

# Research Notes

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## Investment in Directors' Training Yields Big Payoffs

In the business world there are two commonly accepted beliefs. One, successful businesses are run by skilled managers. Second, good managers are not born but made. The same may be said of quality child care centers. New research from the Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University indicates that well-trained directors run higher quality programs and that the more training a director has the better the outcomes in improved program quality.

Evaluation data from two models of director training are presented here. The first model was a one-year, six semester hour management and leadership training program providing 100 contact hours to training participants. The training included a week-long residential institute, two weekend retreats, and mentoring assistance in implementing a Program Improvement Plan. The second model of director training was a master's degree program conducted over a 24-month period with 32 semester hours of graduate credit. This model included weekly class sessions as well as technical assistance provided by a field supervisor.

Evaluation data from the two models provide rich evidence of the powerful effect of professional development on directors' perceptions of competence as well as improved organizational climate and classroom teaching practices. As the following discussion will illustrate, larger investments in longer training programs lead to even greater gains in program quality.

*Even a one-year training program boosts directors' confidence and positively impacts program quality.*

### Improvements in Directors' Perceptions of Competence

- Directors who participated in a year-long training program reported significant gains ( $p < .05$ ) in their level of perceived competence in all 24 knowledge and skill areas measured by the Training Needs Assessment Survey. Differences in pretest and posttest assessments were found to be highly significant in 19 of the 24 areas measured.
- Results from the master's degree model were even more remarkable. An analysis of directors' perceptions of competence revealed an increase in the mean scores in all 30 areas measured on the Training Needs Assessment Survey. These results were found to be highly significant in 25 of the 30 areas measured ( $p < .01$ ).

These findings demonstrate that management training for child care center directors contributes to increased feelings of self-efficacy and competence. Even a one-year training program boosts directors' confidence and impacts program quality.

### Improvements in Organizational Climate

- *The Early Childhood Work Environment Survey* was administered to the teaching and support staff of the participants in both the year-long and master's degree programs to measure their perceptions of ten dimensions of organizational climate (collegiality, opportunities for professional growth, supervisor support, clarity, reward system, decision-making structure, goal consensus, task orientation, physical setting, and innovativeness) as well as staff's perceived level of current and desired decision-making influence. Evaluation data from the year-long training revealed an increase in positive perceptions in nine of the ten dimensions measured. Improvements in one area (professional growth) were found to be significant ( $p < .01$ ). Further, overall climate improved significantly between the pretest and posttest administrations ( $p < .01$ ). This was not expected given the short duration of the training. Additional analysis of programs that had sent more than one administrator to the training revealed significant improvements in the areas of professional growth and clarity as well.

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- Evaluation data from the master's degree program show even stronger results. As a result of the training program, improvements in organizational climate were found in all ten dimensions. Improvements in four of the ten dimensions were found to be statistically significant. Significant increases in staff's level of desired decision making were also noted.

These findings corroborate the belief that director training over longer periods of time with sustained support lead to higher quality programs. In this instance, improved quality of work life for child care staff is the indicator of quality. Quality of work life for staff has been found to correlate with other indices of quality in early childhood programs.

### **Improvements in Classroom Quality**

Improvements in program quality were also found at the classroom level in both the one-year and two-year training models.

- When classroom observations were conducted (using a modified version of the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Scale) in programs participating in the year-long training, improvements in classroom quality were noted in all four areas (interactions among staff and children; curriculum; health, safety, and nutrition; and physical environment). In the area of health, safety, and nutrition as well as overall quality these improvements were statistically significant. Improvements at the classroom level were not anticipated because the training was focused on administrators rather than classroom teachers. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that a “trickle down” of information from directors to classroom teachers occurred even in the one-year training model.
- More remarkable, in the evaluation of the two-year training model statistically significant differences were found in all four subscales of classroom quality—interactions among staff and children, curriculum, health, safety, and nutrition, and physical environment, as well as overall classroom quality.

*The greater the investment of training dollars, the better the outcomes for programs.*

Director training makes a difference in the lives of children enrolled in early childhood programs. Evaluation data from these one-year and two-year programs provide direct evidence that the amount of training is tied to better outcomes for directors and their programs. The greater the investment of training dollars, the better the outcomes for programs. At a time when the Director Credential movement is taking off and discussions are focused on broadening professional development opportunities for early childhood administrators, the evaluation data summarized above provide strong evidence of the need for continued effort in this area. Supporting directors as the gatekeepers to quality is indeed a worthwhile endeavor.

For more information about the Center for Early Childhood Leadership or to order copies of these two reports, please call (800) 443-5522, ext. 5132 or visit our website ([www.nl.edu/cecl](http://www.nl.edu/cecl)).

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