

CONDUCTING FIELD PRACTICALS: AN OVERVIEW

Handout for Learners

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As an adult learner in the adult education programme, you carry-out field practicals for the following reasons; 1) as a learning process (for you to merge theory and practice); 2) to assist groups of people out of the classroom setting (workplace, rural populations, etc); and as a requirement for the courses you undertake. Basically a problem should exist (within the target audience context) which needs to be solved. Your task is to assist them by designing an instructional programme which you will carry-out to completion.

Impact of Practical to the Target Audience

Your task as designer/facilitator is to assist the target audience in achieving their goal. If conducted successfully, the target audience would have gained knowledge and skills in solving their problems. Learning outcomes may include being able to do what they could not do before, increasing their income due to increase in the number of products sold, increase in good health, etc. In the long run, the community and the nation at large would have benefited.

Impact to the Facilitator

After completing the planned tasks, you as facilitator will not only have assisted the target audience in their quest for learning but would have gained knowledge and skill in working with adult learners. Your experience as an instructional designer/facilitator would be enhanced in the process. Furthermore, you would have gained some experience which is crucial for you to function correctly as an adult educator.

Choosing Interest Areas to Carry the Practical

When you decide to choose an interest area for the project you are about to undertake, prior knowledge and experience is a good asset to have. The experience you bring in as an adult learner should assist in choosing the most practical area of interest. Guidelines to this could include your work background and/or area or field of specialisation.

As an example, you may perhaps have knowledge or prior experience on mass communication. You may have worked for or are working with an organisation which uses mass communication practices to disseminate information to clients. This should help you in making a decision on whether to undertake a project in this area or not.

Choosing an area of interest should not be constrained to having knowledge and prior experience alone. You need to have a love for working with adults. You need to view yourself for example as a resource that local people can use to further their own development. Your role in this case will have you wear 'many hats'. You may work as an extension worker, a community development officer, health motivator, etc. You need to have interest in what the target audience is doing, be motivated to work with them, and assist them in a professional manner. Your knowledge, experience and interest put together can help in putting across the information and assistance you want to give.

Other considerations you need to take into account are **resources** and **constraints** which may exist when choosing an area of interest. Resources available include; *people, physical things, money and time* to mention some. Constraints may include; availability of time (i.e. traveling to a remote area), availability of people to assist in the project, and the cost of carrying out particular tasks. Consider the *people or local resources*, and *locally available materials* as resources. Again, the opposite might be true. The above mentioned could turn out to be constraints depending on the situation you are in.

Selecting the Target Audience

Selecting a target audience is an important part of conducting a field practical. There are many reasons which could lead you to select a particular audience. These include: selecting

an audience because you live in the area, the community is dealing with activities of interest to you, you work in the organisation, a friend requested you to help, etc. While this may look easy, there are important considerations to take. While you may have a topic in mind (prior knowledge and experience in the topic, and interest in working with adults driving you), knowing the audience is very important. You may also find out later on that though you may have been interested in *public relations* issues as an example of interest area, after needs assessment you may end-up dealing with *Women in Development Issues*. Below are a few steps you should follow before you actually conduct a needs assessment to find out what their needs are.

- 1) Identify a community, group and/or Organisation you feel you may work with;
- 2) Identify people you may contact (Chief, Chief's runner, Extension Agents, Community Development Officers, Friends and even Relatives).
- 3) Make more visits to acquaint yourself with the potential target audience while exploring possibilities of using a topical area you have in mind (mind you, observation and informal meetings can reveal peoples' needs).
- 4) Make a decision whether the target audience is willing to work with you. Again, look for resources available, constraints, and any other information which may help you in making a better choice of a target audience.
- 5) Make your selection based on your preliminary findings. The actual needs assessment will be conducted at a later stage when your intentions are known.

Another important aspect in selecting a particular audience is to justify the selection. There must be a need, a real problem, and the expectation that learning and impact will take place. The idea here is for you to be more serious with your work and not to select a group just for the sake of it. While trying to justify the selection, you need to keep in mind on some of the following questions:

- Will people learn?
- Will the knowledge be useful?
- Will knowledge and skill improve?
- Will attitudes change?

Though there are many other questions to ask yourself, it would be wise to agree on selecting a target audience if the answers to the above questions are positive. You also need to consider resources and constraints as discussed earlier on.

The next discussion to follow in these series is finally how to actually carry out the practical in the field. Good luck in your preparations. The next series of our handout will come soon to the website below.

<http://www.wikieducator.org/User:Peles>