

Multicultural Training for School Counselors: A Course Description

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Abstract

This article describes a multicultural counseling course designed specifically for school counselor trainees. Results from a course evaluation are also offered and described. Analyses of the pre- and post-tests indicated an increase in the four dimensions (*i.e.*, multicultural knowledge, multicultural awareness, multicultural skills, and multicultural terminology) of the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey-Revised (MCCTS-R; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). However, there was only a significant increase in students' level of multicultural knowledge.

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Over the past two decades, increased attention has been given to multicultural issues in counseling (Fischer, Jome, & Atkinson, 1998; Locke, 1998; Pederson, 1994; Roysircar, Sandhu, & Bibbins, 2003; Sleek, 1998). Much of the multicultural counseling literature has focused on the preparation of pre-service counselors (Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1998; Leach & Carlton, 1997; Ponterotto, 1998). In the forefront of the multicultural training movement has been the question, “What characteristics effectively instill multicultural counseling competence?” However, a review of current literature indicates that there is little research indicating how to best train counselors, particularly school counselors on the acquisition of multicultural competence. Thus, more research evaluating the effectiveness of training methods is sorely needed and multicultural counseling courses have yet to be empirically substantiated.

This article will focus on the impact of a multicultural course specifically designed for school counselors. Increasingly, school counselor trainees, like all counselor trainees, receive training in multicultural topics in their graduate course work. However, multicultural issues specific to the school setting are very rarely the focus of multicultural training in light of the increasing diversity of American schools. Research, which defines or elaborates upon elements that constitute successful multicultural training practices, is needed, and evaluating the pedagogy and components of multicultural courses, particularly multicultural courses for school counselors, is warranted.

Relevant Literature

Generally, multicultural counseling courses stress a combination of one or more of the three dimensions of multicultural competence—awareness, knowledge, and skills (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; D’Andrea & Daniels, 1992; Mio, 1989). Course formats usually vary according to the dimensions that the professor chooses to emphasize. For example, courses that are designed primarily to increase students’ cultural awareness may consist of class discussions geared toward exploring students’ stereotypes, prejudices, and misconceptions of other cultural groups. Additionally, since awareness requires the ability to see a situation from viewpoints, experiential learning through cultural immersion is a classic multicultural awareness activity (Pederson & Ivey, 1993). In contrast, courses that are designed to facilitate skill acquisition will often be very structured so that students are directly involved in a number of concrete learning activities such as role-playing, behavioral modeling, micro-skills training, and critiquing prerecorded counseling sessions (Pederson, 1994; Pederson & Ivey, 1993). Courses focusing on students’ knowledge of cultural differences, on the other hand, are designed to focus on information (e.g., values, beliefs, customs) and factual data regarding specific racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. This is typically implemented through readings, lectures, and media presentations (D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1992; Mio & Morris, 1990). Several multicultural counseling courses have been designed that are multifaceted and comprehensive in nature (e.g., Parker, Valley, & Geary, 1986).

Recently, the literature has included research on the efficacy that such training has had on counselors’ multicultural counseling competence. For instance, Manese, Wu, and Nepomuceno (2001) found that predoctoral interns’ multicultural

knowledge/skill significantly increased after participation in an integrated multicultural training program. Likewise, Yeh and Arora (2003) found that school counselors' exposure to workshops in multicultural counseling fostered increased awareness and acceptance of similarities and differences among and between people. And, Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) found that counselors who had taken a multicultural course rated themselves significantly higher on multicultural knowledge than those counselors who had not taken a multicultural course.

Although attention has been given to the development of multicultural training and multicultural competence, less attention has been given to the multicultural counseling training in terms of their effectiveness in improving competence in specific areas of counseling (e.g., school counseling, rehabilitation counseling). For instance, are school counselor trainees reading texts and literature that pertains to cultural issues in education? Or, are rehabilitation counselor trainees reading articles that focus on cultural issues as they relate to disabled persons? Despite the common knowledge and skills needed to be an effective counselor, there are specific skills and knowledge contained within different counseling settings as evidenced by the separate accreditation standards for various specialty programs (CACREP; Council of the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2001). As such, this article will provide school counselor educators with a framework for developing a course, which addresses multicultural issues that are specific to a school setting. Results from an exploratory course evaluation will also be offered.

Multicultural School Counseling Course Format

In order to develop a course that covered pertinent issues related to multiculturalism in schools, the author sought materials and content from various educational and multicultural resources. First, a reference list was developed containing more than 75 books (e.g., Canino & Spurlock, 2000) and articles (e.g., Herring & Runion, 1994) pertaining to counseling culturally diverse children and adolescents, and issues related to oppression, racism, and multicultural education. Most books were published after 1990 and both theoretical and empirical literature were included. From these references, the author selected readings for the course that aligned with course objectives.

Course Objectives and Format.

Based on Tatum's (1997) work on racism in education and Wehrly's (1991) developmental model for multicultural counselor preparation, the author developed a multidimensional course format. The course was divided into four components: multicultural knowledge, multicultural terminology, multicultural awareness, and multicultural skills. The student objectives for the course reflected the four components and were as follows:

1. Students will have an understanding of important multicultural terms and concepts. (Multicultural Terminology)
2. Students will have an understanding of racism, oppression, White privilege, discrimination, and culture. (Multicultural Knowledge)
3. Students will understand their own issues (e.g., fear, anger), in the context of dealing with an oppressive society. (Multicultural Awareness)

4. Students will be able to explain oppression and racism's effect on past and present educational systems. (Multicultural Knowledge)
5. Students will be able to describe and discuss their own cultural/racial/ethnic heritage. (Multicultural Awareness)
6. Students will be able to discuss cultural norms, history, and/or characteristics of at least one cultural/racial/ethnic group. (Multicultural Knowledge)
7. Students will be able to apply knowledge (e.g., strategies, case conceptualizations) of at least one cultural/racial/ethnic group to his/her counseling practice. (Multicultural Skill)
8. Students will be able to discuss stages and statuses of ethnic and racial identity development (Multicultural Knowledge)
9. Students will be able to apply racial identity development theories to school-related case scenarios. (Multicultural Skill)

This three-credit multicultural counseling course is offered during the spring semester of each academic year. The course is designed for graduate students enrolled either in a master's level school counseling, or school psychology program, as well as doctoral level counselor education programs. However, during the semester in which this study occurred, there were only school counseling students enrolled, possibly because it is a required core counseling course in the school counseling program. The course consists of 15 three-hour class sessions, and includes the following four components: multicultural awareness, multicultural knowledge, multicultural terminology, and multicultural skills.

Multicultural Awareness

The multicultural awareness component of the course encourages that students become aware of their own attitudes toward others who are culturally different. During the first session of the course, the instructor assigns students to small self-awareness groups, which remain the same during the entire course. Composition of the groups is important since diversity of group members can create a unique learning environment. For instance, ethnicity, gender, age, and past experiences are considered. These small groups meet weekly for 30-45 minutes throughout the semester. Some class sessions begin with self-awareness groups, and other sessions end with small self-awareness groups.

In order for students to share experiences, thoughts, and beliefs, the instructor gives each awareness group prompts to start group discussions. Examples of group prompts include the following:

- Discuss your ethnic/racial heritage and/or nationality (American, Canadian, Mexican, etc.)
- Discuss other self-identifications (e.g., religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation).
- Discuss messages you have received from your family and/or cultural groups about other cultural groups? How have these messages affected your interactions with others?
- Discuss your close friends in school (K-12), and whether or not they were culturally and/or ethnically different from you?

- Discuss how your race, economic status, and gender affected your K-12 experiences?
- How might the cultural messages you received from your family affect your work in the schools?

In order to further students' understanding of their own cultural background, students are also required to complete a cultural genogram and "Roots" paper (Wehrly, 1995). The cultural genogram is a graphic representation of the student's multigenerational family diversity tree. Cultural genograms can reveal dates of multicultural experiences, covert multicultural attitudes, and recurring themes and behaviors that flow from one generation to the next (Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995). The "Roots" paper is a thorough description of the cultural genogram in a story format. The paper might include opinions, interpretations, and attitudes that the student has discovered about each generation in his/her family.

Multicultural Knowledge

As part of the Multicultural Knowledge component of the course students are required to read, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" by Paulo Freire (1970). "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" is a classic text about challenging oppression in schools and the obstacles faced by educators in an oppressed society. Freire, a Brazilian educator, grew up in poverty and oppressive conditions. The "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" provides school counseling trainees with an understanding of oppression and its relationship to the educational process. The first two sessions of the class include activities related to important concepts in Friere's book.

While working in small self-awareness groups, students are given questions to guide their discussions. Questions for the groups to consider consist of: Who, according to Freire, are the oppressors in this country? The oppressed? Do you agree with Freire's means of achieving liberation for the oppressed? How does Freire's "banking education" concept relate to his notion of dialogue? How does Freire's assertions relate to your work in schools? What feelings do you experience as you read this book? Why?

The remaining portion of the Multicultural Knowledge component includes content related to racial and ethnic identity development, multicultural consultation, and multicultural assessment. Students are introduced to Phinney's (1989) adolescent ethnic identity development model, Atkinson, Morten, and Sue's (1993) Minority Identity Development Model, Cross' (1987) Black Racial Identity Development, and Helm's (1990) White Racial Identity Development model. As part of their learning experience, students are given case studies of K-12 student problems/issues, and they are required to determine the client's racial identity status and its relevance to future counseling. Also, students are required to read Tatum's (1997) book, "*Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?*" This book discusses the racial and ethnic identity development of children and adolescents, and the implications for school personnel.

Also, the multicultural knowledge component of the course consists of lectures on multicultural consultation and assessment. Students are introduced to multicultural issues in school-based consultation (e.g., Gibbs, 1980) and the implications for school counselors. Critical issues related to the assessment of culturally different students, immigrant students, and students whose first language is not English, are discussed. In addition, the biases of assessment instruments used frequently in the schools are

discussed, and appropriate testing accommodations for culturally different students are provided.

As a means to increase knowledge of other cultural groups, students are required to conduct a cultural interview with an individual that identifies with another racial/ethnic/cultural group. The interviews must cover, but are not limited to the following questions: What values/expectations/beliefs do you regard as culturally important? How are the values of “mainstream America” different from those of your own culture, as well as accompanying conflicts that have arisen? What do you think school counselors should know about your cultural group?

In addition to conducting a cross-cultural interview, students are also required to impart a group presentation. Groups may present research regarding a specific population or issue related to multiculturalism in schools. These 45-minute presentations are held during the last class sessions. The self-selected groups consist of 4-6 students, who collectively choose a topic. Group topics might include counseling Native American adolescents, acculturation vs. assimilation, and cultural considerations when conducting group counseling in schools.

A final assignment that pertains to multicultural knowledge requires that students submit two literature reaction papers. In order to complete the literature reaction papers, students must choose two books from a list containing fiction and non-fiction books. Samples from the list include “The Autobiography of Malcolm X” (Haley, 1965), “The Joy Luck Club” (Tan, 1989), “Alicia: My Story” (Appleman-Jurman, 1988), and “Love in black and white: The triumph of love over prejudice and taboo” (Mathabane & Mathabane, 1992). The reaction paper is different from a book report in that students are required to

examine their feelings related to the book's content, as well as to compare themselves to the main character or subject of the book. For instance, students might compare their life experiences to those of Malcolm X and then to reflect on how differences in experiences can impact one's behavior and development.

Multicultural Terminology

According to Pederson (1991), "part of the confusion in multicultural counseling has been due to the careless use of language in describing the construct" (p. 5). For this reason, the course begins with an extensive discussion of multicultural terminology. The terms that are defined and discussed include culture, discrimination, race, racism, racial identity, ethnicity, multiculturalism, classism, sexism, and oppression. Students are given the opportunity to list and discuss their own definitions and then they are encouraged to compare their definitions with definitions offered in texts, journal articles, and other sources. Since it is difficult to form consensus definitions of most multicultural concepts, the misuse of terms is the focus of this course component. For instance, the term 'race' typically implies genetic or biological characteristics that distinguish one group from another (Ponterotto & Pederson, 1993). At the same time, many students will use the term erroneously to mean 'racial identity' which is "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with one particular racial group" (Helms, 1993, p. 3).

Multicultural Skills

The purpose of the multicultural skills portion of the course is to help students develop appropriate strategies and techniques that are effective with culturally different students. Typically, this component of the course begins after the midterm because it

requires students to have a heightened sense of cultural awareness and knowledge. Students are asked to role-play case scenarios involving culturally different students and parents. In groups students role play scenarios and then observers provide feedback to the role-play participants. At the end of each class session, the case scenarios are discussed in a large group format. Issues pertaining to body language, verbal language, resistance, confronting colleagues about prejudiced beliefs, the application of racial and ethnic identity development, and the appropriateness of different counseling theories/strategies are discussed and explored. As a final assignment, students are required to develop two case studies involving a topic discussed in class during the semester. The instructor then assembles a packet of case studies and the students select three of them to which they respond. This assignment is the final class project.

Course Evaluation

Procedures

A letter outlining the informed consent, purpose of the study, and the survey were distributed to each student on the first day of the multicultural course. Students electing to participate in the study were not given an incentive to participate (e.g., extra credit) and were able to withdraw without penalty. Responses were matched for pre- and post-tests using codes for each participant. Sixteen out of the 20 students enrolled in the course participated (80% return rate). The participants completed the MCCTS-R prior to the course and at the completion of the course. The author's research assistant distributed and collected surveys.

Participants

The participants in this evaluation consisted of 16 school counseling master's level students who were enrolled in a semester-long, 45-hour multicultural counseling course (three credits) at a large, northeastern university. The participants consisted of 15 females and one male with a mean age of 24.1 years of age. There were two African American participants and two Asian participants and the remainder of the participants identified as White/European American. The students were enrolled in a master's level school counseling program accredited by CACREP.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a revised version of the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey (MCCTS; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). The original MCCTS was developed to measure the perceived multicultural competence of professional counselors based on the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) Multicultural Competencies. The revised MCCTS is a self-reported instrument containing 30 behaviorally-stated items specifically designed for school counselor participants. Participants are asked to assess their multicultural competence for each item by using a 4-point Likert-type scale, that was assigned the following numerical values: 4 = extremely competent, 3 = competent, 2 = somewhat competent, and 1 = not competent. The MCCTS was used in this study because of its adherence to the AMCD Multicultural Counseling Competencies, unlike other multicultural counseling competency assessment instruments (e.g., MCT).

In 1999, Holcomb-McCoy and Myers reported that there were five factors underlying the multicultural counseling competence items of the MCCTS: Multicultural

Knowledge, Multicultural Awareness, Multicultural Terminology, Knowledge of Racial Identity Development Theories, and Multicultural Skills. In calculating reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for the instrument, alphas of .92, .92, .79, .66, and .91 for the multicultural Knowledge, Awareness, Multicultural Terminology, Racial Identity, and Skills subscales were derived. The somewhat lower reliability coefficient for the Racial Identity subscale may be a result of the small number of items included on that subscale. In 2002, Holcomb-McCoy (unpublished manuscript) found that the MCCTS-revised consists of four factors rather than five. Those factors are multicultural knowledge, multicultural awareness, multicultural terminology, and multicultural skills. Alpha coefficients for the preceding were .95, .83, .97, and .74, respectively. Some wording on the MCCTS-R was modified in order to reflect language used in the school setting; for example, the term "students" was used rather than "clients."

Results

To test whether students' multicultural competence scores would increase at the end of the course, a Wilcoxon signed ranked test was performed on pre- and post- test scores for each multicultural dimension. This nonparametric test uses information about both the sign and magnitude of the differences between pairs. For this study, an analysis of variance of the MCCTS-R scores would have been inappropriate because no assumption of normal distribution could be made with such a small sample.

Results indicated that students' scores on the MCCTS-R were higher at the end of the course, suggesting that this multicultural course was effective at increasing students' multicultural counseling competence on a self-reported measure. Nevertheless, a significant increase was only evidenced on the Knowledge scale; the

increase in the other scales was small and not statistically significant (see Table 1). The pre-test Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the MCCTS-R factors were as follows: Knowledge .89, Terminology .99, Awareness .51, and Skills .52. The posttest coefficient alphas were .85, .95, .84, and .70, respectively.

Implications and Discussion

To specifically focus on a multicultural course for school counselors is rare. Results of this exploratory course evaluation suggest that a multicultural counseling course with multicultural knowledge, awareness, skills, and terminology components is effective in augmenting trainees' multicultural counseling competence, namely multicultural knowledge. Results suggest that the course increased scores on all four dimensions. However, only scores on the multicultural knowledge factor were significantly increased. Since the course format included four components, one might infer that the format is more important for the development of multicultural knowledge rather than multicultural awareness, skills, and terminology. Or, perhaps the students were already highly self-aware and had culturally competent skills, so that an increase in these areas would not be evident. It is also possible that multicultural knowledge was the most emphasized in the course (e.g., literature, reaction papers, presentation).

Several limitations of this study should be pointed out. The lack of a control group makes it difficult to assess whether the actual course was causal in augmenting multicultural counseling competence. For this reason, future research should compare courses that emphasize different training approaches that address multicultural counseling in a school setting. In addition, because the sample is small, generalizability is limited. It would be advantageous to extend this research by studying larger and more

diverse samples. Finally, the measure used in this study is merely an assessment of global multicultural counseling competence and does not assess competence with specific ethnic or cultural groups. More research and attention should be given to the development of other multicultural counseling competence measures, or on advancing the psychometric properties of the MCCTS-revised. Also, the fact that the MCCTS-revised is a self report measure poses several potential problems: (a) responding based on anticipated rather than actual attitudes, (b) responding in socially desirable ways, and (c) interpreting items subjectively (Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995).

This study suggests several implications for further research. There needs to be more studies that focus on the effect of multicultural training. For example, examining other multicultural school counseling courses that do not include the same components as outlined here and comparing the differences in outcome would provide a baseline comparison or control for courses that focus on multicultural counseling in schools. Because of the inherent selection bias of this school counseling program that emphasizes multicultural competency, another area for further research is whether similar training would have a similar outcome with students who have less interest and background in multicultural competencies at the beginning of training. In addition, as Constantine et al. (1996) suggested, research that examines the longitudinal effects of training students in multicultural competence is lacking and therefore follow up studies should be conducted to determine the long-term effects of training.

Despite its limitations, however, this study suggests that school counselor education programs could benefit from course formats that parallel that which was described in this article in order to enhance multicultural counseling competence.

Faculty and training staff could plan curricula that reflect the four component format and document the impact of such training for further analyses.

Summary

Multicultural counseling courses are thought to be important in the development of multicultural counseling competence. Few studies have assessed the impact of multicultural counseling courses on trainees' multicultural competence, particularly within a school setting. Considering that diversity is rapidly increasing in schools, it is critical that multicultural counseling courses in school counselor education programs impact prospective school counselors' multicultural competence. This study, the first to explore this topic, will hopefully encourage other researchers to fill this void in the literature.

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Table 1

Within-Group Test of Significance for the MCCTS Pretest and Posttest Scores

Factor	Pre Test			Post Test			z
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD	
(1) Knowledge	16	2.05	.62	16	3.02	.63	-2.874*
(2) Terminology	16	2.94	.68	16	3.66	.51	-2.353
(3) Awareness	16	2.74	.59	16	3.46	.55	-2.247
(4) Skills	16	2.59	.62	16	3.04	.59	-1.637

* p < .01