



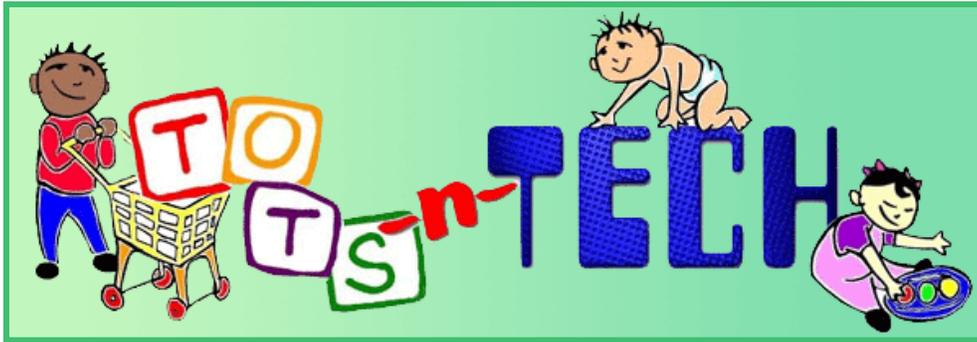
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# How to Design Professional Development Activities about AT in Early Childhood

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## HOW TO DESIGN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ABOUT ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN EARLY INTERVENTION

### *Who Should Provide Professional Development?*

- Professional Development depends on people who are 1) skilled teachers/facilitators and 2) knowledgeable about AT use with infants, toddlers, and families. Finding such a person may be challenging. However, a person with good content who is not necessarily an experienced trainer may collaborate with a person who is an excellent trainer to provide professional development training sessions. Expertise is obtained by combining the strengths of two individuals.
- A person without teaching or formal training experience may be sufficiently expert in content areas to consult with or provide assistance to another person.

### *What Types of Professional Development May be Provided?*

An increasing number of studies about the effects of professional development are being published and generally suggest that:

- Large group training (e.g., > 50 participants) may increase people's knowledge but is unlikely to do much more. Participants may be satisfied with this type of training and may find it interesting or fun and enjoyable but are not likely to change what they do in their work.
- A challenge in professional development is timing — most professionals want content information at the time that they need it which generally means when they need it to work more effectively with a particular family or child.
- Actual practice seems to be best impacted through individualized or hands-on approaches such as mentoring, coaching, or on-site consultation.

### *When and Where Do Professionals Want Professional Development?*

- Most reports and surveys suggest that professionals may "view" training as "good" when it meets their time scheduling needs. In other words, training that is conveniently located and scheduled at convenient times and in ways that do not conflict with an individual's personal and employment responsibilities is viewed as "best" no matter what the content area may be.
- However, when the training centers on something that an individual is personally motivated to know more about, reports indicate that factors such as location, scheduling, or course requirements may be less important considerations.

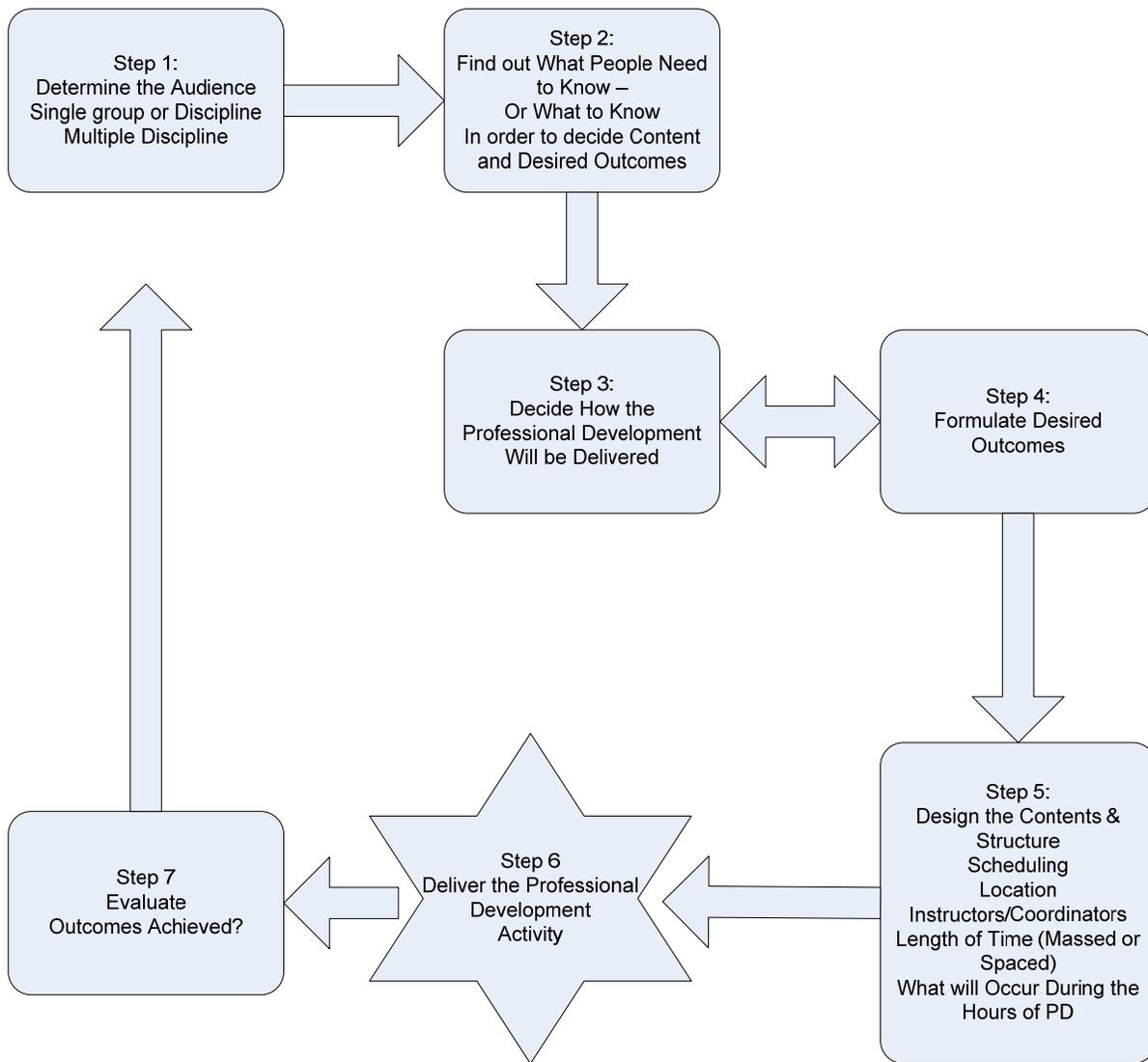
### **STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ABOUT AT**

The chart on the next page illustrates a sequence of 7 steps to follow to design professional development about AT.

#### **Step 1: Determine the Audience**

Decide who is the major focus of the training. It might be EI providers, families, service coordinators or just a member of a single discipline (e.g., only speech and language pathologists) or a single group (e.g., only families). Answering these questions will help you determine your audience: "Who *wants* to know about using Assistive Technology with infants and toddlers?" Or "Who *needs* to know about using Assistive Technology with infants and toddlers?"

### *Follow These Steps to Design Professional Development Activities About AT in Early Intervention*



**Step 2: Select Content and Outcomes by Finding Out What People Need or Want to Know:**

- This can be a challenging step because sometimes people don't know what they need to know about a particular topic because they don't know enough about the topic to identify their needs. Make sure that people are *aware* of AT, what it means and its possibilities when used with infants and toddlers. If you are not sure that people have an understanding of AT, then "awareness" level training is the way to go. Awareness level information may be provided on-line, through formal group training sessions, during expos where materials are displayed and can be handled, or small group discussions. The purpose is to provide an overview about AT practices so that individuals have an overall understanding about the topic.
- On the other hand, if you know that the audience has an understanding about using AT, you can find out what they need or want to know more about in a variety of ways and then design the content of the professional development experience from the information collected. For example,
  - Send out a pre-questionnaire to representative members of the likely audience
  - Conduct focus groups with likely audience members to identify what is most important for them to learn and how they would best like to learn.
  - Talk to parents/caregivers and find out from them what they wish that people who provide services knew.
- If the professional development experience is to be offered to either a large or small group of participants, very experienced trainers may be able to be sufficiently flexible to assess learning priorities and needs during their interactions with an audience.
  - Conduct a pre-test by having participants answer T/F questions by holding up colored cardboard sheets – providing the trainer with information about present knowledge.
  - Use an audience response system to have questions answered and show the group its response. Audience response systems may be integrated throughout a training session.

**Step 3: Decide How Professional Development Will Be Delivered:**

Once you know what people want/need to know, there are many ways in which the professional development may be delivered. Research studies are beginning to define approaches that may be better options for various desired outcomes (e.g., awareness; use in practice). Offering some types of professional development requires specific skill sets – for example, knowing how to do a teleconference – and the different ways of delivering professional development may require significant financial investments – especially for opportunities that may be web-based and require programming abilities. Face-to-face lectures are the traditional and most economical way of providing information but, as a whole, do not provide participants with enough hands-on experiences or confidence to apply content information in their own work settings. While a large number of people may participate, the benefits may be minimal. However, accompanying face-to-face with on-line activities or with consultation/mentoring/coaching increases the effectiveness of group training.

***Examples of Ways in Which Professional Development May be Delivered***

Face to Face	On-Line	Distance	Mentoring, Coaching, Consultation
Face-to Face Group Lecture Alone		Teleconference	Individual Mentoring/ Consultation/Coaching By Itself
Face-to-Face Group Lecture plus Activity	Face to Face Plus On-Line: Blended	Webcast	
Face to Face plus consultation/mentoring			

**Step 4: Formulate Desired Outcomes:**

- Professional development is a means to an end – not an end itself. In other words, professional development experiences are best linked to desired outcomes. An outcome may be for people to increase awareness or be able to fabricate a low-tech device/material. Once one or more desired outcomes have been established, check back to Step 3 to make sure that the way you selected to deliver the information matches the outcome. For example, people are unlikely to be able to fabricate a low-tech device from participating in a large group training session where examples of materials are illustrated in slides. Also, make sure that you are thinking about a way for the outcome to be measurable (Step 7).
- **Examples of Potential Professional Development Outcomes**
  - Awareness of use of adaptations/AT in child care programs to promote inclusion of children with disabilities
  - Awareness of possibilities of AT use for communication, mobility, socialization, or using arms and hands in activities such as outdoor play, toy play, to wash self, etc.
  - Knowledge/awareness of low-tech devices/materials that can be made from household items.
  - How to operate and program different types of augmentative and alternative communication devices
  - Selection of positioning equipment for a particular child
  - Supporting children's toy play using AT
  - Using a decision-making hierarchy to identify AT possibilities for a particular child.

**Step 5: Design the Contents, Structure, Etc. of the Professional Development Activity:**

With the information about desired outcomes, how the professional development will be delivered (e.g., mentoring/coaching; large group face-to-face), and the content information that people need to/want to know, you can make decisions about:

- **Scheduling** – Will this be a one-time or multiple session professional development activity?
- **Location** – Where will the activity take place – in people's homes via computer, in a central location, etc. ?
- **Instructors/Coordinators**– Who will be responsible for coordinating the activity or for teaching, coaching, mentoring, etc. ? One-shot training sessions may have one or more instructors and one person may function as the "team leader." If mentoring or coaching is provided, an individual needs to be designated to coordinate what is being done if more than a few participants are involved.
- **Length of Time** – How many hours will the professional development involve? And What will occur during those hours? Lecture, showing videotapes, group activities, discussion, case study or real-life story examples for problem-solving, PowerPoint presentation, etc. Many successful ideas can be obtained by looking at courses about AT developed by other people. The instructors for face-to-face training need to plan what will occur during the face-to-face time. Similarly, plans need to be made for mentoring. How often will it occur, what will happen during the mentoring/coaching sessions. What will happen during consultation – is consultation different from mentoring?

**Step 6: Deliver the Professional Development:**

Offer the professional development to the target audience you identified in Step 1.

**Step 7: Evaluate the Professional Development Experience:**

Many professional development activities are evaluated in terms of participant satisfaction. The fact that participants are satisfied may be important but does not tell whether they can actually use a practice or know different information than before, etc. Pre-test/post-test or audience response systems can help identify differences in learning that may be attributable to attendance. Other strategies may be used to measure in relation to outcomes – for example, if the outcome is to fabricate a device, the extent to which participants make devices is a measure of outcome. If using collaborative practices a desired outcomes, the number of requests made for consultation within 6 months of the professional development by attending participants is another measure successful attainment of an outcome.

***NOW WHAT??***

One professional development activity is seldom enough to allow people to be really confident and competent in using AT with infants and toddlers. Try different types of opportunities to allow providers, families and children to be successful AT users.