



Sequencing Curriculum

The acquisition and mastery of new knowledge and skill takes place in a predictable sequence. Inservice curricula should follow this sequence to develop, present, reinforce and support learning.

Level I: Awareness

Level I provides a broad overview of the problem or need, describes the scope of the information to be learned, and clarifies the proposed objectives or desired ends of the training. This provides trainees with a conceptual framework within which to organize the new information, and "frames" the questions within in the context of the trainees' jobs and training needs. Presenting and clarifying the rationale for the training creates the motivation to learn.

- **Best Outcome:** Trainees should be able to identify the nature of the problems the training is designed to address; describe the pertinent issues; and state the rationale for their needing to know this to effectively do their jobs. Trainees should also be able to state the goals of the training.

Level II: Knowledge/Understanding

Level II includes two stages. The first, the acquisition of knowledge, provides trainees with comprehensive, factual information about the topic. The second, the development of understanding, enables trainees to master the relationships and linkages between the elements of knowledge, thereby creating a congruent and integrated cognitive system.

Achieving knowledge means one has acquired, retained, and can repeat factual information. To understand, one must be able to fit the elements of knowledge together into an integrated cognitive system. One must know the meaning of the concepts, know the relationships between conceptual elements, and be able to identify how the concepts support or contradict each other. When one understands, one can generalize the information to other problems or settings and can manipulate the information to solve problems.

Risk assessment can provide an example to help differentiate knowledge from understanding. Knowledge would include being able to identify and describe

the most relevant factors that increase risk or promote safety; being able to describe why risk assessment is important to child welfare; and being able to describe why risk assessment is not an exact science. Understanding allows one to simultaneously weigh the relative effects of multiple risk and safety variables, and be able to describe how one key safety factor can mitigate and eliminate all the risk factors. When one "knows" about risk assessment, one is likely to view it as the additive sum of many separate elements that can each be individually assessed and ranked. When one "understands" risk assessment, one views it as an interactive system of personal, interpersonal, and environmental variables that cannot be accurately assessed independent of each other.

Finally, understanding the relationships between elements allows one to predict how these may change in different circumstances. This provides flexibility in application and enables modification of the concepts to assure relevance to a changed situation (that is, can "generalize" to a different environment.)

To achieve understanding, trainees must "work the material." Using and manipulating the information increases trainees' familiarity with the concepts; promotes the identification of linkages between the elements; raises issues not previously considered; enables trainees to integrate the concepts into a flexible and coherent cognitive system. Understanding supports retention, since the knowledge is integrated into the trainee's cognitive system.

- Best Outcome: Trainees will be thoroughly familiar with the elements of the content, and their relationships to each other and to previous knowledge. Trainees should be able to describe how the elements fit together, express logical inconsistencies, cognitively manipulate the information, use the concepts to think through and solve problems, and generalize the concepts to new and somewhat different situations.

Level III: Defines How Knowledge and Skills Apply to the Job

Level III answers the question, "Now that I understand all this, how does it really apply to my job? What am I supposed to do with it?" Level III defines and describes, in detail, how particular knowledge and skills are applied on the job. This usually includes clarifying the worker's role, describing the steps in implementing a task, and identifying how the knowledge or skill may need to be modified for use on the job, particularly to overcome potential barriers to implementation in the work setting.

- Best Outcome: Trainees should be able to define their job expectations and articulate the kinds of skills they will need to perform to these expectations. Where trainees already have the skills needed to perform the task, learning how they should use them will often be sufficient to promote job behavior change. For example; instructing trainees why certain questions are critical at the intake screening level to determine level of potential risk should prompt the collection of this information.

(Trainees already know how to talk on the telephone how to ask questions, and how to record information.)

Level IV: Skill Mastery

Level IV includes the development and refinement of the capacity to perform a task or activity. Skill development proceeds in stages that include: observation, modeling, practice, feedback, repetition, mastery, proficiency, and eventually, habituation – doing it without having to think about it. We cannot effectively promote skill development through training unless Levels I through III have first been completed. Training at Level IV without following the sequence creates "automatons" who may be able to perform certain behaviors, but who likely have no idea why they are performing them, nor can they appropriately adapt their behaviors to different situations. Formal workshop training can generally develop trainees only to a level of modeling and practicing the skill. Further development to achieve mastery and proficiency requires considerable practice and direct feedback, and therefore, **must take place on the job!**

- Best Outcome: Trainees should be able to perform the desired abilities at some level. Proficiency is generally obtained only after on-the-job practice and feedback.