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Article 43

Integrating Technology Into Multicultural Training: Enhancing Outcomes for Didactic and Experiential Courses

Paper based on a program presented at the 2012 American Counseling Association Conference, San Francisco, CA, March 21-25.

Saundra M. Tomlinson-Clarke and Darren L. Clarke

Tomlinson-Clarke, Saundra M., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her research focuses on multicultural training models designed to foster cultural competencies and international counseling.

Clarke, Darren L., is an Executive Director of Continuing Education and Global Programs in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. His expertise includes developing and implementing international educational study tours and international cultural immersion training.

Both didactic and experiential components have been used in multicultural training with goals of developing counselor cultural competencies. Priester et al. (2008) examined syllabi from introductory master's level multicultural counseling courses, and found that the majority of course content focused on developing cultural awareness and cultural knowledge. Awareness and knowledge are associated with the cognitive learning domain (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995). Learning occurring at a cognitive or intellectual level may limit a student's ability to integrate awareness and knowledge into practice, thereby limiting the acquisition of multicultural skills. Heppner and O'Brien (1994) suggested that cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning domains are most affected by experiential components that are well integrated into the course content. In summarizing a recent review of research examining outcomes of multicultural counselor training, Malott (2010) concluded that a single multicultural course does have a positive impact in developing multicultural competency.

In advancing the development of a single multicultural course, Malott (2010) suggested several effective instructional strategies inclusive of course design, exposure to diverse populations, explorations of student biases, specific course-related activities, and ongoing research. Missing from the recommendations was a focus on integrating instructional technology into multicultural course content. In a search of the literature, we were unable to find any studies that used a course management system or Weblogs with a multicultural counseling training course. Two studies were found in the medical field that incorporated Weblogs into course content to promote reflection among medical school

students (Chretien, Goldman, & Faselis, 2008) and blogging as a way of connecting medical students with the global medical community (Ehrlich, Jefferson-Lenskyj, & Plener, 2007). Acknowledging that counseling has not advanced as quickly as other fields of study in utilizing online environments, Krieger and Stockton (2011) recently published an article in which online learning was used to teach group counseling. Despite advances in instructional technology, to date, only one study was found that incorporated technology in the delivery of graduate multicultural training. Stevens and Brown (2011) used blogging as a tool to teach technology use and critical multicultural literacy instruction to graduate students in a teacher education hybrid course. Still, no courses were found that integrated technology and multicultural counseling training with a focus on developing the three components of cultural competency: awareness, knowledge, and skills. Given the increased usage of technology in the delivery of counseling services (Shaw & Shaw, 2006), the absence of instructional technology in multicultural counseling training ignores the growing community of e-learners (Larsen, Visser-Rotgans, & Hole, 2011). Two strategies we have used for integrating instructional technology that provide opportunities for guided reflection associated with cultural competency in a single multicultural course are (1) a course management system and (2) blogging. Guided reflection in a single course has resulted in positive outcomes and is considered to be an important component of a multicultural training whether based on didactic, experiential, or a combined learning approach (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Griffith & Frieden, 2000; King & Kitchener, 1994; Roysircar, Gard, Hubbell, & Ortega, 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

Integrating Technology into Single Multicultural Course Designs

A Didactic Multicultural Course

A course in multicultural issues was developed as a single didactic course examining influences of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, and ability on counselor-client interactions. The goal of the course is to assist students in developing a (more) flexible frame of reference with an overall goal of developing multicultural competencies for delivery of culturally responsive interventions. The impact of culture on counseling process and outcome is explored through class readings, discussions, and systematic examination and critique of current multicultural research. The course objectives include:

1. Increased awareness and knowledge of cultural diversity and ethnic minority issues in counseling.
2. Increased racial/ cultural self-awareness and personal-professional multicultural competence.
3. Understanding of the sociopolitical nature of clinical interventions.
4. Increased familiarity with multicultural counseling research and practice.
5. Integration of theoretical models and interventions in the field of multicultural counseling and therapy (MCT).

Course objectives are met through a combination of activities which include active participation in class discussions and timely completion of course assignments. The course is required for students in the master's degree programs in school counseling and counseling psychology. Students in psychology doctoral programs also may take the

course as part of degree requirements. See Appendix A for required and recommended readings for the course.

Integrating a course management system. A course management system (eCollege) was an integral component of the 15-week single multicultural course. Course management systems, more commonly known as but not limited to *eCollege WebCT*, *Blackboard*, and *On-Course*, serve two main functions in teaching and learning: (1) to manage and retrieve course materials and (2) to provide online faculty-to-student and student-to-student communications (Jarrahi, 2010). To integrate instructional technology into the course design, the course was taught as a hybrid with 40 percent of the course occurring in the online learning environment. The goals were to facilitate reflection and foster critical thinking through online activities, web media, and online asynchronous discussions.

In a structural analysis, Jarrahi (2010) found that utilization of a course management system was directly linked to the meaning that faculty attach to an e-learning environment. Based on the research examining multicultural learning experiences, several reasons are identified for using a course management system as a supplement or extension for teaching a single didactic multicultural course. First, the e-classroom allows students to explore the multicultural course material in a safe, structured environment (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). With the appropriate guided questions and prompts, students have increased opportunities to engage in guided reflection that has been associated with developing cultural competencies (Griffith & Frieden, 2000; Roysircar et al., 2005). Secondly, students are able to use e-communication to reflect on topics and explore cognitions and feelings by engaging in threaded discussions. Asynchronous online discussions are used in the e-classroom to allow time for critical thinking and in-depth feedback from the instructor and peers. Although asynchronous discussion allows for learner flexibility, it differs from self-paced learning. Students are expected to respond within a given time frame to the course materials and discussions in order to maintain the continuity of the course content as well as to enhance the depth and scope of the course resulting from student exploration of the issues. For example, in an *eCollege* unit entitled, *Barriers to Multicultural Competencies*, Derald Sue's lecture on *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* was embedded in the course management system with instructions indicating that students should view this lecture in addition to related readings. Students were able to view Dr. Sue's lecture, read related research on microaggressions, and engage in critical thinking and self-reflection. Asynchronous discussion provided further opportunities for students to reflect on topic and to engage in discussion in the online learning environment, in addition to using the course management system to post related research and questions in advancing multicultural theory and practice.

An Experiential Multicultural Course

Experiential cultural immersion training was based on a cultural immersion model developed by Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010). The model assumes that

international cultural immersion occurring outside of the confines of the university community, within a diverse socio-cultural setting that differs from the United States appears to create the optimal conditions that foster racial and cultural self-awareness. Immersion into a different culture

heightens an individual's personal racial and cultural awareness and encourages a process of examining thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors that might be ignored or denied in a similar or familiar cultural context. (p. 169)

Based on this model, a 3-credit graduate course is offered during the summer session (July-August). The course curriculum was developed specifically for the cultural immersion experience. Weblogging (blogging) was integrated into the course design to facilitate connection among the participants and to promote reflection.

The major goal of the international cultural immersion experience is to provide a comprehensive program in which adult learners are provided with ongoing opportunities to directly experience society from a different socio-cultural context. Through lived experiences, service learning, and self-reflection, learners challenge beliefs and assumptions, and develop critical thinking skills as part of their development of personal and professional competence. It is intended that participants in the cultural immersion program will demonstrate greater personal and professional cultural competencies in their personal and professional lives. The course combines lectures with discussions, required readings, large and small group discussions, cooperative learning activities, simulated experiences, instructor modeling, and student practice of specific techniques.

Integrating Weblogging. Defined as a WEB page or WEB journal, Weblogs are “diary-like entries from a blog owner on personal issues and /or items/topics of interest” (Baker, Psych, & Moore, 2011a, p. 387). Based on Richardson’s (2010) work, blogging is described as “an asynchronous, social networking form of computer-mediated communication that records mediated thoughts published online to a modifiable webpage” (Stevens & Brown, 2011, p. 31). Personal blogs provide an outlet to create content about “...the blogger’s life and internal self” (Hollenbaugh, 2011, p. 13). Consistent with research conducted by Stevens and Brown (2011), blogging was utilized in this experiential course to facilitate cognitive and affective learning through collaborative thinking, reading, and writing of experiences during cultural immersion. Similar to other instructional methods (e.g., journal writing, process notes), blogging was utilized as an instructional technology designed to promote reflection. Although the numbers of internet users are increasing (Hollenbaugh, 2011), training in blogging, internet multi-media and PowerPoint skill-building was provided to each participant to ensure a level of comfort and familiarity with the technology and the process of documenting experiences through a personal blog. As part of course requirements, participants created Weblogs to document daily experiences as well as to inform others of their work within international communities. This experience provided ongoing opportunities for participants to engage with multiple audiences through the e-learning environment. Participants were able to interact with one another as well as to explore the cross-cultural relationships that were developed as a result of the immersion experience.

Discussion

Two strategies for integrating instructional technology into the content of a single multicultural training course were presented. Both courses (didactic and experiential) were developed and taught prior to integrating technology into the courses. The course

instructors viewed technology as a way to increase opportunities for student interaction and learning. A major goal of the e-learning environment in both the didactic and experiential course was to facilitate reflection and critical thinking that has been associated with the development of cultural competencies.

The course in multicultural issues was originally designed as a single, didactic multicultural lecture-style course. A course management system (*eCollege*) was utilized to provide ongoing, asynchronous discussions between students and with the professor. The other course was designed as an experiential course in which international travel was paired with multicultural learning in a cultural immersion experience. In the experiential course, personal blogs were created as a means of documenting experiences and providing opportunities for reflection.

Given that the use of technology in counseling training has been limited with few applications (Krieger & Stockton, 2011) and remains virtually non-existent in multicultural training, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of instructional technology in developing multicultural learning and ultimately cultural competencies. However, based on the reported success of technology and skill acquisition in other disciplines (i.e., medicine and social work) instructional technology appears to provide opportunities to connect with learners in different communities and to engage in various learning activities that affect cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning outcomes. For example, Larsen et al. (2011), concluded that e-learning environments positively impacted students' learning experiences and clinical competencies. Several researchers (Baker, Psych, & Moore, 2011b; Hollenbaugh, 2011; Stevens & Brown, 2011) have developed measures for assessing the use and effectiveness of e-learning environments. Future research might focus on developing specific measures to assess the effectiveness of instructional technology and e-learning environments in developing multicultural competencies.

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Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm

Appendix A

Required Readings in the Multicultural Issues Course

- American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
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- Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (5th ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley.

Recommended Text

- Thomas, A. J., & Schwarzbaum, S. E. (2011). *Culture & identity: Life stories for counselors and therapists*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Appendix B

Required Readings for the International Cultural Immersion (South Africa)

- Jansen, J. D. (2009) *Knowledge in the blood: Confronting race and the apartheid past*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies*. An academic journal features a wide range of essays on South African/American comparative issues. The journal is available online at: <http://www.safundi.com>