A Framework for Enhancing Multicultural Counselling Competence

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ABSTRACT

Canadian counsellors are increasingly called upon to work with diverse client populations whose needs may not be met through traditional counselling models. The question for many is how to development the attitudes, knowledge, and skills for competent and ethical practice. This article introduces core competencies designed to assist counsellors to effectively infuse culture into all aspects of the counselling process. It then describes how these competencies are combined to enhance the multicultural competence of counsellors. Practical strategies are then introduced to provide a starting place for counsellors who identify the need for further professional development to increase their multicultural competence.

RÉSUMÉ

Les conseillers canadiens sont appelés de plus en plus souvent à travailler avec des clients provenant de populations diverses, dont les besoins peuvent ne pas être satisfaits par les modèles de counseling habituels. Pour plusieurs, la question est de savoir comment acquérir les attitudes, connaissances, et habiletés nécessaires à une pratique compétente et éthique. Cet article présente des habiletés de base conçues pour aider les conseillers à imprégner efficacement la culture dans tous les aspects du counseling. Il décrit ensuite comment les combiner les unes aux autres pour améliorer la compétence multiculturelle. Puis, des stratégies pratiques sont présentées comme point de départ pour les conseillers qui ressentent le besoin de se perfectionner davantage afin d'augmenter leurs compétences multiculturelles.

A lot has been written in the last 25 years about the importance of attending to culture in all aspects of counselling practice. Solid arguments have been made that, to a large degree, all interactions with our clients should now be considered multicultural in nature (Pedersen, 1991). The population of Canada continues to change and the definition of culture has expanded to include other factors like age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status (Arredondo & Perez, 2006; Arthur & Collins, 2005; Mollen, Ridley, & Hill, 2003). It is also widely recognized that culture is not something that applies only to non-dominant populations. Rather, all of us carry with us our personal cultural identities that impact the way in which we interact with our clients (Ho, 1995; James, 1996). This article starts from the assumption that these arguments are now well substantiated in the literature and that the key question now is how counsellors enhance their multicultural counselling competence.

In other articles, we have reflected on the historical debates related to multicultural counselling competency and provided detailed theoretical analyses of the

current frameworks of multicultural counselling competencies (Collins & Arthur, 2005b, 2006a). We have also proposed our own model for culture-infused counselling competencies, arguing that culture is a factor that must be continuously infused into work with all clients (Collins & Arthur, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b). The purpose of this article is more practical in nature: to explore what it means to be competent and to describe what we see as the basic competencies that will provide Canadian counsellors with the ability to work effectively with a wide range of diverse clientele. The first few sections of the article will describe the core competencies we have identified through previous theoretical work and literature reviews. The next section will discuss how these competencies combine to support multicultural competence. The final section will look at practical ways in which each of us can work toward increasing our competency in these areas. We hope that you can incorporate some ideas to enhance your work with all clients.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCE

A number of multicultural competency frameworks have been proposed (Arredondo et al., 1996; Hansen, Petitone-Arreola-Rockwell, & Greene, 2000; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1982). We explore the criticisms of these earlier models elsewhere (Collins & Arthur, 2005b, 2006a). The discussion here is based on our model, which is summarized in Table 1. There are three competency domains, each with a number of core competencies. A detailed description of the specific attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills in each competency area is provided in Collins & Arthur (2005b, 2006b).

In this section we will discuss each of these core competency areas, highlighting some of the key targets for Canadian counsellors who wish to learn to more effectively infuse culture into their work with their clients.

Domain I: Cultural Awareness of Self: Active Awareness of Personal Assumptions, Values, and Biases

The person of the counsellor is consistently identified as the starting point for the development of cultural competence (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992). This emphasis on self-awareness is not new, but, as Wong-Wylie (2006) points out, the counselling profession has been slow to fully embrace the power of reflective practice relative to other disciplines. Many of us may believe that we know ourselves, but our knowing goes only as far as the types of inquiry we make of ourselves. Kiselica (1999), for example, describes the painful and very personal process of coming to know himself and his cultural privilege as a White male counsellor. As we extend our definition of culture to include other factors, the depth of our personal inquiry must also expand. There are five areas of self-awareness that we consider as central to multicultural counselling competence.

Core Competency 1: Demonstrate awareness of your own cultural identities. The first step toward multicultural competence is to acknowledge that you are in fact a cultural being (Ho, 1995; James, 1996). For members of non-dominant populations in Canada, this fact is reflected back to them continuously in their interac-

Table 1
A Framework of Culture-Infused Counselling Competencies

Competency	Description
Domain I: Cultural Awareness—Self: Active awareness of personal assumptions, values, and biases	
Core Competency 1	Demonstrate awareness of your own cultural identities.
Core Competency 2	Demonstrate awareness of differences between your own cultural identities and those of individuals from other dominant or non-dominant groups.
Core Competency 3	Demonstrate awareness of the impact of culture on the theory and practice of counselling/psychology.
Core Competency 4	Demonstrate awareness of the personal and professional impact of the discrepancy between dominant and non-dominant cultural groups in North America.
Core Competency 5	Demonstrate awareness of your level of multicultural competence.
Domain II: Cultural Awareness—Other: Understanding the worldview of the client	
Core Competency 1	Demonstrate awareness of the cultural identities of your clients.
Core Competency 2	Demonstrate awareness of the relationship of personal culture to health and well-being.
Core Competency 3	Demonstrate awareness of the socio-political influences that impinge on the lives of non-dominant populations.
Domain III: Culturally Sensitive Working Alliance	
Core Competency 1	Establish trusting and respectful relationships with clients that take into account cultural identities.
Core Competency 2	Collaborate with clients to establish counselling goals that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity.
Core Competency 3	Collaborate with clients to establish client and counsellor tasks that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity.

tions with the dominant culture. But for those who are privileged by virtue of their colour, ethnicity, language, physical and mental abilities, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or socio-economic status, the influences that have shaped personal cultural identities may be much less obvious (Kiselica, 1999). For example, how deeply have you explored the impact of being able-bodied on your view of yourself, your view of healthy functioning, or your view of the world around you? Unless you have been confronted with physical disability, you are less likely to really engage in the level of self-reflection necessary to understand how your own worldview has been shaped by the privilege of ability. One's personal worldview is shaped by numerous such factors (Arredondo & Glauner, 1992; Ho; James; Sue, 2001), including personal identity factors (e.g., genetics, family, personality); cultural identity factors (e.g., cultural heritage, gender, social class, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, ability); and contextual factors (e.g., historical context, environment, social norms). Each of these factors can have a dramatic impact on how we view client problems, what we see as possible solutions to those problems, and the models we choose to follow in addressing those concerns (Collins & Arthur, 2005b).

Self-reflection on these factors is critical to effective practice (APA, 2002; Arredondo et al., 1996). Yet this is perhaps one of the most challenging undertakings because their influence is often subtle and is built into our assumptions, values, and beliefs from an early age (Pedersen, 2001). Our learning in this area is life-long and

is enhanced through deliberate and focused attention to self-reflection (Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2006). Following a recent presentation at the bilingual (English–French) National Consultation on Career Development [NATCON] conference in Ottawa, we were approached by a participant who pointed out that although we identified ourselves as women of privilege in a number of areas, we failed to acknowledge the additional privilege that comes from being English-speaking. She was absolutely right, of course. Our question to you is, "What personal and cultural identities shape your worldview and how do White, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, or other statuses of privilege impact your worldview?" Until you can answer this question honestly and comprehensively, you may not bring the person of the counsellor fully into the counselling process, and you may, in fact, be introducing barriers to effective practice by virtue of unexamined cultural assumptions and ethnocentric perspectives (Pedersen, 1995; Ridley, 1995).

Core Competency 2: Demonstrate awareness of differences between your own cultural identities and those of individuals from other dominant or non-dominant groups. Acknowledgement of difference is critical to culturally sensitive practice. Culture is important in understanding both our clients and ourselves. Culturally sensitive practice requires us to not only recognize, but value, respect, and appreciate these differences (Parham, 2001). This means letting go of our tendency to view ourselves as *normal* and to *welcome* rather than simply *tolerate* diversity.

As counsellors, we are inevitably called upon to make judgements as part of ethical and competent practice. The challenge for each of us is to recognize where our own values and assumptions come into play in our judgements of others (APA, 1993; Canadian Psychological Association, 2000; Merali, 1999). The more subtle and unexamined the judgements, the more dangerous they are in the counselling context. This can be as simple as what we read into a person's body language. We all make these quiet assumptions in our interactions with others, but we often fail to deliberately hold only tentatively to these assumptions and actively explore their cultural roots. A simple challenge in this regard is to choose one day to actively self-monitor your internal self-talk as you interact with people in various contexts and ask yourself this one question: "What do I assume about this person based on what I have just observed and what does that tell me about my automatic reactions to difference?"

Core Competency 3: Demonstrate awareness of the impact of culture on the theory and practice of counselling/psychology. The influence of collective culture is also strongly evident in the discipline of psychology in North America. Some authors continue to argue that there are Western theoretical models that can be applied generically to all clients (Patterson, 2004). However, both feminist and multicultural writers argue that each of these models is rooted in monocultural and ethnocentric perspectives. The underlying assumptions inherent in these models are not compatible with all client worldviews (APA, 2002; Cheatham et al., 2002a, 2002b; Merali, 1999).

Pedersen (1991) argued that multicultural counselling represents a fourth major theoretical force. However, this does not mean that we should toss out earlier models and conceptual frameworks. Rather, we are invited to apply the same standard of active and critical awareness to these models that we apply to our own cultural identities. The question then becomes, "What are the underlying values and as-

sumptions that drive your personal theoretical models and how might those need to be modified to work with clients who hold different worldviews and values?" This is actually a more difficult challenge than simply presenting a new model and saying "Here, try this out." This continuous process of self-examination, examination of one's models for counselling, and reflection on their relevance and applicability for particular clients requires us to hold less firmly to our professional knowledge base and recognize that each of us is responsible for adding to that knowledge base through our experience in active reflective practice (Collins et al., 2006).

Core Competency 4: Demonstrate awareness of the personal and professional impact of the discrepancy between dominant and non-dominant cultural groups in North America. A step beyond simply recognizing and valuing the differences that exist across cultural groups is acknowledgement of the degree to which resources, opportunities, and options are differentially available based on group membership (Kiselica, 1999). We pride ourselves in Canada on being a multicultural nation and in having inclusive federal and provincial policies related to gender, ability, and other cultural identity factors. However, the reality is that what we, as authors of this article, are able to dream of for our lives remains largely a function of our privileged association with particular groups and less a function of our inherent worth or hard work. Our intent is not to downplay or devalue self-responsibility and active pursuit of one's goals and dreams but rather to emphasize that the same doors are not open to everyone in society (Parham, 2001).

If we fail, as counsellors, to acknowledge the fundamental reality of societal inequities, oppression of non-dominant populations, and our own tendencies, however subtle, to think and behave in racist, sexist, elitist, heterosexist, ableist, and ageist ways, we risk inadvertently supporting these continued discrepancies (Pedersen, 1995). We also are much more likely to consciously or sub-consciously blame our clients for things that are beyond their control and to miss that the target of change must sometimes be these larger social, economic, and political systems (Coleman & Wampold, 2003; Sue & Sue, 1999). It is not an easy thing to openly acknowledge that we hold stereotypes of individuals based on group membership or that prejudice and discrimination slip into our practices in subtle ways. However, unless we are willing to do so, we may continue to engage in unintentional oppression of our clients (Collins & Arthur, 2005b; Pedersen, 1995).

What we must also acknowledge are the ways in which the current system serves to uphold a privileged position for many counsellors and psychologists. Although some of us hold non-dominant identities, there are probably other ways in which we have experienced privilege. In a just society, opportunities, resources, and worth are distributed equally and fairly, with no individuals or groups holding particular advantages or disadvantages in access or advancement (Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). Most of us would stand together and wave the flag of social justice. But if social justice means that the playing field really is levelled and we can no longer count on our privilege to ensure us priority access to services, resources, and status, we need to ask ourselves what we are really willing to change. For us, as authors, our privilege as White women in academia likely means our voices are given more public space and credence than those of many other women in Canadian society. Although many of us would agree that social

justice is an important concept, it demands that we seriously examine the principles and practices of counselling. Many of these principles have challenged the structures of organizations. However, as part of the self-awareness competencies, we need to reflect upon the implications of personal privilege. The question we ask ourselves is "How far are we willing to go to ensure that others have equal opportunity regardless of cultural identities if it means that our own level of comfort and privilege may need to change?" It is important that we continue to ask this question of ourselves, and we invite you to do the same.

Core Competency 5: Demonstrate awareness of your level of multicultural competence. The final area where we suggest counsellors focus their attention in terms of their own self-awareness is in honest reflection about their level of multicultural competence. First and foremost, this means making a decision about whether you believe that enhancing multicultural competence is a priority. The emphasis on cultural awareness and sensitivity is reflected in Canadian codes of ethics (Pettifor, 2005), and many, like us, now argue that multicultural competence is necessary for professional competence generally (Arredondo & Toporek, 2004). If you accept this premise, then we hope that this article provides you with continued steps along that path.

One of the areas that receives little attention in the professional literature is the relationship between the personal and professional lives of counsellors (Collins et al., 2006). Feminist writers have taken the lead in their focus on *the personal is political* as a metaphor for the importance of playing out in our personal lives those values that we hold in our professional roles and vice versa (Feminist Therapy Institute, 1999). It is often more difficult to confront racist comments, for example, among our families and friends because we have more to lose in these contexts. However, the more we, the authors, personally learn about multiculturalism, the more we feel challenged to deeper levels of integrity in our personal and professional lives. The emphasis on self-awareness in this section of the article is a reminder, though, that the most important target of consciousness raising and competency development related to culture is ourselves. As a point of reflection, then, you might ask yourself, "What are the cutting edges of your own multicultural competence and how are those manifest in both your personal and professional lives?"

Domain II: Cultural Awareness of Others: Understanding the Worldview of the Client

Once you have begun the process of developing self-awareness about the impact of culture on you as a person and on you as a professional, it is time to turn the cultural lens toward the clients you serve. The second domain of culture-infused counselling competency is understanding the worldview of the client(s). The competencies that we consider core to this domain are explored in this section.

Core Competency 1: Demonstrate awareness of the cultural identities of your clients. Just as your own cultural identities are shaped through historical, social, and cultural experiences and contexts, your clients each bring with them a complex and idiosyncratic cultural history that affects their worldview, values, assumptions, and beliefs (Arthur & Stewart, 2001; Collins & Arthur, 2005b). There are two levels on which your awareness of your clients' cultures come into play. The first has to do with general knowledge of various client groups that you are likely to encounter in your practice. Client cultures should be explored from a non-judgemental stance,

recognizing that worldviews are social constructs that are not inherently good or bad/right or wrong. They are simply the lenses through which each of us views the world around us (Ibrahim, Roysircar-Sodowsky, & Ohnishi, 2001).

The second level of exploration of client culture relates to the cultural identity of the specific client with whom you are interacting (Ho, 1995). Differences within groups are often larger than differences between groups. So, in spite of your group-level knowledge above, you cannot assume that any or all of it applies to a particular client until you directly explore with that client the implications of group membership (Ridley & Kleiner, 2003). It is also possible that you may not be able to ascertain group membership without direct discussion with the client (as in the case of sexual orientation) or that your assumptions are incorrect (as with ethnic minority group members who appear white). This is another reason why we support the position that all encounters with clients must be considered multicultural in nature (Pedersen, 2001). We recommend that you assume differences in worldview exist; then you are less likely to inadvertently impose your own perspectives on the client. What is most important is to keep in the forefront of your own mind the question, "Who is this client and what aspects of her/his cultural identities does the client feel are relevant to explore within the counselling context?"

Core Competency 2: Demonstrate awareness of the relationship of personal culture to health and well-being. Understanding the worldviews of your clients leads you to a better understanding of the meaning of wellness and healthy functioning within that cultural context. Culture also impacts the development and conceptualization of problems and expressions of distress (APA, 2002; Fischer, Jerome, & Atkinson, 1998; McCormick, 1996). Without an understanding of the impact of culture on both healthy and unhealthy functioning, it is possible to completely misinterpret client meanings. For example, in cultures where a collective rather than an individualistic perspective is assumed, it would not be seen as unhealthy or lacking in independence or differentiation for a university student to include, and even defer to, a parent in a counselling session aimed at career planning. However, a counsellor lacking in cultural awareness might jump to inappropriate conclusions about familial relationships or about the student's maturity level for decision-making.

There are also common presenting concerns that can be identified for particular cultural groups, often stemming from the types of discrimination and oppression that individuals from these groups experience within the dominant culture. For example, gays and lesbians may present with issues related to the coming-out process or struggles with both internalized and external homophobia (Alderson, 2005; Collins & Oxenbury, 2005). Understanding these common issues can sensitize you to the types of questions you might ask or areas of exploration you might initiate to ensure that important cultural factors are not overlooked.

We caution you, however, not to assume that group membership means a particular client is experiencing a particular issue or that cultural identity is necessarily related to the client's presenting concerns. It is up to you to assess the salience of various cultural identities to the client's issues. A woman of colour presenting with a work-related communication problem, for example, may not see gender or ethnicity as relevant but rather may focus on a lack of previous training in a particular skill area. However, when she later wants to address her discomfort with particular work

policies and practices, both of these cultural identities may be important to explore. What we are cautioning against here is moving from a position of cultural blindness where you fail to attend to relevant aspects of culture in counselling practice, to the opposing position of over-applying cultural hypotheses, where you assume that all presenting concerns are impacted by group members or personal cultural factors (Collins & Arthur, 2005b; Pedersen, 1995). The question to continually ask yourself is, "What aspects of this particular client's cultural identities are relevant to our understanding of these specific presenting concerns?"

Core Competency 3: Demonstrate awareness of the socio-political influences that impinge on the lives of non-dominant populations. It is important for us, as counsellors, to be informed about the types of social, economic, and political forces in Canada that shape the lives of members of non-dominant populations. Although Canada has made great strides toward its goals of becoming a multicultural nation (Department of Canadian Heritage, 2003), there still exists considerable inequity between various groups. Discrimination based on gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, language, ability, and other cultural factors continues to be a source of distress for many. According to the Statistics Canada (2003) *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, 8% of the Canadian population (1.8 million people) felt out of place or uncomfortable in Canada some of the time because of their ethnicity, culture, race, skill, colour, language, accent, or religion. Systemic barriers also limit access to services and resources (Multicultural Coalition for Access to Family Services, 2000; Williams, 2002). For example, lack of access to translators, supports for education or training, or appropriate childcare services may limit opportunities for immigrants. It is our responsibility both to be aware of and to work toward changing some of these larger systems that are at the core of many of our clients' presenting concerns.

We must also be willing to hold a space for clients to express their distress and to react against an oppressive system, even though we may identify with that system and may naturally tend to respond with guilt and denial of our own roles in their oppression (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001). Acknowledging our own privilege was noted above as a central component of our developing self-awareness and a key to our ability to really be able to hear the depth of impact of these factors on our clients. As we listen, we must also attend to the internalization of these systemic messages (e.g., homophobia, racism, or sexism) by our clients so that we can support them in recognizing and externalizing this oppression. A key question for self-reflection in this area is, "How are the concerns expressed by this particular client impacted by social, economic, or political factors, and how might I create a safe space for her to freely express her experiences of systemic oppression?"

Domain III: Culturally Sensitive Working Alliance

The point of connection between our self-awareness and our awareness of our clients' culture is the working alliance that we establish with each client. The working alliance is composed of three core components: (a) a relationship of trust and respect, (b) agreement on goals, and (c) agreement on tasks (Collins & Arthur, 2005a, 2006a). As we work collaboratively with clients on these three aspects of the counselling relationship and process, we apply the cultural sensitivity we have gained in exploring our own culture and her/his culture. There are

three core competencies that we encourage counsellors to master in this area.

Core Competency 1: Establish trusting and respectful relationships with clients that take into account cultural identities. Considerable evidence exists that one of the key factors in therapeutic success is the relationship between the counsellor and the client (Coleman & Wampold, 2003; Fischer et al., 1998; Roysircar, Hubbell, & Gard, 2003). Establishing a relationship of trust and respect across cultures presents additional challenges to establish common understanding and build bridges across worldviews. This may require flexibility in both communication and counselling styles (Sue & Sue, 1999) and a willingness to adjust some of the cultural norms associated with applied practice in Canada, such as office setting, time for counselling appointments, and expectations implicit for both counsellor and client roles (Amundson, 1998).

Counsellor credibility has been noted as a significant factor in both client willingness to continue with the counselling process and expectations for success (Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Sue & Zane, 1987). In the context of cultural differences, establishing credibility requires active attention to client expectations and cultural norms. We encourage counsellors to engage in cultural inquiry with all clients to explore the ways in which client cultural identities impact their view of the counselling process. It is through this open exploration that you will be able to build a bridge between your worldviews and establish credibility with your client. Ask yourself as you begin your work with each new client: "From the cultural perspective of my client, what verbal or non-verbal behaviours, approaches to the counselling process, or foci for our dialogue might serve to increase my credibility and trustworthiness as a helping professional?" Building a strong working alliance in which your client feels heard and understood provides a solid foundation to then engage in the counselling process in a way that respects and values cultural influences (Collins & Arthur, 2005a).

Core Competency 2: Collaborate with clients to establish counselling goals that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity. Cultural identities will impact how both you and your client understand human nature, problem development, and appropriate targets for change (APA, 2002; Fischer et al., 1998; Pedersen, 2001). You bring your expertise in the change process to the working alliance; your client brings expertise in her/his own cultural context and presenting concerns. Failure to truly understand the meaning of cultural identities for your client will likely result in early termination, dissatisfaction, and lack of success in the counselling process (Collins & Arthur, 2005a).

Assessment instruments and processes that are culturally appropriate should be selected (Stewart, 2005). In most cases, this means taking existing processes and examining the underlying assumptions upon which they are built to see if they are an appropriate match to the worldview of your client. In many cases, you may need to adapt them to ensure that the information you receive is free of cultural bias. This is also a point at which you should examine carefully the external influences on the client's presenting concern and determine the most appropriate target of change (Cheatham et al., 2002a, 2002b). You may find that effecting change in oppressive familial, social, organizational, or other systems is a more appropriate goal than the traditional focus on changing the individual (Fouad et al., 2006).

Failing to attend to important information related to client cultural perspectives or experiences could lead to a mismatch in the goals you set for the counselling process (Collins & Arthur, 2005a). If you sense that you are off track, take a moment to ponder, "Whose agenda is driving the counselling process and how might I ensure that the goals we have established are not being biased by my own beliefs or values about healthy functioning and about success in counselling?"

Core Competency 3: Collaborate with clients to establish client and counsellor tasks that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity. Once you have come to agreement on goals, the next step is to work with the client to establish appropriate and culturally sensitive interventions, strategies, and techniques to accomplish those goals (Collins & Arthur, 2005a). Depending on the nature of the presenting concern and the salience of cultural factors to the goals of counselling, you may need to draw on a wider range of counselling interventions and resources, including indigenous or group-specific strategies or cultural healers (Coleman & Wampold, 2003). This may require you to engage in further training to ensure that you have a broad set of skills and strategies that can be adapted to work with the types of clients that you commonly encounter in your practice. A common theme is counsellor flexibility and adaptability, along with a willingness to engage with the client as a co-contributor to all aspects of the counselling process.

In this particular model, what is traditionally viewed as client resistance must be reframed as a mismatch between the client and the counsellor in terms of the goals or tasks of counselling (Collins & Arthur, 2005a). This puts the responsibility on you as the counsellor to be continuously monitoring client responses to ensure that the counselling processes fit with their worldview, values, and beliefs. It is well recognized that many Western counselling approaches are based on assumptions that are culture-bound and ethnocentric (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996). To use these approaches with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds, you must take the additional step of examining those assumptions and ensuring that a match can be established with the client's worldview or adapting the approaches to be more culturally responsive. While this certainly presents a challenge compared to manualized approaches to therapy, it is more ethical responsible and will bring about greater rewards in terms of client satisfaction and success.

You may also be required to step outside of your traditional counselling roles to act as teacher, advocate, organizational consultant, social activist, and other roles designed to impact the systems of oppression that precipitate client distress and ill health. Ask yourself, "What type of professional roles might I assume to be optimally effective in bringing about change in this client's current experiences?" This particular challenge is one that faces the profession as a whole. We believe that it is time to move beyond the feminist call for *the person is political* to a recognition of *the professional is political* (Collins & Arthur, 2005c). Many traditional Western counselling practices simply maintain the status quo and, in so doing, contribute directly or indirectly to the continued oppression of non-dominant groups in Canada. Many writers are now advocating for social justice to become a more central focus in counselling and psychology (Fouad et al., 2006). While not every counsellor will become a social activist, every counsellor could benefit from adding social justice activities to their repertoire of skills and strategies, even in small

ways. It may be as direct as initiating change in organizational policies that appear to discriminate, or at least present barriers to access, for particular populations.

DEFINING MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

The majority of this article has focused on describing some of the core competencies that counsellors may require to work effectively with clients from culturally diverse backgrounds. There is more to multicultural competence, however, than adding a series of competencies to your existing repertoire of counsellor attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills. As Fowers and Davidov (2006) point out, multicultural competence is closely tied to the character of the counsellor:

> [C]ultural competence is not simply the possession of self-knowledge, information about culture, and behavioral capacities that may or may not alter the psychologist as a person. Rather, one must internalize and embody this knowledge in a profound way, making it part of one's character, not just an addition to one's behavioral repertoire. (Openness to the Other, ¶ 6)

In another article (Collins et al., 2006), we explore the importance of bringing to the forefront the person of the counsellor through the process of reflective practice. The questions for reflection throughout this article are intended to prompt such transformative exploration.

The emphasis on the person or character of the counsellor highlights the connection between intention and actions (Fowers & Davidov, 2006). To be able to effectively and ethically translate your learning into application with each of your clients, two additional qualities are required—judgement and diligence. Drawing on the definition of competence by the College of Alberta Psychologists (2003), we suggest that culture-infused counselling competence involves

> judgement (ability to assess when to apply particular knowledge or skills—e.g., with which client, under which circumstances, focused on which particular presenting concern) and diligence (consistent self-reflection and attention to both one's own level of multicultural competence and the appropriate application of the multicultural competencies in all areas of practice). (Collins & Arthur, 2005b, p. 48)

These are processes that you are already expected to apply on a daily basis in your counselling to ensure that you maintain high standards of ethical practice. They are even more important as you begin to both acknowledge the diversity of your clientele and practice in a culturally sensitive way.

BUILDING MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

At this point, you may be in complete agreement with the need to enhance your competencies in some or all of the areas noted above but may be asking the question we commonly hear from students and colleagues: "How do I actually go about gaining these culture-infused counselling competencies?" One of the major criticisms of the multicultural counselling competency literature is the lack of information about how to move from identification of professional development goals to attainment of multicultural counselling competence (Mollen et al., 2003). We have reviewed the strategies and techniques noted in the literature to date (Alvarez & Miville, 2003; Ancis, 1998; Arredondo et al., 1996; Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Vazquez & Garcia-Vazquez, 2003) and added some ideas of our own to provide a starting place for Canadian counsellors to enhance their

multicultural counselling competence. Table 2 outlines these strategies as they relate to each of the core competencies discussed in this article. We welcome any additional ideas that you may add to this list and challenge each of you to select even one or two of these strategies and see what impact it has on your awareness of culture (both in yourself and in others) and your sensitivity to culture as you build effective working alliances with your clients.

The strategies outlined in Table 2 are intended to provide a starting point for increasing your multicultural competence. They may also be used for planning professional development training or as activities incorporated into graduate education programs.

Table 2
Strategies for Developing Cultural Competence

Cultural awareness—Self: Demonstrate awareness of your own cultural identities.
- Create a personal cultural genogram (family tree).
  - Include generation perceptions toward members of diverse cultural groups, including issues of gender and sexual orientation.
  - Note messages received about the dimensions of your personal cultural identity from members of your family.
- Interview extended family members for insights into your cultural heritage.
  - Identify factors influencing your cultural heritage and conduct further research into the history of ancestral ethnic and other cultural affiliations.
- Develop a model of your cultural identity or identities, drawing on personal, cultural, and contextual dimensions.
  - Introduce yourself to individuals or groups according to salient dimensions of personal culture.
- Create a developmental timeline of your experiences from childhood through to adulthood, highlighting significant events that have impacted your worldview, values, and assumptions.
- Analyze your level of cultural identity development (bearing in mind that you may have different levels and processes of identity development across ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation).
- Write your personal cultural story, highlighting socialization and contextual influences.

Cultural awareness—Self: Demonstrate awareness of differences between your own cultural identities and those of individuals from other dominant or non-dominant groups.
- Research a cultural group in the community where you grew up or where you now live.
- Write a fictitious letter to a cultural group in your community outlining your opinions of the group, your perceptions of its strengths, and your concerns about the group.
- Immerse yourself in an environment in which you are the only person who is non-white, non-female, able-bodied, heterosexual, or other applicable cultural dimension.
  - Record your experiences and debrief them with a trusted colleague or supervisor.
- Write a fictional narrative or create a piece of art or music designed to express your understanding of the experience of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and other forms of cultural oppression.

Cultural awareness—Self: Demonstrate awareness of the impact of culture on the theory and practice of counselling/psychology.
- Describe the values and assumptions underlying the theories you personally use in counselling.
- Critically evaluate a theory based upon its cultural assumptions and implications for counselling practice.
- Prepare a written statement for distribution to clients about the theories that inform your work.
- Read theoretical and applied practice books and articles written from other cultural perspectives.
  - Access resources that describe feminist and gay-affirmative counselling.
- Interview counsellors and other healers who adopt a non-Western or non-traditional theoretical perspective.

Cultural awareness—Self: Demonstrate awareness of the personal and professional impact of the discrepancy between dominant and non-dominant cultural groups in North America.
- Analyze newspapers, magazines, TV commercials, and other popular media sources for incidents of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, or elitism.
- Conduct a cultural audit of services and resources available in your community to assess for barriers to access for members of non-dominant populations.
- Create a list of the privileges you have experienced throughout your life by virtue of your cultural identity (identities).
  – Discuss the emotional reactions that you have to this list with a colleague or supervisor.
- Identify one or two areas in your personal and professional life where you can take an active stance against racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, or elitism.
  – Develop an action plan, implement that plan, and reflect on both your personal reactions and the outcomes of your actions.

Cultural awareness—Self: Demonstrate awareness of your level of multicultural competence.
- Journal about your experiences with counselling clients, noting highlights, successes, and areas for future learning.
- Develop a plan for continued competency development, specifying attitude, knowledge, and skill targets, strategies for increasing competence in those areas, and outcomes evaluation criteria.
  – Develop a multicultural competence portfolio to track your progress.
- Work with a mentor who is culturally similar to yourself and who can serve as a model and source of feedback for multicultural competence.
- Engage in multicultural supervision.
- Incorporate cultural auditing in work with all clients.
- Debrief regularly with colleagues to share your learning with clients.

Cultural awareness—Other: Demonstrate awareness of the cultural identities of your clients.
- Become actively involved with individuals from non-dominant groups outside the counselling setting (e.g., community events, social and political functions, celebrations, friendships).
- Find opportunities to interact with individuals and groups in healthy contexts to gain a balanced perspective.
- Consult with cultural guides from within non-dominant populations.
- Enroll in a cultural anthropology, ethnic studies, human sexuality, rehabilitation, or gender studies course.
- Read newspapers, magazines, or novels specific to particular non-dominant populations.
- Participate in cultural film festivals or rent culture-specific or international films.
- Access information about various cultural groups via the Internet, paying particular attention to websites generated by rather than simply about various non-dominant populations.
- Advocate for training opportunities through professional associations, educational institutions, and other organizations.
- Organize a workshop or session at a conference for discussions about multicultural counselling.

Cultural awareness—Other: Demonstrate awareness of the relationship of personal culture to health and well-being.
- Analyze characters in film or literature according to some of the key concepts related to cultural identity development, cross-cultural transition, culture shock, acculturation, assimilation, or bicultural identity.
  – Apply this analysis to members of both dominant and non-dominant groups.
  – Assess your personal reactions to each character in terms of your cultural identity development.
  – Compare your observations with others who have done a similar assessment.
- Videotape your sessions with clients and then analyze the tapes for examples of cultural blindness and cultural consciousness.
  – Invite feedback from others on your attention to salient cultural factors.
  – Obtain training videos for counsellors and conduct a similar analysis.
- Select a client who presents with multiple cultural identities and develop a diagram to conceptualize the intersection and interplay of these factors.

- Interview members of non-dominant groups on their views of healthy human development and functioning.
  - Note the relationship of culture to health.
  - Identify differences in worldview and the impact those might have on how they approach change.

Cultural awareness—Other: Demonstrate awareness of the socio-political influences that impinge on the lives of non-dominant populations.
- Research provincial and federal legislation that affects the client groups you commonly encounter.
- Talk to your municipal, provincial, or federal government representatives about their views on cultural diversity and their political platform in this regard.
  - Join a social or political organization to fight for the rights of non-dominant populations in Canada.
- Visit a school, health centre, or community group in an impoverished area of your town or city.
  - Volunteer to participate in an event in the school or community aimed at improving social, economic, or educational conditions. Take a follower rather than a leadership role.
- Select one client population or counselling issue to devote professional time to for social advocacy.

Culturally sensitive working alliance: Establish trusting and respectful relationships with clients that take into account cultural identities.
- Work with a cultural mentor from a non-dominant group and solicit feedback on your attitudes, knowledge, and skills.
- Engage in counselling services as a client and actively seek out a counsellor with a different ethnic background, sexual orientation, gender, age, or other cultural identity variables.
  - Track your experiences as a client, noting the counsellor attitudes, behaviours, and skills that are helpful to your personal growth.
- Participate in other forms of culture-specific healing processes or practices to gain experience from the perspective of the client.
- Initiate case conferences and discussions in peer supervision about cultural influences on the working alliance.
- Videotape a client session and solicit feedback from your cultural guide/supervisor on verbal and nonverbal behaviours.
- Solicit direct feedback about your credibility, ability to communicate empathy, empowerment of others, and other issues of communication and counselling style from clients who are similar and dissimilar to you in cultural background.
  - This may be done informally as part of debriefing individual sessions or as part of an exit interview or questionnaire with clients who are terminating counselling.
  - This may also be done informally as part of a consultation session with leaders of community groups in learning how to increase your professional credibility and work effectively.
- Conduct an environmental and organizational cultural audit to assess the monocultural, ethnocentric messages communicated through office décor, marketing or intake materials, service norms, and other contextual factors.
- Learn another language common to your client populations.
- Research service provision patterns in local organizations to identify barriers to access for non-dominant populations.
  - Conduct surveys or interviews with clients and potential clients to assess facilitators and barriers to service provision.
- Visit community agencies to learn more about client needs and potential sources of resources and referral.

Culturally sensitive working alliance: Collaborate with clients to establish counselling goals that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity.
- Use role plays and simulated counselling interviews to obtain feedback on your ability to match counselling goals and processes to clients' worldview and needs.
  - Engage a colleague from another cultural group or a cultural guide to play the role of the client and to exaggerate points of cultural difference to enhance your learning.
  - Transcribe the interview to further analyze your areas of strength and weakness.
- Read case studies developed by practitioners from or working with non-dominant populations to explore differences in case conceptualization.

- Request information during professional training sessions or from marketing representatives about the cultural relevance of assessment tools and procedures.
  – Conduct a cultural audit of your personal or agency assessment policies and procedures to identify cultural limitations.
- Attend various religious or spiritual ceremonies and rituals to expand your understanding of the impact of cultural belief systems on conceptualization of problems and change processes.
- Present case studies to colleagues and supervisors with a view to expanding your perspectives on the multiple and often systemic factors impacting clients from non-dominant groups.
  – Seek out opportunities for consultation with members of other professional groups who may also be involved in client care.

Culturally sensitive working alliance: Collaborate with clients to establish client and counsellor tasks that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity.
- Seek out professional training in the use of non-Western, indigenous healing practices or interventions designed to work effectively with other non-dominant populations.
  – Provide opportunities for client feedback related to intervention strategies and outcomes of the counselling process, specifically addressing issues related to the fit with client worldview.
  – Engage in gender role analysis and power analysis of your work with clients.
- Meet with organizations servicing non-dominant groups to see how to support and learn from their services.
  – Create a resource and referral bank for your personal work with clients or for your organization as a whole.
- Advocate for multicultural training within your organization.
  – Start an advisory group aimed at promoting multicultural competence at the organizational level.
  – Seek out training to support the adoption of other roles—consultation, advocacy, education, facilitator of indigenous healing processes—as culturally appropriate.
- Engage in social advocacy at multiple levels, including:
  – helping clients advocate for their circumstances,
  – advocating directly on behalf of a client in a specific context,
  – advocating on behalf of a group of clients,
  – advocating to change situations that impact clients with common issues, and
  – advocating for broader social change.
- Travel to other parts of the world to meet with practitioners and lay healers.
  – Request opportunities to directly observe their work with clients.
- Actively recruit colleagues, students, and paraprofessionals from non-dominant cultural groups to work with on a daily basis.
  – Seek out volunteer, practicum, internship, or continued professional development opportunities that allow you to work directly with clients from cultural backgrounds different from your own.
- Engage in a continuous process of cultural auditing at all levels and in all areas of professional practice.

CONCLUSION

Canada has strong policies on multiculturalism and we pride ourselves on our acceptance of diversity and our welcoming of difference. However, this does not mean that we have *arrived*. There are still many ways in which non-dominant populations in Canada are underserved, underprivileged, underresourced, and underappreciated. As Canadian counsellors, we have a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of all members of society, which means becoming competent in working across various cultural differences. This article has provided some starting points for Canadian counsellors to increase their multicultural counselling competence. While this may at first appear overwhelming, Parham (2001) provides the following invitation: "Rather than attempt to be 100% better on 50 elements of multicultural competence, try being 5% better on 1 element" (p. 881).

We hope that this article prompts continued research in the area of multicultural counselling competence. The lack of empirical validation of the traditional framework of multicultural competencies is commonly noted (Atkinson & Israel, 2003; D'Andrea, Daniels, & Noonan, 2003; Reynolds & Pope, 2003). It will be important to assess the external validity of the model proposed here. There are also diverse perspectives in the literature about the mechanisms for increasing multicultural competence that warrant further study. We have suggested that without careful attention to the person of the counsellor and the application of judgement and diligence, changes in attitudes, knowledge, and skills may not translate into increased competence. Exploration of other facilitators and barriers to developing and maintaining competence would increase our understanding of how to translate accumulation of specific competencies into competent practice. For example, research needs to better account for the teaching and learning processes that support competency development. Now that we have identified *what* competencies, it is important to emphasize *how* they are developed. Although there is an accumulating body of literature involving student perspectives, the call for continuing professional education for multicultural competence has not been matched by research efforts (Parham & Whitten, 2003).

The development of competence involves a process of life-long learning. As each of us increases our multicultural competence, we become a force for change at the professional level. As a professional group we are then in a position to effect change in the broader social, economic, and political systems that ultimately bring about client distress and present challenges to their emotional and psychological well-being. If each of us takes a few small steps in this direction, we may as a whole have a dramatic impact on the attainment and maintenance of well-being for all Canadians.

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