


2017

Examining the Barriers to the Continuing Education of Early Childhood Teacher Assistants

Colleen Louise Wright
Walden University

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Colleen Wright

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2017

Abstract

Examining the Barriers to the Continuing Education of Early Childhood Teacher
Assistants

by

Colleen Louise Wright

MA, Rowan University, 2006

BA, Montclair State University, 1997

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Higher Education and Adult Learning

Walden University

April 2017

Abstract

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 required teacher assistants (TAs) to obtain their child development associate (CDA) credential by September of 2015. TAs who had not obtained their CDA within the required timeframe were either demoted or terminated from their positions. However, with the increase of working parents, the need for quality early childhood education has risen. In this project study, the barriers TAs confront in regards to their decision to continue their schooling to obtain a CDA credential were examined, as were the factors that deterred or prevented them from enrolling in or completing a higher education program. The purpose of the study was to inform the development of a plan outlining how childcare administration can mentor and encourage TAs in the completion of their CDA program. Knowles's theory of adult learning and Kolb's experiential learning theory provided the theoretical basis and framework for this qualitative case study. Cluster random selection was used to identify 9 participants who were interviewed using a semistructured process. Interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and broken down into 6 themes. Findings showed that 7 out of 9 participants experienced barriers to continuing their education, and 8 of the 9 participants expressed a desire to participate in a mentoring program. Raising the educational requirements and completion rate of TAs positively affects social change through increased quality of instruction, improved teaching strategies, and enhanced and developmentally appropriate support provided to young children.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

I designed this project study to examine the current educational levels of Head Start teacher assistants and the barriers that have kept them from pursuing higher education. In recent years federal lawmakers have written legislation focusing on the educational levels of Head Start teaching staff. The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (IHSSRA) of 2007 required Head Start and childcare teaching staff members across the nation to obtain college degrees and early childhood certifications in order to continue working in preschool classrooms. Because of the IHSSRA, Head Start teacher assistants throughout the United States who had neither met the federal requirements of the act nor enrolled in an educational program by September of 2013 were not able to continue working in their current positions. In order to maintain their positions, Head Start teacher assistants were required to enroll in an educational program leading to the receipt of a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential by the September 2013 due date. Once enrolled in an educational program, teacher assistants were given two years to complete credential requirements.

As authorized by the IHSSRA, the State of New Jersey created the Workforce Preparation Committee whose sole objective was to examine the educational needs of early childhood teaching staff and make recommendations for system improvement. Additionally, educational opportunities including grants and scholarships were accessible through child care resource and referral agencies throughout the state. Although training, education programs, and financial assistance have been made available to teacher

assistants, in this study I examined the reasons why teacher assistants may not have completed or enrolled in a certificate or degree program.

My intent was to address the question of what the barriers are, among Head Start teacher assistants, to finding and participating in post secondary educational training programs. Due to state and federal mandates (IHSSRA) on the continued education of Head Start teaching staff, these individuals in all states must participate in ongoing training in order to maintain their jobs. Although Head Start teacher assistants have been mandated to complete a CDA credential program, they are ultimately responsible for locating, enrolling in, and paying for an education program with no guarantee of a salary increase. If these individuals did not wish to participate in a CDA program, they made the choice to either pursue a position outside of the Head Start program or leave the field of early childhood education completely. I used the results of this project to develop a plan for Head Start administrators to better support or mentor teacher assistants in the successful completion of the CDA program.

Section 1 of this project study details the problem faced by the Head Start program operated within a local non-profit organization in southern New Jersey, and includes my rationale for undertaking the project, which stemmed from the problem that Head Start teacher assistants have faced barriers in their attempts to continue their education in order to meet the mandate of IHSSRA. Additionally, in this section I show the significance of this problem by reviewing related literature which has demonstrated the growing need for quality early childhood education and its impact on child developmental outcomes. The current literature on the topic has focused on the benefits

of Head Start and teacher education, the lack of education of teacher assistants, the increase in teacher assistant job duties, the lack of quality educational programs available to teacher assistants, and the attitudes Head Start teacher assistants may have had toward continuing education.

In the literature review I outline the relationship between teacher education and child learning outcomes. The results of this study highlight the need for increased support (funding, mentoring, and encouragement) of teacher assistants and their plight to continue their education in order to meet the mandated requirements. Now that the barriers have been determined and defined, Head Start center administrators can carry out the plan created to increase the CDA completion rate.

Definition of the Problem

Increased employment qualifications by the State of New Jersey has had a major impact on the field of early childhood education in general, and Head Start teacher assistants in particular (New Jersey Council for Children, 2010). According to the program information report of my study site, only 34 Head Start teacher assistants had obtained the required credentials as of September 2013, while 48 continued to be at risk of losing their jobs due to this mandate. Research conducted by the New Jersey Council for Children led lawmakers to enact legislation requiring preschool teaching staff, as well as teaching assistants, to obtain specialized certificates such as associate and baccalaureate degrees in early childhood education or related fields. More specifically, when President George W. Bush signed the IHSSRA in 2007, Head Start centers nationwide were given a three-year grace period to ensure that all classrooms were

staffed with appropriately credentialed staff, or to demonstrate a concerted effort to meet this requirement (Brown, 2008).

Employment qualifications in the field of early childhood education have continued to change over the years (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011). Research has shown that young children benefit socially, emotionally, and cognitively when qualified, educated early childhood professionals are charged with their care (New Jersey Council for Children, 2012). In New Jersey, preschool teaching requirements began to increase in 1981 with the *Abbott v. Burke* decision (Education Law Center, 2011). In this case, the Education Law Center filed a grievance on behalf of 20 public school children in Camden, East Orange, Irvington, and Jersey City regarding the inconsistency of public and private education (Education Law Center, 2011). From 1995 to 2011, over 30 rulings were made regarding funding earmarked for use in the state's 31 counties identified as the most in need (Education Law Center, 2011). This decision mandated that preschool teachers working in an "Abbott classroom" or a district-contracted preschool classroom meet higher educational requirements including preschool through third grade teaching certification and Praxis testing.

As the *Abbott v. Burke* decision continued to evolve, the focus had begun to turn toward classroom teacher assistants. According to the New Jersey Council for Children (2010), New Jersey has been highly ranked in the nation for providing outstanding early childhood programs; however, the state has fallen short of ensuring that teacher assistants obtain at least a CDA credential. Further, Head Start performance standards set forth strict guidelines that centers were required to uphold which specified child to teacher

ratios and classroom enrollment sizes, and ensured that teacher assistants obtained at least a CDA or related certification (New Jersey Council for Children, 2010). The problem for the non-profit sponsored Head Start program that I studied is that teacher assistants were not continuing their education to meet state and federal requirements (New Jersey Council for Children, 2010). My goal in this research project was to determine the barriers Head Start teacher assistants have faced in meeting state and federal credential and training requirements. This project study was conducted within a nonprofit community action agency located in southern New Jersey which employs over 400 people working in more than 20 different departments. More specifically, the agency sponsors over 15 Head Start and childcare centers located in four counties. The targeted participants for the study were teacher assistants who were employed by Head Start or were working in a Head Start contracted classroom. These individuals may have already held the required teaching credentials, been enrolled in an education program to receive the required credentials, or may have only held a high school diploma. According to the Program Information Report of my study site, as of September 2013, only 34 out of 82 teacher assistants had met the mandated educational requirements.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The purpose of this project was to determine the barriers Head Start teacher assistants have faced in finding and participating in higher educational programs. This project study was centered on credentialed and non-credentialed early childhood teaching support staff employed by a non-profit community action agency in southern New Jersey.

This nonprofit agency sponsors several childcare and Head Start centers that employ individuals who have had no formal education beyond their high school diploma. State and federal regulations have begun to require these early childhood educators to hold a CDA, associate's, or higher level degree in order to teach young children (State of New Jersey Department of Education, 2008). Preschool teachers who did not previously hold the required credentials were given a specific time frame to participate in a credentialing program or they would no longer be eligible to teach in the agency's Head Start classrooms. According to the education manager, these individuals would either be demoted or terminated from their teaching jobs if they had not enrolled in an education program to work toward obtaining their CDA. The Head Start director stated that there was no specific funding designated by the agency to pay for the additional education of these individuals; they were ultimately responsible for locating and enrolling in an educational program.

In order to understand this problem, one must look at the geographic area included in this study. The State of New Jersey ranks fourth in population in the United States, is made up of 51.2% female and 48.8% male citizens, and 63% of the total population is between the ages of 19 and 64 (us-places.com, 2012). The racial composition of New Jersey is 74% White (including 19% who identify as Hispanic or Latino), 15% Black, 11% Asian/American Indian/Alaskan Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013). Southern New Jersey consists of predominantly mid- to low-income families with the highest educational level, typically, not exceeding high school (City-data.com, 2010). Given these demographics, barriers to continuing

education that teacher assistants face could include fear of the unknown, fear of failure, lack of time management skills, motivation, cultural perceptions of school, transportation, low wages, lack of administrative support, and the absence of local support or mentor programs (Eng & Ronaldson, 2010; Robinson, 2010; Vesay, 2008; Zaman, Amin, Momjian, & Ting, 2012). These barriers must be confronted in order for the Head Start teacher assistants to successfully complete their credentialing requirement.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

The professional development of early childhood workers has been an ongoing problem in the United States. In the past, teacher assistants entered the field of early childhood education with no more than a high school diploma (Yamauchi, Im, Lin, & Schonleber, 2012). Legislation was passed in the United States to address the lack of education and credentialing of childcare workers and its effects on the education of young children (Barkham, 2008; Brown, 2008). The *Abbott v. Burke* decision addressed the lack of quality early childhood education opportunities for young children living in New Jersey's lower economic areas (Education Law Center, 2011). The IHSSRA placed increased requirements for minimum educational levels of group teachers and teacher assistants working in Head Start classrooms (Brown, 2008).

Professional development (PD) and continuing education of early childhood instructional staff are necessary for the appropriate education of preschool children. It has been noted by Biancarosa, Bryk, and Dexter (2010) that PD is important to the development of young children. Several barriers have been identified that may explain the reasons why it is difficult for childcare workers to continue their education. Some of

these barriers include time, funding, the need for childcare, transportation, and a lack of educational/training opportunities (Falasca, 2011; Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Stein, Wanstreet, & Trinko, 2011).

The purpose of Head Start is to provide early childhood education to prepare young children cognitively, socially, and emotionally for school success (Gormley, Phillips, Adelstein, & Shaw, 2010). Head Start originated in 1965 when President Lyndon B. Johnson initiated the anti-poverty movement (Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2013). Head Start was developed to provide a holistic approach to serving preschool children and their families which included education, nutrition, and other health services (Lee et al., 2013). Head Start serves children from birth through age 5 who fall within the federal poverty guidelines based on family size and income (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

Children enrolled in Head Start programs receive various health services including dental and hearing screenings, and free nutritious meals; providing for these basic needs has a positive effect on school performance (Gormley et al., 2010). These children score higher in emergent or early literacy and mathematics than those children who are cared for by parents and non-parental childcare providers (Lee et al., 2013). Parents are in need of quality childcare in order for them to work, and to offer their children the chance for greater achievement in kindergarten (Gormley et al., 2010).

Definitions

Abbott districts: School districts in the state of New Jersey that are identified as the poorest in the state. There were 31 urban districts highlighted in the Abbott v. Burke

decision that were considered less advantaged (Education Law Center, 2011). The Abbott v. Burke ruling worked to ensure additional funding to provide quality early childhood education to young children residing in these urban areas (Education Law Center, 2011).

Child development associate (CDA): An early childhood education credential that is governed by the Council for Professional Recognition and accepted nationally in the areas of preschool, infant/toddler, family childcare, and home visiting (Kipnis & Whitebook, 2012). The CDA candidate must obtain 120 hours of professional education, prepare a professional resource file, be observed in the classroom, and pass the CDA exam (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013).

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP): The understanding and use of observations of preschool children to plan lessons based on their learning needs, abilities, interests, and cultural background. Early childhood teaching staff use DAP to plan and implement age appropriate activities that meet the children at their developmental level and challenge them to move to the next level (Fox & Schirmacher, 2012).

Early childhood education: The teaching of young children ages birth to 8 (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 1999). Education for this age range focuses on teaching within the five developmental domains including cognitive, language/literacy, social, emotional, and physical (Kostelnik et al., 1999). Teachers of young children use a combination of their own knowledge and personal beliefs about how young children learn, coupled with daily observation to plan a developmentally appropriate curriculum (Fox & Shirmacher, 2012).

Emergent literacy: The beginning stages of reading and writing exhibited by very young children (Gormley et al., 2010). Children demonstrate early reading skills by using pictures to identify and retell a story (Fox & Schirmacher, 2012). Early writing skills have been identified as scribbles that progress from a simple dot and zig zags to more elaborate combinations of lines and shapes to create an identifiable object (Fox & Schirmacher, 2012).

Head Start: A federally funded early childhood program that provides childcare and education to over 1 million low-income families (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). Head Start is a holistic program that provides services to parents and children, from birth to age 5, in the areas of health, nutrition, and development (Gormley et al., 2010). The program aims to prepare children for school and their educational career (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

Professional development (PD): On-going training and education for early childhood professionals (Pineda-Herrero, Belvis, Moreno, & Ucar, 2010). In-service trainings, staff orientations, workshops, conferences, and hands-on training are all avenues used to provide PD to childcare staff. During these sessions, childcare staff learn new information and techniques that will improve knowledge and teaching practices used in the classroom (Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, & Ting, 2010).

Teacher assistants: Non-certified classroom staff who assist the classroom teacher in supervising children, handling negative behaviors, and maintaining classroom cleanliness and organization. Teacher assistants may be defined as classroom support staff including classroom aides, floating teacher assistants, and substitute teacher

assistants (Jisu & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010). As the duties of teacher assistants continue to evolve, the need for higher education increases.

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act: The act reauthorizes Head Start with the mandate to raise standards of quality, including specific qualifications for staff and on-going professional development (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). The IHSSRA of 2007 has mandated that early childhood teacher assistants obtain a CDA credential in order to work in a Head Start classroom (Brown, 2008). The Head Start act increased the standard of early childhood education by mandating that:

All teaching assistants nationwide in center-based programs have: (1) at least a child development associate credential; (2) enrolled in a program leading to an associate or baccalaureate degree; or (3) enrolled in a child development associate credential program to be completed within two years. (U. S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2007, p. 100)

Significance

The problem identified in this project study has had a profound effect on all three levels of society: micro, or individual level; meso, or family and community level; and macro, or national level (Jenkins, 2005). On the individual level, if the teacher assistants did not obtain their CDA or early childhood related degree, they were no longer qualified to maintain their position. When a childcare center must replace a staff person, it causes a ripple effect throughout the organization (New Jersey Council for Children, 2012). The children in these classrooms must deal with the loss of a caregiver and have to readjust to

a new teacher assistant. Continuity of care is crucial when working with and educating young children (New Jersey Council for Children, 2012).

When the childcare center is unable to replace the teacher assistant within a given period of time, licenses, contracts, and funding sources could possibly be at risk (Rhodes & Huston, 2012). If the center must close the classroom, families will be forced to find alternative care for their children. Without sufficient childcare, parents of children enrolled in the center are not able to continue working (Conley, 2010). If this ripple effect in the childcare industry continues on a large scale, it will have a negative effect on the economic condition of the community at large (Allen & Miller, 2010).

There is also a significant benefit to increasing the educational requirements of early childhood teaching staff. On the individual level, the teacher assistants themselves will acquire useful knowledge of child development and appropriate teaching practices that can be directly applied in the classroom (Burgess & Mayes, 2009; Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, & Ling, 2010). Pineda-Herrero, Belvis, Moreno, and Ucar (2010) found that teacher assistants demonstrate more confidence and an increased sense of professionalism when they are more educated and receive regular PD. Additionally, the children will benefit intellectually in all developmental domains when they are cared for by teacher assistants who are knowledgeable in the areas of early childhood education, DAP, and child development (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter 2010; Yamauchi et al., 2012).

Guiding Research Question

Given that federal legislation has required childcare teacher assistants to obtain at least a CDA in order to work in a Head Start classroom, in this project study I considered

the barriers classroom support staff face in continuing their education, including their ability or willingness to meet the new educational requirements. I used the following research question to guide the study: What are the barriers that Head Start teacher assistants face in their decisions to continue their schooling to obtain a CDA credential or degree in the field of early childhood education? I also used the following subquestion: If the Head Start teacher assistants intend to remain in their positions, what factors have deterred or prevented them from enrolling in or completing a higher education program?

Past research has shown that PD and higher levels of education have a direct effect on child development and performance outcomes (Lee et al., 2013). When early childhood educators continue their education, the teaching practices used with young children are more developmentally appropriate (Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, & Karoly, 2009; Yamauchi et al., 2012). Studies have shown that lower-level employees are less likely to be intrinsically motivated to participate in higher education opportunities (Wagner & French, 2010). There was a gap in the scholarly research regarding the motivation of early childhood educators, specifically Head Start teacher assistants, to continue their schooling. There was also a lack of research on the IHSSRA regarding early childhood educators' attitudes toward continuing education, and on the loss of employment for those who did not obtain required credentials.

Review of the Literature

There are many factors contributing to the problem faced by Head Start teacher assistants in their decision to continue their education to meet the requirements of the IHSSRA. Knowles' theory (1988) of adult learning (andragogy), and Kolb's experiential

learning theory (1983) formed the theoretical foundation for this project study because these theories provided me insight regarding the motivation and educational needs of adult learners. With the upsurge of working parents, there has been an increased need for quality childcare, and thus an increased emphasis on the importance of teacher education and the overall benefits of the Head Start program.

Theoretical Framework

When employers force childcare workers to continue their education it alone does not motivate them to continue their education. Instead, they need to be able to associate the personal meaning of their learning with their job responsibilities (McGrath, 2009). According to Knowles' theory of adult learning or andragogy, this dynamic is referred to as "a need to know" why new information must be learned (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998, p. 44). Knowles (1988) had a clear understanding of adults and their reasoning for returning to school or pursuing higher education, as well as the barriers that keep them from doing so. According to his theory of adult learning, most adults are self-directed and intrinsically motivated to continue their education. They need to know why they must learn new information, they rely on their experience as a means to support learning, and, most importantly, they must be ready to learn (Knowles, 1988; Weber-Mayrer, Piasta, & Pelatti, 2015). Research has shown that lower-level employees were less likely to be intrinsically motivated to participate in higher education opportunities (Wagner & French, 2010). McGrath (2009) inferred that an andragogical approach would be more useful for these learners because they are currently working in a childcare classroom which has given them the knowledge base and experience to draw from.

The andragogical approach offers various strategies adult educators should take to create a conducive learning environment that encourages participation (Corely, 2008; Korr, Derwin, Greene, & Sokoloff, 2012). Knowles' approach includes suggestions for ways to create communicative learning environments where the student and instructor work together over time to determine objectives (Corely, 2008). Forrest and Peterson (2006) noted that "the teacher provides the direction and allows students to make use of their experiences and seek new information" (p.118). The experience of the learner is important not only to the learner herself, but also to the learning environment as a whole (Knowles et al., 1998). Adversely, negative prior learning experiences can become a barrier for the adult learner that may potentially prevent them from continuing their education (Knowles et al., 1998).

Kolb (1983) described a distinct connection between adult learning and experience that can be applied to the circumstances surrounding the problem I addressed in this study. Researchers have contended that learning occurs on a continuum that includes the reception of information, analysis of said information, practical application, and reflection (Kolb, 1983; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Traversing through this continuum leads to experiences for the adult learner that will aid them in understanding the goals and objectives of a given course. The personal experiences of the adult learner lay the foundation for increased knowledge.

McGrath (2009) suggested that the teacher facilitate adult learning by relating theory to practice through the actual life experiences of the students. When instructors clarify the link between curriculum content and practical application, adult learners are

more understanding of why they need to increase their education, and therefore become more receptive and more likely to take part in the overall classroom experience (McGrath, 2009; Chan, 2010; Stevens, 2014). Merriam et al. (2007) suggested that the experience of the instructor is also as important as the experience of the learner, as it is the instructor who is responsible for facilitating the learning process. In working with these teacher assistants, mentors would be useful resources in clarifying the link between theory and practice. Both Knowles's and Kolb's adult learning theories respect the experiences of the adult learner and the influence such experiences have on their decision to continue their education. Experience can act as a motivating factor for the teacher assistants to complete their credential, or as a barrier if those prior educational experiences were perceived as negative.

Need for Childcare

It is important for childcare staff to continue their education because the need for quality childcare will continue to increase as a result of reformation of welfare requiring parents to participate in employment and training programs (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Heinrich, 2014). In 2003, 2.5 million families in the United States fell below 200% of the federal poverty line (Koh & Neuman, 2009). Additionally, because of the declining economic conditions, dual and single-parent households were forced to obtain multiple sources of income. The luxury of caring for children at home is no longer an option for many families (Azzi-Lessing, 2009; Byington, & Tannock, 2011). In fact, Bianchi (2011) found that 63.6% of working mothers had children 6 years old and younger, and 71% of those same mothers were employed full-time. It was also reported by Koh and

Neuman (2009) that about 15.5 million children in the United States age 6 and younger are enrolled in an early care program. This increase in child care enrollment has prompted the need for increased focus on teacher education and credentials.

Benefits of Head Start

Lee, Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, Han, and Waldfogel (2013) determined that children who were enrolled in a Head Start program enjoyed increased academic success, relative to those who received care from parents and other non-parental figures. The researchers attributed these benefits to the environment and interaction with higher educated teaching staff. Additionally, Head Start programs offer holistic services to young children and their families including dental and hearing screenings, nutrition, support for mental health, and parenting education programs (Gormley et al., 2010; Gronski, Niemann, & Berg, 2013; Schilder & Smith Leavell, 2015). Young children enrolled in higher quality early education programs demonstrate higher literacy and mathematics achievement throughout their preschool, elementary, and high school careers (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2009; Lee, 2011; Schippers, 2014). In a comparison study of Head Start and a state funded prekindergarten program, children enrolled in the pre-kindergarten program showed higher gains in emergent reading and writing, and showed similar gains in early math skills (Gormley et al., 2010).

The children enrolled in Head Start and pre-kindergarten programs perform better than those who are not enrolled in these programs because of the education and knowledge of the caregivers, as well as the supplementary health service programs (Lee et al., 2013). Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, and Karoly (2009) asserted that higher

educated early childhood teachers are better prepared to provide appropriate learning environments for young children. Participating in PD opportunities improves teaching strategies that support higher order thinking skills and cognitive development of preschool children (Byington & Tannock, 2011; Yamauchi et al., 2012). Studies have shown that children benefit greatly from these improved teaching strategies, in their development of logico-mathematic, cognitive, language and literacy skills (Biancarosa et al., 2010; McWayne, Cheung, Wright, & Hahs-Vaughn, 2012; Yamauchi et al., 2012). The fact that there is a high number of qualified early childhood classroom support staff “missing” from the field is largely the result of insufficient “skills and training needed to work with young children” (Ryan & Goffin, 2008, p. 388). Because of low wages and a lack of support, those most likely to work in early childhood classroom positions choose not to continue their education or may find other means of employment (Zaman et al., 2012; Boyd, 2013) such as fast food restaurants or retail stores, which pay nearly \$4 more per hour (French, 2010). In general, early childhood teaching support staff members may not be credentialed and do not possess degrees in early childhood or hold other childcare certifications (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Rhodes & Huston, 2012). Support in the form of mentoring would help these teacher assistants form the connection between education and practical application.

Teacher Education and Credentials

According to French (2010), a disproportionate rate of increase in the knowledge of child development and appropriate teaching practices has accompanied increases in the education of early childhood education practitioners. Beginning in the 1980s, New

Jersey began creating inroads for individuals to obtaining teaching certifications by enacting the Alternate Route to Teacher Certification (ARTC) program (Tamir, 2008). Prior to the *Abbott v. Burke* decision, the State of New Jersey did not have formal preschool education teacher requirements (Lobman & Ryan, 2008). New Jersey provided scholarships and other state funding for higher-skilled bachelor-degree-holding individuals to obtain the preschool through third grade certification (Lobman & Ryan, 2008). At the time, this particular funding stream made no provisions for the credentialing of early childhood teacher assistants.

Professional Impact New Jersey (PINJ) was launched to manage the scholarships offered to teachers, and to manage other PD opportunities for certified and non-certified staff (Martin & Zydell, 2011). The CDA credential has been identified as the standard set of knowledge for teachers working in the field of early childhood education (Washington, 2014). In recent years, PINJ created the New Jersey Registry which offers a CDA scholarship to be used toward the assessment fee for those individuals who have completed their required training hours from a PINJ sponsoring agency (PINJ, 2014). These full and partial scholarships are awarded through the local child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) that contract with PINJ-certified instructors to teach the CDA courses (PINJ, 2014). The Council for Professional Recognition has a registry of 43 states that offer CDA programs and scholarships for eligible participants (Council for Professional Recognition, 2013). Mentors and other support staff could assist teacher assistants in registering for PINJ and accessing the scholarships made available for training and the CDA credential.

Teacher Assistants

Teacher assistants were thought to have more non-instructional duties which, as described by Han and Neuharth-Pritchett (2010), include: classroom housekeeping, clerical paperwork, prepping material for planned activities, and assisting with behavioral problems. The teacher assistants, teacher aides, classroom aides, substitute teacher assistants, and floating teacher assistants rely heavily on their experiences in raising children and feel this type of experience is adequate training for their position and level of responsibilities (Fuligni et al., 2009). According to Daehlen and Ure (2009), low-skilled and low-income individuals are less likely to pursue education without a clear understanding of the reasons. In the past, teacher assistants were undervalued, receiving low pay for the little impact of their position and limited involvement in classroom instruction (Roffey-Barentsen & Watt, 2014). In a study completed by Hancock, Hall, Cable, and Eyres (2010), it was found that higher educated and credentialed teacher assistants often perform many of the same duties as classroom teachers. Further, Barkham (2008) declared that the role of the teacher assistant had changed to include more responsibilities which are closely related to those of the higher educated classroom teacher. In many early childhood classrooms the teacher and teacher assistant often work in teams to support the learning and development of their children (Curby, Boyer, Edwards, & Chavez, 2012). Additional responsibilities assigned to teacher assistants require increased education and the need for them to obtain appropriate credentials.

Barriers to Educational Participation

There are many barriers that keep individuals from continuing their education. Daehlen and Ure (2009) examined age as a factor in participating in education programs inferring that it is not as likely for older low-skilled adults to voluntarily take part in continuing education opportunities as their younger counterparts. Research has shown that early childhood workers are mostly made up of women (97%) with an age range from 35 to 43 (Rhodes, Huston, & Society for Research in Child Development, 2012). Stein, Wanstreet, and Trinko (2011) stated that most early childhood workers who choose to continue their education were not likely to complete a degree. Teacher assistants participation in PD is often sporadic and, as a result, does not lead to a credential (Higgins & Guilliford, 2014). In a study conducted by Vesay (2008), it was determined that time was one of the utmost deterrents these individuals face in accessing educational opportunities. Time away from work in addition to cost of admission, personal interest in the topic, availability of relevant educational opportunities, transportation, and unsupportive management disuade these adults from attending college (Vesay, 2008; Colvin, 2013; Fitzgerald, Theilheimer, 2013). It is important to identify the barriers teacher assistants face in order to develop programs and services to combat them.

Strategies to Combat Barriers

It is probable that Head Start teacher assistants may have been more likely to continue their CDA program with the guidance of a mentor. Wagner and French (2010) suggested that, due to workplace morale, classroom support staff display less internal motivation toward PD and continuing education and may need higher levels of positive

administrative advice and support from their supervisors. Teaching staff who participated in mentoring programs exhibited a more positive attitude toward completing PD (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2010). In many states, mentoring for novice teachers is a mandated component in helping to increase teacher quality (Baines, 2010). Research has shown that novice teachers who received professional support from a mentor demonstrated higher order teaching skills (Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Bierma, Welsh, & Jones, 2009; Dunst & Raab, 2010; Manswell Butty et al., 2015) and engagement of students (Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Wilcox-Herzog, McLaren, Ward, & Wong, 2013). Additionally, in a study conducted by Onchwari and Keengwe (2010), children taught by teachers who received mentoring showed higher academic success than those children taught by teachers who were not mentored.

Along with mentoring and administrative support, the manner in which the PD or education is delivered also has a significant effect on participation (Pineda-Herrero, Belvis, Moreno & Ucar, 2010). Early childhood teaching staff prefer to attend training workshops that offer practical techniques that can immediately be applied in the classroom setting as opposed to learning that is more theoretical (Pineda-Herrero et al., 2010, Stevens, 2014). Further, Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, and Ting (2010) found that childcare educators feel more prepared and more qualified for their positions when they receive training and educational opportunities that are relevant to their profession. Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, and Hunt (2011) added that the purpose of PD should primarily “focus upon the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of paraeducators” (p.23). Moreover, it was emphasized by Jones et al. (2011), that each training be designed and developed on a

progressive continuum with each training adding on to the concepts presented in the previous sessions.

Summary of Literature Review

The review of the literature discussed the importance of early childhood education as well as the benefits of the Head Start program. Teacher education and training is shown to have a positive effect on child performance outcomes (New Jersey Council for Children, 2012). There are many barriers teacher assistants faced in continuing their education. Identified barriers included time away from work, transportation, childcare, tuition, administrative support, and the lack of available educational opportunities (Falasca, 2011; Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Stein et al., 2011). Knowles's theory of adult education includes six assumptions that address the learning needs and motivation of adult learners. Kolb's experiential learning cycle also takes into consideration the usage and importance of one's experience as it relates to processing and implementation of new information. Adult educators as well as supervisors of early childhood teachers must take these theoretical perspectives into account when coordinating learning opportunities. More focus must be placed on presenting information that is applicable to the workplace.

Saturation and Boolean Terms

I used various search terms and databases were used to locate articles related to this research topic. For example, I conducted an extensive search using terms such as *early childhood teacher education, adult learners, participation, higher education, higher level teacher assistants, childcare workers, professional development, teacher training, mentoring, and Head Start*. These terms were input into Thoreau, a

multidisciplinary database, and various educational databases. The specific education databases I used were ERIC, Education Research Complete, Education from SAGE, and ProQuest Central. After using these terms in multiple combinations, I found that the search results began to produce the same articles. To ensure that full saturation was reached, I examined the reference list of each relevant article to locate any additional sources. This action proved to be helpful to me in finding articles I could use to support my study topic. I conducted an extensive search of the Walden library as well as the Department of Health and Human Services website, regarding staff qualifications, however current information was not found.

Implications

This project study was intended to identify the barriers that classroom support staff faced in finding and participating in educational programs. I anticipated that the findings would examine the barriers as well as the perceptions of current Head Start classroom support staff toward continuing education and their ability to obtain the CDA credential and higher degrees. I found, for some teacher assistants, state and federal requirements on the credentialing of teacher assistants had no effect on their choice to return to school. I also found that some teacher assistants were intrinsically motivated to increase their knowledge of appropriate practices in educating young children, therefore elevating their self-esteem and feelings of professionalism. Additionally, Head Start teacher assistants did not have the finances to continue their education and may have chosen to leave the profession or find a non-Head Start teaching position that did not fall under the educational mandate.

Recommendation for Further Research

Based on the findings of the data collection and analysis of this project study, further research should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of mentoring programs to combat determined barriers. Mentoring programs will increase appropriate practices in the field of early childhood education and job retention of classroom support staff members. Teacher assistants were given two years from the September 2013 deadline to complete all CDA credential requirements; it is also recommended that further research be conducted at the end of the two year period to determine attitudes toward the mandate of IHSSRA and it's impact on their decision to continue their education.

Summary

The Head Start program was developed and designed to offer educational opportunities to lower income families. The benefits of the Head Start program, including gains in all developmental domains, health, and nutrition, have been shown to last through children's educational career and later in life (Dearing et al., 2009). The knowledge and educational level of early childhood instructional staff has had an effect on the learning and formative development of young children.

The Abbott v. Burke decision was mentioned in this proposal because of its focus on providing early education opportunities for children residing in the lower economic areas in the State of New Jersey. This legislation includes an emphasis on increasing requirements for teachers employed in Abbott district early childhood programs. In addition to the Abbott v. Burke decision, more recently, the IHSSRA has placed

educational requirements on teacher assistants working in Head Start classrooms. Head Start classroom support staff had a limited time frame to meet the educational requirements included in the Act. These individuals were ultimately responsible for finding and paying for their CDA education program. It was not guaranteed that they would receive additional compensation once they obtained the required CDA credential, but would have been demoted or terminated from their current positions if they did not obtain the credential within the allotted time period. There were many barriers classroom support staff faced in participating in continuing their education and training. Sharing the results of this project study with Head Start administration will bring attention to these barriers in order to develop strategies in dealing with them.

In Section 2, I describe the methodology of this project study. I used a case study design to interview a sample of teacher assistants employed by a Head Start program. The results of the interviews were used to determine the barriers early childhood teacher assistants faced in continuing their education and participating in training.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a focus on the education of those responsible for teaching young children, and on the effect this education has had on child development. At my study site, the lack of sufficient teacher education has an effect on child development, the performance of the school, and the success of the agency's Head Start program as a whole. The research problem I sought to address in this study was that early childhood teacher assistants employed by a local Head Start program faced barriers to continue their education to meet state and federal mandates requiring them to obtain a CDA. These barriers included various factors such as fear of failure, lack of time management skills, negative cultural perceptions of school, and childcare needs (see Eng & Ronaldson, 2010; Robinson & Vesay, 2008; 2010; Zaman et al., 2012). According to the education manager of my study site, if these individuals did not receive their CDA or had not enrolled in a CDA program by September 2013, they would not have been able to remain in their teacher assistant positions. The research question I used to guide this study was: What are the barriers that Head Start teacher assistants face in their decisions to continue their schooling to obtain a degree or certificate in the field of early childhood education? Using a qualitative case study design, I conducted a series of semistructured one-on-one interviews to discover what had kept the teacher assistants from continuing their education to meet the requirements of the Head Start act, even though they were at risk of losing their jobs.

Research Design

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers endeavor to understand the point of view of a particular group. I chose a qualitative design because I sought to study the experiences of a specific group of individuals within a bounded system (see Merriam, 2009). The advantage of using qualitative research is that it helped me better comprehend this particular event (Merriam, 2009). The issue in this specific case was the continuing education of childcare teacher assistants (see Creswell, 2012). I did not select a quantitative design using numerical data because it would not have effectively captured the specific experiences of the participants. Similarly, a mixed methods design that included quantitative data would not have presented a clear focus on the actual experiences of the study participants.

For this type of qualitative study, I considered using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is an investigative method that examines the “lived experience” of a particular group (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological researcher would be interested in looking at this particular event over an extended period time (Creswell, 2009). The case study approach was better suited for this study, as it is used to examine a program, event, activity, or process of one or more individuals bounded by a particular amount of time (Creswell, 2009). In this study, I focused on a sample of teacher assistants and their quest to obtain their CDA credential within the 2 year period allotted by IHSSRA.

Rationale of Research Design

My key purpose for using the interview format was to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participants regarding their ability to participate in continuing

education programs, and their willingness to meet the requirements of the Head Start Act. I chose the one-on-one interview format because of the personal nature of the responses and the confidentiality afforded to the participants, and because of the opportunity it gave them to offer more responsive answers. During each interview, participants responded to open-ended questions and discussed their educational level and the barriers influencing why they had or had not met the educational mandate. Individual interviews increased confidentiality and allowed the participants to express their thoughts freely. The semistructured interview format allowed for additional discussion and comments that the participant may have had, and also provided an opportunity for me to ask relevant follow-up questions. The semi-structured interview sessions included 11 open-ended questions (Appendix B), and lasted less than 30 minutes.

Participants

In a cluster random selection, the total number of participants is dependent upon the amount of individuals who fit the necessary criteria within the selected site (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2006). In order to participate in this study, the participants must have been a teacher assistant or classroom support staff employed in either a Head Start or Early Head Start classroom. I used cluster random selection (see Creswell, 2009) to identify six out of 15 sites operated by a non-profit Head Start preschool program located in southern New Jersey. There were nine out of 82 currently employed teacher assistants who accepted the invitation to participate in the interview process (an average of about one to two participants per site). According to Glesne (2011), the use of multiple sites increases the level of reliability of the participant responses or data collected.

I obtained permission to access the participants through a meeting with the non-profit agency's vice president of Head Start. I explained the purpose of the research project, participant selection, and the data collection. The vice president of Head Start submitted a letter of cooperation which allowed me to have access to the participants. Following an email invitation, I met with the Head Start director of operations to determine the six sites or clusters that were to be sampled. Once the clusters were identified, the site directors of each selected site were contacted either through e-mail, or in person, to determine the date and time of their staff meeting. The teacher assistants within each cluster that fell under the educational mandate were informed of the study during the staff meeting, where they were invited to participate in the interview process.

At each staff meeting I explained the purpose and rationale of my study, including the problems they may have faced in choosing to continue their education toward obtaining the CDA credential or advanced degree. I also reviewed the consent form outlining my process for maintaining confidentiality, who would have access to data, and how the data would be used. At the end of each meeting I passed out copies of the consent form, which included my contact information, and reminded them that their participation was completely voluntary.

The nature of the semistructured interview allowed for more of a relaxed discourse between me and the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in a less intimidating neutral environment so that the interviewee could feel more comfortable. I asked the site supervisor of each location to designate unoccupied classroom space, office space, a conference room, or other enclosed setting to use for the interview sessions. The

prepared questions were only used to guide each conversation. The purpose of using open-ended questions was to encourage the participants to provide more than one-word answers that focused on their thoughts and feelings.

Participant Demographics

The current study included nine participants employed as teacher assistants or classroom support staff at a Head Start program located in southern New Jersey. Of the nine participants, four were African American, three Caucasian, and two Hispanic. There were eight females and one male. The participant ages ranged from 20 to 50; four were between the ages of 20 and 30, three were between 30 and 40, and two were 40-50 (Table 1). At the start of the interview, I asked each participant what was the highest level of education they had obtained. Of the nine interview participants, one held an associate's degree in a non-educational field, one participant completed requirements toward their radiology license, four participants had some college credits, and three had obtained their CDA credential (Table 2).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

African American	Caucasian	Hispanic	Male	Female	Ages 20-30	Ages 30-40	Ages 40-50
4	3	2	1	8	4	3	2

Table 2

Participant Educational Levels

AA Degree Non-educational	License Non-educational	Some College Credits	CDA Credential
1	1	4	3

Protection of Participant Rights

At each Head Start site selected for participant recruitment, I attended the staff meeting to explain the purpose of the study, the interview process, the system to ensure confidentiality, and how the results would be used. I explained the potential risks of participating in the study which included minor uneasiness such as stress and the potential for becoming upset. The participants were assured that there would be no health or safety risks related to their involvement in the study. I also reviewed the process for maintaining their anonymity, explaining that participant names would be coded using a method which labels documents with the first and third letter of the first name and the first and third letter of the last name, for each participant. Neither the interview transcripts nor any other study reports included any identifiable or personal information, and I will maintain them for 5 years in a locked cabinet which is only accessible to me. Prior to the start of each interview I reviewed the process for maintaining confidentiality, and requested verbal permission to audio record the interview session.

Role of the Researcher

I have been employed by a community action agency for 15 years as the director of one of the child care centers sponsored by the agency. I have also been employed as an adjunct professor at a local community college instructing courses in early childhood education. Additionally, I facilitated CDA courses for the child care resource and referral agency of southern New Jersey. There were five teacher assistants employed under my supervision who were required to meet the requirements of IHSSRA. I worked closely with these five individuals in an effort to support them in successfully completing their CDA requirements. I had no current or past relationship with the teacher assistant participants included in this study. I personally conducted each of the interviews, which were digitally recorded to ensure participant responses were recorded accurately, eliminating the potential for researcher bias.

Limitations

The availability of the participants to sit for a 10-15 minute interview was a limitation. I contacted each participant to determine an interview time that was convenient to their schedule. Participants decided whether they would meet before or after their work hours, or they may have chosen to give up a portion of their lunch breaks. The time period for accessing potential participants was further limited by the conclusion of the school year. For many of the Head Start sites, the school year ended during the month of May, after which time the teacher assistants were not accessible to me.

Data Collection Procedures

The data I collected were comprised of the participant responses to 11 open-ended interview questions (Appendix B; Merriam, 2009). Participant responses revealed their personal views and perceptions of continuing education and training, including the barriers they had experienced in completing their required training hours. As a result of attending the staff meetings at each site, a total of nine teacher assistants employed within the six selected sites volunteered to participate in the interview process. I contacted each volunteer to determine a convenient date and time to conduct the interview. The director of each site was able to designate a private location for me to conduct the interview session. Each interview lasted 10 to 15 minutes, depending upon the amount of information the interviewees shared.

I audio recorded the interviews with the permission of each participant. The interview recordings were electronically transcribed using NVivo and TranscribeMe software. I downloaded the transcripts onto a password protected computer and saved them on a flash drive. I stored the flash drive in a locked cabinet in my office, which I alone have access. I will destroy interview notes, recordings, and other relevant research information five years after the publication of this completed project study.

Data Analysis

I organized and catalogued the data using the NVivo software. I uploaded the interview recordings into NVivo for Windows 10. NVivo works with TranscribeMe transcription service to transcribe the recordings into written dialogue between myself and the interviewee (Appendix D). This process took two to three days, depending on the

length of the recording and number of speakers. Once the recordings were transcribed I could access them through the NVivo software.

For this project study, I analyzed the interview transcripts in the order in which they were collected. While reading through the transcripts, I recognized specific words or phrases as emerging themes. According to Glesne (2011), the thematic approach is a popular approach for presenting qualitative data. In the thematic approach, the researcher breaks down the data into categories in order to provide an organized description of the findings. Using the NVivo software, I identified themes as nodes. There are parent nodes, which are the main themes, and child nodes, which are the subthemes. Through this process of layering themes, I identified nine main themes or parent nodes, along with six subthemes or child nodes (Creswell, 2012).

After reading through the first set of transcripts, I began to identify and create a chart of emerging main themes. Using the NVivo software, I was able to identify, name, and create each theme, and then insert the participant responses into the chart related to each theme. As I continued to read and analyze the first set of transcripts, I was able to develop a preliminary set of main themes. Using these main themes, I continued to read and analyze each following set of interview transcripts. Similar responses were selected and added to related themes in the NVivo system. Throughout this process, I was able to create themes based upon information that arose from the interview responses. As new additional themes were created, I returned to the previous transcripts to find related responses (Merriam, 2009). After reading and analyzing transcripts several times, saturation was reached as I did not find any new themes. I was then able to group the

themes together, reducing the number of main themes to six and increasing the number of subthemes to eight.

Working in partnership with the NVivo software, I highlighted specific phrases, relevant comments, and similar responses, using a color coded system of related topics (Creswell, 2012). I charted the color coded interview data according to recognizable emerging themes. Themes emerged naturally from the original interview questions which, in turn, I was able to relate back to my project study questions.

Evidence of Quality

In case study research methods, there is a heavy reliance on the honesty of the investigator (Merriam, 2009). Researcher bias can affect the identification of themes highlighted within the data report (Merriam, 2009). For this reason, I maintained a reflective journal that I used to express my personal biases and steps I took to check those biases (Appendix C, Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). I also utilized the NVivo software because it was programmed to systematically aid in the identification of similar responses. To ensure internal validity, I had interview transcripts member checked (Creswell, 2009) by three of the participants to ensure I accurately recorded their responses. According to Merriam (2009), I needed only a few of the participants to validate their responses to certify that I did not misinterpret their experiences. Peer debriefing is often used to discuss the study procedures and to review the findings to determine plausibility (Merriam, 2009). In this study I used a coworker as the peer debriefer who was familiar with the study topic and was not a study participant. To ensure external validity, I took other measures including the collection of unobtrusive

data such as preservice agendas, educational pamphlets, and financial assistance information.

Discrepant Cases

The procedure for dealing with discrepant cases included a more detailed line by line review of the transcripts to determine if any nonconforming data had enough strength to affect or change my study outcomes. Negative data was reviewed by a colleague to identify if the conclusion contained any bias on my part as the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). No discrepant cases or nonconforming data were collected from this study.

Findings

Introduction

As a result of the data analysis of the participant's responses, six main themes emerged; *training hours*, *training completion*, *education*, *agency offered training*, *learning application*, and *Head Start Act*. In partnership with the NVivo software, I grouped together related participant responses into main themes and subthemes. Naming the themes resulted from three different data collection sources (Merriam, 2009). I named the majority of the themes, while other theme names arose from participant responses, and from the literature. Theme names were also determined by what manner the data related to the research questions and the theoretical concept of the study. The *training hours* and *training completion* themes were derived from the interview questions in relation to the first research question; while the *education* and *agency offered training* themes were derived from the interview questions in relation to the second research question. The *learning application* and *Head Start Act* themes related to the theoretical

concept of this study; Knowles's theory of adult learning and Kolb's experiential learning theory (Knowles, 1988; Kolb, 1983). I grouped participant responses together, charted, and discussed them within each section.

These six themes, along with key phrases that were gleaned from the nine interviews, are listed in Figure 1 below. The number of the participants who responded to the interview question associated with each theme is reflected in the *Participants'* column while the *References* column indicates the number of times the key phrase was mentioned.

Table 3

Theme 1: Training Hours – RQ #1

Did not know number of hours	Not clear on number of hours
5	4

Table 3 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews demonstrating their knowledge of required training hours. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates the number of participants who did not know the number of required annual training hours, and the number of participants who were not clear on the number of required training hours.

Training Hours Theme

This particular theme represents the participants' knowledge of the training requirements for their positions as teacher assistants. This theme also demonstrates the

participant’s knowledge, or lack of knowledge, of the type of training they were required to obtain annually. According to the New Jersey Manual of Requirments for Child Care Centers (2013), child care staff who are employed at a center for at least 20 percent of the center’s operating hours must complete 10 hours of PD each year in the areas of child growth and development, positive guidance and discipline, and health and safety procedures (p. 34-35). None of the teacher assistants included in this study had specific knowledge of how many hours of training or what type of training was required for their positions. Participant #4 stated, “I’m not clear on it. I don’t know what the hours would be or anything. I don’t have a list of what I need to do each year.” Participant #5 replied, “Not that I know of, I’m really not sure. They have in-services for us.” The fact that these employees were not aware of the state mandate for training hours directly relates to not only my first research question, but also relates to the theoretical concept of this study which asserted that adults “need to know” why they need to continue their education (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 44). If the teacher assistants had a more comprehensive knowledge of the training and educational requirements they may have been more likely to complete them.

Table 4

Theme 2: Training Completion – RQ #1

Completed Most	Attended Every Training	Feel Successful
2	3	4

Table 4 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews regarding their ability to attend and complete required training hours. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates that there were two participants who completed most of their required training hours, three who attended every training offered each year, and four who felt successful in completing their annual training requirement.

Training Completion Theme

The training completion theme was developed within the context of my first research question. The topic of training completion refers to the participant's ability to complete their training hours which includes their ability to meet the requirements to obtain their CDA credential. The two subthemes included in this theme were training attendance and barriers to attending training and continuing education.

Training attendance subtheme. Although these teacher assistants were not very knowledgeable of their overall training requirements, they did have a high rate of attendance to the trainings for which they were scheduled or registered. All nine of the interview participants stated that they had completed most or all of their required trainings. In regards to their ability to attend required trainings, positive comments were made by Participant #2 who said, "Pretty good. I attend all the ones they give us," Participant #3 said, "I feel like I'm successful," and lastly, Participant #1 said, "I try [to] go [to] every training." Participant #5 shared more information regarding the reason many were able to maintain a high attendance rate stating, "because it's still on our work hours, so it's usually either half a day for the kids or the kids have off on a day that they planned it." Participant #8 stated "I would have to go, because all training is a

requirement. It's not a option to me. Then that way I will basically know what I'm responsible for, and what needs to be done.” According to these participants, the reason why they are successful in attending and completing training is because the training is offered by the agency and is scheduled during their regular work hours.

Table 5

Sub-Theme: Barriers to Attending Training

Health concern/family emergency	Fear of computer	A lot of money	Not into school	Work during the day	Location/travel	No Barriers Identified
4	1	2	1	1	1	2

Table 5 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews regarding the barriers they face in attending and completing required training hours. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates the of references taken from interview transcripts. Some of the participants discussed more than one barrier that precluded them from continuing their education two participants did not specify any barriers.

Barriers to attending training and continuting education subtheme. The second subtheme of this category focuses on the barriers or reasons why these teacher assistants may not complete their educational requirement. When asked what were some reasons why the participants might not complete their training hours their responses included various personal emergency situations such as: sickness, surgery, pregnancy, or family emergencies. When asked to describe the barriers the participants may have faced in attending training or education programs, the participants offered the following

challenges: fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, lack of motivation, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and family responsibilities. Participant #3 stated, “Right now, most of my classes are offered during the day. So I have to wait until a different semester until they offer it at night, because during the day I can't go because I'm working.” Participant #7 shared her thoughts stating, “College is not cheap and you need a lot of support other than money to go through...because it's hard, it's not easy.” Participant #4 shared the specific barriers she faced in participating in training and education programs:

I would say if it was, let's say not at the school, where I had to travel, not familiar with the area. I didn't have a lot of gas in my car and I didn't have the money to get gas to take that trip, basically financial for gas, distance, and that was actually at 6:30 at night, then I have my kids, like I said, time, distance and money really.

Deutsch and Riffin (2013) identified barriers similar to those experienced by this teacher assistant, which included deficiency of funding, transportation and distance, time away from work and family, and a remedial educational capacity. Participant #6 did not experience any of these barriers stating, “It's all depending on how you feel about the training and the school. If you go for it, you can finish it, no matter what. It all depends on the person.” There is, however, a clear disparity between the accessibility of training and the accessibility of continued education courses. In this agency training is made available to the staff and coordinated during their work hours; while educational coursework is not as readily available.

Table 6

Theme 3: Education Theme – RQ #2

Want to obtain CDA/ BA/Teaching Degree	Want to continue education	Does not want to continue education	Not sure
3	4	1	1

Table 6 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews regarding their educational beliefs and their desire or motivation to continue their education. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates that there were three participants who were interested in obtaining a specific degree or certification, four who were interested in continuing their education, and one who was not sure, and one who was not interested in continuing their education.

Education Theme

At the start of each interview, I asked the participants to share their highest level of education. According to Yamauchi, Im, Lin, and Schonleber (2012), teacher assistants typically enter the field of early childhood education with no more than a high school diploma. I wanted to begin each interview with a clear understanding of where each participant stood in their educational career. The education theme was broken down into three subthemes: continuing education, motivation, and educational beliefs. The education theme was derived from the second research question.

Continuing education subtheme. Quite a few of the participants expressed an interest in continuing their education. Out of the nine participants: seven planned to continue their education toward an associate or baccalaureate degree, and two were either undecided or uninterested in continuing their education. Participant #1 shared, “I want to continue., I don't know, I go step by step.” Participant #5 said, “I'm just not sure exactly what I want to do yet for the rest of my life.” Participant #6 stated, “I don't, because I don't feel like going back to school or doing it right now.” Participant #7 stated, “Yes. I want to go-- I'm going back to school next year to continue with my teaching degree for pre-school.” Participant responses demonstrated in this thematic area led me to examine the motivation of the participants who may or may not have expressed the desire to continue their education.

Motivation subtheme. Examining the motivation of teacher assistants directly relates to the theoretical concept of Knowles' (1988) theory of adult learning or androgogy. Prior research studies have shown that low skilled staff are less intrinsically motivated to take advantage of continuing education opportunities (Wagner & French, 2010). Merriam et al. (2007), argued that there are some adults who are motivated to learn by their own accord. The participants of this study demonstrated both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsically motivated participants. Of the seven teacher assistants who expressed a desire to continue their education, three appeared intrinsically motivated. Participant #8 stated, “I do know I want to go for my bachelor's.” Participant #1 stated, “The more important [thing] here is I learn children-- I love children. I love what I do.”

The third intrinsically motivated participant, Participant #7 said, “I love children. I've been dealing with children since I was 11 years old, so it's my cup of tea.”

Extrinsically motivated participants. The four remaining participants who expressed interest in continuing their education were extrinsically motivated by a potential promotion. A clear example of this was demonstrated by Participant #2 who said, “It would get me back to a teaching spot.” Participant #4 also demonstrated extrinsic motivation, “Well, definitely give me more knowledge going in and the confidence to take the next step, because I actually had an opportunity to move up and be a group teacher.” Participant #9 simply stated, “I want to be a head teacher.” According to Deutsch and Riffin (2013), whether intrinsic or extrinsic, motivation is a major factor in determining whether or not a preschool teacher will choose to continue their education.

Educational beliefs subtheme. The final subtheme of the education theme revolved around the educational beliefs of the participant. This subtheme demonstrates the general perception each participant held toward education and training. The majority of participants had a positive view toward education (six out of nine), while the remaining three participants had negative beliefs toward education. These three participants shared their negative feelings toward their lack of self application in pursuit of continued education.

I do know I want to go for my bachelor's. I'm not sure if it's in early head start or early child training. It's between that and health services administration. But at this point, I really don't want to change my major. (Participant #8)

Participant #5 stated, “I don't know if I'd want to say that's what I'm definitely going to do forever for now.” Lastly, some exhibited an overall lack of interest in continuing their education. Participant #6 demonstrated this sentiment when she stated, “I think if I don't feel it, I feel like it's a waste of time and money for me.” These three participants expressed doubt as to whether or not they would choose to remain in the field of early childhood education or choose a different career path.

Table 7

Theme 4: Agency Offered Training – RQ #2

Training should come from the agency	Training received from school district/local college	Training received from coworkers
4	2	3

Table 7 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews regarding agencies that provide training. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates that there were four participants who felt that training should come from the agency, two participants who received their training from an educational facility, and three who received their training from coworkers.

Agency Offered Training Theme

One of the barriers identified in the literature review was the availability of relevant educational programs available to teacher assistants. The topic of agency-offered training was chosen to discuss where the teachers go to get their training and

education. This theme topic was derived in response to my second research question; what factors have deterred, or prevented, them from enrolling in or completing a higher education program? Included in this theme are the subthemes training agency and mentoring.

Training agency subtheme. The participants were asked to provide the name of the agency or educational institution that provides their training. The participants stated that they received some of their training from the Head Start program, some training from outside agencies such as the local school district or community colleges, and lastly, training was received from their colleagues or other staff. When asked if the participants felt the agency or Head Start should offer training for child care staff the participants agreed. Participant #8 responded, "I do, yes, because I don't believe that it's the other staff's responsibility to train us. It should come from the agency what they're expecting us to do." Another participant, Participant #7 replied, "I feel like when you start, here, it should be more-- each time someone new starts, they should have training. Just to get a better understanding of how to work in the daycare." Participant #9 said, "Yeah, I would [participate] because I could do it on my own time, and because it could be helpful."

Participant #3 stated:

they [the agency] need to help people realize whether or not they actually want to be a teacher or not. It takes a lot of patience and a lot of love to be a teacher, and if you don't have that then this is not the job for you.

These participants feel it is the agency's responsibility to ensure the staff are fully trained in program requirements and early childhood developmentally appropriate practices.

Table 8

Sub-Theme: Mentoring

Would participate in mentoring program	Would participate if worked with work hours	Would participate to help get them through school
4	2	3

Table 8 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews regarding their willingness to participate in an agency-sponsored mentoring program. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates that four participants are willing to participate in an agency sponsored mentoring program, two would participate if it fit into their regular work hours, and three would participate because it would help them get through school.

Mentoring subtheme. Teacher assistants who received support from a mentor shared a more positive outlook toward educational participation and demonstrate a higher rate of completion (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2010). The participants were asked if they would participate in mentoring opportunities provided by the agency. The following responses were offered: Participant #2 replied, “Yeah, I think I would. It would get me back to a teaching spot.” Participant #3 stated, “It would help me get through school faster.” Participant #5 replied, “Yeah, as long as it works out with my hours.” Participant #6 replied, “Yeah. If it's going to help the program and help us, I feel like it's good.” A few of the participants shared positive mentoring experiences they have had in

the past. Participant #4 shared, “The mentoring definitely helps a lot, just with confidence in itself, and then it gives you that extra knowledge that some people don't get to have.” Participant #9 said, “They do guide us through things if we need it or if we have questions.” All nine of the teacher assistants who participated in this study demonstrated a positive feeling toward mentoring and exhibited an interest in taking advantage of an agency-sponsored mentoring program.

Table 9

Head Start Act

Not familiar	Prepare children for Kindergarten	Help children go forward
6	2	1

Table 9 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant interviews regarding their familiarity with the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act. There were nine participants who responded. The graph indicates that six were not familiar with the Head Start Act, two thought the purpose of the act was to prepare children for Kindergarten, and one thought the purpose was to help children go forward.

Head Start Act Theme

This theme takes into consideration the teacher assistants' knowledge of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act (IHSSRA). The IHSSRA was responsible for raising the educational requirements for these teacher assistants to maintain employment (Brown, 2008). This theme is a direct correlation to the first

theoretical concept of this study that adults “need to know” why they are being required to continue their education to obtain the CDA credential (Knowles et al., 1998, p. 44).

When asked to explain their understanding of IHSSRA, not one of the nine study participants could effectively define the meaning of the act. Out of the nine participants, six stated that they had no knowledge of the act. The remaining three participants offered the following responses: Participant #5 said, “to prepare them [the children] for kindergarten.” Participant #2 said, “to help the children gain their growth in their families together so they can go forward.” Participant #3 offered, “it's supposed to help us to improve the learning of the children to get them ready to go to kindergarten and to be more successful in life.” Although these three participants offered a response to this particular question they were very unsure as to the true implications of the act and it’s role in raising the educational standards for their positions. “Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (Knowles, 1952, p. 67). If these individuals had a more complete understanding of IHSSRA it is possible that they would have completed the requirements to obtain their CDA credential (Forest & Peterson, 2006).

Table 10

Theme 6: Learning Applications

Manage a child with disabilities/ behavior problems	Keeping the class on a good routine	How to treat the children the best way	Working as a team	Math and language activities
2	1	4	1	1

Figure 9 shows the key phrases gleaned from the participant regarding how they are able to apply their learning in the classroom. There were nine participants who responded. The table indicates that two participants use their learning to manage children with disabilities or behavior problems, one uses their learning to keep a good routine in the classroom, four uses their learning in the classroom in treating the children the best way, one participant said they use their learning to work as a team, and one participant uses their learning to improve math and language activities.

Learning Application Theme

Teacher assistants who participate in professional development and training are more likely to utilize developmentally appropriate teaching practices (Fuligni et al., 2009; Yamauchi et al., 2012). The participants were asked to describe how they apply what they learn in the classroom. The participants put their knowledge to use by trying out the newly learned strategies with the children. Some examples of the learned strategies used with children included: how to manage a child with disabilities or behavior problems, keeping the class on a good routine, how to treat the children the best way, working as a team, and, math and language activities. Participant #1 explained the importance of training, “You pay attention to see what he say to use in the classroom daily. Next time you are doing better or you know what you are supposed to do. That's what training is helping.” Participant #5 said, “I’ll try the ideas our and see if it works well with my class.” Participant #6 said, “I try to go over the information that they give us and try to use it in the classroom as they suggest.” Participant #7 responded, “If I learn teaching

techniques, I'll try it out with the children. They've given us certain activities...like math-wise or language-wise. Whatever I get from training, if I can apply that to [the] classroom, then I do." Participant #4 also shared her experience in applying new knowledge in the classroom:

There's a lot of things I've actually learned this year. Just like one thing for example, how to speak to the children. You have to speak to the children-- like it's a totally different way of speaking then I'm used to, like at home with my kids, but there was one book in there that was actually telling-- it had different ideas for projects or how you can actually-- I forget how it went, but it's just ideas and I was like, Oh, that's a cool idea. I'm going to make sure I use that.

This discussion of the participants' application of their learning relates to the theoretical concept of experiential learning which demonstrates how the participants were able to reflect on, and apply, what they have learned in the classroom (Kolb, 1983; Merriam et al., 2007).

Summary

The first section of this project highlighted the problem that was being faced in the Head Start program operated by a non-profit community action agency located in southern New Jersey where teacher assistants faced barriers in obtaining their CDA credential. According to the IHSSRA, Head Start teacher assistants were required to obtain early childhood certifications and higher degrees in order to maintain their current positions. Over the past several years, teacher assistant responsibilities have transitioned from the role of classroom helper to instructional partner (Barkham, 2008). Formerly,

teacher assistants in general, were considered classroom aides whose primary job responsibility was centered around housekeeping duties. Currently in the state of New Jersey, Head Start teachers and their teacher assistants, have become teaching teams who work as partners in creating appropriate learning environments for young children to thrive (Hancock, Hall, Cable, & Eyres, 2010). This change in job duties for teacher assistants has brought attention to their levels of education. If they did not meet the federal requirements, they either chose to leave the profession or they were subject to demotion to a non-stationary position, a part-time position, or even terminated.

The second section of the project describes the qualitative case study method that was used to determine the barriers that prevented classroom support staff from choosing to continue their education. One-on-one interviews were conducted with nine classroom support staff who fell under the educational mandate. Participants included those who were involved in an educational program as well as those who were not enrolled in a program or training course and those who had already obtained their CDA credential.

The qualitative data obtained from these interviews provided insight into the reasoning behind their choice to participate or not participate in a continuing education program. Although the participants of this study did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the number of training hours they were required to obtain, or the training topics they were required to obtain each year, they did maintain a high level of attendance to the training sessions for which they were registered. Additionally, the participants did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act or how it related to their educational requirement to obtain a CDA

credential. The participants demonstrated a high level of motivation to continue their education, whether intrinsic or extrinsic. However, the extrinsically motivated participants were only interested in continuing their education in order to obtain a higher level position. Lastly, the data indicated that mentoring and administrative support would increase their desire to continue their education and would be beneficial to the successful completion of credential requirements and advanced degrees.

Understanding the barriers to, or reasons why, Head Start teacher assistants have not met the requirements of the educational mandate will help Head Start, nationally, in developing a plan on how to assist them in obtaining their credentials. Positive social change will occur when the barriers are recognized and understood. The quality of programming will improve with a greater educated staff (Kipnis & Whitebook, 2012), which will strengthen young students as they prepare to embark in their roles in society. The results of this study will be used to assist Head Start centers that are sponsored by this non-profit agency in the development and implementation of additional support networks to ensure that the teacher assistants maintain their necessary credentials in order for them to continue in their positions or, if they so choose, to help them find alternative employment.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In 2007, President George W. Bush signed the IHSSRA. Included in this act were specific regulations mandating increased educational requirements for early childhood staff who work directly with children. More specifically, teacher assistants working in a Head Start classroom were required to obtain a CDA credential within a given time frame or they would be demoted or even terminated from their positions.

As a result of this project study, I identified several barriers that have affected teacher assistants' abilities to meet the educational requirement. The barriers I identified included: fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, lack of motivation, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and family responsibilities. In order to mitigate these barriers, I am recommending a policy for developing a mentoring program to support and assist Head Start teacher assistants in the completion of their CDA credential to meet the requirements of the IHSSRA. I found that although teacher assistants are willing to participate in and complete their training requirements, they are not familiar with the specific content areas in which training must be completed. Additionally, I found that the same teacher assistants who fell under the mandate of the IHSSRA did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the mandate. Regardless of their level of understanding, these individuals were to be demoted or terminated from their positions if they did not continue their education to obtain their CDA credential.

Summary of Analysis of Findings

Following the nine semistructured interviews, I organized participant responses into six main themes: *training hours, training completion, education, agency offered training, learning application, and Head Start Act*. The teacher assistants who participated in this study demonstrated a positive outlook regarding their ability and desire to not only complete required training hours, but also to continue their education to obtain their CDA credential and beyond. The teacher assistants who participated in this study were both internally and externally motivated to continue their education.

Although these teacher assistants were motivated to continue their education, they demonstrated an overall lack of knowledge of the number of training hours or the specific type of training required for their positions. Moreover, these teacher assistants had little to no knowledge of the IHSSRA which mandated the increase in educational requirements for their positions. The teacher assistants discussed the barriers they faced in their attempt to continue their education. The barriers identified included: sickness, surgery, pregnancy, family emergencies, fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and other family responsibilities. Lastly, the teacher assistants who participated in this study demonstrated interest in participating in an agency-sponsored mentoring program.

Rationale

I decided to use the results of this study to recommend a policy to create an agency-sponsored mentoring program to provide support to the teacher assistants in obtaining their CDA credential. This specific project was chosen based on the results of

this study as well as the research I cited in the literature review. I developed the policy recommendation specifically to address the problem identified in this project study. The teacher assistants employed by this non-profit agency faced barriers in completing the educational requirements set forth by the IHSSRA and were therefore losing their positions when they were not able to meet the requirements of the mandate within the designated time frame. The participants in this study agreed that mentors would be helpful in completing their educational requirement, and they also stated that they would be willing to participate in an on-site mentoring program.

Review of the Literature

I developed the policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program using findings from my study in conjunction with information from recently published literature. I conducted a thorough search of related peer reviewed literature using various Boolean terms such as *Head Start*, *teacher qualifications*, *teacher aides*, *PD*, *barriers*, *mentors*, *incentives*, *labor turnover*, *educational attainment*, *academic aspiration*, and *re-entry students*. This search was conducted using the Walden University library to access education databases including Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education Research Starters, Education from SAGE, and ProQuest Central. I also input these terms into the multidisciplinary database using variations in search terms until article titles became repetitive.

This literature review includes discussions of the following themes: *need to know why*, *motivation to learn*, *mentoring and coaching*, *learning application*, and *continuity of care*. These five main themes are introduced and discussed as related to the development

of the mentoring program. My analysis of the participant responses, in conjunction with the research and theoretical concepts, formed the basis of the policy recommendation for the development of an agency-sponsored mentoring program.

Analysis of Theory and Research

I designed this study to discover the barriers Head Start teacher assistants face in continuing their education to meet the requirements of the IHSSRA. The qualitative case study format using semi-structured interviews was selected in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the thoughts and feelings of the teacher assistants toward their ability to meet the increased educational requirements. My analysis of participant responses in Section 2 of this study shows a clear relationship between the theoretical concepts and the experiences of the teacher assistants.

The theoretical concepts I selected to support this study were derived from Knowles's theory of adult learning and Kolb's experiential learning theory (Knowles, 1988; Kolb, 1983). Knowles's theory of adult learning describes how adults must be ready to learn and have a clear understanding of why they need to learn something new (Knowles, 1988). In this project study, the teacher assistants employed by a local Head Start program faced mandates that required them to obtain their CDA credential within a given time frame or they would have been demoted or terminated from their positions. The results of this study show that six out of nine participants did not have a clear understanding of the IHSSRA, and that three out of the nine were only vaguely familiar with the act. The fact that these teacher assistants did not have a full and complete knowledge of the reason why they needed to increase their education may have

contributed to their level of motivation to meet the educational requirement. However, Knowles's theory of adult learning also holds that adults are intrinsically motivated to increase their knowledge (Knowles, 1988).

Kolb's experiential learning theory describes a cyclical learning process that includes receiving knowledge, analyzing the new information, applying the knowledge, and then reflecting on it (Kolb, 1983; Merriam et al., 2007). The participants in this study did not demonstrate a clear knowledge of their training requirement, nor did they exhibit a clear knowledge of IHSSRA. In the literature review, I demonstrate how an agency-sponsored mentoring program will provide the support the teacher assistants need in order to not only complete the requirements of the CDA credential, but to also effectively apply their learning in the classroom.

Need to Know Why

More often than not, teacher assistants enter the field of early childhood education with a high school diploma as their highest level of education (Sosinsky and Gilliam, 2011). According to Sosinsky and Gilliam (2011), most states have not raised educational standards for teacher assistants and only require a high school diploma to enter the field. Bullough et al. (2012), suggest that older teacher assistants who are more likely to remain in a Head Start program are the least educated and that the IHSSRA does not take them, their needs nor their goals as educators into consideration. The agency-sponsored mentoring program will recruit members of the non-profit agency's executive team to pair up with teacher assistants participating in the CDA credential program.

These mentors will provide assistance and the support the teacher assistant's need in goal development as they progress through their CDA coursework.

Studies show teachers with higher levels of education demonstrate improved interactions with children, form stronger attachments to children, and create classroom spaces that foster rich cognitive activities and language opportunities (Huss-Keeler et al., 2013). In order to raise the level of quality early childhood programming the educational requirements of teaching staff must be raised (Huss-Keeler et al., 2013). The participants included in this study did not have a clear knowledge of the IHSSRA, it's goal to raise the quality of Head Start programs to improve school readiness, or it's impact on their qualifications to work in an early childhood classroom. Brendefur et al. (2013), inferred that if students do not recognize and understand what is intended for them to do or learn it will not hold any importance to them. One of the main goals of the agency-sponsored mentoring program is to increase the teacher assistants understanding of the IHSSRA and how it relates to their credential requirements. The mentors participating in this mentoring program will be knowledgeable of the IHSSRA and will ensure the teacher assistants understand the act and the impact it has on their continued employment.

Motivation to Learn

As the teacher assistants gain a more comprehensive understanding of the IHSSRA and the reason why they must continue their education, they will also demonstrate increased motivation to obtain the CDA credential. Wagner and French (2010) identified three categories, ranging from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, that compel learners to participate in education programs: to meet employment mandates, to

improve teaching practices, or to meet their own personal educational goals. One of the goals of the mentoring program is to ensure the teacher assistants have a clear knowledge of the IHSSRA as well as other annual training requirements for their position. With the understanding that raising qualifications of teacher assistants elevates the quality of care provided to children, internal motivation would stem from the teacher assistants' own beliefs that increasing their knowledge in early childhood education would better their teaching practices (Deutsch & Riffin, 2013). Out of the teacher assistants who participated in this project study three out of nine demonstrated intrinsic motivation, while four out of nine demonstrated extrinsic motivation to continue their education.

Maude et al. (2011) stated that teacher assistants who demonstrate a concerted effort to continue their education and increase their practical knowledge, often experience difficulties and barriers in their attempts. Similarly, others have found that teacher assistants face many barriers in their decision to continue their education, but with support from family, friends, supervisors, and coworkers they may be more likely to not only participate, but also succeed in attaining their educational goals (Deutsch & Riffin, 2013; Huss-Keeler et al., 2013). The barriers I identified in this project study were fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, lack of motivation, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and family responsibilities. Another main goal of my policy recommendation is to address these barriers through the use of the agency-sponsored mentoring program. The mentors will help guide the teacher assistants through the process of obtaining their CDA credential, support them in

completion of their coursework, encourage continued progress, and assist them in brainstorming solutions when facing obstacles.

According to a study conducted by Huss-Keeler et al. (2013), teachers are not motivated by external factors like funding for school or raising mandates on educational credentials but need to know how they will benefit from continuing their education. Wagner & French (2010), suggested that teachers who feel they play an integral role at their job are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to participate in learning activities and are more interested in growing as a professional. The support offered by the agency-sponsored mentoring program will improve relationships between administration and teaching staff which will promote a feeling of value of the teacher assistants within the Head Start program. The teacher assistants will be involved in ongoing program assessment of the program using formative and summative evaluations. They will be able to offer ideas to improve the program while they are participating which allows them to make changes they can see and experience themselves. As a result, the teacher assistants will be more intrinsically motivated to participate in and complete their CDA credential program.

Mentoring and Coaching

Teacher assistants demonstrate improved performance and relationships with their coworkers when they feel valued and appreciated by their employer (Green, Malsch, Kothari, Busse, & Brennan, 2012; Jones et al., 2012). School administration must improve relationships and build trust with teacher assistants (Manz et al., 2010). When it comes to the responsibility of ensuring teaching staff receive appropriate training and PD,

four of the nine participants of this project study felt it was the responsibility of the agency. In order for PD to have a positive impact it is important to have a strong support network (Kruse, 2012). My mentoring program is designed to provide one-on-one support for the teacher assistants as they navigate their way through the CDA process. Once the teacher assistant enrolls in the CDA credential program they will be invited to participate in the agency-sponsored mentoring program. They will be paired up with a volunteer mentor who will meet with them on a regular basis to provide support as they traverse through the CDA program. The mentor and mentee will determine their own means and frequency of communication based on the needs of the mentee.

Claire Son et al. (2013) stated that mentoring can be helpful for teacher assistants in their efforts to increase their performance and teaching strategies. However, it has been suggested by Landry et al. (2011) that teacher assistants who work with and receive support from non-supervisory mentors demonstrate more confidence in implementing teaching practices in the classroom. For this reason, my mentoring program will use volunteer mentors who are members of the executive team but are not the direct supervisors of the teacher assistants employed in a Head Start classroom. All nine of the teacher assistants who participated in this project study stated they would take advantage of an agency-sponsored mentoring program as long as it took place within their work hours. My recommended policy will allow the mentor/mentee teams the autonomy to set up their own meeting schedule using various forms of contact ranging from in-person to teleconferencing.

Learning Application

When teaching staff are educated it increases their propensity to provide preschoolers a more developmentally appropriate learning environment (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011). Kruse (2012) found that childcare staff applied more appropriate practices and techniques when they participated in coaching and mentoring as opposed to only classroom-based education. Adult educators who do not effectively demonstrate the connection between learning experiences and application negatively affect the students ability to put their learning into practice (Landry et al., 2011). The mentors involved in my mentoring program will act as a liason between the CDA coursework and classroom application. The mentors will help the teacher assistants interpret course directives and connect the relationship between theory and practical application.

Continuity of Care

One of the most important goals of my policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program is to assist the teacher assistants in their attempt to obtain the CDA credential required for them to keep their jobs. In a study conducted by Ward (2011) it was found that teacher assistants were not sure of their specific job duties and were oftentimes held responsible for more than they were trained or compensated. Studies have also shown that older teacher assistants, who have the lowest levels of education, are more likely to remain in their positions in Head Start than their younger more educated counterparts (Bullough et al., 2012). Overall, teacher assistants are more likely to remain in their positions when they participate in PD activities that included the use of mentors (Kang & Berliner, 2012). My mentoring program is intended to increase

the CDA completion rate of Head Start teacher assistants and reduce staff turnover which is a benefit to not only the Head Start program, but to the development of the children, to the local economy, and to the employment rate of the community at large.

Summary of the Literature Review

In this literature review I present an interconnected relationship between the theory, the research, and the study findings I used in the development of the policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program. Five main themes were introduced and discussed as related to the development of the mentoring program. Although I conducted an extensive literature search, I found less than 25 references. There was a limited amount of research available within the five year parameter of this study. Additionally, the amount of research associated with the IHSSRA is extremely limited and in short supply.

Project Description

My policy recommendation includes members of the executive team of this non-profit agency, the teacher assistants, and the Head Start agency's education team. As the teacher assistants begin their coursework, they will be assigned a mentor who will guide and support them throughout the CDA process. The mentor and mentee will meet to discuss contact frequency, including mode of contact; whether in person, teleconference, or e-mail. The mentor will be responsible for providing necessary information to the mentee regarding the CDA process as well as ensure the requirements of IHSSRA are explained and understood.

The non-profit agency that sponsors this specific Head Start program is made up of several departments each led by managers and directors. The managers and directors participate on the executive team which meets on a bi-monthly basis to discuss various issues, political and otherwise, as well as new and innovative ideas to help serve the community more comprehensively. The executive team is made up of educated individuals who have committed their lives to helping others. It is this team who, I believe, will make excellent mentors for the teacher assistants employed by Head Start.

When the teacher assistant begins coursework toward their CDA credential or other degree or certificate, they will be informed of the agency mentoring program. They will be invited to participate in the program on a voluntary basis. Once they have selected to participate they will be assigned a mentor. The first meeting of the mentor and mentee will be a meet and greet where they will introduce themselves and begin the development of their professional relationship. They will discuss the educational goals of the mentee and the timeline for CDA credential or degree completion. At the conclusion of the first meeting the mentor and mentee will determine the means and frequency of continued communication that will work best for the two of them. The mentor and mentee will communicate at least once a week to discuss assignments and due dates. The mentee will forward copies of written assignments for the mentor to review and edit. The mentor will also be responsible for providing moral support and guidance when needed.

Resources Needed and Potential Barriers

The mentors are the most important resource needed for this project. I will invite the executive team of this non-profit agency to take on the role of mentor on a voluntary basis. The biggest barrier faced in the execution of this project would be a low mentor to volunteer rate. It may be difficult for many members of the executive team to add additional responsibilities to their already busy schedules. One solution to this problem would be realized through the support of the agency president, executive vice president, and vice president of Head Start to help encourage executive team members to participate. Another solution would be if the agency president offered incentives to encourage the members of the executive team to become volunteer mentors. Lastly, special acknowledgements for mentors and mentees once the CDA credential has been earned would promote a positive outlook regarding participation in the mentoring program. Time will also be needed during the executive team meetings to provide information and training on the CDA credentialing process and the IHSSRA.

Timeline for Implementation

At the conclusion of this project study the findings will be presented to upper level management. During this meeting, my policy recommendation for the development of a mentoring program will be introduced and requested for implementation. Within two weeks of approval, I will ask interested members of the executive team to sign up to volunteer as mentors. Volunteer mentors will be scheduled to participate in a training session where they will learn about the IHSSRA as well as the CDA credential process. They will also be trained on how to effectively support adult learners. Following training

completion mentors will receive their mentee assignment and schedule their initial meeting. From start to finish, the CDA process is approximately 12-18 months. The CDA recipients and their mentors will be celebrated for their accomplishment at the end of their program. I anticipate that through the use of mentors teacher assistants will have a more successful completion rate thus increasing staff retention.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Student

In partnership with the Head Start education team, I will act as the project manager for the mentoring program. I will work with the agency's executive team to recruit volunteers willing to work as mentors for the teacher assistants enrolling in the CDA credential program. I will also work with the education team to determine which teacher assistants are enrolling in the CDA credential program. The education team and I will meet with these individuals to inform them of the mentoring program and how their participation will support them in the successful completion of their CDA credential. I will act as a liason between the agency's executive team and the Head Start education team to pair mentors with mentees. Once the policies and procedures are developed and the mentoring program is operating successfully I will turn the management of the the mentoring program over to the Head Start education team.

Project Evaluation Plan

Evaluation is an integral piece in determining the success of this policy recommendation. We evaluate in order to define whether or not the policy is effective (Spaulding, 2008). Teacher assistants employed by this Head Start program are losing their positions because of the barriers they face in their attempt to obtain the required

educational credentials. As a result of the data analysis of this study I have determined that there is a need for this Head Start program to develop an agency-sponsored mentoring program. This mentoring program includes the pairing of upper level management with teacher assistants who are enrolled or are required to enroll in the CDA credential program. My evaluation plan will be goal-based including formative and summative data, in the form of surveys, which will be completed by the mentor and mentee at the end of the program.

I will collect formative data through the course of the program in order to make changes and adjustments as the program progresses (Spaulding, 2008). The mentor will submit contact records of scheduled and unscheduled meetings or visits. The contact records will show whether there are regular meetings scheduled between the mentor and mentee. These records will also be used to summarize the discussions and actions taken during the visit showing the type of support the mentor provided to the mentee. The mentor will also submit monthly summaries describing the progress of the mentee in terms of the completion of their CDA credential requirements. The monthly summary will include a section for the mentee to offer their thoughts, opinions, and suggestions regarding the mentoring program. This formative data will help the executive team determine if the mentor and mentee are a good match and are meeting on a consistent basis. The mentor will also submit any requests for specific training or additional support from the education team.

I will collect summative data at the end of the program in the form of a survey, which will be used to measure program outcomes (Lodico et al., 2010). Once the teacher

assistant completes the program and obtains their CDA credential or if the teacher assistant decides to separate from the mentoring program at any point, the mentor and the mentee will complete a survey to identify their level of satisfaction with the program and to offer recommendations for improvement (Appendix E). The survey will be completed by each mentor/mentee team and submitted to the executive team. The survey results will be aggregated and used to determine whether the mentor program is successful in meeting identified goals.

Goals of the Policy Recommendation

I developed this policy recommendation in an effort to affect change regarding the employment retention of key stakeholders, the Head Start teacher assistants. There are three goals that I have identified for this policy recommendation which directly benefit the teacher assistants. The first goal of the policy is to increase the CDA credential completion rate of the teacher assistants. This project study has identified barriers that teacher assistants face in participation and completion of the CDA credential. By increasing the CDA credential completion rate the second goal of this recommendation would be accomplished by decreasing the loss of employment for these individuals. The final goal of this recommendation is to increase the teacher assistants understanding of their training and education requirements as it relates to their position as well as the IHSSRA. I will use the formative and summative evaluation data to determine if the above listed goals have been met.

Project Implications

Local Community

This project study will have a tremendous affect on the local community in it's effort to support job stability and reduce unemployment, thereby boosting the economy of the local community. When President George Bush signed the IHSSRA educational requirements were increased for individuals working with young children (Brown, 2008). Prior to this, teacher assistants were entering the field of early childhood education with only a high school deploma and baby sitting experience. Research has shown that when teaching staff receive higher levels of education and professional development their teaching practices improve (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Kruse, 2012). When teachers are able to provide an enriched robust learning environment children's knowledge and development increases in all developmental domains. Additionally, continuity of care of children has also been shown to increase learning as children develop strong trusting relationships with their caregivers.

As their children enjoy positive experiences in the classroom, their parents are able to obtain employment of their own. They may also choose to continue their education without the stress or worry about the safety and care of their children while they are away. This has an additional positive impact on the economy of the local community.

Lastly, when Head Start centers are able to retain credentialed, educated staff they are able to meet federal requirements and performance standards. When Head Start centers are not able to provide a high quality program they may be subject to losing their

grant forcing the center to close down. In which case, administration, teaching staff, and other support staff will lose their jobs. When parents do not have sufficient child care they may lose their jobs as well. The increase in the unemployment rate would have an extremely negative affect on the economy of the local community.

Far-Reaching

Head Start is a federally funded program with agencies located across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The Head Start program is a massive network that shares systems and ideas across grantees. The IHSSRA has affected the Head Start program nationally. The teacher assistants employed at the local Head Start agency included in this study experienced barriers that would be indicative of the experiences of other Head Start agencies in a larger context. My policy recommendation of an agency sponsored mentoring program could be shared with other Head Start agencies during regional and national conferences which would include the project description, implementation plan, and evaluation procedures.

Conclusion

In this section I recommended a policy to develop an agency-sponsored mentoring program for a local Head Start agency. Teacher assistants will be invited to participate in the mentoring program once they enroll in the CDA credential program. Volunteer mentors, made up of members of the agency's executive team will be paired up with a teacher assistant. Together the mentor and mentee will develop a schedule of communication and regular meetings in order to provide support and guidance to help the teacher assistant in the successful completion of the CDA credential.

My literature review examined: the importance of increasing educational requirements in the field of early childhood education, teacher assistants motivation to learn, the means by which learning application is influenced by more educated teaching staff, the impact of mentoring on continuing education, and the importance of maintaining continuity of care of young children. These five themes were discussed in relation to the development of the agency-sponsored mentoring program. I discussed the project goals and evaluation as well as the potential barriers and resources I will need. I outlined project implications for social change in terms of the impact on the local community as well as the potential impact on the Head Start program in a larger context.

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Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

As a result of the 2007 IHSSRA, educational requirements for Head Start teacher assistants were increased. Teacher assistants were given a specific time frame to obtain the required credential. If the teacher assistants did not obtain the required credential within the time allotted, they were either demoted or terminated from their positions. Using the research questions I designed to guide this study, I sought to identify barriers that may have restricted teacher assistants' abilities to participate in higher education, and to determine, if they intended to remain in their positions, what factors deterred them from enrolling in a credentialing program. Using a qualitative case study research format, I collected data through using semi-structured interviews. As a result of this study, I developed a policy recommendation for the development of an agency-sponsored mentoring program with the goal of increasing the credential completion rate, reducing the turnover rate of teacher assistants, and increasing teacher assistants' understandings of the educational mandate.

Project Strengths and Limitations

I developed the policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program to address the problem identified in this project study. Research strongly indicates that teacher assistants are more successful in participating in higher education and implementing improved practices when they have a solid support network (Kruse, 2012). The implementation of an agency-sponsored mentoring program will provide the

type of support needed to assist teacher assistants in following through on CDA credential completion.

I recognized three strengths in the development and implementation of this policy recommendation. The first strength is the support the program will provide to the teacher assistants in the completion of their CDA credential. I sought to identify the barriers teacher assistants face in their decision to continue their education and what factors may have deterred them from completing the program. The literature I reviewed confirmed that teacher assistants require high levels of administrative support to help motivate them to continue their education (Wagner & French, 2010). The specific role of the volunteer mentor is to provide needed support for their assigned mentee.

The second strength of this mentoring program is the accessibility of the mentors to their mentees. The teacher assistants who participated in this project study stated they would be willing to participate in a mentoring program if it took place within their work schedule. Because this program is an in-house mentoring program, all related parties are employees of the same organization. As employees of the organization, the mentors are able to visit their mentees at their work site without much restriction. In order to work in a child care facility, individuals are required to obtain state and federal clearances and background checks. Also, meeting space will be more readily available for employee use.

Lastly, the third and most important strength of this policy recommendation is there is little or no cost attached to its implementation. An agency-sponsored mentoring program that uses leadership staff as volunteer mentors requires no additional funding to

carry out. Head Start programs rely on federal funding that is designated for very specific purposes. Although there may be funding to assist with the cost of the enrollment in the CDA program, it is not likely there would be funding available for coaching.

This particular policy recommendation may be limited by two factors. One factor that may limit the success of the mentoring program would be the reliance on the leadership team to volunteer their time as mentors. The leaders of non-profit agencies are often responsible for managing more than one service area. These are individuals who already work long hours and may not be willing to take on additional responsibilities.

A second limitation could be resistance of the teacher assistants to participate in the mentoring program. The Head Start agency itself would not be able to force teacher assistants to participate in the program. The agency would have to rely on teacher assistants' desires to maintain their employment with the agency and their motivation to complete their credential. The responses of the teacher assistants involved in this study were positive toward participating in an agency-sponsored mentoring program. It is my hope that this feeling is indicative of the entire population.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative approach the Head Start program could take to address the problem would be to develop strong partnerships with local community colleges that offer courses in early childhood education. The Head Start program could act as the referral agency in recommending teacher assistants required to complete the CDA credential to enroll in the

local community college. The teacher assistants would have access to tutors and other resources and support services provided by the college.

Through this partnership, the community college could, in turn, refer qualified students seeking employment to the Head Start program for teaching positions. Students enrolled in college courses toward a degree in early childhood education would be eligible to apply for the CDA credential after earning 12 credits. Teacher assistants who choose not to remain in the field could be replaced by college students who already hold the required credentials.

Scholarship

It has been a life long goal of mine to obtain my doctoral degree. I have always thought very highly of those who attained the highest level of education. When I first embarked upon this journey I was not aware of how challenging it would be. I spent the majority of my undergraduate career skimming through reading assignments and writing essays at the last possible moment before the due date. Through this process I would learn that it takes time, dedication, and perserverance to complete a project of this magnitude.

Analysis of Self as a Scholar

The organization of the doctoral coursework truly prepares you for the project study. My knowledge of APA formatting has been greatly strengthened. My ability to research and digest large quantities of information and, in turn, be able to paraphrase that information has vastly improved. Although this process has been an intense experience, it has changed me for the better. I have demonstrated personal growth in other areas of

my life as it relates to working with adult learners. My teaching techniques have improved as I have created an inclusive learning environment for all types of adult learners. The learning environment now includes opportunities for my students to share their experiences working with young, time to reflect on their learning, and present a clear connection for knowledge application.

Project Development and Evaluation

At the start of my doctoral studies I was advised to choose a topic early and to develop that topic through my coursework, culminating in this specific project study. I chose a topic that I was passionate about, and a problem that I was truly interested in solving. I feel I have applied that passion toward the research and development of this policy recommendation.

The relationship between the problem of this project study, the research questions, the data analysis, and literature review were all taken into account as I developed the mentoring program. It was imperative that this project be used to increase the CDA credential completion rate of teacher assistants in order for them to maintain their employment. The mentoring program is a cost-effective program using volunteer mentors.

The mentoring program is a comprehensive policy that includes a clear implementation plan and system for effective evaluation. The evaluation procedures will produce data that can be used for program improvement. Formative data will assist in determining changes needed during and throughout the program, with a focus on positive

outcomes for all participants. Summative data will be used to evaluate the overall success of the program, demonstrating the increase in teacher assistants CDA completion.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

The idea of developing a mentoring program initially arose from the research I conducted in the literature review. During the interview process, the teacher assistants all stated they would be willing to participate in an agency-sponsored mentoring program. As a result of this I decided to develop a system that would provide the support these individuals needed and wanted to help them meet the educational madate and keep their jobs.

After researching the impact of mentors and coaches on individuals' educational attainment, I learned that mentors should not be the direct supervisor of the student, but need to be someone they could access easily. Through the process of developing this project, I decided to submit the mentoring program as a policy recommendation to be considered by the agency's executive team. This policy had to be cost effective. I feel that although this was a challenging process, the resulting program will have a positive impact on not only the lives of the teacher assistants, but also the mentors.

Analysis of Self as a Practitioner

My definition of a practitioner is someone who not only conducts research, but also actively works in the field of study. I have worked within the field of early childhood education for over 18 years. I have worked in the classroom with preschool children. I began as a substitute teacher, but aspired to become a group teacher. I enrolled in a community college to obtain the required early childhood credit hours

needed to qualify for the group teacher position. After obtaining the required credentials, I continued coursework toward a preschool through third grade teaching certificate, which qualified me to become a head teacher. Following the completion of my graduate degree in school administration, I became the senior director of a large child care facility, and began teaching early childhood courses at the college level.

In order for me to be able to work my way through the ranks, I had to continue my education. As I traversed through coursework, I always tried to find ways to share my knowledge with others. Throughout my doctoral experience from coursework to capstone, I have vastly increased my knowledge of how adults learn. I have conducted extensive research of not only adult learning theories, but also the work of others who educate adult learners. Receiving new information and gaining knowledge on how adults learn has influenced my process of reflection on my own teaching practices to ensure the adults in my classroom truly grasp the concepts. In addition to this comes an understanding of the importance of making the connection between theory and practical application. The students enrolled my class must have a complete knowledge of how to apply what they learn in my course to the preschool classroom.

Leadership and Change

Throughout my life I have always been interested in increasing my education to support my growth and development as a leader. I have always had an interest in learning about my specific leadership style and how I must present the example in order to affect positive change within the field of early childhood education. Through the course of my doctoral study I have developed a personal mission to increase upward

mobility through continuous education, to learn and absorb information from every experience and acquaintance, and to use my knowledge to motivate and uplift others.

My family and friends have been tracking my progress toward my completion of a doctoral degree. As challenging as this process has been for me, quitting was never an option. Those in leadership positions have the responsibility to set the example for others to follow. Perhaps my journey will encourage someone else to pursue this path. Perhaps my journey will encourage the teacher assistants to continue their education to obtain not only their CDA credential but their associate, baccalariate, or even graduate degree. It is my hope that earning a doctoral degree will strengthen my voice as an agent for change and bring attention to the challenges faced by this vulnerable population.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Teacher education in the field of early childhood development has always been a topic of interest for me. I have conducted extensive research on the impact teacher education and professional growth has on child development and learning. It is imperative that early childhood educators are knowledgeable of how children learn in order to provide an appropriate classroom environment that fosters rich social, emotional, cognitive, and language activities.

Although many states have not raised the educational requirements specifically for teacher assistants, the IHSSRA includes strict timelines for attainment of credentials for those employed in Head Start classrooms. This issue not only affects the local area included in this project study but to Head Start programs located across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Teacher assistants employed in the Head Start

program nationwide are losing their teaching positions, experiencing salary cuts, and are terminated if they do not obtain their CDA credential.

When teacher assistants lose their jobs it has a negative impact on the children in the classroom, the center as a whole, and the economy of the community as well. The barriers teacher assistants face in continuing their education are very real. As a leader in the field of early childhood education who has also been a life-long learning, I felt it was my responsibility to use this platform to determine a means to support teacher assistants through the process of obtaining their CDA credential.

Potential Social Change Impact

This project study and policy recommendation of an agency-sponsored mentoring program will have a positive impact on social change. This impact will be experienced at the center level by the teaching staff, children, and parents. This impact will also positively affect the Head Start program overall and the communities in which they are located.

The purpose and focus of this project study and policy recommendation was to determine the barriers teacher assistants experience in continuing their education. Once the barriers were identified a means to address them was determined through the development of an agency-sponsored mentoring program. It is intended that through participation in the mentoring program, teacher assistants will successfully complete their CDA credential requirements and maintain their classroom positions.

When teacher assistants are able to remain in their teaching positions in the classroom, the continuity of care provided to the children will remain intact. Parents will

experience less stress as they leave their children in the care of teachers with whom they have built trusting relationships. As a result they will be able to work themselves or attend school in order to provide for their families. Without the concern of finding staff replacements the Head Start center will be able to provide higher quality programming for children and families.

With teachers maintaining their jobs and parents who are able to work or attend school the economy of the community will thrive. Additionally, the mentors provide a valued social service to the organization. They will experience a feeling of satisfaction as their mentees move successfully through the program.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications

Improving school readiness of young children has become a major goal of the Head Start program. In order to do this, early childhood teaching staff must participate in ongoing education to meet the changing needs of children. The IHSSRA has set forth educational mandates for not only teacher assistants but to all staff responsible for the development of young children. Without support, teacher assistants who face barriers in their efforts to continue their education will fail to obtain their required credential and will lose their jobs. The implications of this policy recommendation are relevant to the local area as well as the larger context. Through on-going evaluation and development, an agency-sponsored mentoring program has the potential for implementation in Head Start programs across the nation.

Applications

The policy recommendation for the development of an agency-sponsored mentoring program offers a systematic solution to provide support for teacher assistants in the completion of their CDA credential. The policy includes an implementation plan, timeline, and process of ongoing evaluation and assessment. Although this particular program was developed for the Head Start program included in this project study, the mentoring program can be adjusted and redesigned for use in Head Start programs located in other communities as well.

Directions for Future Research

Future research is needed on the overall impact of the increase of educational requirements as mandated by the IHSSRA. There is little research on the IHSSRA and the ability of the Head Start program to ensure staff are qualified to work in the classroom. This project study used a qualitative case study method to determine the thoughts and experiences of teacher assistants employed in the local Head Start program. A similar study could be conducted using quantitative survey methods to include a larger population over several different Head Start programs.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative case study format this project study examined the barriers Head Start teacher assistants face in continuing their education. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews conducted with nine Head Start teacher assistants. The results gleaned from the interviews were used in the development of an agency-sponsored mentoring program. It was imperative that a program was developed

to specifically address the barriers teacher assistants face when attempting to continue their education in order to prevent further job loss. I decided to develop the project as a policy recommendation in order to outline a concise program to present to the leadership team of the local Head Start program.

In Section 4 of this project study, I discussed the development of the policy recommendation, the strengths, limitations, and impact on social change. In addition to this, I discussed various alternative approaches and the importance of work. Lastly, I took an in depth look at my own personal development through this doctoral process. I reflected on my struggles and challenges as well as my learning and growth as a leader and an educator of adults. I shared my analysis of self as a practitioner, project developer, and scholar. It is my hope that this research leads to positive social change in my community and abroad.

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Appendix A: The Project

Introduction

In 2007, President George W. Bush signed the IHSSRA. Included in this act were specific regulations mandating increased educational requirements for early childhood staff who work directly with children. More specifically, teacher assistants working in a Head Start classroom were required to obtain a CDA credential within a given time frame or they would be demoted or even terminated from their positions.

As a result of this project study, I identified several barriers that have affected teacher assistants' abilities to meet the educational requirement. The barriers I identified included: fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, lack of motivation, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and family responsibilities. In order to mitigate these barriers, I am recommending a policy for developing a mentoring program to support and assist Head Start teacher assistants in the completion of their CDA credential to meet the requirements of the IHSSRA. I found that although teacher assistants are willing to participate in and complete their training requirements, they are not familiar with the specific content areas in which training must be completed. Additionally, I found that the same teacher assistants who fell under the mandate of the IHSSRA did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the mandate. Regardless of their level of understanding, these individuals were to be demoted or terminated from their positions if they did not continue their education to obtain their CDA credential.

Summary of Analysis of Findings

Following the nine semistructured interviews, I organized participant responses into six main themes: *training hours, training completion, education, agency offered training, learning application, and Head Start Act*. The teacher assistants who participated in this study demonstrated a positive outlook regarding their ability and desire to not only complete required training hours, but also to continue their education to obtain their CDA credential and beyond. The teacher assistants who participated in this study were both internally and externally motivated to continue their education. Although these teacher assistants were motivated to continue their education, they demonstrated an overall lack of knowledge of the number of training hours or the specific type of training required for their positions. Moreover, these teacher assistants had little to no knowledge of the IHSSRA which mandated the increase in educational requirements for their positions. The teacher assistants discussed the barriers they faced in their attempt to continue their education. The barriers identified included: sickness, surgery, pregnancy, family emergencies, fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and other family responsibilities. Lastly, the teacher assistants who participated in this study demonstrated interest in participating in an agency-sponsored mentoring program.

Rationale

I decided to use the results of this study to recommend a policy to create an agency-sponsored mentoring program to provide support to the teacher assistants in obtaining their CDA credential. This specific project was chosen based on the results of this study

as well as the research I cited in the literature review. I developed the policy recommendation specifically to address the problem identified in this project study. The teacher assistants employed by this non-profit agency faced barriers in completing the educational requirements set forth by the IHSSRA and were therefore losing their positions when they were not able to meet the requirements of the mandate within the designated time frame. The participants in this study agreed that mentors would be helpful in completing their educational requirement, and they also stated that they would be willing to participate in an on-site mentoring program.

Review of the Literature

I developed the policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program using findings from my study in conjunction with information from recently published literature. I conducted a thorough search of related peer reviewed literature using various Boolean terms such as *Head Start*, *teacher qualifications*, *teacher aides*, *PD*, *barriers*, *mentors*, *incentives*, *labor turnover*, *educational attainment*, *academic aspiration*, and *re-entry students*. This search was conducted using the Walden University library to access education databases including Education Research Complete, ERIC, Education Research Starters, Education from SAGE, and ProQuest Central. I also input these terms into the multidisciplinary database using variations in search terms until article titles became repetitive.

This literature review includes discussions of the following themes: *need to know why*, *motivation to learn*, *mentoring and coaching*, *learning application*, and *continuity of care*. These five main themes are introduced and discussed as related to the development

of the mentoring program. My analysis of the participant responses, in conjunction with the research and theoretical concepts, formed the basis of the policy recommendation for the development of an agency-sponsored mentoring program.

Analysis of Theory and Research

I designed this study to discover the barriers Head Start teacher assistants face in continuing their education to meet the requirements of the IHSSRA. The qualitative case study format using semi-structured interviews was selected in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the thoughts and feelings of the teacher assistants toward their ability to meet the increased educational requirements. My analysis of participant responses in Section 2 of this study shows a clear relationship between the theoretical concepts and the experiences of the teacher assistants.

The theoretical concepts I selected to support this study were derived from Knowles's theory of adult learning and Kolb's experiential learning theory (Knowles, 1988; Kolb, 1983). Knowles's theory of adult learning describes how adults must be ready to learn and have a clear understanding of why they need to learn something new (Knowles, 1988). In this project study, the teacher assistants employed by a local Head Start program faced mandates that required them to obtain their CDA credential within a given time frame or they would have been demoted or terminated from their positions. The results of this study show that six out of nine participants did not have a clear understanding of the IHSSRA, and that three out of the nine were only vaguely familiar with the act. The fact that these teacher assistants did not have a full and complete knowledge of the reason why they needed to increase their education may have

contributed to their level of motivation to meet the educational requirement. However, Knowles's theory of adult learning also holds that adults are intrinsically motivated to increase their knowledge (Knowles, 1988).

Kolb's experiential learning theory describes a cyclical learning process that includes receiving knowledge, analyzing the new information, applying the knowledge, and then reflecting on it (Kolb, 1983; Merriam et al., 2007). The participants in this study did not demonstrate a clear knowledge of their training requirement, nor did they exhibit a clear knowledge of IHSSRA. In the literature review, I demonstrate how an agency-sponsored mentoring program will provide the support the teacher assistants need in order to not only complete the requirements of the CDA credential, but to also effectively apply their learning in the classroom.

Need to Know Why

More often than not, teacher assistants enter the field of early childhood education with a high school diploma as their highest level of education (Sosinsky and Gilliam, 2011).

According to Sosinsky and Gilliam (2011), most states have not raised educational standards for teacher assistants and only require a high school diploma to enter the field.

Bullough et al. (2012), suggest that older teacher assistants who are more likely to remain in a Head Start program are the least educated and that the IHSSRA does not take them, their needs nor their goals as educators into consideration. The agency-sponsored mentoring program will recruit members of the non-profit agency's executive team to pair up with teacher assistants participating in the CDA credential program. These

mentors will provide assistance and the support the teacher assistant's need in goal development as they progress through their CDA coursework.

Studies show teachers with higher levels of education demonstrate improved interactions with children, form stronger attachments to children, and create classroom spaces that foster rich cognitive activities and language opportunities (Huss-Keeler et al., 2013). In order to raise the level of quality early childhood programming the educational requirements of teaching staff must be raised (Huss-Keeler et al., 2013). The participants included in this study did not have a clear knowledge of the IHSSRA, its goal to raise the quality of Head Start programs to improve school readiness, or its impact on their qualifications to work in an early childhood classroom. Brendefur et al. (2013), inferred that if students do not recognize and understand what is intended for them to do or learn it will not hold any importance to them. One of the main goals of the agency-sponsored mentoring program is to increase the teacher assistants understanding of the IHSSRA and how it relates to their credential requirements. The mentors participating in this mentoring program will be knowledgeable of the IHSSRA and will ensure the teacher assistants understand the act and the impact it has on their continued employment.

Motivation to Learn

As the teacher assistants gain a more comprehensive understanding of the IHSSRA and the reason why they must continue their education, they will also demonstrate increased motivation to obtain the CDA credential. Wagner and French (2010) identified three categories, ranging from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, that compel learners to participate in education programs: to meet employment mandates, to

improve teaching practices, or to meet their own personal educational goals. One of the goals of the mentoring program is to ensure the teacher assistants have a clear knowledge of the IHSSRA as well as other annual training requirements for their position. With the understanding that raising qualifications of teacher assistants elevates the quality of care provided to children, internal motivation would stem from the teacher assistants' own beliefs that increasing their knowledge in early childhood education would better their teaching practices (Deutsch & Riffin, 2013). Out of the teacher assistants who participated in this project study three out of nine demonstrated intrinsic motivation, while four out of nine demonstrated extrinsic motivation to continue their education.

Maude et al. (2011) stated that teacher assistants who demonstrate a concerted effort to continue their education and increase their practical knowledge, often experience difficulties and barriers in their attempts. Similarly, others have found that teacher assistants face many barriers in their decision to continue their education, but with support from family, friends, supervisors, and coworkers they may be more likely to not only participate, but also succeed in attaining their educational goals (Deutsch & Riffin, 2013; Huss-Keeler et al., 2013). The barriers I identified in this project study were fear of online coursework, money or tuition costs, length of time to complete, lack of motivation, need for evening classes, travel and distance, and family responsibilities. Another main goal of my policy recommendation is to address these barriers through the use of the agency-sponsored mentoring program. The mentors will help guide the teacher assistants through the process of obtaining their CDA credential, support them in

completion of their coursework, encourage continued progress, and assist them in brainstorming solutions when facing obstacles.

According to a study conducted by Huss-Keeler et al. (2013), teachers are not motivated by external factors like funding for school or raising mandates on educational credentials but need to know how they will benefit from continuing their education. Wagner & French (2010), suggested that teachers who feel they play an integral role at their job are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to participate in learning activities and are more interested in growing as a professional. The support offered by the agency-sponsored mentoring program will improve relationships between administration and teaching staff which will promote a feeling of value of the teacher assistants within the Head Start program. The teacher assistants will be involved in ongoing program assessment of the program using formative and summative evaluations. They will be able to offer ideas to improve the program while they are participating which allows them to make changes they can see and experience themselves. As a result, the teacher assistants will be more intrinsically motivated to participate in and complete their CDA credential program.

Mentoring and Coaching

Teacher assistants demonstrate improved performance and relationships with their coworkers when they feel valued and appreciated by their employer (Green, Malsch, Kothari, Busse, & Brennan, 2012; Jones et al., 2012). School administration must improve relationships and build trust with teacher assistants (Manz et al., 2010). When it comes to the responsibility of ensuring teaching staff receive appropriate training and PD, four of the nine participants of this project study felt it was the responsibility of the

agency. In order for PD to have a positive impact it is important to have a strong support network (Kruse, 2012). My mentoring program is designed to provide one-on-one support for the teacher assistants as they navigate their way through the CDA process. Once the teacher assistant enrolls in the CDA credential program they will be invited to participate in the agency-sponsored mentoring program. They will be paired up with a volunteer mentor who will meet with them on a regular basis to provide support as they traverse through the CDA program. The mentor and mentee will determine their own means and frequency of communication based on the needs of the mentee.

Claire Son et al. (2013) stated that mentoring can be helpful for teacher assistants in their efforts to increase their performance and teaching strategies. However, it has been suggested by Landry et al. (2011) that teacher assistants who work with and receive support from non-supervisory mentors demonstrate more confidence in implementing teaching practices in the classroom. For this reason, my mentoring program will use volunteer mentors who are members of the executive team but are not the direct supervisors of the teacher assistants employed in a Head Start classroom. All nine of the teacher assistants who participated in this project study stated they would take advantage of an agency-sponsored mentoring program as long as it took place within their work hours. My recommended policy will allow the mentor/mentee teams the autonomy to set up their own meeting schedule using various forms of contact ranging from in-person to teleconferencing.

Learning Application

When teaching staff are educated it increases their propensity to provide preschoolers a more developmentally appropriate learning environment (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011). Kruse (2012) found that childcare staff applied more appropriate practices and techniques when they participated in coaching and mentoring as opposed to only classroom-based education. Adult educators who do not effectively demonstrate the connection between learning experiences and application negatively affect the students ability to put their learning into practice (Landry et al., 2011). The mentors involved in my mentoring program will act as a liason between the CDA coursework and classroom application. The mentors will help the teacher assistants interpret course directives and connect the relationship between theory and practical application.

Continuity of Care

One of the most important goals of my policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program is to assist the teacher assistants in their attempt to obtain the CDA credential required for them to keep their jobs. In a study conducted by Ward (2011) it was found that teacher assistants were not sure of their specific job duties and were oftentimes held responsible for more than they were trained or compensated. Studies have also shown that older teacher assistants, who have the lowest levels of education, are more likely to remain in their positions in Head Start than their younger more educated counterparts (Bullough et al., 2012). Overall, teacher assistants are more likely to remain in their positions when they participate in PD activities that included the use of mentors (Kang & Berliner, 2012). My mentoring program is intended to increase

the CDA completion rate of Head Start teacher assistants and reduce staff turnover which is a benefit to not only the Head Start program, but to the development of the children, to the local economy, and to the employment rate of the community at large.

Summary of the Literature Review

In this literature review I present an interconnected relationship between the theory, the research, and the study findings I used in the development of the policy recommendation for an agency-sponsored mentoring program. Five main themes were introduced and discussed as related to the development of the mentoring program. Although I conducted an extensive literature search, I found less than 25 references. There was a limited amount of research available within the five year parameter of this study. Additionally, the amount of research associated with the IHSSRA is extremely limited and in short supply.

Project Description

My policy recommendation includes members of the executive team of this non-profit agency, the teacher assistants, and the Head Start agency's education team. As the teacher assistants begin their coursework, they will be assigned a mentor who will guide and support them throughout the CDA process. The mentor and mentee will meet to discuss contact frequency, including mode of contact; whether in person, teleconference, or e-mail. The mentor will be responsible for providing necessary information to the mentee regarding the CDA process as well as ensure the requirements of IHSSRA are explained and understood.

The non-profit agency that sponsors this specific Head Start program is made up of several departments each led by managers and directors. The managers and directors participate on the executive team which meets on a bi-monthly basis to discuss various issues, political and otherwise, as well as new and innovative ideas to help serve the community more comprehensively. The executive team is made up of educated individuals who have committed their lives to helping others. It is this team who, I believe, will make excellent mentors for the teacher assistants employed by Head Start. When the teacher assistant begins coursework toward their CDA credential or other degree or certificate, they will be informed of the agency mentoring program. They will be invited to participate in the program on a voluntary basis. Once they have selected to participate they will be assigned a mentor. The first meeting of the mentor and mentee will be a meet and greet where they will introduce themselves and begin the development of their professional relationship. They will discuss the educational goals of the mentee and the timeline for CDA credential or degree completion. At the conclusion of the first meeting the mentor and mentee will determine the means and frequency of continued communication that will work best for the two of them. The mentor and mentee will communicate at least once a week to discuss assignments and due dates. The mentee will forward copies of written assignments for the mentor to review and edit. The mentor will also be responsible for providing moral support and guidance when needed.

Resources Needed and Potential Barriers

The mentors are the most important resource needed for this project. I will invite the executive team of this non-profit agency to take on the role of mentor on a voluntary basis. The biggest barrier faced in the execution of this project would be a low mentor to volunteer rate. It may be difficult for many members of the executive team to add additional responsibilities to their already busy schedules. One solution to this problem would be realized through the support of the agency president, executive vice president, and vice president of Head Start to help encourage executive team members to participate. Another solution would be if the agency president offered incentives to encourage the members of the executive team to become volunteer mentors. Lastly, special acknowledgements for mentors and mentees once the CDA credential has been earned would promote a positive outlook regarding participation in the mentoring program. Time will also be needed during the executive team meetings to provide information and training on the CDA credentialing process and the IHSSRA.

Timeline for Implementation

At the conclusion of this project study the findings will be presented to upper level management. During this meeting, my policy recommendation for the development of a mentoring program will be introduced and requested for implementation. Within two weeks of approval, I will ask interested members of the executive team to sign up to volunteer as mentors. Volunteer mentors will be scheduled to participate in a training session where they will learn about the IHSSRA as well as the CDA credential process. They will also be trained on how to effectively support adult learners. Following training

completion mentors will receive their mentee assignment and schedule their initial meeting. From start to finish, the CDA process is approximately 12-18 months. The CDA recipients and their mentors will be celebrated for their accomplishment at the end of their program. I anticipate that through the use of mentors teacher assistants will have a more successful completion rate thus increasing staff retention.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Student

In partnership with the Head Start education team, I will act as the project manager for the mentoring program. I will work with the agency's executive team to recruit volunteers willing to work as mentors for the teacher assistants enrolling in the CDA credential program. I will also work with the education team to determine which teacher assistants are enrolling in the CDA credential program. The education team and I will meet with these individuals to inform them of the mentoring program and how their participation will support them in the successful completion of their CDA credential. I will act as a liason between the agency's executive team and the Head Start education team to pair mentors with mentees. Once the policies and procedures are developed and the mentoring program is operating successfully I will turn the management of the the mentoring program over to the Head Start education team.

Project Evaluation Plan

Evaluation is an integral piece in determining the success of this policy recommendation. We evaluate in order to define whether or not the policy is effective (Spaulding, 2008). Teacher assistants employed by this Head Start program are losing their positions because of the barriers they face in their attempt to obtain the required

educational credentials. As a result of the data analysis of this study I have determined that there is a need for this Head Start program to develop an agency-sponsored mentoring program. This mentoring program includes the pairing of upper level management with teacher assistants who are enrolled or are required to enroll in the CDA credential program. My evaluation plan will be goal-based including formative and summative data, in the form of surveys, which will be completed by the mentor and mentee at the end of the program.

I will collect formative data through the course of the program in order to make changes and adjustments as the program progresses (Spaulding, 2008). The mentor will submit contact records of scheduled and unscheduled meetings or visits. The contact records will show whether there are regular meetings scheduled between the mentor and mentee. These records will also be used to summarize the discussions and actions taken during the visit showing the type of support the mentor provided to the mentee. The mentor will also submit monthly summaries describing the progress of the mentee in terms of the completion of their CDA credential requirements. The monthly summary will include a section for the mentee to offer their thoughts, opinions, and suggestions regarding the mentoring program. This formative data will help the executive team determine if the mentor and mentee are a good match and are meeting on a consistent basis. The mentor will also submit any requests for specific training or additional support from the education team.

I will collect summative data at the end of the program in the form of a survey, which will be used to measure program outcomes (Lodico et al., 2010). Once the teacher

assistant completes the program and obtains their CDA credential or if the teacher assistant decides to separate from the mentoring program at any point, the mentor and the mentee will complete a survey to identify their level of satisfaction with the program and to offer recommendations for improvement (Appendix E). The survey will be completed by each mentor/mentee team and submitted to the executive team. The survey results will be aggregated and used to determine whether the mentor program is successful in meeting identified goals.

Goals of the Policy Recommendation

I developed this policy recommendation in an effort to affect change regarding the employment retention of key stakeholders, the Head Start teacher assistants. There are three goals that I have identified for this policy recommendation which directly benefit the teacher assistants. The first goal of the policy is to increase the CDA credential completion rate of the teacher assistants. This project study has identified barriers that teacher assistants face in participation and completion of the CDA credential. By increasing the CDA credential completion rate the second goal of this recommendation would be accomplished by decreasing the loss of employment for these individuals. The final goal of this recommendation is to increase the teacher assistants understanding of their training and education requirements as it relates to their position as well as the IHSSRA. I will use the formative and summative evaluation data to determine if the above listed goals have been met.

Project Implications

Local Community

This project study will have a tremendous affect on the local community in it's effort to support job stability and reduce unemployment, thereby boosting the economy of the local community. When President George Bush signed the IHSSRA educational requirements were increased for individuals working with young children (Brown, 2008). Prior to this, teacher assistants were entering the field of early childhood education with only a high school deploma and baby sitting experience. Research has shown that when teaching staff receive higher levels of education and professional development their teaching practices improve (Sosinsky & Gilliam, 2011; Kruse, 2012). When teachers are able to provide an enriched robust learning environment children's knowledge and development increases in all developmental domains. Additionally, continuity of care of children has also been shown to increase learning as children develop strong trusting relationships with their caregivers.

As their children enjoy positive experiences in the classroom, their parents are able to obtain employment of their own. They may also choose to continue their education without the stress or worry about the safety and care of their children while they are away. This has an additional positive impact on the economy of the local community.

Lastly, when Head Start centers are able to retain credentialed, educated staff they are able to meet federal requirements and performance standards. When Head Start centers are not able to provide a high quality program they may be subject to losing their

grant forcing the center to close down. In which case, administration, teaching staff, and other support staff will lose their jobs. When parents do not have sufficient child care they may lose their jobs as well. The increase in the unemployment rate would have an extremely negative affect on the economy of the local community.

Far-Reaching

Head Start is a federally funded program with agencies located across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The Head Start program is a massive network that shares systems and ideas across grantees. The IHSSRA has affected the Head Start program nationally. The teacher assistants employed at the local Head Start agency included in this study experienced barriers that would be indicative of the experiences of other Head Start agencies in a larger context. My policy recommendation of an agency sponsored mentoring program could be shared with other Head Start agencies during regional and national conferences which would include the project description, implementation plan, and evaluation procedures.

Conclusion

In this section I recommended a policy to develop an agency-sponsored mentoring program for a local Head Start agency. Teacher assistants will be invited to participate in the mentoring program once they enroll in the CDA credential program. Volunteer mentors, made up of members of the agency's executive team will be paired up with a teacher assistant. Together the mentor and mentee will develop a schedule of communication and regular meetings in order to provide support and guidance to help the teacher assistant in the successful completion of the CDA credential.

My literature review examined: the importance of increasing educational requirements in the field of early childhood education, teacher assistants motivation to learn, the means by which learning application is influenced by more educated teaching staff, the impact of mentoring on continuing education, and the importance of maintaining continuity of care of young children. These five themes were discussed in relation to the development of the agency-sponsored mentoring program. I discussed the project goals and evaluation as well as the potential barriers and resources I will need. I outlined project implications for social change in terms of the impact on the local community as well as the potential impact on the Head Start program in a larger context.

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Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What is your highest level of education?
2. How many training hours are required for your position?
3. What type of training and/or education are you required to obtain?
4. How successful are you in completing your training hours each year?
5. Where do you go to get your training? Please provide the name of the agency or educational institution and location of the training.
6. Describe how you apply what you learn in the preschool classroom?
7. What are some reasons why you might not complete your training hours each year? Describe the barriers you may face in participating in training/education programs.
8. How often have you missed a training in which you were registered?
9. In your own words, explain your understanding of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act.
10. Do you think the agency should offer training for childcare staff? Yes, no, explain your answer.
11. If the agency provided on-site training, education, and mentoring opportunities would you participate? Why or why not, explain your response.

Appendix C: Sample Journal Entry

5/8/15

Interview #1

My first interview was a learning process ~~the~~ although this participant was bilingual, there was still a little bit of a language barrier. This participant has already received the CDA and seems to have a positive outlook on continuing education & attending training.

As the interviewer I felt I may have changed the wording of the questions in order to receive a more detailed answer. The language barrier may have caused me not only reword the questions but rephrase or reword the participant's responses as well. I will need to work a little harder to check this in the future.

Appendix D: Sample Transcript

Transcription details:

Date: 21-Jul-2015
 Input sound file: 150618_002_KRBT.mp3

Transcription results:

S1 00:01 I'm here with interview number eight, and I just want to ask if I have your permission to record this interview?

S2 00:08 Yes.

S1 00:09 So we're going to get started. I do have a list of 11 questions, but this is not a structured interview. You might say something that calls me to ask a follow-up question, or an additional question, so we're just going to talk back and forth, okay?

S2 00:24 Okay.

S1 00:26 My first question is what is your highest level of education?

S2 00:30 *Associates Degree.*

S1 00:32 What is that in?

S2 00:32 *Health Service Administration.*

S1 00:37 For your position, is there a required number of training hours? And if so, do you know how many?

S2 00:45 I know there's a required amount but depends on if you have a degree or not. So right now I don't have to do the paperwork. They have books, and I don't know how many books-- it's somewhere between seven and nine books that they have to finish. *So I don't know how many hours* but [I know?] they have books.

S1 01:04 So there's no certain numbers of hours that you have to do every year?

S2 01:09 Me, myself? No. I'm not sure about the other ones.

S1 01:12 All right. For your position, is there some type of training that you're required to get?

Appendix E: Mentor Program Satisfaction Survey

Name: (Optional) _____ Program Start Date: _____

_____ I am a mentee

End Date: _____

_____ I am a mentor

1. Did you/your mentee complete all of the CDA credential requirements? Yes/No
2. If no, what caused you/the mentee to leave the mentor program? (If yes skip to #3)
(circle all statements that apply)
 - The program did not meet my expectations.
 - Did not have time for meeting with mentor.
 - Did not fit into work schedule.
 - Did not feel the program was helpful.
 - Education goals changed.
 - Changing careers
 - Personal reasons
 - Other:
(specify) _____
3. If yes, did the mentor program help? Yes/No
4. Please rate the following:

How would you rate your relationship with your mentor/mentee?

Completely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
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How would you rate your/your mentee success in completing the CDA credential requirements?

Completely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
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How would you rate the frequency of meetings with your mentor/mentee?

Completely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
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How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the mentoring program?

Completely Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
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5. What would you say was the best part of program?

6. What would you change?

7. Would you be interested in volunteering as a mentor in the future? Yes/No

8. Additional comments:
