

Changes in EBP

Sally G. Mathiesen, Ph.D.

Tonika D. Green, Ph.D.

Hannah Swanson, M.Ph.

San Diego State University
5500 Campanile Drive, San Diego, CA 92677-4119
USA

Abstract

A multiyear federal grant to train scholars in social work, school counseling, and school psychology who work with foster youth in school settings includes evaluation of their competencies. This project allows the comparison of not only the individuals within one discipline, but across three disciplines as they negotiate their standard course of study, as well as the specialized educational program and practice settings for three allied fields. A standardized tool adapted to social work that measures knowledge, attitudes and behaviors regarding the use of evidence-based practices was used. The results from the first cohort indicate that the three professions all showed overall improvement over time. The program is committed to training culturally affirming and culturally competent school psychologists to address the critical shortages of diverse professionals in the field and to effectively address the needs of the growing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse youth in schools.

Keywords: evidence-based practice, professional development, foster youth, social work, school psychology, school counseling

1. Introduction

The overall purpose of Project CARES (Interdisciplinary Collaborative to Prepare Culturally Affirming and Responsive Education Specialists (CARES) is to improve outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) foster youth with disabilities by training students across three disciplines to incorporate evidence-based practices (EBP). These practices are guided by competencies that are needed to effectively provide academic and behavioral skills, mental health services and consultation to serve CLD foster youth with disabilities. Project CARES is designed to recruit, retain, and prepare students from underrepresented groups in school psychology, school counseling, and school social work programs. The long-term impact will be measured as the graduates enter the field and data regarding their employment and the degree to which they have integrated their learning are collected. Over the course of the grant, measures of the scholars' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors concerning EBP are crucial to determine the impact of their training. There are shortages of trained professionals to work with the CLD population of foster youth in all three disciplines. Schools have experienced significant shortages of related services personnel for the past 10 years (American Association for Employment in Education, 2012). Since 1996, special education and/or related services have consistently been represented in the "considerable shortage" category among all fields in education (Personnel Improvement Center, 2011); they rank among the country's top labor shortage areas (NAPSO, 2006). The lack of appropriately trained personnel to address the needs of these CLD foster youth has been noted in the literature (Boyle & Springer, 2001; Center on Great Leaders for Teachers, 2014; Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education, 2004). "There is an immediate need for related services personnel (school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers) who can respond to the complex social, emotional, and learning needs of diverse students with disabilities or who are at risk of disabilities in foster care" (Green & Mathiesen, 2016, p. 13).

The programs represented in the grant are described below.

The School Psychology Program is a 4-year graduate-credential program culminating in the Educational Specialist degree and the California School Psychology Credential (PPS). The program, National Association of School Psychologists-approved (NASP) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Accredited (2000), is nationally known for its emphasis on multicultural perspectives and processes in the context of an ecosystems philosophy. The program is committed to training culturally affirming and culturally competent school psychologists to address the critical shortages of diverse professionals in the field and to effectively address the needs of the growing numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse youth in schools.

The School Counseling Program is a 2-year M.S. graduate program. Students receive their California PPS/School Counseling Credential in this nationally recognized program. Graduate students experience interdisciplinary coursework within several of the combined school counseling and school psychology courses. The program admits and matriculates highly diverse students each year.

The School of Social Work was the first school of social work in the California State University System and was founded to respond to the critical shortage of professionals who were prepared and able to respond to the needs of our communities in need. The School of Social Work is accredited by the State of California Department of Education to offer the PPS Credential in School Social Work, as part of the regular Master in Social Work (MSW) program to be completed during the second year of the program.

Each cohort of social work and school counseling scholars is in the program for two years, and school psychology cohorts continue for three years. The current findings are part of the mixed methods approach for the first cohort of scholars for the two-year program (social workers and school counselors), and for the first two years for the school psychologists.

As the interdisciplinary collaborative is new, recommendations from multiple disciplines were used to develop the set of competencies. The project also builds on competencies identified by Merrell, Ervin, Peacock (2012): (1) awareness of the nature, scope, complexity, and developmental trajectories of students in foster care with disabilities, behavioral, social, and mental health issues, (2) knowledgeable of effective interventions, (3) prepared to interact with a multisystem of professionals (e.g., medical, clinical, community care) that impact foster youth with disabilities, and (4) be experts in the application of data-oriented problem solving approaches to management of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and intervention efforts. Little research has been conducted on changes in EBP knowledge and behaviors over a particular course of study, and this project allows the comparison of not only the individuals within one discipline, but across three disciplines as they negotiate their standard course of study as well as the specialized educational program and practice settings for three allied fields.

2. Measure of Evidence-based Practice (EBP)

Research on the barriers to social workers using EBP, even when encouraged or required to do so, have reported that negative attitudes toward EBP (Aarons, 2004; Addis & Krasnow, 2000; Rosen, 2003) and lack of knowledge and skills for using EBP (Addis & Krasnow, 2000; Rosen, 2003) are the two most frequently cited barriers impeding practitioners' use of EBP. To ensure that attitudes toward and knowledge of EBP are measured consistently across the diverse population of social workers, it is essential to have reliable and valid measures (Harrington, 2009).

To address the key competencies of being knowledgeable of effective interventions and to assess the worker's attitudes, the KAB-SW (Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors-Social Work) (Mathiesen & Hohman, 2013) was used. This is a standardized tool adapted to social work that measures knowledge, attitudes and behaviors regarding the use of evidence-based practices. The tool was used at the beginning and end of each cohort. The results allow comparisons over time for each cohort, as well as comparisons between cohorts. The self-assessed aspects of EBP (the level of knowledge, attitudes toward EBP, future use and current use) are the four factors used to evaluate the scholars in this multi-year project. Each scale is comprised of a number of items scaled from 0 to 6. It was hypothesized that all disciplines would show small improvements over time.

3. Methods

The current findings are the changes in EBP measured after the first cohort completed their time on the grant. This time varied depending on discipline and included three years for the scholars studying school psychology and two years for the scholars studying social work and school counseling.

Individuals were asked to complete an online self-assessment based on the KAB-SW pertaining to each of the aspects of EBP (the level of knowledge, attitudes toward EBP, future use and current use). The questions were clustered into these themes and scholars responded based on a 0 to 6 scale. The first measurements were taken in fall 2013 at the beginning of each scholar’s study in their discipline and participation on the grant. The second measurements were taken in summer 2016 after all members of the first cohort completed their time on the grant. Due to the varied length of the programs, the second data point was measured directly after graduation of the program for school psychology scholars and after a year of practicing in the field for school counseling and social work graduates.

4. Results

The current findings are the changes in EBP reported by scholars after completing their time on the grant. Each of the four scales of EBP is represented below, allowing comparisons based on the scholar’s discipline. Table 1 presents the demographics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographics

	School Psychology		School Counseling		Social Work	
	Fall 2013 (n=4)	Summer 2016 (n=5)	Fall 2013 (n=3)	Summer 2016 (n=2)	Fall 2013 (n=3)	Summer 2016 (n=1)
Ethnicity	25% White, 25% Latino, 50% African American	20% White, 40% Latino, 40% African American	33% White, 66% Latino	50% White, 50% Latino	33% White, 33% Latino, 33% African American	100% White
Mean Age	25 (SD= 1.41)	26.4 (SD= 2.08)	25 (SD= 2.31)	29 (SD= 4.24)	29 (SD= 8.72)	42 (SD= 0)

The next four tables, and their corresponding figures, represent the changes in EBP for each scale, allowing for comparisons based on the scholar’s discipline.

Figure 1: Future Use of Evidence-based Practice

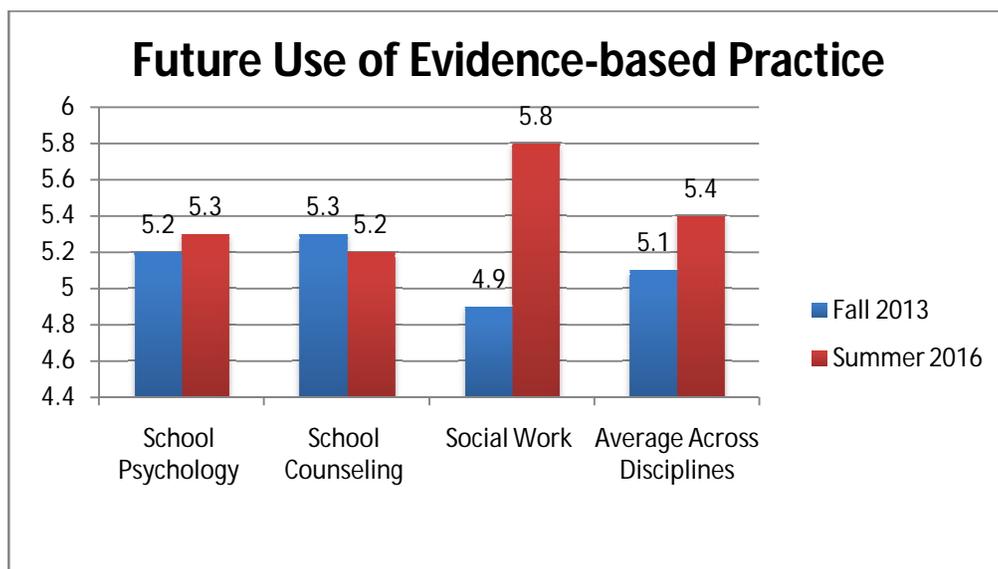


Table 2: Future Use of Evidence-based Practice

School Psychology Mean (SD)		School Counseling Mean (SD)		Social Work Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD)	
Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016
1. Compared to 1 year ago, how useful do you believe evidence-based practices will be in your discipline?							
6 (0)	5.5 (.58)	5.33 (.58)	5.5 (.71)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.5 (.69)	5.5 (.53)
2. Compared to 1 year ago, how willing are you to use evidence-based practices in the future?							
6 (0)	5.5 (.58)	5.67 (.58)	5.5 (.71)	5.33 (1.15)	6 (0)	5.7 (.67)	5.5 (.53)
3. You personally appreciate the advantages of using evidence-based practices.							
5.75 (.50)	*	5.67 (.58)	*	5.66 (.58)	*	5.6 (.62)	*
4. Evidence-based practice should be an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum in your discipline.							
5.75 (.50)	*	5.67 (.58)	*	5.66 (.58)	*	5.7 (.48)	*
5. Evidence-based practice should be an integral part of the graduate curriculum in your discipline.							
5.75 (.50)	5.75 (.50)	5.67 (.58)	5 (0)	5.66 (.58)	6 (0)	5.7 (.48)	5.5 (.55)
6. Compared to 1 year ago, how much do you support the principles of evidence-based practice?							
5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.1 (.57)	5 (.38)
7. Compared to 1 year ago, how much do you support lifelong learning using evidence-based techniques?							
5.25 (.50)	5.5 (.58)	5.33 (.58)	5.5 (.71)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.2 (.63)	5.5 (.53)
8. How much do you consider the use of evidence-based practice a routine part of your learning?							
5 (.80)	5.75 (.50)	5.33 (.58)	5 (0)	4 (0)	6(0)	4.8 (.79)	5 (.53)
9. How much has the use of evidence-based practice changed the way you learn?							
5 (.8)	5.25 (.50)	5.33 (.58)	5 (0)	4.33 (.58)	4 (0)	4.9 (.74)	5 (.58)
10. How easy or difficult has it been for you to use evidence-based practices in the last month?							
2.3 (1.5)	4.25 (.50)	4(1)	5 (0)	4 (1)	6 (0)	3.3 (1.4)	5 (.76)

The Future Use section measures scholar’s beliefs about the future use of evidence-based practices in their area of study and in their work. Viewing the results from each discipline, it may be noted that school counseling scholars report a decrease of .1 and psychology scholars report an increase of .1 in their self-report. These changes are minimal and reflect that, on average, these scholars initially described EBP as ‘useful’ (a rating of 5) and at the end of the program continued with this view. The slight decrease in school counseling responses may be attributed to the nature of the questions that compared scholars beliefs to where they stood the year prior, this includes questions such as “Compared to 1 year ago, how willing are you to use evidence-based practices in the future?”. The decreased ratings are not surprising given that initially scholars were comparing their beliefs to before they entered the program but by summer 2016 the comparison was to their beliefs after completing their program and beginning to work in the field. The largest shift in attitude of social work scholars was seen for those who initially responded with the belief that future use of EBP would be ‘somewhat useful’ (4) and at the end of the grant found it ‘useful’ (5) nearing ‘extremely useful’ (6). Overall, the results show that, across disciplines, scholars began the grant with an average rating of 5.1 and ended the program with a rating of 5.4. These data indicate an increase in the future use of EBP in their careers.

Figure 2: Attitudes about EBP

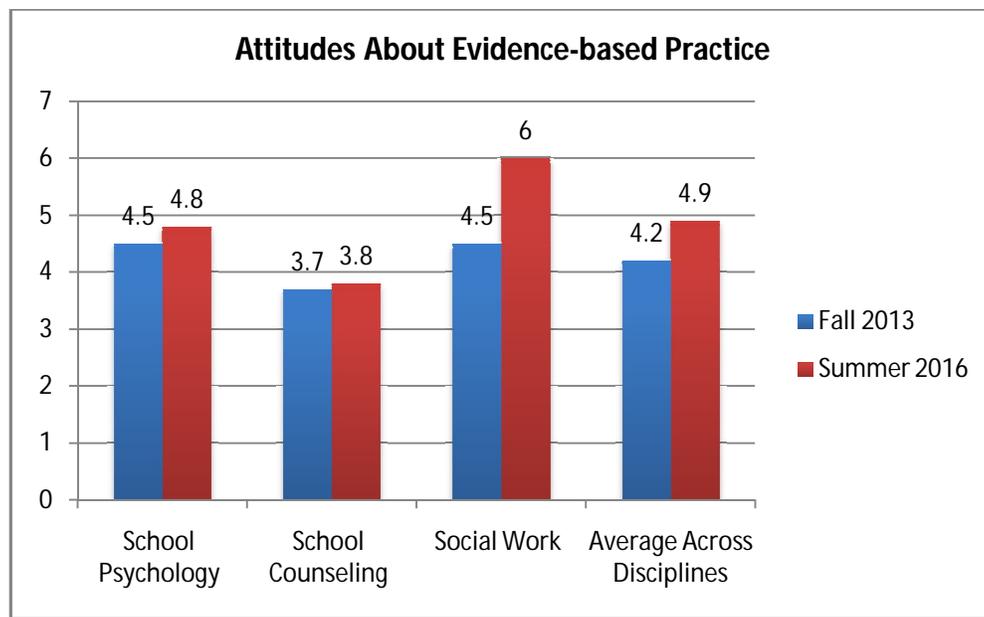


Table 3: Attitudes about EBP

	School Psychology Mean (SD)		School Counseling Mean (SD)		Social Work Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD)	
	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016
1. Compared to 1 year ago, how useful do you believe evidence-based practices will be in your discipline?								
	6 (0)	5.5 (.58)	5.33 (.58)	5.5 (.71)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.5 (.69)	5.5 (.53)
2. Compared to 1 year ago, how willing are you to use evidence-based practices in the future?								
	6 (0)	5.5 (.58)	5.67 (.58)	5.5 (.71)	5.33 (1.15)	6 (0)	5.7 (.67)	5.5 (.53)
3. You personally appreciate the advantages of using evidence-based practices.								
	5.75 (.50)	*	5.67 (.58)	*	5.66 (.58)	*	5.6 (.62)	*
4. Evidence-based practice should be an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum in your discipline.								

	5.75 (.50)	*	5.67 (.58)	*	5.66 (.58)	*	5.7 (.48)	*
5. Evidence-based practice should be an integral part of the graduate curriculum in your discipline.								
	5.75 (.50)	5.75 (.50)	5.67 (.58)	5 (0)	5.66 (.58)	6 (0)	5.7 (.48)	5.5 (.55)
6. Compared to 1 year ago, how much do you support the principles of evidence-based practice?								
	5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.1 (.57)	5 (.38)
7. Compared to 1 year ago, how much do you support lifelong learning using evidence-based techniques?								
	5.25 (.50)	5.5 (.58)	5.33 (.58)	5.5 (.71)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.2 (.63)	5.5 (.53)
8. How much do you consider the use of evidence-based practice a routine part of your learning?								
	5 (.80)	5.75 (.50)	5.33 (.58)	5 (0)	4 (0)	6(0)	4.8 (.79)	5 (.53)
9. How much has the use of evidence-based practice changed the way you learn?								
	5 (.8)	5.25 (.50)	5.33 (.58)	5 (0)	4.33 (.58)	4 (0)	4.9 (.74)	5 (.58)
10. How easy or difficult has it been for you to use evidence-based practices in the last month?								
	2.3 (1.5)	4.25 (.50)	4(1)	5 (0)	4 (1)	6 (0)	3.3 (1.4)	5 (.76)

This section measures scholars’ attitudes towards EBP. Improved attitudes can be observed in each discipline. The most extreme improvement is again observed with the social work scholars whose mean responses rose from 4.5 to 6. This may be attributed to a relatively small sample size of one scholar representing this group for summer 2016. Overall, scholars reported an improvement across disciplines with an initial average of 4.2 for fall 2013 and a concluding average of 4.9 for summer 2016. The largest gains (of about .4) were seen in the responses to the following questions: “In general, those in my discipline should not use evidence-based practice because my field is about people and clients, not statistics”, “Evidence-based practice ignores the “art” of my discipline”, and “Previous work experience is more important than research findings in choosing the best treatment available for a client”.

Figure 3: Personal Use of EBP

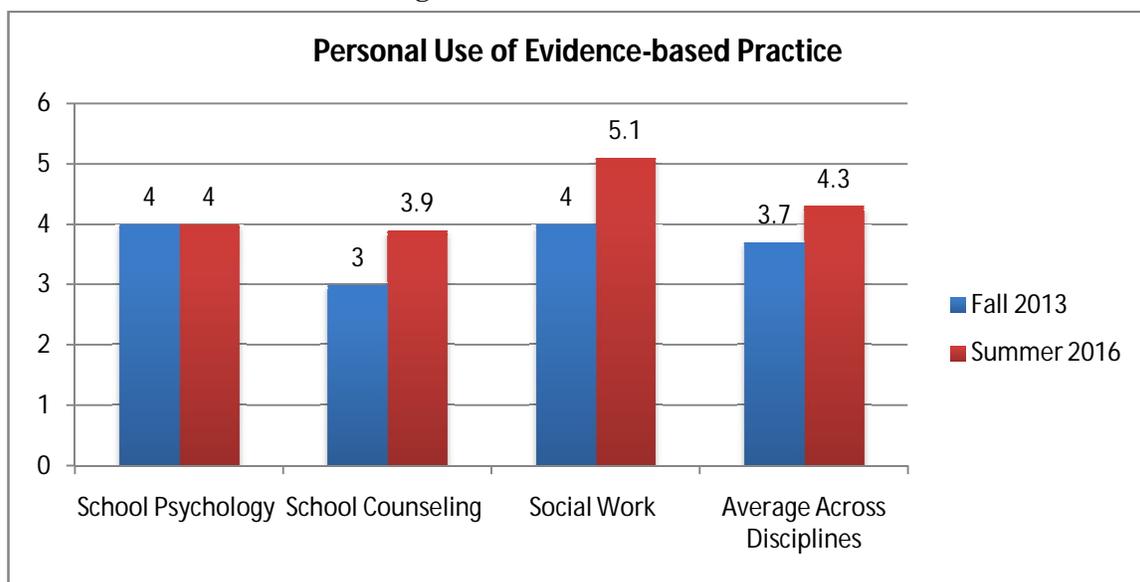


Table 4: Personal Use of EBP

	School Psychology Mean (SD)		School Counseling Mean (SD)		Social Work Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD)	
	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016
1. How frequently do you access evidence about your field from a textbook in your discipline?								
	5 (.82)	3.75 (1.26)	4 (1)	3.5 (.71)	4.33 (1.53)	4 (0)	4.5 (1.08)	3.71 (.95)
2. How frequently do you access evidence in general?								
	5.25 (.96)	4.25 (.5)	3.67 (.58)	4.5 (.71)	4.67 (1.15)	6 (0)	4.6 (1.07)	4.57 (.79)
3. How frequently do you access evidence in your discipline on the Internet (excluding Medline, Cochrane or Campbell reviews)?								
	5 (.82)	3.75 (2.06)	4.33 (.58)	4.5 (.71)	4.33 (1.53)	6 (0)	4.6 (.97)	4.29 (1.7)
4. How frequently do you access evidence in your discipline from research papers?								
	5.25 (.5)	3.75 (1.26)	3.67 (.58)	3 (0)	4.67 (1.15)	5 (0)	4.6 (1)	3.71 (1.11)
5. How frequently do you access evidence in your discipline from the Campbell Collaboration database?								
	1.75 (1.5)	1.75 (1.5)	1.67 (1.15)	3 (0)	2.33 (1.53)	2 (0)	1.9 (1.29)	2.14 (1.22)
6. How frequently do you access evidence in your discipline from the Cochrane Collaboration database?								
	1.75 (1.5)	*	1.67 (1.15)	*	2.33 (1.53)	*	1.9 (1.3)	*
7. How frequently do you access evidence in your discipline from other secondary sources that systematically evaluate interventions?								
	3 (1.41)	2.75 (1.5)	2.33 (1.15)	3 (0)	3.67 (.58)	4 (0)	3 (1.2)	3 (1.15)
8. What is your estimate of the proportion of current practice in your discipline that is based on evidence?								
	4.25 (.96)	4 (.58)	3 (1.73)	4.57 (.79)	4.67 (.58)	6 (0)	4 (1.2)	4.57 (.79)
9. What is your estimate of the need for evidence in your practice?								
	4.25 (.58)	4.5 (.58)	4 (1.73)	4 (0)	4.33 (.58)	6 (0)	4.7 (1.16)	4.86 (.90)
10. Compared to 1 year ago, what is your estimate of the frequency of your search for evidence in your discipline?								
	5 (.82)	4 (1)	4.67 (.48)	4.5 (.71)	4.67 (.58)	6 (0)	4.8 (.63)	4.5 (1.05)
11. You consider yourself an evidence-based practitioner in your discipline.								
	4.5 (.58)	3.67 (1.53)	3.67 (1.53)	4.5 (.71)	4.33 (.58)	6 (0)	4.2 (.92)	4.33 (1.37)

The Personal Use section asked scholars to rate how frequently they use evidence-based practices and access evidence through sources such as the internet, research papers, and the Cochrane Collaboration database. A steady increase in use across the school counseling and social work scholars was noted. The stable level of self-report for school psychology students may be attributed to differences in program structure. At the time of data collection these students had only worked under direct supervision of another school psychologist and had not yet worked independently in the field like the other two disciplines. Overall, the average across disciplines shows a marked increase from 3.7 to 4.3, indicating that as a result of the program the scholars use evidence-based practices more frequently.

Figure 4: Knowledge of EBP

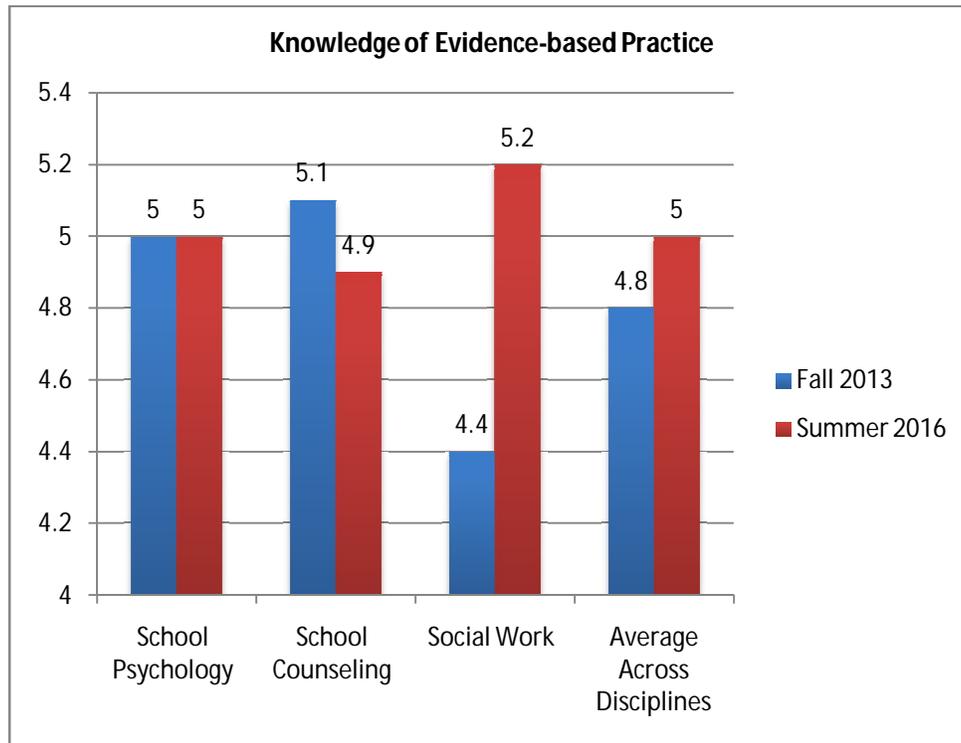


Table 5: Knowledge of EBP

	School Psychology Mean (SD)		School Counseling Mean (SD)		Social Work Mean (SD)		Total Mean (SD)	
	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016	Fall 2013	Summer 2016
1. Evidence-based practice requires the use of critical appraisal skills to ensure the quality of all the research studies accessed.	5.25 (.5)	5 (0)	4.67 (1.53)	5 (0)	4 (0)	4 (0)	4.7 (.95)	4.90 (.38)
2. Effective searching skills/easy access to bibliographic databases and evidence sources are essential to using evidence-based practice.	5 (0)	5 (0)	5 (1)	4.5 (.71)	4 (2)	6 (0)	4.7 (1.16)	5 (.58)
3. Critically-appraised evidence should be appropriately applied to the client using clinical judgment and experience.	5.5 (.58)	5.25 (.50)	5.33 (.58)	5 (0)	5 (1)	6 (0)	5.3 (.67)	5.29 (.49)
4. The evidence-based practice process requires the appropriate identification and formulation of clinical questions	4.5 (.6)	4.75 (.5)	5.3 (.6)	5 (0)	4.3 (.6)	5 (0)	4.7 (.70)	4.86 (.38)
5. Using evidence-based practice increases the certainty that the proposed treatment is effective.	4.75 (.5)	4.75 (.96)	5 (1)	4.5 (.71)	4.67 (1.15)	5 (0)	4.8 (.79)	4.86 (.69)

Knowledge of evidence-based practice reflects scholars' understanding of the process and application of evidence-based practices. A slight decrease for school counseling scholars may be attributed to a smaller sample size in summer 2016 and the fact that at the time of report scholars had spent nearly a year practicing and outside of a classroom setting where theories and language used in the survey are more frequently used. Results vary across discipline with an average increase in self-report from 4.8 in fall 2013 to 5 in summer 2016. Scholars conclude their time in CARES with an increased understanding of the processes and application of evidence-based practices.

5. Discussion and Limitations

The current study provides important information about how three different academic disciplines (school psychology, school counseling and social work) respond to systematic training in evidence-based practices (EBP) over time. There is little current information available about how these three disciplines respond to EBP training, and the data obtained from this study provide important starting points for future evaluations. The lack of systematic interdisciplinary training about communication between school-based professions working with foster children has been documented (Day, Somers, Darden & Yoon, 2015). In their training recommendations, the national study noted that, "the focus should be on helping professionals to understand the unique needs and strengths of children in foster care and learn effective strategies to address their behavioral and emotional difficulties in ways that increase their school motivation and engagement" (p. 54).

The purpose of this current multi-year federally-funded grant was to provide ongoing training to scholars from the three disciplines to enhance outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse foster youth, and understanding patterns of use of EBP over time is a critical marker for these emerging scholars. The results show that in the four areas represented by the standardized scale (Mathiesen & Hohman, 2013), scholars showed improvement over time. In summary, all disciplines showed improvement, but those in the social work sample showed the greatest amount of improvement over time. The school psychology group and the school counseling group showed improvement that was comparable. This was the first study to compare three professions over time using a standardized scale, and yet other findings show comparable results for social workers in the US as compared to social workers in another country (Mathiesen, 2016). This study represents an important first step in examining the impact of training in EBP over time. What is needed is long-term follow-up so that in-service issues and additional needs may be documented and addressed with changes to programs during academic training, and perhaps adding requirements for refresher training modules as the scholars enter the licensure phase. This ongoing training vision may result in improved care for those that the scholars treat, and ensure that changes are sustained. One limit of this study includes the small samples of each discipline, but the documentation of changes over time is an important step in this area. Larger samples are needed for each profession over time to determine how change is maintained and what changes they have made in treating this vulnerable population. In addition, while EBP is measured with a standardized scale, an important step for all three professions, it would be useful to gather qualitative data over time to document the understanding of what was anticipated and explore the richness of what these representatives of each profession may view differently.

6. Conclusion

Overall, a notable increase was observed in the self-reported scores in each of the areas evaluated: future use, attitudes, personal use, and knowledge toward evidence-based practice. This indicates that with the training received through the CARES grant, scholars in three disciplines enter their fields with competency in the use of evidence-based practices necessary for effective service delivery to CLD foster youth with disabilities.

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