



NURTURING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AGES BIRTH TO FIVE

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**Mind in the Making Learning Modules for  
Early Childhood Teachers in the Greater Boston Area:**

**Evaluation Report Executive Summary**

**Mallary I. Swartz, Ph.D.**

**Connected Beginnings Training Institute**

**September 2009**



**CONNECTED BEGINNINGS TRAINING INSTITUTE** is an infant and early childhood mental health training institute that promotes awareness of the central importance of relationships in the lives of infants and young children. Our work extends the capacity of infant and early childhood practitioners and programs to understand and apply current knowledge of the effects of relationships on very young children's social and emotional well being, evolving brain architecture, and capacity to learn.

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To obtain a copy of the full evaluation report, contact Mallary Swartz at [mswartz@connectedbeginnings.org](mailto:mswartz@connectedbeginnings.org) or visit <http://connectedbeginnings.org/cb-publications-research/cb-research>.

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Mind in the Making Learning Modules for Early Childhood Teachers in the Greater Boston Area: Evaluation Report**

**Mallary I. Swartz, Ph.D.**

**September 2009**

The Mind in the Making Learning Modules for Early Childhood Teachers™ (MITM), developed by the Families and Work Institute in 2004, is a 12-module facilitated learning curriculum and pedagogical method that helps bridge research and practice in early care and education. Using research on child development as well as research about teaching and learning, the modules are designed for teachers of young children in both center- and home-based care. MITM endeavors to help teachers learn about seminal research on how young children learn and develop and apply this research to their practice, while emphasizing the importance of relationships in young children's learning and development.

In the spring of 2008, Catholic Charities, a large non-profit Boston-based social service provider, trained 23 leadership staff from nine program sites to be MITM facilitators. From the fall of 2008 through the spring of 2009, these trained facilitators delivered the MITM learning modules to nine cohorts of early childhood teachers from center-based programs and family child care providers who were affiliated with the agency. With the cooperation of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley and Catholic Charities, Connected Beginnings Training Institute conducted an evaluation of MITM as it was implemented with these nine cohorts. This report describes that evaluation.

#### ***Evaluation Questions and Design***

Evaluation questions were as follows:

1. To what extent does MITM increase participants':
  - a. Perceived knowledge of how children learn and develop?
  - b. Perceived confidence in their abilities to support children's learning and development?
  - c. Knowledge of how to apply MITM principles to their everyday work with children?
2. To what extent does MITM influence participants' beliefs about how children learn and develop?
3. How do participants experience MITM?

The evaluation had a pre-post without comparison group design. Therefore, any changes in participants' knowledge, confidence, and beliefs cannot be directly attributed to participation in MITM. However, the evaluation provides a next step toward understanding how a train-the-trainer model works for and is perceived by early care and education providers. It also provides

the basis for developing a larger scale evaluation of the implementation of Mind in the Making in Massachusetts.

### *Participants*

Participants included 120 center and family child care providers. All participants but one were female. They ranged in age from 21 to 68 years old with a mean age of 40.8 years. Almost half of the participants identified themselves as White; about one-fifth identified as Hispanic. Participants' years of experience ranged from less than 1 year to 41 years with a mean of 11.6 years. Slightly over half of the participants had a college degree; almost three-quarters indicated that they had taken a college course in the past or were doing so at the time of the training.

### *Procedures and Instruments*

Participants were given a battery of survey measures both before and after participating in MITM. Surveys assessed participants' perceived knowledge of and beliefs about how children learn and develop, their confidence in supporting children's learning and development, their knowledge of how to apply principles learned in MITM to everyday child care situations, and their satisfaction with MITM. Facilitators were also asked to complete a survey after the training to capture their perspectives on how participants experienced the training and how comfortable facilitators were in presenting the material.

### *Findings*

- **The MITM modules were effective in helping providers from many different backgrounds enhance their knowledge about how children learn and develop.** On average, a comparison of participants' responses before and after the training suggested increases in their perceived knowledge about social and emotional, intellectual, and language development in early childhood.
- **The MITM modules were effective in helping providers from many different backgrounds become more confident in their abilities to support children's learning and development.** On average, a comparison of participants' responses before and after the training suggested increases in their perceived confidence in supporting children's development and learning in various domains. Examples include being able to respond to children's verbal and non-verbal cues, documenting the ways in which children learn, and being aware of *goodness of fit* between one's own temperament and the temperaments of individual children.
- **Participants' beliefs about child development and learning changed in a positive direction.** A comparison of participants' responses before and after the training suggested a shift in participants' thinking about children's development and learning; on average, participants' beliefs became more aligned with MITM principles.
- **On average, participants' knowledge of how to apply MITM principles to their everyday work with children did not change significantly from before to after the training.** There are several possible explanations for this finding related to data collection

and analysis methods. However, it is also possible that while the training may be successful in increasing participants' perceived knowledge and confidence and in shifting their thinking about young children's development and learning, without ongoing mentoring, these positive effects may not be likely to carry over into their everyday work with children and families. While some participants may have received ongoing mentoring based on what they learned in MITM from their directors or facilitators, many others likely did not receive such mentoring, as this was not an institutionalized part of the training model.

- **The majority of participants found the MITM learning modules to be very useful and were very satisfied with the training overall.** The majority also said that the information presented was very closely related to their work with children and that they would be very likely to put their new knowledge into practice.
- **While most participants had positive experiences with the MITM learning modules, there were some differences in how the modules were received based on participants' experience in the field and educational backgrounds.** Participants with less experience in the early care and education field found the training to be more useful than participants with more experience. Family child care providers were also more satisfied with the training than center-based providers. Finally, participants who held a degree felt that the training related better to their work with children than participants who did not hold a degree.
- **The majority of facilitators reported that they were comfortable and successful in presenting the MITM material, and that participants were very engaged with the material.**
  - Participants found the training to be more useful overall when facilitators had more years of experience as facilitators.
  - Facilitators who had more experience were more comfortable presenting the material.

### *Implications for Future Implementations of MITM*

Future implementations of MITM should consider...

- Using a train-the-trainer model with diverse groups of family child care and center-based providers.
- Building in a mentoring or coaching component—both for facilitators and participants.
- Emphasizing self and shared reflective practices in order to help participants think more deeply about how their beliefs about child development and learning may influence their work with young children and families and vice versa.
- Pairing more experienced facilitators with less experienced facilitators.

In addition...

- MITM seems to be successful in its efforts to link the content of the modules to participants' everyday work with children and families. Facilitators should continue to encourage participants to make these connections to their work.
- Future facilitators of MITM should take steps to ensure that the content and presentation of the material are relevant and appropriate for participants with varying levels of experience and education. Mentoring, peer supervision, and other opportunities to engage in reflective practices with other MITM facilitators may help facilitators learn effective ways to tailor their presentation of the MITM curriculum to diverse audiences.

### ***Recommendations for Future Evaluations of MITM***

- Evaluation should be included in the planning of future implementations of MITM in order to help facilitate the data collection process.
- Future evaluations should make translated forms available to participants whose first language is not English.
- Survey questions need to be reviewed and revised, especially on the registration form, in order for all data to be considered reliable in future implementations and evaluations of MITM.
- More work is needed on the design, administration, scoring, and analysis of the *Scenarios Survey*, an instrument that measures participants' knowledge of how to apply MITM principles to their everyday work with children. Such revisions would likely make results more meaningful.
- Future larger scale evaluations should include classroom observations to examine whether MITM content is actually influencing providers' practice with children.
- Future evaluations should include a comparison group in order to determine whether the evaluation is truly affecting participants' knowledge, confidence, beliefs, and practice.

### ***Conclusions***

Overall, the results of this evaluation illustrate that MITM participants' perceived knowledge, confidence, and beliefs about child development and learning changed in positive ways, and that both family child care and center providers had positive experiences with the learning modules. These results were largely consistent across all participants, showing that the training seemed to be effective for participants with a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. The findings from this evaluation build on the results of prior evaluations of MITM and provide further evidence in support of the potential for a train-the-trainer model to be implemented and received successfully by a diverse group of early childhood professionals. This evaluation also provides an important next step in helping us gain a better understanding of the ways in which MITM may ultimately influence the everyday experiences of early childhood professionals, young children, and families.