

VIII. SKILL BUILDING AND TRANSFER OF LEARNING

Introduction

Since its inception in 1986, the OCWTP has implemented a variety of strategies to promote transfer of learning and skill development in the child welfare work force. These strategies have included Core training for supervisors and managers on coaching and on-the-job training skills; training for trainers in incorporating transfer-of-learning strategies into their workshops; and, most recently, the multi-session Skill-Building Certificate Training (SBCT) Programs, which address skill development by incorporating in-agency coaching and feedback for trainees as a primary training delivery strategy.

In the OCWTP developmental work plan for 2001–2003, these skill-building efforts will be continued through two major program initiatives:

- strengthening the capacity of county child welfare agencies, in collaboration with the OCWTP, to promote skill building and transfer of learning
- developing and implementing a continuum of OCWTP training activities that promote the mastery and application of critical job skills

This portion of the statewide developmental needs assessment provides information to inform the development of these two program components. The assessment addresses the following two questions:

- 1) What is currently being done in Ohio's county agencies, and in comparable child welfare organizations across North America, to ensure that workers and supervisors are trained in critical child welfare practice skills?
- 2) What types of programs, activities, and training strategies would help Ohio's child welfare work force acquire and master the necessary skills to do their jobs?

A variety of data collection methods were used during this assessment, including literature reviews, focus groups, survey questionnaires, personal interviews with PCSA executive directors or their designees (all described in Section II,

Methodology), and the collection and review of information from eight key informants from child welfare systems in Alaska, Arkansas, California, Kentucky, Michigan, Oklahoma, Ontario, and Pennsylvania.

Part I: What Is Currently Being Done to Ensure That Workers Are Trained and Skilled?

Literature Reviews and National Key Informants

The information summarized below was compiled from national key informants, a review of the OCWTP 2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced Report, and review of the SBCT program's 1999 and 2001 Final Reports.

National Key Informants

Little was found in the national child welfare practice or training literature that specifically addressed skill-building strategies in child welfare competencies. Several key informants from child welfare training systems in the United States and Canada were interviewed to learn more about their skill-building and transfer-of-learning initiatives. Even though these initiatives varied in nature and scope, most agencies were experimenting with both distance-learning technology and on-site coaching of training participants. Some were quite far ahead and proficient in their use of these technologies, while others were in the initial stages of development.

Use of Technology

Alaska, California, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ontario: These programs reported using video conferencing and some computer-based strategies for Core training, with variable degrees of success. Most informants reported that distance-learning technologies did not eliminate the need for classroom workshops. Alaska reported increased satisfaction with distance learning, as well as increased interaction between participants and the trainer, when there was an opportunity for face-to-face interaction before attempting virtual classroom sessions. Alaska facilitates this by having the same trainer and training cohort group for all four Core trainings. Each cohort group attends the first two workshops in a traditional classroom setting and then completes the remaining two Core workshops via video conferencing.

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The University of Kentucky requires at least 20 percent of any workshop to include face-to-face contact between students and the instructor. Ontario also uses a similar "blended learning" approach, whereby participants attend some workshops in classrooms and some online via the Internet.

Most key informants reported using an enterprise-level platform, such as Blackboard.com, when conducting their computer-based workshops. These platforms can help institutions (traditionally, universities) manage a wide range of online courses. They can be used to administer, grade, and track tests and assessments; post announcements, assignments, and resources; and facilitate online discussions.

Michigan: The Office of Professional Development at the Michigan Family Independence Agency worked with a vendor to provide general supervisory and management courses online. These are accessed through the state's intranet computer system. Michigan has also established its own video conferencing system, conveyed through a land-based phone line that allows for "real time" interaction among the trainer and participants. Michigan also developed a one-week "consultation camp" for trainers to increase their comfort with the system. At the camp, trainers convert their classroom presentations into the distance-learning format and practice using the equipment.

Also in collaboration with a vendor, Michigan developed a performance management system, designed to allow participants to complete learning needs assessments and develop individual learning plans online. Caseworkers complete a self-assessment from a list of competencies, and write personal learning objectives by either selecting pre-set objectives or creating their own. For each competency selected, the program can link caseworkers to developmental resources that include workshops offered, books they can reserve, and web-based courses in which they can enroll. Another link allows workers to view course descriptions, schedules, etc. At the end of a year, caseworkers complete a self-assessment of their objectives and develop a new learning plan for the up-coming year.

Michigan's supervisors and caseworkers use their performance management system to complete employee appraisals online. Management generates reports, and the training program uses the system to track training needs. The number of courses requested is monitored and used to create training schedules and calendars.

New Worker Training, Mentoring, and Coaching

Several state and provincial child welfare training programs have initiated new worker training programs that include formalized mentoring and/or coaching components.

Ontario: In Ontario, each local child welfare agency is responsible for officially authorizing (i.e., certifying) its new workers after assessing their application of Core training to practice. Ontario's program design concentrated on transfer-of-learning strategies. Interventions included strengthening the involvement of agency supervisors, coaches, and/or mentors in supporting on-the-job application of knowledge and skills gained in both traditional and virtual classrooms. Although supervisors were trained by the program to perform their coaching/mentoring role, huge influxes of new workers and significant staff turnover made it difficult for supervisors to work on transfer-of-learning activities. In response, agencies have developed several models to support mentoring and coaching, ranging from a generic model with a supervisor or senior worker acting as mentor to a training team approach, where new workers are mentored and coached in an agency's training unit and then reassigned to a regular unit when training is completed. The training program is also addressing the lack of supervisory support for TOL by sending trainers into the field to assist in coaching and mentoring new staff. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has published descriptions of these models, with their advantages and disadvantages, to help each agency develop a model that matches its needs.

Ontario plans to develop a Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) that will be used to assess competencies in new workers who are likely to have developed many of the competencies through prior work, life experiences, and prior education, enabling them to be diverted from unneeded training.

Kentucky: Kentucky reported using senior workers in the counties as field-training specialists, with responsibility for mentoring new staff. Mentors were appointed by their counties, and received four days of training, including a review of best practice issues, and their roles and responsibilities as field-training specialists. The program was never implemented statewide. According to one informant, there continue to be neither incentives nor compensation for mentors to assume these additional responsibilities, without which success is uncertain. Kentucky has also used university-based staff to encourage child welfare professionals to complete their MSW degrees, by reducing barriers to MSW program enrollment, strategizing with agency managers to reduce workloads so students could attend classes, and providing advising services to students.

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Arkansas: Arkansas also uses university staff to mentor new caseworkers. Each caseworker participates in weekly personal sessions with mentors for a year. The mentors observe the workers during home visits, review case records, and coach workers or arrange for coaching by other professionals. During the mentoring period, the new worker's computer work (e.g., risk assessments, and case plans) is closely monitored. Mentors are alerted when problems are identified, and they work with the new employee to improve. The mentoring program has been in operation for six years. Arkansas reports it has had positive results, but does not know if it has made any impact on retention and turnover rates.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma has developed a structured mentoring program to help new caseworkers transfer learning from the classroom to the job. The new worker's supervisor assigns an experienced worker to mentor a newly hired staff member throughout a five-week training process. The new worker initially accompanies the mentor on various work assignments. As the new worker progresses through Core training, the mentor observes the worker conducting interviews, supervising visits, making foster home placements, and conducting other casework activities, and provides the trainee with feedback and coaching as necessary. According to the informant, however, the mentoring program has not been as successful as hoped. Often, mentors did not have enough experience or skill to mentor, and there was no incentive for mentoring. Their caseloads were not reduced, and there was no monetary compensation for their time and effort.

In addition to mentoring, the Oklahoma program requires intensive supervision of new workers. Supervisors are responsible for assigning a mentor, checking to make sure assignments are completed, arranging for shadowing experiences, scheduling weekly conferences, and monitoring assignment of caseloads to new workers. New workers are assigned one-third of a caseload when they complete Core training, another one-third one month after completion of Core, and the remaining one-third two months after completing Core.

Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania child welfare training program also reported struggling with TOL initiatives. They found that county-level supervisors often were not able to provide educational supervision to workers after completion of training. The Pennsylvania program has recently hired professional staff to provide on-site coaching. These TOL coaches will each carry a caseload of post-Core trainees. They will help new employees with TOL activities in the field and will work with supervisors to enhance their ability to coach their workers on an ongoing basis. To reduce the likelihood of resistance to working with coaches from outside the county, the TOL coaches will spend the first year establishing relationships in the county.

TOL Activities

Several national informants reported having incorporated transfer-of-learning activities into Core training, with requirements that participants complete these activities as part of the training. Each of the jurisdictions had developed TOL manuals that included suggested activities, assignments, and additional resources for review by new workers. Many of these were adaptations of Ohio's TOOL Manual. In California and Oklahoma, supervisors' signatures were required when each activity was completed, and completion of activities was a requirement of the Core training process.

SBCT Final Report

In 1997, the OCWTP developed the Skill-Building Certificate Training (SBCT) programs, which offered a "hands-on" approach to learning for experienced caseworkers and supervisors. SBCT uses experiential workshop formats that incorporate a variety of skill-building learning strategies, including self-directed learning activities, completion of homework projects, on-site coaching by a trainer, and case-based learning exercises. Supervisor SBCT programs are nine months in length, while the caseworker programs are six months long.

Evaluations of each SBCT pilot have been completed and results compiled in two final reports, submitted to the OCWTP Steering Committee and ODJFS in 1999 and 2001. Both reports indicated that SBCT programs successfully increased participants' knowledge and skills. Directors, supervisors, and community partners, as well as the participants themselves, observed improved performance that was directly attributable to participation in the SBCT program.

In the SBCT pilots, participants were asked "What did you learn?" and "Were you able to apply what you learned?" Participants were also asked to comment on the completion of action plans during follow-up sessions, which were held two and four months after completion of the SBCT program.

On all measures, participants reported they had gained new knowledge and skill and had applied these on the job. SBCT participants further reported improved use of unit-level outcome measures, the use of new strategies for engaging clients, and increased comfort in taking risks when applying and practicing new skills. Most significant were the comments from participants' supervisors or administrators, and from community partners, who had observed increased confidence and improved performance by participants during staff meetings, consultations, and courtroom appearances.

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The most significant benefits of the SBCT programs were attributable to required on-site coaching by program trainers and the use of personal action plans by participants. The on-site coaching was critical in assisting participants in applying new skills. Participants, their administrators and supervisors, and trainers unanimously reported the value of this component and suggested increasing the number of coaching sessions. Participants in the supervisory programs also reported that action plans, used throughout the nine-month program, were highly beneficial in helping them apply new skills during unit meetings and in one-on-one supervisory conferences with their staff.

Initial apprehension about the six- and nine-month duration of SBCT programs was dispelled when participants recognized that the program's training format really did facilitate their development and mastery of new skills. Participants found it beneficial to discuss their application attempts from the previous month with the trainers and their training cohort group. Each SBCT program provided follow-up sessions, during which participants discussed and tried to resolve barriers to skill transfer. Participants in each pilot requested that these follow-up sessions be continued beyond what had been originally planned in the SBCT program.

Recently, the Northwest Ohio Regional Training Center implemented the SBCT program for caseworkers, entitled "Developing Skills in Interviewing Techniques with Young Children." Feedback from trainers, administrators, and the RTC coordinator was consistent with the findings from the initial SBCT pilots. The SBCT programs build skills that become evident through improved job performance.

2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced

In 1993, the OCWTP published findings from a comprehensive assessment of OCWTP operations. Agency staff and managers responded to survey questionnaires that addressed their satisfaction with the training system, relevance of training, perceived learning, application opportunities, and the overall training environment (GOALS-RATE). This study was updated and enhanced in 2001. The 2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced Report provided clear data concerning what was currently been done in the state to enhance skill-building and transfer-of-learning efforts, as well as what was needed in these two areas.

According to respondents in all sampled job categories (caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, and executives), OCWTP training addressed high-priority needs, was relevant to trainees' jobs, and better prepared trainees to do their jobs.

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Caseworker responses indicated the following:

- Priority Needs: 86% agreed or strongly agreed that workshops addressed priority needs.
- Relevance to Job: 86.8% either agreed or strongly agreed that training was relevant to their job.
- Preparation: 85% agreed or strongly agreed that they were better prepared to do their work as a result of training.
- Increase in Skill: 87.5% indicated they had either “a great deal” or “some increase” in their skills as a result of attending OCWTP training.

Supervisor data closely mirrored the findings from caseworkers. There was widespread agreement that training addressed priority needs, increased preparedness to do the job, and increased knowledge and skill of both themselves and their workers.

Although caseworkers and supervisors indicated they were better prepared as a result of training, data concerning transfer and application of newly trained knowledge and skills were contradictory:

- Only 37.7% of caseworkers agreed or strongly agreed that they used what they learned in training back on the job.
- Only 62.6% of supervisors indicated their caseworkers transferred knowledge and skills acquired in training back to the job.

FINDINGS:

Questions

To determine what is currently being done in Ohio to ensure that staff are trained and skilled, this assessment asked the following questions:

Directors/Designees

- 1) How does your agency ensure that workers are trained and skilled?
- 2) What does your agency do to enhance training and promote TOL before and after training?
- 3) Does your agency provide coaching and mentoring support for staff? Who provides it?

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Technical Assistance Managers (TAM) and Technical Assistance Specialists (TAS)

- 1) How do agencies ensure staff members are trained and skilled to perform their jobs?
- 2) How do agencies enhance training and promote TOL before and after training?

Supervisors, Caseworkers, Case Aids, Child Care Workers

- 1) How does your agency help you continue to develop your skills and increase your knowledge on the job after OCWTP training sessions?

Trainers

- 1) What techniques do you use during training to build skills?

Responses to Questions

In response to the first question, “How does your agency ensure that workers are trained and skilled?” directors reported the following:

- The majority of executive directors ensured that their staff attended required training.
- Some directors used Individual Training Needs Assessments (ITNAs) to refer their staff to training.
- Some directors scheduled in-house workshops for their staff.
- Some directors created mentoring and shadowing opportunities for staff.
- Some directors purchased additional training materials or sent staff to conferences.
- Some directors created a staff position of training liaison officer.
- One director used in-house roundtable discussions on child welfare issues.
- One director implemented a requirement that workers share what they learned in training with their co-workers during staff meetings or other forums.

In contrast, when caseworkers were asked “How does your agency help you continue to develop your skills and increase your knowledge on the job after OCWTP training sessions?” they reported receiving little supervisory assistance in transferring newly learned knowledge and skills to the job. They confirmed only

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that workers shared resource materials from training and that they had been provided with shadowing opportunities.

Supervisors reported receiving very little TOL support. Several indicated there was not enough time to attend training, much less to receive TOL support when back on the job. One supervisor did acknowledge that reviewing action plans was expected when they returned from training, but that it often did not occur.

With few exceptions, case aides and child care staff reported little attention by supervisors to their transfer-of-learning needs. Both initial training and ongoing skill development were often dependent on an informal process of information sharing and support developed between co-workers.

In response to the question, "How do agencies ensure staff members are trained and skilled to perform their jobs?" TAS and TAM respondents reported that TOL efforts varied among the counties. Some agencies only sent their workers through CORE, either due to lack of leadership or limited resources, while other counties mentored staff and sent them to ongoing training. In response to the question of how agencies supported TOL, the majority of TAS and TAM respondents had observed little attention to TOL in the agencies. Although supervisors were familiar with the concept of TOL, it was not a priority because of high administrative workloads.

Orientation Programs and Shadowing

Executive directors and their designees consistently reported the inclusion of shadowing activities as a component of agency orientation. Therefore, although shadowing can be a valuable strategy at all stages of learning, it appears to be used most often by counties during the early stages of worker development.

Twelve of 23 counties reported they had formal orientation and shadowing programs, while six counties had informal orientation and shadowing programs. Formal programs tended to have a well-delineated structure and time frames for orientation activities. These programs ranged from three days in length to a comprehensive 10-week program that integrated Core training with on-site training and shadowing. Informal programs were not as easily defined or categorized. Agencies with informal programs tended to identify orientation activities, but they were not well defined in scope, content, or time frames.

Many directors indicated that their agency's ability to offer good orientation and shadowing to new employees was dependent on the agency's caseload and number of staff vacancies at the time orientation was needed. If the agency was fully staffed, or if caseload sizes were reasonable, new workers tended to receive more orientation and technical assistance than they did when the agency was overwhelmed.

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Contrary to reports from directors and their designees, most caseworkers in the focus groups reported that their agencies did not have orientation programs for new employees. Caseworkers also reported that a new worker's orientation experiences were largely dictated by when the new worker was hired and whether their immediate supervisor was available to help them. Caseworkers believed structured orientation programs were necessary to help new employees understand the nature and scope of their work. They reported wanting orientation programs that provided a better understanding of all aspects of child welfare (from investigation to reunification or adoption) and of the service systems that partnered with child welfare in performing these functions. Several caseworkers reported the benefits of shadowing professionals from other units in their agency, as well as shadowing community partners, to gain a broader vision of the agency's work.

The trainer focus groups also supported the need for orientation programs for new staff. According to trainers, new workers want concrete answers about work policies and practices, and want these included in OCWTP workshops because they are not getting this information in their agencies. Previously, this information was provided to staff by the ODJFS field offices.

Coaching and Mentoring

Twenty-two of the 23 directors or their designees interviewed indicated that their agencies provided coaching and mentoring to staff. Thirteen indicated supervisors were primarily responsible for these activities, and 10 reported using experienced workers as coaches. Directors, their designees, and supervisors all recognized educational supervision, of which coaching and mentoring are an element, to be an important supervisory function.

Current examples of coaching and mentoring being offered in counties include:

- A consultant provided mentoring to caseworkers working with child sexual abuse cases.
- A mentoring program for residential child care workers required all experienced staff to teach and mentor new employees in specified content areas.
- A trainer provided mentoring to staff in one agency for a year on behaviorally specific case plans. The trainer used a case conference model with each of the three units. The trainer also mentored unit supervisors in leading case conferences.

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- A trainer provided two on-site coaching sessions to caseworkers following a training on using language to facilitate compliance by families on their caseload.
- In the replication of the SBCT program “Developing Skills in Interviewing Techniques With Young Children,” participants each received two on-site coaching sessions with a trainer and were also engaged in structured peer mentoring. There are future plans to develop the most recent SBCT graduates as mentors in their agencies.

Some counties have attempted to formalize coaching by making it a formal job responsibility of senior caseworkers. Job titles vary from “Caseworker III (CWIII)” to “Lead Caseworker.” Staff in these positions function as assistants to their unit supervisors. Depending on the unit’s function, these workers may be responsible for reviewing and coaching new staff on completing risk assessments, case plans, and home studies. Washington County supervisors reported that their staff had a higher, more consistent level of performance due to mentoring by the CWIIIs.

Despite a variety of reported coaching and mentoring initiatives, the assessment data was again contradictory. Many caseworker respondents indicated they were not getting coaching or mentoring support from their agencies.

Skill-Building Strategies Used by Trainers

Trainers reported using a variety of skill-building techniques in the classroom. Skill-building and transfer-of-learning strategies used by trainers during training included case studies for application exercises, facilitated structured practice with feedback, modeling best practice, use of actual case examples, and guided imagery and visualization. Trainers in all three focus groups expressed an interest in and ability to be coaches and mentors.

Part II: What Training Interventions Would Help Staff Develop and Master Necessary Knowledge and Skills?

Literature Reviews

Since the emergence of adult learning as a distinct sub-field of education (Knowles, 1970), human resource development professionals have struggled to identify the best strategies to promote skill development, while concurrently

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identifying the barriers that impede it. Four primary topics are discussed in the published literature on skill building for adult learners: 1) transfer of learning and the barriers that prevent it; 2) orientation programs; 3) coaching and mentoring; and 4) the most appropriate position of "skills training" in the training sequence.

The literature reviewed included a variety of published books and articles, SBCT program final report, *PCSAO Standards for Effective Practice*, and the report of the 2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced Feedback Study.

Transfer of Learning

The term, "transfer of learning," refers to workplace application of knowledge and skills acquired in inservice training. The transfer of learning literature consistently stresses the role of agency supervisors and managers in assuring the effectiveness of this developmental process. In short, without strong supervisory and management support and feedback, much of what an employee learns in training will never be performed on the job (Curry, Caplan, and Knuppel, 1994; Broad and Newstrom, 1992; Brethower and Rummler, 1977; Leifer and Newstrom, 1980; Kirkpatrick, 1978).

Activities that support transfer of learning should occur before, during, and after the training activity or event (Curry et al., 1994). Liefer and Newstrom (1980) delineate the necessary steps in the planning and delivery of training to ensure that transfer occurs:

- 1) Trainees must first understand the work situations in which new skills may be used. This should occur in the work environment before the learner attends the training activity.
- 2) Trainees should enter into a learning contract to acquire specific skills; these then become personal learning objectives set in collaboration with, and validated by, the trainee's supervisor.
- 3) Trainees must be provided with the opportunity during training to plan on-the-job implementation of newly acquired skills, including identifying potential obstacles. Training strategies, such as action planning and experiential exercises, provide these opportunities.
- 4) In the job setting, trainees must be encouraged to practice new skills, must receive ongoing guidance and feedback, and must be positively reinforced while they are trying to implement new skills. This last point underscores the importance of the active involvement of the trainee's direct supervisor in transfer of learning.

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Poertner (2001) cites research supporting the role of organizational influences on transfer of learning and further suggests that these influences can be real, or simply perceived by the employee. According to Poertner, if a trainee does not perceive the work environment to be supportive, transfer of learning will be negatively affected. These organizational factors include the level and type of support received from peers, the expectation that new skills will be practiced, allotted time and opportunity to practice new skills, and the degree of support provided by the supervisor before and after the training.

According to Cone and Robinson (2001), for transfer of learning to occur, learners must:

- Have clear roles and expectations for using the skills;
- Obtain coaching when needed;
- Receive reinforcement when application occurs and negative consequences when it doesn't;
- Operate within organizational systems that are efficiently and effectively designed;
- Have access to essential information, people, tools, and job-aides; and
- Apply for jobs that match their abilities and interests.” (Adapted from Cone and Robinson, 2001.)

Cone and Robinson maintain these principles apply both with traditional classroom formats and when using new technology formats, such as e-learning. Robinson (1984) suggests that one responsibility of human resource development professionals is to identify factors and conditions in the work environment that may impede positive change on the job, and to communicate this information to managers. Managers and supervisors must then promote the necessary changes to allow the integration by employees of newly acquired skills. Without this intervention, Robinson contends that long-term results from training will be impossible.

Cone and Robinson (2001) conclude, “If the end goal is for people to apply newly acquired skills to the job ... you must consider all of the factors affecting performance.”

Orientation Programs

PCSAO Standard I.4 states the following:

"... orienting staff is necessary to build a solid foundation on which to develop staff attitudes and experience. Without a formal orientation

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program, staff are left to their own devices to figure out how the agency functions, and they can linger in a state of disorientation for weeks to months. This confusion does little to support the retention of staff. It can contribute to the feeling that the agency does not support staff, nor communicate important information ... about agency functioning, or the roles and responsibilities of staff."

The *PCSAO Standards for Effective Practice* recommend that a general orientation program be given to all new employees within their first five working days. This program should include, at minimum, an overview of the agency, including its mission, goals and objectives, organizational structure, and program areas and functions. It should also include an agency tour, the location of relevant materials and manuals, and information on employee safety, funding sources, personnel policies, and procedures.

In addition, staff should receive job-specific orientation within the first three months of employment to prepare them for their unique job functions and responsibilities. Activities should include: child protection services history, forms completion and time restrictions, specific job responsibilities, information about other agency units, information on specialized services that interact with the new worker's job functions, and confidentiality.

Coaching and Mentoring

Many recently published articles address coaching and mentoring.

The terms "coaching" and "mentoring" are often used interchangeably. However, several educators believe these interventions to be quite different (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Differences Between Mentoring and Coaching

	MENTOR	COACH
GOAL OF INTERVENTION	Mentoree's personal development	Job performance improvement
ROLE OF COACH VERSUS MENTOR	Facilitator with no preset agenda; set jointly with mentoree	Preset agenda to develop specific skills needed by employee
NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP	Mentor selected by learner	Coach determined by job position
SOURCE OF INFLUENCE	Perceived personal benefit of mentoring	Positional power and authority of coach

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BENEFIT TO MENTOR OR COACH	Affirmation of mentoree's personal development	Enhanced staff performance and teamwork
TIME AND FOCUS	Any area of life and/or career, future-oriented	Oriented toward job performance in current position

Adapted from Starcevich (1999).

Although a constructive interpersonal relationship between mentor or coach and learner strongly affects the success of either intervention, a coach's authority is usually inherent or formally assigned in the coach's job position. A mentor has no such formal authority and must use expert power and influence to promote change. As Starcevich suggests, someone is not a mentor until a protégé says so.

The benefits of both mentoring and coaching are clearly established in the literature, with substantive benefits not only for the learner, but the mentor or coach and agency as well. The literature provides strategies to formalize effective coaching or mentoring programs in organizations (Cook, 1999; Performance Enhancement Solutions, 1999; TOOL Manual, and PCSAO Human Relations Standards). These include the following:

- Strong organizational support is necessary for either intervention to be successful.
- New staff can work concurrently with both coaches and mentors. Mentoring is a long-term relationship directed toward career and leadership development, while coaching is focused on developing the learner's ability to perform a specific job task. The coaching relationship may be short-term. In Ontario, coaches provide demonstrations to new staff of various child welfare tasks and skills and provide corrective feedback as learners practice the skill. The mentor concurrently provides support, encouragement, and general professional development. A new worker in Ontario can have one mentor and multiple coaches.
- Caseworkers being mentored must be as carefully selected to participate as are the mentors. Informal arrangements often fail, often because there is no formal selection process. Mentors are selected for their capabilities, but too often no consideration is given to the protégé's readiness to be mentored.
- Coaches, mentors, and protégés all need considerable preparation to perform their functions. Expectations must be explicit, intended outcomes for individual learners clarified, and individualized learning strategies designed. Both mentors and coaches also need to develop

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their skills in the assessment of training needs and learning styles, and in strategies of educational supervision.

The Sequencing of Skills Training

The professional development literature suggests that for training to be effective in achieving its objectives, the sequence of learning activities must follow the naturally-occurring process by which most people acquire and master new knowledge and skills (Bloom, 1956; Rycus & Hughes, 1994.) The OCWTP has adopted this sequence as the foundation for all curriculum development and sequencing.

Maluccio strongly supports adherence to this sequence when developing inservice training. He contends that attempting to train skills without first training knowledge and understanding, "... is of limited value, since it does little to enhance the worker's competence, mastery, and adaptation – that is, their capacity to think, to function autonomously in the face of uncertainty and rapid change, and to act in a discriminating manner in response to new or nonroutine demands and challenges in their practice." (Maluccio, 1985)

Learners who have attended only "skills training" may appear to properly perform the desired behaviors, but may not use the skills properly, nor be able to modify them for use in different situations. For example, a worker might be able to complete a family assessment form and provide information regarding all the listed criteria. However, whether the assessment findings accurately reflect the family's situation depends upon the degree to which the worker understands the purpose, dynamics, and processes of the assessment; has the ability to discern and gather accurate and relevant information; can draw accurate conclusions from that information; and can apply the conclusion appropriately to that family. A lack of knowledge or understanding of several factors, such as the impact of cultural differences, can undermine the accuracy, and thus the utility, of the assessment.

SBCT Final Program Report

Feedback studies of the SBCT programs provide a variety of recommendations to promote skill development in the work force. (This feedback study is more fully summarized in the Feedback Study Review, Final Report, July 2002.) The most successful strategies reported by participants included:

- Formal on-site coaching of all participants by the trainer
- Peer mentoring and support from a stable cohort group

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- Classroom training interspersed with on-the-job learning activities
- Access to trainer and participants between sessions via e-mail and telephone

Administrators, supervisors, and caseworkers in all four SBCT pilot programs also indicated that administrative and supervisory support for employees in training was critical to the success of any skill-building program. The feedback study listed the recommended responsibilities of each of these groups:

1) Participants would be required to:

- Attend all sessions
- Complete all assignments successfully and on time
- Work closely with their supervisor on TOL activities

2) Participants' supervisors would be required to:

- Commit to participating in TOL and application exercises with participants
- Understand requirements and time needed both on-the-job and in the classroom
- Allow reasonable accommodations for staff to participate in program (such as reduction in caseloads, flexible work schedules, providing coverage while worker is in training)
- Attend preparation sessions, briefings, and workshops if required
- Participate in field mentoring consultations
- Aid in evaluating participants' application of new knowledge and skill on the job

3) Participant's agency executive would be required to:

- Commit to supporting both supervisor and caseworker in successful completion of the program
- Allow reasonable accommodation for staff to participate
- Recognize successful completion of staff publicly within the agency

According to trainees, it was also critical that supervisors understand the content of SBCT workshops and participate with the trainers/coaches in the on-site coaching sessions. SBCT trainees reported that this would allow supervisors to

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benefit from trainer feedback, and would promote on-going supervisory coaching on the job after the completion of the SBCT program.

2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced Feedback Study Report

The 2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced study replicated a 1993 comprehensive feedback study of OCWTP operations. The 2001 study was a cross-sectional study in which four respondent groups – caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, and executive directors – concurrently completed a single questionnaire, which asked whether OCWTP training workshops:

- 1) met the high-priority training needs of workers
- 2) were scheduled in locations that allowed easy access
- 2) better prepared workers to perform their jobs
- 4) contained information that workers generally used on the job

This study is more fully summarized in the *Feedback Study Review, Final Report*, July 2002. However, responses to questions 3 and 4 are highly relevant to skill-building and are reported below.

- 1) Respondents in every category reported that caseworkers were better prepared to do their jobs as a result of attending OCWTP training. But, compared to the GOALS/RATE report of 1993, fewer supervisors thought that workers had experienced a “great deal” of increase in their knowledge, skill, and confidence on the job. There was no similar downward shift in caseworkers’ perceptions of their own growth and learning. It is interesting that workers generally rated themselves higher in their own perceptions of increased knowledge, skill, and confidence than their supervisors rated them.
- 2) Compared to the GOALS/RATE report of 1993, fewer workers reported being able to apply what they learned in training on the job, and supervisors reported less transfer of learning than did caseworkers.
- 3) Staff who felt supported by their administrators and supervisors reported more involvement from their supervisors in promoting transfer of learning, and higher resulting confidence levels. They also believed they were better able to perform their jobs, generally used what they had learned in training, increased their knowledge about culture, and perceived that their clients exhibited progress as a result of implementing skills they had learned in training.

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- 4) Respondents believed there were insufficient opportunities to develop skill proficiency. Caseworkers and supervisors both reported insufficient emphasis on skill building, especially in Core workshops. They also reported there were not enough specialized workshops offered, and they were often closed out of or put on waiting lists for those specialized workshops that were scheduled. A number of key informants in the case studies on agency change also indicated that there should be an increase of skill-building workshops provided by the OCWTP.

- 5) Supervisors were reported to be largely unavailable to staff for educational supervision, including transfer of learning, coaching, mentoring, or use of the TOOL Manual. Only 29.7% of caseworkers agreed or strongly agreed that their supervisor helped them transfer knowledge and skills from the classroom to the job. Workload was reported to be a major barrier for supervisors, who indicated they did not have time to implement transfer of learning strategies with their workers. Only 11.7% of supervisors indicated they used the TOOL Manual or other strategies; the remaining supervisors were almost equally divided between being undecided about using or not using educational supervision strategies.

According to the authors of the GOALS-RATE Enhanced Report, the “findings indicate a strong correlation between supervisory assistance with TOL and worker use of training on the job.” There were only minor changes in this finding between 1993 and 2001; both studies found supervisory support significant to all suggested transfer-of-learning strategies. (GOALS-RATE Enhanced Report, pages 55-56.)

In addition to a lack of supervisory support for transfer of learning, another theme that emerged in 2001, for both caseworkers and supervisors, was the perception that Core training was too basic. Respondents indicated they wanted training to be more practical, with more emphasis on skill building, especially in Core workshops.

FINDINGS:

The Statewide Developmental Needs Assessment asked executive directors, supervisors, caseworkers, case aides, child care workers, TASs, TAMs, and RTC staff to identify the programs, activities, and training strategies that would help staff acquire and master the necessary skills to do their jobs. Many of the findings are entirely congruent with both the literature reviews and data collected previously in the SBCT Program Final Report and 2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced Study.

Suggestions for Enhancing Skill Building and Transfer

The one consistent response from all 16 caseworker focus groups to the question, "What would help increase your knowledge and develop your skills?" was, "Nothing takes the place of on-the-job experience." Three out of nine supervisory focus groups responded similarly. The study respondents also described a variety of desired "hands on" training opportunities, most of which would take place on-site in their agencies. These included:

- Increased opportunities for staff to shadow experienced staff, and to work with coaches or mentors to develop their skills;
- Enhanced orientation programs that provided staff with information and guidance to help them function in their agencies and community environments;
- Better access to a variety of learning resources, including quick reference guides;
- Enhanced ability of supervisors to provide guidance on specific practice problems and issues;
- Enhanced ability of teams to provide peer support, coaching, and feedback; and, enhanced ability to network with peers in other counties about specific practice issues and problems;
- Additional training provided on-site in local agencies and communities; and, provision of agency-specific training;
- Shortened time frames for training, including half-day sessions;
- Increased opportunities for post-training, follow-up learning and coaching sessions;
- Additional workshops tailored to the development of specific skill sets;
- Knowledgeable trainers who have direct work experience in the content areas they are presenting.

Barriers to Skill Building and Transfer of Learning

1) Lack of Supervisory Support: According to participants in all 16 caseworker focus groups, workers could not rely on their supervisors to provide feedback, support, or coaching activities to help them transfer newly acquired

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knowledge and skills to the job. Supervisor focus groups reported that while TOL activities were important, many supervisors felt they lacked the necessary coaching and teaching skills, and most did not have enough time to provide skill-building and transfer-of-learning support to their workers. These conclusions were supported by 15 of the 23 directors or their designees, although lack of time appeared to be a more serious problem for small and medium sized counties than for large or metro counties (nearly 100% of respondents from small/medium counties, compared to 30% of respondents from large and metro counties.)

Technical Assistance Specialists (TASs) also indicated that lack of time was a major barrier for supervisors, who were largely responsible for complying with state and federal reporting requirements, which have greatly increased during the past five years.

According to trainers, trainees often attend workshops without having been prepared by their supervisors. They are unaware of the importance of the workshop to their jobs, do not understand how the content relates to their work, and do not seem to take the training seriously. Further, caseworkers often relate they are not able to use newly learned techniques on their jobs because they lack supervisory support.

There was some discrepancy among respondents about the perceived importance of TOL as a supervisory function. Although the supervisor groups uniformly agreed that TOL was important, many of their executive directors or their designees reported that supervisors did not make coaching and mentoring of staff a priority. Nearly 100% of the metro counties and 50% of large counties surveyed identified this as a barrier.

Executive directors and their designees also indicated that many supervisors lacked knowledge and skills in the competencies their workers were learning in training (nine respondents), and they also lacked general practice skills in the program areas they supervised (five respondents). Both limited the degree to which supervisors could coach their workers in these competency areas.

2) Lack of Funding: Fourteen of the 23 county directors/designees reported that the only funds available to support skill-building and transfer-of-learning activities came from their general operating funds (four of six metros, four of six large, four of six medium, and two of five small counties). This greatly limited their ability to support such programs. Only one metro county reported having a separate training budget that specifically funded TOL activities. This was a significant problem for agencies that are not supported financially by county levies.

3) Lack of Staff: Several of the smaller counties suggested they had too few staff to support coaching or mentoring programs. A related problem was that union rules sometimes prohibited staff in certain job categories from performing

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coaching or mentoring because it was considered "working outside of their job classification."

What RTCs Should Do to Promote Skill Building and Transfer

RTCs almost uniformly reported they should continue to engage in a variety of activities to educate and assist counties regarding TOL strategies. Six RTCs suggested an expansion of their TOL function to include hiring TOL specialists who could provide consultation to supervisors and new staff, and be liaisons to counties for activities before, during, and after training.

DECISIONS OF THE OCWTP STEERING COMMITTEE REGARDING SKILL BUILDING AND TRANSFER OF LEARNING

- 1. In order to ensure state and county support for OCWTP skill-building and transfer outcomes, OCWTP will work collaboratively with PCSAO, ODJFS, and county PCSAs.**
- 2. The OCWTP will collaborate with PCSAs to secure county-specific partnership plans that delineate how skill-building and transfer-of-learning functions will be implemented and evaluated in each county.**
- 3. The OCWTP will secure formal endorsement of the OCWTP's skill-building and transfer efforts from PCSAO.**

The findings of this assessment clearly show that the optimal implementation of skill-building and TOL initiatives cannot be achieved until county agencies adopt a culture that supports and sustains continuing skill development throughout their employees' tenure. This requires agencies to provide a continuum of learning and transfer opportunities that support skill acquisition, application, mastery, and retention. Establishing a "learning environment " in local agencies is primarily an executive leadership function, but it also requires a willingness by all managers and supervisors to reduce or eliminate organizational barriers that impede skill development.

This assessment clearly identified a gap between the perceived importance of skill-building and transfer of learning activities, and the actual implementation of these activities in the agencies. Executives and their designees uniformly reported that skill building was important to their agencies, and they identified supervisors as primarily responsible for this function. Supervisors reported skill building to be very important, but repeatedly stated that lack of time was a significant barrier to providing it. Overwhelmingly, caseworkers reported they were not receiving supervisory support for skill building and transfer of learning.

This assessment also determined that many organizational components necessary to promote transfer and skill building do not exist in most local agencies, such as effective orientation programs, existence and accessibility of formal coaching and support, and positive incentives for using skills. The assessment further suggested that both deficiencies of knowledge and skill, and organizational barriers contributed to the low implementation of educational supervision in local agencies. This may help explain why, despite considerable time and effort by OCWTP to develop training programs and resources to support educational supervision and transfer of learning, there continue to be barriers that have not been satisfactorily resolved.

4. **The OCWTP will develop alternative strategies and options to ensure the delivery of skill-building and transfer functions in county public agencies.**

The lack of support for skill building and transfer in county agencies may be largely the result of the child welfare system's failure to properly staff these functions. Skill building and transfer of learning are fundamental elements of educational supervision. Yet, while line supervisors cited these to be among their most important job responsibilities, other administrative priorities appear to categorically preclude most line supervisors from fulfilling them. As work loads and monitoring responsibilities continue to increase, line supervisors will likely not be able to provide sustained educational supervision to their staff any time in the foreseeable future.

Ohio's solution will include developing creative ways to staff these functions. In some agencies, experienced case workers or in-house coaches and mentors might be identified and trained to perform skill building and coaching. Other agencies might rely on RTC staff or contract trainers to perform these functions. Local agencies might also consider hiring recent retirees or other qualified coaches on contract, or utilize a statewide pool of trained coaches and mentors, or combine resources to jointly finance a shared staff position.

Supervisors will always have a central role in staff development, even if they do not directly provide intensive coaching to their workers. OCWTP will need to consider the best ways to continue to support supervisors in assessing staff training needs, developing training plans, providing pre-training preparation, supporting staff during training, and monitoring TOL activities after workshop completion.

5. **The OCWTP will construct new core-level training initiatives that carefully sequence and incorporate skill-building and transfer strategies for critical competency areas.**

Assessment data, as well as the earlier 2001 GOALS-RATE Enhanced Report, indicate caseworkers and supervisors want more emphasis on skill building during OCWTP training, especially in Core training. These comments highlight an important training dilemma that will need to be addressed by the OCWTP. While inservice training systems are urged to provide more skill-building opportunities, the training literature regularly cautions against shortchanging the learning process by progressing too rapidly to skill development, without first providing the prerequisite awareness, knowledge, and understanding in the content area. Inappropriately sequenced "skills training" undermines the effectiveness of training, and ultimately works against the achievement of desired

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outcomes. This is particularly true when training complex child welfare skills that require critical thinking.

However, a variety of adaptations are possible that both promote skill development and protect the integrity of the training process. Potential strategies are referenced and discussed throughout this report. Further, many states and provinces are developing and piloting training and transfer strategies specifically to support Core training, and these are available to Ohio, at no cost, through its association with TRAINet. It appears, however, that no single strategy will itself achieve the desired goals. A reformulation of the Core training process may need to include embedding skill-building exercises and activities into Core curricula; adding or expanding content to further develop skills in critical competency areas; training staff in stable cohort groups to promote peer mentoring and support; arranging on-site coaching for Core trainees by trainers or skilled agency staff; and providing regular follow-up sessions to sustain learning.

6. **The OCWTP will identify methods to help supervisors gain necessary clinical skills and perform educational supervision.** (This decision is also supported by assessment findings presented in Section IV, *Work Force Characteristics*, and Section VII, *Training Content*.)

This issue has been a conundrum for the OCWTP since the program's inception. In 1987, when Supervisor and Manager Core curricula were being developed, it was agreed that supervisors needed proficiency in both supervisory core and caseworker core competencies. The OCWTP recommended that all line supervisors attend Caseworker Core training with a new worker, hoping to strengthen supervisors' clinical knowledge and skills, while also providing them with the ability to promote transfer with their staff. However, time constraints precluded this from ever occurring. In the early 1990s, the OCWTP designed "IMPACT Core," a series of workshops on caseworker core competencies taught from a management and supervisory perspective. This curriculum was also intended to improve supervisors' ability to train, coach, and support their workers in clinical casework skills. However, this initiative was never fully implemented because supervisors were unable to allocate the time to attend this training. Finally, in 1997, the OCWTP offered a four-day Core Overview, a very truncated version of Caseworker Core, which only addressed the most critical concepts. To date, this training has only rarely been offered by the OCWTP.

7. **The OCWTP will explore funding opportunities to develop an orientation CD-ROM for newly hired county public children services staff, on selected issues common to county agencies.**

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New staff orientation programs are recommended in the PCSAO Human Resource Standards and the OCWTP TOOL Manual. However, the assessment findings indicate that orientation programs are not being utilized effectively in all counties. Formal orientation programs can help new staff understand the nature and scope of their jobs, understand the agency and community environments in which they will work, and prepare staff to attend Core training. A standardized, formal orientation program might permit transferring fundamental information about child welfare practice out of Core training into the orientation program. The OCWTP will consider what elements of orientation should be standardized statewide and delivered regionally, and which need to remain agency-specific, delivered on-site by local trainers (e.g., court procedures, community service resources, and personnel policies and procedures).

OCWTP will also consider integration of policy training into orientation. In the past, ODJFS provided orientation to new workers on statewide policy and procedural issues, but the ODJFS field offices are no longer able to provide this policy training.

8. **The OCWTP will design strategies to use existing OCWTP resources and products as skill-building and transfer-of-learning training interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness.** (This decision is also supported by assessment findings presented in Section IV, *Work Force Characteristics*.)
9. **The OCWTP will pilot additional training resources and technologies to gather feedback from trainees concerning their efficacy as skill-building and transfer-of-learning interventions.** (This decision is also supported by assessment findings presented in Section IV, *Work Force Characteristics*.)
10. **The OCWTP will evaluate selected training delivery technologies to determine their strengths and limitations.** (This decision is also supported by assessment findings presented in Section IV, *Work Force Characteristics*.)

The OCWTP has a number of resources, including the *OCWTP Training and Orientation for Optimal Learning (TOOL) Manual*, the *Field Guide to Child Welfare* (available in print or on CD-ROM), the *Trainee Guide to Core*, and the *Forrester Family* videotape. All of these products have transfer of learning and skill-building potential, provided that staff and their coaches take the necessary time to utilize them.

Many state and provincial child welfare training programs parallel Ohio's search for ways to promote skill mastery and application. Although these are predominantly new endeavors without evaluation results, Ohio can

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learn much by following the process and outcomes of these initiatives. Working collaboratively with other training systems can prevent Ohio from duplicating mistakes made by other programs. It also gives Ohio access to effective resources and technologies already developed by these programs.