

# An Internet Training for Juvenile Justice Professionals

*Courtney M. Yarcheck*

*Stephen M. Gavazzi*

*Kristy Dascoli*

*The Ohio State University*

**FROM THE TIME** that the first juvenile court was established by the Illinois Juvenile Court Act of 1899 with the intention of creating a special court for pre-delinquent and delinquent youth, the juvenile justice system has been based on the concept of “pariens patriae,” or “in the best interest of the child.” By design, the juvenile court was meant not only to be a new and innovative legal institution, but a social service organization charged with protecting and solving the problems of children experiencing various kinds of trouble in their daily lives. This concept has accorded the juvenile court wide discretionary power to serve as a “guardian” over the welfare of the child; namely, those who were abused, neglected, dependent, or in need of supervision, especially when it was clear that neither the natural parents nor other guardians would or could attend to these interests themselves.

For the juvenile court to operate in this capacity, it was not as important to generate a climate based on the adversarial nature of the typical adult court (the state is the victim, punish the offender, etc.). Rather, the juvenile court was designed to intervene through attention to the ways that a given adolescent’s engagement in illegal activity was linked to a set of more global needs that included families, peer associations, neighborhood influences, etc. Youthful offenders appearing before the juvenile court thus were to be insulated from the stigma associated with crime and delinquency so that they might correct their behavior and return to society as a rehabilitated and productive citizen. Since the time that the first juvenile

court was established, juvenile justice efforts have been affected by many factors, including most notably, rulings of the U.S. Supreme Court such as *Kent v. United States* 1966, *McKeiver v. Pennsylvania* 1971, *in re Gault* 1967, and *in re Winship* 1970, as well as acts of Congress such as the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. Over time, such acts have led to the emergence of several unique features that keep the modern juvenile court separate and distinct from its adult counterpart. Most notably, juvenile records are to be kept strictly confidential, hearings are to be conducted in an informal manner, the need to treat and rehabilitate takes precedence over the need to establish guilt or punish, juveniles are to be kept strictly segregated from adult offenders, and the court holds a broad discretionary power in the disposition of cases (Yarcheck, Gavazzi, & Andrews, 2001).

In addition to the impact of lawmaking efforts, the characteristics of the modern juvenile court reflect the tension that exists in current public debate about the relative balance that should be struck between the desire to punish and the need to rehabilitate. In order to create a sense of balance between these competing agendas, juvenile and family courts have spent considerable resources developing and administering a “continuum” of programs that accomplish two tasks. First, there is achieving public safety by holding youthful offenders “accountable” for their harmful actions. Second, there is rehabilitating these youth in the hopes of reintegrating them back into their homes, schools, and communities (Yarcheck et al., 2001).

Thus was born the concept of accountability-based sanctions. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) defines accountability-based sanctions as “any service, sanction, or juvenile offender option that juvenile offenders are subject to and whose goal is to hold adjudicated juvenile offenders responsible for their delinquent conduct” (Matese, 1997). This has culminated in a rather broad definition of sanctioning that encompasses a wide continuum of services and interventions commonly utilized by juvenile courts today. Additionally, this definition has become associated with compelling evidence that suggests these sanctions and/or treatments are best conceptualized and implemented on a continuum known as the “OJJDP Comprehensive Strategy.” This continuum incorporates two key principles: 1) to prevent delinquency in youth through a focus on prevention programming for at-risk youth; and 2) to improve the court’s response to delinquency through a continuum of sanctions and treatment options (Howell, 1995).

Accountability-based sanctions become administered on such a continuum of care at the local level through effective case management (Howell, 1995). Here, juvenile justice professionals and other direct service providers are thought to be most effective when their case management responsibilities include, but are not limited to: the administration and review of risk and/or needs assessments; case planning and referral to appropriate programs; monitoring service delivery; and troubleshooting/reassessing cases when services are proven to be either ineffective or no longer necessary. Further, the

key to effective case management is thought to be two-fold: a) professionals must have access to affordable programs that are based on sound research evidence; and b) they must be trained in processes involved with proper assessment, referral, and monitoring procedures needed to effectively work with these programs (Howell, 1995).

Our efforts have been concentrated on the latter of these two keys to successful case management. In essence, we have sought to meet the needs of those direct service staff who must be provided with opportunities for ongoing training on the most current case management tools available in juvenile justice and related fields. Unfortunately, the task of providing adequate training opportunities for these professionals at the same time that they are attempting to meet the intense demands of their individual caseloads can be and often is a daunting task. Additionally, information on the development and implementation of effective programming evolves without respite. Hence, it is important for direct service staff to have a practical and easily accessible format for gaining the most current and comprehensive information on available treatment options. Thus, a compelling argument is made here for the creation and implementation of a wider range of training options for juvenile justice professionals beyond those typically offered.

While the concept of accountability-based sanctions has become an integral part of how the juvenile justice system operates, the academic literature on such efforts is still in its infancy. While ground-breaking work has been done in such areas as restitution (Schicor & Binder, 1981; Armstrong, Hofford, Maloney, Remington, & Steenson, 1983; Roy, 1990; 1995), diversion (Decker, 1985; Fisher, 1986; Polk, 1986; Kammer, Minor & Wells, 1997; Gavazzi, Yarcheck, Wasserman & Partridge, 2000), drug/alcohol programming (Downs, 1990; Torres, 1997; Greenwood, 1992), multisystemic therapy (Henggeler & Bourduin, 1990; Henggeler, Cunningham, Pickrel, Schoenwald & Brondino, 1996), and mentoring (Mecartney, Styles & Morrow, 1994; Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995), service delivery has preceded much of the theoretical and empirical work that would provide a justification for what could be deemed a "best practice" in the ABS realm.

As a result, juvenile justice professionals often are given little more than anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of a given ABS option and/or its effective use with other treatment efforts. Additionally, the widely

scattered nature of more recent theoretical and empirical work often leaves the developers of training curricula at a loss to present a unified and inclusive picture of what is occurring in the ABS literature. Alternatively, curriculum developers unaware of these rather isolated efforts can be forced into a unwitting reliance on an overly narrow literature base.

A unique set of training options that focus attention on a accountability-based sanctions is described below. The current paper is divided into two sections. First, the paper discusses "distance learning" as a means of disseminating the most current and comprehensive information on accountability-based sanctions to juvenile justice professionals. Second, the paper describes the development and piloting of one particular distance learning effort known collectively as The Ohio State University Accountability-Based Sanctions Internet Training Project.

### *Distance Learning*

Advanced use of technology increasingly has become an important instructional component in the efforts of universities and other institutions of learning. Of particular note is the increased use of "distance learning," an educational technology that incorporates the use of computers and the World Wide Web to offer courses and other training opportunities to those individual learners seeking alternatives to the more traditional educational environment.

Significant institutional issues have contributed to the rise in distance learning, including a steady growth in waiting lists for high-demand courses, a slow deterioration in available faculty to teach courses, inadequate classroom space, and the desire to create more uniformity in the way that given courses are taught. At the same time, career advancement increasingly has been tied to the attainment of advanced education, either through professional development (continual education) or the obtaining of an advanced degree. More often than not, however, professionals already in the workplace are faced with the practical considerations of how to balance current work responsibilities with what is demanded by the standard classroom or training environment.

For the learner, there are many advantages to a distance learning environment. In practice, virtually anyone may participate in a distance learning/training course, assuming that the individual has a computer with internet access. There is usually greater flexibility

in how and when course-related materials can be obtained and class assignments completed. Participants can learn at their own pace and in a convenient location.

Of course, there are limitations as well. Distance learning does not permit the more typical interaction with one's instructor and peers. This type of face-to-face contact typically is replaced by e-mail and chat-room use. Also, the student needs to be able to work independently and with substantial personal motivation to complete tasks. The daily contact with instructors that a typical student becomes used to often is highly structured and with markers that measure the student's progress. In a virtual classroom, responsibility to create and maintain academic momentum is delegated primarily to the learner.

### *The Ohio State University Accountability-Based Sanctions Internet Training Project*

The inadequate transfer of information on sanctioning orientations and the implications for case management and aftercare planning have hampered the development and administration of sanctions that hold juvenile offenders accountable for their harmful behavior. Often as not, probation and parole officers are mandated to follow a certain sanctioning model (i.e. Restorative Justice or Community Justice) prescribed by their individual court or agency without full knowledge of how that model relates to their personal beliefs and professional responsibilities. Addressing this problem, the Ohio State University Accountability-Based Sanctions Internet Training Project was created to provide information on how the development and use of accountability-based sanctions is affected by the specific model that is being employed.

The material that was developed out of this effort relates most directly to case management and aftercare planning issues affecting juvenile justice professionals in the State of Ohio. However, most of the content should be applicable to juvenile justice professionals employed in any of the states that follow similar statutes. To date, two primary vehicles have been used to transmit this material: 1) a hardbound copy of the ABS Handbook, and 2) an ABS Internet training site.

The hardbound version of the ABS handbook was researched and written by project staff in the College of Human Ecology at the Ohio State University between September 1999 and June 2001. The handbook is divided into five sections. Each section describes a

particular domain deemed essential to the overall understanding of the accountability-based sanctioning endeavor. The five sections of the handbook are: 1) the history and characteristics of the modern juvenile court; 2) accountability and sanctioning orientations; 3) the models: Restorative Justice, "What Works," Retributive Justice, and Community Justice; 4) common practices, promising approaches, and issues related to their use with special populations; and 5) future directions in juvenile justice practice.

The Accountability-Based Sanctions (ABS) website serves as a companion training platform to the ABS handbook. Here, the content of the handbook is presented in two formats. First, it exists in a web-based "read only" format that can be accessed by any and all interested individuals with Internet access. The second web format is a companion training platform that, in addition to the handbook content, contains case examples, video footage, sample versions of risk assessments, community and victim impact statements, and links to the Ohio Revised Code. Additionally, the second web format has a testing component that includes both a pre-test and post-test of overall knowledge on ABS-related issues (for purposes of documenting knowledge gain, as is described below), section quizzes, and case examples connected to short answer essays that required an application of learned material to case planning issues. Further, this second format contains a sanctioning model profile that allows juvenile justice professionals to better understand how their personal and professional opinions about offenders, victims, crime, and sanctioning are related to sanctioning decisions.

In addition to the training materials, trainees receive access to a full-time teaching assistant at the Ohio State University, who monitors course progress via the Internet and through phone contact, as well as as-needed contact with a technical support staff member who provides individualized assistance with computer and technical issues surrounding the use of WebCT (the distance learning tool used in the creation of this platform).

### *Pilot Training Efforts*

A first pilot training of the Accountability-Based Sanctions Internet site took place beginning in July 2000 at The Ohio State University. Although this was mid-way through the writing and development effort of the handbook materials, project staff saw this as an important opportunity to gain feedback

from juvenile justice professionals about the format and direction of the content and, as well, the level of comfort they felt with using an Internet-based training tool.

The trainees were selected by the Ohio Department of Youth Services to reflect a combination of different departments (probation, parole, administrative), levels of staff experience (new employees vs. established), and computer skills and Internet experience (ranging from no experience to a great deal of experience). Trainees were divided into groups of 15 and assigned to one of four training dates. The small group size allowed project staff to have more individual contact with the trainees and to provide some initial "hand-holding" for those who had little or no prior experience using the computer and/or the internet. A total of 60 individuals took part in the initial pre-pilot training.

One additional objective associated with the pilot training was to assess participant comfort levels regarding the use of the Internet-based ABS Handbook. This was based on the understanding that the vast majority of field staff would have had very little prior experience with Internet-based training, and would report lower levels of overall Internet usage. Our pre-training survey of the training participants generated information that backed up those assumptions. Participants reported to us that they had limited or no access to the Internet at work. In addition, approximately 50 percent of the participants had access to the Internet at home, where they averaged about 1-2 hours of time on-line in a given week. Further, the participants generally reported that they were most excited about the potential access to training information in a time-unlimited manner vis-à-vis the Internet, while their greatest apprehensions concerned security and privacy issues.

In order to assess comfort levels with the use of the ABS Handbook Internet site, a series of questions were asked immediately following the training. These questions covered a number of areas concerned with the training and its connection to the trainee's increased comfort level. The questions were scaled on a continuum from 0 to 100, and were connected to statements that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." In every case, group average scores reflected participant beliefs that they "strongly agreed" that the training had increased their comfort levels with the internet-based ABS Handbook.

Based on feedback gained from the participants of the first pilot training, project staff began to work on making changes to the

training platform in order to reflect content revisions in the final print version of the hard-bound text (released in July 2001), and to include the comments and changes suggested by the experimental pilot training group and the focus group participants. In addition, with the positive support generated from the pilot and focus group participants, project staff was given the go-ahead to initiate a second pilot training effort at the beginning of the next calendar year (January 2001).

Participants were initially identified and contacted via a memo distributed state-wide by the Ohio Department of Youth Services to juvenile courts, parole offices and treatment facilities. A total of 204 individuals representing 26 county probation agencies, 9 juvenile parole offices, and 2 residential treatment facilities responded to an announcement of this next pilot training, and subsequently were assigned a username and password. However, 90 individuals actually started the training, as indicated by their completion of the internet-use survey.

In addition to the standard registration, trainees were asked to identify a supervisor or administrator in their agency who would act as an on-site teaching assistant (TA) in the course. The rationale for the TA was twofold. First, it provided supervisors with access to the trainee's progress, thus increasing the accountability of the trainees to complete the course and show knowledge gain on the course content. Second, it provided an extra layer of assistance to OSU project staff in monitoring trainee progress, insofar as the training group was quite large. Also, this strategy simplified reporting requirements to counties/agencies with a large constituency enrolled in the course, as progress reports could be sent to the on-site TA to be distributed to individual trainees. Counties and agencies were given the option of assigning more than one TA to monitor larger groups of trainees in their county. The majority of the participating agencies had between one and three on-site teaching assistants.

A full-time teaching assistant at OSU (OSU-TA) was assigned to monitor the course to grade tests/quizzes and provide additional clarification on the content to trainees. In addition, a technical support person was also identified to provide assistance to trainees on the use of the Internet and/or distance learning technology. Trainees who were comfortable with the technology and content were also able to access directions and tips on using the WebCT distance learning tool inside of the ABS training. Help pages



were inserted throughout the content for trainees to access.

### *Thematic Analysis of Data from the Second Pilot Sample*

In terms of the results of the Internet training evaluation, 95 percent of the participants indicated that the ABS website contained information that was useful to them in their professional work, and 82 percent believed that the material contained in the ABS training had helped them perform their job more effectively and/or would be helpful to them in the work they do in the future. Additionally, 82 percent agreed that the availability of an Internet-based training tool was helpful to them as professionals, and 70 percent believed that their agency/organization should invest in more Internet-based trainings for juvenile justice professionals.

At the same time, however, only 38 percent of the respondents agreed that the Internet was a better way to receive information than the typical trainings they were used to receiving. One possible explanation for this result lies in the relative "newness" of using technology in the court systems in the state. Many local and state agencies were reliant on a "paper-driven" system of operation, and hence did not typically offer regular computer use to the line staff. This notion was confirmed subsequently with the release of the hardbound version of the companion ABS handbook in the summer of 2001. Here, project personnel were surprised to discover that the provision of the bound copy of the ABS Handbook seemed to increase Internet participation and completion of the training, and as a result created the situation of a book selling the concept of distance learning.

While the preliminary feedback from those who took the training was positive, project staff identified a number of difficulties in providing the ABS training. First, some difficulties were related to the use of the Internet, including lack of access to the basic computer hardware and a general discomfort with using the required software and hardware. Technical support was offered at relatively high levels of sophistication and at no cost to counties, yet at times there was a reluctance to act on the advice and direction given by our support staff in order to initiate and/or rejoin participation in the training. While there was no data to support the reason for this reluctance to use technical support, project staff derived some basic themes for this phenomenon from records of phone and e-mail contacts with trainees. In

some instances, project staff thought it was born out of the sheer frustration with using the Internet software, as outlined above. Another possible explanation was the level of difficulty experienced by some of the participating agencies in adjusting their computer systems and Internet settings to allow for the transfer of the ABS information into their office sites (this includes so-called "firewall" issues). This was also a common problem for individuals using their home computers, as many trainees were using outdated software incompatible with the training platform.

A training hierarchy was set up to provide some local monitoring of trainee progress using Teaching Associates to assist trainees at the local level. This plan displayed limited success in terms of impacting completion rates. At the same time, those counties that did not have Teaching Associates in their local hierarchy seemed disadvantaged in terms of the fragmented way that ongoing participation could be monitored at these sites. Finally, the level of accountability for training completion proved uncomfortable for certain trainees. The extensive monitoring that occurred through log-in records, testing results, and related tracking efforts was not something that trainees were used to in terms of training participation. Some evidence of this seems to come from the fact that while 82 percent of the trainees believed that availability of an Internet-based training tool was useful to them, 62 percent did not believe that internet-based training was a better way of receiving information than the typical trainings they had received. Friction was created between our desire to constantly update material on the website, where we sought to take advantage of the ease with which content may be edited via Internet-based tools, and our efforts to publish the more traditional and static print version of this material.

### *The Context of Training in the Juvenile Justice Field*

Depending on the type of jurisdiction, the majority of training efforts for juvenile justice professionals takes place at either the local level or the state level. Local training efforts are provided for reasons that include, but are not limited to, the training of current staff and new hires in policy and procedure that pertain to their individual agency; providing a cost-effective alternative to state and/or federal training that may require travel and related expenses; and cutting down on the amount of time workers are away from their caseloads.

At the same time, there are disadvantages

to many of these local training efforts. The argument may be made that the most necessary knowledge line workers need revolves around their ability to interview youth, provide case management, and make effective presentations in court. However, in order to be effective in these more practical aspects of the job, the worker must understand the historical context and the theoretical orientations that provide the foundation for the hands-on work. Often, due to time and financial constraints, local training efforts sacrifice such historical and theoretical orientations to make room for additional work on the "practical" end of things. As a result, trainers and trainees narrow the focus of their learning to basic core concepts, and thus miss the opportunity to advance their knowledge beyond the most cursory level.

While more costly, statewide training efforts often contain more theoretically intense material, and offer the added incentive of providing a link between service professionals from multiple jurisdictions that may share common experiences in the pursuit of new ideas. In Ohio, one such training opportunity of this kind that has sought to "bridge the gap between theory and practice" (NCJFCJ, 2002) is known as the *Fundamental Skills for Juvenile Justice Professionals*. Developed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and funded through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), this training is intended to facilitate the application of juvenile probation theory to the everyday practice of working with court involved youth.

Because fundamental skills training currently is an option for probation and parole officers working in the jurisdictions targeted by our own training efforts, and given the conceptual overlap regarding the historical background of the juvenile court and certain more general materials concerning theoretical orientation, we believed that those who had taken fundamental skills training would have greater knowledge about similar basic subject matter contained in the ABS material. At the same time, we thought that the ABS training was robust enough to allow those who had not taken this prior training to "catch up" in this overlapping general material while concurrently learning more specific content related to accountability-based sanctions. Hence, we hypothesized that our training efforts would indicate differential gains made through participation in the ABS training as a function of prior exposure to fundamental skills training when we more rigorously examined knowledge gain.

### Full-Scale Training

A full-scale training effort was offered in January of 2002. Participants were selected in a similar fashion to the second pilot training described above. The Ohio Department of Youth Services distributed a training memorandum to all 88 county courts. A total of 70 training slots were provided. Due to the limited space, counties were restricted to a maximum of 5 training slots per county. Individuals who did not register in time were given the option of being placed on a wait-list.

Participants in this second training sample initially were identified and contacted in a similar fashion to those individuals in the first training sample. Interested parties voluntarily sent/faxed in registration forms to ODYS and were enrolled in the training on a first-come, first-served basis. For this training, no on-site supervisor TA positions were used. Instead, a full-time teaching assistant at the Ohio State University was assigned to monitor the course in order to grade tests/quizzes and provide additional clarification on the content to trainees. In addition, a technical support person also was identified to provide direct assistance to trainees on use of the Internet and our distance learning technology.

Trainees received a syllabus that included specific timelines for completion of the training. The total length of time trainees were given to complete the course was 10 weeks (or the equivalent of 1 university quarter), broken down into four modules (A-D). Each module lasted approximately 2 weeks. Extra time was given on modules that had lengthy reading assignments or more involved testing procedures (essay or case example). The teaching assistant monitored progress of the trainees throughout the course. Completion of the course was denoted by the submission of the final post-test and the ABS course evaluation.

### Hypotheses Related to the Full-Scale Training Effort

There were three main hypotheses related to the implementation of this full-scale training effort. These were:

1. Scores on a measure of pretest knowledge regarding course material will be significantly related to prior training on related content. More specifically, having prior exposure to comparable training will be significantly related to greater ABS knowledge.
2. Scores on a measure of post-test knowledge will be significantly different from pre-test scores for both those individuals who received prior training and those that did

not. More specifically, both groups will experience significant gains in ABS knowledge.

3. Scores on a measure of post-test knowledge and overall knowledge gain regarding course material will not significantly differ between those individuals who had prior exposure to related content and those that did not. More specifically, the ABS training will allow the two groups to become equivalent in ABS knowledge.

### Full-Scale Training Sample

In all, 67 individuals completed the training. The total sample represented 17 counties (including large urban, mid-size and small rural) and included professionals working in probation (94 percent), parole (1.5 percent), adult corrections (1.5 percent) and residential/community treatment (3 percent). There were 36 males (54 percent) and 31 females (46 percent). The age range of participants was distributed fairly evenly among categories; age 21-25 (10 percent), 26-31 (25 percent), 32-38 (10 percent), 38-45 (13 percent) and 45+ (42 percent). In terms of job experience, 18 percent (n=12) reported that they had been in their current position for 15 or more years, 25 percent (n=17) of the trainees reported they had been in their current position for between 5-14 years, 52 percent (n=35) reported having been with their job between 1-4 years and only 5 percent (n=3) had been in their current position for less than 1 year. Education attainment for the sample indicated that 8 percent (n=5) had a high school diploma, 15 percent (n=10) had some college or a technical certificate/associate degree, 53 percent (n=36) had a four year college degree, and 24 percent (n=16) had a master's degree or above.

In addition to the basic demographic information, trainees were also asked to fill out an Internet-use survey. Results of the survey showed that similar numbers of the trainees had Internet access at both home (81 percent) and work (70 percent) and the top reasons they were most interested in participating in this type of training format was accessibility and convenience (42 percent) and the ability to work at their own pace (18 percent). In terms of Internet usage, only 10 percent (n=7) of the sample had any formal instruction on Internet use before the ABS training. Additionally, 24 percent (n=16) of the trainees reported that prior to beginning the training, they had never spent any time using the Internet, 10 percent (n=7) reported that they used the Internet for less than one

hour per week, 42 percent (n=29) reported using the Internet for an average of 1-5 hours per week, 7 percent (n=5) reported 6-9 hours of use per week and 15 percent (n=12) used the Internet 10 or more hours per week. Finally, trainees were asked about previous training that they had received related to fundamental skills. A total of twenty-four (36 percent) participants reported that they had acquired fundamental skills training, while the remainder (64 percent) did not.

### Results

In support of the first hypothesis, a two-tailed t-test revealed that participants exposed to similar content in previous trainings,  $M = 104.6$ ,  $SD = 24.8$ , scored higher than did those not receiving such prior training,  $M = 89.5$ ,  $SD = 35.1$ , on the pre-test knowledge examination;  $t(65) = 2.04$ ,  $p < .04$ . Paired-sample t-tests generated support for the second hypothesis concerning the significant increase in knowledge gain for all participants. This support was reflected in post-test scores both for those with training experience in related material,  $M = 147.5$ ,  $SD = 32.6$ ;  $t(23) = 5.83$ ,  $p < .0001$ , and those participants who did not receive such prior training,  $M = 143.5$ ,  $SD = 28.1$ ;  $t(42) = 9.65$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Finally, a two-tailed t-test revealed support for the third hypothesis concerning the lack of a significant difference between the post-test scores of these two groups;  $t(65) = 0.53$ , *ns*.

### Discussion

The results of our training efforts to date have laid a foundation for the enhancement of the juvenile justice professional's knowledge of sanctioning models and their impact on case management and aftercare planning. Data gathered from training participants support the ABS Project's use of distance learning tools as an effective means of transferring information about accountability-based sanctions.

Clearly, other training efforts using more standard instructional media cover material that overlaps in some fashion with the ABS Project's curriculum. Recognition was given to this factor in the collection of demographic information from training participants, and its potential to impact the knowledge gain of trainees subsequently was examined in the first hypothesis of this study. Results of the data analyses supported this first hypothesis insofar as scores on the measure of pretest knowledge regarding course material were significantly higher for those individuals exposed to prior training on fundamental skills. Here,

the data indicated that individuals with prior exposure to other training received a basic framework of knowledge that benefited their pre-test scores; likewise, those who did not have the same exposure were at an initial disadvantage because they had not been given access to a similar training protocol.

The results of the present empirical effort also supported the second hypothesis, because scores on the measure of post-test knowledge were significantly different from pre-test scores, regardless of prior exposure to other training material. More specifically, analyses indicated that all participants experienced significant gains in ABS knowledge. As the desired result of any training or learning experience is to gain knowledge in the specific subject area that is being examined, we believe that the ABS learning objectives were achieved. Therefore, preliminary evidence supports the use of the ABS training platform for those juvenile justice professionals interested in acquiring knowledge concerning accountability-based sanctions.

Finally, this study reported that post-test knowledge scores for those with prior exposure to other training efforts would not differ significantly from those for people without such prior exposure. As hypothesized, the ABS training allowed all participants to become equivalent, at least in terms of knowledge of our accountability-based sanctions curriculum. ABS is an effective Internet-based training platform that provides information in a more independent learning environment (i.e., here is material that you need to master individually), even if the distance learning medium used is anything but customary.

The ABS site provides an interface between knowledge gain and practicality, insofar as trainees are asked to take the learned material and apply it to case examples. However, it does not allow trainees to work together or provide feedback to one another directly. Thus, the ABS training concentrates on providing more "nuts and bolts" knowledge about theory and practice concerning accountability-based sanctions to the individual learner. On the other hand, other training efforts typically focus more on applying such "nuts and bolts" information to everyday practice through use of collective activities (small group, brainstorming, role playing etc.) that support using important information in the juvenile justice workplace. Characteristically, however, such trainings do not assess the extent to which trainees are actually taking the time to read this material prior to face-to-face contact, and concurrent-

ly have no mechanism in place to hold these individuals accountable for their having learned that material sufficiently.

In the final analysis, therefore, the ABS internet training platform may be complementary to more traditional juvenile justice training efforts, and even better results might be achieved through a blending of the two forms of instruction. For instance, before any face-to-face training, each participant could be held responsible for reading all important "nuts and bolts" information (history, theory, models of sanctioning, basic treatments and sanctions, and issues pertaining to specialized populations) that would be accessed on the ABS internet site. Simultaneously, the website would allow these individuals to be tested on their potential knowledge gains. Those who achieved a pre-set passing score then would be allowed to move forward to the advanced training that covered the practical (and face-to-face) application of this material to such issues as community supervision, courtroom presentations, ethics, and case management.

Such a strategy would significantly cut down on the amount of time trainees spent in the actual classroom, as they would be able to complete the first portion of their training via the internet. In addition, combining training methods would ensure that trainees were learning the basic knowledge necessary to be truly successful in the practical aspects of their jobs vis-à-vis the examinations taken on the ABS website. Finally, the use of face-to-face training methods regarding the application of these materials mastered through use of these distance learning tools would provide trainees with the most comprehensive preparation for the everyday situations these professional face in courts, homes, schools, and beyond.

## References

- Armstrong, T., Hofford, M., Maloney, D., Remington, C., & Steenson, D. (1983). *Restitution: A Guidebook for Juvenile Justice Practitioners*. Reno, NV: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.
- Decker, S.H. (1985). A Systemic Analysis of Diversion: Net Widening and Beyond. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 13, 207-216.
- Downs, W.R. (1990). Referral for Treatment Among Adolescent Alcohol and Drug Abusers. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 27, 190-209.
- Fisher, D.G. (1986). Diversion Follow-Up: Recidivism and Participant Impressions. *Canadian Journal of Special Education*, 2, 127-133.
- Gavazzi, S.M., Yarcheck, C.M., Wasserman, D., & Partridge, C. (2002). A Balanced and Restorative Approach To Juvenile Crime: Programming for Families of Adolescent Offenders. In G.L. Fox & M.L. Benson (eds.), *Contemporary Issues In Family Research Series* (Families and Crime Millennium Volume), pp. 381-405, Stanford, CT: JAI Press.
- Greenwood, P.W. (1992). Substance Abuse problems Among High Risk Youth and Potential Interventions. *Crime & Delinquency*, 38, 444-458.
- Henggeler, S.W., & Bourduin, C.M. (1990). Family Therapy and Beyond: A Multi-Systemic Approach to Treating the Problem Behaviors of Children and Adolescents. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Henggeler, S.W., Cunningham, P.B., Pickrel, S.G., Schoenwald, S.K., & Brondino, M.J. (1996). Multi-Systemic Therapy: An Effective Violence Prevention Approach for Serious Juvenile Offenders. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 47-61.
- Howell, J. C. (1995). *Guide For Implementing the Comprehensive strategy for Serious, Violent and Chronic Juvenile Offenders*. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Kammer, J.J., Minor, K.I., & Wells, J.B. (1997). An Outcome Study of the Diversion Plus Program for Juvenile Offenders. *Federal Probation*, (June), 51-57.
- Mecartney, C.A., Styles, M.B., & Morrow, K.V. (1994). Mentoring in the Juvenile Justice System: Findings From Two Pilot Programs (Winter). Private and Public Ventures.
- Metese, M. A. (1997). *Accountability-Based Sanctions*. FS-9758, The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- NCJFCJ (2002). *Fundamental Skills for Juvenile Justice Professionals*. Reno, NV: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- Polk, K. (1986). Juvenile Diversion: A Look at the Record. *Crime & Delinquency*, 30, 648-659.
- Roy, S. (1990). Offender-Oriented Restitution Bills: Bringing Total Justice to Victims. *Federal Probation* (September), 30-36.
- Roy, S. (1995). Juvenile Restitution and recidivism in a Midwestern County. *Federal Probation* 59, 55-62.
- Schicor, D., & Binder, A. (1981). Community Restitution Requirements in Community Correctional Programs. *Criminal Justice Review*, 46-50.
- Tierney, J.P., Grossman, G.B., & Resch, N. (1995). Making the Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
- Torres, S. (1997). An Effective Supervision Strategy for Substance-Abusing Offenders. *Federal Probation*, 61, 38-44.

Yarcheck, C.M., Gavazzi, S.M., & Andrews, D.W. (2001). *An Accountability-Based Sanctions Handbook for Juvenile Justice Professionals*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University.