

Capacity-Building of Preschool Teachers as Springboard for Human Resource Development

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Abstract

To upgrade preschool teachers' knowledge and skills essential to organizing, managing, and/or teaching, a government-sponsored training for 90 teachers coming from Region 6, 7, and 8 in April to May 2011 was conducted. Findings revealed a significant increase in the participants' knowledge in the teaching of early childhood education. Holistic concepts were learned and professional and personal skills were developed by the participants who viewed the training as excellent. Misconceptions were also addressed. Indeed, the training enhances the capability of the teacher participants and this made them more confident in handling preschool children.

Keywords: capacity-building, human resource development, preschool, training

Acknowledging the importance of education to every citizen in every society, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the Education for All program which aims to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. One of its six specific goals which is deemed to be the most important is to expand and improve comprehensive early childhood care education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (UNESCO , 2004).

The Philippine government responds to this initiative of UNESCO by strengthening the early childhood education that every child receives. Preschool education is indeed the foundation of the child's education. The skills and knowledge that the child develops in the preschool years have a dramatic impact on his/her success when formal schooling begins as well as in life success. Today children are expected to know more by the time they are in kindergarten and the key to this learning is the preschool teacher.

A preschool teacher plays a major role in a child's life. A kid's experience with his teacher can literally make or break his interest in education and learning. For a child, successful preschool experience is very much dependent on the quality of the teachers. If he has been treated and

taught well, he will always be inclined to go back to school. It is then the role and responsibility of a preschool teacher to instill a sense of comfort and lifelong love of learning in the child (Indian Child, 2011).

The importance of teacher training cannot be underestimated. The better a teacher is trained, the better he or she can educate tomorrow's generation. Teachers facilitate the process whereby students cultivate habits of mind and knowledge schemes that are prerequisites for success, meaningful contributions and prosperity in an open, technological world (Darling-Hammond, 1997). This makes effective teacher training of paramount importance in the cultivation of an educated citizenry within this country. As Secretary Luistro said, "It is highly crucial that we raise the level of competencies of our teachers in line with the education reform that we are now pursuing" (Department of Education, 2012).

With this, educational professionals must be well-trained for their job. Additionally, every good professional must be updated to respond properly to the changing challenges of his/her profession and continuing training plays an important role. Stanford researcher Linda Darling-Hammond found that teachers with strong subject-matter knowledge, solid training in teaching methodologies and theories, full certificates, and high scores on licensing exams have greater student gains in reading, elementary education, and early childhood education (in Fravel, 2010). Another research indicates that young children's learning and development depend on the educational qualifications of their teachers. The most effective preschool teachers have at least a four-year college degree and specialized training in early childhood (Barnett, 2004). Further, trainings were found to have significant impact on the teaching performance of teachers. In a research conducted in Spain, Pineda-Herrero, Belvis, Moreno, and Ucar (2010) tried to find out if continuing training is useful for preschool teachers. Results found that preschool training staff believes that continuing training has a strong effect on their personal development and on their cultural enrichment. The impact of training is also evident, to a lesser degree, in the improvement of teachers' social relations. Moreover, the research tried to find out the effects of training to teachers and centers. Results showed that both teachers and directors consider the improvement of professional practice and the introduction of innovations to be the main impacts of continuing training on the educational center. Their most valued contents of training were teaching strategies and didactical methodologies. The most highly valued training approaches were the active and demonstrative methods. Another factor in which training has an effect is in the improvement of relations between teachers and directors. Training

has no impact however, on the permanence of position in the educational center and on promotions within the field of education. This can be explained because in the educational sector, and especially in government-funded centers, promotion and stability are guided by other criteria. The last area of impact of continuing training is the improvement of education received by the children. In general, interviewed agents say that children benefit from continuing training in many aspects, but only if training responds to basic needs. The discussion forums produced a unanimous agreement on the effect that continuing training has on the education received by the children. All participants say that training improves the quality of professional practice in the classrooms and directly benefits children during the very important stage of their development.

Recognizing these key roles that teachers have in the child's education, the Department of Education released a mandate to provide programs for human resource development, to upgrade and strengthen the quality of preschool teachers to ensure the delivery of quality basic education. The government offered training for more than a thousand preschool teachers across the country. For regions VI, VII, and VIII, West Visayas State University – College of Education was the training service provider. The training started in Summer 2011 with the specific goals of upgrading teacher's knowledge and skills essential to organizing, managing and/or teaching kindergarten classes. Hence this study was conducted.

This research intended to determine how the 2011 preschool training improved the capability of preschool teachers. Specifically, the research aimed to ascertain if the preschool teachers have:

1. an increased content and knowledge
2. gained concepts about teaching preschool
3. developed skills in teaching preschool
4. addressed misconceptions
5. changed world view about the training

Methodology

Research Design

This is a mixed method study which employed multiple data source and data collection methods such as analysis of documents. To ensure validity of results, triangulation of data was done by looking into the results of pre-

and posttests, the training program evaluation sheets, and knowledge and skills inventory.

The quantitative part used the descriptive and inferential analyses, making use of means, standard deviations and t-test in the analysis of data. The qualitative part employed a narrative inquiry and used thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1992) by coding strips of information at two levels. A narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as a way of understanding learning experiences enabled the researchers and participants to live, tell, re-examine, reflect on, and retell stories – stories of classroom experiences that made the researchers and the participants understand their teaching experiences.

The Participants

The participants of the study were the 90 preschool teachers from regions VI, VII and VIII who were trained during the three-week summer program in April to May 2011. Of the 90 participants, 41 or 45% came from Region VI, 31 or 34% came from Region VII, and 18 or 20% came from Region VIII.

Data Gathering Instruments

Measurement of the effectiveness of the training program and end product to the stake holders were assessed through various instruments.

The Pretest and Posttest was a forty-five item test given to the teacher-participants prior to and after the training. This test was used to determine if there is an increase in the content and knowledge gained by the participants after the training.

Training Program Evaluation Sheet consisted of statements with moderately positive and negative description of the whole training program such as system of organization; printed training materials; selection, organization and scheduling; physical arrangement; general observation and self-assessment of knowledge and skill after the training. The participants rated the given statements using a six-point scale with 1 as the lowest and 6, the highest. This instrument was answered by the trainers and the participants.

Knowledge and Skills Inventory is a three-column-chart and was used to assess the participants' knowledge and skills before and after the course. A

misconception column was made to address their misconceptions before the course and what they have learned after the course. First column is for the knowledge before the topic, second column for the knowledge learned after the training, and the third column for the misconceptions addressed.

Results and Discussions

Content and Knowledge Gained by the Participants after the Training

To determine if there is an increase in the content and knowledge gained by the participants after the training, a pretest and a posttest were given. The pretest and posttest results show that out of the forty-five (45) items, the participants got a pretest mean score of 22.04 indicating that prior to the training, they have mastered 48.97% of the concepts involved. However, after the training in the same course, the participants gained almost 4 points.

The t-value of 8.37 is significant even at 0.01 level. Hence, there exists a significant difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores of the participants. This indicates that the training is effective in increasing participants' achievement in teaching preschool.

Table 1 below presents the data.

Table 1

Participants' Mean Scores in Content and Knowledge Gained

Category	N	Mean	SD	Mean Gain	t-value	Sig
Pretest	90	22.04	3.79	3.92	8.37*	0.00
Posttest	90	25.97	4.42			

Note: * $p < .01$

Concepts Learned After the Training

The participants generated a rich array of concepts after the training. They highlighted the foundation on theoretical knowledge in the teaching of early childhood education and their formation as educators as major themes of the concepts learned. Their concepts on theoretical knowledge in the teaching of preschool included not only the legal bases and theories, but also lesson planning, strategies and activities such as storytelling, the teaching of mother

tongue, and assessment. The participants also learned from the training some concepts which became part of their formation as educators, and which they are very grateful for to their professors/trainers.

Theoretical knowledge. The training according to the participants provided them a strong foundation on theoretical knowledge in the teaching of early childhood education. As one participant claimed, *“I learned so many things when it comes to the theory, the foundation of the child ...* Another said, *“I was refreshed about the study of the historical, biological, psychological, and legal basis of ECE, theories and approaches in learning and some approaches in early childhood.”* *“I learned how to treat the child during these stages.”*

Lesson planning. Lesson planning in a new format and in different strategies was also found to be a significant learning. *“I learned about writing a plan in story track using the story reading strategy.”* *“I know how to make a new format on making a new lesson plan.”*

Strategies and activities in the teaching of preschool. Most participants stated that they, *“... learned many things such as new strategies, techniques in teaching preschool.”* Their comparison of knowledge before and after the training revealed that, *“Before, traditional method was practiced, but now I know that there are effective models/methods in EC programs that could really develop the skills and abilities of the children like Head-Start Method, Waldorf, Eclectic Method, etc.,”* *“...Montessori type of teaching”.*

Storytelling as one major activity in a preschool class was also cited as a significant learning for many. One participant said, *“Before, I can tell stories to my children. Now, I learned the proper way to deal with children pertaining to the criteria in storytelling.”* Another added, *“I know that we must ask questions before we read the story to measure whether the children understand. Now I understand that there are two questions, the divergent and convergent questions. You must first ask the children or let them say something about the picture before you start.”*

The participants further learned activities that will make learning fun and enjoyable. As noted in their statements, they showed interest in the discussions on these topics. *“During the training I was able to behave well with one hundred percent attentiveness. After the training, I had learned much on the performing arts and movement experience, literary arts, and creative and visual arts.”*; *“I learned that art is very important. We should not limit*

the children for their appreciation of art to enhance their potentialities”; “I learned that the context of colors we applied in art carries our emotion and our personality.” They were right away able to connect this new knowledge with their previous practices: *“I allow children to participate in stage presentation which I choreograph. Now I know correct choreography in stage presentation with low, medium, high voicing.”* With what they had experienced in the training, one couldn’t help but compare it with his previous trainings, *“I already attended some training programs, and I always experience lecturing about learning theories about children’s learning development. But during this training program, I learned that a creative art is important in child’s life. Those children can relate to express themselves through creative arts and it develops their interest towards learning.”*

Knowledge on the teaching of mother tongue. Knowledge about what and how to teach in the mother tongue made a significant impact on the participants. *“I learned all about the alphabet in the mother tongue, the what and why of MTBMLE”; “I gained knowledge on the legal basis of MTBMLE and the new education curriculum for five years old.* They also claimed to have acquired knowledge about one’s own mother tongue especially on vocabulary and correct usage. *“I learned more words in the mother tongue.”, “I recalled some L1 words that I seldom used.”; “...developed my vocabulary in the mother tongue”; “translation of English words to our mother tongue.”* Thus a clear understanding of the topic made them say, *“I become more comfortable in using L1”; “I know that speaking mother tongue could really help us as a teacher because we can explain well to our pupils the lesson for them to understand better...”*

Assessment. Assessment is another area where learners gained much. They learned *“...different assessment tool used to evaluate children’s performance”.* They also learned the importance of assessment in knowing their learners as revealed in these statements: *“I learned to identify the child’s need during assessment.”; “Learned how to assess their needs and behavior.”* Comparing their knowledge before and after the training, the following were noted: *“Before I learned how to evaluate the child with the use of ECCD checklist. Now, I learned how to interpret the score of ECCD checklist.”, “Before, I already know how to fill-up the ECCD checklist as a means of evaluating the child, after the training, I learned how to make my own checklist and rating scales”; “Before I learned the things on how to assess the students but I don’t know how to put it in action. Later after the training, I learned how to assess the child by conducting as well as interpreting the data about the result on the child’s activity during the assessment.”*

Concepts in relation to formation as educators. The entire training enabled the teacher-participants to translate their learnings into a deeper meaning of what an educator is. Their expressed concern for the child, sharing of learnings with co-teachers, and gratitude to professors/trainers were identified as extension of knowledge in their formation as educators during the training.

Concern for the child. The participants learned from this training that teaching is about concern for the child, as shown in these: *“I learned to be a true educator who always considers the needs of the children”*; *“I learned that it’s not only about versatility, it’s about caring for every Filipino child and inspire (inspiring) them (him) to greater heights.”*, *“As a teacher, I must support children in whatever phase of learning they are in for a given activity.*

Competence. The teacher-participants’ various learnings from the training developed their concept of self-competence in teaching as shown in the following: *“After the training, I conclude that this training is very essential for me because I got so many ideas and I’m knowledgeable enough to teach my pupils.”*, *“I have learned that this training is a big help to perform my functions excellently as kindergarten teacher.”*

Gratitude. The entire training generated overwhelming gratitude to trainers as revealed in these: *“The professors are very expert and well-equipped when it comes to the knowledge and ideas. They are very kind; I consider them a great mentors.”* and *“All professors are excellent in to this training.”*

Skills Developed after the Training

The participants revealed to have developed several teaching skills and people skills after the training. On teaching, they learned the skills in making instructional materials, creative performances, and assessment. The participants also developed people skills through their interaction with other participants.

Teaching skills. As an objective of this training, the participants gained several skills in teaching such as making instructional materials, performing creative activities, and assessing learners.

Making instructional materials. The participants expressed to have learned skills in making instructional materials suited to the learners such

as big and small books and other devices, which in the process improved their skills in art. Their narratives revealed comparisons of what they can do before and how these were enriched after the training. *“Before, I already know how to make simple materials but now I learned how to make devices more attractive to children, how to make big books more interesting to children. I also know how to make a storybook and rhymes suitable for them using our mother tongue.”*, *“Before, I already know how to cut border decorations, flowers and others all about cutting. But now, I learned how to make big book in LI, flower hat, magic box, and so many others.”*, *“Before, the skills that I do is only making simple borderlines and simple visual aids. Now, I learned how to make small books, big books, how to draw and making visual aids like flower hats/ flower crowns and different scribbling’s and drawings.”* Indeed, their repetitive claims about learnings in making instructional materials is simplified by the following statements: *“I learned a lot about arts and crafts in making instructional materials”*; *“Making artworks for every child’s activities, especially the small and big books”*; *“I learned a lot of things in this training especially in making party hats and materials that are related to the lesson”*; *“I learned the steps on how to make a big book properly as well as on how to use it during the class discussion”*; *“I have learned to be more creative and appreciative of arts”*; *“I learned many skills during and after this training especially the creative arts. Maybe I am better than before in terms of creative arts”*; *“Before, I know how to draw a lot of tracing pictures so I have instructional materials to show to my pupils. Now, I learned how to draw on my own without tracing; learned how to mix colors that are cool to look at.”*

Performing creative activities. The participants indicated that they also improved their skills in creative performances such as action songs, finger plays, and writing and telling stories. *“I can sing, dance and draw but not as good as now after the training. Now I am confident that I already learned a lot of talents such as how to dance, to sing, and draw with perspective, with elegance. Maybe I am now better than before”*; *“I learned the strategies in writing and telling short stories and learn how to write stories in Hiligaynon”*; *“Before, I know how to tell story to my pupils but now I can write the stories in Mother Tongue and make big and small books.”* Others claimed that the training taught them *“skills in creating Hiligaynon songs with actions”* and *“draw scenes using combination of colors.”* Thus, the training, as what the participant said, *“drew experiences that spark imagination, divergent thinking and exuberance through creative performances.”*

Assessing learners. Participants also developed the skills on how to

assess the child by conducting assessment tools as well as to interpret the data, and how to interpret the ECCD checklist. Narratives revealed that *“I learned how to assess the children’s progress”*; *“I’ve learned how to assess my pupils in a proper way with a specific subject to be measured”*; *“I know only some assessment method that I can use in assessing pupils’ behavior; however, I can do now the assessment to my pupils and do proper interventions toward the behavior to be observed for this school year.”* Results further revealed that their limited skills on assessment were enriched after the training such as these: *“Before I know how to make a formal or pencil and paper test. Now, I know how to make several assessment like anecdotal, time sample, event sampling, rating skills, and others which are needed to assess our pupils”*; *“The skill I have already prior to training is how to make test questions and how to administer it, making plans what to do to assess pupils and anecdotal records. I learned during/after the training is there is a different type of test to be administered to pupils in order to assess their needs.”*

Personal skills. If the participants developed professional skills in teaching, they also claimed to have developed personal skills such as socialization skills and other personal qualities.

Socialization skills. The participants mentioned that their attendance in the training with participants coming from different regions improved their socialization skills such as this, *“Before the skills that I had in terms of other people and dealing with children were not completely polished. After the training, I gained so many skills; I improved it through what I learned during the training; I learned to be sociable with other teachers even if they used different language.”*

Other qualities. Other qualities were cited to have developed after the training. *“Before, I was just flexible and patient. After the training, I learned creativity”*; *“Now I am proud that I learn many things on how to deal with preschoolers”*; *“I learned a lot of skills during the training that can help me to be more effective and efficient ...”*

Misconceptions that were Addressed after the Training

The participants identified the following misconceptions they had which were addressed after the training. The misconceptions are subdivided into three themes: 1) On the Use of Mother Tongue in the Teaching of Concepts to Pupils, 2) Utilization of Instructional Materials; and (3) the Importance of Assessment.

On the use of mother tongue in the teaching of concepts to pupils.

The word Mother Tongue is new to some participants and some thought that it cannot make the pupil learn. Consider these statements from the participants:

“The use of Mother Tongue in the class can make the pupil dull”

“First to encounter mother tongue”

However, after the training, many believed that the use of Mother Tongue is important in understanding the pupils as shown in the statements below. Also, it is beneficial and very much needed for effective instruction.

“Teaching mother tongue is a great help in developing the learning process of children.”

“That mother tongue can be effective in terms of comprehension when applied correctly and properly”

“Now, I know that it is easy for the pupils to understand/learn the second language if they are equipped or expert in the first language.”

Utilization of instructional materials. Aside from varied activities, the lesson is easily understood if instructional materials are utilized in classroom instruction, especially if these materials are found in one’s locality. Some mentioned that flashcards may not be so appealing with children and that interactive and manipulative materials are more preferred. The skill in making these materials are also of great concern for some teachers and they realized that they too need to develop the skill of drawing and other aspects of creative arts.

Here are what they said:

“It would be easier for the children to understand if we teachers will use IM which are in the locality.”

“Traditional IM like flashcards are not so effective visual aids and not interesting. The use of interactive and manipulative materials are helpful in achieving good performance in school.”

“It is not enough to have a skill in creative arts. I need to enhance myself in different arts (so I can) [to] impart (to) my pupils.”

“I thought that drawing is an easy task. After the training I realized that it is difficult because of the procedure that we must follow.”

The importance of assessment. The participants are clarified about the importance of assessment in Kindergarten and some of its uses. To quote ,

“We can assess and give interventions to pupils with behavioral problems or special needs.” For some participants, “being a kindergarten teacher is not an easy task. It requires a lot of responsibilities as a teacher”, and “lots of patience and understanding to my pupils.”

Participants’ Views of the 2011 Summer Training

The trainees viewed the summer training to be very helpful and enriching for them. In a scale of 1-6, the program has a total mean rating of 5.17 or Excellent. Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Program Evaluation

Areas of Concern	Rating	Description
A. System of Registration	5.19	Excellent
B. Printed Training Materials	5.42	Excellent
C. Selection, Organization and Scheduling		
Organization of Training Activities	5.07	Excellent
Scheduling of Activities	4.49	Very Good
D. Physical Arrangement		
Training Site/Venue	4.39	Very Good
Training Facilities	4.91	Very Good
Training Equipment Used	5.20	Excellent
E. General Observations		
Effectiveness of Trainers	5.46	Excellent
Participation of the Trainees	5.45	Excellent
Expectations among Participants	5.20	Excellent
General Reaction to the Training	5.29	Excellent
F. Self-Assessment of Knowledge and Skills		
Assess students as learners	5.26	Excellent
Gain more confidence in developing lesson plans and instructional materials	5.39	Excellent
Deliver learning experiences using various methods and strategies	5.41	Excellent
Evaluate learners utilizing different assessment Methods	5.38	Excellent
General Evaluation	5.17	Excellent

Note: 5.0 – 5.99=Excellent, 4.0 – 4.99=Very Good, 3.0 – 3.99=Good, 2.0 – 2.99=Poor, 1.0 – 1.99=Very Poor

When asked what was particularly rewarding about the training, the participants mentioned the trainers and the training. They affirmed their trainers by saying, *“Teachers/ trainers are very approachable and accommodating. Their skills and knowledge really inspire me to do the same especially making our instructional materials more creative. We gained a lot from our trainers.”* This response is confirmed by their evaluation of their trainers using the Trainers’ Evaluation Sheet. Results showed that all the trainers were Excellent with mean scores ranging from 3.76 to 4.0.

Their positive comments about the training are evident in the following: *“I’ve learned a lot from this training. It’s really beyond my expectations. Job well done. So thankful!”*; *“I find this training is the best for pre-school teachers. I have gained/learned so much in this training, developed my skills as a pre-school teacher”*; *“It was very helpful to us, as teachers. We gained more skills, were equipped with knowledge on handling pre-school. I have a better understanding of the curriculum of Early Education. I enjoyed learning in mother tongue”*; *“I have a better understanding of the curriculum of Early Childhood Education. Job well done to all trainers, you changed my life in the field where I am now.”*

When asked if they have other comments or suggestions for the enhancement of the training, their responses were on: 1) ventilation: *“Rooms should be well ventilated”*, *“have more ceiling fans in the classroom;* 2) giving of activities and handouts: *“minimize the giving of assignments and reflections”*; *“visit some preschool centers like Montessori and Waldorf”*, *“distribution of handouts after the lecture”*; 3) scheduling: *“...there should be a breakfast of 30 minutes”*, *“We hope that you will give us time for snacks at least 15 minute- break.”*

The findings of this research are supported by the study of Pineda-Herrero et al. (2010) which found out that continuing training has a strong effect on the preschool training staff’s personal development and on their cultural enrichment. The impact of training is also evident, to a lesser degree, in the improvement of teachers’ social relations. Moreover, this study supports the report of Darling-Hammond (2010) in Center for American Progress stating that improving teacher quality is one of the most direct and promising strategies for improving public education.

Conclusions

In view of the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

This study on capacity-building of preschool teachers showed what concepts and skills the participants learned after the training. The results indicated that training is effective in increasing the participants' capability in teaching early childhood education. They appeared to have gained holistic concepts in the training since they cited all the aspects of teaching preparations as concepts that they had learned. They also cited to have learned various professional and personal skills after the training. This is an indication that the training did not only develop their capability as preschool teachers but also as individuals. Thus, it is impressive to note that the participants were able to translate their learning of concepts and skills into what a total educator should be.

Moreover, the participants' misconceptions all aligned with their concepts learned after the training indicating that these were really addressed. This further showed that the whole training was viewed to be excellent, the results conformed to the rich learnings of the participants in terms of concepts and skills.

Recommendations

The first phase of the two-summer training turned out successful based on the program evaluation of the trainees. So far, there were no concerns and recommendations from both the trainees and trainers except for the trainees request for classrooms with better ventilation. Thus, it is recommended to the sponsoring agencies, the Department of Education and West Visayas State University, to look into the ventilation of the classrooms for the next phase of the training since a conducive learning environment is a major element in successful learning. For school heads and supervisors of the preschool teachers trained, it is recommended that monitoring of the trainees' teaching performance be done to ensure that the knowledge and skills they learned from the training are properly and continuously applied.

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