

Suggested APA style reference:

Seward, D. X. (2007). *Multicultural training: Did we forget about our racial minority students?* Retrieved August 28, 2007, from <http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas07/Seward.htm>

Multicultural Training: Did We Forget About Our Racial Minority Students?

Derek X. Seward
University of Rochester

Seward, Derek X., is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Rochester in New York. Seward's areas of interest include multicultural training and racial minority student cultural development.

Multicultural training courses are a primary preparation method employed by counselor education programs to prepare counselors for work with diverse populations (Abreu, Chung, Atkinson, 2000). However, the effectiveness of multicultural training in preparing racial minority students has been questioned. In particular, it has been mentioned that multicultural training courses fail to address the educational needs of racial minority students and have limited effectiveness in the development of cultural competence in racial minority students (Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Negy, 1999). However, there is scant empirical research to support these critiques of counseling multicultural training

courses. This paper presents a rationale for empirical investigation of multicultural training courses to (1) identify racial minority student cultural learning needs and (2) determine the extent to which multicultural training courses are meeting the training needs of racial minority students.

Focusing on the Single Multicultural Course

Although a decade has passed since Midgette & Meggert (1991) recommended the abandonment of the single diversity course format stating that the structure fails to foster adequate cultural competence in counselor trainees, Abreu et al. (2000) noted that the single course remains the most popular form of multicultural training. Integration training models, which "...ensures that all trainees are exposed to MCT [multicultural counselor training] consistently throughout their training" (Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994, p.273), are difficult to implement because these models require that diversity issues be integrated throughout all curricula. This requires the support and participation of all program faculty (Ridley et al., 1994). As such, research on multicultural training courses will be particularly pertinent to counselor educators engaged in diversity training since an infusion model may not be feasible and the separate course will be the primary site for multicultural education.

Training Effectiveness Concerns: Racial Differences in Training Needs?

Although literature on diversity preparation has found training to be effective in enhancing White and racial minority students' multicultural competence (Constantine, 2001a; 2001b), Rooney, Flores, & Mercier (1998) contend that racial minority students

do not need to explore the same issues as White students, nor do racial minorities students have the same process of identity exploration. They assert that racial minorities have a different ownership of racial oppression than Whites, which necessitates a different exploration of internalizations of racism: racial minorities would need to explore being racially oppressed, while Whites would need to explore their investment in conscious and unconscious racial oppression. Rooney et al. (1998) stress minority students have biases worthy of exploration and evaluation, but that multicultural training needs to attend to the unique training needs of racial minority students. However, as a commentary article Rooney et al. lack empirical support for their claims of racial differences in the educational needs of students.

Differences in the perceived multicultural training needs of racial minority and nonminority students have been supported by a limited amount of research. Investigating cultural competence in a national sample of counselor trainees, Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings, & Nielson (1995) noted that racial minorities have higher self-reported multicultural competence than nonminorities. The researchers hypothesized that the life-experiences of racial minorities, due to their status as minorities, is related to their elevated competence scores. Additionally, Constantine (2001b) found that Asian American and Black American counseling trainees, in comparison to their White peers, tended to have increased multicultural case conceptualization ability. Moreover, for the Asian and Black students in her study, Constantine posited that elevated conceptualization ability may result from increased cultural sensitivity due to their

experiences as members of a racial minority group. Constantine also found that after controlling for race and ethnicity, individuals with more multicultural training received higher case conceptualization scores. These findings suggest that training and life experience may contribute to the higher cultural competence ratings of racial minorities; however differences in multicultural competency ratings among minorities and nonminorities necessitates consideration that racial minority students have training needs that differ from nonminority students.

Literature on recruitment and retention of racial minority students provides an additional emphasis on racial differences related to multicultural training. In their study on graduate school choice, Bernal et al. (1999) asked minority and nonminority doctoral students enrolled in an APA accredited clinical psychology program to consider what impacted their program selection when they initially applied to graduate school. They found that while both participant groups identified general training factors (i.e. prestige of the school, amount of financial aid available) as having a greater impact on their school choice than multicultural factors (i.e. diversity of the student population, minority-related course offerings), minorities deemed multicultural factors more important in their school choice than nonminorities. However, when participants were asked to make a hypothetical present-day school choice incorporating their experiences as graduate school students into their decision, minorities placed equal importance on general and multicultural training factors while nonminorities maintained their focus on general factors over multicultural factors. These results suggest racial minorities approach their

graduate study differently than nonminorities, primarily with diversity factors in mind.

Adding further support to the importance of diversity issues to racial minority students is a study of Black and Hispanic American student perspectives of psychology graduate school admissions packets (Ponterotto et al., 1995). Seeking to provide graduate programs with suggestions to develop more minority appealing admissions materials, Ponterotto et al. identified four major themes which all or most of the students mentioned were of interest to them: financial aid information; program requirements and course descriptions; demography; and quality, clarity, and comprehension of application materials. Commenting specifically on the theme of program requirements, Ponterotto et al. (1995) stated, “Consistently, multicultural coursework was identified by participants as an area of personal interest and as a topic necessary to the program in general” (p. 200). This is not to say nonminorities are unconcerned with diversity elements of their graduate training. However, in a related study, racial minorities tended to place increased significance on diversity education and assign more importance to instruction that prepared them for working with diverse clientele more than their nonminority peers (Toia et al., 1997).

With the majority of counselors being White (APA, 2003; Ponterotto, 1997, 1998) and the domination of Eurocentric perspectives in mental health theory, research, and practice (Scheurich & Young, 1997; Sue, 1999; Sue & Sue, 2003), coupled with efforts by the counseling profession to recruit and retain increasing numbers of racial minority students in counseling graduate schools (Ponterotto, 1997, 1998; Ponterotto et al., 1995), the

importance of making sure racial minority students are adequately prepared needs to be a major concern of the counseling profession. As numerical minorities within their counseling programs (Ponterotto 1997; 1998), racial minorities are oftentimes assumed to be culturally savvy, which can help in their work with other racial minorities (Sue & Sue, 1999). This perspective is succinctly articulated by Wohlford (1991) who stated that "...they [racial minorities] understand the customs and language of their own particular ethnic group and therefore are more likely to render high-quality mental health services to mentally ill minorities" (p. 14).

Although it is fairly reasonable to believe racial minorities possess cultural information and interaction skills to which fellow racial group members may positively respond, this perspective erroneously assumes racial minority counselors (a) actually understand their cultural background, (b) can conceptualize how cultural dynamics between the client and themselves might play out in treatment, and (c) can transition their understanding to actual skills to effectively work with fellow minority group members. Moreover, what is particularly disconcerting about Wohlford's (1991) perspective is that it suggests that racial minority students do not need multicultural training or do not require as much training as nonminorities simply because of their minority status. Racial minority counselors do not work only with same race clients. Furthermore, "To assume that a trainee who is Black can competently counsel a person who is gay simply because both share a history of oppression does a disservice to both trainee and counselee" (Pope-Davis et al., 1997, p.239). Racial minority counselors, based on their racial background

and experiences, perhaps are well-positioned to work with fellow racial minorities; however they still need multicultural training as they are not cultural experts or expert multicultural counselors.

Criticisms of a White Student Focus in Multicultural Training

Counselor educators of multicultural training courses recently have been criticized for tailoring course curricula toward enhancing White counselor trainees' multicultural development, while being less attentive to racial minority student multicultural growth. In his critique of multicultural literature, Negy (1999) commented on several assumptions traditionally made during multicultural training; only the two most pertinent to this discussion are presented. Specifically, he stressed that multicultural literature ordinarily assumes in a culturally diverse counseling dyad that the therapist is White, while the client is from a racial minority group. According to Negy, "...this raises some questions regarding the multicultural training nonWhite minority psychologists are receiving" (p. 5). He also asserts that there is a presumption that racism and prejudice are unique characteristics of Whites. Negy argues multicultural literature fails to address racial minority bias towards Whites and other racial minority groups. As counselor educators work to train competent professionals, they must remember racial minorities are not exempt from racist or other biases that require the constructive confrontation of multicultural training (Pope-Davis et al., 1997).

In their reflections of multicultural training, Pope-Davis et al. (1997) asserted that, "...the multicultural counseling training literature appears to mirror society's habit of

considering racial, ethnic, and other groups of diversity to be invisible” (p. 239). They contend that multicultural training should consider variations in counseling dyads other than a White counselor and culturally different client. From this perspective, it is possible that the traditionally White, European American focused training may have significant gaps regarding its training of racial minorities. As such, it seems logical to assume that if counselor educators are to be expected to prepare racial minority trainees to effectively counsel, they need to empirically identify what cultural information, course activities, and classroom discourse will promote cultural competence in racial minority students.

Racial Minority Student Training Experiences

Literature is emerging on the experiences of racial minority students in multicultural training that may help identify the multicultural training needs of racial minority students. While several conceptual articles have attempted to describe how racial minorities experience multicultural training (Jackson, 1999; McNeill et al., 1995; Rooney et al., 1998), two empirical studies have been conducted that have particular relevance to understanding minorities in multicultural courses. In the first study, Coleman (2006) interviewed 59 masters and doctoral counseling students of diverse backgrounds to discern critical incidents of their multicultural training environment that they believed significantly impacted their cultural development. Coleman identified several course-specific and program-specific experiences that contributed to student cultural growth. With regard to course-specific experiences, she found that racial minorities identified didactic and experiential coursework, such as a weekly multicultural training seminar as

part of a practicum, as particularly pertinent to their cultural growth. Academic multicultural experiences, which refer to cross-cultural interaction during their program, including class assignments or discussions, were program-specific experiences found to be more important to White student development than racial minority growth.

According to Coleman (2006), cultural growth does not occur solely within the multicultural course context, thus Coleman inquired about a variety of training components (e.g., practicum, internships, supervision, peer interaction, etc...) that could influence cultural development. However, because Coleman focused broadly on multicultural learning experiences she failed to investigate in significant detail multicultural course specific experiences that improve racial minority student cultural development. Considering multicultural courses are the most popular approach to diversity training (Abreu et al., 2000), research must continue to investigate multicultural training course aspects that improve student cultural development.

In the second study, McDowell (2004) interviewed 8 marriage and family therapy students (4 racial minorities, 2 Whites, 1 bi-racial, and an Indian international student) regarding the topic of race and their overall graduate experience. Four main themes emerged: enhanced racial awareness, racism, strength and resistance, and kinship. With regard to racial minorities in multicultural courses, the racial awareness and racism themes were particularly relevant. For the racial awareness theme, students reported that some course readings, class discussions, and supervision helped to enhance their racial awareness. Regarding the racism theme, McDowell found that students of color

experienced various forms of racism, specifically Eurocentrism, lack of racial awareness, lack of attention to race, negative assumptions, and/or differential treatment based on race. In contrast, White students found themselves reflecting on issues of White privilege. Additionally, all students noted the importance of considering race in conjunction with other cultural identities such as gender.

While McDowell (2004) examined racial experiences of students, she did not specifically investigate racial minority opinions of multicultural training courses. It is plausible that student opinions voiced about their overall graduate experience vary from their experiences in multicultural courses. Furthermore, McDowell ignored inter-racial minority differences in perspectives, choosing instead to aggregate racial minority opinions. Although presenting a single racial minority voice is valuable given racial minorities may share similar experiences of subjection to psychological, economic, social, and political oppression (Martinez, 2004), differing sociocultural histories necessitates examination of individual racial group experiences of multicultural training.

Conclusion

Has the counseling profession forgotten about the multicultural training needs of racial minority students? It is difficult to answer this complex question, especially given that racial minority students demonstrate increased multicultural competence ratings as a result of completing training. It is possible that multicultural training courses are effective in addressing the cultural development and educational needs of racial minority students. However, if the counseling profession is truly serious in its commitment to prepare all

counselors for professional service with diverse clientele, empirical investigation into the extent to which specific training needs of racial minority students are being addressed must be undertaken.

References

- Abreu, J. M., Chung, R. H., Atkinson, D. T. (2000). Multicultural training: Past, present, and future directions. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 28, 641-656.
- American Psychological Association (APA) (2003). Guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 58, 377-402.
- Bernal, M., Siroli, A., Weisser, S., Ruiz, J., Chamberlain, V., & Knight, G. (1999). Relevance of multicultural training to students' applications to clinical psychology programs. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 5, 43-55.
- Coleman, M. N. (2006). Critical incidents in multicultural training: An examination of student experiences. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 34, 168-182.
- Constantine, M. G. (2001a). Predictors of observer ratings of multicultural counseling competencies in Black, Latino, and White American trainees. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 48, 456-462.
- Constantine, M. G. (2001b). Independent and interdependent self-construals as predictors of multicultural case conceptualization ability in counsellor trainees. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 14, 33-42.
- Jackson, L. (1999). Ethnocultural resistance to multicultural counseling and training students and faculty. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 5, 27-36.
- Martinez, E. (2004) Seeing more than black and white. In M. L. Andersen & P. H. Collins (Eds.), *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology Fifth Edition* (pp. 111-117). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson Learning.
- McDowell, T. (2004). Exploring the racial experience of therapists in training: A critical race theory perspective. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 32, 305-324.
- McNeill, B. W., & Hom, K. L., & Perez, J. A. (1995). The training and supervisory needs of racial and ethnic minority students. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and*

Development, 23, 246-258.

Midgette, T. E., & Meggert, S. S. (1991). Multicultural counseling instruction: A challenge for faculties in the 21st century. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 70, 136-141.

Negy, C. (1999). A critical examination of selected perspectives in multicultural therapy and psychology. *Psychology: A Journal of Human Behavior*, 36, 2-11.

Ponterotto, J. G. (1997). Multicultural counseling training: A competency model and national survey. In D. B. Pope-Davis & H. L. K. Coleman (Eds.), *Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Assessment, Education and Training, and Supervision* (pp. 111-130). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ponterotto, J. G. (1998). Charting a course for research in multicultural counseling training. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 26, 43-68.

Ponterotto, J. G., Burkard, A., Yoshida, R. K., Cancelli, A. A., Mendez, G., Wasilewski, L., et al. (1995). Prospective minority students' perceptions of application packets for professional psychology programs: A qualitative study. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 26, 196-204.

Pope-Davis, D. B., Breaux, C., & Liu, W. M. (1997). A multicultural immersion experience: Filling a void in multicultural training. In D. B. Pope-Davis & H. L. K. Coleman (Eds.), *Multicultural Counseling Competencies: Assessment, Education and Training, and Supervision* (pp. 227-241). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pope-Davis, D. B., Reynolds, A. L., Dings, J. G., & Nielson, D. (1995). Examining multicultural counseling competencies of graduate students in psychology. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 26, 322-329.

Ridley, C. R., Mendoza, D. W., & Kanitz, B. E. (1994). Multicultural training: Reexamination, operationalization, and integration. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 22, 227-289.

Rooney, S. C., Flores, L. Y., & Mercier, C. A. (1998). Making multicultural education effective for everyone. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 26, 22-32.

Scheurich, J. J., & Young, M. D. (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? *Educational Researcher*, 26, 4-16.

Sue, D. S., & Sue, D. (1999). *Counseling the culturally different: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2003). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Wiley & Sons.

Sue, S. (1999). Science, ethnicity, and bias: Where have we gone wrong? *American Psychologist*, 54, 1070-1077.

Toia, A., Herron, W., Primavera, L., & Javier, R. (1997). Ethnic diversification in clinical psychology graduate training. *Cultural Diversity & Mental Health*, 3, 193-206.

Wohlford, P. (1991). Trends in NIMH support for clinical training for ethnic minorities. In H. F., Myers, P. Wohlford, & R. J. Echemedia (Eds.), *Ethnic minority perspectives on clinical training and services in psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

VISTAS 2007 Online

As an online only acceptance, this paper is presented as submitted by the author(s). Authors bear responsibility for missing or incorrect information.