

Not just exposure: multicultural awareness captured in photos

Erika Raissa Nash*

Counseling Program, University of San Diego

Often times courses focused on diversity and multiculturalism simply expose students to multiple cultures and provide assignments to engage the acquisition of multicultural skills. In addition, many courses have set expectations of where all student multicultural awareness should be at the end of the semester. This however, is often not the best measure, because students enter courses at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and abilities. This manuscript will briefly demonstrate how student's multicultural awareness can be individually developed and measured through creative instruction, travel, and research. In addition, this manuscript provides the rationale for multicultural awareness and the background information on the Multicultural Counseling competencies that were utilized to analyze the images in this study. Individual photo-ethnographic research conducted by each student, documented the development of their multicultural awareness through four key stages during the course: 1) Foundation: Students described their personal identity in terms of cultural background, values and lifestyles at the beginning of the course; 2) Perception: students explain the perceptions they had of the culture before entering; 3) Immerse: Students document their cultural observations of eight elements while in the foreign country; and 4) Reflect: Students summarize their experiences of the course and their development of multicultural awareness.

Keywords: Visual Ethnography; Multicultural Awareness; Multicultural Counseling.

Diversity and multiculturalism has become a reoccurring discussion topic in business, academia, and government over the past decade. In addition, been the focus of media examining the future of America's workforce and culture. As professionals face increasing challenges of cultural diversity in their professions, research findings also support the growing complexity of relationships between culture and professional disciplines. Social determinants and historical precedents, such as those related to war or colonialism, condition cultural dynamics that occur within professional relationship and continue to negatively impact disadvantage communities and minorities. In such environments, professionals must respond adequately on both an individual and a cultural level, thereby calling into play the response capabilities of the organizational structures and support systems in which they function.

As awareness of culture-based needs grow in various disciplines, so does the necessity for innovative ideas to teach multicultural awareness in higher education. In reaction to the emerging realities of multiculturalism and of a global economy, for example, business schools and management programs are giving increased recognition to the importance of the individual as a 'cultural being'. Although multicultural education and teaching of equity and diversity are often viewed in higher education as important around the globe, developing an effective pedagogy can be daunting. As a counselor educator, the counseling profession

* Corresponding author. Email: enash@sandiego.edu

provides Multicultural Counseling Competencies as standards for students to obtain, but no formalized teaching strategies are explicitly stated. Current counselor education literature addresses how training programs implement multicultural competency development primarily through traditional classroom methods. However, cultural immersion is a particularly effective way of assisting students in developing multicultural competence (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). Yet, this modality remains largely unexplored by counselor educators in the counseling literature. The purpose of this paper is: 1) Describe multicultural awareness in counselor education to be applied in other disciplines; 2) To describe the effectiveness of utilizing non-traditional teaching methods and a nine day immersion trip to Tokyo, Japan to increase the multicultural awareness of US graduate students in counseling; and 3) To provide educators from various disciplines with ideas to develop multicultural awareness in students.

Multicultural Awareness In Counselor Education

Multiculturalism has been referred to as psychology's "fourth force" (Pedersen, 1989, 1990) and is an important topic in the counseling profession (Lee & Richardson, 1991). Much of this is driven by the recognition that US society is multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual (Sue, 1991; Sue & Sue, 1990). In the past, US society has operated primarily within a monocultural and monolingual perspective reflected in what has been referred to as the "encapsulated counselor" (Wrenn, 1962). The changing "complexion of our society" and the "diversification of America (US.);" makes it imperative for the professions to take a proactive stance on cultural diversity.

Kottler (2004) refers to multiculturalism as the most powerful movement in the counseling profession in the past decade. Cultural bias among counselors became a focus of the counseling profession over 25 years ago with the onset of the multicultural counseling movement (Wendel, 1997). Sue and Sue (1999) found a lack of training courses that addressed the needs of non-white clients and this research ignited counselor educators' focus on how to provide exceptional multicultural training. It is in the best interest of counselors to work toward understanding clients who come from non-dominant cultures. To this end, counselor educators include comprehensive diversity training in masters' and doctoral level counseling programs. Diversity includes race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability or disability and other characteristics whereby people may choose to self-define (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

The United States has increasingly become more composed of racial, ethnical, and culturally diverse individuals. It is imperative that students possess competence in working effectively with a range of culturally diverse individuals upon graduating from a university. In the counseling field, such competence is referred to as multicultural counseling competence. Multicultural counseling competence as defined in the literature describes the practitioners' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills in working with individuals from a wide range of cultural groups. The majority of the counseling literature suggests that educators and practitioners should focus on the broad goals of cultural competence, by working and teaching from an awareness, knowledge, and skill model (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Sue and Sue (1990) defined three dimensions of becoming a culturally competent counselor.

Awareness. Culturally skilled counselors are actively becoming aware of their own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, and personal limitations. Multiculturally competent counselors understand their own worldviews and how

they are a product of their cultural conditioning (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). For counselors, a key component is to know thy self. Before counselors can make therapeutic change they need to first know their own biases, assumptions, values, and cultural beliefs (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). It is also important that counselors understand their own product of cultural conditioning and how it influences psychological processes. Culturally competent counselors need to recognize the limits of their competence and expertise. It is extremely important that counselors are comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and their students in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and beliefs.

Knowledge. Culturally skilled counselors are active and intentional in their attempts to understand the worldview of their culturally different clients without judgment or bias. Culturally sensitive and competent counselors understand that a culture is not to be “blamed” for a person’s problems, “nor does the presenting problem have to be based on culture or race for a person of color” (Arredondo et al., 1996, p. 49). Is the ability for students to have the needed knowledge, which addresses the students’ understanding of the worldviews of culturally different individuals (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). In counseling, this knowledge is vital for counselors to make connections with their clients, perceive behaviors appropriately, and provide interventions and responses services that are culturally effective. Counselors need to possess a knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping may affect them personally and in their work. Not only are multicultural competent counselors responsible for knowledge surrounding race and culture, but the affects of socioeconomic status, ability, gender, religions, and etc.

Skill. Culturally skilled counselors are in the process of actively developing and practicing appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and skills in working with culturally different clients. Counselors recognize that traditional counseling theories and methods may not be beneficial when working with clients from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Counseling approaches need to be consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of clients (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). It is not sufficient that counselors take just one course about multiculturalism; it is imperative that counselors in training advocate for their own education, competency training, and practice.

Research Project

Each of the 18 students enrolled in a Multicultural Counseling Course taught by the Principal Investigator completed an assignment entitled: Cultural Plunge Paper. The Cultural Plunge paper asked students to reflect in words and through 15 photos on: 1) their personal culture and background; 2) the culture they entered through the global studies portion of the course; 3) analysis of Japanese culture after they have left the US; and 4) their reflection on their cultural competence and future role as a counselor. Students were given the option to have their assignment included in this research study, by signing a photo release form independently of their assignment.

Students in the course did not know which assignment was used in the study to protect the integrity of the analysis. The students were asked to complete all of the assignments to the best of their ability as outlined in the course syllabus. In addition, each student was given a letter about the study, consent form, and a blank envelope on the first day of class. If a student chose to participate, they signed the photo release and returned it to the instructor at the next class or if a student chose not to participate, they returned the blank photo release in the envelope to the instructor at the next class. Only at the end of the course, after the grades

were filed with the registrar, did the instructor open the envelopes to know which projects can be used for this study.

Participants

Of the 18 students enrolled in the course, 16 students volunteered. Of the 16 students, 13 students had complete assignments and their papers could be analyzed. The study participants consisted of 12 females and one male; four Caucasian, two Asian, five Hispanic, two bi-racial students. Five of the study participants have travelled outside of the US prior to the trip and of that, two had previous travel to Asia.

Multicultural Awareness Captured

Counseling and teaching is embedded in social relational processes – that is, within processes of obtaining self-awareness through experiencing one's self and experiencing others (Pedersen, 1991). Understanding cultural issues within these social and relational processes can enhance the delivery of services for culturally diverse students who educators teach (Hill, 2004). It is imperative that counselors and educators must fully understand the historical backgrounds, customs, attitudes, morals, and worldviews of culturally diverse students/clients and of themselves.

Students enter counseling programs from a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The mission statements or values of the college/university and the counseling department often will reflect the idea of multicultural competence and responsibility. Clearly, the goal of many colleges/universities and specifically the counseling departments is to create a diverse population from whom all students can learn from each other and have an enriching multicultural experience. While the goal is noble, it will not be achieved by simply bringing people from different backgrounds and cultures together without some well-planned, organized procedures, and institutional practices designed to help students become multiculturally competent and responsible (McRae & Johnson, 1991). Without intentional planning, placing people from different racial cultures together can create racial conflict, anger, confusion, marginality, and many negative emotions. This array of emotions arises because, while some people will want to increase cross-cultural dialogue, others will be resistant to this (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991). Further complications come from well-intentioned people, who are nonetheless unaware of how to have appropriate and respectful cross-cultural dialogues.

In light of these scenarios, becoming multiculturally responsible will serve students in various programs, their profession, and their own life (Parker & Sager, 2008). Some of the benefits of becoming multiculturally competent are as follows:

- Develop better understanding of others
- Promote greater harmony among individuals in any setting
- Able to interact with diverse individuals
- Be receptive to different cultures, traditions, experience, beliefs, and ideas
- Able to listen and respond non-judgmentally to others
- Have the capacity to avoid generalizing when viewpoints and experiences differ from your own

To have students go beyond being just cultural tourist, assigning the Cultural Plunge paper allows the students to research and capture what they learn while abroad. This assignment

allows the student to demonstrate their cultural competence by demonstrating their *knowledge* and *awareness* that was gained. For the purpose of this study, *skill* will not be focused on because it is a product of gained knowledge and awareness. Each of the assignments' photos and written explanations were analyzed and coded for themes that the students demonstrated as cultural competence within the knowledge and awareness categories. Table 1 below depicts examples of the pictures and the themes that were captured to demonstrate where students entered into the course and what they gained from the course and the global study experience.

Table 1: Multicultural Awareness Themes and Sample Pictures

Knowledge			
 Assumptions of Culture	 One national culture	 Dialects	 Political Influence
 Diversity is seen as choices and interest people have	 Cardboard City	 A Japanese Mind	 Buddhism and Shintoism
Awareness			
 Individual Culture		 Awareness	
 Vessel for the Mutual Learning		 Multiculturalism is Everything	

Teaching Methods to Teach Multicultural Awareness

This course focused on utilizing contemporary literature and movies to address multicultural awareness in students. The use of contemporary literature in courses allows students to examine culture through characters and story plots in a safe and non-defensive approach.

Many times when students are faced with the strong implications of examining diversity and culture, there is a tendency to become defensive and the acceptance and openness to new knowledge is impacted. An additional unique feature of this course was in the travel to Japan that took place.

What reading fiction and watching movies can do for you vicariously, traveling gives you more directly. Traveling and being away from your things, your possessions, and your support systems can free you to be more adventurous. Your job as a traveler, besides negotiating yourself from place to place, is to observe what is going on around you, meet people, see new sights, and find new experiences. Such adventures broaden your awareness of different people and help you to be more knowledgeable and tolerant of those who are different from you. All of these things will benefit you as a student, as professional counselors, and as a person.

You can learn about multicultural perspectives in the classroom or read about different cultures in books, but nothing can replace the experience of actually visiting or living in these cultures. By studying overseas, students are provided with firsthand experience and knowledge of the multicultural issues they learn in class. Different people, food, music, values, gender roles, philosophies, clothes, and weather are experienced every day or during the trip. In addition, students will broaden their cultural perspective of their respective field. By looking at their profession from another culture's perspective presents new approaches and ideas on how society and values impact people. Another culture will view and practice their profession in ways different to their previous experiences. In addition, students and educators are given an opportunity to expand their professional network around the world. By travelling abroad, students and educators are able to develop collegial relationships and make friends with people from around the world.

Conclusion

The use of contemporary literature, creative assignments, and an international trip allows students to develop multicultural awareness deeper and with less defense. The ideas and methods that were used can be translated into other disciplines to increase student multicultural awareness.

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