

Standardized Core Curriculum Development and Evaluation in California
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Abstract

The Standardized Core Curriculum Project (SCCP) is the result of a multi-year, statewide collaborative effort aimed at providing each new child welfare worker in California with a comprehensive, competency-based training before he or she assumes an independent caseload. After legislation initiated the project in 1998, the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) utilized a collaborative model to assemble the curriculum and pilot a delivery model in early 2001. An integrated evaluation plan measured satisfaction and application of knowledge to practice. Focus groups also gleaned qualitative information on curriculum delivery, curriculum content, and application to the workplace. A unique set of transfer of learning tools applied the curriculum to on-the-job training and integrated the supervisor into the training process.

Preliminary analysis of the pilot evaluation has yielded valuable information about curriculum delivery and application of the curriculum to the workplace. In addition, the curriculum development process fostered statewide collaboration and clarified the critical issues that must be addressed when attempting to

¹ CalSWEC wishes to acknowledge the work of the Standardized Core Work Group (SCWG) and the Standardized Core Evaluation Subcommittee in completing this project. Members included Betsy Gross, Ray Liles, Latifu Minirah, Margaret Rainforth, Martha Roditti, and Meera Srinivasan. Elsa Ten Broeck and Frankie Freitas also provided valuable consultation to the SCWG.

implement a large standardized curriculum in a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system.

The Standardized Core Curriculum Project in California

The Context: California's Child Welfare Training System

California's state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system presents unique challenges and opportunities for development and delivery of core curriculum for new child welfare workers. The magnitude and diversity of California's child welfare system complicates the normal challenges inherent in developing a standardized curriculum. According to the 2000 census, California has over 33.8 million people and over 10.5 million children. California's fifty-eight counties range in population and sensibility from Los Angeles's densely populated urban sprawl to Alpine's small mountain towns. Educating and training the child welfare workforce in such a diverse environment requires collaboration between the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), state and private universities and schools of social work, and county administrators. The Standardized Core Curriculum Project (SCCP) is embedded in, and builds upon, this collaboration.

The CalSWEC Title IV-E Program

Such collaboration has a history in California, most notably with the inception and continuing operations of the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC). CalSWEC was formed in 1990 at the University of California, Berkeley School of Social Welfare as a collaboration among California's accredited schools of social work, the CDSS, and the fifty-eight counties. Its mission is "to assure effective, culturally competent service delivery and leadership to alleviate negative human conditions, such as racism and poverty, for the people of California" (CalSWEC Web site, <http://calswec.berkeley.edu>) CalSWEC provides financial assistance (using university and federal funds through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act) to full- and part-time students pursuing an MSW degree in one of California's accredited MSW programs. A comprehensive set of competencies form the basis of a specialized IV-E child welfare curriculum, which students complete during their MSW coursework and field placements. Students receiving the IV-E stipend also complete at least one of

their field placements in a public child welfare setting. The students then are required to complete two years of service in a public child welfare setting, at full salary, after they receive their degree.

The IV-E competencies were developed by a coalition of practitioners, administrators, researchers, and instructors in 1991, were revised in 1996, and are currently under a second revision. The competencies were used in the development of the Standardized Core Curriculum, providing a link between the university-based master's-level education and the academy-based training for newly hired workers.

Newly hired workers who completed the IV-E curriculum are generally believed to require less training than those who have not completed the curriculum. It is unclear, however, whether this is, in fact, the case. It is also unclear which content areas newly hired workers with different levels of training and experience require. As outlined below, one goal of the Standardized Core Curriculum evaluation was to determine with more certainty what areas of training were required for newly hired child welfare workers with different levels of education, training and experience.

The Regional Training Academies

The CalSWEC model was also used to develop a training system for newly hired child welfare workers. For this type of training, five regional training academies were developed. These academies are university/county partnerships, which are charged with meeting the training needs of all counties in their region. CalSWEC provides coordination for the academies, and until fiscal year 2001 oversaw three of the five academies' budgets. Four of the five training academies are funded through Title IV-E training funds, leveraged with matching funds from the CDSS and from the universities where their operations are located. The Inter-University Consortium in Los Angeles also utilizes federal IV-E funds but contracts directly with the County of Los Angeles. Figure 1 shows the counties served by each academy, with their corresponding university affiliations.

Figure 1. California’s Regional Training Academies

The Bay Area Academy

Service Area: 12 counties in the San Francisco Bay Area—Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, and Sonoma.

Principal University Partner: San Francisco State University

Total Population of the Region: 7.49 million*

The Central California Child Welfare Training Academy

Service Area: 11 counties in the Central Valley Area—Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Ventura.

Principal University Partner: California State University, Fresno

Total Population of the Region: 4.14 million*

The Public Child Welfare Training Academy—Southern Region

Service Area: 5 counties in Southern California—Imperial, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego.

Principal University Partners: San Diego State University; California State University, San Bernardino

Total Population of the Region: 9.06 million*

The Northern California Children & Family Services Training Academy

Service Area: 29 counties in the Northern Region—Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Mendocino, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yolo, and Yuba.

Principal University Partner: The Center for Human Services Training and Development, at UC Davis Extension.

Total Population of the Region: 3.66 million*

Figure 1. (Cont'd) California's Regional Training Academies

The Inter-University Consortium

Service Area: Los Angeles County.

Principal University Partners: UCLA; the University of Southern California; California State University, Long Beach; and California State University, Los Angeles.

Total Population of the Region: 9.52 million*

*Source: 2000 U.S. Census.

The Move Toward Standardization

Developing and delivering training for child welfare workers regionally allows for each academy to tailor curricula to meet its particular counties' needs. This variation in content and training delivery presents a challenge, however, for evaluation of training. Without a standardized training regimen statewide, it is difficult to determine, for example, whether workers in different regions are getting equivalent training. As the federal government moves toward an outcomes-based evaluation for child welfare systems, it becomes even more important to easily elucidate who has been trained, on what topics, and whether the training has been effective.

The lack of standardized training also has considerable liability implications, in that new employees with minimal social work education and training may be empowered to make decisions about removal and placement of children. Although most counties provide training prior to assigning cases to new employees, this is not always the case. With no mandate for standardized training, all training is more likely to be perceived as a luxury rather than as a necessity, particularly under budget constraints.

The current statewide workforce shortage exacerbates these problems, by creating pressure on counties to fill positions quickly and to recruit workers who do not have degrees in social work or related fields. California regulations stipulate that "At least 50% of the professional staff providing emergency response services, and at least 50% of the professional staff providing family maintenance services, shall possess a master's degree in Social Work, or its equivalent in Education and/or experience as certified by the State

Personnel Board or a county civil service board.” The remaining 50% of emergency response and family maintenance staff are to possess a BSW or its equivalent, as defined above. All child welfare supervisors are to possess an MSW or equivalent. (CDSS Division 31 Regulations handbook, section 31-070.11.) Counties are unable to locate sufficient numbers of such qualified candidates, however, and apply for and receive waivers for this requirement. This means that some large counties with ample resources are able to hire new workers with MSW or MSW-equivalent degrees, including those that completed the IV-E curriculum. Smaller counties with fewer resources have increasingly resorted to hiring new workers with less education or less relevant education (i.e., BSWs, BA/BSs, or AAs).

Legislation

Partly in response to these issues, the SCCP began in 1998, with the passage of Assembly Bill 2779, sponsored by California Assemblymember Dion Aroner. AB 2779 appropriated funds to “support efforts to develop a standardized training curriculum for child welfare workers.” Child welfare workers would complete the training prior to their assumption of an independent caseload. The legislation mandated CDSS to contract for services with an entity to work in “close collaboration” with various stakeholders in the child welfare system. Specifically named stakeholders included the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), CalSWEC, the five regional training academies, and representatives of child welfare social services workers. AB 2779 further stated that the “curriculum effort shall build upon work currently done and efforts currently under way within the California Social Work Education Center and the regional training academies.” (California Assembly Bill 2779, section 52, 1998.) CalSWEC received the contract to coordinate the project beginning in 1998.

The SCCP’s origins in legislation had a great impact on the course of the project. While the legislation clearly moved the project forward and provided funds to do so, it also placed some limitations on the progress of the project. Of particular note was the absence of any language in the legislation about implementing the standardized curriculum once it was developed.

The Curriculum Development Process

General Development Process Principles

Several general principles emerged as the SCCP moved forward from the legislation to the design of the Standardized Core Curriculum (SCC). These principles guided the project, and will be expanded upon below:

- The SCC would be a **collaborative** effort;
- The SCC would be a **competency-based curriculum** with measurable learning objectives;
- The SCC would reflect **adult learning styles** and have options for distance learning; and
- The SCC would integrate **transfer of learning** into the delivery of the training.

Collaboration: The Standardized Core Curriculum Advisory Committee

The legislative mandate for collaboration greatly influenced the curriculum design process. In order to assure input and buy-in from all of the named (and other important unnamed) stakeholders in AB 2779, CalSWEC convened the Standardized Core Advisory Committee (SCAC) in August 1999. The SCAC consists of representatives from CDSS, CalSWEC, CWDA, the Regional Training Academies, county child welfare training management, child welfare supervisory and line staff, child welfare consumers, foster parents, and labor unions. Other relevant stakeholders and professionals also participated in the SCAC, such as substance abuse training experts and representatives from the Judicial Council of California.

The diverse membership of the SCAC allowed the group to set the tone of the project from the beginning, and the four principles above were established through discussions at the SCAC. The collaborative nature of the group also helped to address “territory” or “turf” issues early on in the process, increasing buy-in by the key stakeholders. Subcommittees were established to specifically address curriculum content, transfer of learning, distance learning, and evaluation, with each subcommittee led by a regional training academy.

Competency-Based Curriculum

As noted above, CalSWEC established competencies for the Title IV-E Program in 1991, using a similar collaborative process with a diverse group of stakeholders. (Clark and Dickinson, 1998). These competencies have been used at universities and training academies throughout the state as they developed their core curricula. This wide use made the synthesis of existing core curricula easier.

The Advisory Committee and the Curriculum Outline

Using the existing CalSWEC competencies as a foundation, the SCAC incorporated existing curriculum content areas at the regional training academies into a comprehensive outline. This outline included eight large content domains, with smaller content areas within each domain. Five domains roughly corresponded to the categories of the CalSWEC IV-E competencies. Three additional domains were identified as “thematic content areas,” to be integrated throughout all sections of the curriculum. The SCAC then developed broad learning objectives for each content area. Figure 2 shows the eight domains and twenty-three content areas.

Figure 2. SCC Domains and Content Areas

Primary Child Welfare Skills

This domain includes training related to the practice of child welfare with the child welfare population as it is organized within the State of California.

Content Areas:

- Fundamental Practice Issues in Public Child Welfare (includes Confidentiality and Social Work Ethics and Values);
- Identifying Issues in Child Maltreatment;
- Risk and Safety Assessments;
- Family Needs Assessment;
- Case Planning and Case Management;
- The Issues of Placement in Child Welfare;
- Working Effectively with Caregivers;
- Mandates Regarding Placement.

Figure 2. (Cont'd) SCC Domains and Content Areas

Social Work Skills

This domain encompasses the training of essential social work skills.

Content Areas:

- Child Welfare Practice in a Multi-Cultural Environment;
- Conducting Interviews;
- Crisis Intervention;
- Working Effectively with Families.

Human Behavior

This domain includes training concerning child, adolescent, and adult human development; human sexuality; and mental health issues.

Content Areas:

- Human Development and the Effects of Child Maltreatment;
- Intrafamilial Sexual Abuse;
- Domestic Violence;
- Substance Abuse;
- Mental Health and Mental Illness.

Work Place Management

This domain contains job behavior and community collaboration.

Content Areas:

- Time Management;
- Stress Management;
- Worker Safety;
- Interdisciplinary Practice.

Legal Processes

This domain contains training related to juvenile court processes.

Content Areas:

- Documentation and Writing Skills for Legal Reports;
- Court Procedures.

Figure 2. (Cont'd) SCC Domains and Content Areas

Cultural Competence

This thematic domain focuses on identifying and addressing cultural differences and their impact on child welfare practice. This domain also has a one-day training as part of the curriculum.

Content Areas:

- Child Welfare Practice in a Multi-Cultural Environment.

Interdisciplinary Practice

This thematic domain addresses working effectively with community members, agencies, and other professionals.

Social Work Values and Ethics

This thematic domain covers NASW Ethics and Values and their application to child welfare practice. This content was also addressed more specifically in the content area *Fundamental Practice Issues in Public Child Welfare*.

Synthesis of the Curriculum Content

Once the SCAC had broadly defined the curriculum content with the outline, the role of the SCAC changed. While called an advisory committee, the SCAC had actively worked on the curriculum outline, rather than simply advising CalSWEC. Meetings were held monthly from August 1999 to September 2000. As the SCAC grappled with converting the outline into a usable curriculum that could be piloted throughout the state, however, more intensive work was required. This work also required a smaller team than the approximately fifty-member SCAC. Again, a collaborative model was used to develop the curriculum for the pilot. Four of the five regional training academies devoted staff to a new, more intensive group—the Standardized Core Curriculum Work Group (SCWG). The SCAC then assumed a more advisory role, meeting quarterly.

The SCWG's focus was to “flesh out” the curriculum outline developed by the SCAC, synthesizing the curriculum from the regional training academies and developing measurable learning objectives for each content area. At the initial meetings in

November 2000, the group established a standardized format for the curriculum, using the Core Curriculum of the Central California Child Welfare Training Academy as a model. The group also established a subcommittee, the Standardized Core Evaluation Sub-Committee (SCES), to design the evaluation and formulate the necessary evaluation instruments.

For several reasons, the synthesis process presented more difficulty than initially anticipated. First, there was (and remains) little agreement as to the meaning of the term “standardized curriculum.” While the SCAC had discussed this issue, the SCWG confronted it much more concretely. This lack of agreement manifested itself in widely differing views as to how “scripted” a standardized curriculum should be. In any large curriculum project with an integrated evaluation component, the pressure to make each training similar in format tempts one to provide a “script” for each trainer to follow, with similar activities and discussions. Scripted curricula maximize the possibility of generating valid, reliable evaluation data, because they minimize differences in training styles.

Using a scripted curriculum has drawbacks in terms of flexibility, however. In a diverse environment, different trainers have different ideas for effective curriculum delivery, and different audiences may react very differently to particular exercises or discussions. The SCCP demanded a highly flexible curriculum that also had measurable objectives. For this reason, a non-scripted curriculum was developed, with recommended guidelines for trainers and standardized objectives. Content was defined in the curriculum as it related to the learning objectives, and trainers were required to teach to this content. The method of delivery of the material, however, could vary according to individual trainer style and the make-up of the group of trainees.

Participants’ Guides and Trainers’ Guides

Each content area of the curriculum therefore has two separate guides, one for the participants and one for the trainer. Both the *Participants’ Guide* and the *Trainers’ Guide* contain the learning objectives. The *Participants’ Guide* also contains the CalSWEC competencies and defines the content needed to cover the learning objectives. Trainees keep the *Participants’ Guide* as a reference manual during and after the training. Trainers receive both the *Participants’ Guide* and the *Trainers’ Guide*, which advises

trainers about how to approach the material and sets priorities for them when time is limited. A summary of all of the curriculum components, including the transfer of learning tools, is included in Appendix A.

Learning Objectives

McCowan and Wegenast (1998) define instructional objectives as a combination of three specific behaviors trainees must demonstrate to show they have mastered a particular competency:

- **Knowledge**—Specific information that is perceived or learned;
- **Skills**—Proficiency or dexterity requiring the use of hands or body;
- **Values**—A state of mind or feeling.

The SCWG used this model for developing objectives for the different content areas of the curriculum. Work group members who synthesized the curriculum reviewed the learning objectives to determine that they were: (a) reflective of knowledge, skill, or value; (b) actually covered in the curriculum content; and (c) measurable. Each content area of the curriculum also had to have one learning objective related to cultural competence, to reflect the importance of this thematic content area.

Adult Learning Styles

A relatively large body of literature has discussed and categorized preferred learning styles for adults. Approaches to adult learning have included categorizing learning styles by sensory domain (i.e., some people learn visually, others learn kinetically, etc.) and categorizing learning styles by the method with which people integrate information (i.e., some people think globally, some think compartmentally, etc.).

Kasworm and Marienau (1997) identified five key principles to adult-oriented learning:

- Adults learn from multiple sources;
- Adult learning engages the whole person;
- Adult learning is facilitated by self-direction that is encouraged with feedback;
- Adults learn best when the information is in the context of experience; and
- Adults learn from their experiences. (p. 7)

These principles were considered in the development of the core curriculum and in the delivery of the curriculum. Because different trainers would be training in different regions, they would likely have different strengths and use different training techniques. In addition to defining the content areas, the SCAC established guidelines for the standardized curriculum that would make it reflective of adult learning styles and flexible in its delivery. Three issues were identified as guidelines for curriculum development:

- The recognition of various adult learning styles and their respective impact on the structure of training curricula;
- The specification of training technologies that will enhance the possibility that counties with their respective differences in resources will find this curriculum useful, and
- The incorporation of different approaches to delivering this training curriculum.

Using these guidelines, the SCWG incorporated into the *Trainers' Guide* suggestions for adult learning techniques. CalSWEC also began development of the *Trainer Activity Book*, a tool to assist trainers in developing dynamic, multi-modal presentations in their content area. Unfortunately, the *Trainer Activity Book* was incomplete prior to the pilots, due to time constraints. CalSWEC and the training academies therefore offered trainers assistance in developing their presentations as necessary.

Distance Learning Modules

Given the increasing focus on distance learning of all types, the SCCP sought to develop areas of content that could be delivered outside of the classroom. The Public Child Welfare Training Academy—Southern Region (PCWTA) initiated the distance-learning portion of the core curriculum and assisted in the field-testing of two courses as part of the pilot in the northern region. PCWTA developed Web-based courses for two content areas: *Fundamental Practice Issues in Public Child Welfare* and *Court Procedures*. PCWTA chose to use Blackboard.com™ as a platform for the distance learning courses. (See Bookhagen, A., in *this volume*.) The courses are “asynchronous,” meaning that participants may work on them at their own pace, provided that they finish them by the specified end date. Students are required to participate in “discussion boards,” which allow all participants to view comments by other participants and instructors. Students also

maintain e-mail contact with the instructors. In the SCC pilot, these instructors were located hundreds of miles away, in southern California. Blackboard.com™ also allows instructors to track student participation, and information on the satisfaction level with the distance learning format is collected as part of the courses.

Transfer of Learning

Mindful of the importance of the transfer of learning to the workplace, and of the need to reinforce the transfer of knowledge both during and after training, the SCCP developed a unique set of transfer of learning tools. These tools are designed to facilitate the transfer of learning from the classroom (or from the computer, in the case of distance learning) to the workplace. This emphasis on transfer of learning acknowledges that classroom training alone—even classroom training by a dynamic presenter with a multi-modal format—does not necessarily apply learning directly and effectively to the workplace.

Background on Transfer of Learning

Curry et al. (1994) refer to the transfer of adult learning as “the application of learning, knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired in a training setting to the practice setting,” and point out that “social work training frequently fails to enhance job performance because it is not viewed as a collaborative process involving factors that affect the social worker before, during, and after training.” (p. 8.) The CalSWEC IV-E curriculum applies these principles to an academic setting for MSW students, in that classroom content is tied to field practice in a public child welfare agency. However, training of newly hired public child welfare workers in California has not historically emphasized the field application of what was learned in the classroom. Although a great deal of effort has gone into creating training programs for classroom learning, the development of tools to assist workers once they leave training has been confined to a few recent county and academy programs.

This emphasis on the transfer of learning has important implications not only for the relevance of training to practice, but for retention of workers in social welfare agencies. Research on transfer of learning within the education field has emphasized this connection to retention. A study by Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (RNT), a national nonprofit educational research organization based in Belmont, Massachusetts, found that teachers who get

extra support early in their careers are far more likely to stay in the profession (Recruiting New Teachers, Inc., 2000). The study also found that when mentors (or in this case, supervisors) are prepared and motivated, they provide crucial guidance about practice and system issues. RNT cited California's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA) as a model for mentorship and retention. BTSA uses a variety of methods to transfer knowledge and skills to new teachers, including support by a mentor, clinical supervision (including reflection and portfolio work), and ongoing formative assessments of teaching practice. The BTSA program increased new teachers' confidence and satisfaction, and improved teaching practices and retention rates. (p. 33)

Dickinson and Perry (1998) found similar results for child welfare workers in CalSWEC's study on burnout and retention. They found that child welfare workers' perceptions of professional support from their supervisors significantly contributed to whether they remain on the job.

Emphasis on the Supervisor-Worker Relationship

Given the importance of mentoring and supervision, the transfer of learning efforts in the SCCP focused on the supervisor-worker relationship, rather than on the trainer-worker relationship. With leadership from Bay Area Academy, the SCAC identified three tools designed to focus on this relationship in the training. The SCWG subsequently developed the tools, which are summarized in Figure 3, below.

**Figure 3. Standardized Core Curriculum—
Transfer of Learning Tools**

The Participant's *Visa*

The *Visa* contains assignments for the participants to complete (with guidance from the supervisor) during the on-the-job training that is embedded in classroom core training. It is intended to be a living document that will be used by trainers, supervisors, and participants to track progress on the job.

The Supervisor's *Cookbook*

The *Cookbook* contains the exercises from the *Visa*, plus supporting content materials for the supervisor to help them reinforce participants' learning on an ongoing basis. It is intended for use both during and after the training. The *Cookbook* could also be used as a resource guide for supervisors to assist others in their unit.

The Supervisors' Retreat

Prior to the first day of training for new workers, all supervisors attend the Supervisors' Retreat, a one-day training that:

- Emphasizes the importance transfer of learning;
- Stresses the role of the supervisor in the learning process and in the retention of staff;
- Provides an overview of the curriculum content covered in the classroom, and the schedule of core training classes;
- Orients the supervisors to the *Visa* and the *Cookbook*, and instructs them in the use of these tools.

Implications for the Hiring Process

Including the supervisor in the training process significantly affected the county hiring process. In county and academy-based core programs prior to the SCCP, new workers either attended core training prior to their eventual assignment, or attended core training after they had been assigned for a period of time and had assumed an independent caseload. With the new focus on the supervisor-worker relationship for the transfer of learning, however, neither of these options was available. Workers must be assigned to their units, but not yet have caseloads. This change has significant impacts on the hiring process for counties, and

implementation of such a plan would likely require greater intra-agency coordination of the hiring process.

The Evaluation Plan

Development of the Evaluation Model

As noted above, a standing subcommittee of the SCAC developed the broad parameters of the integrated evaluation of the SCC. Designing an evaluation for the pilots, however, required a smaller, more focused group. CalSWEC therefore convened the Standardized Core Evaluation Subcommittee (SCES) on a monthly to bimonthly basis beginning in November 2000. This group was charged with constructing a comprehensive evaluation of the standardized core, including determining the specific research questions and designing tools to measure them in the pilots.

Contributing members of the SCEC were selected for this collaborative effort from participating training academies and CalSWEC. The group was comprised of social welfare researchers and training and curriculum specialists, as well as experienced child welfare workers. SCES members concurrently participated in the SCWG to give input on the curriculum development, as well as keep abreast of its progress.

Research Questions

The SCES devised five research questions:

1. Do participants in the SCC indicate greater satisfaction with course content, course trainer, and job relevancy than participants in regular core trainings (i.e., trainings currently provided by regional training academies and counties across the state)?
2. Does the SCC provide a greater difference in knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants relative to regular core trainings, or relative to those who begin child welfare work without any training?
3. After working three to six months, post-training, in the child welfare field, does the SCC make a greater difference in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants relative to regular core trainings, or relative to those who begin working without any training?

4. Do the training needs differ by education levels for participants with less than BA, BA/BS, BSW, MA/MS, MSW, or IV-E MSW?
5. For trainees with diverse education levels (i.e., less than BA, BA/BS, BSW, MA/MS, MSW, or IV-E MSW), what differing content area needs do they report?

Methods

The evaluation utilizes a quasi-experimental evaluation design. A series of tools developed specifically for the SCCP were administered to participants throughout the pilot trainings. The participants in the pilot trainings constitute Experimental Group I. The same tools will be administered to Experimental Group II, comprised of workers in a separate, regular core training sponsored by an academy or county. Finally, the tools will be administered to a control group, consisting of newly hired child welfare workers who have not yet begun any core training. Figure 4 presents the three groups graphically.

Figure 4

FIGURE 4.A: Evaluation Design

NO TRAINING Control Group					
EDUCATION LEVEL					
<BA	BA BS	BSW	MA MS	MSW	IV-E MSW
REGIONAL ACADEMIES					
Northern		Central		Bay Area	

FIGURE 4.B: Evaluation Design

STANDARDIZED CORE Experimental Group I					
EDUCATION LEVEL					
<BA	BA BS	BSW	MA MS	MSW	IV-E MSW

REGIONAL ACADEMIES		
Northern	Central	Bay Area

FIGURE 4.C: Evaluation Design

REGULAR CORE Experimental Group I I					
EDUCATION LEVEL					
<BA	BA BS	BSW	MA MS	MSW	IV-E MSW

REGIONAL ACADEMIES		
Northern	Central	Bay Area

The evaluation tools measure basic constructs using qualitative as well as quantitative data. These constructs, or areas of measurement, are listed in Figure 5, with the corresponding tools used to measure them.

Figure 5. Research Constructs of the SCC Evaluation, with Corresponding Evaluation Tools

Participants' Demographics

Evaluation Tool: Demographic Survey

Participants' Satisfaction with Curriculum Content and Delivery

Evaluation Tool: Satisfaction Scales

Participants' Application of Knowledge Acquired During the Training

Evaluation Tool: Content Questionnaires (closed-ended questions)

Participants' Perception of Knowledge Application to the Workplace

Evaluation Tools: Content Questionnaires (open-ended questions), Closing Focus Group, Follow-Up Interview

Supervisors' and Trainers' Perception of Participants' Utilization of Curriculum Content

Evaluation Tools: Wrap-Up Focus Group

Evaluation Tools

Demographic Survey

In order to track the relationships among background, education, and experience, participants fill out a *Demographic Survey* and assign to themselves an identification code number that they use throughout the evaluation. Data are collected on:

- Level of formal education;
- Previous child welfare training;
- Previous child welfare work experience;
- Age;
- Race/ethnicity; and
- Disability status.

Opening Focus Groups

Each participant brings his or her own perspective and level of curiosity into the training situation, and these factors can heavily influence the participant's ability to learn. The SCES therefore

chose to use *Opening Focus Groups* prior to the beginning of each of the pilots in order to gather information that would not only inform the overall evaluation about possible intervening variables, but also to provide continuous feedback for future evaluations. Opening Focus Group questions centered on what the participants felt they needed to learn in order to complete their job duties competently. Specific topic areas included:

- Participants' expectations regarding what kinds of situations and issues they would be facing during a career as a child welfare worker;
- Participants' motivations for entering the field of child welfare;
- Participants' level of motivation for taking the training;
- Participants' perception of supervisory and managerial support for the training; and
- Participants' experience and background related to child welfare and human services.

Facets of one's workplace culture often relate to an individual's ability to apply knowledge to the job. The evaluation explored this linkage in the closing and wrap-up focus groups (*see below*).

Satisfaction Scales

Since a limited amount of genuine learning can occur when a participant is restless, frustrated by the content, or bored by a trainer, participants filled out a standardized satisfaction scale at the completion of each content area. The SCES decided to modify Bay Area Academy's satisfaction scale for use in the pilots.

The resulting *Satisfaction Scale* is a twenty-five-item, five-point Likert scale divided into three main sections. The participants rate their satisfaction with (1) the clarity and content of the course objectives; (2) the relevancy of the training to their job; and (3) the trainer and delivery of the materials. Additional items solicited overall ratings of each of the above areas as well as the facilities, with space for elaboration on those questions that are rated low on the Likert scale.

Content Questionnaires

One of the primary objectives of the SCC evaluation is to measure whether trainees apply curriculum material to real-life

situations—in effect, to measure skills gained from the training. To meet this goal, *Content Questionnaires* were designed to address the learning objectives for each subject matter. Since the entire list of learning objectives for the SCC is quite vast, a purposive sample of learning objectives was selected.

While established methods exist to measure skill acquisition, such as observation in the field or in an experimental setting, these are often very time-consuming and costly. The Content Questionnaires, designed to approximate skill acquisition at much less cost, measure the application of knowledge acquired in the training to a child welfare case vignette. For the pilots, the SCES administered the questionnaires at the beginning of each week, starting in Week 2. They covered the content areas of the previous week, after the participant had completed the training and attended one day of on-the-job training intended to reinforce the material. In the first revision of the evaluation, Content Questionnaires will be developed for each content area of the curriculum, rather than for each week. This way, the curriculum can be delivered in a longer or shorter format, and the order of the topic areas can be adjusted to suit a particular county's or academy's needs.

The questionnaires provide vignettes taken from real child welfare cases, with all identifying information removed. With each scenario, participants are presented with various true-to-life dilemmas of child welfare practice and are given five possible means for handling the described dilemmas. The choices offer several marginally adequate means of responding to the situation, at least one grossly inadequate means of handling the situation, and one alternative providing the “best practice” means of responding to the situation. The “best practice” choice is taken directly from the curriculum. Participants are expected to think through the subtle differences among the responses, and choose the “best practice” response.

At the end of each Content Questionnaire, participants answer one open-ended, qualitative question. This question was the same for all the content areas—participants were requested to list three or four key things they had learned (from the most recent training module) that they thought would be vital to their work.

Closing Focus Groups

On the last day of the training the SCES conducted a *Closing Focus Group*, wherein participants give feedback about the

training as a whole. Information is gathered regarding the training, the curriculum, participants' experiences of on-the-job training using the *Visa*, and whether the training met participants' educational expectations.

This information is helpful for identifying problems in the curriculum and the training. It also provides context for the data collected by the other, more quantitative instruments. In short, the Closing Focus Groups serve as signposts in the evaluation; they offer qualitative information, including participant self-assessments, expectations, and child welfare concerns that were stimulated by the training.

Wrap-Up Focus Groups

After the training is complete, trainers, supervisors, and county and academy personnel participate in a *Wrap-Up Focus Group*. During this discussion, everyone shares his or her experiences and provides constructive feedback about the SCC. This information provides further context for the effectiveness of the training and the *Visa* assignments.

Follow-up Interviews

To further determine whether participants think the SCC prepares workers to more effectively do their jobs, CalSWEC will conduct *Follow-Up Interviews* of participants between three to six months after the training. Through these interviews trainees will again be asked to conduct self-assessments and to reveal whether or not the training met the expressed learning objectives. If not, they are asked to describe what was missing. They are also asked to provide specific suggestions that would improve the training for the next generation of trainees, and provide information on what factors kept them from applying the knowledge and skills they acquired in the training.

Coupled with the Closing Focus Groups and the Wrap-Up Focus Groups, the Follow-Up Interviews also provide valuable information on intervening variables that were not known to the participants prior to the training. These include factors such as workplace culture and organizational climate. Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) found that organizational climate within the child welfare agency was the primary predictor of positive service outcomes, and was a significant predictor of service quality. Ellett and Millar (2001) found that several factors of professional

organizational culture were related to child welfare employees' intent to remain employed with the child welfare agency. While comprehensive core training may provide workers with a base of knowledge and skills to succeed, the organizational culture may mitigate or enhance this success. By including questions related to organizational culture in the Closing Focus Groups, Wrap-Up Focus Groups, and Follow-Up Interviews, the SCC evaluation will shed some light on this relationship.

The Field Study and Pilots

At the writing of this paper, CalSWEC has completed the first wave of pilot trainings of the SCC. During April 2001, the first SCC training began in Fresno County, conducted by CalSWEC and the Central California Child Welfare Training Academy. The SCWG decided to designate this first training as a "field test" rather than as a pilot, since the curriculum was not yet completed and the evaluation tools had not been used before. Field-testing the curriculum delivery and the evaluation tools proved very beneficial—the SCES quickly discovered that the content questionnaires were far too long to be completed adequately as planned prior to the field test.

Applying what was learned via the field test, CalSWEC completed the remaining two pilot trainings during June and July of 2001. The first of these took place in Redding and was co-sponsored by the Northern California Child Welfare Training Academy. This pilot included new workers from multiple counties across rural northern California. As noted above, many smaller counties have great difficulty filling positions with master's level candidates. This was evident in the sample from this region (*see below*). This group was somewhat smaller than the other two groups, due to the logistical problems of assembling a group from a large, sparsely populated area for an extended training. Costs per trainee were also significantly higher, since many participants lived so far from the training site that they required lodging between consecutive days of training. Because of these logistical challenges, the northern region was particularly interested in distance learning and chose to field test the two distance learning modules designed by the PCWTA in southern California.

The second pilot took place in Alameda County, a comparatively urban environment in the San Francisco Bay Area.

This pilot was co-sponsored by the Bay Area Academy, and participants generally were more experienced and had more formal education.

Both pilots were conducted using the six-week delivery model. Participants attended classroom training three to four days a week (three on the weeks they used the distance learning format) and one day on the job.

Sample for the Pilots

The target population for the SCC is newly hired child welfare social workers. In order to understand the usefulness of a *statewide* standardized core training, the field test/pilot sample consisted of three groups of child welfare workers who will work with differing populations once they are on the job. The demographics of these groups are outlined below. The cumulative sample includes fourteen men and thirty-nine women (three participants did not indicate a gender), with a median age of 32.

Group I, from the Fresno County field test, consisted of eighteen participants. Of these, none had an MSW or equivalent master's degree, sixteen had completed a BA or BS, and two had completed a BSW. The group was racially/ethnically mixed, with ten participants identifying themselves as white, five as Black/African American, and three as Hispanic/Latino. These new workers will work with a combination of agricultural families, largely African American, Hispanic, and White.

Group II, from the northern pilot, consisted of twelve participants. Again, none had attained an MSW or equivalent degree. Three had attained a BSW, five had attained a BA or BS, and four indicated that they had completed "some college." This group was also more homogenous racially and ethnically; eight participants identified as White, and one identified as Hispanic/Latino. Three participants did not list a race or ethnicity. This group of new workers will work primarily with rural populations that are primarily white, with some Native American, Hispanic/Latino, and African American families.

Group III, from the Alameda County pilot, consisted of twenty-six participants, all with a master's degree of some kind. Of these, nine had completed their MSW with the specialized CalSWEC IV-E curriculum, eight had completed an MSW without the IV-E curriculum, and nine had completed an MS or MA. Ten participants identified themselves as African American, two as

Asian American, and nine as White. Alameda County's population is ethnically mixed, with a large African American population served by the child welfare agency.

Preliminary Findings

As of this report, the field test and pilots have been completed, but data is still being compiled from Experimental Group II and the Control Group. A great deal of qualitative information has been collected both during the curriculum development phase of the project and during the focus groups for the pilot. CalSWEC is currently sorting and analyzing all of the data, and the findings are very preliminary. They are outlined below as they pertain to the delivery model, the curriculum content and development, the distance learning tools, and the evaluation logistics/development.

Delivery Model

Under pressure to fill positions, child welfare agencies are likely to choose shorter training. The SCWG developed a six-week and a nine-week version of the curriculum. The six-week version covered all of the material in twenty-four classroom days, with one day each week of on-the-job training (OJT). The nine-week version included two days weekly of OJT, and allowed for the worker to assume responsibility for two cases part way through the training. Each county chose the shorter version, expressing concern with pressure to complete the training in a timely manner.

Lengthy core training needs to integrate a variety of modalities (i.e., OJT, classroom, distance learning) in order to sustain interest. The response to delivering the training up-front was mixed. While many workers and trainers reported that the material was too exhaustive to be completed straight through, few saw an alternative given the pressures to fill positions quickly. Since the project dictated that participants complete the core training prior to assuming an independent caseload, creative approaches to training must be explored in the transfer of learning. Such approaches are likely to eliminate classroom time, and increase OJT time.

Integrating a mentorship program into the core curriculum shows promise as a tool to increase transfer of learning while decreasing classroom time. Under this model, new workers complete some coursework in the classroom, but follow up on this coursework with an on-site mentor who accompanies them in the

field as needed to model and reinforce best practices. The mentor also works closely with the supervisor to focus on what the particular trainee needs to improve his or her practice. The mentor uses the SCC content, learning objectives, and competencies, and the SCC evaluation tools are administered. This allows for simultaneously standardized and personalized training. The Central California Child Welfare Training Academy has begun to implement a mentorship model, using academy employees as mentors working in the county. This model shows potential for buy-in by the counties, as it does not require them to fund more positions.

Curriculum Development

Lack of an implementation plan can foster superficial buy-in.

As noted above, the legislation that initiated the SCCP called for the development of a standardized curriculum. The legislation made no mention of the much more expensive task of implementing such a curriculum. This helped the relevant stakeholders to work together in the short run, because stakes were lower than if an implementation plan was looming. As the project moved forward, however, it became clear that while many of the relevant stakeholders believed *in principle* in a standardized statewide core curriculum, this was quite different than pushing for implementation of the curriculum. Implementation would require changing the training that each academy and county had invested in for a number of years.

Pilots of the curriculum can move the project toward implementation. CalSWEC narrowed the focus of the SCC from implementation of the entire curriculum to implementation of the pilots in order to move the project forward. In order to run pilots, after all, one must have a curriculum to implement. This moved the project from an outline of content to be covered to a set of curriculum tools with an integrated evaluation plan.

Curriculum synthesis is a lengthy and difficult process. The collaboration mandated by the legislation assured that curriculum was included from most of the regional training academies. Synthesizing existing curriculum, however, proved more difficult than anticipated, because a great deal of editing was required to make the different curricula similar in style. Some curricula included detailed text and comprehensive references, while other curricula used a broader outline format. A different member of the

SCWG synthesized each separate module, and this also decreased standardization. This meant a great deal of work for the SCWG and CalSWEC staff, editing and re-editing the curriculum once it was synthesized.

Transfer of Learning

Supervisors need support and accountability in order to provide the transfer of learning. While supervisors involved in the pilot appeared to appreciate the extra information on the training delivered to their new hires, they expressed frustration at not having the time or support to use the *Cookbook* to assist their trainees to complete the *Visa* exercises. Without a strong mandate to use the transfer of learning tools, the supervisors were unlikely to use them.

Increased OJT is needed in order to utilize the transfer of learning tools effectively. The supervisors who participated in the Wrap-Up Focus Groups all reported that the *Visa* and *Cookbook* were well-designed tools—they just did not have enough time with their trainees to use them effectively.

Distance Learning

Web-based distance learning requires logistical support in order to get students started. The field test of the distance learning modules demonstrated that once students were able to access the courses easily, they responded well to this modality of learning.

Web-based distance-learning models require significant up-front development time. Web-based distance learning has a definite advantage in presenting content to participants from a wide geographical area, and potential to reach greater numbers of participants than traditional classroom training models. Development of these courses, however, often involves a significant investment in time and resources. The trainers who developed the distance learning modules for the SCCP reported that it took many more hours of work than they anticipated, partly because they had not before developed such an extensive on-line course.

Web-based distance learning does not necessarily take the place of classroom time. The SCCP initially hoped to replace some classroom time with distance learning modules, thus shortening the time a participant would need for training. It soon

became apparent, however, that this did not necessarily account for building skills on the job. While distance learning was effective in disbursing knowledge to participants, participants still needed to transfer the learning to the workplace and improve their skills. Other models, such as skill-based classroom learning, or on-the-job mentorship, can be used to apply the knowledge learned through distance learning courses.

Evaluation

Collaborative curriculum development affects post-pilot evaluation. CalSWEC's collaborative model of curriculum development produced unexpected effects in the evaluation plan. Since regional training academy and county training staff were part of the development of the synthesized curriculum, they also used the new material to improve their own curricula. Lessons learned by CalSWEC from the pilots were also learned by the academies and the counties, who then integrated them into their core training. Unfortunately for the evaluation, this means that experimental Group II will not receive typical core training, but core training that was influenced and improved by participation in the SCCP. The process of developing the curriculum influenced the outcomes. In fact, the more effective the SCCP was in moving training efforts forward, the less likely it was that the data from experimental Group II would show this.

Holding focus groups at the beginning of the training can affect the culture of the training group. Beginning the training with a focus group provided unexpected benefits and liabilities for the training, depending on the group of trainees. In the Fresno field study and the northern region pilot, the focus groups appeared to enhance the evaluation, by establishing the SCC training in an experimental context for the participants. Since the focus groups encouraged self-examination and self-disclosure as part of the evaluation process, the evaluation itself seemed more personalized. The participants responded with a genuine effort to provide meaningful feedback throughout the evaluation process.

In the Bay Area pilot, however, the focus groups appeared to negatively affect the culture of the training group. Participants in this pilot also saw themselves in an evaluative role. They used this role differently, however, harshly criticizing the individual trainers for particular content areas. This appeared to have a negative affect on the atmosphere of the training room. It is unclear whether this

dynamic was particular to this training group, or a result of other intervening factors. The consensus of the Wrap-Up Focus Group, however, was that the focus group held at the beginning of the training contributed to some of the problems in the training group.

Field test evaluation tools prior to using them in pilots. As noted above, the Fresno field test made clear that the content questionnaires were simply too lengthy to be used effectively in the pilots. They were then pared down to cover a purposive sample of the learning objectives, rather than all of them. This made the evaluation during the pilots less cumbersome.

Allow enough time and resources to prepare and revise the evaluation tools. The “pilot phase” of the SCCP lasted only eight months. During this time, activities included: forming and convening the SCWG and SCES; gathering and synthesizing the curriculum; developing a delivery model; developing an evaluation plan and tools to measure the learning objectives; identifying trainers who could deliver the curriculum; and arranging for and delivering the field test and pilots. Since the evaluation tools could not be developed without the learning objectives, even less time was available to modify and hone them. This meant that a comprehensive item analysis (*See Peterson, A., in this volume*) was not possible. In hindsight, a full-time evaluator would have greatly benefited the project. In the next phase of the SCCP, CalSWEC will conduct an item analysis and revise the evaluation for use in the implementation of the SCC.

Next Steps

After completing the pilots, the SCCP will move further toward implementation. Over the next year, activities will include:

- Revising select content areas to further standardize the format and integrate the latest research;
- Exploring and piloting alternative delivery methods, which include some combination of distance learning, classroom training, and on-the-job-mentorship;
- Analyzing and revising the evaluation plan and evaluation tools so that they can be used effectively in the implementation of the SCC; and
- Continuing to work with relevant stakeholders to move the project further toward implementation.

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Appendix A

Standardized Core Curriculum Project Summary of Curriculum Components

Participants' Guide

This set of documents fleshes out the content of the Standardized Core Curriculum outline, and contains a synthesis of the existing core trainings from California's Northern, Central, and Southern Academies. Additional material not included in these academy core trainings was also gleaned from CalSWEC curricula and other sources.

- The material in the *Participants' Guide* is intended to be fairly exhaustive, and more material is included than can be covered in the training. This allows trainers flexibility in their approach to the material, while setting clear, measurable objectives that are necessary for evaluation.
- Each section of the *Participants' Guide* has a set of specific, measurable learning objectives in the areas of knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes.
- Both trainers and participants receive a copy of the *Participants' Guide*. Trainers use it to develop their training, assuring that it covers the proper material. Participants use it both as a reference point during the training, and as an ongoing post-training resource guide.

Participants' Visa

The *Visa* contains assignments for the participant to complete (with guidance from the supervisor) during the on-the-job training that is embedded in the six weeks of classroom core training. It is intended to be a living document that will be used by trainers, supervisors and participants to track progress on the job.

Trainers' Guide

The *Trainers' Guide* is a condensed version of the *Participants' Guide* that outlines the minimum information that is to be covered for each content area. The trainers use the outlines to assure that they cover all areas of the larger content outline. Trainers will use the *Participants' Guide* as a resource for the content outlined in the *Trainers' Guide*.

Trainer Activity Book

This trainer resource is a collection of interactive exercises and training materials that can be used during the training, sorted by type and content area. These will be gathered from experienced trainers throughout the state. With the *Participants' Guide*, *Trainers' Guide*, and *Trainer Activity Book*, trainers should be able to formulate interactive trainings that cover all the material and that reflect regional differences.

Supervisor's Cookbook

The *Supervisor's Cookbook* will provide exercises and supporting content materials for the supervisor to help them to reinforce participants' learning on an ongoing basis. It is intended for use both during and after the training. The *Cookbook* could also be used as a resource guide for supervisors to assist others in their unit.