



Enhancing the Professional Development of the Child Welfare Workforce: Does the Training Method Matter?

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Enhancing the Professional Development of the Child Welfare Workforce: Does the Training Method Matter?

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Introduction

Ongoing training of the workforce is a critical component of the overall success of child welfare practice. According to the results of various studies, benefits for the workforce include increased confidence, (Turcotte, Lamonde, & Beaudoin, 2009; Hopkins, Murdick, & Rudolph, 1999; Lieberman, Hornby, & Russell, 1988), increased knowledge, (Turcotte et al., 2009; Jones & Okamura, 2000; Scannapieco & Connell-Corrick, 2003; Beckman & Mays, 1985; McCowan, McGregor, & LoTempio, 1989), and a change for the better in attitudes and behavior toward clients, (Turcotte et al., 2009; Hopkins et al., 1999; Jones & Okamura, 2000; Leung, Cheung & Stevenson, 1991; Gregoire, 1994).

The federally mandated Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) identifies ongoing training and education as one of seven key systemic factors related to achieving the safety and wellbeing of children and families, and the best chance for permanent arrangements for the children. The funding allotted to states for child welfare training also attests to the importance of education and training. Reimbursements range from approximately \$10,400 in Alaska to more than \$79 million in California. The median federal reimbursement among all 50 states was approximately \$2.7 million in 2002 (US General Accounting Office, 2003).

The present study addresses gaps in current knowledge about effective training methods by comparing a traditional training approach that uses Hunter's ITIP method with the Credit for Learning (CFL) integrated curriculum approach.

Overview of Training Methods

A variety of training methods -- used in whole or in part -- prepares the best workforce possible. One method relied on is Berdie, Leake, and Parry's skills training model (2004). "In its marrying of key adult learning theory principles, mainstream child welfare competencies, and a focused evaluation method, the model offers the child welfare field a possible avenue for improving the relevance and transferability of training" (p. 46, Collins et al., 2007). It has six components: 1) explain and discuss, 2) demonstrate/model and discuss, 3) practice, 4) feedback, 5) discussion of transfer implications, and 6) embedded evaluation. The strength of this method lies in "the assumption that skills in child welfare practice involve the integration of various competencies, including knowledge, cognitive strategies for applying knowledge, and behaviors or action" (p. 46, Collins, Amodeo, & Clay, 2007).

Another often-used training method is Madeline Hunter's *Instructional Theory into Practice* (ITIP) for planning writing, and delivering training curricula. According to Hunter (1979; 1985; 1986; <http://sorrel.humboldt.edu/~tha1/hunter-eei.html>), this is a decision-making model. The teacher/instructor decides on what content to teach based on learner needs/abilities, what learners will learn, and how they will demonstrate what they have learned, and selects and utilizes the "research-based" teaching principles and strategies that will most effectively promote learning. Although it may not have been Hunter's intention, the model is most often described as a seven-step process:

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- 1) specifying objectives (what the student should be able to do, understand, care about, as a result of the teaching)
- 2) explicating standards (an explanation of the type of lesson to be presented, procedures to be followed, and behavioral expectations related to it, what the students are expected to do, what knowledge or skills are to be demonstrated and in what manner)
- 3) using an anticipatory set (sometimes called a "hook" to grab the student's attention, actions and statements by the teacher to relate the experiences of the students to the objectives of the lesson)
- 4) teaching (*input*-- the information needed for students to gain the knowledge or skill, *modeling*-- show students examples of what is expected as an end product of their work, and *check for understanding*-- determination of whether students have "got it" before proceeding)
- 5) offering guided practice (an opportunity for each student to demonstrate a grasp of new learning by working through an activity or exercise under the teacher's direct supervision)
- 6) providing closure (actions or statements by a teacher that are designed to bring a lesson presentation to an appropriate conclusion)
- 7) allowing time for independent practice (time is provided for reinforcement practice).

This seven-step process is implemented on a repeating schedule so that learning is not forgotten.

A more recent method being implemented is the *Credit for Learning* (CFL) integrated curriculum approach, which integrates Madeline Hunter's *Instructional Theory into Practice* method (ITIP) of training with traditional instructional components. In partnership with the training branch of Kentucky's child welfare agency, Kentucky's three public graduate social work pro-

grams developed the CFL integrated curriculum approach to respond to the professional development needs of its child welfare workforce. Also the intention was to strengthen its training system in response to criticism about the impact that training has on knowledge and skill development of the workforce.

At its core, the CFL integrated curriculum approach is designed to increase the effectiveness of the child welfare system by enhancing the training of state social workers. Social Work faculty from three state universities partner with state trainers to provide specialized courses to the state child welfare workforce to fulfill training requirements and to provide the opportunity to earn graduate-level course credit. For a more detailed description of the development of the CFL approach, see Sar, Bledsoe, Sullivan, Weeks, Fox, Barrett, Wadlington, & Cashwell, 2008. In the CFL approach, the ITIP method guides the writing and delivery of the curriculum, with the added requirement that participants complete readings, take tests, and write papers -- activities that are typical of traditional classroom instruction. This approach is one that is consistent with the view that training/instruction should be motivational in nature. The trainer/instructor is expected to actively work to engage the learner and increase the efforts that are invested in learning (Bohlin, Milheim, & Viechnicki, 1993-94). It also incorporates a variety of teaching methods, such as presentation and experiential exercises (Heimlich & Norland, 1994).

Review of the Literature

Long-standing concerns about inadequate training and skill level of child welfare workers have persisted (Bibus & Rooney 1995; Leightner & Ellett 1998; Olsen & Holmes 1982; Pecora 1989; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991). Inadequate training and skills have been frequently cited by workers for feelings of incompetence and reasons for leaving public child welfare work (Russell & Hornby 1987; Barak et al., 2001; Ellett et al., 2003) and for lower ratings by supervisors and peers on skills and competencies (Perry, 2006).

Not surprisingly, both researchers and practitioners have expressed reservations about the impact training has had in promoting effective practice (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellman-Jenkins, 2005).

Researchers have offered several explanations for the varying impact of training on the development of worker competencies and skills. One centers on the trainees' capacity to retain information. One estimate is that immediately following training, trainees are able to recall and utilize approximately 40% of the training material. However, this diminishes to 25% at six months and 15% at one year (Burke, 1997). Another explanation is that there is a significant transfer problem in training (Newstrom, 1986). Training transfer is concerned with the degree to which trainees regularly apply to their jobs the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and attitudes learned in training (Velada & Caetano, 2007).

Training evaluation models identify training transfer as a key determinant of training effectiveness (Eseryel, 2002). Examples include both goal-based approaches (i.e., the IPO model—Input, Process, Output—developed by IBM) and system-based approaches (i.e., Kirkpatrick's four-level evaluation model. In the IPO model, training transfer is described as an output resulting from training, and it is typically operationalized as knowledge and skill gains. In Kirkpatrick's (1959) four-level evaluation model, training transfer is behavior (level 3), which is referred to as "the extent to which participants change their on the job behavior because of training" (p. 56, Kirkpatrick, 1996). Likewise, Holton (1996) proposes individual performance as one of three primary outcomes of training intervention – the other two being learning and organizational results -- all of which are sequentially linked. That is, application of the learning results in change in individual performance, which in turn leads to results at the organizational level as a consequence of change in individual performance.

Baldwin and Ford (1988) propose three categories of factors affecting training transfer: training inputs, training outputs, and conditions of transfer. Training inputs include trainee characteristics, training design, and organization/work

environment. Training outputs consist of learning and retention. Conditions of transfer include generalization and maintenance of training. Examples of trainee characteristics are self efficacy, commitment to the organization, personality traits such as anxiety and negative affect, interest and involvement in one's job, perceived usefulness, worth, relevance of training, and individual learning readiness (Franke, Bagdasaryan, & Furman, 2008; Antle, Barbee, & Van Zyl, 2008). Organizational/work environment related factors, such as transfer climate, supervisor/peer/organization support for training and training content, and opportunity to apply newly acquired skills on the job have been found to correlate with training transfer (see Franke, Bagdasaryan, & Furman, 2008; Antle et al., 2008; Curry, McCarragher and Dellman-Jenkins, 2005).

Aspects of training design that have been studied are *worker input*, *training content*, *training method*, *delivery format*, and *action planning and reinforcement*.

1. *Worker input*: Denning and Verschelden (1993) found that when workers participate in the development of the curriculum the product is more relevant and better received by the worker audience than when the workers are excluded.
2. *Training content*: Curry et al., (2005) found that emphasizing skill development and providing examples of when to use these skills were significant predictors of perceived transfer of learning, assuming that they are consistent with agency policies and worker responsibilities. Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Traver, and Shotland (1997) found that perceived usefulness of the training content was much more predictive of training transfer than whether the training was liked by the trainee. When Wehrmann, Shin, and Poertner (2002) evaluated the transfer of knowledge and skills at the completion of training and again six months later, they found that familiarity with the content prior to training was a significant predictor of training outcomes.

3. *Training method:* In a large meta-analysis on the effectiveness of training in organizations, Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell (2003) found that the training method used is related to the effectiveness of training programs. Kessler and Greene (1999) reported that in a comparison of *group vs. individual* training of case-work skills, trainees experienced an increase in transfer between pre- and post-tests of training regardless of training method; however, group training resulted in more effective transfer of casework skills to the workplace. Smith, Schinke, and Springer (2000) utilized a multiple-probe research design to evaluate a behavioral training program for child protection workers and found significant gains in practice knowledge, skills, and confidence. A behavioral training program provides workers with education in the practice skills (behaviors) necessary for effective casework practice.

transfer of assessment and case-planning skills in the training-of-trainers group (n = 21) and the team training group (n = 27) indicated a statistically significant difference in the transfer of assessment and case-planning score. The mean transfer score for the team-training group was two times higher than that of the mean-transfer score for the training-of-trainers group. Austin and Pecora (1985) found that transfer of training material is most likely to occur when specific plans are made to implement training content on the job. Curry et al., (2005) found that having an opportunity to perform new tasks on the job and the support of their peers for using new skills enhanced training transfer. Burrow and Berardinelli (2003) advocate the use of planned learning to promote key performance measures after conducting a study in which planned learning as part of the training resulted in a significant improvement in observable work behaviors.
4. *Delivery format:* In examining delivery format, Kessler and Greene (1999) compared the findings of two studies that employed case-study methodology. The first used individual training, while the second used group training. When individual training was used, there was limited transfer of casework skills for supervised visitation in child welfare casework (use of skills ranged from 3-20%). Higher rates of transfer occurred in the group-training approach, although trainees in both studies experienced an increase in transfer between pre- and post-tests of training.

Antle, Barbee, Christensen, and Martin (2007) also examined delivery format by comparing the use of a *training-of-trainers* approach with team training for the *solution-based casework* model of child welfare practice (Christensen, Todahl, & Barrett, 1999). In the training-of-trainers group, child welfare supervisors received training from a university faculty person who developed the *solution-based practice* model and then trained their workers. In the team-training group, a child welfare supervisor and her workers participated in training together. A chart-file review for the
5. *Action plans and reinforcements:* Providing reinforcement post-training is also important. Miller and Dore (1991) selected four states that are reputed to have high quality child welfare training. They found that all four states provide training curricula that have the following components: they address both knowledge and skills for workers, many of the programs supplement didactic learning with experiential activities, and workers are asked to try new material in the field and then return to the classroom to discuss their experiences. Miller and Dore concluded that training programs must move beyond knowledge acquisition to focus on the specific practice skills important to casework, such as engagement, assessment, case planning, and facilitating change.

Additionally, Miller and Dore (1991) found that a key component of successful state programs is that supervisors are involved in the reinforcement of new knowledge and skills. Supervisors can teach new skills, demonstrate or model their use, observe workers practicing skills, and provide feedback on ways to improve these skills.

Similarly, Leung, Cheung, and Stevenson (1994) reviewed a strengths-based approach to training child welfare workers for ethnically sensitive practice. They concluded that training should include components of self-evaluation and ongoing reinforcement or evaluation by the supervisor.

Antle, Barbee, Sullivan, and Christensen (2009) conducted a study to compare the difference in training transfer between classroom training only and classroom training plus reinforcement. The key finding was that a significantly higher rate of training transfer occurred when classroom training plus reinforcement was provided than when only classroom training was given. Participants in the training-plus-reinforcement group utilized correct assessment methods and case planning skills at a significantly higher level than their peers in the training-only group.

This review of the literature suggests that group training methods are found to be preferable to individual training (i.e., Kessler & Greene, 1999), and direct training is more effective than a training-of-trainers approach (e.g., Antle et al., 2008). Furthermore, strategies that promote transfer of learning and training effectiveness include explicitly stating learning goals and desired outcomes in performance and behavior. Also a good strategy will closely link training goals and materials to what is expected in practice, and it will allow for practice of what is being learned. Providing feedback, using behavioral modeling and error-based examples, and providing training reinforcement or booster sessions following classroom training are also effective. (See Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Curry et al., 2005; Franke et al., 2008; Antle et al., 2009).

The present study adds to this research by specifically comparing traditional training approaches with emerging professional education methods, such as *Credit for Learning (CFL)*, in order to maximize training resources to create an adequately prepared workforce to promote positive outcomes for children and families. Therefore, our primary focus in this paper is on these issues of training design and outcomes, using the research described below.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in satisfaction and knowledge between workers from pretest to posttest based on the training method used?
2. Is there a difference in transfer of skills into the work environment among workers based on training method used?

Methodology

Design

This study utilized a pre/post comparison group design. All child welfare workers who volunteered for the training course were given the option of earning three hours of graduate course credit that could be applied toward current or future graduate studies or toward meeting continuing education requirements if they already had a Masters degree. All of these child welfare workers participated in 2.5 days of training on *Building Couple Teams for Child Protection* (see description below) using Hunter's (1985) *Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP)* method. Some of these workers (ITIP GROUP, n=135) elected not to earn graduate course credit, and their only participation was the 2.5 days of training. Others (CFL GROUP, n = 29) elected to earn graduate course credit. After receiving the same 2.5 days of training as the other group, these child welfare workers were required to fulfill the following assignments: (1) complete a set of readings on couple relationships and systems, (2) write two brief papers (2-4 pages) on how they might use key ideas from the readings in their work, (3) review the assessment and case plan from one of their cases and discuss how they might work the case differently given the knowledge and skills gained from the training course, and (4) complete a final exam consisting of a true/false, multiple choice, and essay questions. These additional activities were monitored and evaluated for completion by the first author, who was not part of the training team for either group.

Intervention: Description of training provided

The training course entitled *Building Couple Teams for Child Protection* was developed from a synthesis of information gathered from 1) an evidence-based literature review; 2) a chart-file review study on couple themes and issues in child welfare case records; 3) focus groups with child welfare workers and foster parents; and 4) consultation from experts in child welfare and marriage and family therapy, as well as child welfare agency representatives. The overarching theme that guided course development was that *couple relationships are relevant to child welfare workers only in that they impact child outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being*. Some of the specific content elements emphasized in the course were communication and conflict resolution, co-parenting, fatherhood issues, divorce and blended families, the role of paramours, and domestic violence. Course content also dealt with how attitudinal barriers among child welfare workers make them hesitant to discuss healthy marriages and couple relationships with child welfare clients. This hesitation resulted from lack of competence and confidence. Another key emphasis was the recognition and valuing of diverse family configurations, including those who are married, divorced, dating or cohabitating, and more. The course communicated that regardless of the configuration, children benefit when adults can work together in positive co-parenting relationships. The final version of the course contained the following modules:

- *Why Study Couple Relationships in Child Protection Work?*
- *Overview of What Seems to Work Best for All Couples Who Parent*
- *What Works Best for Couples in Transition (Separation/Divorce, Dating, Cohabitation, Blended)?*
- *What Works Best for Couples Who Provide Foster Care, Kinship Care or Adopt?*

- *Issues that can Overwhelm Couples who Parent: Domestic Violence*
- *Engaging Parents Regarding the Effects of the Couple Relationship on Parenting*

This training course was provided to child welfare workers in their geographic regions in an effort to overcome barriers such as time away from agency work and travel costs. The instructors for the course were faculty from the University's child welfare specialization program, who committed to delivering the course for the duration of the project. The training was made available to all child welfare teams across the state over a three-year time period.

Sampling

The sample for this study was drawn from the population of child welfare workers employed in the protection and permanency division of a Mid-western State's public child welfare agency. Participants were recruited through the distribution of flyers sent via e-mail and by advertisement of the training opportunity through the state's online training registration system. Potential participants were provided additional specifics, such as information about the research/evaluation component, when they inquired about the training.

Variables and Measurement

The *study variables* were demographic characteristics, knowledge of key concepts from the curriculum, transfer of skills from the curriculum, and satisfaction with the training course.

The *demographic variables* included education, ethnicity, gender, length of employment, and current position within the agency.

Readiness to learn was measured using the 10-item *Learning Benefits Inventory* (Van Zyl & Van Zyl, 2000), which measures desire for learning as a life skill, support for learning, and self-directedness in learning.

Knowledge of key concepts from the curriculum was measured using a multiple-choice test

designed for this curriculum. The test consisted of 38 questions based on core concepts from the training. Project evaluators developed these questions. Item analysis was performed on the test to determine the appropriateness of each item and overall fit of the test.

Transfer of skills from the curriculum was measured using seven Likert scale items through which participants rated their own skill in the following areas: identifying couple issues, engaging clients in couple teamwork conversations, assessment, case planning, referral to appropriate services, distinguishing between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and coaching couples in relationship skills. Participants rated the extent to which they mastered this skill on a one-to-five point scale. Sample items asked participants to rate the extent to which they “assessed the impact of couple issues on the safety and well-being of children” and whether or not they could distinguish “between healthy and unhealthy patterns in couple relationships.”

Training satisfaction was measured along two dimensions: utility and affective reactions. *Utility reaction* refers to the degree to which trainees find the training material useful. *Affective reaction* refers to the degree to which trainees like the training. Both of these reactions were measured using a scale adapted for this study—the *Level One Training Evaluation Scale*. This scale contains 12 items. For each item, respondents indicated their degree of agreement on the five-point Likert scales. A similar scale was previously used for the evaluation of training in child welfare (Barbee & Barber, 1995; Antle et al., 2008).

Data Collection and Consent Procedures

Data on demographics, trainee knowledge of key concepts, and use of skills from the training were measured pre-training. Trainee reactions to training, knowledge, and transfer of skills were measured post-training. Measures were administered on the first day of training prior to the beginning of the lecture, on the last day after com-

pletion of the training, and six months post-training (mailed to participants).

Prior to the start of the training, participants were provided with a consent letter approved by the University’s IRB and informed of their right to refuse to complete these surveys or to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Everyone was given the opportunity to participate in the training, regardless of whether or not they elected to enroll in the evaluation. All identifying information was kept confidential during data collection and destroyed prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS, version 19. Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed to arrive at sample description and answers to the research questions.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The final study sample consisted of 164 child welfare workers, 29 of whom were in the CFL group and the remaining 135 were in the ITIP training group. Table 1 displays the sample characteristics by group. The CFL group, on average, were younger (mean age =35.24 years; SD =10.94) and had been employed with the agency on average for fewer months (54.32 months; SD=49.07) than the ITIP group. There were several statistically significant differences between the two groups:

- in relation to the number of minorities in each group [CFL group (n= 1); ITIP group (n=29)] ($\chi^2 = 5.317$, $df= 1$, $p=.021$);
- percent of men in each group ($\chi^2 =6.015$, $df =1$, $p=.014$) with men comprising 6.9% of the CFL group versus 28.6% in the ITIP group;

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Sample Characteristics	CFL GROUP (n=29)	ITIP GROUP (n= 135)
Age (mean)	35.24 yrs (SD =10.94)	39.0 yrs (SD=10.92)
Race/Ethnicity	96.6% Caucasian	77.0% Caucasian
Gender	93.1% Female	70.4% Female
Education	55.2% BSW 34.5% other Bachelor's Degree	12.6% BSW 41.5% other Bachelor's Degree
Length of Employment	54.32 months (SD=49.07)	106.10 months (SD=99.82)

- in relation to length of employment [$t(146), -2.52, p<.05$], (CFL group: 54.32 months, SD =49.07 vs. ITIP group: 106.10, SD=99.82);
- participants with a Masters' degree either in social work or related field ($\chi^2 = 10.294, df = 1, p = .001$) within each group [(CFL group (n=2); ITIP group (n=50)].

Was there a difference in satisfaction between workers from pretest to posttest based on the training model used?

In all, satisfaction with the training was very high. For all the participants, the mean satisfaction score was 58.51 out of 75 (SD = 10.41). A t-test revealed no significant differences in training satisfaction between the CFL (mean = 59.10, SD =9.82) and ITIP groups (mean= 58. 21, SD = 10.54) ($t = .409, df = .135, p = .683$).

Was there a difference in knowledge between workers from pretest to posttest based on the training model used?

The two groups did not statistically differ in their readiness to learn as measured by the Learning Benefits Inventory (LBI) (CFL group: 36.13, SD=3.65; ITIP group: 35.93, SD=4.81) ($t = -.249, df = 51.87, p = .804$) indicating no difference between the two groups on perceived benefit to learning. However, there was a significant difference in learning as measured by a pre/post training test of concepts between the CFL and ITIP groups in several key areas. There was a significant difference between groups in knowledge gain for Module 1 (Why Study Couple Relationships in Child Protection Work), $t(161), = 3.20, p < .01$. The CFL group experienced a greater gain in knowledge (M=.52, SD=1.35) than the ITIP group (M= -.55, SD=1.68). There

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was a significant difference between groups in knowledge gain for Module 4 (What Works Best for Couples Who Provide Foster Care, Kinship Care, or Adopt), $t(161) = 2.80, p < .01$. The CFL group experienced a greater gain in knowledge ($M = .93, SD = 1.31$) than the ITIP group ($M = -.09, SD = 1.86$). There was also a trend in the difference between groups in knowledge gain for Module 5 (Issues That Can Overwhelm Couples Who Parent: Domestic Violence), $t(161) = 1.76, p = .08$. The CFL group experienced a greater gain in knowledge ($M = .55, SD = 1.53$) than the ITIP group ($M = -.08, SD = 1.80$).

Is there a difference in transfer of skills into the work environment between workers based on the training method used?

There was a significant difference between the CFL and ITIP groups in training transfer, $t(25) = 2.62, p < .05$. Six months after training, CFL participants reported better case planning skills ($M = 5.75, SD = .96$) than ITIP participants ($M = 4.61, SD = .78$).

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the CFL integrated curriculum approach to preparing the child welfare workforce is a viable method of training and that it increases knowledge and self-efficacy in applying skills learned in the classroom at a better rate than the ITIP method. Those who were taught using the CFL integrated curriculum experienced a greater increase in knowledge of why couple issues are important for child welfare, and of how couple issues relate to foster/adoptive parents, and domestic violence. They also reported higher levels of skill in the area of case planning. This group experienced better outcomes despite the fact that its members had less formal education and less work experience than the other group. CFL used traditional classroom pedagogy, such as required readings, testing, and writing papers, in its integrated curriculum approach, and these were found to be useful tools that reinforced the critical content

being delivered for increasing worker competence. These findings build on previous research which indicates that providing training reinforcement or booster sessions following classroom training leads to better practice outcomes (i.e., Burke & Hutchins, 2007; Curry et al., 2005; Franke et al., 2008; Antle et al., 2009). This study found support for use of a specific type of reinforcement within the confines of the training course -- that of evaluation of participants' knowledge and skills.

Incentives can be powerful motivators for producing desired outcomes but they should be targeted and marketed to meet the needs of the workforce. In this study, "earning elective credit" towards a Masters' degree worked well in enticing those pursuing or interested in pursuing graduate education. It was not powerful enough to draw in those not interested in course credit, either because they already had a degree or because they had no interest in one. All of the participants, it appears, could have benefitted from being taught using the CFL integrated curriculum approach. An area for further exploration might be to investigate what incentives would appeal to experienced workers enough to make them wish to enroll in a training course that uses the CFL integrated curriculum approach.

Finally, the participants in this study -- either in the CFL or ITIP group -- already holding a Masters' degree could have chosen the CFL integrated curriculum approach and applied their "earned credit" towards continuing education credit through the state chapter of the NASW or other human services related to professional organizations granting continuing education credit. Most chose not to do so because there was no such ongoing condition-of-employment requirement for ongoing continuing education hours. Having such a requirement would be a way to communicate that such training is important, a truly critical professional development activity in human services.

Future Research

The strengths of this study include the quasi-experimental design with a comparison group and

pre/ post-test measurement of outcomes. A related strength was the use of many standardized measures of key outcomes with established reliability and validity.

Despite these strengths, the research had several limitations. First, there was a potential selection bias because the training was voluntary. Those who self-selected to participate in the CFL group may have been particularly motivated learners, although the two groups did not statistically differ in their scores on the the Learning Benefits Inventory (LBI), which is suggestive of motivation, readiness, and value of learning. The overall size of the study sample at the various phases of the study may also be a factor in the results given the much smaller sample size for the CFL group (N=29) than the training group (N=134). The response rate for the six-month post-test for the training group (20%) was very low. Lastly, transfer was self-reported, which means that it may have been subject to inflation by individuals reporting on their own skills.

Future research should address these limitations through the use of random assignment of workers to the CFL or ITIP groups. This evaluation assessed the impact of the training on worker skills through self-report. The next step in this chain of evidence would be to assess these skills through direct and independent observation and to determine whether these worker skills translate to better outcomes for clients. Future research could also explore the specific elements of the CFL approach -- readings, tests, writing papers, and/or receiving credit --and whether or not these contribute to greater gains in knowledge and skill.

Conclusion

The overall success of child welfare practice is due in part to the training and continuing education undertaken by the workforce to enhance their knowledge and skills. Thus, the training method used becomes an important factor to consider in the explanatory model for effective practice. This paper has reported on the CFL integrated curriculum approach, a training method that combines

training with traditional classroom pedagogy such as required readings, testing, and writing papers, as a promising method for enhancing the professional development of the child welfare workforce.

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