Transracial Adoption:
An Analysis of the 1996 Multi-ethnic Placement Act

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By

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December 2, 2003

Mr. Jerry Regier, Secretary
Florida Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Boulevard
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0700

Dear Secretary Regier:

I have the honor to submit to you, Transracial Adoptions: An Analysis of the 1996 Multi-ethnic Placement Act. This report is the product of extensive research and analysis during the fall of 2003. Cultural and racial identity are the most important fundamental elements in our individual character development. These identities allow our society to be known as the world’s melting pot of cultural cohabitation. The same applies to the adoption process. Families are able to come together in order to provide a stable environment to a child in need. In order for that child to exist in a transracial family, culture preservation must be maintained for society to function cohesively.

After examining several alternative policies, my recommendation is that the Department of Children and Families should establish a community awareness campaign, focusing specifically in minority neighborhoods. This policy was recommended based on the use of three evaluative criteria: potential effectiveness, political desirability and administrative feasibility. In summary, this policy option scored highly on all three criteria. It scored high on potential effectiveness because of the changes made to improve recruitment techniques. It also scored high on the two other criteria because of the full support of the state government and program administrators, as well as the transition of services to private agencies equipped to handle foster and adoptive campaigns.

An awareness campaign targeting minority communities would be beneficial because most communities may not know of the staggering number of children that need homes. This campaign is a way for informing communities on what they can do to help provide homes for children in the welfare system. In contrast,
the other three policy options need several modifications in order to be implemented at a satisfactory level.

This recommendation has the potential to benefit minorities in general because 66% of the children in foster care are minorities. If given a chance, minority communities will lead the way into decreasing the number of minority children in the welfare system if they are made aware of how to become a potential foster or adoptive parent.

Respectfully submitted,

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1. Summary of Alternatives and Evaluative Criteria
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The most important aspect of adoption is finding suitable placements for children regardless of the racial or ethnic background of the adopting family. “For a child moving from place to place in foster care, being adopted by a permanent family is more important than the color of the adoptive family’s skin” (Murphy, 2000, p. 1). According to most proponents, the adoptive family of a non-white child should have proper sensitivity to the child’s racial heritage. Children can benefit and thrive in a family of a different race, thus creating a more positive attitude towards race in society. It would seem that by promoting transracial adoptions, the great color barrier would slowly start to disappear. This could only prove to be beneficial while living in a world of different races and cultures. Transracial families could learn about different cultures, thereby making them more aware of what goes on outside of one’s race.

Policy makers understood the need for an improved adoption system for all cultural backgrounds by implementing the Multi-ethnic Placement Act of 1996. Since the implementation of this Act however, several factors have directly affected cultural sensitivity to adoptions: a shortage in minority social workers, implied psychological and emotional harm of transracial placements, growing numbers of minority children still in the welfare system and a shortage of families willing to adopt or foster. In order to provide cultural preservation to children that have been transracially adopted, policy makers and Department of Children and Families administrators must seek options to enhance the goal of this Act.
Information for this report was gathered using four methods. First, recent media, agency studies and academic literature were analyzed to provide background information. Second, reviews of the rules, regulations, and laws from federal and state statutes were examined in determining what guidelines are used for determining foster care and adoption placements. Third, an analysis of data and statistical reporting systems (such as the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System) showed the approximate number of children that are currently in the foster-care system. Fourth, adoption specialists from the Department of Children and Families and faculty members from Florida State University’s School of Social Work were contacted to provide insight into the potential effectiveness, political desirability, and of the administrative feasibility, for the importance of maintaining cultural preservation in transracial adoptions.

This report presents four viable options for purpose of maintaining cultural preservation in adoption policies: maintain the current policy, recruit professional minority social workers, provide special family services and training, and establish a community awareness campaign targeting minority communities.

Based on the assessment of the options using three evaluative criteria, establishing a community awareness campaign would be the most viable option for maintaining cultural preservation. The other options need modifications in order to effectively administrate the function of these options when implemented. Creating a network in minority communities that are not readily informed on the process of becoming an adoptive or foster parent will increase the number of suitable homes needed for children in the foster care system.
I. Problem Statement

One of the primary responsibilities of government is to ensure that the basic rights of its citizens are protected (Behn, 1997). Some of those citizens most vulnerable to violations are children, thus creating the need of an advocate. Social workers fulfill this need by ensuring that a child’s basic needs are being met. Under the U.S. Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, those most vital rights were determined to be “safety, well-being and permanency” (Department of Health and Human Services, 1997). The legislature established three means of advocacy for protecting a child’s safety: removal from the home, termination of parental rights, and adoption. As a means of last resort, legislators realized that adoption is the best solution to ensure a child’s security in a stable home. The 1995 film, Losing Isaiah, illustrates not only the adoption process, but the controversy surrounding transracial adoption as well (The Koch Company, Paramount, 1995). Prior to 1994, social workers were not legally required to consider transracial placements. However, in 1994 Congress enacted the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) (Hollinger, 1998).

Pursuant to MEPA, the social worker no longer needed to search for same race families. The purpose of this act was to remove barriers to permanency for the increasing number of children that are in the child protective system. This act also attempts to ensure that adoption and foster placements are not delayed or denied based on race, color or national origin (Department of Health & Human Services, 1994).

Though Congress acknowledged the need for anti-discrimination and adoption policies, it failed to create policies sensitive to preserving the cultural and racial identity of a child. The major concern is that minority children are being placed in non-minority
homes without the consideration of the long-term harm that might be created (Baden, 1995). This type of placement could eventually lead to social, cultural and religious problems for the child placed in an ethnically different environment.

The purpose of this report is to examine four policy alternatives to MEPA: maintain the current adoption policy, create modifications that include recruitment and retention of more professional minority social workers, mandate services for families before and after transracial adoptions (such as cultural awareness classes, parental sensitivity training for racial issues, and eligibility classes for parents that do not qualify initially), and establish an awareness campaign in minority communities to promote adoption.
II. Background and Literature

Background

To understand the concept of transracial adoption two topics should be considered: the evolution of children’s social welfare policy and the evolution of transracial adoption.

First, the concept of children’s social welfare policy begins with the evolution of child protection services. In 1696, Principle of “parens patriae” was used to protect children in England. It was not until over a century later that the United States implemented policies to protect children’s rights. In 1825 several states began legislating the right of social welfare agencies to remove children from abusive homes (Kearney, 2003). During these times, children were compared to animals, meaning that animal cruelty and child abuse were treated as one. Children’s rights policies were not implemented again until 1955 when child protective services were defined as a specialized form of casework.

Again in the 1970s, there was another influx of child protection reforms passed through Congress. In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was passed. Prior to this Act, there was no uniform system between the states’ classification on the definition of abuse and neglect. The first act protecting minority children’s rights was the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). This ensured that the tribe of a child is responsible for that child’s protection (Kearney, 2003). Finally, the major piece of legislation came with the 1980 Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act (the Adoption Act). This act determined what parental rights were and forced social workers to show
reasonable efforts to keep a child in the home until removal is necessary due to abuse or neglect (Kearney, 2003).

MEPA was created in Section 551 under the “Improving America’s Schools Act,” which was enacted in 1994. For agencies that receive Federal assistance and actively participate in foster care or adoption placement, this law prohibits them from using race as a factor for adoption or fostering. Not only does this act prohibit “denying to any person the opportunity to become an adoptive or foster parent solely on the basis of the race, color, or national origin of the adoptive foster parent or the child,” but it also applies to the “failure to seek termination of parental rights or otherwise make a child legally available for adoption,” (U.S. Department of Children, Administration of Children and Families, 2003). The most important aspect of this act is that it also ensures that agencies engage in active recruitment of potential foster and adoptive parents who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children needing placement.

In doing extensive studies on foster care, Congress found that there were nearly 500,000 children in foster care. Tens of thousands of those children are waiting to be adopted (Opie, 1996). Congress saw a problem with the length of time that minority children spent in foster care waiting for placement into adoptive homes. A study done by Richard Barth (1998) showed that the average amount of time that a child spends in foster care is two years. The average time of a minority child is twice as long as a non-minority child that is legally free for adoption.

Creator of this act, Senator Howard Metzenbaum, stated that, “The goal for these children is a loving and stable home” (Opie, 1996). This reason alone increases the goal of MEPA in that social workers can ensure that every effort is made to develop a large
and diverse pool of potential foster and adoptive families. Children need to be placed in homes that meet their needs. Richard Barth, Professor at the School of Social Work, UNC-Chapel Hill testified in a House Committee Hearing that MEPA also will not be able to accomplish the goal of finding homes for children, especially minority children. “The combination of ASFA, MEPA, and its amendments can eventually make a major difference in the odds of adoption and the time to adoption…” (Barth, 1998, p. 4). With Congress in full support of this act, social workers are now forced to follow its guidelines when determining proper placement of children in foster care.

Second, the history of transracial adoption dates back to World War II. The start of purposely making families interracial began with international adoptions from Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. These types of adoptions began the historical “blurring” of the color line, which previously was black and white, and now “yellow”, “red,” and “brown” are acceptable colors for adoption (University of Oregon, 2003).

Transracial adoptions were made in small numbers throughout the Civil Rights Movement, and yet made a symbolic impact during this time period. A break through came in 1967 when the Supreme Court ruled on Loving v. Virginia. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court found that laws prohibiting racial intermarriage were unconstitutional, states still enforced their ban on transracial adoption (University of Oregon, 2003). Transracial adoptions hit their peak around 1970. Approximately 2,500 adoptions were finalized each year, and no more than 12,000 African-American children in all were placed in white homes before 1975 (University of Oregon, 2003). This all occurred until
the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) took opposition against transracial adoption.

In summary, there were two distinct developments that occurred for children’s rights, the evolution of children’s social welfare policy and the evolution of transracial adoption. These policies set the standard for the proper handling of child welfare cases, especially when dealing with minority children in the child welfare system. Though in recent years legislative policy has advocated transracial adoption, controversy still surrounds the well being of a child who has been placed in a transracial home. Because this issue is still fairly new to legislators and those in child welfare positions, the continued debate surfacing around transracial adoption is likely to cause changes in emerging policy.
Literature Review

The relevant literature has three basic themes: challenges of finding placements for minority children, the lack of minority social workers, and effects of transracial adoption.

First, the literature examines the challenges of finding placements for minority children. Minority children make up 67% of all children in the public foster-care system (Alexander & Curtis, 1996). On average, black children wait over four years for a permanent home (Baden & Stewart, 1998). These children have grossly unequal access to adoption depending on their race ethnicity (Gill, 1996). One study found that among children who have not been adopted by the age of four and remain in non-kinship foster care, the proportion of Caucasian children who are adopted is 1.16 times that of those who remain in foster care (Barth, 1998). For Hispanic children the ratio is .79, for American Indian children, .52, and for African-American children only .34 (Barth, 1998).

Second, there is an abundance of literature discussing the lack of minority social workers. Agencies are struggling to hire more minority social workers and educating their non-minority colleagues on the traditional concepts and unique structures embedded in the family life of their culture (Griffith & Durby, n.d.). Non-minority social and welfare workers are being educated on issues previously outside the scope of importance for many agencies (Andujo, 1988). The importance of the extended family, the value of mutual respect and familial reluctance to disclose personal information are topics that agency workers are grappling with to aid them in placing children of color in culturally sensitive situations (Hayes, 1993). However, some authors feel actively seeking minority social workers may give the workers the impression that their job should be to advocate
only for minority children (Chimezie, 1975). They say that some minority social workers are so determined that transracial placements not occur that they are willing to keep children in foster care (Cohen, 1994). Agencies should broaden their definitions to be more flexible with the types of individuals and families considered satisfactory in adoptive situations (Gopaul-McNicol, 1996).

Research shows that there is a lack of universities specializing in child welfare programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). In the state of Florida alone there are only two universities that have a Bachelor of Social Work and Masters in Social Work with a concentration in child welfare. It is noted that the major university specializing in this area is the Florida State University. It is important to note that neither of the remaining universities are Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU’s), which shows that minorities are clearly underrepresented in social welfare. Currently, no HBCU offers a concentration or specialization in child welfare at the time that this data was updated (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

Third, research data indicate that much of the concern regarding the effects of transracial adoption has been expressed by practicing social workers, leaders of minority group communities and scholars (Opie, 1996). Risk factors included in the repercussions of transracial adoptions are: racial identity, psychological adjustment, racism and prejudice (Baden, 1995). Authors say that racial identity is important to minorities. Since birth, a child begins an understanding of who they are, where they come from, and how feasible it is to interact in society (Helms, 1990). Social workers need to make every effort to increase same-race adoptions in order to ensure that the racial divide does not become obscured.
There could be a tremendous psychological adjustment to a child placed in a transracial home (Grow & Shapiro, 1974). Parents tend to believe that race is not a major issue in how people are perceived, evaluated or relate to each other. Research indicates that there tends to be an emotional or psychological adjustment when a child is unable to naturally relate to the culture and society of their adopted parents as opposed to the society of their ethnic origins (McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982). The literature shows a lack of awareness in the outcome of racism. “Same-race placement is the only way to ensure that black children receive the ‘survival techniques’ necessary to exist in a racist society that seeks to physically and mentally destroy black people” (NABSW, 1992, p.607). With the continuing problem of racism, an interracial adoption will only bring harm to the child in that “white” home (NABSW, 1992).

In summary, the research highlights three relevant themes: the challenges of finding placements for minority children, the lack of minority social workers, and the effects of transracial adoption. Children have grossly unequal access to adoption depending on their race or ethnicity. It is crucial to the well being of these children that policy makers continue to monitor and evaluate policies that surround transracial adoption. Based on the literature provided, this report assesses the need to make changes in this current policy by evaluating alternative policy options.
III. Methodology and Evaluation Criteria

Methodology

The following resources were used in collecting information for this report:

- The most recent media and academic literature utilizing library databases, including: Web LUIS Academic Index and Full Text, 1996-date; Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe, 1990-date; JSTOR, all available literature to-date; Social Services Abstracts, all available literature to-date;

- Analysis of government documents including the Multiethnic Placement Act (1994) and Adoption and Safe Families Act (1997);

- Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Adoption Statistics; and

- Unstructured interviews and telephone contacts (n=five) approximately 30-60 minutes) with Florida Department of Children Families’ Adoption Specialists and faculty from the Florida State University School of Social Work.

Academic literature and government documents were helpful in providing historical data, background information and the assessment of the information used in the literature review. Interviews and telephone contacts provided insight into the opinions of individuals who are knowledgeable of transracial adoption in social work. The interviews with faculty also provided information, history, and background on the recruitment programs that currently exist within the universities.
Evaluation Criteria

Three criteria were used in the evaluation of the four possible management policy options: potential effectiveness, political desirability, and administrative feasibility. They will be measured individually on a ranking scale of 1 to 5 with 1 ranked with a low outcome, 3 ranked with a moderate outcome and 5 ranked with a high outcome. Scores for each option will be tallied based on the analyst’s assessment of the degree which the option meets the criteria (Patton & Sawicki, 1993).

- Potential effectiveness rates whether the proposed options will have its intended effect of maintaining cultural preservation. The data sources are related literature and interviews with DCF staff.

- Political desirability rates whether a policy is acceptable to the political actors (i.e., public, DCF, and state government) involved. The data sources come from interviews with DCF staff and related literature.

- Administrative feasibility rates whether administrators have the necessary resources and tools (such as staff and appropriated funding) needed to implement policy options. The data sources are related literature and interviews with DCF staff.

These criteria were selected because they best represent the considerations necessary to meet the intended goal. Other criteria such as economic feasibility and equity were not used due to the difficulty of assessing a cost to a program that is federally funded.

There were several limitations to this study: the lack of concrete proof that the goal of the Act is either helpful or harmful to a child’s well being. Another is a limited pool of experts in the legislative field with extensive knowledge of transracial adoption policies. However, interviews with faculty from the Social Work department and DCF staff, and research on the adoption process overall, have provided helpful information. In
spite of this constraint, the most important criteria were used and it is believed that any study using the methodology outlined would find similar recommendations.
IV. Management Policy Options

In this section, four viable options are examined for promoting cultural preservation in adoption policies: maintain the current adoption policy, create modifications that include recruitment and retention of more professional minority social workers, mandate services for families pre- and post- transracial adoptions, and establish an awareness campaign in minority communities to promote adoption. These options are evaluated by three criteria: potential effectiveness, political desirability, and administrative feasibility.

**Policy Option One: Maintaining Current Adoption Policy**

Under Florida’s current adoption policy (Administrative Code Chapter 65C-16 Adoptions Rule), no person shall be denied the opportunity to become an adoptive parent on the basis of race, color or national origin. This ensures that child placements will not be denied or delayed due to racial discrimination. This procedure has been designed in an effort to decrease the length of time children spend in the child welfare system. The Florida Administrative Code falls under the guidelines of the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act. The discussion evaluates the possible effects of maintaining the current policy without supplemental programs and services.

**Potential effectiveness:** While children are being passed through the child welfare system at a much faster rate since the implementation of MEPA, families now must contend with the difficulties of cultural differences when a transracial placement has been made. After the mandatory 10 week Model Approach to Parenting Class (MAP), parents are not required to have any additional training or services to help prepare them for parenthood of transracial children (S. Tintle, personal communication, October 6, 2003).
Children that have spent expanded lengths of time in the child welfare system may already have severe emotional and mental health problems due to being removed from their home and placed in foster care until a suitable placement has been found. Research shows that, children may experience additional emotional distress and psychological setbacks if the child cannot adjust to the potential culture shock to their transracial placement (Baden, 1996). In short, using this criterion, option one is given a low score for potential effectiveness.

**Political desirability:** Under Florida’s Administrative Code, the Multi-ethnic Placement Act correlates with the policies of the current administration under DCF. The DCF Secretary is focused on governmental privatization and the removal of children out of the welfare system versus trying to provide services to ensure the emotional well-being of the child once they are out of the system (anonymous, personal communication, November 2, 2003). These lack of services can lead to cases being re-opened due to the absence of adequate, culturally sensitive services that could be made during the child’s transition.

NABSW has stated its opposition on transracial adoption unless used as a measure of last resort. The organization argues that the length of time a child stays in the welfare system does not out way the importance of a child’s cultural preservation (NABSW, 1992). Currently, citizens are unaware of the number of minority children that are still in the welfare system (Hirth, 2003). The purpose of MEPA is to decrease the number of minority children still waiting to be adopted. However, statistics show that minorities outnumber Caucasians in the system by 25% (Office of the Governor, 2003). By July of 2004, all adoption and foster care services will be completely under the
supervision of private community based providers. These providers will have complete
discretion on how these services will be coordinated (Hirth, 2003). In short, using this
criterion, option one is given a moderately low score for political desirability.

Administrative feasibility: Chapter 65C-16 of the Florida Administrative Code is
feasible under the current administration. Requiring additional services or interventions
could potentially cause further damage to the currently constrained budget in the
Department of Children and Families. However, the frustration placed on agency staff by
the constant remediation of families who have not received proper services can result in
cases being shuffled to different social workers due to constant turnover. The average
time a caseworker remains in child welfare is less than a year. This leads to an influx of
different workers for children awaiting placements and lengthens the time it takes for
workers to familiarize themselves with these new cases (anonymous, personnel
communication, November 4, 2003). Program administrators have to contend with a high
volume of open cases due to the continual revolving door of social workers. In short,
using this criterion, option one is given a moderate score for administrative feasibility.

In summary, maintaining the current adoption process rates moderately low. This
option lacks the important balance that must be maintained between the MEPA
placements and placement services. There are some must-needed changes for this Act to
reach its full potential of lowering the number of children in the system and providing
adequate cultural preservation at the same time.
Policy Option Two: Recruit and Retain Professional Minority Social Workers

This option is designed to recruit minority social workers as they complete their BSW or MSW degree. An internship program can be used as a tool to provide a steady pool of social workers (O’Dare, 2002). It will be taken by each eligible student studying to practice child welfare field during their final semester of study. It could also be used as the training tool that social workers must complete when hired (DCF, 2003). If the intern has successfully completed the program requirements and DCF training requirements, the intern may then be retained as a full time permanent employee (O’Dare, 2002). This not only benefits the Department by transitioning an intern into a permanent employee with prior experience, but it also gives Social Work departments at HBCU’s and other predominately minority universities credibility in providing jobs for their students upon graduation. The program will target these universities due to the higher enrollment of minority students.

This program would be limited to students receiving their BSW and unlimited for those receiving their MSW. A total of 15 students will be eligible for the internship program, allowing Master’s students to intern in supervisory positions. A university faculty member will work as the DCF program liaison and coordinate the number of students and positions available each semester. The students will also work as a paid employee by receiving a stipend of $500 for undergraduates and $1000 for graduate students per semester for 20 hours a week. The cost of this program will be funded through federal monies under the Title IV B and E Grant (O’Dare, 2002). Policy option
two highlights the benefits or drawbacks the relationship between the Department of Children and Families and universities may create.

**Potential effectiveness:** By establishing an internship program, DCF can create at least one solution to the high turnover crisis for social and welfare case managers. With the pressure of continually finding knowledgeable professionals lowered, program administrators will be able to begin more evenly distributing caseloads. The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 2002) recommends caseloads between 12-20 open cases per caseworker (2002). Recent data showed that workers had anywhere from 14 to 131 opened cases (DCF, 2002). Recruiting minority social workers allows DCF to have a diverse workforce. This diversity will create the staff and board members needed in order to reflect the same minority ethnic and racial groups as the clients they serve (CWLA, 1998). Option two is given a moderately high score for potential effectiveness.

**Political desirability:** While the current administration is determining how to spend less by creating permanency plans, funds for retention and recruitment come from the federal government. This lowers the fiscal impact of this option on DCF administrators. These funds are appropriated through a block grant, which can be used for any program under child welfare. By July of 2004 all of the foster care and other child protective services will be overseen by a private, non-profit agency in Florida (Hirth, 2003). Private agencies have already assumed the responsibility of overseeing foster care within District 2B. With this collaborative effort between DCF, HBCU’s and other predominately minority universities, the universities will have a higher success rate of available positions for students wanting careers in the child welfare field. This will provide a career placement service for social work graduates (O’Dare, 2002). Likewise,
this option will attract more students to social work/welfare programs due to greater “guaranteed” job placement upon graduation. Adoptees may find it easier to work with social workers who are of their same ethnicity (CWLA, 1998).

As stated in the literature review (Funderberg, 1998), some feel actively seeking minority social workers may give workers the impression that their job should be to advocate only for minority children. Due to the racially sensitive nature of this option, it has been given a moderate score for political desirability.

**Administrative feasibility:** With more staff, program administrators will be better able to delegate cases. In turn, caseworkers will be better equipped to provide the necessary attention to each individual case, rather than having to execute the bare minimums required to close out a case due to case loads and time constraints (O’Dare, 2002). The “internship-to-employment” program would also give program administrators an easier task of hiring staff because of the work ethic the intern displayed during his or her internship (Hayes, 1993). A program coordinator will be the necessary link between DCF administrators and internship program coordinators from the social work department of each school (O’Dare, 2002).

This option has an indirect effect on private agencies while DCF continues to oversee all adoption, foster care, and child protective services. Should private agencies develop a collaborative effort with universities for recruiting professional minority social workers; the role of how it will effect privatization will be reexamined. Option two is given a moderately high score for administrative feasibility.

In summary, Option Two scored moderately high on potential effectiveness, and administrative feasibility, and scored moderate on political desirability. The recruitment
and retention of minority social workers can give families and adoptive children a chance to have a caseworker that can identify with certain needs and issues of a specific culture. In short, option two is given a moderately high overall rating.

**Policy Option Three: Provide Special Family Services and Training**

Parents that are pursuing transracial adoptions need to be aware of the special types of needs that may arise during the rearing of their child. Adoptive parents currently are only required to take a 10-16 week training course known as MAP. This is a general parenting course that does not address transracial adoptions.

Option three provides services that teach cultural sensitivity skills, cultural identity exercises, and cultural preservation awareness. The training will highlight the importance of ethnicity and culture while integrating the child’s past living experiences and identifications. These classes should be offered at least three days a week for two hours per class. It will also encourage an awareness of and sensitivity to the ethnic and cultural resources that may be available to the family after placement (CWLA, 1998).

The family as a whole, from prospective parents, siblings and adoptees, will participate in this training rather than just the adoptive parents. Special counseling services will also be offered to address specialized issues unique to each individual family. These services will continue until one year after the adoption has been finalized. The cost of these services could be funded through Title IV B and E Grants. Option three evaluates the importance of having services and training for families in order to ease the transition of a child being placed in a transracial home.

**Potential effectiveness:** The benefits of parents taking classes to maintain cultural preservation are plentiful. Parents can learn about the culture of their child and institute
that knowledge in the parenting of that child (Baden, 1996). Parents will also be more prepared to cope with the difficulties that may manifest themselves simply due to the child’s race. This may benefit the parent and the child. The parent can help the child learn about their background, culture and heritage to avoid feeling alienated from their race (CWLA, 1998). These classes and programs will have a long-term effect on the well being of the adopted child. The child can avoid feeling that they have missed out on the importance of who they are and where they came from. The classes will also show how important heritage and cultural is, no matter what ethnic origin a person is (NABSW, 1992). Providing services for transracial adoptions will not have an adverse effect on caseload management due to the amount of transracial adoptions that are made; approximately 15% of all adoptions are transracial (US DHHS, 2000). The finalization of the adoption will be contingent upon how well the parent does in their cultural awareness classes. Option three is given a moderate score for potential effectiveness.

Political desirability: While the citizenry will most likely accept attempts of cultural preservation, the legislature may not share these views (Barth, 1998). The culturally sensitive additions to transracial adoptions will require a reanalysis of MEPA by the legislature (CWLA, 1998). Cultural preservation services are beneficial to the mental and emotional well being of the adoptee (S. Tintle, personal communication, October 10, 2003). Thus DCF staff has the best vantage point of the benefits cultural preservation services may offer. Yet, program administrators will incur an extra burden due to additional services being added to their administrative duties. Option three is given a moderate score for political desirability.
Administrative feasibility: Currently, DCF does not have trained staff to provide cultural preservation services for families intending to transracially adopt. Because child welfare services are in need of an increase in subsidies for additional programs, they may not be able to provide these services (S. Tintle, personal communication, October 10, 2003). Classes will be provided to districts that have a higher volume of transracial adoptions in efforts to salvage funding. Option three has been given a moderately low score for administrative feasibility.

In summary, option three scored moderate against potential effectiveness and political desirability and scored moderately low in administrative feasibility. The consideration of the ability of the prospective parents to meet the need of a particular child should take place in the framework of the general placement decision, in which the strengths and weakness of prospective parents to meet all of a child’s needs are weighed so as to provide for the child’s best interest (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). An implementation of training and services has the potential of meeting this need. Overall this option has been given a moderate overall score.

Policy Option Four: Community Awareness Campaign

The need for foster and adoptive parents is at an all time high, yet community awareness is at an all time low. There are more than 4,600 children in foster care available for adoption in the State (Office of the Governor, 2003). DCF has identified homes for more than 2,500 children. Almost 2,100 of those children are still waiting to be placed with a family. The ethnic breakdown of those children is 1131 African American or 59%, 95 Hispanic or 5%, 42 biracial or 2% and 647 Caucasian or 34%.
A Community Awareness Campaign gives communities additional knowledge about the number of children needing safe and permanent homes. This campaign specifically targets rural communities considering that the majority of children in foster care are minorities (Hirth, 2003). Included in this campaign would be public service announcements, expanded community outreach, and an improvement to Florida’s adoption website (Office of the Governor, 2003). Public advertisements such as commercials, newspaper ads, and public service announcement would occur on a weekly basis on public access television, major newspapers (such as Tallahassee Democrat, St. Petersburg Times, and Miami Herald), and local news broadcast, for one year. After the year-long campaign, an analysis would be done to show whether the campaign helped increase adoptions. DCF can begin a partnership to increase community awareness with businesses, nonprofits, universities, and faith-based organizations. With the support of community leaders and local businesses, the community outreach would occur during church services and neighborhood meetings. Policy option four will use campaigns of this nature and focus on minority communities.

**Potential effectiveness:** A community awareness program will be able to adequately recruit more foster and adoptive families from various minority communities. Targeting minority communities through a community awareness campaign increases the number of possible minority applicants. This, in turn, increases the number of potential same-race placements. The benefit of this campaign is to have an improved adoption process by shortening the length of time for foster parents and relative caregivers to adopt from a statewide average of eight months to five. This enables DCF staff to increase the efficiency of their caseloads by handling cases in group settings versus individually. This
campaign also offers DCF adoption staff an opportunity to enhance staff training in identifying at risk children that will be hard to place (Office of the Governor, 2003). In short, option four has been given a high score for potential effectiveness.

**Political desirability:** Governor Bush and DCF Secretary Regier support this option and have created an initiative in its likeness. “Our goal is to increase the number of adoptions through tested and proven methods and at the same time introduce new ways of thinking and innovative techniques to help create new, healthy, and permanent families for our children,” said Secretary Jerry Regier (Office of the Governor, 2003). Regier (2003) also stated, “In order to provide these homes, we have to make the public aware of the need.” Department of Health and Human Services has developed an Internal Evaluation Instrument to evaluate whether or not states are complying with MEPA regulations in recruiting families to adopt or foster. The agency staff will respond favorably to this option because of the added effort in recruiting more families as potential foster and adoptive parents to provide children in need of homes. By establishing a community awareness campaign, the public will be able to respond to the need for more foster and adoptive families by applying on their own or by passing the information onto other families. With full support from the Governor, DCF administrators, and private community based agencies; this option has been given a high score.

**Administrative feasibility:** A community awareness campaign can be implemented through the media, community forums and other means of advertisement (public service announcements, newspaper ads, commercials). Public awareness will boost the number of potential families available for placement services. The money and
training needed has already been allocated through $3.5 million received in federal funds for increasing adoption numbers for state-supervised foster care. These funds will be appropriated to support programs to increase public awareness. With these funds and the financial support of community leaders and local businesses, this campaign will have the monetary support needed. There is a tremendous amount of support from the Governor, DCF Secretary, and legislators for a community awareness campaign. These actors have the ability to accrue additional resources for the implementation of this option. Thus, this has been given a high score.

In summary, option four has scored high on all criteria. The Governor and Secretary Regier have publicly stated that communities need to be aware of the mounting need to place foster kids in a stable, loving home. Private community based agencies have already targeted rural counties, which are predominately minority, as counties that will be focused on the most. Because of the support that private agencies, the Governor, and Secretary Regier have given for this option, option four has been given an overall high score.
V. Conclusion

This analysis presented four alternative options to maintain cultural preservation within the Multi-ethnic Placement Act: (1) maintain the current adoption policy process, (2) recruit and retain more professional minority social workers, (3) provide services and training for parents wanting to adopt transracially, and (4) establish a community awareness campaign. The alternatives are evaluated by three criteria: potential effectiveness, political desirability, and administrative feasibility. The following table summarizes the analysis.

Table 1 – Summary of Alternative and Evaluative Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Potential Effectiveness</th>
<th>Political Desirability</th>
<th>Administrative Feasibility</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current Policy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Recruitment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Awareness</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Ranking Scale: 1 = Low, 2 = Moderately Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Moderately High, 5 = High

Option one highlights the current adoption process without any added cultural preservation clauses. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of not maintaining
cultural preservation throughout the adoption process. Maintaining the current policy scored low in potential effectiveness due to the lack of efforts to reach the goal of maintaining cultural preservation. It does not meet the minimum score needed for it to be considered as a viable option in the efforts of maintaining cultural preservation. However, three of the four policy options would provide a much-needed solution to maintaining cultural preservation for transracial placements. While two of the options scored low in the effectiveness and administrative criteria, they all have the potential to become viable options with some minor modifications to their implementation.

Option two presents the possibility of recruiting and retaining more professional minority social workers. It is beneficial to DCF, HBCU’s, and other predominately minority universities due to the prospect of receiving a steady pool of social workers each calendar year and improving employment placement rates for universities. However, this option scored moderate in political desirability due to the racially motivated nature of the option. This option is racially sensitive to all involved parties; therefore adjustments need to be made in order to avoid conflict between non-minority social workers and minority social workers.

The benefits of option three are two-fold. The first is the benefits of parents participating in various training in order to become aware of cultural preservation. Also, this training will show that parents are actively recognizing the need to provide a sense of cultural well being for the child that they have transracially adopted. However, this option scored very low in administrative feasibility due to the concern of finding qualified professionals to teach these classes. Funding is very limited and is directed
toward areas such as mental health services, which are considered priority for most children in foster care.

Option four informs the community of the need to find stable homes for children that are in the welfare system. It is not only approved by Secretary Regier, but Governor Bush has also given full support in targeting communities in efforts to find suitable homes. The community awareness campaign has been created to target rural counties because these are the communities that have been affected the most. This option has been given a high score in all three criteria because of state and local governments’ and public and private agencies’ willingness to assess the problem in foster care and create a solution that not only provides homes for children, but also considers cultural preservation in the process. Therefore, option four is recommended.
References


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interests of the child: Culture, identity and transracial adoption. (pp.43-76). London: Free Association Books Ltd.


About the Author

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