Multicultural Counseling Competencies and CCBG: A Framework for Building Congruence

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Overview

Rivers and Morrow (1995) state that by the year 2000, children and adolescents from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds will comprise 30 percent of the population, an increase that will be due to rising birthrates among American students of Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, Latino, and African descents. This demographic change necessitates the development of elementary and secondary school Comprehensive Competency-Based Guidance (CCBG) programs that address culture and its impact on human behavior and which prepare all students for effective citizenship.

This digest suggests competencies for counselors and other school professionals as part of building CCBG programs that can begin to meet these needs. The material here is based on seminal publications on multicultural competencies, counseling, psychological interventions, and guidance (Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1990; Pedersen & Carey, 1994; Aponte, Rivers, & Wohl, 1995; Lee, 1995).

A basic tenet of CCBG is that it is a comprehensive program based on individual, school, and community needs and is organized around skill-development goals (Gysbers & Henderson, 1988). A guidance program is designed to assist ALL students and is an equal partner with other educational efforts. One can then surmise the interrelationships between Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC’s) and CCBG.

Multicultural counseling is a general theory of counseling, generic to all counseling and, as such, applies to all counseling relationships. It complements psychodynamic, behavioral, and humanistic scientific theories in explaining human behavior and is seen as the Fourth Force in counseling, along with behaviorism, psychodynamics, and humanism (Pedersen, 1991).

Multicultural counseling suggests a conceptual framework as well as a tool for counseling, being concerned with culturally appropriate attitudes, knowledge, strategies and skills. It considers how individuals are influenced by their particular culture, the interlockings and interrelationships among the many microcultures and microsystems to which they belong and the political, economic, social, and legal forces that impact on their position at any given moment (Sue & Sue, 1991). Thus, it is a perspective that combines universalism and relativism and it explains behavior in terms of culturally learned perspectives unique to a particular culture.

MCC searches for common ground and within-group differences shared across cultures (Pedersen, 1991). In addition, MCC acknowledges the complexity of culture and its impact on the human being. It also provides “a conceptual framework that recognizes the complex diversity of a plural society ... suggesting bridges of shared concern that bind culturally different persons” (Pedersen, 1991, p. 4). MCC also considers “the myriad of microcultures without comparing or ranking them, nor denying them their uniqueness even when there are intergroup contradictory perspectives” (Pedersen, 1991, p. 4).

MCC begins with the notion that the counselor enters the professional relationship with attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about the client. Thus it is imperative that counselors become vigilant and reflective of these feelings and work forthrightly to diminish those that can inhibit a facilitative, warm, supportive, and embracing relationship.

Rivers and Morrow (1995) also caution counselors on issues of transference and counter transference which can potentially hinder the effectiveness of a working relationship with ethnically different clients, as well as with ethnically dissimilar and similar counselors. In addition, continued training and in-service opportunities must become natural components in the designing of CCBG and MCC programs.

The symbiosis and congruency in these schools of thought, MCC and CCBG, lie, first, in the notion and understanding that, in order to implement effective MCC or CCBG programs, attention must be given to the competencies of each counselor. While the MCCs developed by Sue, Arrendondo, and McDavis (1992) were for counselors, these can be adapted to include other professional staff in the schools environment, including the principal, teachers, psychologist and support staff.

The first order of business for counselors and the staff is to reflect on their attitude toward multiculturalism. Sue and colleagues identified culturally skilled counselors as those who:

1. are actively in the process of becoming aware of their own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, pre-conceived notions, personal limitations, etc.
2. actively attempt to understand the world view of the culturally different client without negative judgments.
3. are in the process of actively developing and practicing appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and skills in working with their culturally different clients.

These competencies include attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills which must be mastered by the counselor. This is an on-going process, necessitating continuous vigilance and training: vigilance for the myriad of daily messages given through society that continue to impact our perceptions of culturally different groups; training for techniques that research suggests are effective strategies with various groups of students from diverse microcultures. The following is a list of these competencies (Sue, Arrendondo & McDavis, 1992):

**ATTITUDES/BELIEFS**

1. Knowledge of own culture and psychological processes; limits of own competencies and expertise; respect for clients’ uniqueness and differences.
2. Aware of own emotional responses towards culturally different clients.
3. Respects clients’ religious, spiritual beliefs and values and their physical and mental functioning; their indigenous helping practices and community networks; respects indigenous language.

KNOWLEDGE
1. How oppression, isms, discrimination, stereotyping, affect them and their work; how clients and their communication styles affect the counseling process.
2. How race, culture, ethnicity, etc., may affect personality formation, vocational choices, manifestation of psychological disorders, help-seeking behavior, and the appropriateness of counseling approaches.
3. Characteristics of counseling therapy; institutional barriers; potential biases in assessment instruments, procedures, and interpretation.
4. Specific knowledge and information about the particular group working with; community and family structures, hierarchies, values, and beliefs.
5. Knowledge of the demography, culture, community, and language of the client; knowledge of how the American economy, socioculture, and politics impact on the psychology of culturally diverse clients.

SKILLS
1. Apply appropriate theories of counseling and development with culturally different individuals, families, and groups.
2. Identify culturally appropriate factors operating in clients.
3. Identify intervention strategies on behalf of clients and for combating oppressive and exploitative attitudes and behaviors.
4. Identify how issues and constructs affect culturally different clients.
5. Identify research on the usefulness of assessment instruments and apply culturally appropriate instruments and procedures.

These competencies can be embraced by school counselors and other personnel in an effort to promote human development, maximize human potential, and prepare all students for effective citizenry. Counselors, parents and administrators should model these competencies for students.

Pedersen (1991) refers to culture as a valuable metaphor for understanding ourselves and others, the most important responsibility we have as human beings. Culture and multiculturalism have the potential to facilitate the work of counselors when used and understood appropriately in symbiosis with CCBG programming.

References

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