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Does Training and Coaching Matter? An 18-Month Evaluation of a Community Supervision Model

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Abstract: During the last decade, several formalized approaches have been developed to improve the effectiveness of probation and parole by implementing evidence-based research into community supervision practices. A key component of these new approaches are the use of officer coaching sessions, which are designed to improve officer fidelity in the core correctional skill areas. This study explores the impact of an initial training and monthly coaching sessions in the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model on probation and parole officer use of core correctional skills. The results examine the average quarterly officer use of skills over an 18-month follow-up period based on training status (i.e., trained versus untrained officers) in the EPICS model. This study adds to the understanding of the role training and coaching may play in improving officer use of core correctional skills. Policy implications and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: community corrections, offenders, probation

Community supervision has a long history in the United States. Its early roots can be traced back to the 1850s when it was initially created with the intent of bringing a "new spirit of humanitarianism and a new capacity for rehabilitation to every stage of the post-conviction process" (Rothman, 1980, p. 61). Recently, several formalized attempts have been made to improve the effectiveness of community supervision by incorporating evidence-based strategies into practice. However, the extent to which training and coaching on these new models of supervision play in the officer acquisition of skills remains unclear.

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Therefore, this study provides a longitudinal examination of the effect that training and coaching on one of these new community supervision models has on the transfer of knowledge into practice.

COMMUNITY SUPERVISION

Support for probation and parole remained relatively unabated until the 1960s and 1970s, when offender rehabilitation more generally came under attack (Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). Though the original intent of community supervision was to "assist, advise, and befriend deserving offenders" (Garland, 2001, p. 177), it became increasingly harder for agencies to do so while rehabilitation was being discredited (see Martinson, 1974). Under this pressure, community corrections agencies responded by downplaying their role as providers of treatment and casework services, intensifying their use of controls over offenders, and redefining themselves as a form of "community punishment" (Garland, 2001). In addition, there was a series of punitive sentencing policies adopted in federal, state, and local jurisdictions throughout the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., mandatory sentencing, three strikes laws, truth in sentencing, etc.). Among other things, this resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number of offenders under community supervision (Austin & Irwin, 2012). Comparing the number of offenders under community supervision in 1980 to the year 2000 illustrates just how drastic this increase has been. In 1980, there were less than 1.5 million offenders on some form of community supervision (Austin & Irwin, 2012); in 2011, the number grew to 5 million offenders (Maruschak & Parks, 2012)—representing more than a 300% increase.

In response to the growing movement of increasingly severe punishments (Clear, 1994), there was a countermovement to "reaffirm rehabilitation" as the overarching goal of corrections (Cullen & Gilbert, 1982). Most notably, the Canadian school of rehabilitation led this effort to develop a viable theory of effective offender treatment (see Cullen & Jonson, 2011). The approach taken by this group was to search for convergent validity from diverse empirical and theoretical literature to demonstrate that certain types of treatment programs and strategies produced replicable effects that would benefit offenders and protect the public. As part of this process, the primary method used to summarize findings was to quantitatively synthesize the results (i.e., meta-analysis). Currently, there are more than 50 meta-analyses that have been conducted of the correctional treatment literature, which have been replicated with remarkable consistency (see McGuire, 2013). Collectively, these findings are referred to as the *principles of effective intervention* (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010 for a detailed review).

The three most important principles identified by Andrews and Bonta (2010) are those of risk, need, and responsivity (RNR). The *risk principle* asserts criminal behavior is predictable when valid risk assessment tools are used and treatment intensity is matched to level of risk, where higher-risk

offenders receive more services than lower-risk offenders. The *need principle* mandates that officers target dynamic (i.e., changeable) crime-producing risk factors, or criminogenic needs, to reduce recidivism (e.g., antisocial personality, antisocial cognition, antisocial associates). The *responsivity principle* describes how to provide treatment to an offender in a manner that is most conducive to his or her learning style, motivation, abilities, and strengths (Andrews & Dowden, 2006).

Despite the fact that stronger adherence to the RNR principles have been associated with more dramatic reductions in recidivism ($r = -.02$ for no adherence and $r = .26$ for adherence to all three principles; Andrews & Bonta, 2010), and that stronger effects have been found when applied in the community versus institutional setting (reductions of 40% compared to 30%; McGuire, 2002), these principles have not yet been widely applied in community supervision settings (Bonta, Rugge, Scott, Bourgon, & Yessine, 2008). Rather, it has been observed that the primary focus of community supervision officers remains on compliance monitoring and law enforcement aspects of supervision (Bonta et al., 2008). This is rather unfortunate, given that it has been well documented that punitive-based supervision strategies (e.g., intensive supervision, electronic monitoring, house arrest, etc.) have no appreciable effects on recidivism, and may actually increase recidivism under some circumstances (MacKenzie, 2006; Petersilia & Turner, 1993; Sherman et al., 1997).

Two recent evaluations of the effectiveness of community supervision have also raised serious doubts in the ability of probation and parole to reduce recidivism (Bonta et al., 2008; Solomon, 2006). To illustrate, Bonta et al. (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 15 studies and reported that probation was associated with only a 2% reduction in general recidivism and had no impact on violent recidivism. Similarly, Solomon (2006) found prisoners released without parole performed about as well as those released with mandatory or discretionary parole requirements. Taken together, these findings question the rationale for maintaining a law enforcement approach toward supervision when it has been so clearly shown to be ineffective at reducing recidivism (Burrell, 2012). If the purpose of community supervision is to reduce recidivism and increase public safety, then it simply must redefine how it does business (Burrell, 2012). In response to these findings, there has been a growing effort for correctional agencies to use evidence-based practices (MacKenzie, 2006), and more specifically to nudge probation and parole out of its focus on compliance monitoring (Bourgon, Gutierrez, & Ashton, 2012).

New Approaches to Community Supervision

During the last decade, several formalized approaches have been developed to improve the effectiveness of community supervision by incorporating the principles of effective intervention into practice (Bonta et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2012; Smith, Schweitzer, Labrecque, & Latessa, 2012). These

strategies include, but are not limited to, the Strategic Training Initiative in Community Supervision (STICS) model, which was developed by the Canadian Department of Public Safety (Bonta et al., 2011); the Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS) model, which was developed at the University of Cincinnati (Smith et al., 2012); and the Strategies Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR) model, which was developed by the U.S. Federal Probation and Pretrial Services (Robinson et al., 2012).

Although differences exist between specific models, it is encouraging how much each has in common with one another. First, each of these models attempts to apply the principles of RNR within the context of individual case management meetings between officers and offenders. Specifically, treatment focuses on the higher-risk offenders (risk principle), the primary targets of treatment are criminogenic needs (need principle), and the strategies used seek to match the learning style and motivation of the offender (responsivity principle).

Second, these models have also all sought to improve the officer use of the core correctional skills. These intervention skills, otherwise known as core correctional practices (CCPs), are a result of an evolution of ongoing meta-analytic investigations (Andrews & Kiessling, 1980; Dowden & Andrews, 2004). Inherent in these initiatives is the idea that training on these clinical skills are related to service delivery (Taxman, 2008). For a thorough review of these skills see Gendreau, Andrews, and Theriault (2010).

Third, these initiatives have also attempted to improve the nature of the relationship between the officer and the offender. Specifically, these models have sought to incorporate Chris Trotter's (2006) work with involuntary clients, and also Jennifer Skeem et al.'s (2007) work on managing the dual role of probation, that is balancing the needs of rehabilitating the offender (care) and protecting the community (control). Inherent in each of these models is the notion that officers should develop a quality relationship with offenders, while balancing the goals of care and control (Skeem & Manchak, 2008).

Fourth, each of these initiatives makes an effort to ensure the program model is translated into practice as intended. It has been well documented that the effectiveness of any treatment program is diminished if careful attention is not paid to how the program is implemented in the real world (Gendreau, Goggin, & Smith, 1999). In an effort to ensure treatment fidelity, officers audio-record some of their interactions with the offenders they supervise. These audiotapes are then submitted to the research team, and a standardized rating form is used to evaluate the officer's performance in using the CCPs. Furthermore, officers are provided with written feedback, highlighting strengths/areas for improvement.

Finally, a key component of these new approaches involves the use of officer coaching sessions. Coaching sessions are meetings that occur after the initial training where officers are encouraged to discuss the concepts and skills of the model by a trained facilitator. Coaching developed as a response to

the "technology transfer" problem, which suggests that the effectiveness of training diminishes when knowledge is transferred into the "real world" of everyday corrections (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Outside of criminology, coaching has been widely evaluated and has produced rather impressive results. In the field of education, for example, Joyce and Showers (2002) found that training teachers on new techniques led to a 5% use of skills, but just by adding additional coaching sessions—which included the modeling of skills and role-playing—the use of skills rose to 95%. Inherent in these models is that the use of officer coaching sessions will improve officer fidelity in the CCPs; however, the "amount of taping, coaching, and feedback needed to master the skills has yet to be determined" (Lowenkamp, Alexander, & Robinson, 2013, p. 200).

Support for these new initiatives is beginning to accumulate (for a recent review of the empirical literature see Trotter, 2013). To summarize, collectively, these models have been found to focus the session and increase time spent addressing criminogenic needs (Bonta et al., 2010, 2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, & Gutierrez, 2010; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, Scott, & Yessine, 2010; Smith et al., 2012), enhance the officer use of CCPs (Bonta et al., 2010, 2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, and Gutierrez, 2010; Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012; Labrecque, Schweitzer, & Smith, 2013, 2014; Latessa, Smith, Schweitzer, & Labrecque, 2012; Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2014; Lowenkamp, Robinson, VanBenschoten, & Alexander, 2011; Robinson et al., 2012; Robinson, VanBenschoten, Alexander, & Lowenkamp, 2011; Smith et al., 2012), decrease offender antisocial attitudes (Labrecque, Smith, Schweitzer, & Thompson, 2013), and reduce recidivism (Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012; Latessa et al., 2012; Lowenkamp et al., 2011, Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Robinson, & Alexander, 2014; Robinson et al., 2011).

However, a limitation of this literature is that far fewer evaluations have examined what role (if any) coaching may play in improving officer acquisition of CCPs. What is more, the few studies that have been conducted to date on coaching have suffered from some rather unfortunate methodological limitations. For example, most of the coaching research in this area has been limited to interviews and surveys with probation officers (Alexander et al., 2013; Lowenkamp, Holsinger, Flores, Koutsenok, & Pearl, 2013; Lowenkamp, Robinson, Koutsenok, Lowenkamp, & Pearl, 2012). This anecdotal evidence from small nonrandom samples of officers has the potential for selection bias and does not provide any empirical estimates of whether or not the officers did in fact gain competency in CCP skill areas.

Another set of works that are useful in this area have examined the association between officer participation in ongoing supervision activities (represented as a composite score including elements of attendance of coaching sessions, level of participation in coaching sessions, feedback on audiotapes, and attendance to follow-up refresher course) and the officers' long-term skill and discussion content measures (defined as the average skill score for all audiotapes received after nine months from the initial training; Bonta et al.,

2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, and Gutierrez, 2010). It should, however, be noted that this work—while informative—did not limit its investigation specifically to coaching, but rather it included other elements of participation which are unable to be parceled out to determine the specific effect of coaching itself. Further, the choice to only assess the use of skills after nine months denies the reader the opportunity of any insight as to the process or rate of skill acquisition over time.

Finally, there has been one investigation that examined the percentage of skills used on a monthly basis, which generally found officers used more skills over time (Alexander et al., 2013). However, there are two issues with the way the researchers presented their findings. One, the authors did not inform the reader how the percentages were calculated, so it is not clear what is being measured. Second, and more concerning, is that the skills rise each month until June, when a drop in skills occurs, followed by a steady rise until December. The authors suggest this fluctuation in skills competency is due to the fact that more officers were added to the study in June. It is unclear why the authors chose to report the data this way, when it may have been more informative to report the use of skills for each month following each group of officers' specific training.

Current Study

Given that the extant research suggests that the effective officer use of CCPs is significantly related to offender recidivism, the potential role that coaching may play in increasing the officer use of these skills is monumental. Therefore, this study explores the underresearched area of officer training and coaching and its subsequent effect on the use of CCPs. More importantly, this investigation provides a methodological advancement in that it is the first to examine officer use of skills, by skill type, over multiple periods of time with a comparison group.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study include probation and parole officers from four jurisdictions within one large Midwestern state—two that supervise adult probationers, one that supervises adult parolees, and one that supervises juvenile probationers. Officer participation in the study was voluntary. Participating officers were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions: the experimental group (i.e., trained and coached in the EPICS model) and the control group (i.e., untrained and not coached in the EPICS model). Officers in the experimental group were instructed not to discuss any aspects of the EPICS training or coaching process with the officers in the control group.

EPICS Officer Training

All of the officers in the experimental condition attended a three-day training period on the EPICS model. The purpose of the training was to help officers use the model's skills during their officer-offender contact sessions. The first day of the training introduced the rationale and development of the model in addition to the EPICS model structure (i.e., check-in, review, intervention, homework) and discussed the importance of the officer-offender relationship. Day two focused on specific intervention techniques (i.e., cognitive restructuring, problem solving, structured learning). The final day of training focused on behavioral practices (i.e., anticriminal modeling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, effective use of authority). The format of the training included visual presentations, demonstrations of skills, workbook and participation exercises, and several opportunities for officers to practice skills.

EPICS Coaching Sessions

In addition to completing the initial three-day training, officers in the trained group also participated in 24 coaching sessions (approximately 1 per month). These sessions were designed to refresh officers on the EPICS model, which included reviews of the various intervention techniques and behavioral practices. The coaching sessions were structured just like EPICS sessions. First, each session began with a check-in, where any outstanding questions or concerns were addressed. Second, the topic from previous sessions was discussed until everyone felt comfortable with using the specific skill/technique. Third, a different topic from the initial training was reviewed and modeled. Officers were given the opportunity to practice the skill and were provided with feedback on their performance. Finally, officers were assigned the task of using the reviewed skill during a contact session with one of their offenders prior to the next coaching session.

Audio Recordings

In order to evaluate the impact of the training initiative and ongoing coaching feedback, officers (including untrained officers) were asked to submit at least one audio-recorded officer-offender interaction per month through a secure website. It should be noted that there was no limit to the number of audiotapes officers were allowed to submit. Trained officers were provided with feedback based on the ratings of their performance on the audiotape recordings. Feedback indicated which components the officer satisfactorily completed and which components needed improvement. This process was also used to identify which areas the overall group of officers needed improvement in and those skills were selected as topics for review in subsequent coaching sessions.

Use of Core Correctional Practices

Trained researchers listened to each submitted audiotape recording and adherence to the eight service delivery skills of the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory-2010 (CPAI-2010) were measured: *anticriminal modeling, effective reinforcement, effective disapproval, problem solving, structured learning, effective use of authority, cognitive restructuring,* and *relationship skills* (Gendreau et al., 2010). Specifically, items were scored as 0 if the officer had the opportunity to use the skill but did not, 0.5 if the officer used the skill but missed major steps, and 1 if the officer demonstrated proficient use of the skill. *Yes* or *no* items were scored as 0 if the officer did not use the skill ("no") and 1 if the officer did use the skill ("yes"). Only items where the officer had an opportunity to use the skill in the session were included. On each audiotape, the total scores for each skill were divided by the total number of items in each skill that the officer had the opportunity to use in the session. This produced a range of potential scores for each skill between .00 and 1.00. In order to obtain one overall score for the session, all of the scores for each skill were summed and divided by the number of items which the officer had the opportunity to use the skill in the session. In order to assess the acquisition of skills over time, the audiotape scores were also binned into three-month increments following the initial training.

RESULTS

The present study included 43 probation and parole officers: 28 (65.1%) that were trained in the EPICS model and participated in monthly coaching sessions, and 15 (34.9%) that were not trained in the EPICS model and did not participate in any coaching sessions. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the officers in the study separated by group type. In general, the officers in the study were predominately white and female, with approximately ten years of service. There were not any statistically significant differences between the trained and untrained groups on any of the characteristics examined.

Table 2 examines the frequency of audiotapes by group type. Although there were originally a total of 755 total audiotapes submitted, 169 (22.4%) were missing date information and were therefore excluded. The remaining

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of probation and parole officers, by group type.

	Trained ($n = 28$)		Untrained ($n = 15$)	
Characteristic	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**
Male	12	42.9	5	33.3
White	25	89.3	12	80.0
Mean years of service (SD)	9.7	4.3	11.2	5.7

Table 2: Number of audiotape submissions per three-month interval posttraining, by group type.

	Trained		Untrained	
Month Submitted Posttraining	***n***	**%**	***n***	**%**
1–3	108	27.6	42	22.1
4–6	109	27.9	36	18.9
7–9	58	14.8	31	16.3
10–12	53	13.6	38	20.0
13–15	43	11.0	27	14.2
16–18	20	5.1	16	8.4
Total tapes	391	67.3	190	32.7

586 audiotapes were binned into three-month intervals beginning one month after the initial training (the date of the first coaching session). It should be noted that the initial protocol for the study was to examine audio-recorded interactions for a two-year period; however, so few audiotapes were received beyond 18 months (four from the trained group and one from the untrained group) that these audio-recordings were also excluded. In total, there were 581 audio-recordings examined in this study. The 28 officers in the trained group contributed 391 audiotapes (approximately 14 tapes per trained officer) and the 15 officers in the untrained group contributed 190 (approximately 13 tapes per untrained officer).

An examination of Table 2 clearly shows that the trained group of officers submitted more audiotapes during the first six months of coaching than during the remainder of the period examined. The number of tapes in the first six months for this group accounts for 55.5% of all audiotapes during the 18-month time frame examined. The untrained group has a more evenly dispersed frequency of tape submissions over the first year; however, there were noticeably fewer tapes received from both groups as the study progressed.

Table 3 shows that trained officers were rated significantly higher than untrained officers on their adherence to the six CCPs of *anticriminal modeling, effective disapproval, problem solving, structured learning, cognitive restructuring,* and *relationship skills* ($p \leq .002$). Trained officers also scored almost twice as high on the EPICS total score (Mean = .60) compared to untrained officers (Mean = .31). The effect size, Cohen's d, of these group differences ranges from .75 to 2.23, which are considered large in the behavioral sciences (Cohen, 1988). Trained officers did not differ from untrained officers on the ratings for adherence to the two skills of *effective reinforcement* ($p = .828$) and *effective use of authority* ($p = .325$). Table 3 also shows that three CCPs were used, or attempted, very infrequently in audio-recorded sessions of both groups: *anticriminal modeling* ($n = 106$), *effective disapproval* ($n = 121$), and *problem solving* ($n = 123$).

Table 3: Comparison of officer adherence to core correctional practices skills, by group type.

	Trained			Untrained						
Skill	***n***	***M***	***SD***	***n***	***M***	***SD***	***df***	***t***	***p***	**Cohen's *d***
Anticriminal modeling	97	.09	.24	9	.00	.00	96.0[a]	−3.60[a]	<.001	.75
Effective reinforcement	390	.65	.22	190	.65	.25	344.7[a]	.22[a]	.828	.00
Effective disapproval	92	.28	.35	29	.08	.18	94.4[a]	−4.11[a]	<.001	.75
Problem solving	45	.18	.36	78	.00	.00	44.0[a]	−3.39[a]	.002	1.00
Structured learning	391	.63	.25	190	.23	.14	565.0[a]	−23.78[a]	<.001	2.05
Effective use of authority	384	.94	.17	187	.93	.21	308.4[a]	−.99[a]	.325	.05
Cognitive restructuring	391	.33	.39	190	.01	.10	477.7[a]	−14.94[a]	<.001	1.31
Relationship skills	391	.71	.25	189	.37	.29	325.2[a]	−13.88[a]	<.001	1.26
EPICS total score	391	.60	.15	190	.31	.11	493.5[a]	−25.21[a]	<.001	2.23

Note: [A] The *t* and *df* were adjusted because the variances were not equal.

As indicated above, the purpose of coaching is to improve officer fidelity in the core correctional skill areas. In order to assess the influence of coaching sessions on the use of these service delivery skills, the mean officer adherence scores of both groups (i.e., trained and untrained) were examined in three-month increments for the 18 months following the initial EPICS training.

Figure 1 compares the mean total EPICS scores of both groups over the six time intervals. This figure shows that the trained group of officers had higher scores than the untrained group across all of the time periods examined. The figure also reveals that the trained group increased their use of skills over time, whereas the untrained group remained relatively stable in their use of skills.

After one year of coaching, the trained group gained 12 percentage points on their mean total EPICS score compared to the untrained group, who gained only 6 percentage points. After 18 months of coaching, the trained group gained 9 percentage points on their mean total EPICS score compared to the untrained group, who gained 3 percentage points. Taken together, these findings indicate that the general trend was to increase officer use of skills. Across all time periods, this increase was much more pronounced for the trained group than for the untrained group.

Similar graphs were examined for each of the eight core correctional practices to determine if there were any differences in the acquisition of skills over time by skill type. The findings are summarized here in three groups. First, there are three CCPs (structured learning, relationship skills, and cognitive

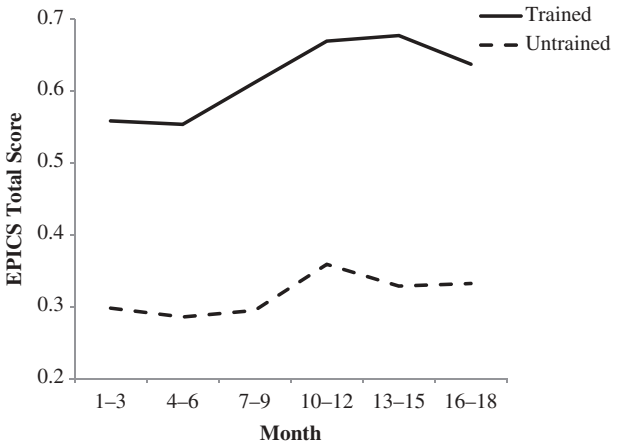

Figure 1: EPICS total score in three-month intervals, by group type.

restructuring) in which the trained group increased their use of skills over time, whereas the untrained group remained more stable. Figures 2–4 depict the mean scores of the three practices of both groups over the six time intervals. After one year of coaching, the trained group demonstrated much higher gains in use of skills than the untrained group. Specifically, the trained group gained 14 percentage points on their mean structured learning score, compared to the 3 percentage points gain by the untrained group; the trained group gained 21 percentage points on their mean relationship skills score, compared to the 14 percentage point gain by the untrained group; and the trained

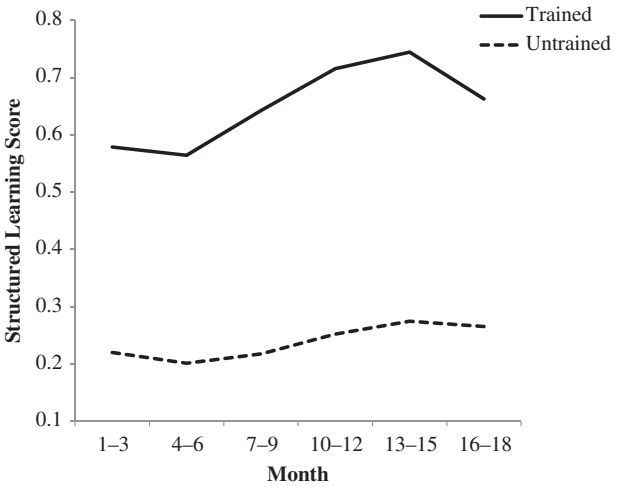

Figure 2: Structured learning score in three-month intervals, by group type.

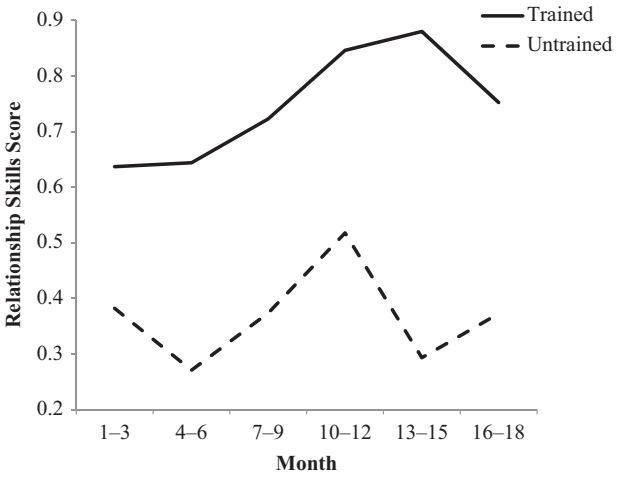

Figure 3: Relationship skills score in three-month intervals, by group type.

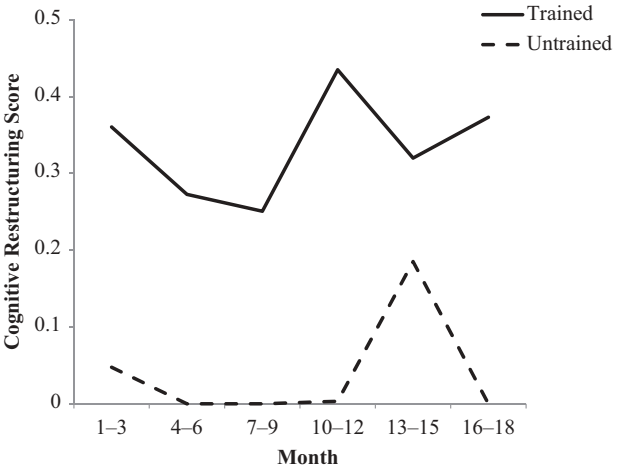

Figure 4: Cognitive restructuring score in three-month intervals, by group type.

group gained 7 percentage points on their mean cognitive restructuring score, where the untrained group score remained near zero across all time periods examined.

Second, there are three CCPs (effective disapproval, anticriminal modeling, and problem solving) which both groups of officers used, or attempted, very infrequently in their audiotape submissions. Although fewer tapes may limit our ability to understand the acquisition of skills over time, it should be noted that in all three of these skill areas there was a clear advantage of the trained group over the untrained group in terms of skill usage. Specifically, the trained group gained 15 percentage points on their mean effective disapproval

Table 4: Frequency of high-fidelity audiotape sessions per three-month interval, by group type.

Month Submitted Posttraining	Trained %	Untrained %
1–3	31.5% (34/108)	0.0% (0/42)
4–6	33.9% (37/109)	0.0% (0/36)
7–9	50.0% (29/58)	0.0% (0/31)
10–12	69.8% (37/53)	0.0% (0/38)
13–15	65.1% (28/43)	3.7% (1/27)
16–18	50.0% (10/20)	0.0% (0/16)

score after one year, 20 percentage points on their mean anticriminal modeling score after 15 months, and 40 percentage points on their mean problem solving score after 18 months.

Third, there are two CCPs (effective reinforcement and effective use of authority) in which both groups had near equivalent scores across the time. It should be noted that while both groups did show a slight increase in the use of skills over time, both also started with high scores immediately following the initial training.

In a previous evaluation of EPICS, Latessa et al. (2012) determined that high-fidelity officers (defined as those officers with a total EPICS score of 63% or higher) supervised offenders with fewer incidences of recidivism. Specifically, Latessa et al. (2012) found that ineffective officers supervised offenders that had approximately twice as many arrests and 1.5 times as many incarcerations as effective officers. Table 4 examines the frequency of officers that scored in the effective range at each time interval by group type. Only one untrained officer scored in the effective range during this entire course of this study. In comparison, 31.5% of trained officers were rated in the effective range during the first time interval, and after one year of coaching there were more than twice as many trained officers that scored in the effective range (69.8%).

DISCUSSION

There is now extensive research that suggests punitive community supervision strategies focusing on compliance monitoring and other law enforcement aspects of supervision are not effective in reducing recidivism (MacKenzie, 2006; Petersilia & Turner, 1993; Sherman et al., 1997). As a result, there are few (if any) correctional researchers or agencies still openly advocating for a return to these traditional, deterrent-based forms of supervision. However, despite the rhetoric to the contrary, recent evaluations reveal that community supervision agencies still do not adhere to many of the principles of effective

correctional intervention (Bonta et al., 2008). The challenge has thus become how to translate the "what works" literature into practice.

In response, several formalized approaches (e.g., STICS, EPICS, STARR) have been developed to assist correctional agencies to better implement evidence-based research into community supervision practices. The preliminary results from several jurisdictions suggest that these new models have been associated with meaningful reductions in recidivism (Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, and Gutierrez, 2010); Bourgon & Gutierrez, 2012; Latessa et al., 2012; Lowenkamp et al., 2011, 2012; Robinson et al., 2011). A staple of these new approaches is the use of officer coaching sessions, which are designed to improve fidelity in the core correctional skill areas. However, far fewer of the evaluations in this area have examined the effect of coaching on officer acquisition of CCPs and those that have attempted to do so to date have suffered from some methodological problems that limit their value.

In an attempt to add to the underresearched area of coaching (Alexander et al., 2013; Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, Scott, and Yessine, 2010; Lowenkamp et al., 2013; 2014), this study examined the impact of an initial training and monthly coaching sessions in the EPICS model on probation and parole officer use of core correctional skills over a period of 18 months. In support of these RNR models, this study found that EPICS-trained and -coached officers used CCPs more proficiently than untrained officers in their one-on-one recorded interactions with offenders across all of the time periods examined. This study adds to the growing literature that suggests these RNR approaches to community supervision are effective in increasing officer use of CCPs (see Trotter, 2013). However, this study also made two important advancements in this area that will be described below in detail.

First, officer training and coaching were associated with increasing officer use of CCPs.

Based on the longitudinal nature of the data examined here, there also appears to be a distinct benefit of additional coaching sessions that extends over time. What is more, the percentage of audiotapes that were rated as high-fidelity (Latessa et al., 2012) more than doubled from the first time interval to the fourth, which suggests coaching may not only increase officer use of skills, but may also decrease recidivism. If the goal is to improve officer use of CCPs and reduce recidivism, than coaching may need to be conducted for at least one year posttraining.

It may be of further benefit to extend coaching beyond one year, but for exactly how long remains unclear at this point. In this study, officers who attended the coaching sessions generally continued to improve their use of CCPs over the 18 months examined, so it is a logical extension that additional sessions might lead to even more proficient use of these skills. However, there is also a possibility for reaching a level of diminishing returns. That is, there may be a certain number of coaching sessions in which officers reach their

peak performance, and in which any further sessions would have no effect (or perhaps even a negative effect) on improving fidelity. It should be noted that aside from research sites, the typical frequency of coaching sessions for many of these RNR models after the initial training is 6 or fewer. The findings of this study suggest there would be a tremendous value in increasing the number of coaching sessions to at least 12 and that further research in this area should be conducted to determine exactly what the optimal number of sessions beyond the first year is.

Second, the rate of skill acquisition varied by skill type. This is important information because it might ultimately lead to better, more efficient coaching (and training) sessions. There were two skills (effective reinforcement and effective use of authority) in which trained and untrained officers alike had similar scores over time. Given the nature of these two practices, it is probable that the officers in the study received other training in these skill areas. As a result, while these skills should still be monitored for compliance in officer audiotape submissions, there is tentative evidence to suggest that addressing these skills should not take up too much time during the training or coaching sessions. The results of this study suggest that this time may be better spent on attempting to improve the other CCPs, which are used less proficiently.

The three CCPs that appeared to benefit the most from coaching were structured learning, relationship skills, and cognitive restructuring. In all three areas, the trained and coached group increased their use of skills over time, while the untrained group remained relatively stable in their use of these skills throughout. It should, however, be noted that although structured learning and relationship skills ended at 18 months with relatively high mean scores (.66 and .75, respectively), the mean for cognitive restructuring never rose above 50% across any of the time periods examined. Therefore, the training and coaching protocols in these three areas should remain relatively unchanged. However, it may be worthwhile to pursue steps aimed at improving officer use of the cognitive restructuring skills in both venues.

Finally, there were three CCPs (anticriminal modeling, effective disapproval, and problem solving) which both groups of officers used, or attempted, very infrequently in their audiotape submissions (refer back to Table 3). It should be noted that while not displayed, the trained group did have higher scores than the untrained group on all three measures. However, given the infrequent use of the skills and small *n*'s across the time intervals these figures were not presented here. Trainers and coaches from the sites in this investigation anecdotally confirm that officers struggled with these skills the most in training and coaching sessions, and were thus more likely to avoid their use during recorded sessions. This suggests that future trainings and coaching sessions should seek to better address these skills in order to get officers more comfortable and proficient in using them.

These findings have been presented here so that they may be incorporated into the future designs and implementation protocols of EPICS and other RNR-based community supervision programs. Given the empirical research on the effectiveness of adherence to CCPs and recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Dowden & Andrews, 2004), any attempt to increase the use of the four skills identified here (anticriminal modeling, problem solving, effective disapproval, and cognitive restructuring) in sessions with offenders may have an even more pronounced impact on their probabilities for recidivism. It is also critical that agencies ensure a minimal level of officer fidelity in these skill areas, given that it has been well documented that incompetent use of treatment strategies is associated with increases in recidivism (Lowenkamp, Latessa, & Smith, 2006; Matthews, Hubbard, & Latessa, 2001).

Although this work has made several methodological advancements in the study of coaching on officer use of skills, there are a number of limitations that should be understood before proceeding with any policy changes. First, although this study was the first longitudinal examination of skills with a control group, the number of participating officers was relatively modest ($N = 43$). It is therefore possible that this sample size is in part responsible for the lack of statistical significance found between the experimental and control groups. However, because the officers were randomly assigned to the treatment conditions, it is unlikely that the sample size had a large bearing on the results. Second, this study did not have any pretraining measures of officer competency. Therefore, we were not able to rule out the possibility of different skill levels from the onset of the study. Future studies should strive for a larger sample size—as well as make an effort to use pretraining, along with posttraining audiotape evaluations, to account for this problem.

Third, although efforts were taken to discourage discussions related to EPICS between the two officer groups, it is possible that members of the control group may have inadvertently picked up on some of the EPICS skills from members in the experimental group. This study found that officers in the control group improved over time in several of the CCP areas, albeit to a much lower extent than the experimental group. To rule out any possible contamination effects, future investigations could take further efforts to minimize contact between officer groups (e.g., assign treatment conditions to officers in different locations).

Fourth, although the RNR models have a lot of commonalities with each other, they also have several unique attributes that mean the findings presented here may, but do not necessarily, generalize to other models besides EPICS. However, this is an empirical question, and similar studies should seek to determine whether or not similar results are achieved with other models. Finally, we considered officers to be "coached" if they attended the majority of coaching sessions. Such a view does not of course incorporate the participation level of the officers in those meetings, or the number of tapes provided, which

has been used in the work produced by Jim Bonta and his colleagues (Bonta et al., 2011; Bourgon, Bonta, Rugge, and Gutierrez, 2010). In the future, in may be worthwhile to explore how the various participation levels of officers compare with their use of CCPs over time. For example, the groups for examination may include (1) trained with no coaching, (2) trained with high participation in coaching activities, (3) trained with low participation in coaching activities, and (4) untrained and no coaching.

Despite these limitations, the findings from this study are encouraging and provide a number of areas for future academic investigation. This work also hopes to inspire others to continue to research the influence of coaching on officer use of CCPs beyond what has been discussed here. This area of study is of critical importance because if coaching is implemented correctly it has the potential to decrease recidivism as well as save time and money. In closing, it should not be forgotten that agency supervisors are trained and encouraged to carry on the coaching process after the research staff is gone. It is currently unknown how many agencies follow through with this recommendation and continue with the coaching process as intended—although conversations with several EPICS coaches and facilitators suggest that the number is probably not as high as it should be. This area should also be further studied to see if the coaching from within agencies could be as effective as that conducted by researchers.

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