

# From Training to Transformation: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study on the Lived Experiences of Child Development Workers Across a Capacity-Building Program

Maeven E. Tubayan<sup>1</sup> , Rafael M. Duran<sup>2</sup> , Nestor Jr P. Peñalver<sup>3</sup> , Chaseur Leo Vann O. Ontolan<sup>4\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Integrated Basic Education, <sup>2</sup>School of Arts and Sciences, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines; <sup>3</sup>College of Business, <sup>4</sup>College of Arts and Sciences, Bukidnon State University, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines

\*chaseurleovann\_ontolan@buku.edu.ph

## ABSTRACT

This study captures the profound personal and professional transformation of Child Development Workers (CDWs) in Malaybalay City after completing the Empowering CDW Program, a localized training initiative grounded in mentoring, inclusive pedagogy, and culturally responsive resources. Using Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology, this research, involving four participants through online focus group discussions, illuminates how these frontline educators reclaimed their professional identities and emerged as confident, reflective practitioners. The data revealed four essential themes: Professional Growth and Realizations, Empowerment through Learning, Enhanced Professional Identity and Purpose, and Empowered Practice and Advocacy. This highlights a reawakening of agency, purpose, and voice, transforming participants from caretakers to educators shaping lives and communities. This study affirms that meaningful, situated professional development transforms CDWs.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 July 2025  
Revised 15 September 2025  
Accepted 24 November 2025

## KEYWORDS

Child development workers (CDWs), empowering CDW program, professional transformation, Malaybalay City, inclusive pedagogy, professional identity, early childhood education

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's lifelong learning and development. In their formative years, children acquire foundational cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills that significantly influence their academic performance and well-being (Vandenbroeck et al., 2018). Central to the success of ECE are Child Development Workers (CDWs), who serve as frontline facilitators of learning in barangay-based child development centers. However, while these workers often demonstrate passion and commitment, many lack access to sustained, relevant professional development (AlHussaini et al., 2024). Passion alone, as evidence suggests, is not enough, competency must be continuously developed in contextually meaningful ways.

In the Philippines, CDWs operate within a landscape marked by structural and professional limitations. In Malaybalay City, many face inadequate access to training, limited instructional resources, and insufficient institutional support (Cadosales et al., 2020). Nationally, the profile of CDWs reveals professional gaps: only 52.2% are college graduates, while others possess only high school diplomas, vocational certificates, or incomplete

tertiary education (Education Commission [EDCOM] 2, 2023). With over half of CDWs aged 46 and above, and with most having attended fewer than two formal trainings (UNICEF Philippines, 2023), the urgency to professionalize and empower this workforce is clear.

This need for transformation aligns with both national reform and global mandates. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 advocates for inclusive, quality education, while SDG 10 emphasizes reducing inequalities — objectives that include investing in human capital at the grassroots level. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM 2, 2023) has underscored the need to elevate CDWs through structured training programs that address real-world demands.

In response, the Empowering Child Development Workers' Classroom Management and Pedagogy Program was implemented. Unlike conventional one-off seminars, this extension initiative used a multimodal approach: print modules, instructional videos, hands-on activities, and mentorship (Escarlos et al., 2019). It aimed to provide culturally relevant, inclusive, and practical tools for CDWs to deliver

holistic early childhood services, particularly in underserved communities.

The present study is grounded in the extension program titled “Empowering Child Development Workers’ Classroom Management and Pedagogy”, implemented by the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Program of Bukidnon State University from 2019 to 2022. This initiative was developed in partnership with the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) of Malaybalay City, following a series of consultative meetings and a formal needs assessment. The assessment revealed that CDWs demonstrated only moderate familiarity with key early childhood education domains, including developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), inclusive education, instructional material (IM) development, children’s literature, assessment strategies, and technology integration. These findings served as the empirical basis for the program’s design.

Structured as a modular and multimodal intervention, the program consisted of nine thematic modules delivered through a total of 36 intensive weekend sessions. Batch 1, which commenced in late 2019, began with face-to-face sessions but transitioned to a blended format during the pandemic, utilizing printed modules, asynchronous video lessons, and online consultations. Batch 2, implemented in 2022, resumed full face-to-face delivery while adhering to health protocols. Each module spanned 2 to 4 sessions and was designed to be both content-rich and practice-oriented. Topics included Inclusive Education, Development of Instructional Materials, Assessing the Behaviors of Young Children, Curriculum Models, Children’s Literature, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Technology in Early Childhood, Behavior Management Strategies, and Teaching Strategies.

The program was spearheaded by College of Education of Bukidnon State University. Each session included performance-based tasks, mentoring, peer feedback, and reflective outputs that encouraged contextual application of new knowledge and skills. Evaluation results from both batches indicated a consistent rating of “Best” across all domains, with general average

scores ranging from 4.90 to 5.00.

This research explored the lived experiences of CDWs who participated in the program, capturing their journey across three distinct phases: before, during, and after the intervention. The study examined how they experienced the training content, mentoring relationships, challenges, and personal-professional transformation. Rather than limiting the scope to post-program effects, the inquiry followed the full arc of change to provide a holistic understanding of their development. In doing so, the study emphasized the rigor, intentionality, and transformative potential of a locally designed, research-informed professional development initiative for grassroots educators.

Previous literature on ECE in the Philippine context tends to prioritize child outcomes or program structures. What remains underexplored is how CDWs themselves experience transformation, how training shifts their mindset, equips them with new strategies, and fosters a deeper sense of professionalism (Cadosales et al., 2020; Vandenbroeck et al., 2018). By documenting these experiences, the study addressed a critical gap and offered practical implications for designing responsive professional development models.

The study is grounded in empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000), which underscores the role of knowledge, support, and participation in building self-efficacy. It also draws on Guskey’s (2002) professional development theory, which emphasizes that sustained, context-sensitive training is essential for lasting behavioral and attitudinal change. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978) further guide the analysis, highlighting how individual transformation is embedded in broader systemic, relational, and cultural environments.

Through these lenses, this study illuminated how localized training initiatives can spark meaningful professional growth. More than a skills upgrade, the program allowed CDWs to reclaim their professional identity, recognize their capacity for reflective practice,

and assert their place as educators, not just caregivers, within the early childhood education system.

## METHODS

### Design

This qualitative study adopted Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to describe lived experiences with minimal researcher bias. The approach allowed for a deeper understanding of how CDWs experienced professional transformation following their participation in the Empowering CDW Program.

### Locale

The study was conducted in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon. Baseline data from the extension program revealed that most CDWs lacked college degrees and formal training in early childhood development, highlighting the importance of exploring how localized, comprehensive training impacted their professional development.

### Participants

Four CDWs who completed the Empowering CDW Program voluntarily participated in this study. Out of seven eligible completers from Batches 1 and 2, only four responded to recruitment efforts. All were employed under the Malaybalay City Social Welfare and Development Office. Inclusion criteria required participants to (1) be employed as CDWs in Malaybalay, (2) have completed the training program, and (3) have educational attainment ranging from elementary level to college level. Those who did not complete the program or declined consent were excluded. Demographic information such as age, gender, education, and years of service was collected to contextualize their perspectives.

### Research Instrument

The researchers developed a three-part semi-structured interview guide. Part 1 established rapport; Part 2 explored core

experiences aligned with research objectives; Part 3 allowed for open reflection. The guide was reviewed and validated by two subject matter experts in early childhood education to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness.

### Data Gathering Procedure

Ethical clearance was secured from the university's Research Ethics Committee. After approval, participants were contacted and coordinated with ECEd extensionists. Those who consented were informed of their rights and provided with mobile data to facilitate participation in online focus group discussions (FGDs).

FGDs were conducted in four separate sessions, each with three to four participants, lasting approximately two hours. Conversations were recorded and transcribed. Member checking was implemented by presenting participants with transcripts and preliminary themes, allowing them to verify and clarify content. This process strengthened the credibility of the findings and ensured participants' voices were accurately represented.

### Data Analysis

Following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, analysis began with epoche - setting aside researcher biases. Participants' narratives were examined through phenomenological reduction and horizontalization, giving equal value to significant statements.

To observe epoche, the research team conducted a collaborative bracketing session prior to data collection. During this meeting, all researchers explicitly laid down their personal beliefs, professional experiences with early childhood education, and expectations about the outcomes of the extension program. These reflections were discussed openly and documented, serving as a conscious act of setting aside preconceptions. This allowed the team to approach data collection and analysis with a renewed commitment to neutrality and participant-centered interpretation.

Non-repetitive statements were clustered into meaning units and categorized into themes such as reclaiming professional identity, building confidence through mentoring, accessing practical resources, and developing advocacy. These reflected both noema (what was experienced) and noesis (how it was experienced).

In line with Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method, data analysis involved generating both textural and structural descriptions. Textural descriptions focused on what the participants experienced, as expressed through their narratives. Structural descriptions, on the other hand, examined the underlying conditions or contexts that shaped those experiences. Together, these layers contributed to the development of composite descriptions that represent the essence of the participants' shared lived experiences.

The final phase of analysis involved the synthesis of composite essence, which integrated both the textural and structural descriptions to arrive at a unified understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This synthesis aimed to capture the core meanings that transcended individual variations. To enhance the dependability and confirmability of the findings, the researchers employed member checking, wherein participants reviewed and validated the interpreted themes, and peer debriefing, wherein fellow researchers critically examined the data analysis process for coherence, alignment, and potential bias.

## Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, the researchers applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, prolonged engagement with the data, and triangulation across multiple focus group discussions. Transferability was supported by providing rich, contextual descriptions of participants and settings, allowing others to assess relevance to similar contexts. Dependability was addressed through an audit trail documenting the research process and analytic decisions, while

confirmability was established by practicing epoche, maintaining reflexive journals, and engaging in peer debriefing to minimize bias. These strategies ensured that the findings authentically reflected the lived experiences of the participants.

## Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical standards in conducting research involving human participants. Prior to its implementation, ethical clearance was secured from the Research Ethics Board of the researchers' institution. All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and scope.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant before data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. Throughout the research process, care was taken to ensure that no participant was exposed to physical, psychological, or emotional harm.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms or participant codes during transcription, analysis, and reporting. All collected data, including interview recordings and transcripts, were stored securely and accessed only by the researchers. Upon completion of the study, all data were disposed of in accordance with institutional data management protocols.

To support equitable participation, mobile data load was provided to participants to facilitate their involvement in online interviews. A member-checking process was also conducted to ensure that participants' views and experiences were accurately represented in the study's findings.

Throughout the research process, the researchers upheld integrity, respect, and professionalism in all interactions. No conflicts of interest were present, as there had been no prior meetings or engagements between the researchers and the participants that could have influenced their responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To provide meaningful context for the lived experiences explored in this transcendental phenomenological study, the demographic profile of the CDWs who participated in the Empowering CDW Program is presented (Table 1). Details such as age, educational background, years of service, and workplace setting help illuminate the diverse life and professional contexts from which each participant engaged with the capacity-building initiative. These variations shaped the lens through which each CDW experienced the training and, ultimately, their personal and professional transformation.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic and Professional Backgrounds of Participants in the Capacity-Building Program*

Participants	Age	Sex	Educational Background	Years in Service	Place of Assignment
CDW1	31	Female	Bachelor of Elementary Education	6	Barangay Silae
CDW2	31	Female	College Level (1 <sup>st</sup> year)	9	Barangay Indalasa
CDW3	45	Female	Bachelor of Elementary Education	10	Barangay 8
CDW4	34	Female	Bachelor of Elementary Education	14	Barangay Zamboanguita

In addition to their teaching and lesson planning responsibilities, participants had received limited professional development from institutions such as the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO), and the Local Government of Malaybalay. These trainings often focused on basic child development, classroom routines, and occasionally, Basic Life Support (BLS). However, they were typically delivered as one-off orientations, lacking sustained engagement, mentoring, or contextualized pedagogy. Most CDWs reported minimal access to structured follow-through or reflective learning prior to the Empowering CDW Program, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive, university-led initiative.

To explore how the program shaped participants' personal and professional growth,

interview data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method. This process involved horizontalization, clustering of meaning units, and synthesizing significant experiences into core themes. These themes trace the CDWs' developmental journey, starting from early classroom struggles, through transformative learning moments, to a strengthened sense of purpose and empowerment. Each theme reflects both the content of their experiences (textural) and the conditions that enabled them (structural).

Table 2 presents the paraphrased meaning units and corresponding themes and subthemes, while full-length responses are discussed in detail in the narrative that follows.

This theme captures the participants' developmental trajectory from inadequately prepared practitioners to informed and reflective early childhood educators. Their transformation was rooted in the training's capacity to expose deficiencies, challenge assumptions, and introduce pedagogically sound practices.

### Lack of Preparation and Ineffective Classroom Practices

Prior to the Empowering Child Development Workers Program, many participants lacked formal training in early childhood education and classroom management. Their practices were largely shaped by trial-and-error, peer observation, or outdated materials. As one CDW recalled:

*"I really can't say I was effective at that time because I felt like I hadn't had proper training yet... I was just basically going along with whatever usually happened."* (CDW 1, 31 years old, 6 years in service)

This lack of pedagogical grounding led to feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy, particularly when handling large class sizes or children with diverse needs. The absence of structured methods resulted in fragmented classroom experiences and limited child engagement.

**Table 2**

*Emerging Themes and Subthemes from the Lived Experiences of Child Development Workers across the Capacity-Building Program*

Meaning Units	Themes	Subthemes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Felt unprepared and ineffective due to lack of proper training</li> <li>Realized she misunderstood children's reversed writing as misbehavior, not a learning disability</li> <li>Gained refreshed and updated knowledge from the training ; opened new perspective on the latest trends and approaches</li> </ul>	1. Professional Growth and Realizations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of formal training and limited classroom strategies</li> <li>Realizations about past misconceptions and child needs</li> <li>Learning new, developmentally appropriate techniques</li> </ol>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewed the training as a chance to continue personal education and growth</li> <li>Understood the importance of inclusive education and not excluding children with special needs</li> <li>Gained confidence and clarity on how to handle children effectively; viewed play, routines and interactions not just task but as opportunities for learning</li> </ul>	2. Empowerment through Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training as a second chance for education and self-betterment</li> <li>Inclusivity and respect for child diversity</li> <li>Growth in confidence and motivation to teach</li> </ol>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified more deeply as a capable, passionate, and purposeful CDW</li> <li>Improved classroom management and communication with children and parents</li> <li>Developed emotional connection and sense of calling to the profession</li> </ul>	3. Enhanced Professional Identity and Purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition of role transformation</li> <li>Shift to responsive and engaging teaching practices</li> <li>Stronger personal commitment and professional purpose</li> </ol>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learned to advocate for children and collaborate with parents effectively</li> <li>Practiced more empathetic, patient, and positive discipline methods</li> </ul>	4. Empowered Practice and Advocacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Holistic and confident classroom management</li> <li>Emotional maturity and values-based teaching</li> </ol>

**Realizations about Past Misconceptions and Child Needs**

The training served as a reflective mirror, helping CDWs identify and correct misconceptions they had unknowingly internalized. A striking example involved the misinterpretation of a child’s reversed writing:

*“I really can’t forget this... they were writing the letter, and I didn’t even know that the child had a disability.”* (CDW 2, 31 years old, 9 years in service)

This experience catalyzed a shift in how the participant understood learning differences, moving from blame or confusion to empathy and informed intervention. Moustakas (1994)

emphasizes the value of such awareness as part of phenomenological reduction, where preconceived notions are suspended and replaced with fresh insight.

**Learning New, Developmentally Appropriate Techniques**

Beyond cognitive realization, participants were quick to apply what they had learned in their daily practice. The introduction of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and holistic child development frameworks were repeatedly cited as useful and relevant. One participant noted:

*“My knowledge was refreshed... I was reminded that*

*a child's development should be holistic... all seven domains need to be addressed.*" (CDW 1, 31 years old, 6 years in service)

This subtheme reflects Moustakas' concept of imaginative variation, where participants explore new ways of thinking and practice. Through exposure to structured pedagogy, CDWs began adopting more intentional, child-centered strategies.

Collectively, these subthemes reveal a significant shift in how participants understood and enacted their roles. From initial uncertainty, they moved toward developmentally responsive teaching, experiencing growth as both inner transformation and practical change. Their development was not additive, but reconstructive, reshaping their professional identity from the ground up.

This transformation was supported by key structural elements: printed modules, video lessons, and mentoring created a clear learning path. Bukidnon State University's academic credibility added legitimacy, while the program's pacing allowed space for reflection. Peer discussions, in turn, encouraged critical engagement and the reexamination of long-held beliefs. These features fostered an environment of deep self-awareness and professional insight.

### **Empowerment through Learning**

The Empowering Child Development Workers Program served not only as a training initiative but as a powerful personal and professional catalyst. Participants reported a deepened sense of agency, motivation, and identity as educators. This empowerment emerged through transformative learning experiences that enhanced both their confidence and their commitment to their vocation.

### **Training as a Second Chance for Education and Self-Betterment**

For many participants, the training represented more than skill acquisition; it was a rare opportunity for formal education, personal validation, and professional renewal. This is especially significant given that most CDWs

come from underserved or remote areas with limited access to professional development. One participant reflected:

*"I am truly very happy... I really want to learn... because this is where we are now, this is our destiny."* (CDW 2, 31 years old, 9 years in service)

This reflects the essence of transformative adult learning, where learners engage in experiences that change their perspectives, values, and behavior. According to Illeris (2018), transformative learning involves significant shifts in identity and worldviews, particularly when learning resonates with the learner's life context and is emotionally meaningful. The CDWs' excitement and renewed commitment highlight how relevant, context-based training can promote both cognitive and affective change.

The accessibility and timing of the program also supported their sense of empowerment. Participants felt seen and supported in ways they had not experienced before in their roles as frontline educators, a factor which Brookfield (2017) underscores as critical in adult learning environments that aim to be empowering.

### **Inclusivity and Respect for Child Diversity**

Another profound change reported by the participants was the shift in how they viewed children's individual differences, particularly those with special needs. The training emphasized inclusive and developmentally appropriate practices, which challenged previous beliefs and inspired a more compassionate approach to teaching:

*"Inclusive education... is really a big help... I realized I shouldn't treat children with special needs any differently."* (CDW 1, 31years old, 6 years in service)

This perspective aligns with Florian's (2015) view that inclusive pedagogy begins with the belief that all children are teachable. Moving away from labeling and exclusion is key to equity in education and often emerges from well-designed professional development (Nilholm, 2021).

Participants began to show a deeper understanding of children's diverse needs and behaviors, signaling a more humanizing and inclusive approach to teaching. As Sutherland and Yang (2020) note, empowerment in inclusive practice arises when educators gain both the competence and confidence to create spaces where all learners can thrive.

In this theme, empowerment was fueled by meaningful learning, practical application, and personal transformation. Participants gained knowledge, but more importantly, redefined themselves as capable and valued professionals. Their empowerment was rooted in growing confidence, inclusive values, and the affirmation that their work mattered, both to children and the larger educational system.

This transformation mirrors Moustakas' (1994) synthesis of meanings and essences, where lived experience is reinterpreted through reflection. For the CDWs, the training was not only informative but deeply transformational, reshaping how they viewed themselves, their learners, and their mission.

### **Growth in Confidence and Motivation to Teach**

Participants shared that one of the most immediate effects of the training was increased confidence in their capacity to manage classrooms and address children's needs. They expressed a stronger sense of control over their teaching responsibilities:

*"I'm much more confident now... I already know what needs to be done."* (CDW 4, 34 years old, 14 years in service)

This aligns with contemporary research showing that teacher empowerment programs significantly enhance professional self-efficacy, leading to greater motivation, emotional resilience, and persistence in practice (García-Martínez et al., 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). Empowered educators tend to be more proactive, more adaptive to student needs, and more fulfilled in their roles.

Additionally, the participants began to see themselves as educators with potential, not just as caretakers, but as capable facilitators of learning. This internal redefinition contributed to a stronger commitment to their work, suggesting empowerment at both the behavioral and identity levels.

The empowerment experienced by the CDWs was rooted in the training's thoughtful and context-specific design. Learning was not simply delivered; it was scaffolded through modules that reflected the realities of barangay-based early childhood centers. The mentorship provided by the university faculty gave participants sustained and affirming feedback, while their growing confidence was further reinforced by the consistent encouragement of peers and trainers. Unlike previous short-term seminars, this program's multi-modal delivery allowed CDWs to engage with the material in ways that suited their learning pace and style. These layered supports positioned learning not as compliance, but as transformation.

### **Enhanced Professional Identity and Purpose**

Following their participation in the Empowering Child Development Workers Program, participants reported a significant transformation in how they viewed themselves as educators. Their narratives indicated a deeper sense of identity, commitment, and fulfillment in their professional roles. This transformation was grounded not only in knowledge and skills gained but in how they perceived their value and impact in the lives of children and communities.

### **Recognition of Role Transformation**

Before the training, many participants regarded themselves as caregivers or informal teachers with minimal authority or influence. After completing the program, however, they began to see themselves as legitimate early childhood educators with the capacity to lead learning and advocate for children. One participant described this shift clearly:

*"I've become a more effective CDW... I realized I can actually be more."* (CDW 1, 31years old, 6 years

in service)

This change reflects a strengthened professional identity, which Beauchamp and Thomas (2017) define as an evolving construct influenced by experience, reflection, and recognition. For the CDWs, the training offered not only technical guidance but also the social and emotional affirmation needed to develop a more empowered sense of self.

When individuals internalize new roles and see themselves as competent professionals, it fosters intrinsic motivation and greater persistence in the face of challenges (Zhang & Zhu, 2021). This self-perception shift was reinforced by the visible outcomes of their teaching, more engaged children, positive feedback from parents, and improved classroom dynamics.

### Shift to Responsive and Engaging Teaching Practices

An important manifestation of professional identity was the way participants began modifying their teaching styles. They described a move away from passive or rote methods toward responsive, child-centered approaches. One participant explained:

*"There have been many changes in the relationship between me, the children and their parents... there's definitely a new approach."* (CDW 3, 45 years old, 10 years in service)

This shift aligns with constructivist principles in early childhood education, where learning is seen as an active process shaped by social interaction and environmental engagement (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). By implementing play-based and inclusive strategies, participants began fostering more meaningful connections with their learners.

Professional identity, in this context, was not only about how CDWs viewed themselves, but how they enacted those beliefs in daily practice. According to Kelchtermans (2017), such identity is "lived out" in teaching and constantly shaped by emotional and contextual experiences.

The CDWs' responsiveness to learners' needs illustrates their emerging identity as reflective practitioners.

### Stronger Personal Commitment and Professional Purpose

A recurring motif across participants' narratives was the deep emotional attachment they had developed toward their work. Some had initially entered the profession by accident or necessity but came to view it as a personal calling. One participant shared:

*"I agreed to take over... and over time, I genuinely fell in love with daycare."* (CDW 2, 31 years old, 9 years in service)

Others described how they missed their students during breaks or found it difficult to disengage, even during illness or personal challenges:

*"I can't stay still... I look for the daycare even during vacation."* (CDW 2, 31 years old, 9 years in service)

This theme highlights the internal shift participants underwent, from hesitant or accidental educators to empowered professionals with a renewed sense of purpose. Reflective learning, responsive teaching, and emotional investment reshaped their identity as CDWs. For many, the training deepened their sense of mission, moving them from compliance to committed service. This echoes Day and Gu's (2019) view of teaching as a vocation tied to moral purpose. As Miller et al. (2022) note, such clarity supports emotional well-being, resilience, and satisfaction, especially in under-resourced contexts.

This identity shift was made possible by several structural factors. Being called "educators" by BukSU mentors offered symbolic validation. Collaborative sessions encouraged reflection and goal-setting, while tasks like lesson planning and peer feedback-built intentionality and professionalism. These structured experiences helped CDWs move beyond informal caregiving, embracing their roles as competent, reflective early childhood practitioners.

## Empowered Practice and Advocacy

The final theme captures how participants translated their newfound knowledge and confidence into concrete action within and beyond the classroom. The Empowering Child Development Workers Program enabled participants not only to grow personally and professionally, but to advocate for children, engage with families, and embody a more compassionate, holistic approach to education. Empowerment, in this context, was not abstract, it manifested in day-to-day practice and leadership.

### Holistic and Confident Classroom Management

Participants reported that the training significantly improved their ability to manage diverse learners, including children with special needs and behavioral challenges. One participant expressed pride in being able to care for a large, varied group of young learners:

*“I can truly say that I am empowered as a CDW because I was able to handle 30–40 children with care, love, and also knowledge.”* (CDW 3, 45 years old, 10 years in service)

This reflects what Albrecht and Miller (2020) describe as practical teacher empowerment, a state in which educators feel capable of making instructional decisions, adapting to learner needs, and enacting their pedagogical beliefs. The CDWs no longer viewed themselves as passive implementers of programs, but as active shapers of classroom dynamics.

Their empowerment also manifested through inclusive practice: rather than separating or avoiding children with additional needs, participants reported intentionally engaging and supporting them. This aligns with inclusive pedagogy, which centers on “teaching all learners” rather than only those perceived as typical (Florian, 2015).

## Increased Self-Efficacy and Public Confidence

Beyond technical skills, CDWs described newfound confidence in being observed by others, particularly parents, colleagues, and even school administrators. What once felt intimidating became an opportunity to model good practice. As one CDW shared:

*“Before, I used to get scared when a parent would observe the class... but now, not anymore.”* (CDW 2, 31 years old, 9 years in service)

This is supported by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2019), who found that teacher self-efficacy is closely linked to emotional well-being and job satisfaction. Teachers who believe in their capabilities are more likely to engage in reflective practice and remain committed to their work, even under pressure. Increased confidence also enhances teachers’ ability to advocate for their pedagogical choices and communicate effectively with families.

### Emotional Maturity and Value-Based Teaching

One of the most deeply felt outcomes of the training was the cultivation of empathy, patience, and intentional discipline. Participants described how they learned to listen more carefully to children, refrain from harsh correction, and adopt a nurturing mindset:

*“My patience has grown, and I’ve become a better listener to my kids so I can understand how they’re really feeling.”* (CDW 4, 34 years old, 14 years in service)

*“We were taught not to get angry so the children won’t be afraid.”* (CDW 2, 31 years old, 9 years in service)

This final theme shows that empowerment was not a single turning point but a continuous process of reflection and action. CDWs expressed agency not only through instructional choices but also in how they engaged families and asserted their roles in the community. This mirrors Osgood’s (2019) concept of emotional professionalism – teaching

rooted in care, affirmation, and relationships. For many, empowerment meant understanding that how they teach is just as vital as what they teach.

It also marked a shift from behavior control to child advocacy. By adopting trauma-sensitive and culturally responsive strategies, CDWs embodied Zhang and Sun's (2020) idea of value-driven practice, where the teacher's moral stance shapes pedagogy. Empowerment, in this sense, became both a personal journey and a public duty.

In line with Moustakas' (1994) synthesis of structural and textural meaning, CDWs reconstructed their identity as educators who could decide, act, and advocate. Their confidence translated into tangible changes, in classrooms, relationships, and community work.

These outcomes were enabled by sustained mentorship, institutional support from Bukidnon State University, and peer collaboration. Localized case studies helped bridge theory and practice. Together, these elements transformed passive learning into active leadership, allowing CDWs to emerge as empowered educators and advocates for early childhood development.

## CONCLUSION

The lived experiences of Child Development Workers following the Empowering CDW Program reveal that true professional growth is not merely the result of acquiring skills, but of reclaiming one's worth, voice, and identity within a system that has long overlooked their contributions. As captured through Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology, empowerment was not a linear outcome but a layered awakening, of purpose, agency, and care. The training served as both mirror and map: it helped participants confront limitations and offered a path toward becoming reflective, intentional, and inclusive educators. What emerged was not just instructional improvement, but a deeply human transformation marked by confidence, compassion, and advocacy. These findings underscore the need for policy reforms that formally recognize the role of

CDWs as professional educators and invest in sustained, mentored, and contextually grounded training. Institutional support, trauma-informed strategies, and culturally responsive pedagogy must be integrated into future programs to empower CDWs as agents of change, capable not only of transforming early learning environments but also of strengthening the broader fabric of community-based education. Future studies may explore the long-term impact of such training programs on learner outcomes, the role of local government support in sustaining CDW empowerment, and comparative analyses of capacity-building models across different geographic or cultural contexts. Additionally, research into the emotional labor and resilience of CDWs may further illuminate how empowerment unfolds in high-stakes, resource-constrained environments.

## REFERENCES

- Albrecht, K., & Miller, L. (2020). *Empowered educators: Shaping the profession that shapes our future*. Gryphon House.
- AlHussaini, M. H., Amanat, I., & Munawar, N. (2024). Impact of professional development programs on early childhood teachers' well-being and classroom practices. *Journal of Early Childhood Care and Education*, 8(1). 76–93. <https://doi.org/10.30971/jecce.v8i1.1982>
- Beauchamp, C., & Thomas, L. (2017). Understanding teacher identity: An overview of issues in the literature and implications for teacher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 47(3), 345–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2016.1136954>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Cadosales, M. N. Q., Cabanilla, A. J. B., & Beltran,

- N. Y. (2020). Kakugi Ko, Kalambuan Mo (KKK Mo) as an extension program for daycare workers: An impact study. *Recoletos Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 8(2), 107–119.
- Day, C., & Gu, Q. (2019). *Teacher resilience: Managing stress and fostering motivation in challenging contexts*. Routledge.
- Education Commission (EDCOM) 2. (2024, March 6). *Upskilling, training opportunities necessary to professionalize CDWs EDCOM 2*. <https://edcom2.gov.ph/upskilling-training-opportunities-necessary-to-professionalize-cdws/>
- Escarlos, G. S., Bermillo, J. E., Magday, E. R. J., & Salon, M. V. S. (2019). An impact study on mentoring barangay day care workers extension program of the College of Education. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 8(11), 1891–1897.
- Florian, L. (2015). Inclusive pedagogy: A transformative approach to individual differences but can it help reduce educational inequalities? *Scottish Educational Review*, 47(1), 5–14.
- García-Martínez, I., Fernández-Camínero, G., & Álvarez-Castillo, J. L. (2021). Teacher empowerment: School leadership, self-efficacy, and innovative practice. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 36, 75–93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-020-00465-6>
- Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 381–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/135406002100000512>
- Illeris, K. (2018). *Contemporary theories of learning: Learning theorists in their own words* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2017). Professional identity as a teacher: A review of research. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 365–388). SAGE.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Miller, R. M., Ramirez, E., & Murdock, J. (2022). Teacher identity, well-being, and the moral purpose of teaching: A narrative review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 116, 103793. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103793>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Nilholm, C. (2021). Research about inclusive education in 2020 – How can we improve our theories in inclusive education? *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(2), 320–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1754547>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2017). *Starting strong V: Transitions from early childhood education and care to primary education*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264276253-en>
- Osgood, J. (2019). *Narratives from the nursery: Negotiating professional identities in early childhood*. Routledge.
- Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2019). Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 79, 30–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.12.006>
- Sutherland, K. S., & Yang, N. Y. (2020). Teacher perspectives of professional development for inclusive education: A systematic review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 24(6), 675–699. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1482012>
- UNICEF Philippines. (2023, October 23). *Investing in day care workers is an investment in the future—UNICEF*. <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/press-releases/investing-day-care-workers-investment->

future-unicef

- Vandenbroeck, M., Lenaerts, K., & Beblavý, M. (2018). *Benefits of early childhood education and care and the conditions for obtaining them*. European Expert Network on Economics of Education (EENEE) Analytical Report No. 32. European Commission.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Zhang, Q., & Sun, J. (2020). Value-driven teaching in early childhood education: A case study of reflective practitioners. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 52, 223–240. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-020-00262-5>
- Zhang, Q., & Zhu, W. (2021). Teacher professional identity and teaching motivation: A self-determination theory perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 691140. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.691140>