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Teaching the Multicultural Counseling Course: Facilitating Courageous Conversations and Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy

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Abstract

The meaning-making emphasis of Transformational Multicultural pedagogy is reviewed and suggested as it pertains to the context of the multicultural counseling class in the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) accredited master's level programs. Suggestions regarding group facilitation, media sources, cross-cultural experiences, and other nontraditional class activities are provided. A specific transformative model is proposed for a group learning process within the multicultural course.

Transformative Multicultural Pedagogy: A Group Approach

Counselor education programs train counselors to guide clients in accordance with their professional ethical responsibilities (Pack-Brown, Thomas, & Seymore, 2008). Part of a counselor's ethical duties include an awareness of personal values, biases, and culture in relation to the values and experiences of the client; the ethical counselor should strive to empower rather than impose personal biases upon the client (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Mitcham, 2009). The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) requires counselor education programs to maintain this distinction in part through infusing specific standards of multicultural training throughout the curriculum (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2009). These standards are upheld through meeting objectives for the multicultural counseling course and through incorporating the multicultural counseling competencies (Seto, Young, Becker, & Kiselica, 2006). For many counselor educators, this is easier said than done. When do doctoral students and

counselor educators learn and perfect the course delivery for this often anxiety-producing course? What professional development opportunities are available to experienced professors who have never taught the multicultural counseling course?

Despite required coursework on multicultural counseling, there are few concrete strategies to guide counselor education students towards cultural competence. It has been suggested that "experiential education is a key vehicle for fostering multicultural competency" (Seto et al., 2006, p.304). Similarly, Arredondo and Arciniega (2001) noted that counseling students benefit from role-playing and interactive debate in the multicultural course, since "students must acknowledge their 'hot buttons' about racism, privilege, and oppression, either as recipients or as beneficiaries" (p. 269). Arredondo and Arciniega purported that the level of discussion that students enter into during the multicultural course includes topics which many tend to avoid in other contexts. Thus, students are able to face issues of race, culture, and social barriers that they will encounter with diverse clients.

Because cultural perspectives operate on a profoundly personal level, understanding cultural differences among people is likely to be a transformative and potentially emotional experience. The group counseling experience may serve as a microcosm for individuals' relational experiences in the world (Corey, 2008); hence, a group approach appropriately serves counselors in multicultural training, as they reflect upon their culture, and interact with the cultural experiences of others. The utilization of group work accounts for a unique, multicultural classroom experience that differs from a traditional and passive learning environment. The purpose of this article is to present an innovative group process approach to the multicultural counseling class that embraces transformational pedagogy and learning while fostering a community of trust.

Theoretical Framework

Both group work and the multicultural counseling coursework lend themselves well to transformative learning (TL) practices. Originating within the adult learning theory (Merriam, 2001; Meyers, 2008), TL hinges on broader theories such as social constructivism and postmodernism (Gunnlaugson, 2005). Narrative postmodern theory emphasizes investigating personal stories. This practice applies well to multicultural counseling in that each person has a cultural lens through which they view the world; they have cultural and personal scripts of which they may not be aware. Consistent with this emphasis, "cross-cultural narrative inquiry," or inviting others to learn through an openness to experiencing another population and to the stories of others, is highlighted as personally and communally enriching (Phillion, He, & Connelly, 2005, p. 9). Gunnlaugson (2005) purported that the nontraditional emphasis of TL lends itself well to continued fusion with other theories that teach to the holism of the individuals in the classroom as well as to the social context of the multicultural class. Much more than asking for regurgitation of textbook material, the classroom dynamic of a TL course enables an internalization of the material that easily transfers to group process. Transformational learning warrants a change in knowledge and a deeper reconstruction of personal meaning for a student. Furthermore, the group processing of multicultural course material not only aids in personally impacting students and strengthening the collective experience of a counseling cohort, but this group work within the classroom

directly indicates to master's students how they may lead and invite multicultural group counseling in any future work setting.

Given the personal nature and group building of the class, the multicultural counseling teacher's role is crucial in guiding students through effective processing of what often constitutes highly emotional material (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). Because the course delivery concentrates on a group dynamic, the professor must strive to create a comfortable, trusting environment that is conducive to sharing and student self-disclosure. Students may discover the value in learning from others, particularly in combined classroom learning (Perusse, Goodnaugh, & Lee, 2009). As students come to know more about themselves, they also learn from others' experiences. In addition to learning from one another's differences, the sharing of similar reactions will help students to feel the universality of the group and normalize their personal feelings (Corey, 2008). A higher level of comfort within the group will enable deeper levels of self-awareness, a central component of group counseling, along with cultivating knowledge and skills.

The experiences of groups, cultural learning, and transformational learning mirror one another in their reliance upon a foundation of trust. Meyers (2008) noted, "one cornerstone of transformative pedagogy is the creation of a supportive learning community" (p. 220). One significant goal of TL is for individuals to be able to reflect upon their worldview and understand their own "taken-for-granted frames of reference" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). This same goal is inherent in the field of multicultural counseling, whereby the effective counselor will have to know his or her biases, cultural beliefs, and worldview.

Transformational Opportunities in Multicultural Counseling Classes

According to a study conducted by Sammons and Speight (2008), the transformational changes that occur in the multicultural counseling class comparably impact white students and minority students. Sammons and Speight (2008) utilized the Critical Incidents Technique (CIT) in order to evaluate how students rate specific aspects of the multicultural counseling course. Participants acknowledged their increase in knowledge, greater self-awareness, a change in attitude, as well as a change in their behavior since enrolling in the multicultural course. Students also reflected that the size of the multicultural class was a significant factor in the impact of this experience.

While CACREP-accredited master's programs are expected to weave multicultural coursework through every counseling class, the multicultural class is the course that specifically addresses multicultural competence as its central focus. This course will prepare students for counseling diverse clients; thus, it is imperative that students are able to understand the views and values of people from different racial backgrounds and experiences. According to Robinson-Wood (2009), individuals have "multiple identities that are shifting, fluid, and substantial to personal identity construction" (p. 3). It is important that students reflect upon the material presented during this class. The history, other cultural perspectives, and peer life stories may be material students have never come in contact before. It is important that students adequately reflect and process the often emotional content of this class because some of

the messages may contradict assumptions and messages students have made and received all of their lives.

A Transformative Model

Building upon the foundations of narrative and transformational theories, a nontraditional multicultural class that provides experiential, transformative opportunities is proposed through the Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy model (Mitcham, 2009). This model emphasizes thematic guidelines in order that the professor sheds light on key meaningful aspects of multicultural counseling in addition to facilitating student access to cross-cultural opportunities. Central to the proposed multicultural counseling class model, it is the goal of the course to: ignite the senses, inspire individual creativity and activism, intrigue the passive learner, interplay between diverse agendas, interact knowledge, emotions, and actions, integrate global gains and interdisciplinary relevance, and invest in versatile approaches.

One essential task for the professor lies in broadening student perspectives and in helping students to distinguish "between-group and within-group differences" (D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008, p. 356). The multicultural counseling professor may first introduce these differences through inviting students to bond over food; the suggestion to try foods from a variety of different cultures may be given. Food will ignite students' senses and highlight the value of diversity for students while allowing students to enjoy in a group-building and group-sharing experience. As the multicultural course progresses, cultural differences will continue to be highlighted through varied experiences beyond food, including an investigation through various media sources. Because this is not intended to be a traditional classroom environment, students will not passively observe material but rather, they will be asked to interview, present, as well as participate in a cultural immersion experience.

Creativity and Activism

Requesting that students step outside their comfort zone and observe another culture, whether through an unfamiliar religious service or through volunteering with the homeless, beckons a transformative experience; the student will likely not be the same afterward. Volunteer opportunities and service-learning provide transformational opportunities for students as well as opportunities for students to partake in the cause of social justice, which they are called to pursue throughout their counseling careers (Pieterse et al., 2009).

The multicultural counseling course aims to intrigue the passive learner through awakening students to diverse populations' narratives. For example, the film *Malcolm X* is recommended viewing for the class, followed by the writing of reaction papers and engagement in a courageous conversation within the group. Further, this film provides an effective example of the Black Racial Identity Development Model in progression, which students may identify where Malcolm X had parallels in his life. Upon analyzing the movie, students may also discuss within the group where they are in terms of racial identity development. This significant questioning is a central aspect of multicultural counseling competency; they will ponder how they may best advocate and serve their clients and discover what belief systems or biases stand in their way of serving others.

Interplay Between Diverse Agendas

The intention of the Transformative Multicultural Pedagogy culminates in the interaction of students' knowledge, emotions, and actions. This is the aim of TL by its definition: to provide this meaningful interaction that transforms the way a student observes the world. It is intended through exposing students to various media sources, cross-cultural experiences, and group discussion that empathy will register and perspectives will change and broaden. Students will also integrally benefit from journaling their reactions to the various aspects of the course and through weaving their own narratives into their new insight into a range of the experiences of others.

The course also aims to integrate global gains and interdisciplinary relevance. In addition to relaying historical significance and anecdotal insights into multicultural experience, the professor aims in assisting student interest in current world affairs, both globally and specifically within the cultural community of their clients.

Implications for Counselor Education Programs

Counselor educators are expected to teach the multicultural counseling course effectively; however, opportunities to develop these skills may not be readily available. An important aspect of multicultural competence lies in the counselor educators' awareness, knowledge, and skills regarding special populations, as well as their level of multicultural self-efficacy (Mitcham, 2009). With this said, it is incumbent upon counselor education programs to provide each professor ample opportunity to facilitate this course. Perhaps the multicultural counseling course could be shared or rotated among all faculty as a form of professional development, so that it is evident to the students that the program embraces and values diversity. Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy is one option for course delivery which highlights the importance of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills, thereby facilitating courageous conversations and transformational learning.

Activities for Transformational Multicultural Pedagogy

Villegas and Lucas (2002) identified several classroom-based practices that are essential for cultivating dispositions, knowledge, and skills of culturally responsive students. These practices can be infused throughout the counseling curriculum to aid in the transformative learning of students. Some of the activities include:

Reflective writing. Counselor educators may engage their students in deep introspection about attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions through journal writing.

Simulations and games. These can be implemented to enable students to obtain personal experiences of cross-cultural differences. In one activity by Shelkin (n.d.), students participate in a 3-hour simulation where they immerse themselves in a completely different culture from their own. Students learn the language, rules, and roles of the new culture. Students also have the opportunity to observe and interact with strangers from a new culture. This activity allows students to develop real empathy for individuals with differing cultures, beliefs, and values from their own.

Articulating sociocultural affiliations. This exercise allows students to examine the power privileges that are attached to certain affiliations and groups within their communities.

Exploring personal history and development. Students explore their personal and family histories and develop a greater awareness of their own identities and values.

Learning about the history and current experiences of diverse groups. This technique exposes students to people who are different from them.

Use of case studies. Counselor educators may utilize case studies to promote exploration and understanding of varying approaches and perspectives and also to facilitate dialogue on successful inclusion practices.

The following are several TL activities used by the authors when presenting about and or teaching this course.

Are You Ethnocentric?

This activity requires approximately 20-30 minutes. It should be implemented before a classroom discussion of ethnocentrism.

Instructions. Students are given a worksheet with a list of statements and options, and the instructions are read out loud. (See Appendix A for a sample of possible questions.) Allow adequate time for participants to complete this activity quietly. When all students have completed the activity, the instructor reads the choices out loud and asks participants to raise their hands to indicate their preferences. Remind students that they are not obliged to respond to every question and that they have the option to pass on any question they are not comfortable with. After all questions have been addressed, the instructor then processes the activity with students.

Processing. The following questions can be used to facilitate discussion and further exploration:

1. Why did most of us prefer the same thing? This leads to the definition of ethnocentrism, the natural tendency for people to feel their culture, religion, race or nation is superior and to judge others by one's own frame of reference.
2. How does ethnocentrism develop?
3. Did you recognize your own ethnocentric beliefs and attitudes?
4. Do people within the same culture always share the same attitudes and beliefs? If yes, why? If no, why not?
5. Is any one culture really better than another?
6. Are there any dangers to ethnocentric attitudes in a world that is becoming more diverse? If yes, what are the dangers?
7. How can ethnocentric beliefs and attitudes become more culturally relative?
8. What are things you can do in your life today to become more culturally relative?
9. Do you think your family and friends might resist your becoming more culturally relative? If yes, why? If no, why not? (*Cultural Awareness Learning Module One*, n.d.)

Circles of My Multicultural Self

This activity requires 20-30 minutes and is designed to allow students to identify what they consider to be the most important dimension of their own identity as well as to

examine stereotypes associated with each identity. Students share aspects of their identity that they are proud of as well as instances when it was hurtful to be associated with a particular group.

Instructions. Ensure that each student receives a copy of the "Circles Handout" (See Appendix B). Students are then asked to pair with someone they do not know very well and follow the instructions given. Ask students to write their names in the center circle. They should then fill in each satellite circle with a dimension of their identity that they consider to be the most important in defining themselves. Some examples include: Asian American, Caribbean, athlete, mother, male, middle class, etc. In their pairs, participants will share two stories with each other. First, they should share experiences when they felt especially proud to be associated with one of the identifiers they selected. Next they should share an experience when it was painful to be associated with one of the identity dimensions they chose. Third, students will share a stereotype they have heard about one dimension of their identity that fails to describe them accurately. Students will complete the sentence "I am (a/an) _____ but I am NOT (a/an) _____." You may provide an example for your students.

Discuss reactions to each other's stories. Ask for volunteers to share with the rest of the class. (Ensure that the student who originally told the story has granted permission to share it with the entire class.) In the next step of this activity, students will stand and read their stereotype statement. Ensure that everyone remains respectful especially during this phase of the activity.

Processing. Several questions can be used to process this activity. Some of these include:

1. How do the dimensions of your identity that you chose as important differ from the dimensions other people use to make judgments about you?
2. Did anybody hear someone challenge a stereotype that you once bought into? If so, what?
3. How did it feel to be able to stand and challenge your stereotype?
4. (There is usually some laughter when someone shares common stereotypes such as "I may be Arab, but I am not a terrorist" or "I may be a professor, but I do have a social life.") I heard several moments of laughter. What was that about?
5. Where do stereotypes come from?
6. How can we eliminate them? (Gorski, 2005)

Stereotypes and Prejudices

This transformational learning activity requires about 20-30 minutes and is designed to assist students in exploring, challenging, and eliminating stereotypes and prejudices.

Instructions. Ask students to form small groups of 3-4 people (size can vary depending on size of class). Prepare ahead of time several 5x7 cards with the name of a group of people who are often the target of societal prejudice. Fold the cards, so that the participants cannot see what is written on the cards. Place the cards in a box and have a volunteer from each team select a card. Instruct teams that they are to write down as many stereotypes (adjectives) they can come up with that they have heard to describe their particular group. Give teams about 5 minutes to complete the listing of stereotypes.

Processing. Once the teams are finished, discuss:

1. Where did these stereotypes start?
2. Why do people hold this stereotype?
3. Are there positive and negative stereotype?
4. How does this stereotype affect people who share a cultural background?
5. Have any of you ever felt the effects of prejudice? How did it make you feel?
6. How does prejudice and stereotyping hurt individuals and society?
7. What can we do about dispelling the myths that perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices?

Ideas for 5x7 card labels.

Asians	Baptists
American Indians	People who live in rural areas
Americans	People living with HIV/AIDS
Middle Eastern	Women
Whites	People with mental disabilities
Blacks	Homosexuals
African Americans	Physically handicapped
Hispanics	Elderly
Jews	Catholics

(*Cultural Awareness Learning Module One*, n.d.)

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Appendix A

Are You Ethnocentric?

Directions: Quietly, without discussion, place a check by the lifestyle or belief that you prefer.

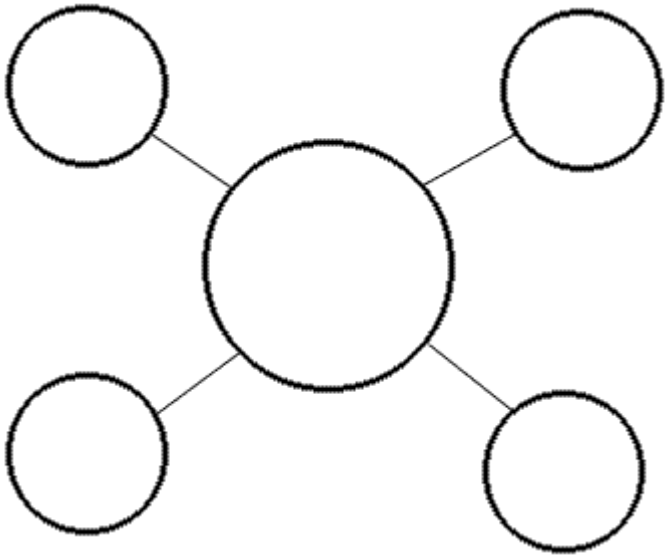
1. People should eat:
   - Meat ____
   - Vegetarian style ____
   - Mostly fish ____
2. People should seek:
   - Individual fulfillment ____
   - Harmony and respect within their community ____
3. People should believe in:
   - One religion ____
   - More than one religion ____
4. People should eat with:
   - Silverware ____
   - Chopsticks ____
5. People should make group decisions by:
   - Voting ____
   - Consensus ____
6. Gender roles should be:
   - Loosely defined ____
   - Clearly defined ____
7. Schools should emphasize studying:
   - One's own language and country ____
   - Other countries' languages as well as one's own ____
8. Direct eye contact infers:
   - Attention and respect ____
   - Disrespect and/or defiance ____
9. People who commit crimes should:
   - Be put in prison ____
   - Be shamed by community but possibly not imprisoned ____
10. One's future is controlled by:
    - Behaviors and actions ____
    - Fate ____
11. People should be paid for a job according to:
    - Skills only ____
    - Skills, age, number of children ____
12. Time means:
    - More opportunities to make money ____
    - More opportunities for human interaction ____

Appendix B

Circles of My Multicultural Self-Handout

This activity highlights the multiple dimensions of our identities. It addresses the importance of individuals self-defining their identities and challenging stereotypes.

Place your name in the center circle of the structure below. Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the satellite circles—an identifier or descriptor that you feel is important in defining you. This can include anything: Asian American, female, mother, athlete, educator, Taoist, scientist, or any descriptor with which you identify.



1. Share a story about a time you were especially proud to identify yourself with one of the descriptors you used above.
2. Share a story about a time it was especially painful to be identified with one of your identifiers or descriptors.
3. Name a stereotype associated with one of the groups with which you identify that is not consistent with who you are. Fill in the following sentence:
   I am (a/an) _____ but I am NOT (a/an)_____.
   (So if one of my identifiers was "Christian," and I thought a stereotype was that all Christians are radical right Republicans, my sentence would be: I am a Christian, but I am NOT a radical right Republican.)