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Do Rural Child Welfare Professionals Perceive Themselves Culturally Competent?

Culture Competence Training

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COMMON GROUND

Do Rural Child Welfare Professionals Perceive Themselves Culturally Competent? Culture Competence Training

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Abstract: Cultural competence among child welfare professionals is imperative given the rapidly changing American demographics. Current inadequacy in the delivery of culturally responsive social services is due to inadequate cultural competence training for child welfare professionals. This research study investigated the extent to which cultural competence training based on constructivism influenced rural child welfare professionals perceived level of cultural competence. In three regions of a de-identified state, rural child welfare professionals (N = 44) completed a post survey that included the adapted California Brief Multicultural Scale (CBMCS) (Gamst et al. 2004). Using a correlational-descriptive design by surveying participants, the researchers discovered rural child welfare professionals in the de-identified state do perceive themselves as being culturally competent. The variable training quantity was a significant predictor of perceived cultural competence.

Keywords: Culture Competence, Child Welfare, Training, Cultural, Diversity, Children and Families, Child Welfare Professionals, Rural Child Welfare

Literature Review

Scholars have extended numerous definitions of culture (Straub et al. 2005). Although there is not a widely accepted definition of culture in scholarly literature, the construct of culture is considered a salient component of human existence. One of the many definitions for culture that applies to this research study, comes from Matsumoto (2006) who maintained that culture provides the framework for acceptable behavior and that cultural norms shape unacceptable behavior. Another definition of culture which shed some light on this research study is by Bardi and Schwartz (2003), who suggested that an individual's values and beliefs typically guide his or her behavior. Values and beliefs shape a person's interpretation of, and method of, addressing life issues, such as cultural diversity. People filter life issues through their values and belief systems (Bardi and Schwartz, 2003). Therefore, a person's culture can shape how one progresses through life. As a result of the various interpretation of culture, it is important for child welfare professionals (CWP) to understand what it means to be culturally competent. This can be done by studying cultural competency first.

Cultural competency requires acknowledging different cultures and addressing the needs that occur because of cultural diversity (Medrano et al., 2005). The children and families of the child welfare system are heavily dependent upon the child welfare agency as an organization to address all of their needs. Children and families of the child welfare system may have diverse needs, and the inability to have their needs met may result in poor outcomes. Providing culturally competent services may become necessary as a result of the influx of the immigrants (Balcazar & Willis, 2005). One way of viewing the appropriate method of cultural competence (CC) training to determine if a relationship exist between CC training and CC perceived level for rural CWP is a constructivist viewpoint.

Constructivists see knowledge as constructed by the learner, based on his or her prior learning experiences and through active participation in the current learning process. From the constructivist viewpoint, a group of learners might each have somewhat different learning outcomes. Constructivists see group-based learning as important, with key gains in learning coming from the give-and-take with other learners and the opportunity to reflect on learning and

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performance. For constructivists, a primary role of trainers is to create conditions conducive to collaborative learning (Winn, 1991). Peters (2000) contended constructivism is an approach to instructional design. It helps learners view knowledge as a product that develops in relation to broader social, cultural and historical factors, and has the potential to enhance self-directed learning. Moderate applications of constructivism have been useful in guiding trainers in instructional design. In thinking about the utility of constructivism for child welfare training related to CC, it is relevant to consider at what point in the training the CWP could make best use of it. FSW will probably find it more helpful when they have considerable job experience and are participating in continuing, in-service, or professional education, rather than when they are enrolled in pre-service training.

Other professions, such as counseling, have been exploring the concept of cultural competence for several decades, while social work (child welfare) has only recently developed explicit Standards for Culturally Competent Social Work Practice (NASW, 2001, NASW, 2010). In order to develop culturally competent rural CWP, the child welfare system may need to adopt a constructivist approach to training to ensure rural CWP's perceived level of CC is directly related to the CC training. CWP must be responsive to the cultural needs that arise from the unique cultural backgrounds of their clients. CWP must be encouraged to develop cultural knowledge by exploring their own ethnocentric ideas and by challenging their personal prejudices and assumptions (Sue, 2006). Finally, CC training is becoming a more frequent choice for rural CWP who would like to increase their ability to assist diverse children and families. The next chapter, outlines the methodology used in the study, including population, sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis.

Methodology

The research design used for this study is quantitative. The quantitative research design is non-experimental, descriptive, and correlational. It should also be noted that the underlying philosophical perspective of the research in this study is post-positivist, due to the self-assessed measures associated with the survey instrument.

Instrumentation

The research instrument included an informed consent form, purpose of study statement, instructions, and contact information. Participants were required to review this information and follow instructions accordingly before gaining access to the actual survey (Creswell, 2009). The electronic survey was generated using web-based software; participants were able to access the survey via their work e-mail address at any time. The study employed a survey that was comprised of four sections: an introduction section, a demographic section, a section with the adapted California Brief Multicultural Scale (CBMCS; Gamst et al., 2004) and a training approach (mode and quantity) section. The publisher of the CBMCS to use and adjust the tool to be more appropriate for the child welfare field granted permission, such as the term mental health professional was replaced with child welfare professional. Even though the CBMCS was designed and tested for mental health professionals, the questions provide measurements related to the perception of cultural competence level by child welfare professionals.

Research Question Results

Do rural child welfare professionals perceive themselves as being culturally competent as measured by the California Brief Multicultural Scale (CBMCS)?

Of the 44 participants, 90% ($n = 40$) responded to all 20 items of the CBMCS, which yielded the following mean score ($m = 2.83$, 70%). According to Gamst et al. (2004) and the CBMCS scoring guide, the CBMCS items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 =

Disagree, 3 = *Agree*, and 4 = *Strongly Agree*. Higher scores indicate higher competence. CBMCS yields one total score and four subscale scores from each factor. Approximately, the bottom one-half of the scores below the 50th percentile, are considered as lower, and the top one-half, at or above the 50th percentile, are considered as higher. Scores below the 50th percentile on any one of the subscales are symbolic of lower multicultural competence in that area, suggesting the need for training (Gamst el al., 2004).

Gamst et al. (2004) recommended, for research and publication reasons that involve statistical manipulations, the use of mean score for each subscale. The mean subscale scores were obtained by adding the responses to the items and dividing the sum by the number of items in the subscale. In other words, to obtain the mean scores, the mean of all 20 scores were calculated, the values range from 1 to 4. The mean of the total mean scores is 56.95/20 or 2.83 for the CBMCS. The value 56.95 is the total mean score of the 40 individual CBMCS total scores. There were several means involved; one was the mean of the 20 individual question scores (M = 56.95), and another was the mean of the 44 participant scores (M = 56.61). The mean score of the total mean score is noted as providing a common reference point across different research studies as well as comparison of subscale scores with one another (Gamst et al., 2004). Based on the mean scores of the subscales regarding knowledge (*m* = 2.67, 66%) and awareness (*m* = 2.86, 71%) it is assumed the majority of the participants did perceive themselves as being culturally competent as measured by the CBMCS. The Scale Statistics for the CBMCS and the subscales are in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Scale Statistics

Scale	*n*	*M*	*m*	*%*	*N of Items*
CBMC	40	56.95	2.83	70	20
Multicultural Knowledge Subscale	44	13.38	2.67	66	5
Awareness of Cultural Barriers Subscale	42	17.38	2.86	71	6
Sensitivity and Responsiveness to Consumer Subscale	44	9.38	3.12	78	3
Socio-Cultural Diversities Subscale	42	16.76	2.77	69	6

Discussion of Results

The state's Department of Child Services or other public child welfare organizations could make use of data to determine the level of perceived CC in relation to CC training. It is imperative for CWP to be properly trained in order to have the ability to serve children and families of diverse cultures (Boyle & Springer, 2001; Tapp, 2002; Wallace, 2000). Consequently, the child welfare system has to discover how to develop appropriately CWP to prepare them to work with culturally diverse children and families, due to non-implementation of effective CC training (Brown, 2004; Newell et al., 2010). Therefore, this study explored if there is a relationship between CC training approach, which includes the mode of training and the quantity of training that leads to rural CWP of The state's Department of Child Services becoming culturally competent (perceived level). This problem is in need of resolution, since this is unknown to the child welfare system as an industry (Strong et al., 2005; Sue, 2006).

Amodeo et al. (2009) mentioned the study by Milner et al. (2004) explored the Children and Family Service Review (CFSR) activity and its relationship to public child welfare training on the state level. One of the major challenges reported for states was in offering in-service training (e.g., cultural competence training). Milner et al. (2004) described as an issue that there were no standardized or core requirements for in-service courses. The authors also mentioned that ever-

changing conditions across regions such as caseload ratios created barriers to accessing training; as well as deficient time committed to training. This challenge could explain the results from this study with respect to it was reported 18.2% ($n = 8$) did not complete any cultural, multicultural, or diversity trainings during that fiscal year; 47.7% ($n = 21$) completed at least one course; 29.5% (n = 13) complete two courses; 2.3% (n = 1) completed three courses; and 2.3% (n = 1) completed more than six courses during the examined timeframe. Milner et al. (2004) also emphasized the benefits of evidence based learning outcomes (transfer of learning) to be proven on-the-job and not simply during the professional development experience. This major issue may explain this study's finding of participants' low level of perceived CC (M = 56.96). The authors concluded that training has the ability to be the catalyst with respect to assisting public child welfare organizations confronts the challenge of offering culturally responsive services. Nevertheless, this accomplishment may be contingent on how well the child welfare system is able to align its overall mission with what is being imparted during training for all levels within the system (Milner et al., 2004).

In light of the scarce research literature, CC challenges exist in child welfare practice. In child welfare practice, certain skills are required to work with people from different cultures. Although child welfare agencies across the nations are seeking to respond to the rising ethnic minorities, the lack of exploration in this area is contributing to the absence of cultural knowledge among CWP and is hindering child welfare agencies from providing appropriate services (Lawson, 2010). This adds clarification to the negative significant relationship discovered in calculating training quantity with the subscale, Multicultural Knowledge ($r_s = -.357$, $p = 0.017$, two tails). To explain further, the state's Department of Child Services has made systematic efforts to overcome current multi-cultural barriers. Those efforts included CC training and employing special skills workers and language interpreters (glossary on the Department of Children Service's website); which may support the thought, CWP were able to recognize they are not knowledgeable enough to serve diverse children and families according to the information imparted during their CC trainings and are in need of more CC training. This notion may also imply that they are aware of potential cultural barriers, which may in fact make them better able to serve diverse children and families. In general, the child welfare system's current practice is limited in its experience with multi-cultural issues that minorities experience (Carter, 2003; Grant, 2008). Nevertheless, the inability of any public organization to provide culturally relevant services prevents CWP from effectively providing culturally responsive services (Crosson, Deng, Brazeau, Boyd, and Soto-Greene; 2004). This adds clarification to the negative significant relationship discovered in calculating training quantity with the Socio-Cultural Subscale ($r_s = -.326$, $p = 0.017$, two tails), which may support the thought CWP were cognizant, they could be better equipped to serve diverse children and families according to the knowledge imparted during their CC trainings and are in need of more CC training.

Applying a constructivist viewpoint to CWP, CC training can also assist public child welfare as an entity to promote change with success. According to Altun and Büyükduman (2007), Fardanesh (2006), Fleck-Henderson (2002) and Hunt and Krantz (2010) benefits for learners trained utilizing a constructivist outlook included high accountability for outcomes because they were able to set individual aspirations within the framework of the curriculum objectives. Benefits also included, they could identify their learning needs and focus specifically on those needs, and they could achieve high individuality in learning. The researcher sees this individuality in learning as necessary for the complex topics addressed by CWP, such as CC.

As a result of this current study's findings, the researcher considers a CC training program with a constructivist stance, (a) which focuses on multiple, socially constructed truths, perspectives, and realities within a group setting; (b) often allowing for on-going CC training opportunities; (c) which is said to have a positive impact on CWP's perceived level of CC, will be beneficial in the process of rural CWP becoming equipped to offer culturally responsive services (Bussema, & Nemec, 2006; Carter, 2003; Hill, 2003).

Implications for Child Welfare Practice

Since, rural CWP in the state perceived themselves as being culturally competent per the mean scores of the assessment tool; and there was a negative statistical significance in CWP's perceived CC level and training quantity according to the mean score of the CBMCS and two of its subscales, findings of this research study may be useful. The findings may be beneficial for organizations and associations guiding the practice of human services, especially child welfare services. Organizations and associations can further analyze the perceived level of CC with the tool (CBMCS) and focus on promoting change within the child welfare industry through CC training efforts. The child welfare industry should continue to communicate actively with states about a cultural competence model based on constructivist principles and the assessment tool, CBMCS. Increasing communication about constructivism and CBMCS (assessment tool) can engage CWP in the process of change as pressure from federal government and national organizations still exist. In addition, leaders implementing change within the child welfare profession should acknowledge individual perceived cultural competence levels and provide CC training centered on constructivism in order to promote successful change initiatives related to cultural responsiveness (Al-Weher, 2004).

Researchers explained CWP development and services as implanted in procedures that are largely mono-cultural and oblivious to the necessities of culturally diverse children and families. Traditionally, training of CWP is based on culture diversity curricula, which fails to increase the participants' knowledge base, skill level, or change their attitudes. Boyle and Springer (2001) asserted that there is a pressing requisite for those that are responsible for the professional development to produce CWP fortified to offer applicable social services for the multiplicity within the diverse groups in America. This sense of urgency was prompted by the increasing amount of culturally diverse Americans, (Bhui, Warfa, Edonya, McKenzie, & Bhugra, 2007).

Holcomb-McCoy (2005) asserted that cultural competencies are vital to performance capabilities of CWP in a self-governing environment, which implies that required CC training is mandatory to manufacture cultural competencies in CWP. Professionally developing CWP with a skill set centered around cultural competencies means training CWP to embrace and sustain an advance skills level and knowledge depository (Mattaini, Lowery, & Meyer, 2002). The concern regarding CC in child welfare services will remain until more uniformity is reached within professions and across professions for assessment. Once there is more consistency in how child welfare providers are being assessed for cultural competence, then further research can determine success of strategy implementation.

In the near future, statistical analysis should be conducted on rural CWP with administration participation. With a higher response rate and with a more diverse sample, demographic variables could be reviewed for any relationships that exist with the CBMCS scores. This data could further add to the body of research that exists between demographic variables and CC training. Future studies should acknowledge the various limitations of gaining access to public CWP via email and attempt other mechanisms to contact members. Information from chapters 1 and 2 indicated other human services professions have developed and are developing cultural competency training programs and models. A subsequent research study comparing perceived CC levels among trained and non-trained CWP from various child welfare settings would assist national organizations in their discussion of ensuring a culturally responsive industry.

Conclusion

The child welfare profession, like other human services professions, is faced with pressures from federal and state laws to assure CC of CWP. This research described the forces driving the topic of CC training as a method to ensure culturally responsive organizations and individuals from a

constructivism stance, the variations in defining cultural competence, and a valid tool to measures perceived levels of CC for CWP.

Even though state and federal government regulates most public child welfare occupations, many professional federations, and specialty review boards are paving the path for more reliable methods to ensure the best outcomes for culturally responsive services for the children and families they serve. Similar to higher education, internal public child welfare leaders on the state level are defining the rules and regulations of child welfare practice. It would be advantageous for organizations developing policies and laws for cultural competence services to determine training requirements (approach and mode) that have proven to increase CWP's perceived level of CC. Determining CC training requirements could facilitate in implementing a new CC training philosophy with success.

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