

The Capacity Builder

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Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research
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Center Collaborators

Fabricio Balcazar, Ph.D.,
Center Director,
University of Illinois-Chicago

Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar,
Ph.D., Associate Director,
University of Illinois-Chicago

Tina Taylor-Ritzler, Ph.D.,
Project Director,
University of Illinois-Chicago

Celestine Willis, M.A.,
Training Coordinator,
University of Illinois-Chicago

Reginald J. Alston, Ph.D.,
University of Illinois Urbana-
Champaign

Glenn Fujiura, Ph.D.,
University of Illinois-Chicago

Carol Gill, Ph.D.,
University of Illinois-Chicago

Brigida Hernandez, Ph.D.,
DePaul University

Christopher B. Keys, Ph.D.,
DePaul University

Paul Leung, Ph.D.,
University of North Texas

Katherine McDonald, Ph.D.,
Portland State University

María E. Restrepo-Toro, M.S.,
CRSP,
Boston University

For more information, please contact:

Tina Taylor-Ritzler, Ph.D.
312-413-4149 (Phone)
312-413-1804 (Fax)
312-413-0453 (TDD)

Dear Colleagues,

We are pleased to share with you the third newsletter of the Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research.

Our Center, funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), aims to build the capacity of state vocational rehabilitation agencies (VR) and community based-organizations (CBOs like Centers for Independent Living and/or other agencies serving minorities with disabilities) to develop more culturally competent services. In addition, we are devoted to improving the capacity of researchers to include individuals with disabilities from underrepresented groups in their work. Our work involves a national network of collaborators who are conducting a variety of research, evaluation, and training projects to fulfill our mission.

In this issue we include short articles based on two of the Center's projects. In the first, Dr. Reginald Alston proposes instituting an outcome-oriented agenda for rehabilitation. In the second, Maria Restrepo-Toro and Deborah Delman summarize some of the experiences of our evaluation collaboration in Massachusetts. We also include information about our recent accomplishments and upcoming events. We invite you to read about our work and to visit our website where you can find additional information about our various projects and activities: <http://www.uic.edu/orgs/empower>.

Please feel free to contact us if you are interested in any of our research or training. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you.

Sincerely,

Fabricio E. Balcazar, Ph.D.
Director & Professor
Dept. of Disability & Human Development

Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Professor & Head
Dept. of Occupational Therapy

Recent Accomplishments

- Fabricio Balcazar was the Keynote Speaker at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education. His presentation entitled "A conceptual framework for understanding and promoting cultural competence" was part of the luncheon-award ceremony of the convention.
- Read more about our work:
 - Alston, R.J., Gayles, T., Rucker, R., & Hobson, M. (in press). The centrality of race in rehabilitation: Views of former clients who are African American. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*.
 - Garcia, E., Balcazar, F. & Taylor-Ritzler, T. (in press). Analysis of case managers' support of youth with disabilities transitioning from school to work. *Vocational Rehabilitation*.
 - McDonald, K., Keys, C. & Balcazar, F. (in press). Disability, race/ethnicity and gender: Themes of cultural oppression, acts of individual resistance. *American Journal of Community Psychology*.

Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Rehabilitation: Placing an Emphasis on Outcomes for Research and Policy

Reginald J. Alston, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
Principal Investigator, Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research

Who does not agree with the cry to reduce racial disparities in rehabilitation outcomes? If you raise your hand, it is akin to saying that you sanction injustice or mistreatment. There is not much to argue on the subject. Over the past few decades, scholars have shone a light on the success gap between persons of color and Whites in rehabilitation. You name it, be it access, acceptance, or placement, minorities fall short on the rehabilitation scale. Sure, doubters criticize weak research methodologies of researchers who suggest disparities, but find me one state rehabilitation administrator who does not have reduction of disparities as a priority for his or her agency. I have never encountered a commissioner or director who has said: "Disparities are not a problem for us in this state." The very existence of the Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research raises an interesting question. Why would the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) direct funds to study a phantom problem? Apparently, the people at NIDRR are believers.

Now that you are convinced that disparities are real and you agree to join the world of enlightenment, let us switch the focus. A lot of information exists in the literature about how to address the issue of racial disparities in rehabilitation. Yet, little is available to describe how administrators can measure if their agency is actually reducing disparities. Our orientation needs to shift to outcomes. In other words, "Who's doing well?" Clearly, there are scattered indicators that management information specialists on staff feed administrators and share with researchers which point to improvements, but a uniform or standard approach should be developed and implemented by the

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) for state offices around the country. Uniformity could lead to national analyses that identify high achievers at eradicating disparities. Thus, the policies and practices of achievers could be packaged and shipped to states with poorer performance records. Since one size does not fit all, state administrator would have the liberty to alter successful models to fit their agencies.

Adoption of a standard matrix to identify successes in disparity reduction is the challenge. It can begin with the development of a disparity index (DI). The DI could consist of indicators that measure minority client outcomes in a set of service parameters common to all state agencies. Based on the DI, a disparity reduction profile (DRP) of the agency could be formed. The DRP would provide RSA with a description of an agency's efforts and could take into account organizational structure, policy and planning, staffing patterns, and budgeting. Such an outcome oriented approach would move us beyond disjointed approaches across state agencies to a more systemic and concerted effort to impact racial disparities in rehabilitation.

The Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research is a logical place to assemble a roundtable of researchers, state agency administrators, and consumers to spearhead the development of the DI and to draft parameters of the DRP. Other disciplines have conceptualized similar matrixes and models, and it would behoove rehabilitation to refine our efforts at instituting disparity reduction approaches. Everyone is "doing something" to address disparities. Adoption of the DI and DRP could mean the incorporation of evidence-based practices and policies. Instead of everyone "doing something", let's identify and do what works.

Center for Capacity Building Upcoming Events

- Celestine Willis and Fabricio Balcazar will be starting a state-wide cultural competence (CC) training for the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), Illinois Department of Human Services, in April. The CC training workshops are part of DRS' efforts to improve outreach and services to minorities with disabilities throughout Illinois.
- Center collaborators are working on an edited volume, *Race, Culture and Disability: The State-of-the-Science* to be published next year.

Maria E. Restrepo-Toro¹, M.S., CPRP, and Deborah Delman²

¹Northeast Coordinator of the Evaluation Capacity Building Project based at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University and ² Executive Coordinator, The Transformation Center

During the last 12 months Center staff has been working with the Transformation Center in Massachusetts. The Transformation Center is a technical assistance center run by people in mental health and/or addictions recovery. It trains peers to work in the mental health system and service providers to understand the recovery process. In addition, it provides consultation to peer-run and provider-run organizations, as well as researchers and policy makers, to increase their effectiveness in supporting mental health recovery.

The Transformation Center invited four affiliated peer-run organizations to work with the Center for Capacity Building staff. These organizations included Northeast Independent Living Program's Peer Counseling Project, Consumers of Color Peer Networking Project, Jonathan Cole Mental Health Resource Center, and the Recovery Network-Boston. The four peer-run organizations have evolved out of the mutual support and civil rights movements driven by and for people with mental health conditions.

Our Collaboration

The participatory evaluation model used by center staff was particularly attractive to the Transformation Center because all stakeholders are included in the process of examining the impact of their programs on increasing consumers' participation in their communities and enhancing their full recovery. People with mental health conditions and psychiatric disabilities are often marginalized in society. Their ability and right to self determination has regularly been invalidated in public service systems, the media and the community at large. Longstanding inequities, shunning, and the condition itself too often result in poverty, homelessness and isolation.

The collaboration between the Center for Capacity Building and the Transformation Center began in January 2006 and has focused on assisting the Transformation Center in identifying outcome indicators and developing a measure to assess the involvement of program participants in their communities. Through this collaboration, 20 staff, representing all four programs, received training on how to develop a logic model and develop an evaluation plan.

During the training, each program developed its own logic model. The group started this process with the goals of learning how to:

- 1) ensure their effectiveness in service to peers and
- 2) quantify the programs' effectiveness for the benefit of state policy makers.

Consultation and Technical Assistance

After the training, representatives from each of the participating organizations had several meetings. The four programs focus on peer support; however, they approach it with fairly different services and philosophies. In the initial meetings, the group struggled to clarify what they could agree to measure, in part because each program offers different services. The breakthrough occurred when the participants identified the shared mission of supporting peers to integrate into the community. They reached consensus about measuring *community integration* because they felt that this was really the essence of their services. This insight led to clarity on how they all could evaluate the impact of their programs on the lives of the people they serve with a single survey.

In follow up meetings, conference calls and email communications the group was actively engaged in identifying the survey items. Once a full draft of the survey was developed, we translated it into Spanish and conducted focus groups with 19 consumers to identify their views about community integration and to get feedback on the measure. The focus group feedback was then incorporated



From Left to Right: Maria Restrepo-Toro, Deborah Delman and Ruthie Poole

into the survey. The group is now in the process of using the survey to collect information from peers so that they can start to assess the impact of the services on participants' level of community integration.

Feedback on the Collaboration

The thought of engaging in a program evaluation was very overwhelming but with the support of the evaluation team the process was very enjoyable for all. Members of the group who are participating in the evaluation provided the following feedback on the process:

Maria Restrepo-Toro shared: "My experience as the Northeast Coordinator was extremely positive. This is a very passionate group of people who love what they do. I really enjoyed listening to them and facilitating the entire evaluation process. I'm delighted to be part of the Center for Capacity Building team."

Other members of the evaluation team shared:

"The most helpful part of the evaluation process was the beauty to take the time to process all the information."

"It is great to have a survey that will really help us capture what we do and what we care about in our programs."

"The feedback from the focus groups was really helpful to shape the survey. The group had a wide range of experiences."

Members of the evaluation team were Deborah Delman, Ruthie Poole, Anne Whitman, Trina Oswald and Valeria Chambers (from the Transformation Center) and Maria E. Restrepo-Toro, Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar, and Tina Taylor-Ritzler (from the Center for Capacity Building). For a copy of the Community Integration Survey, please contact Deborah Delman or Ann Stillman at the Transformation Center at 617-442-4111.

University of Illinois
at Chicago

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Department of Disability and Human Development (MC 626)
College of Applied Health Sciences
1640 West Roosevelt Road
Chicago, IL 60608-6904

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www.uic.edu/orgs/empower