
Training Counsellors to Work with Diverse Populations: An Integrated Approach

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Abstract

The counselling literature pertaining to special needs clients describes the problems inherent when counsellors work with clients who are unfamiliar or different from themselves. Increasingly there are demands for additional counsellor training to meet the needs of specific groups such as ethnic or racial minorities, elderly persons, or individuals with disabilities. In this paper a review is presented as a cross-section of strategies developed for training counsellors to work with these populations. It is proposed that these strategies have broader application than the client populations for whom they were initially designed. Training that utilizes these approaches could enable counsellors to develop a foundation from which to work effectively with a wide variety of special populations.

Résumé

La littérature touchant aux clients ayant des besoins particuliers décrit les problèmes inhérents aux conseillers qui travaillent avec des clients avec lesquels ils sont peu familiers ou différents d'eux-mêmes. De plus en plus, il y a des demandes pour que le conseiller obtienne un entraînement additionnel dans le but de répondre aux besoins de groupes spécifiques tels que les minorités ethniques ou raciales, les personnes âgées, ou les personnes ayant des handicaps. Dans cet article, une revue d'un échantillon des stratégies développées est présentée pour l'entraînement des conseillers qui travaillent avec ces populations. Il est proposé que ces stratégies aient une application beaucoup plus large que la clientèle pour lesquelles elles furent initialement développées. Les programmes d'entraînement qui utiliseraient ces approches pourraient amener les conseillers à développer une fondation avec laquelle il pourrait travailler effectivement avec une grande variété de groupes aux besoins particuliers.

Cross-cultural counselling has been defined as any counselling relationship in which the participants differ with respect to such variables as ethnic and racial background, lifestyle, values, sex and age (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1989; Lonner, 1985; Paradis, 1981; Pedersen, Holwill & Shapiro, 1978; Sue, *et al.*, 1982). Central to this conceptualization is the recognition that it is the degree of counsellor-client dissimilarity which determines to what extent the interaction is cross-cultural (Sue, *et al.*, 1982; Vontress, 1988).

This broad view of cross-cultural counselling has sparked controversy within the counselling literature. Locke (1990), for example, stated:

We have made cultural difference so broad that it includes everyone, and our discussions of "human rights" omit specific ethnically relevant content. Too many teachers and counselors view the culturally different from the perspective of being people only. The result is often to treat everyone the same. (p. 24)

As a result, Locke supported a more focused view of multi-cultural counselling, directing attention to specific racial and ethnic groups within our culture.

We, however, propose that counselling members of various designated special populations present common challenges which can, at least initially, be addressed more economically as a whole. It is recognized that there are common societal and counsellor responses to members of special populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities, gay persons and ethnic minorities. Client issues may include those of "identity, self-esteem, a need for validation of personal experience, and a need for empowerment" (Margolis & Rungta, 1986, p. 643). Societal responses include "various forms of discrimination, prejudice, and neglect" (Fukuyama, 1990, p. 9). Some typical counsellor reactions towards minority clients may include stereotyping (Leong, 1986; Sattler, 1977; Wampold, Casas & Atkinson, 1981), preference to work with their own kind (Larson, 1982; Lorion, 1974; Wright & Hutton, 1977), and discomfort or anxiety (Christensen, 1981; Kadushin, 1972; Lofaro, 1982; Westwood & Vargo, 1985).

The field of cross-cultural counselling is at a critical point in its development. Lloyd (1987), Ponterotto and Benesch (1988) and Fukuyama (1990) have all noted problems with population-specific counsellor training. As a result of such concerns there appears to be a trend towards a re-evaluation of the current situation and a search for new directions. Ponterotto and Benesch (1988) as well as Sue and Zane (1987) advocated the adoption of a comprehensive model or framework by which to apply cultural concepts and thereby integrate them in a more generalized sense. Margolis and Rungta (1986) and Fukuyama (1990) recommended that a course pertaining to cultural issues in the broad sense be implemented in counsellor training programs. Along these same lines Buhrke and Douce (1991) felt that the integration of lesbian and gay concerns into a multi-cultural course would allow issues of multiple oppressions or double minority status to be addressed.

The purpose of this article is to review and summarize a cross-section of training strategies which could be used in a course dealing with cross-cultural issues in the broad sense. These strategies are not intended to be an all-inclusive review of methods, but rather examples which demonstrate our orientation towards generalization and integration. It is our hope that this paper will provide a foundation from which educators can develop the details of a more comprehensive course or training program.

Unlike previous descriptions of cross-cultural training methodologies (Johnson, 1987; Parker, Valley & Geary, 1986) which focus primarily on racial and ethnic differences, we have also examined training methods pertaining to counselling populations such as the elderly or gay, or counselling clients with disabilities. We propose that because many of the

underlying issues are similar across special populations, existing training strategies developed for one minority population can often be generalized. In this way, existing culture-specific training methods have broader application than the client population for whom they were originally intended. Our hope is to integrate apparently separate training methods that teach counsellors to work with clients from special populations so that counsellors will be better able to transfer what they have learned from one group to another.

In proposing such a training approach, we recognize that the adoption of such a philosophy is not, in and of itself, a solution to Ponterotto and Benesch's (1988) valid concern regarding the lack of a comprehensive model by which to incorporate "cultural learning into a broader, universal counseling context" (p. 240). We do, however, view this as a step towards a more integrated approach and a viable means by which counsellors-in-training can begin to work more effectively with any unfamiliar population.

TRAINING STRATEGIES

The literature pertaining to the counselling of special populations suggests that the gaining of knowledge, skills and awareness through a variety of methods, along with experience interacting with members of other cultures are thought to be essential ingredients in the education of counsellors (Pedersen, 1983; Sue, *et al.*, 1982; Triandes & Brislin, 1984).

We have selected for review a sample of training strategies which address one or more of the goals of increasing knowledge, skills or awareness. Each of these training goals is defined below and followed by Table 1, which identifies the strategies reviewed in this paper and indicates which training goal is accomplished with each strategy.

1. Knowledge: (cognitive learning)

Gaining information about facts, figures and concepts related to general cross-cultural issues and information pertaining to specific groups. Included would be such things as historical background, population demographics, social customs, and models of identity/acclaculturation.

2. Awareness: (experiential)

Involves a greater understanding of self and others. This requires an exploration of the counsellor's attitudes, values and biases as well as increased sensitivity and understanding of the minority-client experience.

3. Skills: (behavioural practice)

Practising new ways of responding to minority clients in a variety of situations.

Following Table 1 is a review of each training strategy which includes (a) rationale; (b) description of the approach; and (c) relevant research findings if available.

TABLE 1
Educational Goal Achieved by Training Method/Strategy

| Training Method | Goal Achieved | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|--------|-----------|
| | Knowledge | Skills | Awareness |
| Personal Contact | X | X | X |
| Triad Model | X | X | X |
| Critical Information | X | | |
| Role Play/Role Reversal | | X | X |
| Exploration of Cultural Self | | | X |
| Culture Assimilator | X | X | X |
| Assessment | X | X | |
| Visual Case Processing | X | | X |
| Common Experience | | | X |

PERSONAL CONTACT

Rationale: The goal of increasing counsellor contact with culturally different persons is to increase knowledge about a particular culture and make counsellors aware of individual variations which may exist within a culture. It is hoped that this contact will reduce stereotyping and prejudice in counsellors working with clients who are different from themselves as well as decrease counsellor anxiety. For example, Westwood, Vargo and Vargo (1981) indicated that "exposure to disabled persons will eventually decrease the tension and discomfort felt by many people when in the presence of a disabled person" (p. 221).

Approach: Increased personal contact with minority populations can be achieved by counsellors doing volunteer work as well as supervised work experience with clients different from themselves. In addition, college and university administrators can contribute to increased personal contact by increasing the numbers of minority status students and professors in their counselling programs.

Research in the fields of cross-cultural and disability counselling provides evidence that significant interpersonal contact with members of designated groups can result in a positive attitude among counsellors from the majority population (Sue, 1978; Wright, 1960). More specifically, Mio (1989) concluded that the type of cross-cultural contact is a determining factor in increasing cross-cultural sensitivity. Mio found that

counsellors-in-training who were paired with one individual versus having contact with a racial or ethnic group in a more general sense (restaurants, festivals) had a more enriching experience. Similarly, Yaker (1988) noted that attitude change towards disabled persons occurs only under certain conditions. These include (a) persistence of the relationship over time; (b) willingness of the disabled person to discuss their disability; (c) belief by the non-disabled person that the disability is not the most important characteristic of disabled persons; and (d) equal status. It would seem, therefore, that counsellors would benefit most from more intimate relationships with minority persons outside the counsellor-client context.

THE TRIAD MODEL

Rationale: Pedersen's triad model has been used in training counsellors to be more effective with a wide variety of client populations. It can be applied to any situation in which the values of the client and counsellor are dissimilar (Pedersen, 1977). In addition to skill training, the purposes of the model include imparting specific knowledge concerning a given culture, increasing awareness of the cultural barriers in counselling and heightening cross-cultural sensitivity (Pedersen, Holwill & Shapiro, 1978; Neimeyer, Fukuyama, Bingham, Hall & Mussenden, 1986).

Approach: The procedure consists of simulated cross-cultural interviews in which the triad is: the counsellor, the client, and a third party role-playing the problem from the client's world view. The third-party role, often called the anti-counsellor, voices the resistance that would normally remain unexpressed, often in the form of value conflicts, fears, or expectations. In this way the barriers affecting the counselling process are brought to the surface and directly confronted. Following the role play, the session is de-briefed by all three participants and a videotape of the session replayed to the larger training group for additional comments and discussion (Pedersen, 1977).

Trainee evaluations done on two separate occasions emphasized the value of the model in terms of helping counsellors anticipate client resistance and articulate the problem (Pedersen, 1977). Research has indicated that counsellors who had participated in the training were rated as being more empathic, congruent, and demonstrating a more positive regard to simulated clients than before the training (Pedersen, 1977; Pedersen, Holwill & Shapiro, 1978).

Niemeyer, Fukuyama, Bingham, Hall and Mussenden (1986) compared the pro-counsellor model to the anti-counsellor model. In contrast to the anti-counsellor, the pro-counsellor is a supportive ally to the counsellor while still highlighting issues relevant to the cross-cultural interaction. These researchers discovered that participants in the anti-counsellor model experienced more negativity and felt less competent

and more confused than those in the pro-counsellor model even though their competence was judged to be the same. They suggested that the pro-counsellor model might be more appropriate with beginning counsellors, whereas the anti-counsellor model would be better used with students who have already developed some confidence and expertise in cross-cultural situations.

CRITICAL INFORMATION ABOUT SPECIAL GROUPS

Rationale: Increased knowledge and understanding of a client's values and socio-cultural context are considered essential to enhance the counsellor's ability to provide effective service (Gibbs, 1985; Johnson, 1987; Parker, Valley & Geary, 1986; Sue, *et al.*, 1982). For example, counsellors who are not aware that parents' goals and expectations are important factors for many Asian clients in their career choice may inadvertently contribute to conflict in the family by emphasizing the importance of individual choice. Ganikos, Grady and Olson (1979) pointed out that inaccurate information about older adults can lead to negative stereotyping which is detrimental to the helping relationship. Among the myths their workshops were designed to dispel are the misconceptions that older adults are not sexually active and that most of the elderly live in old-age homes.

Approach: This is a fact-oriented process which includes presenting information about the etiology, history, experiences and specific needs of distinct client groups (Landis & Brislin, 1983). Harper (1973), (cited in Christensen, 1984), recommended that counsellors gain knowledge and understanding in the areas of history, sociology, economics and psychology of Black Americans. Similarly, Hosie, Patterson and Hollingsworth (1989) outlined fourteen areas of knowledge necessary to ensure counsellor competence in working with disabled clients. These included knowledge of disabled people's rights and knowledge of appropriate referral agencies. Buhrke and Douce (1991) promoted the presentation of historical material and issues pertaining to the oppression of gay persons to be done in much the same way as with ethnic or racial minorities.

Information may be provided to counsellors-in-training by means of guest lecturers from representatives of specific cultural groups, required readings and research, as well as contact with members of minority groups. Dailey (1978) and Vargo (1989) stated that it is appropriate, and even desirable, for counsellors to learn about their disabled clients from the clients themselves.

Parker, Valley and Geary (1986) described several methods which would facilitate the assimilation of cultural knowledge. These included assessing cultural knowledge by asking students to share their experiences and perceptions of various ethnic groups; having students read

ethnic literature and write book reviews "focusing on themes, cultural values, insights, impressions, and implications for counselling" (p. 66). They also developed an Ethnic Minorities Cultural Awareness Test which can be used as a pre-test-post-test of cultural knowledge. Although Parker, Valley and Geary (1986) did not conduct a formal study, students who participated in the course judged it to be valuable in gaining cross-cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

ROLE PLAY/ROLE REVERSAL

Rationale: The primary goal of this procedure is to give counsellors the opportunity for skill practise. In role reversal, counsellors experience and perceive the world through the minority client's eyes. The hope is that this process will result in increased counsellor empathy and awareness.

Approach: A role play is a means by which counsellors are able to take on roles and act out a situation. The most typical role play is where one counsellor takes the role of client, the other of counsellor and a counselling interview is re-enacted. Counsellors-in-training playing the counsellor role are able to practise responding to various client statements. The counsellor playing the minority client is also able to benefit by experiencing first-hand different counselling styles and interventions (Gysbers & Moore, 1970).

Variations of role reversal have been documented for use in training counsellors to work with specific populations. Ganikos, Grady and Olson (1979) attempted to replicate the experience of being elderly by having counsellors in their training program wear dark sunglasses and participate in tasks which would simulate the experience of a person whose physical condition was deteriorating. As part of their cross-cultural awareness training, McDavis and Parker (1977) had counsellors attach to their backs a card on which a stereotypic role (black militant, welfare mother, hippie) was written. The counsellors were not aware of their specific role designation. The trainees were then asked to interact based on the roles others were assigned. The de-briefing focused on how the "minority client" felt when others were interacting with them.

The positive effects of role play and role reversal have been documented by Corsini (1966), although not in relation to specific minority populations.

EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL SELF

Rationale: The purpose is to encourage a process of self-discovery and awareness in counsellors. It is hoped that through this process counsellors will become aware of their own cultural baggage and how it affects their effectiveness as counsellors or therapists working with diverse popu-

lations. Other gains include becoming aware of "hidden culture" in other trainees and increasing identification and empathy with minority clients through the realization that we are all influenced by our cultural backgrounds. As Sue, *et al.* (1982) stated: "ethnicity and culture is a function of every person's development and not limited only to 'minorities'" (p. 47).

Approach: Paradis (1981) developed a training program that included sensitizing counsellors to their own cultural heritage, exploring how it has influenced them as people, and the effect this has on them as psychotherapists working with diverse client groups. Exploration of counsellors' own values and prejudices was also addressed.

Corvin and Wiggins (1989) developed a four-stage model of White Identity Development to be used as a basis for anti-racism training. Central to the overall training is for the counsellor to go through a process of self-examination pertaining to the membership and connection to his or her cultural group.

Bussard (1985) also focused on trainee self-exploration in working with people with disabilities. He asked trainees to consider such questions as "What are your everyday handicaps? How do you deal with them? Do others know about them?" (pp. 1-5). Similarly, Iasenza (1989) pointed out that training experiences pertaining to working with gay, lesbian and bi-sexual clients offers an opportunity for counsellors to explore their own sexual feelings including their reactions to same- and opposite-sex persons.

Such self-explanatory material could be dealt with through small-group or dyad discussion, structured activities promoting self-disclosure, or completion-of-values inventories which would be used as a stimulus for discussion.

Participant evaluations from Paradis' (1981) experiential training program indicated an increase of ethnic and cultural awareness in relation to their own and other groups. Counsellors also reported experiencing personal growth from the program.

THE CULTURE ASSIMILATOR

Rationale: The culture assimilator (CA) was designed to prepare overseas sojourners for the experience of living and working in another culture. The goal is to bridge racial or ethnic differences by increasing participants' awareness of their own assumptions and values and how these may differ from the expectations of peoples from other cultures.

Approach: This attributional approach to learning about racial or ethnic differences "is a programmed learning experience designed to expose members of one culture to some of the basic concepts, attitudes, role perceptions, customs, and values of another culture." (Fiedler, Mitchell

& Triandis, 1971, p. 95). Trainees are asked to read and interpret short episodes of cross-cultural interactions which emphasize elements of interpersonal attitudes, customs and value contrasts. The trainee then learns why their answer is correct or incorrect.

Brislin, Cushier, Cherrie and Yong (1986) developed a culture general assimilator (in contrast to the various culture specific assimilators) which could have widespread use across numerous cultures. One advantage of a general assimilator was that specific information about various cultures could be integrated and generalized. Another advantage was that it could be used as a catalyst for creating discussion among students who have little direct cross-cultural experience (Brislin, *et al.*, 1986). While the culture general assimilator was designed to be used with racial/ethnic differences, the potential to develop further assimilator models to enhance understanding of other minority populations appears to exist.

In his review of multi-cultural training for counselling, Johnson (1987) noted that the CA has received more research attention than any other cross-cultural training method. The results of all the studies reviewed by Johnson, most of which utilized subjective measures of effectiveness, indicated positive effects on trainees' performance in the new culture. The culture assimilator has not been empirically evaluated when used in training counsellors.

ASSESSMENT

Rationale: Lonner and Ibrahim (1989) and Buhrke and Douce (1991) raised concern about the cultural bias inherent in most psychological tests, and their use outside of a mainstream cultural context. One goal of this training, therefore, is to examine the appropriateness of utilizing various standardized assessment tools with culturally different clients.

Counsellors also need to learn to assess the degree of impact on culture on the particular problem and counsellors need to place appropriate emphasis on the "difference variable" (culture, handicap, sexual orientation) yet maintain the view of the client as a "whole person." Johnson (1987) stated that "this notion of balance, not over-emphasizing culture at the expense of recognizing true pathology or under-emphasizing cultural difference at the expense of sensitivity, is potentially a true index of the kind of expertise required of effective multi-cultural counsellors" (p. 327).

Approach: Counsellors-in-training should be made aware of issues surrounding the use of standardized tests across populations. Lectures and handouts regarding applicability and modification of such instruments would be appropriate.

Counsellors could also be taught to utilize assessment tools such as a written autobiography or lifeline (if there are language difficulties) directly in their sessions with minority clients. A life review would not

only have positive therapeutic value for clients (Knobloch & Knobloch, 1979), but would also enable counsellors to become familiar with the clients' cultural-historical context. In addition, the counsellor would become aware of unique factors in the minority client's history. This would diminish the possibility of counsellor stereotyping based on the client appearing to be a member of a particular cultural group. Examples from our experience include: (a) Chinese clients who are brought up in North America and do not identify with the Chinese culture; and (b) a hearing-impaired client who attended a regular school and as a result did not feel part of either the hearing or non-hearing culture. The benefits of this approach extend equally to clients of the majority group in that such a process can reveal important aspects of hidden culture which may greatly affect the client's everyday functioning.

Another similar, but less structured approach would be to have counsellors practise ways in which they can directly ask for cultural information from their clients. Johnson (1987) pointed out that counsellors need laboratory practise to experiment with bringing issues of race, gender, religion, or social class out in the open. He pointed out that these are often considered taboo subjects in normal social exchange, and this hesitancy often translates into counselling sessions. Buhrke (1989) suggested role plays involving specific issues with gay clients be used to help trainees learn to determine whether or not the clients' sexual orientation should be the focus of the counselling. Buhrke gives the example that it would be appropriate to deal with sexual orientation issues if a client is struggling with sexual identity. However, if the client wants to improve communication in his or her relationship, it would not be appropriate to focus the counselling on sexual orientation.

VISUAL CASE PROCESSING TECHNIQUE

Rationale: This technique, developed by Ishiyama (1988), aims at having counsellors-in-training explore and expand their awareness of the perspectives of their clients.

Ishiyama (1988) outlined three specific goals to this supervision approach: (a) increased counsellor awareness of the client's particular needs, issues and concerns; (b) increased counsellor awareness concerning his or her feelings and the degree of held or absorbed prejudices towards the client; and (c) greater understanding of the nature and process involved in the relationship between counsellor and client.

Approach: This technique is a modification of the case presentations approach described by Biggs (1988). Both the counsellor-in-training and the client are asked to generate metaphors and images for visual case processing and draw the case as a visual summary. The non-verbal nature of this activity allows the counsellor to become aware of alternate or additional information. Frequently, the counsellor's metaphor to de-

scribe the issue or problem is vastly different from the metaphor of the client. The differences are explored by the client and the counsellor in order to reveal discrepancies in their understanding of what is occurring in the counselling relationship. Recognition of the differences in perception creates an opportunity for increased effectiveness in counsellor-client communication.

COMMON EXPERIENCE

Rationale: The purpose of this approach is to enable the counsellor to identify with the minority client in some way. The assumption is that once counsellors are able to identify with a client, empathy occurs, and anxiety is decreased. This approach would encourage counsellors to focus less on the aspect of the client which is different, and more on the "whole person." In this way "the difference" would recede from the foreground, thereby creating a more balanced perspective.

Approach: In order for identification with the client to occur it is essential that counsellors be trained to find an area of common ground with the client who is dissimilar from themselves. The assumption here is that the human experience is one which can be understood by all.

While counsellors from the majority population may have difficulty relating to experiences such as being black or having a significant disability, they may be able to identify with the client in terms of commonly shared issues such as being unemployed or losing a loved one.

Bussard (1985) developed a program entitled "More Alike Than Different" for increasing awareness and comfort in interacting with people with disabilities. In his introduction, Bussard states:

Handicapped people enjoy the same food, watch the same TV programs and share the same hopes and disappointments as the rest of us. Unfortunately, it is not these everyday things which we have in common that shape our feelings and reactions; it is the difference of the handicap that becomes the focus of misunderstanding and, for some, even creates a sense of fear. (p. 1)

In order to underline the commonalties shared by disabled and non-disabled people, Bussard's training program contains an exercise in which trainees are asked to draw from their personal experience and make a list of the things they have in common with a disabled person they know.

Although this approach has not received direct research attention, Rungta (1987) postulated that one of the reasons counsellors were not more anxious with a culturally different client in her study, was that the counsellors were able to identify so strongly with the client on the unemployment issue presented. Statements from the participants included: "I identified with the situation he was in and vividly experienced his desperation" and "I know what it's like to have \$30.00 in the bank and

monthly payments to keep. I could empathize with his despair and humiliation."

CHALLENGE FOR COUNSELLOR EDUCATORS

As outlined in the APA accreditation criteria, counsellors-in-training must develop knowledge and skills "relevant to human diversity such as people with handicapping conditions; of differing ages, genders, ethnic and racial backgrounds, religions, and lifestyles" (APA, 1979, p. 4).

The counselling literature contains numerous articles pointing out the special needs of each of these groups and recommending specific training to enhance counsellors' ability to work effectively with different "special populations." While the intent of recommending specific training is laudable, the result is often impractical. It is not feasible for counsellors to address through separate courses and training all the unfamiliar groups which they may encounter. Of even greater concern is the observed inability of counsellors to transfer what they had learned about dealing effectively with one population to another (Margolis & Rungta, 1986). Realistically, counsellors will not be able to limit their practice to one population. Counsellors may see clients with different abilities, different ethnic backgrounds and different sexual orientations in the course of one day, or they may encounter all of these differences in one client.

To meet the objective of counsellors acquiring the knowledge, awareness and skills to work effectively with diverse clients, we have recommended that counsellor education programs incorporate a core course designed to enhance counsellors' ability to transfer their skills across a variety of client populations. This course would serve as a foundation for any further focused training pertaining to one particular minority group. Such a course would involve considering both differences and similarities of the client's experience, and would require the use of a mix of training strategies.

We have begun this process by reviewing a number of counsellor training strategies for the purpose of demonstrating their use in a broader context. We are hopeful that educators will continue in the effort to integrate existing separate bodies of knowledge and move towards an approach which promotes counsellors to generalize what they have learned across populations.

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