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## The Need to Infuse Multicultural Competence Into a Master's Level Community Counseling Internship

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The majority of master's level counseling students continue to be White European American (Arredondo, 1998). Research findings have suggested that members of this majority group are both less knowledgeable about multicultural issues and less multiculturally aware than minority group members (Yeh & Arora, 2003). The emergence of multiculturalism as the fourth force mandates counselor education programs to move beyond a monocultural view to a multicultural one. A single class in multicultural issues, taught by one professor, is simply not adequate (Whitfield, 1994). Since the internship plays such a critical role in assisting students to integrate awareness, knowledge, and skills into practice, it is the ideal environment to infuse counselor development with a thoughtful and intentional focus on multiculturalism.

Arredondo and Arciniega (2001) argued that counseling programs need to reframe themselves into learning organizations that respond to environmental changes by challenging and changing existing norms. A learning organization is characterized as one that develops an ability to question, challenge, and change operating norms and assumptions. Given the fact that the U.S. population is becoming more diverse culturally, ethnically, and racially, counselor education programs are ethically bound to prepare their students for the populations they will serve. The American Counseling Association's (1995) Code of Ethics as follows:

Counselors will actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients with whom they work. This includes, but is not limited to, learning how the counselor's own cultural/racial/ethnic identity impacts her/his values and beliefs about the counseling process. (A.2.b)

The internship year provides counselor educators with the opportunity to assist future counseling professionals in a pivotal stage of development. A fresh perspective is needed that incorporates the recognition

of an increasingly diverse society with the need for counselor education programs to prepare interns for the challenges they will face. This article presents a rationale for conceptualizing the cognitive developmental growth of students in a community counseling internship. It argues that the internship should incorporate the elements of a Deliberate Psychological Education model (DPE) (Sprinthall, 1994) that has been infused with an intentional focus on multicultural competence. The DPE is designed to allow interns to experience an environment that, while challenging, allows for adequate support and reflection as they navigate new roles.

Constantine and Ladany (2000) suggested the need for a broader conceptualization of the construct of multicultural competence. In order for training programs to achieve their objective of creating culturally competent counselors, there needs to be a framework for conceptualizing this goal. The authors proposed that multicultural counseling competence consists of six dimensions or competencies: (a) self-awareness; (b) general multicultural knowledge; (c) multicultural counseling self-efficacy; (d) ability to understand unique client variables; (e) effective counseling alliance; and (f) multicultural counseling skills. According to the authors, the level of a counselor's overall multicultural counseling competence can be determined by identifying what level has been achieved by the counselor in each dimension. In their description of the philosophy underlying multicultural competence, Arredondo and Arciniega (2001) stated,

All counseling is multicultural in nature; sociopolitical and historical forces influence the culture of counseling beliefs, values, and practices, and the worldview of clients and counselors; and ethnicity, culture, race, language, and other dimensions of diversity need to be factored into counselor preparation and practice. (p. 266)

Multicultural competence should focus not solely on race issues but on multiple social identities that intersect with individuals, organizations, and society. These other identities include, but are not limited to, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, ability status, and socioeconomic status.

Most multicultural courses in counseling are taught from a traditional perspective of focusing on specific minority groups. They do not provide a holistic framework that is united throughout the curriculum with an intentional focus on difference, power, and oppression. Choudhuri (2003) found that students consistently stated that “the traditional approach has taught them how to stereotype minorities as well as majority culture students; keep the issues of diversity at a superficial, intellectual level; and not have to deal with or explore their own issues of power and discrimination” (p. 25). Clearly, traditional instruction methods are not adequately helping students resolve issues of unearned privilege, nor are they effectively engaging students at both an intellectual and affective level.

Cognitive developmental theory may hold promise as a framework for both clinical preparation and multicultural competence, while promoting development in counselor interns. A body of research has indicated that effective counselor behaviors are associated with higher levels of cognitive development in several domains (Brendel, Kolbert, & Foster, 2002). Promotion of cognitive development is called for by researchers and counselor educators because research has indicated that successful counselor behaviors and functioning is predicted by higher levels of cognitive development (Brendel et al., 2002; Lovell, 1999; Sprinthall, 1994).

Individuals functioning at higher levels of cognitive development “increase the availability of multiple alternatives in evaluation and behavior, responding more relativistically and less dichotomously” (Holloway & Wampold, 1986, p. 311). The evolution of effective interventions for nurturing counselor growth and development during preparation is detailed in the research literature on developmental supervision and counselor development. Despite this, there is a paucity of research that specifically addresses the need for higher levels of cognitive development in interns who must navigate the complexity of a diverse society while exhibiting multicultural competence in practice.

Developmental approaches to supervision focus on how supervisees change as they gain training and supervised experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998). Most of these approaches, however, do not highlight individual cultural differences as a domain of clinical

training and practice. The model of counselor development proposed by Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) uses cognitive developmental theory to trace changes in trainee empathy toward clients of diverse origins. In this model, the trainee is described as progressing from stereotypic thinking and a limited awareness of personal prejudices to increased awareness, and a view of the client as an individual and person-in-context. One major limitation is that the authors have not provided specific strategies for increasing trainees’ multicultural competence.

Preparing master’s level counseling students for practice is a complex and important task. The internship year is especially significant, and is arguably the experience that lays the foundation for the rest of the student’s counseling career. The focus on skill acquisition, the importance of theory, and the use of supervision as a form of counseling and psychotherapy has been documented in the literature. Counselor education programs expose the student to a variety of counseling theories, and the student must be able to find the theory that suits him or her. However, traditional theories have been criticized for their “perpetuation of culture-bound value systems that contradict the value systems of many clients” (Hill, 2003, p. 45).

The internship year provides counselor educators with the opportunity to assist future counseling professionals in a pivotal stage of development. Blocher (1983) proposed a cognitive developmental framework to assist the intern as he or she navigates early clinical practice. According to Sprinthall (1994), “at the graduate level there is an urgent need for programs to focus on a developmental model” (p. 97). Barber (1963, cited in Rest & Narvaez, 1994) described a professional as one who is in a line of work having a high degree of generalized, systematic knowledge, who is oriented to community interest rather than self-interest, and who has a high degree of self-control and self-monitoring of their behavior with that behavior being regulated by a professional code of ethics. Rest and Narvaez (1994) used the term *professional* to refer to those with special expertise in the work setting “in which there is some discretion for action involving moral judgment” (p. xi). Professional counselors must exhibit impulse control, self-discipline, ego strength, and the ability to regulate their emotions and behavior.

## Review of the Literature

Hill (2003) challenged counselor educators who train master’s level students to be at the forefront of developing multicultural counseling competencies. Competencies are defined as a framework for guiding counselor education programs and a framework for

articulating the rationale for counselor educators to invest in promoting multicultural competence. The literature has described three characteristics of multicultural competence: counselor awareness of own cultural values and biases, counselor awareness of client worldview, and culturally appropriate interventions (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999).

Results of a national survey indicated that counselor trainees had low levels of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). Steward, Boatwright, Sauer, Baden, and Jackson (1998) reported that 33% of counselor trainees they surveyed had negative reactions to discussions and guest speakers that focused on multicultural issues. A variety of factors hinder the integration of multicultural counseling into counselor education programs. These include negative attitudes of counselor trainees, lack of knowledge and training by supervisors, and the general perception that rather than being a philosophical shift to cultural empathy as part of the counseling process, multiculturalism is just an afterthought (Hill, 2003).

Thoma and Rest (1986) asserted that there is a correlation between level of moral development and moral action. Given the climate that today's counseling students will soon be entering, counselor education programs have a responsibility to prepare interns for the challenges they will face. Predominately White counseling interns will serve predominately non-White clients as they begin practice (Arredondo, 1998). This cultural mismatch, with all its overt and covert power differentials, is clear and has profound implications for practice. Blum (2002) found that Whites at higher levels of moral development are better able to recognize and take responsibility for White privilege and respond to the disadvantaged with empathy. Promoting moral development enhances the ability of counselors to advocate for social and community change, as well as to promote change and development in their clients (Hayes, 1991).

Evans and Foster (2000) investigated the degree to which multicultural training impacts moral reasoning and racial identity development in White counseling students. The authors cited the internal confrontation of attitudes, behaviors, and values regarding race as central to the moral dilemmas that students face. Their study investigated whether the level of moral development is related to a student's racial identity status level. Respondents were 68 White students in master's and educational specialist programs in counselor education. To measure moral reasoning, the Defining Issues Test (DIT; Rest, 1986) short version was administered to each participant, and to measure racial identity development, the White Racial Identity Attitude Scale (WRIAS) was used. Results showed that

there was no significant relationship between White racial identity and moral development scores of the participants. The study did find that students with more multicultural training tended to score higher on the most positive status level of racial identity.

Although multicultural training seems to be helpful in changing attitudes toward racial groups, it does not seem to promote the cognitive complexity needed for moral development. The authors asserted that a missing component of this training is the use of the dilemma discussion method, which provides "concentrated practice in moral problem solving, stimulated by peer give and take" (Evans & Foster, 2000, p. 79). The authors asserted the need for concentrated practice in dilemma discussions and active problem solving during multicultural training, components lacking in traditional programs.

Brendel, Kolbert, and Foster (2002) conducted a longitudinal study of 30 graduate counseling students to examine developmental change that occurred during their counselor preparation program. The program under study incorporated elements of the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE) model, and the researchers measured moral reasoning and cognitive complexity at three different points over 2 years. Level of moral reasoning was assessed by the DIT short version, and level of cognitive complexity was assessed by the Paragraph Completion Method (PCM), a semiprojective method designed to assess conceptual level (Hunt, Butler, Noy, & Rosser, 1978). Test-retest reliability for the DIT ranges from .70 to .80, and internal consistency reliability is between .70 and .80. For the PCM, concurrent validity was reported in the .20-.30 range when correlated with intelligence tests, and at .40 when correlated with the Kohlberg Moral Maturity Scale. With trained raters, the interrater reliability from 26 studies was reported as median  $r$  of .86 (Hunt et al., 1978). There is sufficient evidence of both reliability and validity for the PCM to be used for research purposes.

The study's results showed that cognitive complexity in counselor trainees did not increase until after internship had been completed. The DIT means increased, but these changes were not significant. Brendel et al. (2002) asserted that the lack of significant increases in principled reasoning among the students was contrary to expectations from the empirical literature on DPE interventions. The authors described as troubling the failure of the academic program to produce significant increases in moral development. These findings suggested that counselor education students would have trouble grasping the ethical principles of the dilemmas often confronted in professional practice.

One major limitation to this study was small sample size. Other limitations included lack of a control group and the fact that the study participants were from one small university counseling program in the southeastern U.S. Strengths of this study included its longitudinal design, and the relatively large effect size found (0.13) for gains in cognitive complexity. The researchers called for future studies to identify the essential educational components for promoting cognitive growth: “Studies are needed that combine various activities related to problem solving, social role taking, and ethics... in the process of counselor education and then evaluate the various developmental outcomes” (Brendel et al., 2002, p. 21).

In a review of the development of multicultural counseling training, Abreu, Chung, and Atkinson (2000) described a growing consensus that an integrated model is needed. The authors encouraged infusing multiculturalism into a program’s entire curriculum, and asserted that approaches that balance experiential and didactic components and that extend training into practicum and fieldwork settings are needed. Torres, Ottens, and Johnson (1997) found empirical support for a variety of experiential activities that can infuse multicultural content into a curriculum. The researchers interviewed multicultural counseling experts and led focus group discussions at three universities. Study respondents reported that experiential activities such as conducting values clarification work through discussion, writing cultural autobiographies, and journaling were effective in promoting multicultural competence. Pedersen (2000) recommended using case studies during internship to facilitate trainees’ consideration of how culturally relevant a particular intervention is for a specific client.

In an exploratory study of 118 counseling graduate students, Carlson, Brack, Laygo, Cohen, and Kirkscey (1998) considered the relationship between multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to the amount of training they had completed, whether or not they had practicum experience, self-reported exposure to various multicultural activities, and overall confidence in being a competent counselor. Multicultural competency was assessed using the Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey (MAKSS) developed by D’Andrea, Daniels, and Heck (1990). Cronbach’s alpha for the subscales were .75 for the awareness subscale, .90 for the knowledge subscale, and .91 for the skills subscale. The authors reported that they established content validity by comparing the training model objectives outlined by D’Andrea et al. (1990) to another instrument designed to measure the same construct of awareness. Unfortunately, the authors of this study did not cite the name of this instrument.

To test the relationship of students’ perceived multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills to progression through a graduate program, students were divided into three groups, based on the number of graduate hours completed. The researchers conducted a MANOVA on the group means of the MAKSS subscales, and Wilk’s lambda revealed no significant differences between the groups’ means on the three subscales. The results of this study showed that there was a general positive trend in the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the students as they progressed through their program. Further, the results showed that students who had client contact, as well as students who experienced a multicultural activity, perceived themselves to be more multiculturally competent.

This exploratory study argued for counselor educators to consider the importance of not only the development of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills in students but also the need for a curriculum that directly addresses issues of diversity in an experiential fashion. Information regarding specific client populations, and specific strategies for working with them, are necessary, but not sufficient components of exemplary counselor training programs. Limitations to this study included its small sample size from one university, as well as its cross-sectional nature, thus limiting generalizability. As a self-report measure, the MAKSS is prone to social desirability confounds, and as a general assessment tool it does not address students’ awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with specific client populations.

From the literature it is evident that training programs are heeding the call to increase their understanding of multicultural competence, but clearly they are not doing enough to adequately prepare professional counselors. Allison, Echemendia, Crawford, and Robinson (1996) mailed 600 surveys to recent PhDs in counseling and clinical psychology to examine training and work experience with clients from diverse groups. A 48-item questionnaire was mailed to participants selected from APA members in current practice, and the survey instrument asked respondents to provide information about their demographic backgrounds, training experiences, current employment, client populations, and treatment strategies. Respondents, 90% of whom were White, were asked to rate their competence to provide counseling services to various groups, defined by ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, economic disadvantage, and ability status.

The authors used regression analysis to predict respondents’ self-ratings of competence to provide counseling services to the various cultural groups. Findings indicated that there is a considerable range of self-reported competence in providing counseling to different client groups. Not surprisingly, respondents

overwhelmingly reported competence when working with White clients, followed by women and individuals who face economic disadvantage. Respondents reported the least competence in working with Native Americans, African Americans, and gay men and lesbians. The number of cases during training (i.e., practicum or internship) with members of specific cultural groups was a significant predictor of competence for work later with those same groups. The authors presented a warning to training programs that the discrepancies among ratings of self-perceived competence mean that programs have not been effective in adequately raising counselors' sense of multicultural competence.

Limitations to this study included its cross-sectional nature, which may limit respondents' recall of training experiences and may diminish causal linkages between training experiences and current multicultural competence. Also, the researchers described their instrument as relatively new, but based on sound literature review and review by professionals from the American Psychological Association's Office of Demography, Education, and Employment Research. Neither validity nor reliability statistics were provided by the researchers. Because the instrument does not have the benefit of ample investigation, results should be interpreted with caution. The authors concluded by calling for training programs to expose students to different types of educational experiences as well as different means of evaluating multicultural competence.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cognitive developmental theory provides a framework for conceptualizing how master's level community counseling interns make sense of their experience by utilizing varying levels of problem solving, thinking, and moral reasoning. As part of the intricate process called counseling, the intern must assume multiple perspectives in order to empathize with individuals having different worldviews. The relationship between cognitive developmental stage and the complex behaviors required of individuals in the helping professions has been well documented in the literature (Brendel et al., 2002; Foster & McAdams, 1998). Higher levels of cognitive development are associated with successful counseling behaviors and functioning, including more flexibility, more autonomy and independence, and higher levels of empathy. Higher levels of cognitive development have also been linked to reductions in prejudice and stereotypical thinking (Evans & Foster, 2000).

Cognitive developmental theory is concerned with the psychological and cognitive processes that occur with the changes in mental structure that evolve over

the life span (Sprinthall, 1994). The human cognitive structure and the various ways in which its growth and mental structures can be enhanced have been documented by such theorists as Dewey, Piaget, Kohlberg, and Loevinger. Dewey (1963) believed that the goal of education should be development. Adequate stimulation is the hallmark of psychological growth and development. In other words, development will not occur unless an individual is confronted with the reality that their way of making meaning is no longer sufficient. During this process, individuals require support as they navigate their new understanding of the world.

The need for adequate challenge, along with support, comprises the core of the proposed changes in the traditional community counseling internship and reflects elements of the DPE model infused with multicultural knowledge and awareness. Five conditions necessary for an effective DPE have been identified by Sprinthall (1994) and include a significant role-taking experience, guided reflection concerning the role-taking experience, a balance of action and reflection during the experience, support and challenge during the process, and continuity with a continuous interplay between role taking, action, and reflection.

### **Conclusion**

This article proposes a new approach to internship supervision, guided by the literature as well as by ACA and CACREP standards. This new approach employs an integrative framework using the DPE model, is based on cognitive developmental theory, and utilizes multicultural competence as its overarching rationale. A major difference between the proposed internship and the traditional internship can be found in the grounding principles for the systemic use of the multicultural counseling competencies (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). These principles lead to strategies and techniques for counselor training based on cultural competency found in the literature. Specifically, within the three domains of cultural competence (counselor awareness of own bias, counselor awareness of client worldview, and culturally appropriate intervention strategies) are expectations about general competence regarding counselor attitudes, beliefs, and skills, along with strategies for their implementation.

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