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ABSTRACT

Research concerning the Child Development Associate (CDA) program at the Pennsylvania State University aims to define more carefully the characteristics of the adult learners enrolled in CDA training, delineate the characteristics and process of training, and broaden the scope of outcome variables studied. To address this third aim, a series of studies conducted over a period of 4 years has focused on the effects of training on a range of teacher characteristics: teacher beliefs, dogmatism, locus of control, self-concept, self-confidence, educational aspirations, professional involvement, child development knowledge, early childhood methods, CDA behaviors, and cognitive flexibility. Results of these six studies show that (1) CDA trainees gain specific knowledge of child development and early childhood methods; (2) trainee educational aspirations appear to be raised by participation; (3) trainees are more actively involved professionally and seek professional growth; (4) trainees demonstrate increased self-confidence, and (5) cognitively oriented, child-centered beliefs increase during the first year of participation and slightly decrease during the second year. It is suggested that slight differences in percentages between these results and those of national CDA surveys indicate that training may be enhanced by the actual assessment and credentialing process or by the subsequent recognition credentialled CDA's attain. (AS)

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What Does Research Tell Us About CDA Training?¹

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The Child Development Associate (CDA) program embodies many innovative concepts for training as well as for the assessment and credentialing of early childhood personnel. Indeed, in assessing the impact of the CDA "process" on the individuals involved, it is often difficult to separate out the effects of the formal assessment and credentialing procedures from those of the training that brought the person to "readiness," and both from the selection factors that brought the individuals into the program in the first place. It is to the effects of training that this report is directed.

Few studies are available that address either the process or outcomes of CDA training. CDA training is going on in some form throughout the United States. Over 300 institutions of higher education are now, or have been, providers of training. The federal government early on provided funds for the development of a variety of training models, and, even within a single institution, programs may differ in systematic ways. It seems strange then that so little is known and documented about the CDA training process.

Even stranger is the lack of solid data about the effects of CDA training on the individuals involved. The few published studies have focused upon such variables as the success of

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trainees in obtaining the CDA credential (cf. Brawley, Gerstein, & Watkins, 1981) and the acquisition of child development knowledge (Pettygrove, 1981). Little is known about the impact of training on a wider range of potentially more important variables (Peters & Sutton, in press). Further, most of the studies that appear in the literature have involved relatively small samples of self-selected trainees from a single program or model. Few have provided adequate control or comparison groups. These weaknesses have limited the possibilities for either relating process variables to outcomes or generalizing the results more broadly.

The research being conducted at Penn State has sought to improve upon this situation. Our aims have been to:

1. Define more carefully the characteristics of the adult learners enrolled in CDA training;
2. Delineate the characteristics and process of training; and
3. Broaden the scope of outcome variables studied.

The long range intent is to be able to predict success, improve training, and demonstrate effectiveness.

It is to the third aim--broadening the scope of the outcome variables--that we turn now.

Outcomes

The CDA assessment procedure addresses behavior in 6 competency domains and 13 functional areas. The assumption is that those who can DO are competent teachers--at least in their current situation with their current children, etc.. Yet,

analysis of Head Start, CDA, and a wide range of other early childhood education materials suggests a broader set of teacher characteristics that "excellent" early childhood teachers should have.² These include: flexibility, the ability to adapt to the needs of individual children and parents, self-directedness, the understanding and adoption of a consistent belief system about children's learning and development, a child-centered approach toward teaching, a positive self-image as a person and as a teacher, and a sense of professionalism and professional growth. The teacher demonstrating these characteristics is likely to be successful in ALL situations.

In a series of studies conducted over the last four years, we have sought to determine the effects of training on this range of teacher characteristics. We have attempted to design studies with sufficient control to allow reasonable attribution to the effects of training over and above such other factors as self-selection. The vast majority of our data have been collected prior to CDA assessment and credentialing. Let me briefly summarize our findings to date.

Summary of Results

Table 1 summarizes the result of six studies. In essence, our data show that:

1. CDA trainees gain specific knowledge of child development and early childhood methods and that such knowledge is reflected in classroom behavior. These results are manifest on paper-and-pencil assessments (Llewellyn, 1983; Prudhoe, 1983), through classroom observations (Prudhoe, 1983), and through

Table 1

Summary of Study Samples and Results

Study	Sample	# CDA Programs	Variables	Results
Peters & Sutton (In press)	N=55 CDA N=44 Undergraduates	7	Teacher beliefs Dogmatism Locus of control Self-concept Self-confidence Educational aspirations	Increased child-centered, cognitive beliefs. Increased educational aspirations. Increased self-confidence. Improved performance in several areas of classroom performance. No significant differences in CDA's or undergraduates in beliefs, dogmatism, locus of control, or self-concept.
Sutton & Peters (Note 1)- (Longitudinal replication)	N=9 CDA	3	Teacher beliefs	Increased child-centered, cognitive beliefs.
Peters (1984)	N=108 CDA N=70 Head Start control	18	Teacher beliefs Self-confidence Educational aspirations Professional involvement	CDA's more than control involved in educational activities. CDA's more than control professionally involved. CDA's stronger than control in child-centered, cognitive beliefs.
Llewellyn (1983)	N=15	1	Child development knowledge Early childhood methods	Increased knowledge of child development and early education methods.
Prudhoe (1983)	N=8 Traditional N=8 CDA only N=8 CDA & traditional	1	Child development knowledge CDA behaviors	Increased knowledge and improved classroom competence in some, but not all, functional areas. CDA and traditional significantly better.
Sutton (1983)	N=151	13	Teacher beliefs Cognitive flexibility	Teacher beliefs related to routinization, to closeness of supervision, and to complexity of work with people, data, and things.

trainee self-reports (Peters & Sutton, in press). The gains are greater when theory and practice are judiciously combined (Prudhoe, 1983).

2. CDA trainee educational aspirations appear to be raised by participation in the program (Peters & Sutton, in press), and this is manifested in more direct involvement in current educational involvement (Peters, 1984). In our most recent study, for example, we found that there were no differences in current educational level between CDA trainees and a comparable sample of non-CDA trained Head Start teachers and aides, but the former were more likely to be enrolled in certificate or degree programs of colleges or universities. Further, participation in such higher education ventures was likely to increase with time in the CDA training program. The CDA trainees and their Head Start comparison group did not differ, however, in their predictions of their future educational attainments. In other words, the data from this most recent study suggest that there are no differences between Head Start aides and teachers in their current level of education or their aspirations, but that those involved in CDA training are more likely to be engaged in actions to accomplish their goals.

3. CDA trainees are more actively involved professionally and seek professional growth (attend conferences, read journals, etc.) than do the Head Start controls, and such professional involvement increases with time in the CPA training programs. CDA's begin to think and act professionally.

4. CDA trainees have increased self-confidence as teachers based upon self-reports (Peters, 1984; Peters & Sutton, in press). However, when looked against the Head Start control group and across time in training, an interesting picture emerges. It appears that entry in the CDA program initially depresses self-confidence ($\bar{X} = 24.1$, one month into the program, as compared to controls, $\bar{X} = 25.3$, and second-year trainees, $\bar{X} = 26.1$), but that this is restored by the end of the initial year, ($\bar{X} = 25.6$). Second-year trainees were found to have consistently and significantly higher self-confidence levels than their Head Start controls.

No significant changes in the control group's self-confidence were noted over time.

5. By far, the most robust of our findings to date have been in the area of cognitively oriented, child-centered beliefs. Such beliefs have been found to increase with time in CDA training during the first year and slightly decrease during the second year (Peters & Sutton, in press). This cross-sectional finding was replicated in an 18-month longitudinal study (Sutton & Peters, 1983). CDA trainees were found to be significantly more likely to endorse such beliefs than Head Start controls (Peters, 1984), both initially and after training, and showed a trend toward greater endorsement than undergraduates completing a four-year early childhood teacher training program (Peters & Sutton, in press). Adherence to such beliefs was found to be related to specific characteristics of the CDA training program (low routinization and supervision and high levels of complexity)

(Sutton, 1983). That such trainees more strongly endorse child-centered, cognitively oriented beliefs at the outset of training clearly points to a self-selection factor for those entering the program.

Discussion

We at Penn State have gained considerable experience with CDA training over the past several year. We have trained close to 300 CDA's and currently have 175 CDA trainees in our programs. We have incorporated CDA training in our undergraduate program and have involved CDA trainees from almost all of HHS Region III CDA Training programs in our research.

Our research findings corroborate our 'gut' reactions. Our data are consistent with those of the national survey of CDA's and/or with those of smaller studies conducted by others. CDA training has made a difference in the lives of those involved. CDA's are better, more self-confident teachers who view themselves as professionals. They seek additional professional growth through formal educational programs.

Additionally, they have a better understanding of child development, a coherent set of beliefs about learning and development, and endorse child-centered approaches toward early childhood education.

In short, those entering the CDA process, completing training, and getting credentialed are likely to have the observed competence and personal attributes of excellent early childhood teachers. Some of the "success" of the program is likely due to self-selection. Directors and Education

Coordinators encourage their "best" aides to enter the process. Those who volunteer to enter training do not necessarily have higher educational attainment or aspirations, or greater self-confidence than those who have not been offered the opportunity. They may, however, endorse more strongly cognitively oriented, child-centered beliefs.

Training itself does affect both behavior and beliefs. It also seems to "activate" professional development activities.

Slight differences in percentages between our results and those of the national CDA surveys suggest that the process is maybe further enhanced by the actual assessment and credentialing process or by the subsequent recognition credentialed CDA's attain.

The combined results of selection, training, and credentialing work together to produce a cadre of "excellent" teachers for our young children.

Footnotes

1. Paper presented as part of CDA Preconference Session, Annual Meeting of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Los Angeles, California, November 8, 1984.
2. The CDA functional area indicators get at these characteristics as well, but, with some exceptions, the characteristics cut across functional areas and represent a different "factor" structure.

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