

## **The Barangay-Based Exercise as a Training Technique**

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*Field work has been included in the formal training to blend theory and practice. However, since the theory may not have generated from the situation on which it will be applied, theory testing becomes a pre-condition to the application of a training device in a field setting. Hence, the need to delineate the components of the conceptual framework of the training design vis-à-vis Philippine realities. Equally important are the definition of the goals, the strategies to accomplish the goals, the establishment of the time frame of the training program, the identification of the key groups in the community and the involvement of intersectoral agencies, as well as the level of involvement of the trainees.*

Any type of formal training is always affected by a question of whether what people learn can be applied in the field situation. As part of conventional training device, field work has been included in formal training to ensure that there is direct linkage between training and actual application, called a "process of bridging theory and practice." While this is completely acceptable, one basic question that must be raised is how was the theory generated or, better yet, what is the basis of the theory? Was the theory generated from the reality on which it is supposed to apply? If the theory has been generated from another reality, what provisions are made in order to see to it that the discrepancies between theory and reality are bridged? The clarification of this problem is important most especially in situations where there is a need

to apply the theory in a field setting. Field problems that are currently being encountered probably result from the lack of theory testing, especially for those which were developed in another context or social environment. In other words, the context of the theory and the realities of the environment must first be established before its application to field setting. It is, thus, important to find out the dynamics of the socio-cultural environment and how such an environment relate to the theory being advanced by the training program.

In view of this problem, it would not be enough to expose the trainees to theory and reality. In addition to this, there is a strong need to establish the positive and negative connections between theory and reality. Under what field conditions will the theory not apply and what can be done to see to it that it will work? If the theory

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works, what can be done to improve the socio-cultural environment and hopefully improve the theory?

It is in this context that the theoretical framework underlying a training program must be carefully spelled out. What is the underlying conceptual framework of the training program and how is this framework translated into a number of strategies? A careful review of the submitted models show key concepts whose operationalization have been assumed to directly apply to Philippine reality. Among these concepts is "self-reliance." While no one will dispute the value of this concept, still there is a need to understand the context of Philippine social reality. What problems will occur if this concept is immediately applied to the field? How self-reliant are the farmers and what structural conditions are present in the rural areas preventing them from attaining this psychological state? In other words, there is a need to carefully delineate the various components of the concepts taken by the trainers in order for these concepts to be useful in the field setting. In short, therefore, there is a need to carefully spell out the conceptual framework of the training design, especially in terms of Philippine reality.

As a general rule, a training program has two sets of objectives. One is often called the "general objective" and the other is the "behavioral objective." Following are two related objectives: First, by exposing the trainees to the realities of the rural situation, they will be able to develop a new consciousness and commitment to improve the poor in the Philippines—most especially those found in the rural areas. Second,

in directly working with the rural people, the trainees will be able to change some of the conditions of poverty prevailing in the rural areas thereby ultimately improving the quality of life of the rural poor. In this connection the question of ethics and morality in "manipulating" people becomes an issue. A more fundamental problem concerns goals: What are goals? How are they planned? What is the time frame?

Without exception, all the training programs aspire to have a major impact on the development processes in the rural areas. Given the resources and other capabilities, how realistic are the goals? How is the problem of training discontinuity reflected in these goals? In formal training, however, as in the case of the Institute of Social Work and Community Development and the Institute of Public Health (IPH), training discontinuity is not a major problem because of the continuous supply of students. How about those institutions that are engaged in non-formal training? This issue is important because the continuity of a development effort is a function of the continuity of manpower supply. It is agreed that in the long-run, the community will gradually take over whatever have been initiated with the direct assistance of the trainees. Because of this problem of continuity, there is a need to carefully delineate *realistic* from *idealistic* goals.

How should projects be planned? What resources and strategies must be utilized to accomplish the goals? Essentially, the more important question in this regard is: Who are the targets of plan? It is instructive to quote from the IPH paper regarding this issue:

*the objectives, therefore, are to apply and test basic knowledge, concepts, and tools of public health to actual community situations in collaboration with local health staff, other government officials and personnel, private groups, and with family heads and members.<sup>1</sup>*

Again, there is no doubt that all these people and others should be mobilized. Is this realistic? Is it the best strategy to make a blanket coverage of the community or would it be wiser to identify key groups and/or individuals and work with them more closely rather than work with many groups at a distance? It is important, therefore, to look into the problem of *key persons and/or groups* in the community and develop a theory on what makes them prominent or critical persons in the community and use this theory in mobilizing them.

Will the time frame of a formal training program be different from that of a non-formal training program? The problem of "pull-out," is worthy of consideration. The question of "pulling out", however, will not be that critical if distinction between "change" and "development" was made. Simply stated, "development" is concerned with any attempt to improve social reality by using the existing and potential capabilities of the people.

<sup>1</sup>Melchor L. Jacinto, "Impact in Community Health Development of the Field Practice Program on Graduate Students, Institute of Public Health, Health Sciences Center, University of the Philippines System," paper prepared for the Seminar-Workshop on Barangay-Based Exercises as a Technique, Asian Institute of Tourism, July 25-26, 1980, p. 2.

On the other hand, "change" literally means correcting something negative or counter-productive to the development of the people. While both problems are equally important, efforts should be addressed to the problems of development because it is concerned with the positive capabilities of the people. Theoretically speaking, this does not look formidable because the expertise of the trainees to enhance the capabilities of the people will be utilized. In this way, there is no conflict with the social reality obtaining in the rural areas. By identifying with such positive elements, acceptance by the people in general will be facilitated. In other words, trainees will not run the risk of being labelled as intruders; on the contrary, they will be identified as supporters of community projects.

Considering the time constraint imposed on the program, another issue is the need to identify key persons with the widest contacts in the community. Added to this is the identification of key groups that are strategically located in the community. Here the question of participation and decision-making become prominent since the chosen persons/groups must be those who are considered to represent the interest of the community in general. The selection of these people must involve the participation of the community.

Another issue relates to the involvement of agencies found in the community. How are their resources utilized for the larger benefit of the community? Is there any indication of working together among these agencies? What are the sources of conflict among them? It is perhaps in this area where the participants can contribute their

expertise in terms of helping these agencies operate on the basis of complementation of resources? In other words, there is a need to study more carefully the level of involvement the trainees will have in the community as they attempt to contribute to its development. By designing levels of involvement, it would allow the program designer to carefully map out the kinds of resources needed and the capabilities that the trainees will bring in. It would be necessary to identify various development activities in the community and find out which among these activities the program designer would like to enter into. In doing this, it will also be possible that in the process of involvement in one of several activities, other activities to be included in the projected plans of community immersion may be identified.

The issue of intervention becomes a minor one in the above process, in the sense that the primary focus of concern is in the area of development and not change. Any attempt at introducing changes in the community must be carefully weighed, most especially, in terms of being able to provide continuing support to the change process. If manpower support cannot be provided, then it would be best to think twice before initiating change in the community. In the case of development, "pull-out" will not present a major difficulty. The focus of concern is on improving the capabilities of the people and the process mechanisms within the community to provide continuing support to development. It is here where the involvement of the development agencies is taken to be central. It is imperative for development

agencies in the area to participate in enhancing the development process in the true spirit of partnership. In short, therefore, their role in the development process will be to facilitate and support the people's efforts and to enhance their capabilities.

Another major issue that training program designers will face is whether they can agree on a basic development model and how the various capabilities of participating institutions can be harnessed to make the model work. In other words, how can they blend formal and non-formal training designs to achieve development goals? Perhaps, what is needed is a *training mix*. What combination of skills would best bring about and hasten the development process? This may be done first by establishing the lead school and the supporting schools. It is a fact that different communities have different problems based on their identified priorities. If health were the most pressing problem in a community, the obvious lead institution here will be a health agency. However, the health problem could have been generated by economic, educational, and environmental factors. The supporting activities, thus, must come from those institutions which have the expertise to provide the supporting functions. As the most pressing problem of the community changes, the lead and the supporting institutions will also change; therefore, development agencies can contribute toward the achievement of an integrated rural development only if the programs are in the first place integrated.

Finally, it may be noted that basic socio-economic data are preconditions

to community entry. There is a need, however, to know what data are needed and why. The Institute of Social Work and Community Development believes that people should not remain merely respondents to a survey. They must be made active partners in identifying community problems. There is always a need to prime people on the need for a social survey, when the data are collected and analyzed, their perceptions, and explanations of these problems must be solicited. One's expertise should be introduced only to support the people's down-to-earth explanation by showing them that at times the problems iden-

tified are not independent of each other—they are in fact interrelated and solutions would require a closer collaboration between development agencies and the people in the true spirit of partnership in development.

It is hoped that in this overview, critical issues which should be addressed had been identified. It must be reiterated that development is possible only if the people in the community are consciously taken as real partners in development, and all efforts are only intended to facilitate and support their own aspirations towards an improved quality of life.