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Article 22

Addressing Racial Identity Development in an Introductory School Counseling Course

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The call for culturally competent counselors has been both long-standing and broadly disseminated within the counseling profession (Arredondo, 1999; Lewis & Hayes, 1991; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2008). A number of authors have enumerated cross-cultural professional competencies for counselors intending to practice in general, child/adolescent, and school settings (Arredondo, 1999; Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Liu & Clay, 2002; Sue et al., 1992).

School counselors in particular serve an increasingly diverse clientele, as the cultural diversity of school-aged youth in the United States is projected to grow more rapidly than that of the general population (Baruth & Manning, 2000). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA), recognizing the critical need for advocacy skills among school counselors, has issued a position statement on cultural diversity that provides guidelines for culturally responsive practice (ASCA, 2009). ASCA's National Model for School Counseling Programs (ASCA, 2005) further details the advocacy role of school counselors serving youth of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Although an increase in multicultural perspectives has been apparent in the professional counseling literature and training curricula during the past two decades, the challenge of preparing culturally competent school counselors continues to be compelling (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Baruth & Manning, 2000; Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). The extent to which multicultural perspectives are systematically included in school counselor

preparation programs remains unclear. For example, although many programs include a course on multiculturalism (Kim & Lyons, 2003), less evidence has demonstrated the effectiveness of such courses, the infusion of multicultural literature into other course content, or the multicultural competency of counselor education faculty (Miville, Rosa, & Constantine, 2005; Pack-Brown, 1999; Sue et al., 1992). Nevertheless, rapidly increasing diversity among PK-12 students nationwide demands that school counselor training programs address multicultural competency both systematically, within specific courses, and comprehensively, in the broader curriculum and in program policies (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Lewis & Hayes, 1991).

The urgent need to provide culturally responsive counseling services has shaped the promulgation of standards for multicultural counseling competency (Arredondo, 1999; Arredondo & Perez, 2006; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992). Within these standards, three characteristics or components of competence have been identified: awareness of one's own cultural beliefs, understanding of the client's culture and worldview, and practice of appropriate interventions (Arredondo, 1999; Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2008). Each component in turn encompasses three dimensions: attitudes and beliefs about the component, knowledge about the component, and skill in applying the component (Arredondo, 1999; Sue et al., 1992). Within the first component, specific dimensions include attitudinal awareness of one's own cultural heritage, knowledge about the general processes of racial identity development, and skill at seeking to understand oneself as a racial and cultural being (Arredondo, 1999; Sue et al., 1992).

A lack of consensus regarding evaluation of multicultural competence has limited the assessment of practice and training effectiveness (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). Several authors have developed tools for assessing aspects of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). Inventories of multicultural competence typically take the form of self-report surveys. Although several authors report data on validity and reliability of these inventories, their link to actual counseling practice and student/client outcomes has not yet been established (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005b). Evaluation methodologies for assessing racial identity development likewise vary in terms of theoretical foundation, empirically-based construction, and practical application (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2007).

Investigations of cultural competence exhibited by school counselors have been limited (Constantine, 2002; Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). In a study assessing attitudinal racism, racial identity, and multicultural counseling competence in school counselor trainees, Constantine (2002) found an inverse relationship between multicultural counseling competence and racist attitudes. Robinson and Bradley (2005) assessed rural school counselors' self-perceptions of multicultural competence, and they determined that self-reported multicultural awareness was lower than expected. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) developed a self-assessment checklist to allow school counselors to review their own multicultural competence in areas such as counseling, consultation, racial identity development, and social advocacy. Holcomb-McCoy also modified the Multicultural Competence and Training Survey (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999) for use with school counselors, employing it in an investigation of practicing school counselors' perceptions of their own multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy & Day-Vines, 2004). The study indicated that use of multicultural

terminology, knowledge, and awareness were distinct factors in school counselor multicultural competence. However, all these studies utilized self-reports, which are limited by their inability to provide objective information about an individual's actual knowledge or skill. Self-reports of perceived multicultural counseling competencies may be vulnerable to what Neale and Liebert (1986) identified as response acquiescence and social desirability.

Does learning about multicultural issues and, in particular, racial identity development contribute to multicultural competence in counselors and counselor trainees? Training in multicultural issues has been associated with increased multicultural competence in several investigations. Constantine and Gainor (2001) found that multicultural training was predictive of self-reported multicultural knowledge, but not multicultural awareness, in practicing school counselors. Counselor trainees who prepared a multicultural counseling portfolio showed evidence of higher levels of multicultural counseling competence as determined by instructor evaluation (Coleman, Morris, & Norton, 2006). Experiential training activities, including cultural immersion experiences, have also been reported as effective means for promoting multicultural counseling competence in future counselors (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Kim & Lyons, 2003).

Racial identity development is a critical aspect of multicultural counseling competence, particularly for White counselors and counselor trainees (Leuwerke, 2005). Pack-Brown (1999) argued that counselor educators must be able to identify the developmental stages of trainees' racial identity in order to train them effectively for multicultural competence. According to Holcomb-McCoy (2005a), school counselors and counselor trainees themselves must understand the impact of racial identity development in the lives of their students if they are to be effective helpers and advocates. In one of the earliest published studies of racial identity in school counselor trainees, Constantine (2002) found that the stage of racial identity development among White school counselor trainees was associated with perceived multicultural competence. Specifically, White trainees in Helms' Disintegration Stage showed lower levels of multicultural competence on self-report (Constantine, 2002). Sue and Sue (2008) stressed the importance of understanding the assumptions of White racial identity development models: "Ultimately, the effectiveness of White therapists is related to their ability to overcome sociocultural conditioning and make the Whiteness visible" (p. 282).

Although multicultural training has demonstrated influence in the development of multicultural counseling competence in counselor and school counselor trainees, specific instructional approaches to the development of counselor awareness, knowledge, and skill in racial identity development are limited in the literature. To address this gap, our investigation implemented an instructional unit on racial identity development and evaluated its impact on school counselor trainees' knowledge base and skill development. Instructional activities in the unit were primarily experiential rather than didactic; racial identity theory suggests the importance of "felt experience" (Denevi & Pastan, 2006, p. 71), including exploration and crisis (Quintana, 2007), in racial identity construction. Field-based investigations also support the efficacy of experiential approaches in multicultural training (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Kim & Lyons, 2003).

The purpose of this study, then, was to assess the impact of an instructional unit on racial identity development in an introductory/overview course for school counselor

trainees. Specifically, this investigation sought to answer the question: Will learning about racial identity development enhance the multicultural counseling competence of school counselor trainees?

Method

The instructional unit on racial identity development was added to a required introductory school counseling course which tied school counseling practice to theoretical foundations of academic, personal/social, and career development. Examination of multiple textbook options for the course revealed little multicultural content in even the most recently-published texts. Although a majority of the 16 students enrolled in the course had completed prior coursework in human development, fewer than half reported in class discussion any prior instruction in multicultural perspectives on human development, such as theories of racial identity development.

Participants

Students in this graduate school counseling program were predominantly White: 91% were White, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1 % Hispanic, and 1% African American. Within the class itself, 14 of the students were White and 2 were students of color, either African-American or Asian/Pacific Islander. Ten of 11 instructors for program courses were also White, including the instructor of this course.

In contrast, student practicum placement sites and eventual employment sites included several rural school districts with recent dramatic increases in immigrant Hispanic, Asian, and African American populations, as well as several urban districts with rich student racial and cultural diversity. For example, a rural placement site with a PK-12 student enrollment of just under 400 had experienced an increase from 1 Hispanic student in 1998-99 to 42 in 2006-2007 (State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Another rural site with PK-12 enrollment of about 450 students increased from 1 Black student in 1998-99 to 41 Black students, primarily Somalian refugees, in 2006-2007 (State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Urban placement sites had several schools with students representing all racial groups reported (American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White), with White students being in the minority. Training in cross-cultural counseling competence was essential in preparing our students for these placements.

Fifteen of the 16 students consented to participate in an Institutional Review Board-approved evaluative study of the unit's impact. Evaluative data indicating the impact of the unit came from four sources: student pre/post self-assessment of cultural competence, midterm examination of content knowledge, instructor observation of student participation, and student survey regarding multicultural instruction in the program.

Instructional Activities

In this foundational course on PK-12 school counseling practice, discussion of multicultural issues took place throughout the semester through case studies, research and literature reviews, and examination of current trends. In addition, a specific instructional unit on racial identity development occurred over a three week period, encompassing five

hours of classroom instruction. These five hours were spent on the field trip, classroom activities linked with lecture and discussion, and reflective closure activity that made up the unit. The instructional unit was incorporated into course content and objectives for all students.

The unit on racial identity development comprised five discrete learning activities. It began approximately a third of the way into the semester, in the context of theories of cognitive and personal/social development. The first activity was intended to raise awareness of racial identity development. Thus, no prior information was provided on the topic of racial identity development. A field trip to a local secondary school cafeteria was scheduled during the noon hour. Students were briefly instructed to be friendly but non-intrusive participant observers of adolescent development and behavior. Their observation protocol asked for brief descriptions of notable behaviors and interactions, developmental implications tied to theory, evidence of school support for healthy development, and ideas for counselor involvement.

The second activity occurred during the first class session after the field trip, initially with no reference to the previous field observations. Per Tatum's (1999, p. 20) "I am..." exercise, students were presented with the sentence stem "I am..." and asked to complete the stem anonymously by writing as many self-descriptors as they could generate in one minute. Students were then invited to submit their anonymous lists of descriptors. As a class, instructor and students tallied responses that fit into the categories of racial, economic, religious, and gender descriptors. The grouped responses were examined to see whether the class replicated Tatum's general findings: that members of advantaged groups (racial, economic, religious, gender) rarely include descriptors about areas of advantage (e.g., White, male), but members of disadvantaged groups are more likely to include such descriptors (e.g., female, Hmong).

An hour of lecture and discussion on the foundations of racial and ethnic identity theory followed as the third activity of the unit. Phinney's (1989) model of ethnic identity development was presented in detail, as it provided an empirically-derived framework rooted in survey and interview data of high school-aged adolescents from four racial groups. Phinney's model fit well with the field trip observations these graduate students had recently made of high school students. Class discussion concluded with an examination of the implications of racial and ethnic identity development in relation to the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) domains of personal/social, academic, and career development.

The fourth activity, a small group discussion adapted from Tatum (1999, p. 31), encouraged students to examine their own racial and ethnic identity development. Students were asked to think of their earliest race-related memory, to describe the specific event, to recall the emotions that went with it, and to relate any actions or consequences they experienced afterwards. Students wrote on the memory individually for five minutes. Next, they were presented with Countee Cullen's poem *Incident* (Cullen, 1947), a vivid description of one African American child's experience of prejudice, and invited to jot down any reactions. Finally, they were randomly assigned to small groups for open-ended discussion about anything they had written and were willing to share. In their small groups, all students were given the freedom to discuss or simply listen to classmates. The instructor circulated among groups to observe and respond if students requested clarification or further information.

The final class period was devoted to a Heritage Fair. Students were given the following prompt:

Think about how your awareness of your own race or ethnicity, in relation to other races and ethnicities, has developed over your life. Identify key events or transitions in your awareness. Select several concrete symbols that illustrate your developing racial/cultural awareness. Bring them to class to share with classmates in a culture exhibition.

Items were displayed as students circulated and investigated. Following this exploration time, each student briefly described his or her objects and the events they symbolized.

All five instructional activities addressed Sue et al.'s (1992) first component of multicultural competence (i.e., awareness of one's cultural background, assumptions, and values). Dimensions within this component, as identified by Sue et al. (1992), were targeted by specific activities. The "I am" activity, along with the reflection on Cullen's poem, addressed the attitudes dimension (valuing and respecting differences, becoming aware of one's own background and experiences, and becoming comfortable with differences between oneself and others). Field observations, instruction about racial identity theory, and the Heritage Fair addressed the knowledge dimension (understanding of one's own racial/cultural heritage and its effects; understanding of the processes of oppression and racism; understanding one's own impact). Finally, the skills dimension (seeking out experiences and understanding) was addressed experientially via the field trip and the Heritage Fair.

Evaluation of Instructional Impact

The impact of the instructional unit was assessed through several means. Because activities within the unit addressed attitudes, knowledge, and skills dimensions of the first component of multicultural competence (Sue et al., 1992), a pre/post survey of participants examined each dimension of this component. Prior to the instructional unit, the 15 students who consented to participate in the evaluative study completed a pre-instruction self-assessment checklist of cultural awareness. The instrument consisted of shortened versions of descriptors listed under the first component, counselor awareness of own assumptions, values, and beliefs, from Sue et al.'s (1992) multicultural competencies for counselors (available on request). The same instrument was administered to participants following the unit. A paired samples *t* test was applied to pre-instruction and post-instruction group means for each of the items on the checklist; in light of the limited sample, this statistical application was exploratory only, intended to generate rather than test hypotheses.

A second source of evaluative data came from student midterm examinations, which assessed application of racial identity development theory and research. Students were asked to explain and support or refute Phinney's model of ethnic identity development, basing their argument on knowledge, research, observations, and/or experience.

Naturalistic observation of student interaction and examination of student work products during classroom instructional activities provided a third, qualitative source of evaluative data concerning student knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Student interaction was evident during the field trip and in the course of small and large group discussions. Examination of student products included tabulation of the "I am..." responses and

observation of student Heritage Fair displays. Observations of student interactions were conducted by the instructor during the course of the learning activities; thus, no *a priori* observation protocol was used.

The final source of evidence about the unit's impact was a broader course and program evaluation survey that asked students which experiences in their training had helped increase their multicultural awareness. Student responses relevant to this unit were tabulated and examined qualitatively for common themes.

Singly, no evaluative method in this field investigation met standards of rigor required by experimental research. However, triangulation of results from these three data sources provided evidence regarding the impact of this instructional unit on the first component of multicultural counseling competence (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992), namely awareness of one's own cultural values and biases.

Results

Analysis of pre/post changes on checklist items was conducted with a paired samples *t* test on group means. Two items, "I understand how the processes of oppression, racism, and stereotyping have affected me and my work" (pretest $M = 3.73$, posttest $M = 4.43$, $p = .011$), and "I understand how my communication style may impact the process of cross-cultural counseling" (pretest $M = 3.93$, posttest $M = 4.56$, $p = .014$) showed significant increase ($p < .05$) following completion of the unit. Both of these items addressed the knowledge dimension of counselor awareness of one's own assumptions (first component) in the Sue et al. (1992) framework. The remaining six items showed no significant change.

Analysis of responses to a midterm exam question asking students to outline and critique Phinney's (1989) model of ethnic identity development yielded that all participants were able to define Phinney's three stages (unexamined, search/moratorium, and achieved racial identity). Most students ($n = 12$; 80%) accurately described the model's application to individuals of various racial backgrounds. However, three students critiqued the model by arguing that it applied only to individuals with ethnic minority status, indicating either confusion about the model or, possibly, unexamined racial identity. This data source also related primarily to the knowledge dimension of cultural self-awareness (Sue et al., 1992).

Instructor observation during the unit activities showed a range of developing multicultural competence among students. During discussion following the field trip, several students noted that high school youth of minority races "all" sat at lunch tables together. The instructor explored this observation by asking about White high school students' seating choices and about exceptions to the initial observation about seating patterns of minority students; student responses acknowledged White-only groupings as well as exceptions to racially-grouped seating patterns. Later, in the "I am..." activity, written responses partially supported Tatum's findings. Females tended to describe themselves in gender terms more frequently than did males, and one individual of minority racial status self-described in racial terms, while no White students did so. During the small group exercise, student groups clustered either in the room or in conversations centers in the building, settings allowing for intimacy and disclosure that would have been difficult in the whole class setting. Students in the small groups were

observed sharing emotionally charged stories of racial encounters, including harassment of a member of a racial minority group and discrimination against the partner of an individual with minority status. Several White students struggled with the Heritage Fair assignment, consulting with the instructor for clarification as they sought items. Some students opted for cultural items such as ethnic food or dress; others brought in evidence of their experiences of prejudice or information about community strife (e.g., conflict over Indian mascots). The diversity of items illustrated a range of cultural experiences and suggested various stages of racial identity development among the trainees.

Finally, examination of responses to a broader survey on program opportunities for multicultural training yielded further evidence of the unit's impact. Eleven of the 15 participants (73%) named assignments in the class as enhancing their multicultural awareness, evidenced by such responses as "The heritage assignment...the conversation regarding racism was also intriguing, and although frustrating to me as well, it was beneficial to my understanding." "The theory-based discussions and lecture. I have had everyday life experiences but was not as well aware of the scholarly literature on multiculturalism."

Discussion

This evaluation of an instructional unit on racial identity development demonstrates the positive impact of incorporating specific instruction on race and racial identity in the training of school counselors. Following the unit, the group as a whole showed significant gain on two items measuring one component of multicultural competence, counselor awareness of own assumptions/values/biases. All students demonstrated basic knowledge of a least one model of racial identity development by describing it accurately on a written examination. Informal observation showed students struggling with racial identity issues and working to learn about themselves, their classmates, and secondary students in the community. Finally, the majority endorsed the benefit of these instructional activities in promoting multicultural awareness: the experiences of observing race-related social interactions, talking with others about race, and learning from racial identity theorists had, in the students' view, enhanced their multicultural awareness.

In contrast, the study's results suggest that school counselor trainees varied in their own racial identity development. Three students, all White, critiqued Phinney's (1989) model of ethnic identity development as applicable only to students of minority status; their responses suggest either confusion about the model or evidence of the model's initial stage of ethnic identity development. Also, areas of multicultural counseling competence on the pre/post checklist remained unchanged by the unit, illustrating opportunity for additional learning on the part of these trainees. Examples of items that remained unchanged included "I am comfortable with cultural differences between myself and my students/clients" and "I seek to understand my racial and cultural identity, and I challenge myself to be non-racist."

Implications for Counselor Educators

Improvement on informal measures of multicultural competence, including pre/post self-assessment, written examination, and instructor observation, indicated a positive impact of this instructional unit. At the same time, a lack of significant change on several pre/post items and confusion on the part of some students about racial/ethnic identity theory point to the need for increased information about multicultural issues. These students' endorsement of the unit on multicultural awareness places the onus on us, their counselor educators, to meet their needs for additional multicultural training.

Implementation of this instructional unit also highlighted the importance of modeling awareness of our own limitations and seeking of non-racist professional and personal identity. Multicultural instructional initiatives may seem awkward as counselor educators open topics of discussion that have been taboo for many students. Counselor educators, particularly those in groups of advantaged status, must risk being educated by students and must recognize the need to seek the expertise of others when necessary.

Implications for Researchers

This study was limited by lack of standardized assessments and by number of participants. Its findings about the value of instruction on racial identity development are exploratory rather than confirmatory. Further study of the value of racial identity instruction, using either these approaches with additional participants or using different strategies entirely, would strengthen evidence in answer to the research question.

Researchers must also examine the linkages among counselor training, current measures of multicultural competence, and actual practice. Most investigations reviewed for this study showed effects on self-report measures; some demonstrated improvement on counselor educator ratings of trainees; this investigation used both. Yet the findings of none, including this one, were linked directly to client outcomes.

Will learning about racial identity development enhance the multicultural counseling competence of school counselor trainees? The evidence from this study suggests that learning about racial identity development enhances one component of multicultural competence, awareness of one's own cultural values and biases, as measured by self-report, instructor observation, and class examination. But researchers must go beyond campus-bound measures: an important next research direction is determining what impact, if any, multiculturally-trained school counselors have on their own students.

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