sensitive to any evidence that the group process is breaking down. The observer must be well aware of what types of behavior are destructive and what types are constructive or at least neutral in their impact. When she observes that relationships have in some way broken down, she needs to be able to feed this observation back to the team in such a way that it will be received constructively and acted upon. Providing feedback to the team on its performance actually requires as much, if not more, skill and nerve than observing the behavior in the first place.

Clearly, the role of the observer is one that new or inexperienced team members cannot play efficiently. In fact, due to the sensitivity and credibility required, it may be beneficial to have the team formally designate someone to perform this role (Likert).

• **Standard setting.** Someone needs to move the team towards accepting or setting standards that will govern team performance. Team members need to know what types of behavior are encourage by the team and what types are discouraged. They need to know what level of participation is expected of them and what amount of flexibility is allowed to them in pursuing individual approaches to their work.

More often than not, this role falls to the team leader. Since the team leader is ultimately responsible for the performance of the team, it is important that she take an active role in seeing to it that appropriate standards are set for working to achieve the tasks before the team.

From reviewing these roles that need to be performed by team members, it is obvious that if a team is to be successful its members will need to do much more than simply show up and put in their seven hours every day. They must all be concerned with moving the team forward toward the accomplishment of its goals, and they must accept responsibility for helping the team function effectively.