Using the Critical Incident Technique to Explore Interdisciplinary Trainees’ Long-Term Behavior Change

Akilah Heggs, Emily Graybill, Stephen Truscott, Mark Crenshaw, Erin Vinoski, & Daniel Crimmins

Center for Leadership in Disability, Georgia State University

Interdisciplinary training can be effective at improving participants’ knowledge, skills, and feelings about program content, yet little is known about how trainees transfer the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs into professional practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of the critical incident technique (CIT) to investigate experiences of LEND trainees and to assess the impact of participation of LEND on trainee behavior in their current work. The following questions were answered.

1. What LEND activities were most salient for trainees?
2. How do trainees connect the LEND activities to their current professional work?

The Critical Incident Technique:

The critical incident technique (CIT) was developed in 1954 by psychologist John Flanagan as a qualitative research methodology to observe and collect data on human behavior (Flanagan, 1954). Essentially, the CIT is the study of critical incidents in defined situations. Critical Incidents are defined as significant instances of a specific activity as experienced or observed by research participants and should be capable of being critiqued or analyzed (Twelker, 2003). The CIT provides a systematic way of gathering the significance others attribute to events, as experienced or observed by research participants and should be capable of meaningfully apply constructs from the experience to their current professional decision-making behaviors.

The research team used CIT to collect interview data from (n = 24) former and current trainees in the Ga LEND program to explore how specific activities during the interdisciplinary training experience contributed to their current professional decision-making behaviors.

Results

The results suggested that the training activities during the Ga LEND program had a sustainable impact on the trainees and that trainees were able to meaningfully apply constructs from the experience to their current decision-making behaviors. Through the data, we were able to identify 40 critical work incidents or work behaviors that could be connected to the trainees’ participation in the program to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.