

The Effect of Leadership Training on Child Care Program Quality

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Twenty-two individuals participated in a 16-month Early Childhood Leadership Training Program. The content of the training covered all components of the child care center director's role: personal and professional self-knowledge; child development and early childhood programming; organizational theory, leadership style, legal and fiscal issues; parent and community relations/public policy and advocacy; and research and technology. This article documents training outcomes in three areas: (1) participants' level of perceived competence; (2) the quality of classroom teaching practices; and (3) the quality of work life for the staff at their programs. Self-report feedback from participants indicated a statistically significant increase in their perceived level of knowledge and skill in all five task performance areas. Posttest observations of classroom quality revealed a significant improvement in the quality of classroom teaching practices compared to a comparison group not receiving training. A pretest-posttest comparison of organizational climate showed a significant improvement in clarity of program policies, degree of program innovativeness, opportunities for professional growth, and staff's level of perceived decision-making influence.

Studies conducted in a variety of settings have repeatedly shown that the quality of staff training in preschool programs is a critical determinant of overall program quality (Arnett, 1989; Berk, 1985; Clarke-Stewart &

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Gruber, 1984; Howes, 1983; Jorde-Bloom, 1989c; Oyemade & Chargois, 1977; Ruopp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979; Vandell & Powers, 1983; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). Unfortunately, political and economic realities work against the creation of a well-prepared child care work force. Low wages, long hours, and the lack of benefits make it difficult to attract and retain highly qualified staff (Jorde-Bloom, 1988a; Sheerer & Jorde-Bloom, 1990; Whitebook et al., 1989).

Of particular concern is the lack of specialized training among center directors. Few have had any formal training in the principles of program administration, staff management, clinical supervision, or group dynamics. This has created an unstable situation at best. Many directors feel they are ill-prepared to assume the myriad of responsibilities associated with their roles, and as a result often experience high levels of stress (Berk, 1985; Jorde-Bloom, 1982; Whitebook, Howes, Darrah, & Friedman, 1982). Most directors, supervisors, education coordinators, and others in leadership positions have been promoted to their positions because of exemplary performance as classroom teachers or because of longevity in their agency, not because they have specialized expertise in program leadership.

This is unfortunate because considerable evidence has accumulated that the director sets the standards and expectations for others to follow. It is the director who sets the tone and creates the climate of concern that is the hallmark of a quality program (Decker & Decker, 1984; Greenman & Fugua, 1984; Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Peters & Kostelnik, 1981). The causal link to program quality, however, is usually an indirect one. The director shapes the work environment for the teaching staff who, in turn, provide the critical link to the children. Thus, the director's ability to train and supervise staff who have had limited experience or formal education is critical (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b, 1989b; Powell & Stremmel, 1989).

The literature on training programs to improve the leadership behavior of educators has predominantly focused on intervention efforts with elementary and secondary school principals. Although several studies have investigated the perceived problems and training needs of early childhood administrators (Austin & Morrow, 1985; Bordelon, Stone, & Tate, 1981; Johnston, 1983; Norton & Abramowitz, 1981; Texas State Department of Human Resources, 1977) and the relationship between level of education and program outcomes (Jorde-Bloom, 1989c; Whitebook et al., 1989), virtually no systematic research has been conducted documenting intervention efforts to improve the leadership skills of early childhood personnel.

In an effort to upgrade the leadership capabilities of Head Start personnel, the Department of Health and Human Services awarded a training grant to National-Louis University in 1989. In May of that year, literature was sent to the Head Start grantee agencies inviting participation of Head Start personnel in the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program. Candidates needed a minimum of a baccalaureate degree and be willing to enroll

in graduate-level course work for 16 months. The 31 individuals who completed the training represented Head Start programs geographically distributed throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. They included lead teachers, center directors, educational coordinators, social workers, and individuals who worked in central office positions. The Early Childhood Leadership Training Program began in September 1989 and culminated in December 1990.

This article documents training outcomes in three areas: (1) participants' level of perceived competence; (2) the quality of classroom teaching practices; and (3) the quality of work life for staff. In addition, a case study of one of the participants is presented to document in greater detail the impact of training.

METHOD

Subjects

Thirteen Head Start lead teachers and 9 directors of Head Start centers comprised the target sample for this study. These individuals were selected from a pool of 31 participants in the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program because they had immediate supervisory responsibility for the quality of teaching practices in their respective classrooms or centers. The subjects were all women, had worked in the field of early childhood education an average of 12 years, had family responsibilities, and were generally uncertain about their academic ability.

To provide comparison data, an equal number of Head Start directors and lead teachers who did not receive training were invited to participate in the study. These volunteers were solicited through letters sent to Head Start programs in Chicago and through personal contacts. Table 1 (p. 582) provides a summary of the background characteristics of the target group (those receiving training) and the comparison group. A *t* test was conducted on the background variables noted in Table 1 to discern if there were statistically significant differences between the target group and the comparison group before the training cycle began. In all areas, no statistically significant differences surfaced.

Instrumentation

The evaluation design of this study utilized several approaches for measuring training outcomes: feedback from the participants regarding changes in their knowledge and skills; feedback from supervisors and colleagues attesting to changes in behavior or attitudes; and independent observations by an outside party looking at changes in actual on-the-job behavior. It was hoped that these multiple perspectives would increase the reliability and validity of results by decreasing the possibility of bias.

for the 10 dimensions of climate is .95. Cronbach's alpha for the decision-making influence subscales is .66, and for the congruence with ideal subscale, it is .92. Additional information regarding the reliability and validity of the ECWES is available elsewhere (Jorde-Bloom, 1989a).

Training Intervention

The conceptual model underpinning the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program is grounded in adult learning theory. This perspective takes into account the distinctly different orientations, needs, and interests of adults who return for graduate study after working for several years. Consistent with adult learning theory, the model encouraged a facilitative role for the teaching faculty who helped students take an active role in structuring relevant learning experiences that are consistent with their career aspirations.

One of the frustrations that many adult learners experience in training is the inevitable gap between the theoretical ideas they encounter in their studies and their ability to apply these ideas in their work. This training model rests on the assumption that immediate application from new learning to real-life situations reinforces what is learned. It emphasizes the links among theory, research, and practice in a very useful and pragmatic way. Indeed, a central goal of this training model was to help nurture "reflective practitioners" (Schon, 1983): teachers and directors who could analyze the new material being presented and integrate it into their existing schema. The instructional strategies used were designed to challenge participants to move beyond simple comprehension of concepts and theories into higher order thinking of application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of ideas and practices.

These links were accomplished in three important ways. First, the curriculum of the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program was problem-centered and site-specific. The examples used during class presentations all related to real issues and concerns that participants faced in their work settings on a daily basis. The training did not focus on theory alone, but weaved theory into the idiosyncratic issues that confronted the students in their professional roles. Thus, theory and knowledge were used to enlighten and enlarge experience. The manner in which Head Start Performance Standards relate to different aspects of organizational effectiveness is one example of this kind of application.

Second, participants had an opportunity to be actively involved in applied research. They each identified an issue relevant to their professional needs and designed a research study around that issue. Their project thus served as a catalyst, blending theory and experiential learning. In the process they became not only consumers of research who study and apply the work of others, but also researchers themselves, creating knowledge and learning to think critically about educational ideas and practices. Finally,

the instructors visited each participant at his or her work site. These visits allowed the instructors to assess participants' training needs and monitor their progress during the course of the training.

The content of the leadership training covered all components of the director's role: personal and professional self-knowledge; child development and early childhood programming; organizational theory, leadership style, legal and fiscal issues; parent and community relations/public policy and advocacy; and research and technology. The training took place over 16 months. Participants met for approximately 77 training sessions which were 4 hours in length. In addition, individual conferences were held as necessary to assist students in the design, data collection, and writing of their individual research projects. A full description of the curriculum and the logistics of the leadership training is provided elsewhere (Bloom et al., 1991). Participants received 32 semester hours of graduate credit leading to a M.Ed in Early Childhood Leadership and Advocacy.

Data Collection Procedures

The TNAS was administered before the training sequence began to help assess each participant's training needs and to provide baseline data on participants' level of perceived competence. The TNAS was administered again at the end of the 16-month training cycle to document any changes in perceived level of competence in the 28 knowledge and skill areas. This survey was not administered to the comparison group.

The classrooms of the target group and the comparison group were observed using the ECCOS at the beginning of the 16-month leadership training and again at the end of the training sequence. A total of 44 classrooms (22 in each group) were included in the pretest-posttest analysis. An early childhood specialist who is on the faculty of National-Louis University served as the classroom observer in conducting both the pretest and posttest observations. This individual was a key investigator in a large-scale study using the sample instrument where detailed interrater reliability checks were conducted (Jorde-Bloom, 1989c). It was decided to use a single observer to ensure reliability of observations from one program to another and between the pretest and posttest observations. Although the observer was not directly informed of the center assignment to target or comparison groups, she may have gained such knowledge about group inclusion through informal conversation in the centers at the time of the observations.

During the first month of training, the ECWES was administered to all employees who worked at the centers of the 9 center directors who were part of the target group. At the end of the 16-month training cycle, the ECWES was administered to the teaching and support staff working in eight of these Head Start centers ($N=72$). (In the intervening months, 1 of the directors changed positions and posttest data from her staff were not collected.)

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations for Background Characteristics of Target and Comparison Groups

Variable	Target Group		Comparison Group	
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
Age	37.95	(8.56)	37.71	(9.56)
Education level ^a	4.50	(0.51)	4.05	(1.17)
Specialized coursework ^b				
ECE/child development	25.18	(22.40)	29.60	(22.10)
Administration	5.36	(7.62)	4.81	(7.08)
In-service training ^c				
ECE/child development	60.05	(50.84)	66.10	(55.60)
Administration	17.09	(11.93)	13.60	(24.20)
Experience				
Total years in ECE	11.73	(5.40)	10.43	(5.71)
Years in present position	6.23	(3.50)	5.73	(4.11)

^a Education level: 1 = high school diploma; 2 = some college; 3 = associate degree; 4 = bachelor's degree; 5 = some graduate work; 6 = master's degree; 7 = post master's coursework; 8 = doctorate.

^b Semester hours of credit.

^c Clock hours.

Level of Perceived Competence. The participants' level of perceived competence was measured using the Training Needs Assessment Survey (TNAS; Bloom, Sheerer, Richard, & Britz, 1991). The TNAS assesses level of perceived competence in 28 knowledge and skill areas related to early childhood program leadership. These 28 knowledge and skill areas can be clustered under five task performance areas:

1. *Personal/professional self-knowledge* (4 items)
(e.g., knowledge of one's learning and teaching style and how to apply or adapt that style as situationally appropriate).
2. *Child development and early childhood programming* (8 items)
(e.g., skill in evaluating learning environments and outcomes of different curricular models as they relate to NAEYC center accreditation standards for high-quality programming).
3. *Organizational theory, leadership, and program administration* (6 items)
(e.g., ability to apply research in the area of adult learning, job satisfaction, and motivation theory in the supervision of staff).
4. *Parent and community relations/public policy and advocacy* (7 items)
(e.g., skill in evaluating existing family support services in the community).
5. *Research and technology* (3 items)
(e.g., ability to design and implement a research study that builds on previous research in early childhood education).

On a 5-point scale, respondents were asked to indicate their level of knowledge or skill in each of the 28 areas from *no knowledge in this area* (1) to *extremely knowledgeable in this area* (5). The total possible range of scores for the items assessed on this scale was 28 to 140. Content validity of the TNAS was established in a previous study assessing the training needs of 990 center directors in Illinois (Jorde-Bloom, 1989c). In the study here, internal consistency of the TNAS using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of .95 on the pretest and .96 on the posttest.

Quality of Teaching Practices. A modified version of the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Scale (ECCOS; Bredekamp, 1986) was used to assess the quality of teaching practices. This observation tool was developed to assess program quality for centers seeking accreditation through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; 1984). It is a measure of the "developmental appropriateness" of teaching practices in a particular classroom. This observation tool has been used previously in several studies (Holloway, 1988; Jorde-Bloom, 1989c). The ECCOS was modified slightly in this study. A 4-point scale instead of a 3-point rating scale was used to eliminate the tendency to select the mean position. In addition, a few items relating to the physical environment that were out of the teacher's immediate control were eliminated. The modified version of the instrument used in this study assessed four areas of teaching practices: interactions among staff and children (11 items); curriculum (15 items); health, safety, and nutrition (17 items); and the physical environment (15 items). Each criterion was rated on a scale from *not met* (1) to *fully met* (4). Thus, the total classroom quality score could range from 58 to 232.

Quality of Work Life—Organizational Climate. The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES; Jorde-Bloom, 1989a) was used to measure the quality of work life in the center. The ECWES measures 10 dimensions of organizational climate (collegiality, opportunities for professional growth, supervisor support, clarity, reward system, decision-making structure, goal consensus, task orientation, physical environment, and innovativeness). Organizational climate is defined as the collective perceptions of staff regarding these 10 dimensions. A score of 0 to 10 is generated for each dimension of organizational climate by averaging employee responses to 10 items for each dimension.

The ECWES also measures the staff's level of current decision-making influence and their level of desired decision-making influence (each subscale ranges from 0 to 10). Finally, the ECWES measures staff's perceptions of how their current work environment compares with their ideal (scores range from 10 to 50). The ECWES is particularly useful in differentiating climate between centers. The total scale alpha coefficient for internal consistency

Table 2. Pretest and Posttest Means for Task Performance Areas^a

Item	Pretest	Posttest	<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	
Personal/Professional Self-Knowledge	14.14	17.16	5.45*
Child Development and Early Childhood Programming	26.43	32.94	5.81*
Organizational Theory, Leadership, and Program Administration	15.62	23.28	5.29*
Parent and Community Relations/Public Policy and Advocacy	17.71	26.89	7.58*
Research and Technology	6.48	11.89	7.28*
Total Knowledge and Skill	80.38	112.17	7.23*

^a *n* = 22.

* *p* < .0001.

RESULTS

Level of Perceived Competence

A comparison of pretest and posttest data revealed a strong statistically significant increase in participants' level of perceived competence in all five clusters. Participants reported an increase in their level of knowledge and skill in all 28 areas. The pretest mean score summing all areas was 80.38; the total posttest mean score was 112.17, for an average increase of 32 points.

When asked to reflect on how they had grown professionally from participating in the program, the most common responses seemed to relate to a gain in self confidence, which in turn seemed to translate into a stronger professional conviction and a resurgence of energy and enthusiasm relative to early childhood education. The statement, "I feel much more confident as an early childhood educator," was echoed by many of the participants in their reflections. They appeared to look for, and find support and reinforcement for, many of the practices that they had established through experience. And, on a broader basis, participation in and completion of the master's program enhanced their self-esteem.

Related to these perceptions were statements about increased self-understanding and consequent improvement of interpersonal skills. Many participants commented on the positive nature of the group process and the growth experienced through group interactions. In similar fashion, other participants spoke of their increased assertiveness, their more professional behavior, and their willingness to advocate for young children and the profession. "I stretched this year," said one student. "I stepped out with both feet and didn't fall. In fact, I flew!" Another student captured the sentiments of many when she commented, "I was slowly dying professionally—I was in a rut. You have opened my eyes, enhanced my self-esteem, and motivated me to get involved in early childhood issues."

Table 3. Pretest-Posttest Means and Standard Deviations for Classroom Quality

Variable	Target Group		Comparison Group	
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)
Pretest				
Interactions among staff and children	32.12	(7.26)	31.91	(7.59)
Curriculum	42.69	(8.57)	42.70	(10.49)
Health and nutrition	57.60	(7.23)	56.30	(8.35)
Physical environment	41.77	(9.64)	42.20	(10.93)
Overall classroom quality	174.08	(27.50)	173.00	(32.80)
Posttest				
Interactions among staff and children	41.00	(3.37)	30.63	(9.79)
Curriculum	52.32	(6.76)	42.92	(12.19)
Health and nutrition	62.00	(4.82)	55.63	(9.96)
Physical environment	51.95	(8.15)	40.58	(11.64)
Overall classroom quality	207.26	(19.70)	169.75	(39.50)

Table 4. Mean Change Scores for Classroom Quality

Variable	Target Group		Comparison Group		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i>	(<i>SD</i>)	
Interactions among staff and children	8.06	(7.03)	-1.70	(9.25)	3.83***
Curriculum	9.39	(8.86)	-0.26	(10.66)	3.16**
Health and nutrition	4.61	(8.40)	-1.04	(8.13)	2.17*
Physical environment	11.28	(10.86)	-1.87	(9.20)	4.11***
Overall classroom quality	33.33	(29.48)	-4.87	(32.52)	3.94***

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Quality of Teaching Practices

Table 3 provides a summary of the pretest and posttest means and standard deviations of the four classroom quality subscales as well as the total classroom quality score. A series of *t* tests were conducted to discern if the target and comparison groups were evenly matched at the beginning of the training period. The mean pretest scores for overall quality for the target group was 174.08; the mean pretest score for the comparison group was 173.00. None of the four subscales on the pretest revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups. In looking at posttest scores, it can be seen in Table 3 that the mean overall quality score for the target group was 207.26 (an increase of 33 points). The mean posttest score for the comparison group was 169.75 (a decrease of 3 points).

Table 4 summarizes the mean change scores for each group (the average increase or decrease between the pretest and posttest observations). A series

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for Pretest and Posttest Organizational Climate, Commitment, Congruence with Ideal, and Decision-Making Influence

Variable	Pretest		Posttest		t
	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	
Organizational Climate					
Collegiality	6.53	(2.36)	6.99	(1.96)	1.37
Professional growth	5.49	(2.47)	6.24	(2.04)	2.15*
Supervisor support	7.17	(2.31)	7.68	(2.33)	1.39
Clarity	6.51	(2.31)	7.54	(1.96)	3.13**
Reward system	6.13	(2.01)	6.60	(2.05)	1.42
Decision-making structure	7.08	(2.24)	7.56	(1.90)	1.49
Goal consensus	7.12	(1.81)	7.64	(1.83)	1.79
Task orientation	7.24	(2.12)	7.64	(2.06)	1.21
Physical environment	7.55	(2.08)	7.33	(1.96)	-0.68
Innovativeness	6.33	(1.87)	6.96	(1.51)	2.33*
Congruence with Ideal	36.08	(9.50)	42.53	(7.00)	4.37***
Commitment	7.01	(1.83)	7.69	(1.64)	2.53**
Decision-Making Influence					
Current	6.30	(2.25)	7.05	(1.77)	2.33*
Desired	7.72	(2.45)	7.77	(1.93)	0.16

Note. $N=72$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

of t tests were conducted to discern if there were statistically significant differences in the mean change scores that might be attributable to training. On all four subscales and on the overall classroom quality scores, there were statistically significant differences. The target group of Head Start teachers (those receiving training) consistently had higher scores on the posttest observations.

Quality of Work Life: Organizational Climate

Table 5 summarizes the results of the aggregate data from eight centers participating in the pretest and posttest administration of the ECWES ($N=72$). On 9 of the 10 dimensions, the staff employed at these Head Start centers expressed more positive attitudes about the climate of their programs. In 3 of the 10 dimensions (opportunities for professional growth, clarity, and degree of innovativeness) the differences in mean scores reached statistical significance.

In addition to more positive attitudes in the dimensions associated with organizational climate, Table 5 shows that staff expressed stronger levels of commitment to their centers at the end of the training period ($t=2.53$, $p < .01$). In the area of staff's perceptions of their current decision-making influence, there were also statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest administration of the ECWES. The strongest differences

in staff's perceptions, however, occurred in the congruence with ideal subscale. The pretest mean score on this subscale was 36.08; the posttest score was 42.53 ($t=4.37$, $p < .0001$).

Case Study

Case study data provided more descriptive information relative to participants' experiences in the program. This feedback served to support and enhance the quantitative findings of the training outcomes. The following brief summary documents one participant's growth through her involvement in the leadership training program. Because of the sensitive nature of some of this information, a fictitious name is used.

Background Information. Monica Davis, a widow, is a soft-spoken, warm, 39-year-old black woman who entered the training program with a Bachelor of Science degree in child development. She had taught preschool for 11 years and was currently the acting director of a Head Start center. Monica noted that her reason for entering the Leadership Training Program was to prepare herself better for her administrative role. In a personal statement, she said, "It will provide me with the technical training that is needed to improve my program's administration and management, while giving sound direction to staff and others."

Monica reflected a belief system that the early childhood profession should address the issue of the relationship between the children we teach, the school, and the broader community. She showed a strong concern that children receive the services they need, educationally, socially, and emotionally.

Monica rarely spoke in class and was often late arriving. Her concern about her abilities as a student and her perception of the assignments (particularly the research project) overwhelmed and frightened Monica and eroded her confidence. In her journal at the beginning of the training, she voiced her fears about whether she would make it through the program.

Process of Change. Despite a number of obstacles in her personal life, Monica persevered in the program. She was sustained mostly through a deep conviction that this program was right for her. Her commitment to study was reinforced by the social ties she built in class. The support of classmates was important to her. After one of the first classes she wrote in her journal, "Were we all matched, selected by a computer for the Tuesday class? We have so much in common. Good! I finally found other people who are just like me!" Her confidence was buoyed by the feeling that she was not alone in her efforts to achieve and learn in the program.

At the beginning of the second term, Monica's level of confidence was stronger. She wrote in her journal, "I really enjoy the instructors, and my classmates. The cohesiveness and collegiality of our group is strong. It has helped me through this term, with smiles, looks, words, and touches. I have

truly enjoyed this learning experience. One of my goals is to be a better writer and speaker.”

Monica appeared to be at the renewal stage in her career development. She was searching for new challenges in the area of supervision. Her role identity was changing from thinking of herself as a teacher to thinking of herself as a full-time administrator. She demonstrated a great deal of openness in her desire to understand new ideas in her assigned work. She put a great deal of effort into each assignment.

Monica's ability to express herself both verbally and in writing were areas of difficulty for her. During the course of the training, her ability to think abstractly improved. She became more able to look at situations in her work with families, children, and teachers from multiple perspectives and analyze problem areas by taking many different viewpoints into consideration. In examining her own growth through the program, she said, “I have learned that there is not only one right way to do something. Through group discussions, I have come to learn more about myself by listening to other teachers' problems.” Monica showed an ability to organize ideas and draw conclusions more in personal discussions than in her writing. Nevertheless, she exhibited an increased ability to think reflectively about herself and her work.

In her journal entries, Monica reflected a more intense emotional response to her environment than what she demonstrated in her behavior. Affectively, she seemed rather low-keyed and easygoing in her manner. However, her inner intensity was reflected in her motivation to succeed and in her willingness to adapt to new situations. When confronted with the possibility of termination from the program due to absences, she immediately changed her life style enough to stay in the program. Toward the end of the program, Monica began to participate more in class discussions, offering comments, reflecting on ideas, and asking questions.

Growth and Change. One need only compare the pretest-posttest results of the ECWES administered to her staff to see the tremendous impact the training had on Monica's ability to provide a more nurturing work climate for her staff. In 9 of the 10 dimensions of organizational climate, her staff's perceptions were more positive at the end of the training; in 6 of these dimensions, the differences reached statistical significance. Her staff's collective perceptions about how their current work environment compared with their ideal also improved. The most exciting change could be seen in the staff's perceptions of their current decision-making influence. The mean pretest score on this subscale was 3.75 (of 10); the mean posttest score was 6.3.

On a personal level, Monica feels that her attitude about herself improved through participation in the program. “I am much more self-confident and

better able to function as an administrator and supervisor. I used to think that being an administrator called for leadership abilities I didn't have. Now I see things more clearly. I know what it means to be a director and supervisor.”

Monica stated in an interview at the end of the program, “My attitude is more professional. I can handle difficult situations at work much better now. I am calm when crises happen because I understand what my role is and I know I can do it.” She feels she had learned to relate to people better because she can put herself in a parent or teacher's place and understand their point of view. She also believes she has gained the ability through the Head Start Training Program to use a variety of strategies to find solutions to both personal and professional problems.

Finally, Monica demonstrated an increased sense of confidence in her role as advocate of children. “I have learned to speak up for children. I have learned to speak to government administrators about our program and not be afraid or intimidated.”

DISCUSSION

Two important themes emerged from the evaluation data collected to assess the outcomes of the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program. These themes focus on the potency of training as it relates to participants' increased feelings of self-efficacy and participants' ability to effect positive changes in their respective programs.

With respect to self-confidence and self-efficacy, the results of the data analysis provide strong support that the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program had a significant impact on participants' perceived level of competence in the knowledge and skill areas assessed. These data were supported by personal reflections of how individuals had grown and changed through this educational experience. The program format, based on an adult development model, encouraged the sharing of experiential knowledge. It also emphasized the written and verbal expression of a variety of strategies and ideas reflecting sound knowledge of child development. As students received positive feedback as well as constructive criticism from instructors who validated their efforts and ideas, they were willing to take more risks in articulating a point of view and even modifying their position on issues. In commenting on the nature of the assignments and the value of the research project, many participants articulated that the gap between theory and practice had been narrowed as a result of their participation in the program.

The overriding goal of the Early Childhood Leadership Training Program was to empower participants to effect change in their respective Head

Start programs. At the conclusion of the 16-month experience, participants were more willing to offer and substantiate their views, as well as to advocate for change. Self-empowerment—the feeling that one person can have an impact on his or her program—no doubt resulted from the increased self-confidence.

The observations of classroom quality confirm previous research (see, e.g., Arnett, 1989; Berk, 1985; Whitebook et al., 1989) that training can have a pronounced impact on the quality of teaching practices in the classroom. Significant improvements in the interactions between adults and children, the classroom curriculum, the arrangement and use of the physical environment, and health, safety, and nutritional practices were noted at the end of the 16-month training. These same changes were not detected in the comparison group.

It appears that improving participants' repertoire of administrative and organizational skills had a direct impact on many organizational practices. Previous research in this area would lead one to be cautious in expecting changes in staff's attitudes about organizational climate in such a short period of time, but the results of the data analysis revealed a surprising increase in positive perceptions. Significant changes in employees' perceptions of organizational climate with respect to the clarity of program policies and procedures, the degree of program innovativeness, and opportunities for professional growth were seen in the posttest administration of ECWES.

If one looks at the pattern of changes that occurred in these directors' centers, it appears that those areas that achieved the greatest degree of positive change were areas in which the director (the participant in this training) had more control. These dimensions included clarity, providing opportunities for professional growth, and the degree of innovativeness exhibited at the center. As well, significant changes were noted in the level of decision-making influence accorded to staff, an area most certainly regulated by the director's leadership style. It is possible that as the directors became more confident of their own leadership abilities, they were better able to institute organizational practices that improved the quality of work life for their employees.

Several limitations of this research should be noted, however. First, the study employed a volunteer selection process to recruit the comparison group. Second, it relied on a pretest-posttest comparison of only the target group for two measures. Consequently, the calculated gains must be viewed with some caution. Moreover, because the Head Start community in Chicago has a strong informal communication network, it was impossible for the classroom observer to remain completely blind relative to the participation of particular programs in the training. These limitations represent the realities of conducting research in the real world of early childhood programs.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study provide evidence to support the contention that the director of an early childhood program is indeed the "gatekeeper to quality." Both quantitative and qualitative data attest to the apparent impact that the training program had on the program directors who, in turn, promoted changes in the working environment for the teaching staff. This intervention effort appears to have improved the supervisory and leadership skills of participants.

Continued professionalization of the early childhood field will have to include preparation and training of directors and other administrators, as well as teachers aspiring to leadership positions. Such training, as this study suggests, should benefit both the professionals involved and the children enrolled in their classrooms.

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