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# Make-it–Take-it professional development training at Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc.

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## Make-it–Take-it professional development training at Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc.

### **Abstract**

Staff development training was integrated with peer sharing and professional renewal during the 1999-2000 school year at Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc. in Waterloo, Iowa. In this training program, at each monthly meeting teaching teams made presentations on educational topics. A learning material was constructed during the workshop; the game or toy could be used in the teacher's classroom. While literacy activities for young children was a suggested theme, presenters were allowed to present on a topic of personal interest or commitment. All teachers and assistant teachers in the program were encouraged to attend the sessions. Credit for continuing education within the program was given for attendance.

The popular Make-it–Take-it workshops offered the teaching staff an opportunity for personal and professional development. An added bonus was the peer mentoring that naturally ensued. Teachers felt comfortable sharing ideas with one another; several teachers took the opportunity to present at other training workshops. Sharing their expertise and teaching experiences was a way of earning praise and respect of fellow workers, but the greatest beneficiaries were the Head Start children. This was because their teachers returned to their classrooms excited and re-invigorated with new ideas and activities.

**MAKE-IT – TAKE-IT**  
**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING**  
**AT TRI-COUNTY CHILD AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, INC.**

**A Graduate Project**  
**Submitted to the**  
**Division of Early Childhood Education**  
**Department of Curriculum and Instruction**  
**in Partial Fulfillment**  
**of the Requirements for the Degree**  
**Master of Arts in Education**  
**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA**

**By**  
**Joyce Gallentine Nelson**

**April 12, 2001**

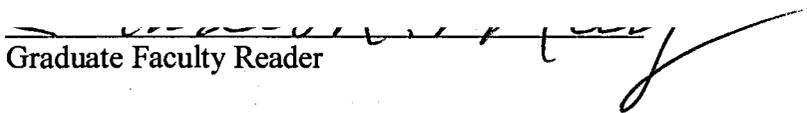
This Research Paper by: Joyce Gallentine Nelson

Titled: Make-it – Take-it: Professional Development Training  
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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
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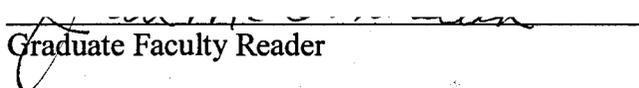
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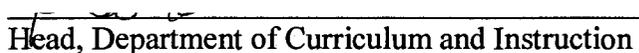
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## Abstract

Staff development training was integrated with peer sharing and professional renewal during the 1999-2000 school year at Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc. in Waterloo, Iowa. In this training program, at each monthly meeting teaching teams made presentations on educational topics. A learning material was constructed during the workshop; the game or toy could be used in the teacher's classroom. While literacy activities for young children was a suggested theme, presenters were allowed to present on a topic of personal interest or commitment. All teachers and assistant teachers in the program were encouraged to attend the sessions. Credit for continuing education within the program was given for attendance. The popular Make-it - Take-it workshops offered the teaching staff an opportunity for personal and professional development. An added bonus was the peer mentoring that naturally ensued. Teachers felt comfortable sharing ideas with one another; several teachers took the opportunity to present at other training workshops. Sharing their expertise and teaching experiences was a way of earning praise and respect of fellow workers, but the greatest beneficiaries were the Head Start children. This was because their teachers returned to their classrooms excited and re-invigorated with new ideas and activities.

## Make-it - Take-it

### Professional Development Training

at Tri-County Child and Family Development Council, Inc.

The 1999-2000 school year brought an innovation in professional development training for the Tri-County Head Start teaching staff in Waterloo, Iowa. This innovation consisted of monthly Make-it - Take-it workshops, which benefited the participating classroom teachers. The initial goal was to improve classroom instruction by offering new ideas in an atmosphere of sharing. Ideas used successfully with children were to be demonstrated by teachers for their colleagues. The opportunity to construct useful learning materials was part of the workshop. Other ideas were displayed or compiled in handouts. Time for exploring the learning materials and asking questions of the presenter was available. The general theme of literacy was suggested, but presentations reflected the personality, teaching style, and interests of each team of presenters who shared their ideas with the audience.

It is well known that children learn through active, hands-on exploration in the classroom. Adults also learn through active, hands-on exploration. Developing curiosity is an important aspect of learning. For this reason, time for play and investigation are needed. The freedom to ask questions and share insights strengthens the knowledge that is gained. Time for reflection and possible applications of knowledge is also important. Teachers are encouraged to bring in child-tested ideas, which can be integrated into action and shared with colleagues. Teaching one's peers is an effective way of deepening one's own understanding and commitment to teaching. Thus, these tenets served as the basic premise for instigating the Make-it - Take-it workshops.

On-going professional development is important as programs seek continuous improvement of instruction. Varied styles of professional development have been utilized in education. These include: (1) training by a presenter, (2) observation / assessment, (3) involvement in a development / improvement process, (4) teacher study groups, (5) inquiry / action research, (6) individually guided activities, and (7) mentoring (Guskey, 2000). Since each style has pluses and minuses, we were interested in combining several methods to take advantage of people's strengths. Training workshops were considered since they are an efficient, cost-effective way to share ideas and information. Also teacher study groups were deemed necessary since they focus on different aspects of a topic (e.g. literacy) and facilitate instructional innovations; they bring teachers together to solve common problems. Individual activities offer flexibility, choice, and reflection. Mentoring benefits both parties by providing time for discussion and sharing ideas and strategies of effective teaching. Recognizing these benefits, we incorporated positive features of each model in our planning.

The intent of these programs was to develop in our teachers a sense of ownership in their training. Thus, the opportunity to attend brief introductions concerning different aspects of classroom literacy and instruction was offered. Teachers could self-select topics of specific interest to them; each person was encouraged to attend our workshops. By attending these workshops, they would meet agency requirements for training. In addition, they would have an opportunity to ask questions and share personal classroom experiences in positive social interaction with their peers. And at the end, they would have useful developmentally appropriate activities to use with their students.

A second intent was to develop presenter skills within our staff. Some of our finest teachers volunteered to be trainers. They have accumulated a wealth of knowledge and this was

an opportunity for them to mentor co-workers in an informal learning environment. The trainers benefited as they reflected on what strategies work best with children and how they might share these ideas with their peers in training sessions. As a consequence, organizational, public speaking, and leadership skills were extended through these workshops.

### Literature Review

In order to develop an optimum Make-it – Take-it program, staff members surveyed the literature to see what had been done to improve professional development. It was found that research was limited prior to 1960, but in the 1980's and 1990's more interest was evidenced. In 1997, Showers, Joyce and Bennett analyzed the research on staff development. They concluded that, "Almost all teachers can take useful information back to their classrooms when training includes four parts: (1) presentation of theory, (2) demonstration of the new strategy, (3) initial practice in the workshop, and (4) prompt feedback about their efforts." (Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1997, p.79)

Other research studies described additional features of a successful staff development program. Certain common elements were noted. They include the following: collaborative planning, integration of individual and program goals, training based on the principles of adult learning, concrete activities, and incentives for participation (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 1998).

A recent publication described professional development as "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students" (Guskey, 2000, p.16). He further wrote that professional development must be an intentional, ongoing and systemic process. This process requires that purposes and worthwhile, assessable goals must be clearly stated. After

goals are stated, then educators must continuously analyze, reflect, adapt, and explore their teaching practices to improve instruction.

Teacher to teacher mentoring is a recognized type of staff development that has been successful. Working 1:1, teachers learn together from one another. Experienced teachers share insights and knowledge they've gained with newer staff members, for social interaction and mutual support are important in promoting professional growth (Hudson, 1999). Reflection, as well as, mutual trust and respect are components in successful peer mentoring.

Adults learn in the same ways as children. They need real, hands-on activities. They learn best when the assignment is of high personal interest and meets their needs. Adults need follow-up practice, coaching or feedback, and review so the learning can be retained. Professional development must be made practical and personally relevant to the adult learner.

Based on these findings, Head Start created 14 regional training centers in 1993. Using various formats, these centers worked to improve program quality through staff development and training. Participatory training at the New England Head Start Teaching Center included active participation in the form of practical hands-on experiences in real world settings (Caruso, Horn-Wingerd, & Golas, 1998). High quality training was found to be directly linked with improved services for children and families.

Financial and time constraints for staff to participate in professional development are a consideration in childcare settings. Head Start recognizes the value and positive outcomes for children of teachers who have participated in professional development. Staff development funding dollars were allocated to buy all workshop materials and flex time was provided so all teachers could attend the afternoon sessions.

## Description of Workshops

- *A Taste of Tri-County.* In November, 1998, staff members gathered for a workshop to share nutrition experiences for young children. A challenge to share the actual snack, recipe, and extension activities was offered with prizes awarded to the winners. Each group decorated a table where workshop participants made and sampled snacks. Mini pizzas, crunchy apple toast, honey bees, and pretend soup were examples of entries. Lively conversations took place as recipes, activities, and praises were exchanged. This training was very popular with our Head Start staff.
- *A Second Taste of Tri-County.* At the spring See How They Grow conference we presented a nutrition workshop. An explanation of our philosophy of involving children in nutrition activities was given. Recipe books with classroom extensions were distributed. The chance to make and sample nine different foods at decorated displays was the highlight. Head Start hostesses fielded questions and shared additional ideas.
- *Writer's Briefcase.* In September, 1999 we held the first official Make-it - Take-it workshop. Teachers made writer's briefcases using resources for encouraging young children to explore writing. Items such as notebooks, pencils, post-it notes, journals, and index cards were available. Writing folders were assembled for every student in Head Start.
- *Alphabet and Phonemic Awareness.* In introducing the alphabet, names, and phonemic awareness, each attendee learned to use the Accu-cut machine to make magnet board ABC's from *fun foam*. Examples of ways to use names such as sign-in sheets, puzzles, and circle time name games were introduced.
- *Rhymes and Recipes.* Each person made a set of magnet board characters for the story "The Giant Turnip". The use of recipes as a literacy activity was shown as we made a tasty popcorn ball snack following a simple picture/word recipe.

- *Puppetry.* A colorful pop-up puppet was created using a plastic cup, styrofoam ball, dowel rod, and fabrics. Rhymes and songs with a clown or Jack-in-the-box theme were shared. Staff members had time for conversation on unique ways they have created and utilized puppets.
- *Constructivism.* Through a partnership with the University of Northern Iowa Regents Center, some teachers have implemented the Constructivist approach to instruction. Ramps, water play, magnets, and Soft-soap sensory bottles were available for play and experimentation. Wooden *wrecking ball pendulums* (Moomaw & Hieronymus, 1997, pp. 90-91) were built for learning center fun.
- *Reggio Emilia.* A clear plastic shower curtain on which we signed in with paints reflected the importance of light and color. The teachers displayed posters and child-constructed objects documenting learning projects. An informative handout explained the Reggio Emilia approach. Ribbons were woven into the sides of plastic baskets. The baskets, filled with collections of textured fabrics, served as a take-it project.
- *Inclusion of Special Needs Children.* A videotape showing highlights of a day in our combined Head Start – Area Education Agency-7 program gave insights into how adaptations and accommodations can involve all children inclusively. Adaptive equipment for special needs children was demonstrated. A plan board using computer-generated designs showed one way to assist children.
- *Storytelling.* Glove puppets portraying the story “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” were created. Circle time games and pellen storytelling figures patterns were available to be traced. A display of multi-cultural books offered an opportunity to select new books. Literacy take-home backpacks developed through a special literacy project were introduced. Participants exchanged a variety of storytelling ideas.

- *A Second "Taste" of Tri-County Head Start.* Program Managers planned a learning center format for the See How They Grow 2000 conference. One example from each of our monthly workshops was available for the attendees to make and take. The participants provided positive feedback for this approach to professional development.

### Future Workshops

Plans for the 2000-2001 year are underway. Continuation of the monthly professional development meetings is planned. The overall themes will be a pilot program, Every Child Reads, as well as documentation and individualization of instruction.

### Discussion

There were multiple benefits from the Make-it – Take-it workshops. Staff members who participated gleaned new ideas that could be immediately put to use. The learning activity constructed at the workshop was ready to be utilized and the information easily referenced. Children had opportunities to try new activities and developmentally appropriate materials that enriched the program.

Conversations among teaching peers had two benefits. Teachers can feel somewhat isolated in their own little worlds. These workshops offered a chance to share joys and successes with fellow teachers who do understand. The discussions led to brainstorming sessions; one idea piqued others. Idea sharing was encouraged and became a valuable outgrowth of the workshops. The idea sharing and opportunity to interact with other preschool teachers was a motivation for some staff members to attend. All ideas and input were welcomed enthusiastically. A valuable outgrowth has been the comfort level our newer teachers have gained as they have met mentors they can call upon for suggestions and encouragement. The sense of unity and common purpose that bind us together at Head Start has been strengthened.

Recognition for the presenters was valuable. The positive feedback from their peers was sincerely appreciated. There was no financial compensation for the presenters except for the cost of materials. But the volunteers who offered their talents were reimbursed with praise and a sense of accomplishment. They were sought out later by coworkers as questions arose. This was effective peer mentoring.

The agency itself benefited as new ideas were shared and spread. Our newer innovative programs such as the Constructivist, Reggio, and inclusion classrooms were highlighted. The interest generated by these presentations may result in expansion of these philosophies to other centers. Training from within the agency has been an inexpensive and highly popular means of professional development. Attendance ranged from 15-33 of our 46 teachers; they donated one hour of their planning time per month to learn together.

### Conclusions

Make-it – Take-it Workshops proved to be a helpful method of professional development. The opportunity for active hands-on involvement in learning was unique. The chance to share child-tested information was offered. Presenters were committed to the topics of their programs. They were allowed the freedom to select from their teaching repertoire or personal interest areas.

This is a format that could be easily adapted to many child care settings. When staff members generate workshops on areas of personal strength and share them with their teaching peers, good results will come for children and adults. Continuous learning leads to continuous improvement of instruction. New ideas bring new energy and a renewal of our commitment to high-quality education for young children.

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