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ABSTRACT

The Head Start Teaching Center is a federally funded national demonstration project designed to test the efficacy of participatory training for staff in all components of Head Start services. The New England Teaching Center is designed to provide intensive training during a 3- to 5-day period of residence. Each Teaching Center conducts a regular independent evaluation; the New England Center's evaluation plan consisted of two components: (1) a formative evaluation of the program's development during the planning year (1992-93); and (2) an outcome evaluation of the impact of training during the implementation years (1993-97). The subjects were 73 trainees, and 70 individuals participating in the comparison group "treatment"--a stress reduction workshop. Analysis of the outcomes for training year 1 (1993-94) indicates significant differences were found between the comparison and training subjects in terms of the training's impact; compared to the control group, both trainees and their supervisors reported gains in trainees' knowledge, skills, and expertise after completing this program. (MOK)

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Head Start Teaching Center:

Evaluation of a New Approach to Head Start Staff Development

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Abstract

This paper provides a description of the program and outcome evaluation of the New England Head Start Teaching Center, one of fourteen funded nationally to study alternative approaches to Head Start staff development. Head Start Teaching Centers are a national demonstration project created to provide participatory training in all Head Start component areas within the context of an exemplary Head Start program. Each Teaching Center employs an independent evaluation project. The New England Teaching Center is designed to provide intensive training during a 3 to 5 day period of residence at the Teaching Center. The purpose of this paper is to briefly describe the Head Start Teaching Center model and its implementation in the New England region. Additionally, the outcome evaluation plan and preliminary results from the first year of training delivered by the New England Teaching Center will be presented and discussed.

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Introduction

The Head Start Teaching Center is a federally funded national demonstration project designed to test the efficacy of participatory training for staff in all components of Head Start services. When the 5 year project was initiated by the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1992, 14 Head Start Teaching Centers were funded including at least one in each Head Start region. As required by ACYF, each Teaching Center project includes an independent evaluation to ascertain the effectiveness of training.

The 14 Head Start Teaching Centers are individual Head Start programs deemed by ACYF to provide exemplary Head Start services in all component areas and to be capable of providing quality training to visiting Head Start staff. Head Start Teaching Centers are expected to provide training that is "participatory in nature, relying on observation, guided practice and immediate feedback" (Federal Register, 1992) in each of the four major Head Start components: education, health, social services, and parent involvement. The Teaching Center concept is based on the teaching hospital model in medicine that provides quality medical services to patients and training to visiting doctors.

The 14 Head Start Teaching Centers funded by ACYF represent diverse approaches to implementing the Teaching Center model. Approaches range from the training of trainers to training of individual Head Start direct service or administrative staff. While some programs provide for training a relatively small number of persons with ongoing follow-up activities over an extended period, others consist of 3 to 5 day training sessions without any follow-up training and therefore have the potential to provide training for several hundred of trainees in a given year. Evaluation data collected over the 5 year demonstration project should add considerably to our knowledge of the efficacy of these different approaches to participatory training in early childhood education.

The New England Head Start Teaching Center

The New England Head Start Teaching Center (NEHSTC), designed and implemented by CHILD, Inc., a Head Start grantee located in Rhode Island, provides intensive training during a relatively short (3 to 5 day) period of residence at the Teaching Center. Typical training topics or "tracks" include: cultural diversity, individualizing services for teachers and family workers, home visitor training, home visiting program development for Head Start directors, food safety and sanitation, menu planning, and child-initiated activities.

Each training track offered by the NEHSTC is composed of four types of learning activities: didactic, group discussion, simulation/role play, and participatory (typically observation and "hands-on" guided practice). The relative amount of time trainees spend in each of these four types of learning activities varies from track to track. Training at the NEHSTC is conducted by the Teaching Center Project Coordinator, a staff member hired to coordinate the project, and other component coordinators (e.g., Education, Parent Involvement, Health, and Social Services) as well as the Executive Director. Other Head Start staff assist with the training through serving as "training partners" during participatory sessions. Training partners are direct service staff (e.g. classroom teachers, home visitors, cooks) of the Head Start Teaching Center who facilitate the observational and guided practice training activities.

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation plan for the NEHSTC consists of two major components:

1. a formative evaluation of the development of the NEHSTC during the planning year (1992-93). The purpose was to examine the process of developing the teaching center including management issues, design of training strategies and topics, preparation of staff for training roles, and evaluation of pilot training. Data were collected from several sources including minutes of all planning meetings, observations of pilot training, self-reports from the teaching center staff, and summary evaluations of the pilot training provided by the trainees.

2. an outcome evaluation to assess the impact of training during the implementation years of NEHSTC training (1993-97). The outcome evaluation uses a nonequivalent control group design with information collected prior to training, and 1 and 6 months after training. Comparison subjects are drawn from Head Start agencies in the New England region that have not participated in NEHSTC training. Training and comparison subjects and their supervisors provide information via mailed surveys that were specifically designed to assess knowledge, skills, and competencies in the training content areas. On-site observations of randomly selected trainees occur 6 months after training as an independent assessment of the impact of training (see Table 1).

Results

Demographics

Trainees. During the 1993-94 training year, 73 trainees participated in the NEHSTC training and 70 individuals participated in the comparison group "treatment" - a stress reduction workshop. Of the 73 potential subjects in the training group, 51 (69.86%) completed the evaluation component; of the 70 potential comparisons, 31 (44.29%) completed the evaluation component. Analyses indicated that no significant differences existed between individuals who did and did not complete all portions of the evaluation component on the seven personal and five employee characteristics

analyzed. Further analyses included only those trainees (51) and comparisons (31) with complete evaluation data.

No significant differences were found between the training and comparison group members who completed the evaluation component on personal characteristics (sex, age, marital status, ethnicity, education, income, number of children) or employee characteristics (current Head Start position, year in current position, total years in Head Start, total years working with children in non-Head Start positions, similar training). In general, the trainees and comparisons were white females between the ages of 25 and 45 who were married with annual family incomes of \$30,000 or less. The majority had some college or a B.S. degree and had worked in Head Start from 3 to 5 years.

Program. Significant differences were found between the comparison and training subjects on two out of the six program characteristics analyzed. Individuals in the comparison group came from programs that served a more urban population (85% of the comparisons; 66% of the training group) and were higher in rates of compliance with Head Start performance standards (100% of the comparisons; 59% of the training group). Other than these two differences, the trainees and comparisons came from similar programs in terms of the average number of children served (216 for trainees; 223 for comparisons), average number of center-based (190 for trainees; 208 for comparisons) and home-based slots (25 for trainees; 15 for comparisons); and number of sites (8 for both).

Implementation of training

Nature of training. Information collected during training year 1 (1993-94) indicated that the NEHSTC is successful in capitalizing on the power of the teaching center model by including ample participatory training. The average percent of training time allocated to participatory activities is 37% with 23% didactic, 33% discussion, and 6% simulation (see Table 2).

Quality of training. Both trainee ratings and independent observations completed by the evaluation team suggest the training is high quality. Overall, trainees rated the content of training as relevant and useful, the trainers as knowledgeable and organized, and the “laboratory” nature of the participatory training as invaluable (see Tables 3 and 4). The evaluation team provided high ratings for the overall quality of the various learning activities. On a 9-point scale, the ratings provided by the evaluation team were 7.4 for participatory activities, 8.0 for didactic, and 7.7 for discussion.

Outcomes: Impact of training

Analysis of the outcomes for training year 1(1993-94) indicate that the NEHSTC training had a significant impact. A 2 (group) X 3 (time) repeated measures analysis of covariance, using the self ratings collected prior to training as the covariate, indicated a significant difference between the groups over time, Wilks' Lambda $F(2, 91) = 8.0, p = .001$. Table 5 shows the adjusted least square means. A Tukey Test indicated significant gains from pretraining to posttraining (1 and 6 months) were reported by trainees but not comparisons. At 1 month and 6 months after training, trainees reported significant gains in knowledge, skills, and expertise. The comparisons did not report significant gains from pretraining to 1 and 6 months.

A similar pattern was found in the analysis of supervisor ratings. A 2 (group) X 3 (time) repeated measures analysis of covariance, using the supervisor pretraining ratings as the covariate, indicated a significant difference between the groups over time, Wilks' Lambda $F(2,78) = 10.1, p = .001$. Table 6 shows the adjusted least square means for the supervisor ratings of trainees and comparisons. At both 1 month and 6 months after training, supervisors rated the trainees as having significant increases in knowledge, skills, and expertise. For the comparisons, the 1 month rating was significantly higher than the pretraining and 6 month ratings. However there was no difference between the pretraining and 6 month ratings.

These results are based on the 51 training and 31 comparison subjects that participated in the evaluation project during training year 1 (1993-94). No firm conclusions can be drawn until data from all training years are collected and analyzed. However, the analyses from training year 1 does indicate that the NEHSTC's training produces significant gains. As compared to similar Head Start employees who did not participate in training, both trainees and their supervisors reported significant gains in trainees' knowledge, skills, and expertise after NEHSTC training.

Effects on Host Program

The formative evaluation conducted during the planning year (1992-93) revealed several impacts on the host program and the staff participating in delivering training. Although the staff reported some frustrations, more satisfactions were noted. The reported satisfactions clustered in three areas. The trainers noted that the process of planning and delivering the training caused them to upgrade their own service delivery and enhance their own skills. They also reported an increased sense of staff cohesion and dedication to Head Start. The trainers also reported they experienced great satisfaction with the receptiveness and enthusiasm of the trainees. The frustrations related to lack of time for planning and preparing the training during work time and the need to narrow the format to meet the training time and logistical restrictions. Staff also voiced concerns about being "visited" and evaluated.

Table 1

Outcome Evaluation Design

Data Source	Group	
	Training Groups	Comparison Group
1. Pre-training data		
- trainee self-report	X	X
- supervisor report	X	X
2. Evaluation of training sessions		
- observation	X	
- records review	X	
- trainee report	X	
3. Evaluation of training outcomes		
- trainee self-report		
1 month	X	X
6 months	X	X
- supervisor report		
1 month	X	X
6 months	X	X
- observation in trainee program		
6 months	X	

Table 2

Percent of Time Allocated to Different Learning Activities for 93-94 Trainings

Track	Learning Activities			
	Didactic	Discussion	Simulation	Participatory
Celebrating Diversity	26	49	0	25
Food Safety	26	19	15	41
Individualizing Services/Social Serv	17	24	9	50
Individualizing Services/Education	19	29	6	46
Child Initiated	32	32	10	27
Menu Planning	22	50	3	25
Home Visitor	22	29	2	46
Average	23	33	6	37

Note. Numbers in table are percentages of time allocated to different learning activities.

Table 3

Participant Evaluations for HSTC Training Sessions for 93-94

Overall Rating of Training Sessions			
Track	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Celebrating Diversity (n=18)	9.6	8.7	9.3
Food Safety (n=8)	9.8	8.4	7.9
Individualizing Services/ Social Serv (n=8)	8.0	8.1	7.9
Individualizing Services/ Education (n=18)	7.7	8.8	8.1
Child Initiated (n=18)	7.9	7.3	7.8
Menu Planning (n=7)	9.9	6.4	8.7
Average (n=77)	8.6	8.1	8.3

Note. Numbers in table are mean ratings based on a 10 point scale with 1 representing "not worthwhile" and 10 representing "very worthwhile".

Table 4

Participant Evaluations for HSTC Trainers for 93-94

Overall Rating of Trainers					
Track	knowledge	organization	enthusiasm	AV use	discussion
Celebrating Diversity (n=18)	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.8	5.0
Food Safety (n=8)	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.6	4.4
Individualizing Services/ Social Serv (n=8)	4.8	4.4	4.1	3.7	4.4
Individualizing Services/ Education (n=18)	4.8	4.8	4.7	4.4	4.8
Child Initiated (n=18)	4.6	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.7
Menu Planning (n=7)	5.0	4.7	5.0	4.9	5.0
Average (n=77)	4.8	4.8	4.7	4.6	4.8

Note. Numbers in table are mean ratings based on a 5 point scale with 1 representing "inadequate" and 5 representing "excellent".

Table 5

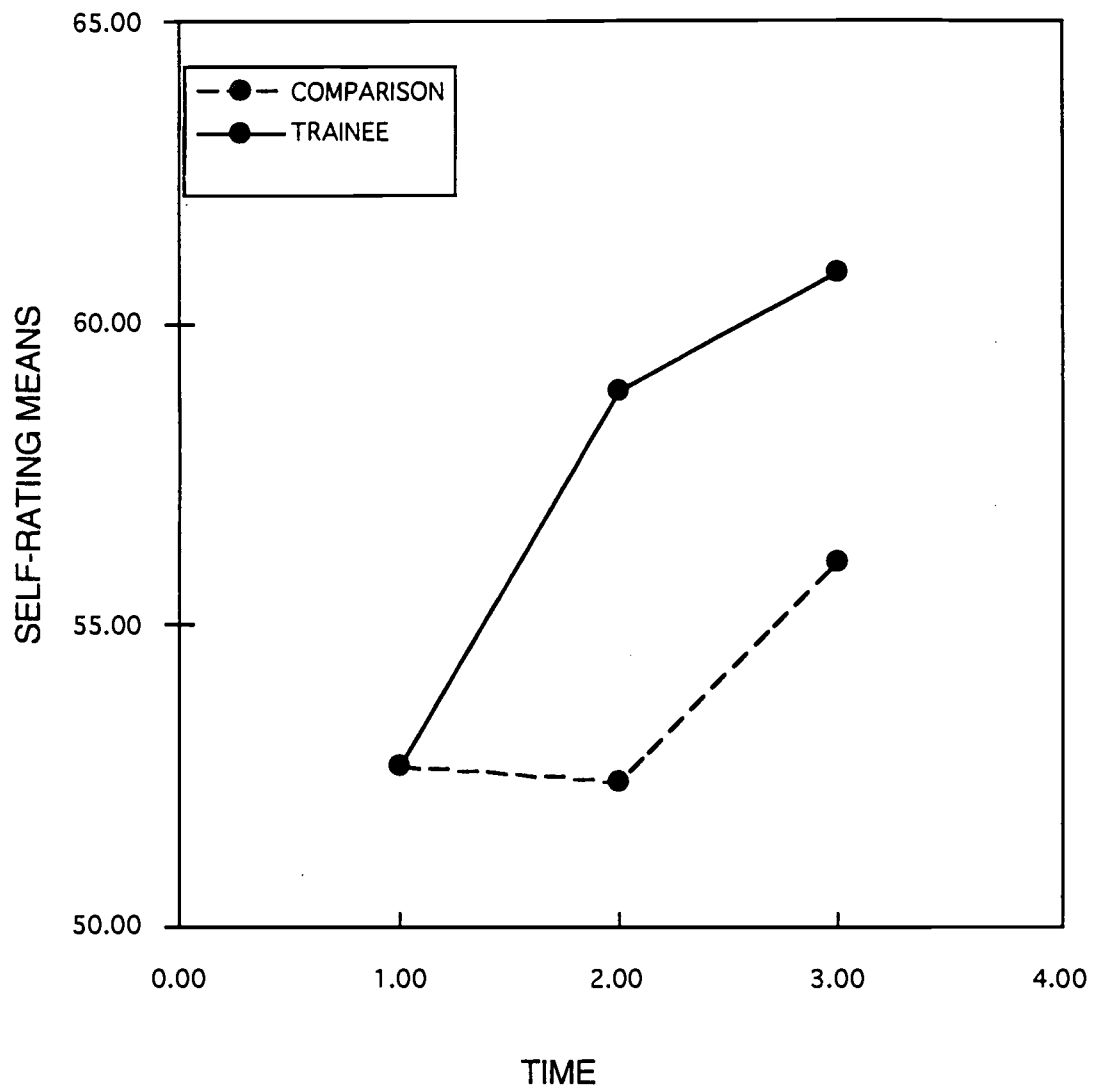
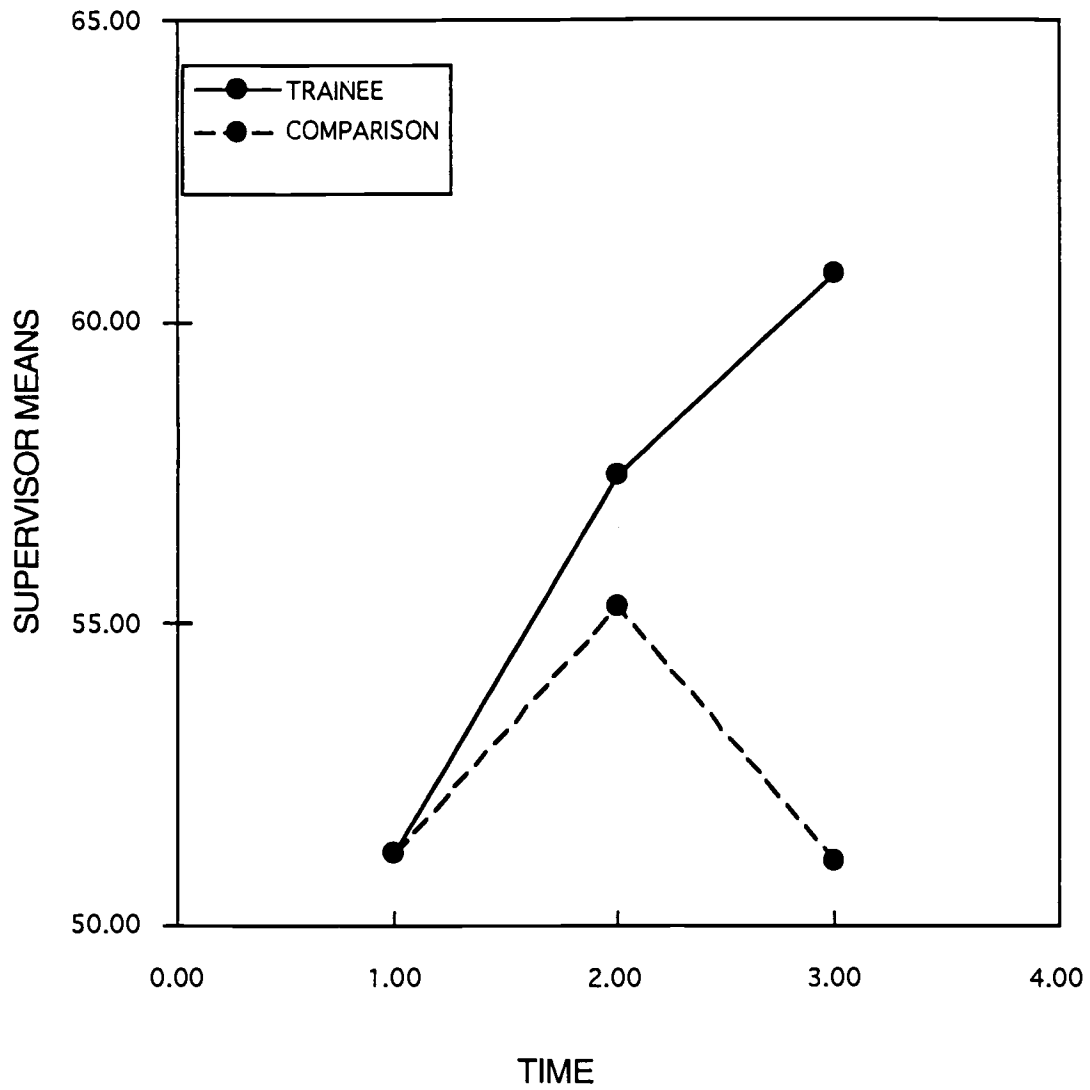
Adjusted Means for Trainee and Comparison Groups-
Self Ratings (1993-1994)

Table 6

Adjusted Means for Trainee and Comparison Groups-
Supervisor Ratings (1993-1994)



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