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Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Extending Multicultural Training Paradigms Toward Globalization

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Abstract

Current multicultural training models may be limited in helping counselors to acquire cultural competencies needed for effective interventions with culturally diverse clients in global communities. In preparing counselors to meet the challenges of diverse societies in the 21st century, multi-dimensional multicultural training models and attributes of cultural competence are examined. Sequential coursework and experiences that assist trainees in developing a deeper understanding of self in relation to global communities are recommended.

More than three decades ago, a call to the counseling profession identified the need to prepare culturally competent helping professionals to meet the challenges of a multicultural and diverse American society (Sue et al., 1982). Multicultural counseling competencies were defined, revised, and operationalized with goals of training multiculturally skilled counselors who are able to provide ethical and effective counseling interventions to culturally diverse clients (Arredondo et al., 1996; Pedersen, 1994; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Conceptualized within the historical and sociopolitical context of the United States, *multiculturalism* referred to race, ethnicity, and culture, focusing on four racial-ethnic minority groups (Asian, Black /African, Latino/Hispanic, Native American and groups who have historically resided in the continental United States and its territories) while *diversity* referred to dimensions of personal identity and individual differences (Arredondo & Glauner, 1992; Arredondo et al., 1996). The attributes of cultural competence were identified using a tripartite model: (1) awareness of one's own personal beliefs, values, biases, and attitudes, (2) awareness and knowledge of the worldview of culturally diverse individuals and groups, and (3) utilization of culturally appropriate intervention skills and strategies (Sue & Sue, 2013). A model of personal identity operationalized dimensions of human differences, in addition to the complexities of diversity and shared identity (Arredondo & Glauner, 1992). The components of cultural competence and dimensions of personal identity provided frameworks for developing the goals and strategies for counselor cultural competency-based training (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001).

In the early 1990's, Sue et al. (1992) called attention to the *diversification of America*, as evidenced by a growing multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual U.S. society. Recent reports continue to show an increasingly diverse U. S. population, with Hispanics and Asians having the highest rate of growth when compared to African Americans, Native Americans, and Whites (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). Immigrants are estimated to comprise 12% of the U.S. population (Sue & Sue, 2013). Consistent with the nation's growing and changing racial-ethnic diversity was a decrease in the monolingual English-speaking White population (Portman, 2009). Reflecting the 21st century demographic profile of the United States, Sue and Sue's (2013) text, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (6th edition) included chapters on the four American minority groups (African American, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, and Latinos) as well as chapters focused on counseling practice with Arab and Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans, immigrants and refugees, LGBT individuals, the elderly and individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, increasing interactions across national borders have resulted in the globalization of the counseling profession and an *interconnectedness* of human, environmental, and technological concerns affecting people worldwide (Gerstein, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, Leung, & Norsworthy, 2009).

Given the realities of an interdependent and changing world, counselors may be limited in their ability to provide effective interventions that extend to culturally diverse populations in global communities. Glockshuber (2005) reported that counselors experienced difficulty in perceiving multicultural diversity within a global context. Multicultural training and the development of multicultural competencies typically have been conceptualized from U. S. national perspectives (Leong & Ponterotto, 2003). In advancing globalization of the counseling profession, the generalizability of national models must be examined and the discussion must include global perspectives that extend beyond national borders (Leung, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this research is threefold. Firstly, attributes of multicultural competence are examined within the context of the globalization of the counseling profession. Secondly, multi-dimensional, developmental multicultural training models designed to prepare helping professionals to work with culturally diverse clients in global communities are discussed. Thirdly, attributes of cultural competence that increase counselors' abilities to work effectively with culturally diverse clients living in the U.S. and globally are explored.

Multicultural Counseling Training

Cultural competency standards approved by the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development in 1991 and adopted by Association of Counseling and Development (now American Counseling Association) have continued to provide guidelines for multicultural counselor training as well as the criteria by which multicultural training outcomes are assessed. Multicultural coursework is required in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited counselor education programs (CACREP Standards, 2009) and American Psychological Association (APA) accredited psychology programs (APA, 2003). Although approaches have varied from program to program, counselor trainees completing pretest and posttest measures reported increased cultural awareness, cultural

knowledge, and culturally responsive skills after multicultural training (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000; Yutzenka, 1995). Self-reported quantitative measures were primarily used to assess the three attributes of cultural competence (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991; Ponterotto, 1997; Sadowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). In a more recent study, (Castillo, Brossart, Reyes, Conoley, & Phoummarath, 2007) first year counseling graduate students' cultural self-awareness significantly increased and implicit racial prejudice decreased after taking a multicultural course, and cultural knowledge and skills increased for students completing multicultural counseling and counseling foundations courses.

Although research has tended to support the efficacy of multicultural training, few studies have examined the effectiveness of multicultural counseling competencies in helping counselors to use acquired cultural awareness and cultural knowledge in conceptualizing client concerns and in developing culturally responsive interventions (Dickson & Shumway, 2011; Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007). Also, students' racial-ethnic backgrounds and experiences may influence multicultural training outcomes. Although multicultural training experiences improved multicultural competencies and cognitive racial attitudes among Hispanic counseling students, their affective racial attitudes were not changed (Ginger, Argus-Calvo, & Tafuya, 2010). More training increased White counseling students' multicultural awareness but did not increase racial-ethnic minority students' multicultural awareness (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011). Current multicultural training approaches may not provide trainees with adequate prompts to encourage the process of exploration and growth toward increased cultural competence. Multicultural training may need to be differentiated based on trainees' racial-ethnic backgrounds and experiences in order to increase counselors' multicultural competencies (Chao, 2013). Consequently, the effectiveness of multicultural training in preparing counseling professionals for the challenges of the 21st century and beyond has been questioned (Ahmed, Wilson, Henriksen, & Jones, 2011; Toporek & Reza, 2001).

Multi-dimensional, Developmental Multicultural Approaches

Current multicultural training models may “oversimplify the complexities involved in multicultural interactions” (Dickson & Jepsen, 2007, p. 47). Pernell-Arnold, Finley, Sands, Bourjolly, and Stanhope (2012) advocated for a shift from being culturally encapsulated (Wrenn, 1962; 1985) to a multiperspective or a multicultural worldview. Due to the complex process of developing cultural competence, multicultural researchers concluded that multi-dimensional (Glockshuber, 2005) or multi-faceted (Dickson & Shumway, 2011) models may be needed. Multicultural learning experiences that are developmental and build upon levels of counselor competence are more likely to achieve learning objectives that extend to global communities. Sequential experiences that build upon trainees' current levels of cultural competence provide a foundation for developing comprehensive approaches to cultural competency-based training. Also, the importance of multiple training formats has been emphasized (Sevig & Etzkorn, 2001). Experiential learning complements didactic instruction, providing opportunities for direct lived realities that encourage self-reflection and growth toward cultural competence.

Dickson and Shumway (2011) presented an integrative framework for delivering effective multicultural training identifying three essential components: 1) a culturally sensitive program environment, 2) traditional, participatory, and experiential instructional strategies, and 3) multicultural clinical instruction (p. 2). Sequential experiences involving both didactic and experiential course work provide opportunities for acquiring and utilizing attributes of cultural competence. Exposure to a variety of multicultural training experiences as well as differentiated training provides continual opportunities for self-reflection and growth. Furthermore, transformative multicultural learning environments are characterized by learning experiences that directly challenge assumptions and beliefs about self within the social-political context of culturally diverse others (Clarke & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2009).

Attributes of Cultural Competence

Attitudes/Beliefs and Cultural Awareness

Conceptualizing multicultural training models from a global perspective, Glockshuber (2011) and Minami (2008) considered attitudes/beliefs to be a critical component in a model of counselor cultural competence. According to Minami (2008) “Developing awareness is necessary, but not sufficient to develop MCC” (p. 42). An attitudinal component of cultural competence is viewed as separate and distinct from cultural awareness. Attitudes/beliefs were assumed to involve explicit and implicit affective, cognitive, and behavioral evaluative responses that influenced interactions with culturally diverse others. High attitude competency was associated with a constructive racial-ethnic attitude. Glockshuber (2011) found that counselors’ self-evaluated cultural competence was directly related to their cultural attitudes/beliefs. Minami (2008) concluded that attitudes/beliefs should be a separate attribute of in a model of cultural competence. On the other hand, Sue and Sue (2013) conceptualized attitudes/beliefs as social conditioning that required self-examination of attitudes and feelings associated with cultural differences. Hence, the importance of attitudes/beliefs can not be underestimated and is particularly relevant in considering the dynamics of counselor-client relationships when working across cultures. Assisting counselors to become self-aware and to examine their cultural attitudes/beliefs is an important attribute in developing cultural competence and increasing counselor effectiveness with culturally diverse clients.

Cultural Knowledge

Sue and Sue (2013) define cultural knowledge as understanding and sharing the world view of clients through cognitive empathy rather than affective empathy (p. 48). Limited cultural knowledge resulted in a reliance on stereotyped generalizations about racial-cultural groups that increased the likelihood of inappropriate decision-making (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000). Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2013) found that direct ongoing cross-cultural interactions facilitated cultural knowledge and cultural empathy, enabling helping professionals to connect with cultural diverse others, understand and appreciate the uniqueness of their daily lives and to recognize universal commonalities (etic) that existed between them. Inherent in this level of knowledge is an understanding of the social and political context in which clients live their lives.

The knowledge component in a model of cultural competence might be expanded based on the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986). Belenky et al.'s theory focused on women's ways of knowing, and is used in proposing a developmental process for acquiring cultural knowledge as an attribute of cultural competence.

1. *Silence* is characterized by a tendency to adhere to stereotypes with difficulty defining self. This may be a common experience for a new graduate student or a student who has not been exposed to cultural diversity.
2. *Received Knowing* is a result of listening to the voices of others. This may be the experience of a trainee beginning their first multicultural didactic course with little or no prior multicultural experience.
3. *Subjective Knowing* results when one follows self and does not feel obligated to listen to others. This may be the experience of a trainee who begins to challenge cultural biases and assumptions through critical self-examination.
4. *Procedural Knowing* consists of *connected knowing* that is grounded in first-hand experience and empathy or *Separate Knowing* that relies on reason rather than feelings. This may reflect the experiences of practicum or interns working in culturally diverse settings who are attempting to understand the experiences of culturally diverse clients.
5. *Constructed Knowing* involves integrating self and reason within a global perspective. This way of knowing may reflect the experiences advanced students or graduates with direct and on-going cross-cultural experiences and interactions with culturally diverse others. Constructed Knowing implies critical self reflection as part of understanding the relation of self to others in the world.

Cultural Skills

The ability to provide effective counseling interventions is maximized when counselors are continually working to develop the attributes of cultural competence. Sue and Sue (2013) discussed the implications of assuming universal applications to the exclusions of cultural specific views when working with culturally diverse client populations in the U.S. and globally. For example, Minami (2008) cautioned that a counselor with high cultural awareness competency, high cultural knowledge competency, and low attitude/belief competency will be unlikely to successfully engage in effective cross cultural interactions or provide culturally responsive counseling. Also, McRae and Johnson (1991) asserted that multicultural training that focused on cultural differences limits trainees' ability to apply acquired cultural knowledge in providing culturally appropriate interventions to culturally diverse clients. Culture-specific knowledge about racial-ethnic groups may be unintentionally misused and become stereotyped generalizations. Similarly, the use of culture-general knowledge may overlook important nuances necessary in making culturally appropriate clinical judgments. Therefore, the ability to develop appropriate interventions strategies and techniques are dependent on the ability to acquire and utilize cultural awareness, and cultural knowledge (Sue & Sue, 2013).

Self-Reflection

Counselor cultural competence is to know oneself cognitively and emotionally within the context of socio-political influences (Arredondo, 1999). Innovative approaches to cultural competency-based training seek to move trainees to a level by which they are better able to consider differing worldviews and engage in critical reflective thinking in making judgments about situations that may differ from their own. Rather than relying on multicultural self-assessments as a way to measure cultural competence, critical self-reflection promotes meaningful opportunities for self-examination and developmental growth (Roysircar, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Griffith and Frieden (2000) define reflective thinking as, “the active, on-going examination of the theories, beliefs, and assumptions that contribute to counselors’ understanding of client issues” (p. 82). The ability to develop reflective thinking about self and others is an essential skill that promotes reflective judgment. Fitzgerald (2000) discussed cultural competence stating,

It is about developing the ability to ‘see’ a situation from multiple perspectives and, if necessary, to reconcile them. It is about developing multiple potential interpretations and using critical reflective thinking to choose which alternatives are most likely to provide effective strategies for care. It is about using such understandings to become more competent and effective professionals. (p. 184-185)

Conclusion

In meeting the needs of a diverse nation and advancing global counseling initiatives, there is a demand for helping professionals who are culturally aware, culturally sensitive, and have specific cultural knowledge about individuals representing cultural groups who may live in the United States and abroad (Nieto, 2004). Advancing counselor competencies toward an increased level of awareness and knowledge that extends across cultures requires a complex understanding of the dynamics of culture and the impact of cultural practices from a sociopolitical context. A continuing challenge for counseling professionals is to move beyond current levels of competence, and to confront attitudes and practices, both personally and professionally, that reflect cultural bias (Pedersen, 1987). Counselor training programs should provide multicultural training that expands worldviews, providing cultural lenses by which counselors are better able to see and to understand a client's worldview (Ivey, D'Andrea, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 2002). Multicultural training must extend counselors’ competencies beyond pre-requisite levels for meeting client concerns in a culturally diverse world. Whereas multicultural training focused on first-order change may result in increased knowledge, Pernell-Arnold et al. (2012) advocated for multicultural training models aimed at second-order change which transforms the way in which one perceives the world and lives in the world.

Sue and Sue (2013) asserted that the journey toward counselor cultural competence is a developmental process. Multicultural training must provide continuing opportunities use self-reflective skills to confront bias assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Sue & Sue, 1990). Self-reflective analysis is a key component of critical reflective thinking and reflective judgment. It is necessary to understand oneself within a racial-cultural context in order to objectively consider multiple perspectives as part of

effective decision-making. Critical thinking thereby leads to reflective self-analysis and reflective judgment. Self-reflection, intergroup dialogue and openness to the experience are essential to developing the attributes of cultural competence (Manese, Wu, & Nepomuceno, 2001). The goal of developing self-reflective skills in multicultural training appears to help counselors to illuminate and combat cultural bias and ethnocentric assumptions in advancing the profession toward global initiatives (Pedersen, 2003).

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