



Umbrella Summary

Diversity Training

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is diversity training?

Diversity training refers to a “distinct set of instructional programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of participants to interact with diverse others” (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016, p. 1228). In the absence of a standard approach, there has been significant variation in the design and context of diversity training. The following characteristics have been identified as differing across trainings reported in the research literature (Bezrukova et al., 2016):

- ▶ **Content Focus:** Group-specific training focuses on learning about one or more specific groups (e.g., African Americans, females, persons with disabilities), whereas inclusive training deemphasizes group differences and focuses on promoting inclusiveness of all groups.
- ▶ **Duration:** Trainings can be as short as 30 minutes and as long as several years.
- ▶ **Objectives:** Awareness training aims to increase participants’ awareness of assumptions, values, and biases about both their own and other cultures, whereas skill-building training focuses on monitoring and managing behavior in response to cultural differences.
- ▶ **Instructional methods:** Trainings employ either a single instructional method (e.g., video or simulation) or multiple methods.
- ▶ **Approach:** Trainings can either stand alone or be integrated into more comprehensive diversity initiatives.
- ▶ **Attendance:** Trainings can be either mandatory or voluntary.

What is the value of diversity training?

Overall, diversity training leads to positive participant reactions and improvements in attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (Bezrukova et al., 2016). The effect is strongest for reactions, followed by smaller changes in knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes (Bezrukova et al., 2016). All outcomes are better when the training is longer and includes skill building, rather than focusing only on increasing awareness (Bezrukova et al., 2016). When training is integrated into more comprehensive diversity initiatives, there are greater changes in attitudes and behavior, though not in knowledge (Bezrukova et al., 2016). Though participants like voluntary training more, behavioral changes are greater for mandatory training; changes in knowledge and attitudes are the same for voluntary and mandatory training (Bezrukova et al., 2016). Participants also prefer the experience of a variety of instructional methods, but using multiple methods instead of one

method does not affect learning outcomes (Bezrukova et al., 2016). There are no differences in outcomes based on the content focus (group specific or inclusive), participants' age, or the racial or gender composition of the training group (Bezrukova et al., 2016). In short, research suggests that diversity training outcomes are maximized when the training is longer, includes skill building, is part of other efforts to improve diversity, and is mandatory. In addition, participants will like it more if it includes a variety of instructional methods, though that does not improve learning outcomes.

How does diversity training work?

The existing research is not yet sufficient to support meta-analysis of the mechanism(s) through which diversity training causes change. Though it has been established that there are no differences in outcomes for a) group-specific versus inclusive training and b) one versus multiple training delivery methods, there are many other approaches to examine, most of which are based on theories about prejudice reduction (see Paluck & Green, 2009 for a narrative review). For example, interventions based on the contact hypothesis reduce prejudice by inducing a common identity through intergroup contact and collaboration (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; 2008). Unfortunately, there is a lot of training that is not grounded in any theory, which means that much of the existing data are not able to provide insights about how and why training is or is not effective (Paluck & Green, 2009). Rigorous evaluation of additional approaches will shed more light on which approaches are more or less effective and, by extension, the potential processes through which change does or does not occur.

In addition, more research is needed to explore the role of pre-training individual differences in factors like demographics, personality, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation. Post-training results such as on-the-job behavior and other more applied outcomes should be examined to understand the extent of training transfer to the job.

Child welfare training programs, especially those conducted in partnership with universities, offer a valuable opportunity to a) develop training on the basis of established theories and evidence and b) conduct more rigorous applied research of this topic through experimental or quasi-experimental designs. Even without significant revamping of curriculum, child welfare training programs are probably well positioned to compare the effects of two of the more common training approaches in child welfare—developing cultural competence and developing cultural humility. Though the focus in child welfare tends to be more specific to working with families of diverse backgrounds, the overall training objectives are very similar to those of general diversity trainings. Depending on the status of current curricula, evaluations could be done within agency training programs or across training programs through interagency or interuniversity cooperation.

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Overall, diversity training leads to positive participant reactions and improvements in attitudes, knowledge, and behavior.

- ▶ The effect of training is strongest for reactions, followed by smaller changes in knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes.
- ▶ Diversity training outcomes are maximized when the training is longer, includes skill building, is part of other efforts to improve diversity, and is mandatory. In addition, participants will like it better if it includes a variety of instructional methods.
- ▶ Participants prefer the experience of a variety of instructional methods, but using multiple methods instead of one method does not affect learning outcomes.
- ▶ There are no differences in outcomes based on the content focus (group specific or inclusive), participants' age, or the racial or gender composition of the training group.
- ▶ There are many other approaches to examine, most of which are based on theories about prejudice reduction. Rigorous evaluation of additional approaches will shed more light on which ones are more or less effective and why.
- ▶ More research is needed to look at pre-training individual differences in training participants and at on-the-job outcomes.
- ▶ Child welfare training programs are well positioned to test theory-based diversity training.

References

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