



Taking Charge of Change™

A 20-year review of empowering early childhood administrators through leadership training

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A 20-Year review of empowering early childhood administrators through leadership training

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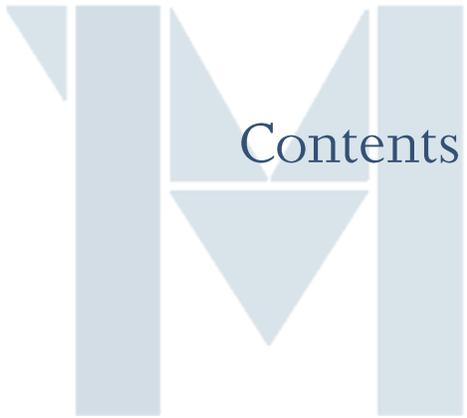
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Executive Summary

While there is consensus among policymakers and practitioners about the importance of strong leadership in early childhood, few states have made leadership training a high priority in the implementation of their career development systems. Illinois stands out as a notable exception. For the past twenty years, the state has served as a shining example of a focused investment in the professional development of administrators of early childhood programs. The most well known is **Taking Charge of Change (TCC)**.

Funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Taking Charge of Change is a 10-month leadership training program that focuses on the nature of individual, organizational, and systemic change and the program director's role as a change agent. A comprehensive, integrated model for improving the quality of early childhood programs is presented during the training cycle and participants implement a program improvement plan to enhance the quality of their centers.

The TCC training model has been designed to foster collegial support and networking. Based on the principles of adult development and experiential learning, training is conducted in a seminar-like atmosphere using a variety of training formats. The experience is designed to provide a forum where participants experience a professional learning community—the trusting relationships and environment of critical inquiry where they can share their passions and struggles with one another, co-construct knowledge, and reflect on assumptions and beliefs about their role and the vital work they do. Through regular on-site observations and discussions with a skilled mentor, directors refine administrative practices, acquire new competencies, gain insights, and become more confident and effective leaders in their communities.

To date, 502 Illinois early childhood administrators have completed Taking Charge of Change. In addition, through a national TCC Train-the-Trainer initiative, the model is being disseminated and implemented in other states.

502

Illinois early childhood administrators have completed Taking Charge of Change

The 502 individuals who have completed Taking Charge of Change were predominantly female (96%). Fifty-nine percent held a baccalaureate degree and 24% held a graduate degree. Participants were racially and ethnically diverse; more than one-third (38%) were of African-American, Asian, or Hispanic heritage. The typical participant was in her early 40s and started her career as a classroom teacher. Participants averaged 12 years experience in early childhood education and 7 years of experience in an administrative role. They represented nonprofit and for-profit, part-day and full-day, Head Start, faith-based, privately owned and publicly funded programs. In total, the 502 TCC participants served 61,850 children during the year in which they participated in training.

THE STUDY

This study looked at two data sets: archived evaluation data from the twenty cohorts who had completed the Taking Charge of Change training and new data about the current job status of TCC alumni generated from an online survey. The research questions guiding this inquiry clustered into three areas:

- Participants' current job status and career decisions since completing TCC.
- The impact of training on directors' perceptions of competence and on the quality of organizational practices at their centers.
- The potential of leadership training for strengthening the early childhood profession by promoting ongoing professional development, strengthening commitment to the field, and mentoring other practitioners.

Archived data from the twenty cohorts who had completed Taking Charge of Change included several measures:

- A *Training Needs Assessment Survey* (TNAS) was used to assess participants' level of perceived competence in 18 different knowledge and skill areas.
- The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) was used to measure the quality of administrative practices at participants' programs.
- The *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* (ECWES) was used to assess the organizational climate of participants' programs.

The archived data were supplemented with the responses of 138 TCC alumni who completed an online survey about their current job status, career decisions, continuing professional development, commitment, and professional achievements.

FINDINGS

Job status and career decisions. Of the 138 TCC alumni who completed the online survey, one-half indicated they were still directors of center-based programs. Another 43% remained in the field but not in a directorship role. They held positions such as college instructor, technical assistance specialist, regional manager, and independent consultant. The remaining 7% left the field because of retirement, health issues, parenthood, or to teach in higher education in another discipline.

Sixty-three alumni reported they had made at least one job change since completing TCC. Of this group, 28% indicated their decision was prompted by a need for greater influence or a need for greater challenge.

The impact of training. The results of the TNAS data analyses across the twenty cohorts revealed a statistically significant increase in participants' knowledge and skill in all 18 areas assessed. The two areas in which participants reported experiencing the greatest growth were:

- knowledge of how systems theory applies to early childhood organizations
- how to implement an individualized model of staff development

In addition to specific skill building, virtually all individuals commented on a heightened sense of self-esteem, greater confidence, and a stronger sense of self-efficacy as a result of participating in the training.

The 69 alumni who were still directors were asked to indicate their current level of role competency—*novice*, *capable*, or *master* director. Sixty-one percent reported that they now perceive themselves as master directors. Only 5% of this same group viewed themselves as master directors when they enrolled in the training.

In addition to self-reports of program improvements, the study verified organizational outcomes with independent observations and assessments. Results of the pre- and post-PAS assessments revealed an increase in all items assessed with statistically significant increases in three items: staff orientation, staff development, and family communications.

Additional evidence of improved program practices can be seen in the percentage of TCC alumni programs that are accredited by NAEYC or NAC. Forty-two percent of alumni reported their programs were accredited. This contrasts with the overall 13% percent of accredited programs in Illinois. In addition, 58% of the alumni reported that their centers participate in Illinois Quality Counts—Quality Rating System. This is more than three times the state average of 17%.

Perceptions of the work environment in participants' programs also improved from the pre- and post-administration of the ECWES in all ten dimensions of organizational climate. In three dimensions (decision making, goal consensus, and innovativeness) these differences were statistically significant. There were also positive changes in staff's level of commitment to their organizations. The ECWES data represented more than 3,000 employees who worked at TCC participants' programs.

Strengthening the early childhood profession. Perhaps the most encouraging data regarding TCC alumni relates to their level of commitment to the early childhood field. Of the 138 alumni responding to the online survey, 128 (93%) continue to work in the field either as a director of a center-based program or in a related position supporting children and families. Fully 89% see themselves as continuing to work in the field five years from now.

- 65% of alumni indicated they had mentored other directors, thus multiplying the effects of their initial training.
- 64% of alumni indicated that they went on to pursue formal college coursework since completing TCC.
- 44% indicated that they had completed an undergraduate or graduate degree.
- 46% reported having attained a credential since completing TCC.
- Statewide, 23% of all practitioners holding an Illinois Director Credential (IDC) have participated in TCC.

LESSONS LEARNED

From our work over the past two decades, we have learned some important lessons about the change process. We have learned that personal change usually precedes organizational change and that organizational change is best achieved when it is implemented in small, incremental steps.

We have seen firsthand how a well-designed training program can serve as a catalyst for change, providing the tools that individuals need to make program improvements. These are the design elements of Taking Charge of Change, we believe, that have contributed most to its success.

- Evidence-based content that challenges but does not overwhelm the learner
- A clear and understandable framework for presenting key concepts and ideas
- Structured opportunities for community building, peer learning, and collegial support
- A comfortable learning environment that enhances focus
- Practical tools for creating data-driven program improvement plans
- Experiential learning that reinforces important concepts
- Recurring loops of data gathering, reflection, and action
- Field assignments that have direct application in the workplace
- Mentor support that helps ensure follow-up and bridges theory to practice

The impact of a leadership training program like Taking Charge of Change on the early care and education system is difficult to measure. It is but one of several state initiatives to improve quality. However, having 502 individuals share a similar experience of leadership training means that there is a growing cadre of leaders in the state who “speak the same leadership language,” are invested in the state’s career development system, are committed to continuous quality improvement, and are knowledgeable advocates of high-quality learning environments for staff as well as for children and families.

The rich empirical and anecdotal evidence received from TCC participants provides compelling evidence of how leadership training can help change the early childhood profession from the inside out and from the bottom up, through changes in early childhood administrators themselves. The results of this study underscore the need for systematic, intensive, and relevant training focused on the unique needs of early childhood directors. It also provides a better understanding of what structural supports are needed to improve the stability of the workforce and maintain the quality improvements to programs that benefit from leadership training.

A large, light blue, stylized letter 'M' composed of several geometric shapes, including vertical bars and triangles, serving as a background for the title.

Introduction

OVERVIEW

Strong leadership is a vital component of any thriving organization.¹ Capable leaders are able to step back to understand and solve challenges from a systems-wide perspective while simultaneously leaning in and being cognizant of the small details that influence people's thoughts and actions. In early childhood organizations strong leadership is particularly critical because center directors are the gatekeepers to quality. They are the ones responsible for creating a climate that promotes optimal growth and development of children as well as implementing systems to ensure that quality is maintained.² Early childhood administrators must be able to envision goals, affirm values, motivate staff, achieve unity of purpose, and foster norms of continuous improvement.

While there is consensus among policymakers and practitioners alike about the importance of strong leadership in early care and education programs, few states have made leadership training a high priority in the implementation of their career development systems. Illinois stands out as a notable exception. For more than two decades, the state has served as a shining example of a focused investment in the professional development of leaders of early childhood organizations. Illinois has implemented a comprehensive and rigorous director credential and has forged public and private partnerships to provide needed funding for leadership training. The most well known is Taking Charge of Change (TCC).

Funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Taking Charge of Change is a 10-month leadership training program that focuses on the nature of individual, organizational, and systemic change and the early childhood leader's role as a change agent. A comprehensive, integrated model for improving the quality of early childhood programs is presented during the training cycle and participants implement a program improvement plan to enhance the quality of their centers. Over the past twenty years, 502 Illinois early childhood administrators have completed this training. In addition, through a national TCC Train-the-Trainer initiative, the model is being disseminated and implemented in other states.

This 20-year milestone of Taking Charge of Change provides an opportune moment to step back and take a look at this leadership training program—the conceptual model underpinning its design and delivery, the content and components of the training model, and the impact the training has had on early childhood administrators and their programs.

Data on training outcomes have been collected for each TCC cohort including measures of participant satisfaction and changes in their perceived level of knowledge and skill. In addition, pre- and post-measures of organizational effectiveness have been utilized to collect data on the organizational climate and the quality of administrative practices at participants' respective programs. These data have provided rich documentation of training outcomes as well as useful information for refining the curriculum.

Now after two decades, it is important to take a retrospective look at what has happened to the individuals who have participated in Taking Charge of Change. This 20-year benchmark also provides a convenient time to document lessons learned and best practices in the design and delivery of leadership training that may be useful to other entities engaged in similar professional development endeavors.

This report is divided into five sections. In this first introductory section we provide a brief overview of the research relating to the importance of effective leadership in early childhood settings. Next we present a detailed description of the Taking Charge of Change training program, including the background characteristics of the participants and their programs, the curriculum, and how the content and delivery of the training has been refined over the past 20 years. Then we describe the methodology of our current study, including research questions, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and a description of survey respondents. Next we share the results of our investigation, looking at the current status of TCC alumni, the impact of training as it relates to personal and organizational change, and how training can strengthen commitment to the profession by promoting ongoing professional development.³ Our final section summarizes what we have learned about the change process and our recommendations for the content, design, and delivery of effective leadership training programs.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD ADMINISTRATORS

Over the past two decades, a number of studies have looked at different segments of the early childhood workforce. Out of this research has emerged a fairly clear portrait of center-based early childhood administrators who manage part-day and full-day, for-profit and nonprofit, Head Start, publicly funded preschool, and faith-based programs.⁴ This section summarizes some of the findings in that body of research as it relates to the career aspirations and educational background of administrators, the effect of specialized training on program quality, and the similarities and differences with their counterparts at the elementary and secondary level, school principals.

Directors' Career Aspirations and Level of Preparation

While most early childhood teachers go into teaching as an expressed career goal, most directors do not enter the field with the goal of being a program administrator. Most of them were promoted to their administrative position because others saw their leadership ability and encouraged them to pursue the role.

- Approximately 90% of directors have been classroom teachers, but only one-fifth report that they actively pursued an administrative position.⁵
- Only 27% of directors state they were well-prepared for their administrative role. Over one-half of directors describe the transition into their new role as overwhelming.⁶
- One-third of directors working in a mixed-service delivery system (funding from Head Start, child care, and publicly funded preschool) identify the fiscal arena as the area in which they could most improve.⁷

Directors' ability to attract and retain effective teachers in their programs, establish norms of ongoing quality improvement, and oversee other facets of program operations is directly related to their own level of formal education, experience, and specialized training in both early childhood education and program administration.

- Directors' level of formal education is a strong predictor of overall program quality.⁸
- There is a significant positive relationship between the quality of administrative practices and the quality of the children's learning environment in center-based programs.⁹
- Directors with higher levels of education and specialized training in program administration are more likely to support the professional development of their teaching staff, secure and maintain program funding, and achieve center accreditation.¹⁰

Directors and Principals—Same Universe, Different Realities

The scope of responsibilities for center directors is similar to elementary school principals. Both administrators oversee curriculum and child assessment, supervision and evaluation of teachers, human resources allocation, family engagement, community outreach, and fiscal matters relating to their programs. Yet director qualifications contrast sharply with the qualifications for principals.

- While state requirements for principals vary, virtually all states require certification and classroom teaching experience, a master's degree, and ongoing professional development. Some states require special education coursework, supervisory endorsements, specific early childhood content, and training beyond a master's degree.¹¹
- Only five states (CA, CO, FL, NH, TX) require even one college course related to administration or business before assuming the position of director of a licensed child care center. Only four states (DE, IN, NJ, PA) require a director to have a degree at any level. There are 28 states that recognize the administrative competency of center directors by issuing a director or administrator credential. In almost all of these states the credential is voluntary.¹²
- The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identifies as a best practice for program accreditation that an administrator have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree with 24 semester hours of specialized education in early childhood and 9 semester hours of specialized education in administration.¹³
- Director qualifications are decreasing. In 2001, 72% of center directors reported having a bachelor's degree or higher; in 2008, only 66% reported having a bachelor's degree or higher.¹⁴
- Two kinds of leadership development programs exist—one for principals and one for child care center directors—but neither addresses the needs of leaders in the new mixed service delivery early childhood system.¹⁵

The Impact of Specialized Training on Professional Practice

The research is quite solid in its findings that professional development makes a difference. Directors who receive leadership and management training specific to early childhood are able to perform their responsibilities more effectively. Administrative practices are also improved when mentoring or coaching supplements the training.

- Directors with greater levels of administrative training report significant gains in their level of competence. Staff who work at these programs perceive the work environment to be more positive and productive.¹⁶
- A formal curriculum to increase directors' administrative knowledge and skills, coupled with a strong mentoring component emphasizing peer support, results in demonstrable organizational change.¹⁷
- Business training is most effective when it is used in concert with ongoing technical support, is hands on, and meets administrative needs specific to early childhood.¹⁸
- Directors with more training report significant differences in both their self-perceptions as advocates and in their actions advocating for the early childhood workforce. They are also more likely to serve in a leadership role in an early childhood professional organization.¹⁹

In response to the limited specialized training, education, and overall lack of preparedness directors have for their important roles, leadership development programs have been created to help fill the gap. The McCormick Center's Taking Charge of Change program is among the most established of these types of programs. The multi-faceted nature of the director's role and the necessity to professionalize the role are packaged into a 10-month opportunity for job-embedded specialized training. For twenty years the training model has worked to increase the competence, commitment, and collegial support of early childhood administrators dedicated to providing quality learning environments for children, families, and staff.



THE TRAINING MODEL

This section provides an overview of the Taking Charge of Change training model—a description of the target audience, learning experience, curriculum, mentoring component, refinements made to the model over the years, and recent activities in disseminating the model to other states.

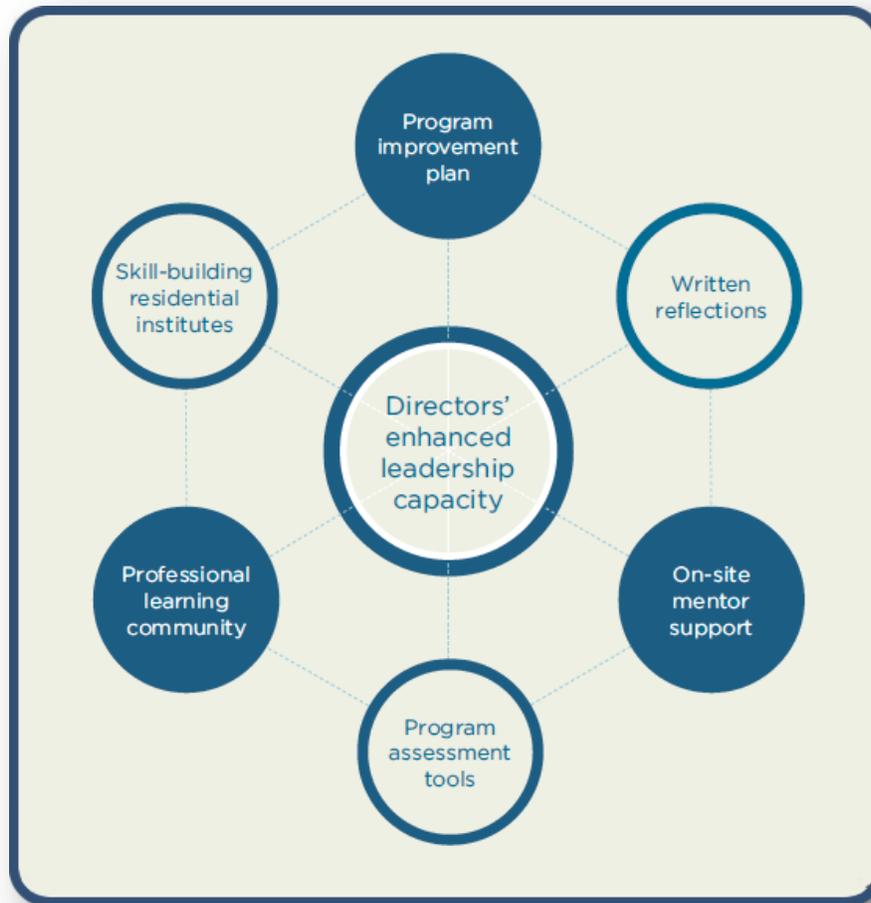
Target Audience

The target audience for Taking Charge of Change is directors and assistant directors of center-based early childhood programs in Illinois. Candidates are chosen for their demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of care and education of young children, their interest in pursuing center accreditation or a quality rating, their leadership potential, and their ability to effect organizational change.

While a baccalaureate degree is preferred, experienced candidates who possess an associate's degree are eligible to apply. Effort is made to ensure that each group represents the geographic diversity of Illinois as well as the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of the early childhood workforce. To date, a total of 502 individuals have completed the TCC experience in 20 cohorts ranging in size from 22 to 28 participants.

The Learning Experience

The following graphic captures the essential features that contribute to the Taking Charge of Change learning experience.



The training begins in the summer with a six-day convening residential institute. Participants meet again in the fall for a three-day connecting residential institute, and then for a one-day culminating institute held in late spring in conjunction with the McCormick Center's annual Leadership Connections conference. Over the 10-month program, participants receive approximately 80 hours of small- and large-group instruction and 20 hours of individual feedback and conference time with their instructors and mentors. At the culmination of training, participants are eligible for six semester hours of college credit from National Louis University.

The training model has been designed to foster collegial support and networking—what some participants refer to as “cross-fertilization” of the field. By bringing together directors from both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, representing a variety of program types—Head Start, faith-based, military, privately owned, corporate-sponsored, university-affiliated, public school sponsored—participants come to appreciate the diversity of the field and increase their access to different types of professional resources. In addition, housing for the three institutes is provided for all participants so they can immerse themselves in the training experience and strengthen their networking with peers.

Prior to the summer institute, each participant is interviewed by telephone and an in-depth needs assessment is conducted. The case studies that are used during training are drawn from the critical incident scenarios and program profiles that are developed as part of the needs assessment interviews. The case studies developed draw on both generic themes that cut across different types of programs and from specific examples highlighting unique issues inherent to participants' programs.

Based on the principles of adult development and experiential learning, training is conducted in a seminar-like atmosphere using a variety of training formats including formal presentations, large-group discussions, small-group experiences, and role playing. In addition, during the summer institute, participants visit two exemplary programs to learn more about center engagement in a quality improvement process through national accreditation or the state quality rating system.

The TCC training experience was designed to provide a forum where participants experience a professional learning community—the trusting relationships and environment of critical inquiry where they can share their passions and struggles with one another, co-construct knowledge, and reflect on their assumptions and beliefs about their role and the vital work they do.

Within this setting, they are able to practice the essential elements of effective teaming and reflect on opportunities to implement these practices in their organizations. Some of these practices include: establishing ground rules, spending focused time in the process of co-inquiry, sharing background on what they do, and collaboratively using tools to move through a cycle of describing, informing, confronting, and reconstructing.

A unique feature of Taking Charge of Change is the assignment of a mentor to each participant. Mentors are paired with mentees during the summer convening institute, where they get to know one another and begin to build a supportive relationship. Mentor and mentee meet face-to-face again at the follow-up connecting and culminating institutes. In addition, the mentors make on-site visits, set up regional group mentee meetings, provide technical assistance via telephone and e-mail, and review written reflections from their mentees.

Curriculum Content

The Taking Charge of Change curriculum focuses on the nature of individual, organizational, and systemic change and the early childhood director's role as change agent. In all areas, participants focus on the application of general principles to the specific needs of their programs.

TCC DESIGN FEATURES

- Evidence-based content that challenges but does not overwhelm the learner
- A clear and understandable framework for presenting key concepts and ideas
- Structured opportunities for community building, peer learning, and collegial support
- A comfortable learning environment that enhances focus
- Practical tools for creating data-driven program improvement plans
- Experiential learning that reinforces important concepts
- Recurring loops of data gathering, reflection, and action
- Field assignments that have direct application in the workplace
- Mentor support that helps ensure follow-up and bridges theory to practice

The content covers:

- Social systems theory
- Individual and organizational change
- Assessing leadership style and practices
- Diversity as an organizational asset
- Continuous quality improvement
- Center accreditation and QRS rating
- Assessing the work environment
- Recruiting, screening, and orienting staff
- Learning styles
- Developmental supervision
- Individualized staff development
- Group dynamics and effective communication
- Reflective practice and ethical conduct
- Managing stress and avoiding burnout
- Shared decision making and distributed leadership
- Conducting effective meetings
- Professional learning communities
- 360-degree feedback and performance appraisal

Directors often have a global impression that things are either going well or not so well at their centers, but they tend to lack specific information on areas of their program's operation that contribute to these impressions. TCC provides a systematic approach for assessing organizational needs and implementing program improvements. A step-by-step process is presented for collecting data about their programs and how the data can be turned into an action plan for center improvement. This component helps to establish norms of continuous quality improvement.

During the training, participants learn about two valid and reliable assessment tools that are key to the program improvement process. An organizational climate assessment using the *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES)* is conducted to evaluate the quality of work life at their respective centers.²⁰ An assessment of administrative practices using the *Program Administration Scale (PAS)* is conducted to measure the quality of leadership and management practices at each participant's center.²¹ The profiles generated from these assessments are used as baseline data to guide program improvement efforts. Both tools are also administered at the end of the training to discern changes in program quality.

Directors leave the summer institute with concrete, applicable strategies to bring back to their programs to implement. Once back at their centers, they continue their professional development with regular self-reflections, completion of assignments, meetings with their assigned mentors, and periodic discussions on a website discussion forum with other members of their cohort.

Throughout the 10-month training cycle, emphasis is given to the integration of these field experiences. Participants look at their programs as social systems, examine shared norms, values, expectations, and the pivotal role they play in influencing the direction of program practices. The field experience component of the training is premised on the belief that immediate application of new learning to real-life situations reinforces what is learned. During the field experience, participants have an opportunity to implement a formal Program Improvement Plan (PIP). At the culmination of training, directors share the results of their efforts in an oral presentation.

To assist participants in their efforts to improve the quality of their programs, they each receive a \$500 quality enhancement grant. Grant monies are spent on specific recommendations detailed in their PIP such as supporting staff training or purchasing materials to enhance the center's learning environment. The PIP is designed to strengthen an area relating to the organizational assessments conducted at each site during in the initial phase of the institute.

Mentoring Component

As stated previously, mentors play an integral role in the success of Taking Charge of Change. They meet with their assigned mentees during the convening, connecting, and culminating institutes, make on-site visits to participants' programs, host regional small-group meetings, and often organize reciprocal visits to their mentees' centers. TCC mentors are selected from alumni of this leadership training program. Because they have gone through the training, and many are still directors themselves, they know firsthand the challenges that early childhood administrators face. They play a vital role in helping participants to bridge the theoretical concepts learned in training to the real-life world of practice.

Due to the frenetic pace of program administration, directors rarely have time to reflect on what is happening in their centers, document their work, or study their own leadership and management practices. The mentoring component of TCC is intended to help counterbalance the impact of ingrained routines by helping directors step back to analyze and examine the underpinnings of their actions while identifying opportunities for growth. This is critical as directors begin to see themselves as change agents leading their organizations through program improvement efforts. Through regular observations and discussions with a skilled mentor, directors can begin to refine administrative practices, acquire new competencies, gain insights, and become more confident and effective leaders.

During each TCC cohort training cycle, mentors go through a parallel professional development experience. They take part in their own mentor training to learn about new resources to strengthen their mentoring, communication, and presentation skills. They also meet at three points during the year with a mentor supervisor who oversees their mentoring activities, organizes periodic teleconferences to discuss issues that emerge, and provides feedback to strengthen their effectiveness as mentors.

Refinements to the Model

The Taking Charge of Change leadership training experience has been refined over the past twenty years both in response to lessons learned internally and to changes in the external environment. These changes relate to the curriculum, the policy context, and the impact of technology.

Curriculum. Each year small changes have been made in the content of sessions, readings, and assignments to reflect feedback from participants in previous cohorts and new research and resources in the field. For example in the early years of TCC, terminology from the Total Quality Management (TQM) movement in business and industry was used to frame the discussion around organizational change. This has been replaced with more relevant research relating to continuous quality improvement in educational settings and Kaizen as organizing frameworks for incremental change. Additionally, an emphasis on appreciative inquiry, distributed leadership, reflective practice, and professional learning communities has been woven into the content in the last few years.

Policy context. Much has changed in the policy landscape since 1993 when Taking Charge of Change began. At that time, NAEYC accreditation was regarded as the primary strategy for improving the quality of early childhood programs. Accreditation facilitation initiatives were embraced by both public agencies and the philanthropic community. Today, state quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) are recognized as an effective policy approach to help child care programs increase program quality incrementally from the "floor" set by licensing standards to the "ceiling" represented by accreditation standards or other measures of program excellence. Statewide quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) are now the norm and accreditation is often one pathway in QRIS to demonstrate adherence to high-quality standards.²²

The Taking Charge of Change model has evolved to reflect these changes in the policy context. While TCC content has remained aligned with NAEYC accreditation standards, components of the pre- and post-evaluation of the TCC experience have changed. For example, during the past five years, the quality of leadership and management practices at participants' programs has been assessed using items from the *Program Administration Scale*, one of the assessment tools used in Illinois' quality rating system.

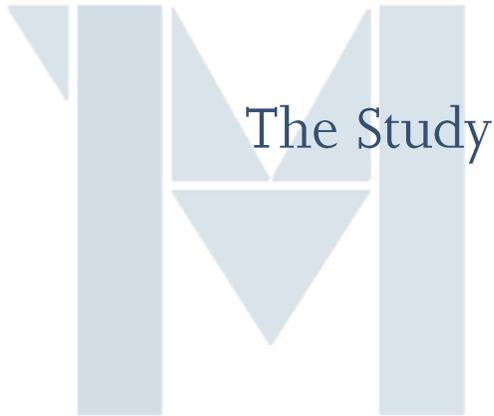
Impact of technology. When TCC participants were first introduced to the potential of electronic networking, attempts to connect online were met with resistance. Although directors expressed interest, only a handful became proficient at using e-mail by the end of their cohort training cycle. Many of the directors' programs did not have the necessary hardware or modems to get online. Some directors became frustrated because of the lack of technical support. There was a critical need for technology training for child care administrators. Once this was identified, IDHS began funding director technology training.

By 2002, the growth in technology greatly enhanced the ability of mentors to communicate with each other and their mentees. The mentor group decided to eliminate teleconferences and to rely instead on the use of a listserv for communication. This practice proved to be effective, not only for the exchange of information, but also for brainstorming and problem solving. Today, the use of technology is embedded throughout the TCC experience. Participants use PowerPoint or Prezi to make presentations, send their assignments to instructors as attachments to e-mail, and communicate with each other via listserv, social media, and text messaging.

Disseminating the Model

In 2007 with a grant from the Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation, the McCormick Center expanded the reach of Taking Charge of Change by disseminating the model to other states. Each year approximately eight to ten trainers from across the country attend TCC and meet with McCormick Center faculty to learn about different aspects of the training model, review the curriculum, and share techniques for delivering high-impact training. The goal is to develop a cadre of informed and experienced trainers who can implement the components of the Taking Charge of Change model to support the leadership development of early childhood center directors in other states.

The target audience for TCC Train-the-Trainer is community college instructors, supervisors of multi-site programs, technical assistance specialists who work for child care resource and referral agencies, and organizational development consultants who support directors' quality enhancement endeavors. TCC Trainer-the-Trainer participants receive detailed trainer's guides for each of the TCC topics, along with sample evaluation tools, mentor materials, and guidelines for recruiting participants and implementing the training. While the Train-the-Trainer model is not the focus of this report, additional information about the McCormick Center's partner organizations in other states can be found on our website.



METHODOLOGY

The current study was prompted by one of those casual office conversations that ignite a flurry of ideas and activity. We were updating our McCormick Center database with a new coding system to better track the participants who have attended the center's different training initiatives. This prompted the realization that Taking Charge of Change was about to celebrate a milestone 20th anniversary.

We wondered out loud what had happened to the participants who had attended the first TCC cohorts two decades ago. In 2003, the center had conducted a mail survey of past participants to observe the tenth anniversary of the TCC.²³ It was clearly time to do an update of their job status and career decisions. It was also time to analyze 20 years of data to look more deeply at the impact of Taking Charge of Change on participants and their organizations.

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data collected before and after training as well as recent data collected via an online survey. One data set consisted of archived demographic and evaluation data from the twenty cohorts. The second data set was generated from an online survey about the current job status of alumni. The study also included telephone interviews with a small number of TCC alumni to learn more about their leadership journey.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study clustered into three areas: 1) participants' current job status and career decisions since completing Taking Charge of Change; 2) the impact of training on directors' perceptions of competence and on the quality of organizational practices at their centers; and 3) the potential of leadership training for strengthening the early childhood profession by promoting ongoing professional development, strengthening commitment to the field, and mentoring of other practitioners.

Job status and career decisions. Given the investment of time and financial resources devoted to professional development endeavors like Taking Charge of Change, it was important to determine the current status of individuals who have participated in training. Did they still work in the early childhood field or had they left the field to pursue other interests? If they continued to work in the field, had they changed jobs? If so, what factors prompted their decision and did they perceive their job change as career advancement? If they were still a director of a center-based program, what issues did they find most challenging in their work?

Impact of training. While it is difficult to quantify the outcomes of different educational change efforts, it is important to try to discern the impact a professional development experience has had on participants and their organizations. In other words, how has the experience added value to the work individuals do? In the case of TCC, how had participation in the training enhanced participants' feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and appreciation for the importance of their leadership role? How had it impacted their perceived level of knowledge and skill? Analyzing the aggregate data across all cohorts, what areas of growth would be most notable? Had directors' feelings of personal empowerment been sustained over the years? Did participation in the training result in a more positive organizational climate in their programs and an increase in staff's commitment to the center? Had it translated into greater organizational effectiveness in terms of human resources management, internal communications, and communication with families? What concrete, specific changes had individuals made in their early childhood programs or in their communities?

Strengthening the early childhood profession. Across the country, considerable investments are being made to incentivize professional development in an effort to create a more stable and well-educated early childhood workforce. In terms of the TCC experience, had the awarding of college credit and connecting individuals to professional development resources served as an impetus for continued formal college coursework? Had participants gone on to pursue a degree or a director credential? Did they express commitment to the early childhood field and did they anticipate working in the field for at least five more years? Finally, had TCC alumni multiplied the effect of their leadership experience and utilized their enhanced skills and talents to mentor other directors in their community?

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized several measures to gather data to answer the research questions relating to TCC participants' job status and career decisions, the impact of training on participants and their programs, and participants' continuing professional development, commitment to the field, and professional achievements.²⁴

Training Needs Assessment Survey (TNAS). At the beginning and culmination of training for each cohort of Taking Charge of Change, participants completed a Training Needs Assessment Survey. The TNAS assesses participants' level of perceived competence in 25 knowledge and skill areas related to early childhood program administration. On a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = *no knowledge or skill in this area* to 5 = *extremely knowledgeable or skillful in this area*), participants were asked to indicate their level of knowledge or skill in each area. The survey was administered before the training began to help assess each participant's training needs and again at the end of the training cycle to document any changes in perceived level of competence.

Archived TNAS data were utilized for the current study. Because some of the TNAS items have changed over the years with updates in the training content, only those items that were consistent across all 20 cohorts were used in the data analyses. Thus the analyses for the current study included 18 items with a possible range of 18 to 90. For the current study the pretest-posttest analysis was conducted using cohort level data. While the unit of analysis was the cohort ($N = 20$), the data represent all 502 participants.

Program Administration Scale (PAS). The *Program Administration Scale* measures the quality of administrative practices in center-based programs. The complete PAS includes 25 items with two to five indicator strands comprising each item. The range of quality scores for each item is 1 (*inadequate*) to 7 (*excellent*). In assessing the quality of administrative practices of TCC participants' programs, five items from the PAS were used. The 18 indicator strands comprising these five items relate to the focus of the Taking Charge of Change curriculum (Item 1 Staff Orientation; Item 2 Supervision and Performance Appraisal; Item 3 Staff Development; Item 9 Internal Communications; Item 16 Family Communications).

Pre- and post-PAS assessments were conducted for TCC participants beginning in 2007 (Cohort #15). The assessments were done by a trained PAS Assessor who was not involved in the TCC training. The assessment was administered on-site at the participant's center and took approximately two hours. Each assessment included a brief tour of the facility, an interview with the administrator, and a review of documentation. Seventy-four programs were included in the PAS data analyses for this study.

Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES). The *Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* was administered to teaching, support, and administrative staff working at participating programs. The resulting ECWES profile that directors received provided information regarding their staff's collective perceptions of different organizational practices across ten dimensions of organizational climate: Collegiality, Opportunities for Professional Growth, Supervisor Support, Clarity, Reward System, Decision Making, Goal Consensus, Task Orientation, Physical Setting, and Innovativeness. The possible range of scores for each dimension is 0 to 10. A low score on any subscale represents unfavorable perceptions; a high score represents favorable perceptions. The profile also included information regarding staff's overall level of commitment, how their current work environment resembles their ideal, their current and desired levels of decision-making influence, and their ranking of different educational goals.

The ECWES takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. To ensure confidentiality, each employee placed their completed survey in a plain envelope and sealed it. All completed surveys were then sent to the McCormick Center for processing. The survey was administered at the beginning of the training cycle for each cohort and again at the end. Changes in data management software over the years made it difficult to retrieve data from some of the cohorts. For the present study, 271 programs were used in the ECWES analyses. This represented the perceptions of over 3,000 employees working at the participants' programs.

Job Status Survey. An online questionnaire was developed to assess the job status, career decisions, continuing professional development, commitment, and professional achievements of TCC alumni. On the questionnaire, respondents were asked to identify one of three categories that characterized their job status: 1) currently a director of a center-based program; 2) no longer a director, but still working in the early childhood field; or 3) no longer working in the early childhood field. In identifying the category that characterized their current job status, respondents were directed to complete specific sections of the survey. Three sections (A, F, and H) were completed by all participants.

Part A of the questionnaire included demographic information about the individual: contact information, current job title, the job title they had when they participated in TCC, age, gender, and if they had achieved an Illinois Director Credential or Aim4Excellence National Director Credential.²⁵ Part B was completed by TCC participants who continue to work in the field of early childhood but not as a director. This section of the survey included questions about their career decisions—how many job changes they had made since participating in the training, the reasons for those changes, did they perceive their job change as career advancement, and did they anticipate working in the field of early childhood five years from now.

Part C was intended for those individuals who had indicated that they had left the early childhood field. It included a question about the person’s reasons for leaving the field. Part D of the survey, designed for current directors, requested background information about their center—legal auspices, funding, size, turnover rate, QRS status, and accreditation status. Part E, also designed for current directors, requested information about their role perceptions, and the critical administrative issues they face. Part F included information about the individual’s leadership journey, the two professional achievements they were most proud of, if they remained in contact with anyone else from their cohort, and if they had the opportunity to mentor other directors.

Part G included questions about the individual’s involvement in formal coursework and if they had completed a degree or achieved any credentials since completing TCC. Part H asked about the person’s involvement in other McCormick Center sponsored training initiatives, if they received the center’s monthly electronic mailings, and if they had any suggestions for professional development topics they would like the McCormick Center to offer.

A cover letter and link to the online survey were sent to 278 active e-mail addresses of TCC alumni. Of those e-mails, 99 were opened. Approximately 50 e-mail addresses were corrected and resent. By the March 14, 2013 deadline, 138 individuals had completed the survey. Respondents to the survey had completed TCC between 1 and 19 years earlier with an average of 10 years since completion. Five of the respondents had some missing data. Thus the *N* for the data analyses ranges between 133–138 depending on the item being analyzed. The telephone interviews with selected TCC alumni were conducted in late February 2013.

Sample

Table 1 provides a summary of the background characteristics of the 502 individuals who completed Taking Charge of Change. The participants were predominantly female (96%). Fifty-nine percent held a baccalaureate degree and 24% held a graduate degree. Participants were racially and ethnically diverse; more than one-third (38%) were of African-American, Asian, or Hispanic heritage. The typical participant was in her early 40s and started her career as a classroom teacher. Participants averaged 12 years experience in early childhood education and 7 years of experience in an administrative role.

TABLE 1 | Background Characteristics of TCC Participants

	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	19	4
Female	483	96
Education level		
Some college	9	2
Associate’s degree	58	12
Baccalaureate degree	294	59
Graduate degree	118	24
Experience	<i>M</i>	Range
In the field of early childhood	12	1 – 25
In an administrative role	7	1 – 25

Note: *n* = 479 – 502 depending on missing data.

The Taking Charge of Change participants represented all geographic regions of the state. While the vast majority of the programs were center-based, there were a few family child care providers who attended TCC. Programs ranged in size—from small home-based operations serving less than 20 children to large corporate-sponsored programs serving more than 500 children. At the start of the training, 137 (27%) of their programs were accredited. In total, the 502 TCC participants served 61,850 children for the year that they participated in the training.

Of the 138 TCC alumni who completed the online survey in March 2013, 96% were female. Respondents ranged in age from 30 to 77 years old with an average age of 52. Additional information about this subsample of TCC participants is presented in the following section.

Anita Harvey-Dixon

It is fair to say that Anita Harvey-Dixon would not be the director of an exemplary early childhood program today if she had not attended Taking Charge of Change. In fact, Anita reports that she would not be working in the field of early childhood in any capacity. When she attended TCC in 2001, Anita felt she was on the edge of burning out. She was working as the regional site supervisor for a family-owned child care business with responsibility for supervising staff at three sites. She was new to Chicago, felt very isolated, and badly needed peer support. Anita remembers TCC as a rejuvenating experience that provided her with the network of support she so badly needed.

Over the course of the yearlong training, members of her cohort supported Anita with attentive listening and guidance. Anita gained a new perspective on her situation. “I realized that I wasn’t crazy; I just needed to find another job that valued caring relationships among staff.” The most memorable lessons Anita learned in TCC had to do with looking inward. The idea of self-reflection, of having honest and candid conversations with oneself and then with staff, was first introduced during the convening summer institute. The power of networking was another important TCC take-away for Anita. Even a dozen years later, she still expresses gratitude to her TCC mentor for helping her make the connection that led to her subsequent employment at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. “She used her own network to speak about me. This showed real compassion. She believed in me and that made all the difference.” Anita is still employed at the Ounce as the site director of Educare in Chicago.

When asked if Taking Charge of Change continues to impact her practice, Anita speaks of her role mentoring others:

TCC taught me to pay it forward. Currently I support the development of new principals through the New Leaders program. I am helping them learn about the importance of early learning and how preschool education is essential to K-12 education and not just an add-on. I invite them to observe at Educare, see developmentally appropriate environments and teaching practices, and learn how we engage families.

Lois Malone

Lois Malone attended the very first cohort of Taking Charge of Change. At the time she was the owner and director of the Malone Day Care Center in Carterville, Illinois. In 1993, Lois already had over twenty years of experience in the field. She didn't think there was anything that needed to be improved in her practice. In fact, she was sure of it.

I went in to TCC with a negative attitude. I don't like change and I was sure that I didn't need to make any. But I learned that change is inevitable and that I can't make changes without changing who I am. I started with small changes. The more I tried, the more I was willing to try.

Today Lois credits TCC for the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to make internal changes to her organization and to adapt to external changes in the environment when needed. "I learned that change is a journey, not a destination. Change happens continuously and I need to be prepared to move with it." When asked to describe any changes to her program since participating in TCC, her list was long and included NAEYC accreditation and changing the organization's name to Malone's Early Learning Center, reflecting a new focus on teaching and learning. In 2003 her center added Head Start and state Pre-K programming. Lois was successful at integrating these programs and braiding these new funding streams with existing funding from the Child Care Assistance Program.

Originally Lois' center served 35 children and was organized as a sole proprietary entity. Today the center serves over 200 children and is organized as a corporation. Like many owners, Lois needed to think seriously about leadership succession. She first explored the concept of leadership succession at TCC. This knowledge helped guide the changes in organizational structure that became necessary when her husband Bill died. "It is difficult to transition from a proprietary structure to a corporate structure. I wanted the business Bill and I started to continue to thrive. We needed to look at everyone's strengths in order to put people in the right positions."

Leadership succession also means mentoring her son-in-law, Lee, as the new Executive Director of Malone's Early Learning Center to become an advocate for quality early care and education at the local, state, and national levels. When Lois attended TCC, her advocacy was limited to Carterville. After TCC, she became a leader in Illinois AEYC and currently serves as the ILAEYC Policy Chair. "I am mentoring Lee to follow in my footsteps. It is not sufficient for him to succeed as Executive Director. I am training him for my advocacy role. He serves on committees of the AEYC. He will go with me to Washington to see what is happening on the national level."



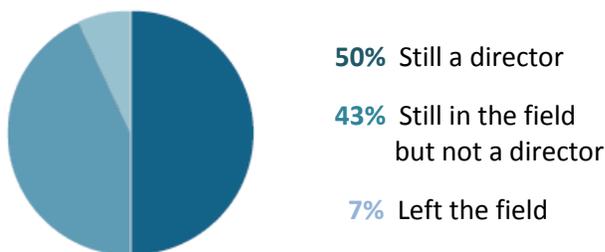
JOB STATUS AND CAREER DECISIONS

The first cluster of research questions guiding the current study centers on the job status and career decisions of Taking Charge of Change alumni. Did they still work in the early childhood field or had they left the field to pursue other interests? If they had changed jobs, what factors prompted that decision? If they were still a director of a center-based program, what issues did they find most challenging in their work?

Current Job Status

Of the 138 alumni who completed the online survey, 69 (50%) indicated that they continue to work as a director or assistant director of a center-based early childhood program; 59 (43%) indicated they were not an early childhood administrator but continue to work in the early childhood field; and 10 (7%) no longer work in the field. Figure 1 provides a graphic distribution of the sample regarding their current job status.

FIGURE 1 | Current Job Status



It is possible the percentage of individuals who no longer work in the field is underreported as the McCormick Center and INCCRRA data bases were used to contact TCC alumni. Individuals who have left the field are less likely to be part of these databases. Of the 128 individuals who indicated they still work in early childhood education either as a director or in a related role, 72 (56%) continue to work for the same organization they worked for when they participated in the training.

Directors of center-based programs. While half of the respondents remain directors of an early childhood program, approximately 13 of these individuals (19%) no longer worked for the same organization or agency they worked for when they participated in the training. The level of commitment to their profession appears quite strong. Of those respondents who remain in an administrative role, fully 91% see themselves as continuing to work in the early childhood field five years from now.

The 69 respondents who reported they are currently directors administer centers with enrollments ranging from 18 to 513 children ($M = 117$). They supervise both small and large staffs, from 3 to 69 employees. In all, these directors represented programs serving over 8,000 children. They supervise and guide the professional development of over 1,200 staff. These center characteristics have remained fairly constant for all TCC cohorts over the twenty year span of training.

Staff turnover has also remained constant since the 2003 study of TCC, with directors reporting a mean annual turnover rate of only 12%. This is considerably lower than the turnover rate reported for the field nationally which hovers around 30%. Thirty-three percent of the directors indicated that they had no staff turnover during the past 12 months.

Table 2 summarizes center characteristics regarding program type and legal auspices. As noted in this table, approximately two-thirds of the programs were nonprofit; the rest were for-profit entities.

TABLE 2 | Program Type and Legal Auspices

	<i>f</i>	%
Program type/legal auspices		
For-profit private proprietary or partnership	17	27
For-profit corporation or chain	5	8
Private nonprofit (independent or affiliated with social service agency)	28	46
Public nonprofit (e.g., public school, park district)	8	13
College or university-affiliated	4	6

Note: $n = 62$; data were not provided for seven of the programs

Thirty percent of the centers received Head Start funding and almost one-half of the programs (45%) received Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) funding for the Preschool for All or Prevention Initiative programs. Twelve percent of the programs were sponsored by a faith-based organization. Forty-two percent of respondents reported that their centers are accredited and over one-half (58%) indicated that their centers participate in the Illinois Quality Counts–Quality Rating System.²⁶

Directors were asked to select from a list of twelve possibilities the most critical issues they face in their administrative role. For the respondents in the current study, these issues centered on recruiting qualified staff and funding for their programs. The percentages for the three most frequently mentioned items by respondents were:

- Difficulty recruiting qualified staff (30%)
- Limited funding (25%)
- Uncertain funding (24%)

Interestingly, these were the same troublesome issues identified in the McCormick Center's 2003 study of TCC participants.²⁷ It appears that, at least in terms of the pressing challenges facing early childhood administrators, not much has changed over the past decade.

No longer a director, but working in the early childhood field. As noted earlier, 43% of the 138 respondents indicated that they no longer work as a center director, but continued to work in the field of early childhood. The variety of positions these individuals have taken is as varied as the field itself—college instructor, resource and referral specialist, regional manager for corporate-sponsored programs, QRS assessor.

Initially TCC taught me the skills I needed as a director to more effectively manage my center and “survive.” The confidence I gained and the leadership skills I perfected helped me to make the decision to sell my center and seek new opportunities within the child care field.

Paula Steffen, Cohort #4

“ I now work for the school district teaching the child development program at the high school level. This job has better pay and more benefits. ”

Trudi Douglas, Cohort #8

First I moved from education coordinator to center director. Then I moved from center director to the agency management team. Now I do training and technical assistance for Head Start programs.

Darlene Towns, Cohort #2

No longer working in the early childhood field. The remaining 10 individuals (7%) who left the early childhood field made their decision for a variety of reasons. Four individuals retired, two reported health or stress-related issues as being their prime consideration, one expressed a desire to stay at home with her young children, one person moved, and two indicated that they now work in higher education in another discipline.

Motivation for Job Changes

TCC alumni who completed the online survey were asked if they had made a job change since completing the training. Sixty-three individuals (46%) reported making at least one job change. When asked to identify the primary factor prompting their job change, 28% of respondents indicated a need for greater influence or a need for greater challenge and 16% indicated they made a job change because they were disillusioned with the organization.

Eighty-seven percent of those making a job change saw the move as career advancement. Given this information, it appears an underlying motivation may well have been to find an organization with a better fit for their expanded leadership skill set. The following comments by respondents provide support for this interpretation.

I moved from being a center director to working in a county-wide capacity as a professional development coordinator for child care resource and referral. This put me in contact with all our center and child care providers in McHenry County—a much wider sphere of influence in regard to child care.

Patricia Dunn, Cohort #1

“ I now work for the American Academy of Pediatrics, where I manage several national early education and child care health initiatives. Working on the national level has allowed me to continue my efforts to drive quality improvement and professional development in this field. This has also allowed me to utilize the tools that I was given in numerous national forums regarding best practice. ”

Jeanne VanOrsdal, Cohort #6

I moved to try to effect change on a larger scale and went to work for a foundation that grants money to early childhood initiatives.

Katherine Falan, Cohort #10

After having great success as a center director in an initial job change, I wanted a new challenge, desired more knowledge, and wanted to work on a larger scale. I completed my M.Ed. and took a position managing the education and disabilities services for all Head Start sites in DuPage County.

Kathryn Schwedler, Cohort #1

THE IMPACT OF TRAINING

The second cluster of research questions guiding this study address the effectiveness of the Taking Charge of Change training model in promoting personal and organizational change. Did participants feel more competent in their administrative roles as a result of the training and if so, did that heightened sense of self-efficacy translate into concrete changes in their programs?

Personal Change

The evaluation reports compiled over the past two decades at the culmination of each TCC cohort have provided heartfelt anecdotes about the personal transformation participants have experienced as the result of training—a sense of personal empowerment and a recommitment to the vital work they do. This study sought to determine if the feelings of personal empowerment that participants experienced were sustained. In addition, looking at the aggregate empirical data collected over two decades relating to participants' perceived level of competence, in which specific knowledge and skill areas did participants experience the greatest change?

Knowledge and skill areas. As seen in Table 3, the results of the TNAS data analyses revealed a statistically significant increase in participants' knowledge and skill in all 18 areas assessed. The total pretest mean for the 20 cohorts was 52.60. The posttest mean was 72.10 for an increase of 19.50 points ($p < .001$). The results of the data analysis provide strong support that Taking Charge of Change had a measurable impact on participants' perceived level of competence in the knowledge and skill areas assessed.

TABLE 3 | Pretest and Posttest Means for Knowledge and Skill Areas

ITEM	Pretest M	Posttest M	t*
Knowledge Areas:			
Knowledge of different personality typologies and learning styles	3.20	4.03	20.79
Knowledge of how systems theory applies to early childhood organizations	2.21	3.70	25.71
Knowledge of different leadership and supervisory styles	3.11	4.14	14.24
Knowledge of different early childhood professional resources	3.24	4.15	17.21
Knowledge of NAEYC accreditation criteria	3.19	4.04	13.77
Skill Areas:			
How to diagnose organizational problems	2.64	3.94	20.68
How to implement an individualized model of staff development	2.53	4.04	24.77
How to use different supervisory styles for staff at different career stages	2.79	4.12	23.02
How to implement organizational change in non-threatening ways	2.87	4.13	22.09
How to give and receive feedback	3.43	4.25	16.58
How to facilitate teamwork among staff	3.31	4.23	15.69
How to motivate staff to high levels of performance	3.08	4.06	17.12
How to implement a fair and equitable compensation system	2.64	3.62	17.36
How to conduct a comprehensive performance appraisal of staff	3.00	4.07	19.58
How to conduct an effective staff meeting	3.42	4.40	23.40
How to reduce the incidence of job stress and burnout	2.85	3.94	13.11
How to implement strategies to increase teachers' compensation	2.38	3.49	16.61
How to use the computer for electronic networking	2.72	3.74	15.07
Total knowledge and skill	52.60	72.10	30.73

Note: * $p < .001$

The two knowledge and skill areas in which participants reported experiencing the greatest growth were:

- Knowledge of how systems theory applies to early childhood organizations
- How to implement an individualized model of staff development

The 138 alumni who responded to the online survey were asked how their TCC experience contributed to their ability to affect change in their organization and community. Content analyses of the responses clustered in four areas: change management, self-reflection and perspective-taking, shared decision making, and staff development.

The capacity to manage change is a key to effective program leadership and is a central component of the TCC curriculum. Participants leave with a variety of resources to help assess the need for change and then manage the change process in a systematic and thoughtful way. “I am not known for enjoying change, but since it was continually being forced upon me, I had the choice to either crumble under it, or develop the skills to survive it,” says Cindy Lowe of Cohort #13. “TCC helped me navigate all this change without my staff (or myself) falling to pieces. I learned what it would take to get staff buy-in, see the possibilities in the change process, and develop a strong sense of teamwork within my center.” Cindy changed jobs two years ago. She assumed the leadership of another center that was also going through changes. She says, “I still rely on what I learned from TCC when introducing changes to our staff—and there have been plenty! I can't say I will ever look forward to change, but now I take it more in stride and I lead it more effectively.”

Trudi Douglas of Cohort #8 echoed these same feelings of resolve and confidence in being able to managing change. She says, “I have always identified Taking Charge of Change as the single most influential contribution to my professional growth. TCC allowed me to put things into perspective, prioritize, and work toward positive change in my program.”

Appreciating another person's point of view begins with self-awareness. Learning about one's own leadership and communication style provides the foundation for understanding others who may have a different style or point of view. Valerie Krajec of Cohort #6 says, “Nothing has been more important to my personal growth and ability to understand and work with others than the self-reflection that was required at every step in TCC and became ingrained in my being.”

This ability to perform better in the role of director through self-reflection and taking the perspective of others was repeated again and again by participants during their interviews. “TCC made me think about what type of leadership style I want to have and it made me more aware of the importance of knowing the people I work with, such as their learning styles, past experiences that make up their beliefs, and where they may be on a self-awareness continuum,” says Lisa Boggess from Cohort #15.

This ability to expand one's perspective is essential to implementing shared decision-making practices and a distributed leadership approach. Many of the participants expressed a greater ability to “let go” and not having to be in control of all decisions. Implementing more collaborative decision-making and problem-solving processes was an important goal for many of the respondents—to consider themselves as part of a team rather than always dictating the agenda. Doug Clark of Cohort #3 says he “learned the importance and power of shared vision and group decision making.” Lyriss Clark of Cohort #19 says, “I am much more able to connect with my staff in a reflective mode rather than as a monitor. “We discuss changes and ideas and issues to get to solutions.”

As directors are able to welcome their staff into the decision-making process, opportunities for intentional staff development maximizes the impact of the TCC experience. Taking Charge of Change made an incredible impact on developing my leadership skills, especially learning to work toward a goal with a group of staff members. Gay Clark of Cohort #13, says, “Whether working toward small improvements in their classrooms or working to achieve accreditation for the center, the experience at TCC gave me the tools necessary to help the staff achieve their full potential.”

Promoting peak performance is an important component of the learning experience for directors. Without effective staff development skills, the other skills of change management—self-reflection, perspective taking, and shared decision making—become less impactful. After TCC, Sara Starbuck from Cohort #6 says, “I began to see that my role was to nurture and care for the teachers in many of the same ways as I had the children. TCC also gave me skills to plan goals and put together a step-by-step action plan to meet those goals.”

Self-efficacy and confidence. In addition to specific skill building, virtually all individuals commented on a heightened sense of self-esteem, a greater confidence, and a stronger sense of self-efficacy as a result of participating in the leadership training. Many had not perceived themselves to be leaders before attending the training, but left with an overwhelming sense of awe at the importance of their role and the power and potential of their position to do good.

I feel my experience at TCC enabled me to understand myself, my mission in life, and my overall sense of direction for my life, which in turn supports my leadership.

Joleen Patton, Cohort #6

“ Taking Charge of Change totally changed my outlook on my role as a leader and my ability to move my program forward in a positive manner. I truly believe our early childhood program would not be as successful as it is today if I had not participated in TCC. I still have a photo of my TCC cohort on my desk and look to it to remind myself of the phenomenal experiences I had with that wonderful group of people. I am so thankful for having had the opportunity to participate in TCC. That experience positively impacted my leadership abilities and how I perceive myself as an early childhood professional. TCC was a life changing event for me! ”

Sue Benters, Cohort #7

My experience with TCC has redefined my understanding of myself as a leader, educator, and community activist.

Robbin Cole, Cohort #19

Many of the alumni respondents indicated that their experience in TCC revealed just how much they did not know about effective supervision and the dynamics of organizational leadership. This sense of “conscious incompetence” was not a discouraging realization, however. To the contrary, it served as a stimulus to learn more and become more accomplished in their administrative role.

Perceived level of competence. The 69 alumni who were directors of center-based programs were asked to indicate their current level of role competency—*novice*, *capable*, or *master* director. They were also asked to indicate their level of role competency at the time they enrolled in Taking Charge of Change. Figures 2 and 3 summarize the results of the data analyses. Sixty-one percent of directors reported that they now perceive themselves as master directors. This contrasts sharply with their initial assessment of their competency when only 5% viewed themselves as master directors.

FIGURE 2 | Perceived Level of Competency—Then **FIGURE 3** | Perceived Level of Competency—Now



The responses to the open-ended questions on the online survey provided additional evidence of participants’ heightened sense of competency.

Without the program I would have never perceived myself as a leader. I would never have been able to make the contributions that I have made to the field of early childhood and beyond. The TCC experience gave me the awareness to reflect on my personal abilities and the courage to lead myself through my own personal journey of self-awareness.

Debra Ann Muscato, Cohort #6

I learned so much at TCC and I reach back to this often as we are faced with challenging changes such as agency mergers, funding opportunities and cuts, and increased accountability.

Dottie Donovan, Cohort #13

Respondents were asked to list two professional achievements they had accomplished as a result of the training that they were most proud of. They mentioned pursuing goals that they previously did not think possible to achieve, but with a heightened sense of self-confidence, personal conviction, and an expanded support system, they felt they could do it. These goals included such things as going back to school, completing a college degree, obtaining the Illinois Director Credential, writing an article for publication, and starting a new center.

TCC helped me gain confidence in my own knowledge and ability to lead. As a result, I was confident enough to purchase the facility I had directed for several years. I went back to school to get my bachelor's and master's degrees in early childhood administration. Finally, I have served in a leadership role for several early childhood organizations in the community and state. I am not sure all of this would have been possible if I had not participated in the first cohort of TCC.

Cindy Mahr, Cohort #1

Organizational Change

In addition to personal perceptions of change, the study also sought to determine if participants were able to translate the theoretical concepts underpinning effective leadership into needed changes in their organizations to improve the quality of services for children and families.

Self-report of programmatic changes. The evaluation data collected at the end of each cohort's leadership training experience provides numerous examples of the program improvements that TCC participants had made at their respective centers—new staff orientation procedures, more consistent performance appraisal processes, individual professional development plans, to name a few. In the online survey of TCC alumni, respondents provided additional examples of the concrete, specific changes they made in their programs and in their communities as a result of their participation in Taking Charge of Change.

“After attending TCC, I had the tools and knowledge needed to create change for any program. I started with my own and became the first family child care provider to achieve an Illinois QRS Star Level 4. ”

Penny Williams Wolford, Cohort #16

TCC made what could have been a very difficult situation—moving from a peer to a leader in my organization—a much easier process. Since graduating from the TCC program I have successfully led my organization through both QRS and accreditation.

Karen Mosley, Cohort #16

Leadership and management practices. In addition to self-reports of program improvement efforts, this study also sought to verify these organizational outcomes with independent observations and assessment. Beginning in 2007, on-site assessments of program quality were conducted using five items from the *Program Administration Scale (PAS)*. A trained assessor collected data at the beginning of the cohort training cycle and at the end of the training on the 18 indicator strands comprising five of the PAS items. Table 4 summarizes the findings of the pre- and post-PAS item scores. Also included in this table are the national norms for the five items assessed.

As Table 4 reveals, an increase in scores were seen in all five items between the pre- and post-administration of the PAS. Statistically significant differences were found in three of the items: Staff Orientation, Staff Development, and Family Communications.

TABLE 4 | Pre- and Post-PAS Item Scores

PAS ITEM	Pre M	Post M	t	National M
Item 1: Staff Orientation	2.81	3.75	2.57*	2.88
Item 2: Supervision and Performance Appraisal	2.73	3.26	1.48	3.37
Item 3: Staff Development	3.32	4.21	2.54*	4.01
Item 9: Internal Communications	1.93	2.51	1.83	2.40
Item 16: Family Communications	2.81	4.07	3.47**	3.26

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$

When comparing the average PAS item scores to the national averages for similar early childhood programs, the level of leadership and management practices in TCC participants’ programs was lower than the national average at the beginning of training. By the end of the training, however, the mean item scores were higher than the national average in four out of the five items assessed.²⁸

Accreditation and QRS status. An important goal of Taking Charge of Change is to promote the importance of center accreditation and participation in the state’s voluntary quality rating system. The training is designed to provide specific support to directors for making needed quality improvements to achieve accreditation and a QRS rating for their programs.²⁹

The data regarding changes in the accreditation status of participants’ programs speak directly to the impact individuals have had on their centers as a result of their participation in TCC. Data collected on each cohort showed that 27% of participants’ programs were accredited at the beginning of training. At the end of the training cycle, 39% of programs were accredited. Of the TCC alumni responding to the online survey, 42% reported that their programs were accredited. This percentage is more than three times the rate of program accreditation statewide; only 13% of early childhood programs in Illinois are accredited.

In addition, 58% of alumni responding to the online survey reported that their center participates in Illinois’ quality rating system. Again, this percentage is more than three times the rate of QRS participation statewide; only 17% of licensed centers in Illinois have a QRS rating. It appears that TCC has had an impact on participants’ awareness of the value of attaining accreditation and/or a QRS rating and has provided them with resources and support to make these program outcomes possible.

Organizational climate and commitment to the center. The aggregate data from the pre- and post- organizational climate assessments conducted at TCC participants' programs provides additional evidence of the impact that leadership training has on the quality of organizational practices. As the data in Table 5 show, overall perceptions of climate increased from the pre- to the post-administration of the ECWES in all ten dimensions. In three dimensions (decision making, goal consensus, and innovativeness), these differences achieved statistical significance. In addition, changes in the overall organizational climate score were statistically significant.

These results are particularly encouraging because a center's organizational climate does not change quickly. Indeed many programs experience an implementation dip in climate scores initially as new policies and practices are put in place that shake up the status quo.³⁰ To see positive changes in all ten dimensions in such a short time span speaks to the importance of implementing change in thoughtful and deliberate ways, involving staff as engaged partners in the change process.

TABLE 5 | Pre- and Post-Organizational Climate Dimension Scores

	Pre		Post		t
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.	
Collegiality	6.91	1.38	7.12	1.35	1.64
Professional Growth	6.27	1.94	6.33	1.94	.34
Supervisor Support	7.46	1.48	7.55	1.31	.69
Clarity	6.58	1.45	6.81	1.54	1.64
Reward System	6.10	1.23	6.25	1.26	1.31
Decision Making	6.45	1.21	6.71	1.30	2.26*
Goal Consensus	6.82	1.15	7.15	1.23	3.02**
Task Orientation	6.90	1.81	7.08	1.26	1.67
Physical Setting	7.04	1.29	7.27	1.36	1.89
Innovativeness	6.92	1.20	7.21	1.20	2.60**
Total Climate	67.39	10.73	69.48	11.32	2.06*

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

In addition to changes in the ten dimensions of organizational climate, the results of the ECWES also revealed an increase in staff's level of commitment to their centers. As mentioned earlier, these data represented more than 3,000 employees who worked at the TCC participants' programs. The mean for aggregate organizational commitment at the beginning of the training was 7.23. At the end of the 10-month training it was 7.40.

STRENGTHENING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSION

The final cluster of research questions guiding this study looks at the potential of leadership training for promoting continuing professional development, commitment to the field, and mentoring of other early childhood administrators. Had TCC participants gone on to pursue formal college coursework? Had their academic efforts resulted in a degree or credential? Did individuals anticipate working in the field for at least five more years? And had they used their enhanced leadership and management skills to mentor other early childhood directors?

Continuing Professional Development

Of keen interest to both those who fund professional development experiences and those who deliver the training is whether or not the experience prompts participants to engage in additional training; particularly formal coursework that leads to college credit. Any training event should not be viewed as an isolated experience but rather one link in the chain of accumulated experiences that shapes a person's professional identity and competence.

The findings from the online survey suggest that for many, participating in Taking Charge of Change may have been the impetus to pursue additional formal coursework. Sixty-four percent of respondents to the online survey indicated they had pursued formal college coursework since completing TCC and 44% indicated they had gone on to achieve an undergraduate or graduate degree. In addition, almost one-half of alumni (46%) reported having attained a credential since participating in TCC.

Sixty-two alumni who responded to the online survey (45%) hold an Illinois Director Credential (IDC). Many factors prompt people to continue their education or pursue a credential, so it is not possible to assert a direct correlation between participation in TCC and enrollment in further studies. Still, it is notable that 23% of all practitioners holding an IDC have participated in Taking Charge of Change.³¹ The six semester hours of college credit associated with TCC fulfill two-thirds of the required nine semester hours of management coursework necessary to achieve the IDC, Level 1. It seems that completing TCC serves as an incentive to attaining the IDC.

Participating in Taking Charge of Change gave me the courage to complete my degree and move on to another agency where I felt I could make a difference and influence change for high-quality programming.

Brigette Davis, Cohort #2

Commitment to the Field

Perhaps the most encouraging data resulting from the online survey of TCC alumni related to respondents' level of commitment to the early childhood field. Of the 138 alumni responding, 128 (93%) continue to work in the field either as a director of a center-based program or in a related position supporting children and families. Of the 10 people who had left the field, 5 of them had retired or were taking a hiatus from full-time employment to raise young children. Framed in the context of an early childhood profession with a turnover rate of 30% nationwide, this picture of workforce stability in Illinois is noteworthy. Even more impressive, of the 128 alumni currently working in the field, 114 (89%) see themselves as continuing to work in early childhood five years from now.

As noted earlier, 28% of alumni who are not currently directing a program but continue to work in the field left their previous position because of a desire for greater influence or the need for greater challenge. With the growth of Illinois' professional development system, new job opportunities have emerged providing a stepping stone for greater challenge and influence for many early childhood leaders who no longer want to administrate a center-based program. As Jill Moore from Cohort #1 observed in her comments in the online survey, "TCC has contributed to creating a step on the career ladder for many of those who did not continue directing."

One of the important features of Taking Charge of Change is that it brings together individuals from different geographic regions of the state and from different program types (private for-profit, corporate-sponsored, independent nonprofit, agency-affiliated, faith-based, Head Start, public-school sponsored, military, university-affiliated). This certainly expands participants' exposure to different professional development resources and job opportunities. Fifty-four percent of alumni who responded to the online survey stated that they have remained in contact with others in their TCC cohort.

TCC provided all of us a community of fellow learners, where directors enjoyed a safe, challenging format to explore best practice, and how to manage the diverse roles of mentor, supervisor, cheerleader, budget manager, parent counselor, marketing, and technology. The professional connections I gained through TCC have always been a trusted asset even today.

Susan Fahey, Cohort #3

Mentoring Others

One of the goals of the Taking Charge of Change leadership training is to expose participants to a model of mentoring that provides both emotional and technical support in strengthening administrative practices. While not an explicitly stated outcome of the training, it is hoped that participants will “pay it forward”—in other words, that they will share what they have learned by mentoring others. In the current study, we were interested in finding out the extent to which TCC alumni formally or informally mentored other early childhood administrators in their community.

Sixty-five percent of alumni responding to the online survey indicated that they had mentored other directors. Formally, they described becoming Professional Development Advisors for the Illinois Director Credential, mentoring others to become credentialed. Others mentored newly hired directors in their agencies, and still others worked in paid consultative roles with directors in their community. Informally, they described themselves as mentoring other directors by participating in electronic discussion groups, responding to director-colleague questions by telephone and e-mail and providing them with professional resources, and networking at state and local conferences.

Taking Charge of Change moved me on a challenging and rewarding career path. It gave me the confidence to be a much better leader. I have mentored many individuals as a Professional Development Advisor for Gateways, and have helped make change at the local, state, and national level.

Kerri Nolan, Cohort #7

TCC changed my life as a director! It gave me the tools to be a leader in the field. Although I am no longer a director of a center, I use those tools in helping other directors.

Missy Brown, Cohort #12

Joni Scritchlow

Joni Scritchlow is the Senior Program Director at the Illinois Network of Child Care and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). In this role she oversees the state's early childhood professional development system, Gateways to Opportunity. When Joni participated in Cohort #8 of Taking Charge of Change, she was the Coordinator for Family and Community Engagement at Heartland Head Start in Bloomington, Illinois. Her work included supporting staff to attain their degrees and credentials.

Although attaining further education had always been her dream, Joni says that she "put herself on hold" until she attended TCC. As it turned out, setting aside time to attend the weeklong summer institute was taking the first step toward attaining a graduate degree. Joni received six semester hours of college credit for completing TCC and went on to receive a master's degree from Illinois State University. She describes the TCC experience as a huge catalyst in her own professional growth. "TCC reignited my passion for the field. The cohort consisted of not just directors but others in supporting roles equally passionate about their work. Collectively, we could move the field forward and make our dream that all children have access to high-quality early care and education come true."

Joni hasn't stopped supporting the professional growth of others. Reflecting on the mentoring she first received in TCC, she states that "I consciously try to mentor staff and other colleagues. Mentoring is a gift that gets stronger as we give it back."

One of the most memorable lessons Joni learned from her TCC experience is the importance of shared decision making. Currently she works closely with the Professional Development Advisory Council (PDAC), the entity that advises the state professional development system. Over the past ten years, she has seen PDAC thrive because of its commitment to consensus building.

At TCC I learned the importance of valuing individual differences. Everyone has something to offer even if their way of thinking or behaving differs from mine. I continue to emphasize in my work that every person has unique strengths; what we can produce is huge if we can combine everyone's strengths.

A large, light blue, stylized letter 'M' composed of several geometric shapes, including vertical bars and triangles, positioned behind the text 'Lessons Learned'.

Lessons Learned

THE CHANGE PROCESS

The twenty years of experience implementing the Taking Charge of Change training model has provided a unique wide-angle perspective into the nature of individual, organizational, and systemic change. We have learned a few lessons about the change process: first, personal change usually precedes organizational change; second, organizational change is best achieved when it is implemented in small, incremental steps; and third, systemic change is slow. The logic model on the following page summarizes the conceptual framework for Taking Charge of Change leadership training.

Personal Change Usually Precedes Organizational Change

It has been said that leadership starts in the head—it is a way of thinking about oneself in the context of different personal and professional interactions. That certainly is what we have observed in our twenty years of offering Taking Charge of Change. Repeatedly, participants talk about the sense of empowerment they feel when they complete their leadership training and how that heightened sense of self-esteem literally transforms how they think about their leadership role at their respective centers. It is these heightened feelings of self-efficacy that empower individuals to tackle the organizational challenges they experience in their programs and to get back up on their feet when they encounter obstacles in pursuing their ambitious program improvement goals.

At the completion of the training cycle, many directors use the metaphor of a caterpillar emerging into a butterfly to describe the personal metamorphosis they experienced during the leadership training. The intensity of their personal reflections and the gratitude for the “awakening” they experience are inspirational.³² The quantitative and qualitative data summarized in this report regarding changes in directors’ perceptions of personal competency provide strong evidence of this transformation. It appears that an intensive 10-month professional development experience can have a powerful impact in boosting confidence and self-efficacy.

Taking Charge of Change™ Logic Model

LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO SUPPORT PERSONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

INPUTS	TAKING CHARGE OF CHANGE ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors ▪ Early childhood administrators ▪ Mentors ▪ Program and practitioner standards ▪ Leadership curriculum ▪ Books and resources ▪ Quality improvement assessment tools ▪ Online networking ▪ Funding ▪ Partnership with college ▪ Training facility ▪ Lodging and meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6-day convening residential institute <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessing leadership style and appreciating individual differences - Supporting staff development and shared decision making - Understanding organizational systems and change process - Evaluating program quality ▪ 3-day connecting residential institute <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using data to support continuous quality improvement - Understanding group dynamics and facilitating effective meetings - Linking program improvement efforts to accreditation and QRIS ▪ 1-day culminating institute <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capstone presentation - Envisioning next steps ▪ 3-day Leadership Connections Conference ▪ Program Administration Scale (PAS) assessment ▪ Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) assessment ▪ Structured opportunities for community building and collegial support ▪ Ongoing mentor support at participants' programs ▪ Visits to exemplary centers ▪ Recurring loops of data gathering, reflection, and action ▪ Online engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organizational analysis ▪ Reflective journals ▪ Leadership style assessment ▪ Organizational climate ECWES profile ▪ Meeting analysis ▪ Administrative practices PAS profile ▪ Individualized professional development plans ▪ Shared decision-making plan ▪ Implementation of program improvement plan ▪ Quality improvement grant ▪ Earned college credit ▪ Cohort community of practice 	<p>Personal change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthened capacity for reflective practice ▪ Increased self-efficacy and confidence ▪ Greater awareness of leadership style ▪ Increased knowledge and skill in leadership and management ▪ Greater ability to see viewpoints and perspectives of others ▪ Increased capacity for systems thinking ▪ Enhanced commitment to the profession ▪ Expanded network of contacts <p>Organizational change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Established norms of continuous quality improvement ▪ Improved systems for collecting, analyzing, and using data ▪ Increased opportunities for shared decision making ▪ Increased productivity of staff meetings ▪ Improved internal communication systems ▪ More effective staff development and supervision practices ▪ More positive organizational climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Committed, educated, and stable workforce ▪ Engaging learning environments for children, families, and staff ▪ Public awareness of the importance of strong program leadership ▪ Accredited and higher-rated programs in state QRIS

Individuals have said the TCC experience gave them a new perspective on their administrative role. The lens through which they previously viewed themselves was limited in scope, concentrating mostly on the details or nitty-gritty management issues of administering a program. The leadership training they took part in gave them the capacity to step back and see the broader view—the vision of what they wanted their programs to become. This helped them see themselves and their programs more clearly in the context of their community and in the context of the early childhood profession.

Individuals also talked about the personal paradigm shift they experience after completing training that impacts how they spent their time. While they continue to focus on management issues such as balancing the budget or planning a fundraising event, they now consciously think about broader, more abstract, issues relating to the future of their organizations.

Organizational Change is Best Achieved Incrementally

While changes in participants' sense of personal efficacy and perceptions of competence are often dramatic and clearly achievable over the course of the TCC training cycle, changes at the organizational level are slower and more difficult to achieve. Simply put, a 10-month leadership training program, even one that provides the support of a mentor, cannot transform a low-quality or mediocre early childhood program into an exemplary program. It can however, give the administrators of those programs the tools they need to begin to implement organizational changes that will impact the quality of services that teachers and support staff provide children and families.

Given the long standing demands and extraordinary pressures on early childhood directors, leadership development programs should prepare them to meet both the technical and adaptive challenges of administering their programs. Technical challenges can be addressed with existing expertise, protocols, and operations and typically involve more predictable, clearly defined challenges. Adaptive challenges are situations for which existing procedures and know-how do not provide the solutions needed.³³ The challenges may be difficult to clearly identify and the solutions lie outside the current way of operation.

The reality is that many directors who participate in Taking Charge of Change are overwhelmed by the adaptive challenges confronting them when they target areas for program improvement. We have found that helping directors adopt a *kaizen* approach of breaking down their program improvement plan into small, incremental steps both reduces their level of anxiety and increases the likelihood of their staying on task and being successful in their change efforts.³⁴

Introducing participants to social systems theory has also helped them understand conceptually how to better manage the organizational change process.³⁵ They learn how change in one component of the system (people, processes, structure, culture) can impact other components of the system and that programs often experience an implementation dip before things get better. Directors who understand the nature of organizational change will not be seduced by quick-fix solutions to the complex problems that exist in their programs. Our goal is to help them embrace the concept of continuous quality improvement where they work with recurring cycles of identifying problems, exploring change options, implementing new strategies, and evaluating the outcomes of implementing those strategies. Taking Charge of Change provides directors with the knowledge, tools, and collegial support to experience a microcosm of this cycle through the program improvement plan process.

Systemic Change Happens Slowly

The impact of a leadership training program like Taking Charge of Change on the early care and education system is difficult to measure. It is but one of several state initiatives to improve quality reflecting a policy shift from child care as a work support for parents to child care as a learning environment for children. However, having 502 individuals share a similar experience of leadership training means that there is a growing cadre of leaders in the state who “speak the same leadership language,” are invested in the state’s career development system, are committed to continuous quality improvement, and are knowledgeable advocates of high-quality learning environments for staff as well as for children and families.

As the voice for a stable, well-qualified workforce grows, it has the potential to create the critical mass needed for large-scale policy changes. Looking back over the last twenty years, incremental changes at the policy level have yielded a bold design for a state professional development system with a career lattice consisting of multiple credentials for early childhood practitioners, a professional development registry, professional development scholarships and other supports, and, most recently, strong linkages to the state’s new, cross-sector QRIS.

In 1993, a credential for center directors was not on the radar of Illinois policymakers. Today, there are 520 early childhood professionals holding an Illinois Director Credential (IDC). The Illinois Director Credential has served as a model for other states. The core knowledge and skill areas of the IDC were adapted by NAEYC to define the competencies needed for effective program administration.³⁶ Effective 2016, the IDC will be embedded in Illinois’ quality rating and improvement system. On a national level, there are now 24 states that have a director credential or enhanced director qualifications embedded in their quality rating and improvement systems.³⁷

KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

We have witnessed firsthand how well-designed leadership training programs can serve as a catalyst for change, providing the tools that individuals need to start their journey of continuous quality improvement. But training for directors of early childhood programs cannot be haphazard. Administrators have extraordinarily frenetic lives and their time is too precious to waste on training experiences that do not meet their personal and professional needs. It is incumbent, then, for professional organizations and institutions of higher education that provide training to design learning experiences that are coherent and connected.

Drawing from our experience working with directors at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership and the collective wisdom of others we offer ten key elements that can serve as a framework for planning professional development experiences for early childhood administrators. These elements relate to the content, structure, and delivery of training.

Content of Training

- 1. Address both the management and leadership functions of the director’s role.** Leadership functions relate to the broad view of helping an organization clarify and affirm values, set goals, articulate a vision, and chart a course of action to achieve that vision. Management functions relate to the actual orchestration of tasks and the setting up of systems to carry out the organizational mission. Management issues lend themselves nicely to short-term training; they are focused and skill-based. Leadership training is more intense and takes longer because it involves fundamental changes in the way people view their role and the overarching principles that guide their behavior. The professional development of early childhood directors must provide a delicate balance of both management and leadership issues.

2. **Provide a systems perspective.** It is easy in early childhood administration for directors to view the nettlesome problems that occur in the everyday life of their programs as isolated events that need to be solved. Such a narrow perspective can hamper their ability to respond to situations appropriately. Early childhood centers are organizations, and as such they are complex social systems. Centers do not exist in a vacuum; they are influenced by funding and regulatory agencies, the current social and political climate, professional organizations, and a host of other external influences that act as both opportunities and constraints to program effectiveness. A broader perspective of how organizations function allows directors to look at the whole as well as the parts and view their centers as true ecosystems.
3. **Focus on issues of immediate relevance.** One of the frustrations that many adult learners encounter in their formal education is the inevitable gap between the theoretical ideas they encounter in their studies and their ability to apply these ideas in their work. Successful training models are built on the premise that immediate application of new learning to real life situations reinforces what is learned. If training is to be effective, the examples used during training should relate to the real issues and concerns participants face in their work settings. Theory and knowledge should be used to enlighten and enlarge experience. Case studies, program improvement plans, and action research are but three of the instructional strategies that can be used to make these practical connections.
4. **Focus on the director's role as change agent.** Change and early childhood administration go hand in hand. Daily, directors are confronted with issues and concerns that need attention. Training should help directors understand that quality is a moving target, that change is continuous, and that change provides opportunities for growth and program renewal. Helping directors define their role as a change agent is crucial to instilling norms of continuous improvement in programs.³⁸ Directors need to build a vision for change, serve as the catalyst for change, create a conducive climate for change, and provide the resources and encouragement that are necessary to implement change in healthy and constructive ways. Being exposed to different models of change and having opportunities to build the skills to make the change process successful is essential to effective training for center directors.

Structure of Training

5. **Include follow-up.** Research provides strong evidence that one-time workshops on broad, global topics have limited lasting impact on behavior.³⁹ It is during follow-up that the real questions tend to surface when participants attempt to implement what they have learned. Without a forum for addressing their questions, individuals do not receive the help they need to apply the lessons learned in the training. Follow-up can involve on-site mentoring, reflective journal writing, practicum experiences, online discussions, or specific field assignments that help individuals integrate newly acquired knowledge into their professional repertoire of skills and competencies.
6. **Include an evaluation component.** Evaluation can serve two purposes. As a formative assessment it can provide valuable feedback to help improve the content and delivery during the training cycle. As a summative assessment it can provide evidence of learning outcomes and accountability to interested stakeholders. Whenever possible evaluation should go beyond simple questionnaires to gauge participants' reactions and satisfaction to include perceptions of their attained learning, actual changes in behavior, and the impact on the participant's organization and the children and families served.⁴⁰

- 7. Promote the professional advancement of participants.** The early childhood field has many practitioners who have accumulated hundreds of hours of in-service training but still lack a college degree. Few working professionals can commit the time needed to pursue an advanced degree full time. Directors need training models that utilize a variety of face-to-face and online formats, are structured to achieve different short- and long-term goals, and provide maximum flexibility in terms of scheduling and logistics. Whenever possible, training should be tied to the awarding of college credit and support the horizontal and vertical advancement of participants on the early childhood career lattice.

Delivery of Training

- 8. Promote active learning.** When designing programs for adults, all factors that may potentially impinge on learning need to be considered. For example, adult learners are likely to be more rigid in their thinking. Breaking old patterns of behavior takes time. Adult learners need to take an active rather than a passive role in structuring their own learning experiences. They need to be provided with the opportunity to learn via multiple modes of instruction (e.g., lecture, small-group exercises, media, independent work, role playing). Respecting differing learning styles also means structuring assignments so participants can demonstrate competence in more than one way. Adult learners also need to see the relationship between how they are evaluated and the objectives of instruction. It is also important that they receive immediate feedback about performance.
- 9. Promote reflective practice.** The frenetic pace that characterizes the professional lives of most early childhood administrators leaves little time for reflection. Yet it is through reflection that educators gain insight into the issues and problems they confront. High-quality professional development experiences provide a focused opportunity for leaders to reflect on their administrative roles. Becoming a reflective practitioner fosters self-awareness and metacognition. The delivery of training should include many opportunities to reflect on the application of new learning.⁴¹
- 10. Promote collegiality and networking.** The professional role of the early childhood director is often a lonely one, so it is important when designing leadership training experiences to weave in ample opportunities for community building and collegial support. When training is provided to an intact cohort over a period of time, for example, there are powerful dynamics that can develop. The collegial model creates an atmosphere of mutual trust that encourages the sharing of ideas and collaborative learning. Instructional activities can also be designed to foster cooperation and the exchange of ideas and insights. In addition, training that brings together individuals from different types of programs—public and private, for-profit and nonprofit, part-day and full-day, independent and agency-affiliated, Head Start, state-funded Pre-K, corporate-sponsored—helps foster cross-sector collaboration.

Bettye Cohns

No one could possibly doubt Bettye Cohns's commitment to early childhood education. She has worked as an early childhood teacher, family educator, or program administrator for over forty years. In fact, she worked at the same early childhood program for nearly forty years! Two weeks before attending the Taking Charge of Change summer institute Bettye decided it was finally time for a change. Two weeks after the institute she assumed the position of Program Director at Reba Early Learning Center.

Bettye credits her participation in TCC Cohort #20 with providing her with the resources, mentoring, peer support, and opportunities for reflection that allowed for a smooth transition to a new position. Bettye felt prepared to meet the challenges ahead. "I walked into an environment where people didn't trust or like each other. My first order of business was to help staff develop into an effective team where **Together Everyone Achieves More.**"

The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES) was administered in late summer and the resulting profile of organizational climate confirmed Bettye's perception of the need to address staff morale. She decided that her Program Improvement Plan would focus on building trust, enhancing collaboration, and improving collegiality. Some of the steps she took to achieve her objectives were to find more opportunities to show appreciation to staff; work on mission, vision, and values with all members of the staff and board; express feelings in a safe, nonjudgmental way; include staff in the program planning process; provide anti-bias training; empower staff to make decisions about their classrooms; and, finally, have fun together. A pretty ambitious agenda!

TCC validated my feelings about what I should be doing as a leader. A leader guides staff by being a role model, supporting innovation, and encouraging all to be a part of the process, to be a team.

Bettye continues, "At one of my first staff meetings I shared the story I learned at TCC of the boy who walks along the shore throwing beached starfish back into the sea. His father asks why he bothers when there are so many starfish left stranded on the beach. The boy responds that it matters to the starfish that are saved. **I wanted my staff to know that small things do matter. And each one of them is valued for their contribution.**"

Bettye states that she would have changed positions without attending TCC but she would have been confused about whether her leadership instincts were correct and she would likely have floundered. Instead, she received support from her mentor and cohort members that empowered her to act decisively on her convictions. Bettye is clearly a leader with staying power.

A FINAL WORD

Participants' reflections at the culmination of Taking Charge of Change leadership training reveal how they have grown personally and professionally through this leadership development process. Directors report heightened feelings of self-esteem and greater self-confidence in their ability to implement change and actively advocate for staff, children, and families. They articulate that the gap between theory and practice has been narrowed as a result of their participation in TCC and that the training provided them with the opportunity to refine their knowledge base and expand their repertoire of administrative skills. The results of this study underscore the need for systematic, intensive, and relevant training focused on the unique needs of early childhood directors. It also provides a better understanding of what systemic and structural supports are needed to improve the stability of the workforce and maintain the quality improvements in the early childhood programs positively impacted by this training.

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3. The term *professional development* is often confusing because it is used as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it refers to the transformational process of personal growth that over time expands one's knowledge base and builds new competencies. It is, in essence, the personal change that results from reflecting on experience. As a verb, professional development refers to the actual activities and experiences that individuals engage in to enhance their repertoire of professional skills. In this sense, professional development can be viewed as a synonym for training—allocating resources, setting expectations, and providing opportunities for individuals to engage in experiences that will result in personal growth or change (i.e., professional development as a noun).
 Similarly, it is important to clarify the distinction between *training* and *education*. In a technical sense, *training* refers to specific information and skill development that enable an individual to do a specific job in a specific setting. It focuses on “how to” more than “why.” Education, on the other hand, is concerned with providing individuals with a broad perspective, a conceptual base for framing information and solving problems. The leadership training described in this report is a blend of both orientations and the term “training” is used to encompass both philosophical bases. For an excellent resource that provides a fuller treatment of this topic see:
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25. The Illinois Director Credential (IDC) is a voluntary credential for administrators of early childhood programs, administered by the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA). Aim4Excellence National Director Credential is an online director credential recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as fulfilling the alternative training component for directors of accredited programs.
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