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Article 11

Connecting Counselors Around the World: Enhancing Counselor Training Through Cultural and Global Initiatives

Paper based on a program presented at the 2009 American Counseling Association Annual Conference and Exposition, March 19-23, Charlotte, North Carolina.

David D. Hof, Julie A. Dinsmore, Catherine M. Hock,
Thomas R. Scofield, and Michael A. Bishop

Over the last several decades, there has been a rapid increase in racial and ethnic minorities in the United States due to immigration as well as growth domestically within non-White groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). This growth has led to a heightened awareness in the counseling profession that counselors need to adjust their practice in order to meet the individual and systemic needs of clients from these groups. Both the American Counseling Association (2005) and the American Psychological Association (2002) have deemed it unethical to serve diverse clients without having developed multicultural competence. More specifically, the standards for the preparation of counselors, developed by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) emphasize the importance of the advocacy role of counselors by stating that programs should include “counselors’ roles in social justice, advocacy and conflict resolution, cultural self-awareness, the nature of biases, prejudices, processes of intentional

and unintentional oppression and discrimination, and other culturally supported behaviors that are detrimental to the growth of the human spirit, mind, or body” (CACREP, 2001). Attitudes, knowledge, and skills that constitute multicultural counseling competence have been identified, which in turn have delineated domains of learning that counselor training programs should incorporate into their curriculum (Arredondo et al., 1996; Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2003; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Most counselor training programs have designated a course focusing on diversity issues in counseling as the primary way to build multicultural competence in trainees (Atkinson, Brown, & Casas, 1996; Brown, 2004; Dinsmore & England, 1996). These courses have been shown to focus heavily on facilitating students’ cultural identity exploration and imparting knowledge of non-dominant cultural groups in the U.S., and often do not address skill development (Priester et al., 2008). More specifically, these courses generally do not help trainees develop the expertise in systems intervention needed to act as advocates and address sociopolitical forces and systemic barriers impacting client mental health (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007; Ponterotto & Casas, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2008). Additionally, they do little to promote a global perspective that would enhance trainee understanding of issues specific to immigrant and refugee clients (Chung, Bemak, Ortiz, & Sandoval-Perez, 2008) and the broader implications of governmental policy decisions for these clients.

These findings suggest that counselor training programs must move beyond the curriculum in the designated multicultural courses and provide opportunities for trainees to engage globally and domestically with diversity. One way to do this is to develop a variety of extracurricular and curricular experiential activities that focus on skill development and the advocacy role in counseling. These types of activities have been shown to better support trainee development of the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to respond to the challenges that accompany a rapidly diversifying client base and community context (Kim & Lyons, 2003). This article details

initiatives developed by the Department of Counseling & School Psychology (CSP) at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) that focus on skill development in clinical practice, research, and advocacy and provide trainees with hands-on experience with both global and domestic diversity. Over the past decade, the area in which the university is located has experienced a rapid increase in the non-White refugee and immigrant population that has resulted in a 960% increase in non-English or limited English speakers (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Extracurricular Immersion Experiences

Outreach to the Immigrant Latino Population

Faculty in the CSP department assisted in developing a grant-funded program that has played a significant role in increasing enrollment of Latino students on campus by 266% since 2000 (University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2008). Several initiatives connected to this grant program have provided counseling trainees with hands-on clinical and advocacy experience with recently arrived Latino immigrant populations.

Cultural Unity Conference

Annually, this conference draws 300 Latino and multiracial high school students to UNK to introduce them to the campus, discuss the benefits of higher education, and provide information on resources that may help them access a college education. Most of these students are immigrants and/or potential first-time college attendees in their families. During the conference, students and faculty from the CSP department facilitate growth groups that help participants explore their fears and discuss the individual and systemic barriers that are impacting their readiness for, or access to, further education. Participants also brainstorm interventions to meet those needs.

Grief Groups

The CSP department collaborates with the Office of Multicultural Affairs to provide counseling support for students who access their office

and for members of the Latino sorority and fraternity on campus. Individual and group counseling services have been provided, an example of which are grief groups offered in response to the death of a Latino student well known among the Latino campus community.

Justice for All Conference

The Kent Estes Justice for All Conference (JFA) is a statewide training event focused on advocating for underserved populations that was developed by the department's Upsilon Nu Kappa Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota. The annual student-led conference is intended to empower members of the educational and mental health communities to respond to the reality of social injustice through professional and client advocacy. Community counselors, school psychologists, school counselors, social workers, educators, students, faculty and other mental health practitioners throughout the state engage in a day of active learning and interdisciplinary collaboration via discussion, lecture, group learning and experiential activities. Attendees receive training on specific social advocacy strategies such as collaborating with other professionals to advance mental health services to marginalized groups, practice their new knowledge on site, and develop advocacy plans that utilize these skills in their schools or agencies. Over the past six years, the conference has provided training to approximately 600 students, faculty, and practicing professionals to address a broad spectrum of advocacy topics such as immigrant populations, non-dominant sexual orientation, cognitive disabilities, social class, underrepresented racial/cultural groups, elderly, survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, bullying, and infant/toddler mental health. Outcome research conducted on the implementation of the advocacy plans developed at the conference shows the positive impact of this training event on putting advocacy into action (Hof, Scofield, & Dinsmore, 2006).

Professional Development Workshops

The department offers six professional development workshops per year, designed to make in-depth training on important

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issues available to both students and practicing professionals. At least one of these workshops each year is devoted to an advocacy issue, such as cyber-bullying or legal and ethical issues impacting children and adolescents. Students may apply credit earned for workshop attendance to the elective course requirement on their degree program. If students take this option, they are required to create an individual learning project that focuses on application of the workshop content. Approximately 400 students, faculty, and practitioners attend these training workshops annually.

Pine Ridge Reservation

This annual immersion experience for students and faculty on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation emphasizes cultural exchange, in-depth experience with indigenous helping traditions, and a clearer understanding of the barriers to effective mental health services for American Indians. Students and faculty have participated in a Sundance, Purification Ceremony (Sweat) and other cultural experiences that helped them gain valuable insights into the Lakota Sioux culture, concrete ideas on the nature of advocacy actions needed to support American Indian clients, and relationships that have led to collaborative training initiatives for mental health professionals.

International Collaborative Research Initiative

The International Collaborative Research Initiative focuses on exploring the counselor role globally through cooperative teaching and research exchanges between the CSP department at UNK and the department's international counterparts. Over the past several years, the CSP department has partnered with Black Hills State University to exchange faculty and students with the psychology department at Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania. This international experience has provided teaching activities and discussions in both the U.S. and Lithuania centered around effective mental health practice and social interventions to support clients. Through these opportunities, counseling trainees develop a global

perspective and clinical skills. Another unique opportunity afforded trainees by this international partnership are interactive real-time video research symposiums between U.S. and Lithuanian students who present and discuss their current research projects. Another aspect of this international collaboration is co-ownership by the CSP department at UNK and Vytautas Magnus University of an international research journal focusing on issues in counseling and psychology. In addition to the program in Lithuania, the CSP department maintains a connection with an international research journal published by Chulalongkorn University in Thailand.

Immersion Experiences Within the Curriculum

The extracurricular opportunities available to students are augmented by required immersion and advocacy activities that are part of four of the counselor education program core courses. These activities are designed not only to increase student awareness and knowledge of social justice issues (e.g., racism, oppression, discrimination, stereotyping), but to also develop skills in the emerging counselor role of client advocacy in institutional and community settings.

Organization and Practice Course

Students are introduced to the ACA-endorsed advocacy competencies (Lewis et al., 2003) and then required to design Service Learning Projects for their communities that focus on one of the following: (a) Direct Community Services-Preventative education, (b) Direct Client Services-Outreach and counseling to vulnerable populations, (c) Indirect Community Services-Design of more responsive social environments and/or systemic change through public policy initiatives, or (d) Indirect Client Services-Creation of new helping networks, provision of consultation and advocacy services to people and agencies. Students, in small cooperative groups, identify an underrepresented population for which they will provide service and they then work collaboratively to develop an

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advocacy plan. By repeatedly examining competency building activities from increasingly more complex perspectives, the students not only learn about specific concepts, but also have the opportunity to consider how those concepts work together to create a comprehensive service delivery effort for a focal client population within their respective communities.

Consultation Course

Advocacy skill development in this course focuses on environmental or systemic change interventions within the school setting. Each student identifies an advocacy need for an underrepresented group within his or her school and designs and implements an advocacy plan to address that need.

Seminar in Professional Issues & Ethics

Students are required to research advocacy issues in a community or school setting and develop a needs assessment instrument based on their findings. In addition, discussion of ethics vignettes includes an exploration of the advocacy implications of each vignette.

Multicultural Counseling Course

Students develop two Multicultural Action Plans, the first being an interview with a member of a non-dominant group and the second an immersion experience, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the worldview and socio-political experiences of individuals within that group, including individual and/or institutional barriers that have had a negative impact, and to then develop implications for counseling practice.

Professional Orientation Course

Students are expected to become involved in one social justice issue that interests them and to document that involvement. Their plans can be highly individual and can take place on a community, department, college, university, state, national, or

international level. Examples include using the www.care2.com website to sign up for information from a particular issue/interest group, sign petitions, write letters to government officials, and keep up to date on relevant news; joining a professional organization and signing up for a listserv such as the one sponsored by Counselors for Social Justice, a division of ACA, posting on the listserv, and keeping up to date on relevant issues; or getting involved in a local or community project where you spend time for a particular cause.

A sample of the types of advocacy plans and experiences emerging from these various course requirements include the development of the following: an ELL literacy project, a shelter for abused women and children, a homeless shelter, access to counseling services for an incarcerated population, a GLBT Community Center, a GLBT youth support group at a local YMCA, parity in university financial support for student organizations serving non-White students, a Daycare Program for the elderly, after-school enrichment and support programs for at-risk children, and ELL services within a school.

Conclusion

The initiatives described in this article focus on developing counselor expertise in the areas of domestic and global diversity. They emphasize multicultural skill development and competence in implementing client advocacy at both the individual and systemic levels. Change through these initiatives is not accomplished through individual didactic learning, but experientially through partnering and interacting with colleagues, both here and abroad, as well as with members of a number of marginalized client groups. In addition to extending the scope of the counselor education program, the activities impact a significant number of practicing professionals annually by providing training related to their workplace and client caseloads. The uniqueness of these activities is the opportunity for participants to practice skill development and implement practical advocacy initiatives. Hopefully, the ideas presented here will provide direction for other counselor education programs on ways they can help their

trainees develop not just attitudes and knowledge related to global and domestic diversity, but skill at interacting with members of non-dominant groups and competence at developing and implementing the advocacy initiatives needed to more effectively meet the needs of their diverse clients.

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