

## CHAPTER 28

# Combating Disproportionality and Disparity with Training and Professional Development

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### OVERVIEW

This chapter provides examples of how professional development and training programs are supporting initiatives to address disproportionality and disparity in service delivery and outcomes. Delineating and articulating cultural competencies, attempting to infuse cultural competence into all training, training on content specific to disproportionality, and evaluating the effectiveness of these training activities are a few current approaches described in the chapter. Strategic use of professional development and training activities as important components of a comprehensive approach to addressing the systemic problem of disproportionality is emphasized throughout. Conceptual models to promote an individual's development of cultural competence and support effective application of newly learned skills are described. Practitioners are encouraged to differentiate training from nontraining issues, accurately assess learning and development needs, implement appropriate training and development strategies that support transfer of learning, and evaluate progress to more effectively address the disproportionality challenge.

### AUTHORS' STATEMENT

Dr. Barbee became interested in the issue of racial disproportionality in child welfare because of the startling statistics about disproportionality and disparities not only in Kentucky, but throughout the United States. Her understanding of these issues resulted in further research, development of training, and changes in practice to achieve better outcomes for children and families. Dr. Curry holds a firm belief in his ethical obligation as a child welfare professional development practitioner to combat disparity and promote an increased understanding of and appreciation for human diversity. He would like to see professional development and training activities used effectively to help reach these goals.

The National Staff Development and Training Association (NSDTA) Code of Ethics for Training and Development Professionals in Human Services emphasizes the importance of promoting worker competence in understanding the uniqueness of individuals within their environments. The Code states that professionals should incorporate strategies and/or content to facilitate cultural competence in all training (NSDTA & American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], 2003). In conjunction with the preponderance of evidence regarding the disparity of service outcomes by race throughout the decisionmaking process within many child welfare systems, an ethical responsibility exists for training and development professionals to take a leadership role in reducing disparity. This chapter will focus on the strategic use of training and development activities to help avoid disparity in service delivery and outcomes. A brief review of current training efforts will be followed by a description of two models that provide guidance for the strategic use of training and development interventions in combating the disproportionality/disparity problem.

### Current Approaches

There are several strategies involving education, training, and development activities commonly engaged in child welfare training systems throughout the United States including (1) attempting to infuse cultural content and methods into all training, (2) using evaluation as an intervention to promote cultural infusion into training, (3) delineating and articulating competencies specific to cultural competence, and (4) training on content specific to cultural diversity/competence, antiracism, or other areas relevant to disproportionality training.

#### *Infusion of Cultural Content into All Training*

Congruent with NSDTA standards, many statewide training systems have highlighted the importance of cultural competence and have attempted to integrate

cultural content into all training. These efforts typically involve communicating the importance of cultural competence to all involved in planning, developing, implementing, evaluating, and receiving training. Standardized curricula are systematically reviewed to ensure inclusion of cultural diversity content and to increase cultural awareness. However, participant responses on evaluations frequently question its relevance. Examples of responses include, "does not apply to this content area" for behavior management training, child development and abuse, or legal issues in child welfare (Leake, Berdie, Curry, Parry, Rainey, & Morales, 2005; Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, 1994). Until learners are aware of how culture impacts these areas, they cannot adequately assess these training attempts.

Several statewide child welfare training systems have found that the majority of supervisors and administrators perceive some increased cultural competence of their workers as a result of cultural content infusion into ongoing training. However, only minimal gains in cultural competence have been observed by 25% to 37% of supervisors or administrators. A relatively small percentage (9%–13%) observe a substantial amount of increased cultural knowledge or skill in their workers. Part of the reason that the cultural infusion approach has not been more successful may be that many trainers are not sufficiently prepared to incorporate culturally relevant content into their training. Evaluation results indicate that a significant number of trainers (20%–24%) do not perceive that they are sufficiently prepared to incorporate cultural content into their training (Leake et al., 2005; Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, 1994).

Some states have responded to this need by requiring trainer training in the culture and diversity area (e.g., Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, 1994). The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program's Diversity Taskforce developed a handbook to assist trainers to incorporate issues of human diversity into curriculum development and training presentation. The trainer's handbook

includes tools to promote an inclusive training environment, to clarify levels of integration of ethnic content and self-assessment tools, etc. (Pennsylvania Child Welfare Competency-Based Training and Certification Program, 2001).

Infusion of cultural content as a strategy to combat disproportionality merits inclusion as part of a comprehensive plan; however, implementation could be improved and bolstered by additional training and nontraining interventions. Since race appears to be an influential factor throughout the child welfare decisionmaking process (Gryzlak, Wells, & Johnson, 2005), attempts to expand beyond inclusion of cultural issues and promoting cultural competence—to infusing information specifically pertaining to disproportionality and disparity—should be considered.

### **An Example of Measuring Readiness for Cultural Content**

In Kentucky, the Louisville Child Welfare Training Evaluation Model is used to guide evaluation efforts. One aspect of the model acknowledges that child welfare employees who attend training come to the training with personal and educational backgrounds, attitudes, and personality traits that can affect the willingness and ability to learn and transfer practices on the job (Antle, Barbee, & van Zyl, 2008). In the area of cultural competence, child welfare training participants will come with varying levels of prejudice and bias regarding race, poverty, family configuration, and parenting that will affect both learning and practice. Past research has found an impact of both learning readiness and personality traits such as conscientiousness on participant learning and transfer (e.g., van Zyl, Antle, & Barbee, 2010). The evaluation team has found the usefulness of measuring racial attitudes, poverty attitudes, family configuration, and parenting attitudes to assess the range of attitudes workers bring and the impact of such attitudes on learning, transfer, and actual practice in the field with clients—particularly those that are black, Hispanic, extremely poor, and/or single parents

struggling with disciplining their children. Findings not only give feedback to trainers about what should be included in training regarding difference in families being served in the child welfare system, but also have implications for hiring. Attitudes are difficult to change, thus choosing the most appropriate staff to work with vulnerable families and children is an important step in the overall workforce strategy of an agency.

### **Evaluation as an Intervention**

It is important for child welfare programs to have clear goals regarding the types of problems that can be solved with training and development solutions. Unrealistic expectations of what training and development programs can accomplish can divert resources in unproductive directions. Training is sometimes used as a “band aid” when more comprehensive strategies are indicated, or mistakenly used as the solution to the disproportionality and disparity problem rather than a component of a comprehensive evidence-based initiative (e.g., using the Disproportionality Diagnostic Tool; APHSA & National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators, 2008). Planning a training evaluation forces an agency to focus on the specific targeted knowledge, skills, and values and often clarifies when training should be the solution or when resources are better spent on other strategies. Evaluating training helps clarify the purpose and goals for training, and further specifies what knowledge, skills, and values must be addressed in the curriculum in order to be evaluated (Curry, Johnson, & Mathias, 2007).

Several statewide training systems (e.g., Ohio and Pennsylvania) evaluate the infusion of cultural concepts into all training, as an intervention in itself.

### **An Example of Evaluation as an Intervention**

California’s child welfare training system attempts to directly impact disproportionality and disparity

using training evaluation as an intervention (Johnson, Zeitler, & Mathias, 2007). Although the impact of this initiative has yet to be assessed in the comprehensive manner that is suggested, a brief summary of this evaluation/intervention framework could be helpful.

The framework for evaluation, developed by the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) and adapted from the American Humane Association, suggests building a "chain of evidence" for training program effectiveness by establishing a linkage between training and desired outcomes for the participant, agency, and the client in such a way that a reasonable person would obviously agree that training had a role in producing the outcome (Johnson et al., 2007; Parry, Berdie, & Johnson, 2004; Parry & Johnson, 2005). The chain of evidence is established through the use of seven levels of evaluation:

1. Record of who comes to training
2. Course evaluation
3. Trainee satisfaction and opinion
4. Knowledge acquisition
5. Skill acquisition
6. Transfer of learning
7. Outcomes related to disproportionality and disparity

While there are many variables (training and nontraining) that can influence outcomes pertaining to disproportionality and disparity, designing training interventions and assessing at each level can provide evidence of training's impact and/or suggest areas (levels) where improvement is needed. For example, in order to make systemwide change, administrators must monitor the extent to which those who need training in this area receive the appropriate training in a timely manner (Level 1). Individuals who are uncomfortable with value-laden training may attempt to avoid attending if they have the opportunity to opt out. This could possibly lessen the potential impact of training as an intervention. When assessing the extent of transfer of

learning (Level 6), it may be found that there is significant knowledge gain and skill acquisition (Levels 4 & 5) but little application on the job. It has been estimated that as little as 10% to 13% of learning is typically used on the job without specific interventions to promote transfer of learning (Baldwin, Ford, 1988; Clark, 1986; Georgenson, 1982; G. 1995; Rackham, 1979; Wehrenberg, 1988). In this case, providing more training may not be the appropriate intervention but rather an emphasis on promoting application to the job (e.g., coaching, application planning, etc.). This type of comprehensive evaluation approach can determine which "link in the chain" to focus on and suggest effective intervention strategies.

### *Delineating and Articulating Cultural Competencies*

A substantial amount of progress has been achieved in many child welfare training systems in articulating competencies necessary to successfully perform as a child welfare practitioner; in clarifying training needs, methods, and outcomes; and in guiding other human resource activities such as personnel recruiting, selection, and performance evaluation.

### **An Example of Delineating and Articulating Cultural Competencies**

The Ohio Child Welfare Training Program ([www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com), 1994) provides a number of knowledge, understanding, and skill competencies that have been replicated or adapted for use by many statewide training systems. For example, a core competency pertaining to the ability to approach and relate to families in a respectful and competent manner "can recognize one's own areas of potential bias and knows how to prevent these from negatively influencing one's judgment and relationships with clients and coworkers."

Competencies have also been developed in other areas specific to key decision points where disproportionality/disparity is typically found (e.g.,

length of time in out-of-home care). A competency pertaining to the ability to conduct foster and adoption services in a culturally responsive manner would, for example, "understand how agency policies and practices may present obstacles to recruiting minority families, and knows strategies to identify, engage, and assess prospective families within their cultural context."

It is important to note that training systems have also focused on competencies for trainers pertaining to cultural competence. A trainer competency from the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program relevant to the ability to include culturally important information in training might be: "The trainer understands why the development of cultural competence is a lifelong process and knows the stages in its development."

The Ohio Child Welfare Training Program provides a four-day training based upon these trainer competencies. All approved trainers are required to participate in the training within one year of employment.

### *Training on Content Directly Addressing Disproportionality and Disparity*

Accurate individual and organizational needs assessment may suggest training on specific content or competency areas. In response, statewide systems have developed training curricula promoting cultural awareness and the development of specific cultural competencies. For example, the Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program offers a variety of training curricula including:

- Engaging Latino Families
- Parenting Styles: A Cross-Cultural Perspective
- Hair and Skin Care for African American and Biracial Children
- Recruitment of Minority Adoptive Families

The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program also provides training in other key areas that

pertain to disproportionality/disparity problems such as kinship care. This curriculum also introduces a 10-step model for transfer of learning to increase the likelihood of workers incorporating their learning into practice (Jhirad-Reich, 2006).

Several localities and states such as Louisville, Kentucky, and Texas (where legislation has mandated efforts to address disproportionality) make the assumption that cultural competence training will affect attitudes and biases pertaining to families of color and will in turn affect decisionmaking at various points in the child welfare system that affect disproportionality (Johnson, Antle, & Barbee, 2009). Thus, these localities conducted *Undoing Racism* training by the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond as a part of an overall strategy to combat disproportionality and disparity in child welfare. *Undoing racism/community organizing* workshops do not simply focus on the symptoms of racism but attempt to understand what it is, where it comes from, how it functions, why it persists, and how it can be undone (James, Green, Rodriguez, & Fong, 2008; Johnson et al., 2009). Over a four-year period of time Louisville has trained close to 1,000 child welfare professionals and others in the larger child welfare system (i.e., teachers, judges, police officers, counselors) and Texas has trained more than 2,000 child welfare workers. These trainings were conducted as part of an overall strategy that changed hiring, policy, and practices around key decisionmaking points.

The Louisville, Kentucky, training evaluation of *Undoing Racism* (UR) workshops across two cohorts ( $N = 462$  and  $150$ ), evaluators measured participant reactions and gains in learning. They utilized the CoBRAS—Color Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000) to measure shifts in awareness of racism in terms of racial privilege, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues from before to after UR training. In both studies they found high participant satisfaction despite the charged content of the training, increased learning, and a significant shift in awareness (Barbee, Henry, & Johnson, 2010; Johnson et al., 2009). And

in a follow-up study with 234 UR participants they found that 80%–90% of participants transferred learning by attempting to or actually bringing about changes in employee selection procedures, policy, and practices in their organizations (Barbee et al., 2010). And while positive changes in disproportionality statistics in both Kentucky and Texas cannot directly be tied to the training intervention aspect of the overall approach to disproportionality and disparity reduction, both agencies lowered the percentage of African American children relegated to out-of-home care and enhanced the percentages of those returned to family or successfully adopted. This does imply that when a dose of antiracism training is delivered to large numbers of professionals in the child welfare system and included in the overall intervention, a sort of tipping point is achieved and positive outcomes result (Barbee et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2009; Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, 2010). More research is needed to determine the effectiveness of this and other training and instruments in assessing cultural competency in child welfare.

There is also evidence in higher education settings that cultural competence/antiracism education/coursework promotes increased awareness of racism and intercultural tolerance (Kernahan & Davis, 2007; Probst, 2003). Miller and Ward (2008) describe changes in awareness and understanding, practice and policy implementation, perceived organizational culture, and spread and sustainability of action planning when training is used as a part of a more comprehensive initiative. However, in general, there is not yet a large amount of research supporting the effectiveness of cultural competency or antiracism training in human service areas such as child welfare, and little support indicating that training alone can directly impact the disproportionality/disparity problem (Hill, 2006). This paucity of empirical support for cultural competence and antiracism training as a simple strategy for addressing the disproportionality/disparity problem is probably less indicative of the lack of importance of

training than it is confirmation of the complexity of the problem; training may well still be part of the solution. Leaders in the field agree that promoting cultural competence is essential to effective child welfare practice and combating the disproportionality/disparity problem (Johnson et al., 2009).

## Levels of Competence Model

The **levels of competence** model can be a useful framework for conceptualizing much of what is known about the progression of learning process from novice to expert in the field (Curry, 2001). The model is also consistent with how many view cultural competence as an evolving process that involves both understanding as well as self-awareness and self-reflection (Webb & Sergison, 2003). This involves competence and **meta-competence** (the ability to reflect upon, monitor, and guide one's practice). Progression through the levels involves varying rates of time, as well as individual and program activity, and there are particular characteristics evident at each level. The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program has adapted the model and refers to the levels as the Human Diversity Learning Continuum (Pennsylvania Child Welfare Competency-Based Training and Certification Program, 2001).

### 1. Unconscious Incompetence (awareness)

This stage is characterized by a worker who doesn't know what he or she doesn't know. The worker does not perform adequately in a competency area. In addition, the worker is not aware of his/her incompetence. This may be typical of newly hired workers who do not have an adequate understanding of the scope of the job. This lack of awareness may also describe experienced workers who function well in many areas but are not culturally competent. These workers may ineffectively impose their "tried and true" work strategies, which have worked with "mainstream" clients, to clients of a different cultural background. They may also attribute lack of client progress to external factors such as client or organizational resistance. Workers

at this level may not recognize the importance of increasing their cultural competence since they do not recognize their lack of competence.

## 2. Conscious Incompetence (recognition)

This level characterizes workers who would still not be identified as competent in a specific cultural competency area but are aware of the need to increase competence. The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program refers to this as the "recognition" stage on the Human Diversity Learning Continuum. A gap exists between a worker's current level of cultural competence and the desired state. A gap may occur for a variety of reasons including a desire to be updated on the most recent research pertaining to the disproportionality/disparity problem and promising intervention strategies or a need for refresher training.

## 3. Conscious Competence (introduction of new skills)

Workers at this level may be described as having "emerging competence" in a cultural competency area. A worker in this stage has a beginning knowledge and skill to perform a task, but the performance doesn't happen "automatically." The worker may have to be reminded or cued by the supervisor or more culturally competent colleague to utilize the knowledge and/or skill already stored in long-term memory. Also, whenever the worker performs the skill, it may not be fluid. The worker may have to think about it while performing. A worker may be aware of what not to do, but may be less comfortable with what to do in newly practiced cultural contexts.

## 4. Unconscious Competence (reinforcement and extension of skills)

This phase is characterized by a worker who, for the most part, has sufficient mastery of a competency area. In this stage, a competency is learned to a level where it can be performed relatively automatically. Steps to successful performance in a cultural competency area are consolidated and now appear as a fluid, effortless activity. The worker uses little active,

short-term memory while conducting the skill. A comfort level is achieved and one no longer has to think about the skill while performing. When learned to the level of automaticity, little active memory needs to be directed to the skill performance. Short-term memory is freed up and the worker can consciously focus on other activities such as fully attending to the client and understanding the subtleties of interaction while simultaneously self-monitoring his or her performance (Curry, 2001).

## 5. Conscious Unconscious Competence (high integration with ability to teach others)

This fifth stage is characterized by workers who can not only perform at a proficient level, but are also able to conceptualize and articulate what it is that they do so well. These workers may be described as "reflective practitioners" who can also communicate effective practice principles, strategies, and techniques to others.

## Ecological Transfer of Learning Intervention

To promote change through training and development activities, learners must put into action newly learned skills in social work practice. This final section briefly reviews a practical model for promoting application of learning. Curry, Caplan, and Knuppel (1991, 1994) describe a basic yet comprehensive approach to improving practice through training and development. Broad and Newstrom (1992) and Wentz (2002) also advocate a similar approach. They recognize that there are often factors that influence application of learning before, during, and after formal training. Some of these factors include the reputation of training; perceived relevance; individual motivation to attend; coworker, supervisor, and administrator support for training (before, during, and after); previous learning and application; opportunities to use after training, etc. (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005).

In addition to emphasizing key times (before, during, and after formal training), this approach

FIGURE 1

Diversity Training Transfer Matrix			
Person	Before	During	After
<b>Learner</b>	Identify relevant cases that can be included in human diversity training/discussion.	Think about how to recognize opportunities to use diversity learning on the job.	Meet with supervisor to help identify where/when to use new learning.
<b>Trainer</b>	Meet with social work personnel to identify relevant case scenarios for later use in diversity training.	Help learners make cognitive connections from in-class discussion to real work situations by helping them identify a case that applies to the new learning.	Send an e-mail reminding learners to work on their ethics action plans. Meet with learners for a follow-up "booster shot" session to discuss application of diversity learning.
<b>Supervisor</b>	Meet with worker to emphasize the importance of diversity and disproportionality training for the organization. Communicate the value of training and relate to social work values of fairness and equity.	Attend the diversity and disproportionality training with the entire team.	Lead a discussion during a team meeting regarding diversity or disproportionality training and how new ideas can be incorporated into daily practice.

emphasizes that key persons (e.g., worker, coworker, supervisor, trainer) can help or hinder transfer effectiveness. The transfer matrix can be used to identify potential factors in each cell that can help (**transfer driving forces**) or potentially hinder (**transfer restraining forces**) application. Utilization of a transfer matrix for transfer assessment and intervention can be applied to any training. This model helps the training and development professional identify the varied factors influencing transfer, suggesting that one attempts to increase transfer driving and decrease transfer restraining forces. This approach encourages one to expand the boundaries of the training environment to include before and after the workshop/class interventions. It also suggests multiple places to intervene. For example, a trainer could meet with a supervisor and worker prior to training to identify relevant cases to bring into the training. The training might also provide ongoing consultation and support after the training.

Miller and Ward (2008) provide examples of how the boundaries of the training-learning environment can be expanded by identifying key community leaders and other stakeholders to engage. They also describe the use of monthly conference calls to promote ongoing information sharing and coaching to facilitate a more comprehensive change strategy. Similarly, James et al. (2008) describe the importance of institutionalized mechanisms of reinforcement of training and developing a cultural change where leaders embrace principles of antiracism in everyday practices. The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program has implemented a 10-step transfer of learning approach consistent with this ecological transfer model that involves a transfer of learning specialist coordinating transfer activities such as clarifying the crucial roles and responsibilities of the learner, supervisor, and transfer-of-learning specialist and use of transfer of learning resources and assessment strategies (Jhirad-Reich, 2006).



Figure 1 provides a brief illustration of how the model could be used with diversity/disproportionality training to promote system change. Many additional before, during, and after transfer strategies can be included to help a social work training and development professional achieve training and transfer objectives. Practitioners are encouraged to think outside the "training room box" and use the transfer matrix to design diversity and/or disproportionality training interventions involving key persons before, during, and after formal training.

## Conclusion

As mentioned throughout, training and development must be considered important but only a component of a more comprehensive approach to addressing the disproportionality/disparity problem. Child welfare training and development systems have philosophically embraced the importance of promoting cultural competence and recognize that training has a major role in addressing disproportionality and disparity. Professionals have a responsibility to use training and development activities in a strategic manner. This involves differentiating training from nontraining problems; identifying the training and development recipients (e.g., individuals, teams, other organizations, community stakeholders, mandated reporters, etc.) and their learning and development needs; implementation issues (e.g., timing of training; enhancing trainer skill in promoting cultural competence; monitoring participant attendance); strategies to promote ongoing learning and transfer of learning; and ways to systematically evaluate training effectiveness. It must be recognized that child welfare and related systems (e.g., juvenile court, public schools, etc.) maintain their own organizational cultures that are more or less receptive to ongoing reflection and development pertaining to culturally sensitive policies and practices. These contexts must be taken into consideration when planning, implementing, and evaluating training and development activities to help produce successful

organizational/system changes to promote fair and effective child welfare service and outcomes.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How might a social worker consciously or unconsciously bias the court's decision to place a child in foster care? How might training reduce this bias?
2. What are some ways to differentiate training from nontraining issues relevant to disproportionality?
3. Using the transfer matrix (Figure 1), what other strategies might you include to promote cultural competence and/or combat the disproportionality problem?
4. The problem of disproportionality in service delivery and outcomes is present in other fields (e.g., education, juvenile justice, mental health). What can child welfare workers learn from training and development in these systems that may promote more effective training and development interventions within the child welfare field?

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