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Multicultural Training in the Counseling Profession: Current Status and Future Directions

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Abstract

This article discusses the status of multicultural training in the counseling profession. Challenges exist to integrating multicultural training in counseling programs, including differences in defining competence, program barriers, and a lack of agreement on effective teaching. Programs are encouraged to address the ways they teach multicultural counseling before adding an additional class. Suggestions include addressing racism, expanding faculty involvement and purposefully providing multicultural opportunities in practicum and internship.

### Multicultural Training in the Counseling Profession: Current Status and Future Directions

The purpose of multicultural counselor education is to train counselors so they will be capable of effective counseling with culturally different clients (Locke, 1990). Client needs are becoming progressively more diverse and nontraditional (Constantine, 2002b). How has the counseling profession responded to multiculturalism and how effective have those efforts been? This article will discuss new directions for counselor training to further increase competence and relevance. Specifically, programs and individuals will be encouraged to continually examine their own multicultural practices and respond with lasting and meaningful change.

Parham (2001) reminded counselors that competence does not happen through one course, professor or textbook. Reynolds (1997) discussed two different types of change across three different target audiences (individuals, groups, and institutions) for multicultural counselor training. First order change is modification that does not adjust the structure of a system. Second order alterations modify a system. An example of a first order group change would be recruitment without changing the program atmosphere or environment. A second order group change would be the development of a new mission involving self-examination and training. All levels of change are important and needed, but counselor education programs have historically responded with first order change. This article will focus on the promotion of second order change. Efforts toward multicultural competency training must focus on people and not the subject matter (Reynolds, 1995). Counselor educators need to continually ask themselves how their work will matter to their students and clients.

In the context of this discussion, it is important to understand how key terms are used. Chen, Thombs, and Costa (2003) described culture as a “network of domain-specific knowledge structures shared by members of a social-cultural group” that guides expectations, perceptions

and interpretations in any given situation (p. 457). Culture is subjective and dynamic (Locke, 1990). Reynolds (2001) offered both concrete and personal definitions for multiculturalism. She believed defining multiculturalism must be “from both universal and race-based perspectives” incorporating the multiple identities one has (p. 104). Her own understanding of multiculturalism arose from a personal reflective journey and discovery of self. Whether or not one is aware of it, everyone experiences multiculturalism. Locke (1990) described multicultural counseling as an interaction of the culture where counseling occurs, the cultural identity of the client, and the beliefs and racial attitudes of the counselor.

The movement toward multicultural counseling grew out of the civil rights movement (Harpner, 2003). A caucus at the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), now the American Counseling Association (ACA), eventually led to the development of the Association for Non-White Concerns in Personnel and Guidance. During the 1970's, counseling minorities courses began to be included in to counseling programs. As the association focused more on inclusiveness, they changed their name to the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) in 1985 (Harpner). In response to editor of the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* Courtland Lee's challenge to provide greater leadership to the field of multiculturalism, the board of directors came together to articulate the 31 multicultural competencies. It was their hope that these competencies would transform the training of counselors (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has sought to be both forward thinking and reflective in designing counseling programs. In the social and cultural directives CACREP has both responded to feedback from constituents, most notably the AMCD, and attempted to meet the future needs of training

professional counselors (C. Bobby, personal communication, July 12, 2006). The standards have sought to reflect the current language of the profession and society. For example, the word “multicultural” was first used in the 1988 CACREP standards while “pluralistic” was added in 1994. Social and cultural foundations became a core area of the CACREP standard requirements in 1994 (CACREP). The name of this core area changed to social and cultural diversity in 2001. In 2001, the social and cultural diversity standards required both experiential learning activities and examination of biases, prejudice, oppression and discrimination (CACREP). As programs are accredited by these standards, programs must meet social and cultural diversity requirements (C. Bobby, personal communication, July 12, 2006; CACREP, 2001).

Difficulty and debate surround the development of multicultural counselor training programs. First, the journey of becoming a competent cross-cultural counselor does not have an endpoint (Sue, et al., 1992). Continual growth will always be necessary. Second, institutional, departmental, and program barriers make significant multicultural change challenging. Reynolds (1995) suggested that efforts within the program are most important in developing competent counselors. Program barriers include a lack of understanding, information, and resources. Third, little agreement exists on the most essential and effective types of multicultural training. Multicultural skills are not easily taught in the classroom (Lee, Chalk, Conner et al., 1999). Fourth, there are a variety of philosophical assumptions of counselor educators on the underlying definitions and understandings of culture (Carter & Qureshi, 1995). The reality that multicultural counseling is not value free further complicates matters (Locke, 1990). Additionally, Constantine (2002b) discussed the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender and social class that compose the multiple identities of individuals. Counselors have historically compartmentalized these issues. Counselors and counselor educators may feel overwhelmed or ineffective addressing client

concerns related to multifaceted societal forces. Despite these challenges, it is important counselor educators demonstrate a sincere and personal respect for cultural differences by providing culturally relevant programs.

### *Current Programs and Training*

How effective is the counseling profession at training multicultural counselors? Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) conducted a national survey to assess counselors' self-perceived level of competence. They hoped to see how the 1994 CACREP multicultural standards contributed to the development of multicultural counseling competence. Self-perceived competence was comprised of five factors: knowledge, awareness, definition of terms, racial identity development and skills. They found 46% of the respondents who had taken a multicultural course had statistically significantly higher levels of self-perceived competence in the areas of knowledge and racial identity development than before taking the course. Despite respondents perceiving themselves to be competent in these areas, participants also believed their training to be inadequate. Several implications were gleaned from this study. In general, taking a multicultural course significantly affects counselors' self-perceived competence. The most adequate training was found in the definition of terms component. However, since counselors still see their training as inadequate, the authors suggested more experiential learning experiences may be needed (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999).

The extent of multicultural training at many counseling programs is one multicultural course. While requiring counseling students to take a multicultural course may be a good start for training, many strongly believe one course is inadequate training for competence (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Ponterotto & Alexander, 1995; Reynolds, 1995; Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000). Ponterotto and Alexander (1995) stated that even though many faculty voice their receptivity to

improving their multicultural programs, the majority simply respond by adding multicultural courses and recruiting minority faculty. Faculty members are unsure how to develop effective comprehensive programs. Reynolds (1995) observed that counselor training programs have made little significant change in curriculum and teaching methods. Multicultural issues have been minimally integrated into the program philosophy and prospectus.

The counseling profession has a responsibility to its community to produce relevant and competent multicultural counselors. In 2001, Arredondo and Arcinieaga warned counselor educators that our relevance as a profession was dependent on immediate action. Counselors are ethically mandated to practice within the boundaries of their competence (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Ponterotto and Casas (1987) soberly stated if history is a reflection of the future, most counselor education programs will not change unless they are forced to become more culturally sensitive.

In search of multicultural competence within counselor training programs, Ponterotto and Casas (1987) concluded the counseling profession was failing to meet racial and ethnic minority mental health needs effectively. There were notable exceptions to their general conclusion. At Syracuse University, a cross-cultural certificate program requiring a practicum in a multicultural setting was available. Boston University's program, boasting many leaders in the field, offered both a specialty in bilingual cross-cultural counseling and supervised practicum in a bilingual setting. Minority issues were integrated into all courses. Western Washington University was strong in both research and practice, offering a cross-cultural concentration. In addition, they offered a practicum in minority mental health settings as well as on Native American reservations.

Alexander, Kruczek and Ponterotto (2005) described a recent international immersion

experience in Trinidad for school counseling practicum students. Their goals were to deepen coursework by integrating it into a practicum experience, meet CACREP standards, develop greater awareness, knowledge and skills, provide a school counseling program that is relevant, and promote an international exchange of ideas. This immersion experience addressed the danger in many locales where exposure to cultural diversity is limited by cultural encapsulation. The above authors stressed the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of multicultural training programs. This program shows a concentrated effort to develop integrated multicultural counseling curriculums.

### *New Directions for Training*

How should class time be used to train counselors? From the above discussion, it is clear that counselor educators need to continue to improve the ways they teach multicultural counseling. Kim and Lyons (2003) shared that despite progress in multicultural counselor education, the issue of *how* to effectively teach the competencies has not been sufficiently addressed. They suggested the key may be using experiential activities. Constantine (2002) stressed that the complexity of concerns mandates counselors be trained in nontraditional ways. Locke (1990) wrote the focus of training should be on how to work in different cultures rather than simply learning about cultures. The examples of progressive multicultural training programs discussed above have a strong experiential component. The following section will discuss further directions for counselor educators to create lasting learning experiences for counseling students.

Many counselors believe that focusing on racism and the reflective journeys of counselor trainees is an essential element of multicultural counseling training (Constantine, 2002a; Faubert & Locke, 1996; Locke & Kiselica, 1999; Reynolds, 1999). Learning content information about different cultures and cultural groups is important. Learning to appreciate and get along with

those of different cultural backgrounds is necessary for change, but not sufficient. Counselors value cultural and racial groups more when they are aware of their own racial attitudes and feelings (Constantine, 2002a). Reynolds (1999) pointed out that the goal in multicultural counselor training is not, nor ever has been, to make people feel more comfortable. The goal should be to aid people in understanding the wide-ranging system of racism and how we have each internalized that system. Understanding racism, both intellectually and personally, is vital to healing the damage it has caused (Locke & Kiselica, 1999). Reynolds (1999) stated that refusing to confront racism is equal to acting codependent, maintaining a damaging system. She called us to examine our own lives--what we are doing and how we go about doing it.

The implication is clear. Confronting racism means counselor educators need to confront the racism within themselves, so they can guide their students in a similar process. Locke and Kiselica (1999) suggest that counselor educators model this process to their students. By doing so, faculty convey to students that confronting racism is continual, containing both successes and failures. Other ways to address racism in the classroom are to include discussions about privilege and judgment with regards to merit, and an informal mentoring process. These strategies provide opportunities for students to personalize issues of racism (Locke & Kiselica, 1999).

Culture can be taught from either a universal or an idiographic view. According to Locke (1990), the universal view is so broad that sources of problems are not explored. This view sees cultural differences simply as individual differences and allows the dominant culture to move the focus away from racism. The idiographic view challenges individuals to evaluate themselves and their institutions for their own levels of racism and contributions to that harmful system. Locke suggests that counselor educators need to focus on groups most likely to be encountered by

students so that students examine their own racial beliefs in regards to specific culturally different individuals and groups.

A cognitive focus in training may provide opportunity to challenge students' filters for viewing the world. Steward, Boatwright, Sauer, Baden and Jackson (1998) conducted a study linking gender and cognitive development to the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS). The WRAIS is a self-report instrument designed to assess five race-related information processing strategies (Helms, 1999). These schemas are progressively contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudoindependence and autonomy. Higher ordered schemas on the WRAIS display less stereotyping and bias, as well as an increased ability to integrate. Steward et al. found that a higher level of cognitive complexity resulted in greater ability to avoid stereotyping, integration of incongruent client information without changing client dimensions, and a lesser proclivity to bias in clinical assessment. Within cognitive development, dualistic thinking was negatively related to racial identity. In a follow-up study, Evans and Foster (2000) found that multicultural training can be beneficial in changing information processing tied to racial attitudes, but does not encouraged the cognitive complexity necessary for moral development.

Steward et al. (1998) and Constantine (2002a) suggested the importance of incorporating identity models in a personal way into multicultural training activities. Constantine (2002a) found racial identity attitudes, as measured by the WRAIS, and racism attitudes contributed to a significant amount of the variance in self-perceived multicultural competence levels of school counselor trainees. Richardson and Molinaro (1996) agreed, citing the well used adage "Counselor, know thyself" should be applied. They believe if it is commonly held that counselor self-awareness is necessary for culturally relevant counseling, then important factors in awareness must be identified and infused into multicultural counselor training. Although the

above four studies focused on white racial identity, counselors cannot make the assumption that all counselors are white. Counselor educators will want to research and develop a wider range of identity models.

Cognitive complexity may be encouraged by using a variety of teaching styles and strategies that challenge concrete thinking. Faubert and Locke (1996) suggested the use cognitive behavioral techniques prepare counselors for unexpected issues that may arise in their practice. Cognitive restructuring can be used to promote awareness and presuppositions. Anxiety reduction techniques may help counselor trainees deal with their fears about counseling culturally different clients. Counselor educators need to understand the limitations of multicultural training with certain trainees, but to continue to work toward developing an integrated curriculum that encourages multicultural sensitivity (Steward et al., 1998).

Multicultural counselor training needs to be occurring in practicum and internship experiences, while counselor trainees are under supervision. Since at least 30% of the general population is minority, clinical training experiences should reflect that diversity (Ponterotto & Alexander, 1995). A lack of minority clients in certain geographic areas is not a legitimate excuse for not providing and assessing multicultural training at practicum and internship sites. Acting as training facilities, program counseling centers cannot passively wait for minority clients to arrive, but must find active methods to provide services to a diverse culture (Lee et al., 1999). Ponterotto and Alexander (1995) suggested faculty develop relationships with centers in the community providing services to diverse clients for possible internship sites. Another recommendation is to offer a multicultural seminar for new practicum students each semester (Lee et al., 1999).

All faculty members need to value their role in multicultural training efforts (Reynolds,

1995) and serve as competent multicultural supervisors (Ponterotto & Alexander, 1995).

Reynolds (1995) warned if one faculty member is seen as the multicultural expert then other members may not feel the importance of developing their own multicultural skills. Faculty training is primary in developing competence in students.

A question for debate is whether a second multicultural class should be required in counselor training programs. As the above discussion reflects, a better approach would be to address the ways programs teach multicultural counseling. A second class would be beneficial only if it would truly be contributing to competence. An option would be to structure the first class as primarily content driven, and a second class that provides experiences to promote more awareness and introspection as multicultural counselors. To better meet CACREP (2001) doctoral standards for counselor education and supervision, doctoral programs also must incorporate advanced training in multicultural counseling.

#### *Further research*

The effectiveness and usefulness of the above suggestions may be difficult to quantify. As was discussed earlier, multicultural counseling and counselor training attempts to address the complex multiple identities of individuals. Due to this complexity, it is suggested that qualitative research methods may be most useful in understanding the impact of experiential and reflective teaching methods. Choudhuri (2003) argues that qualitative research is uniquely suited to answer complex questions of experience and identity. In addition, the majority of research available investigates the counselor's self-perceived level of competency. Research must also address how clients from multiple cultures perceive the relevancy and effectiveness of their counselors. This article suggests that cognitive complexity and moral development are two components of training culturally effective counselors. Further study is needed to substantiate that claim.

*Conclusion*

This article has discussed promoting lasting and meaningful change in multicultural counselor training programs. Lasting change is not a matter of adding new classes or techniques, but changing the way counselor educators teach. In doing so, counselor education programs and counselor educators must reflect on their own practices and participation in a damaged system. The suggestions in this article may serve as a launching point in that process. It is expected that effective and meaningful teaching will arise out of programs and counselor educators that are reflective and open.

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