

Ethical issue paper on multicultural competency



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Introduction

One of many professional issues in counselor training and ethical practice will be educating ourselves so that we can become a multicultural counselor for our culturally diverse clients. It is important to prepare ourselves as a counselor for these types of clients so that they can be given the best opportunity for a meaningful and beneficial counseling relationship. This responsibility includes understanding what cultural competency is, skills that can be utilized and options for further education and training to better educate ourselves on this topic. A counselor needs to learn about various cultures and adapt to a way of thinking so that it takes our values and beliefs out of the equation. I plan to address what cultural competency is and why it is so important. What we can do as counselors to better educate ourselves and taking a look at multicultural counseling and what that entails. It is important to realize that as counselors we will come across diverse clients that we weren't prepared for but learning more about cultural competency in the beginning of our training and throughout our career will better help guide us to where we need to be and become successful multicultural counselors.

What is Multicultural Competency

Multicultural competency is the ability to adapt, understand and appreciate people that have different beliefs and/or different cultural backgrounds than our own. It includes being aware of, gaining knowledge and acquiring skills so that a counselor can be effective when providing therapy to their culturally diverse clients. There must be a willingness to learn about other cultures and differences and change our own thought processes, behaviors and biases to understand people of all different cultural and behavioral

backgrounds. The makeup of this multicultural group includes but is not limited to people of color, sexual preference, religious background, gender, age, geography, occupation or socioeconomic status. It goes beyond skin color, which is often a misconception of what is thought to be multicultural.

Why is this so important?

The importance of multicultural competency is the fact that more and more clients that are seeking counseling fall into this category and coming from a diverse background. It is important to realize that diversity is part of life, there is no way around it. It is imperative that the counselor realizes that not all clients are the same and that not all clients fit into the same mold. It is about gaining the trust of each client by showing them that they can build a therapeutic relationship with the counselor even though there are differences. It is then up to the counselor to apply a therapy that will work with each client, not a one size fits all type of therapy. What it comes down to is acceptance and understanding and not stereotyping a client into a group but rather treating them as an individual. It is about realizing that this individual maybe effected by their culture, history, values and beliefs that have developed through their experiences and their environment that they have come into contact with during their lifetime.

History of Multicultural Competency

The need for multicultural competence emerged during the civil rights movements and involved oppressed groups of people. It is traced back to the African Americans as well as other people of color that were discriminated against back in the 1960s. In the late 60's and early 70's the women's rights movement joined in the band wagon and then throughout

the 70's the gay and lesbian groups, elderly and disabled individuals all joined in the quest for human rights and equality in the education, political and societal systems. These political and social movements brought about big changes to this country. One place in particular that this caused great change to was the education system. These movements caused the schools and universities to take a look at their educational system and make some changes that would include these individuals of multicultural backgrounds no matter what that maybe. Policies, the attitudes of teachers, counseling, teaching styles, assessment methods and instructional materials all had to be looked at in order to conform to a multicultural school environment that was welcoming to everyone. It is this that lead to the importance of multicultural competence in counseling. As more and more counselors started seeing clients of different multicultural backgrounds, it was evident that this would be an area that needed to be explored and expanded upon so that counselors could better serve this population of people.

Steps to Becoming a Multicultural Competent Counselor

Self-Reflection

In order to start the process of becoming a multicultural competent counselor, self-reflection is extremely important. Looking into our beliefs and prejudices about others that are different from us is a way to start. Being self-aware of these beliefs and prejudices is detrimental when it comes to changing our thinking and becoming more open minded. It isn't as easy as it sounds and it can take time. It is important to realize that our clients won't have the same views, values, beliefs and religious preferences as we do which is why it is important to continue educating ourselves and learning

as much about multicultural competency as we can. A counselor needs to go beyond tolerance which means that they are just putting up with these areas in diverse people and to move to a place where they understand, appreciate and are unbiased about all cultural backgrounds. We have to look at ourselves as a counselor and know that we have or can develop the awareness, knowledge and skills to become the best multicultural counselor that we can be.

Building Skills

There are several things that a counselor can do to build skills in multicultural competence. Whether the counselor is in training or a seasoned counselor it is important to continue to build these skills as this is an area that can always be improved upon. There are three important components of cultural competence that a counselor can practice. The first component is active listening. During active listening a counselor is present and in the moment and is not thinking about other things while they are with the client. The counselor needs to concentrate on what their client is conveying when they are speaking. By actively listening to their client a counselor can learn about a client's culture, experiences, and emotions; this step isn't about offering solutions or giving advice in the here and now. This step takes time and a counselor needs to ask questions and reflect back what they are hearing. By doing this it allows the client to trust the counselor and they feel like they are understood. The second component is empathy. Empathy is not about having to agree with the client about their views or ways of thinking, but rather it is about taking a step back to walk in their shoes and feel what they are feeling. It is about understanding and

listening to how a client feels about experiences in their life and understanding their position on an issue. This step allows the counselor to continue to build a relationship with their client. The third component is engagement. This step is about focusing on the behaviors and situations, not the person. During engagement it is about learning from one another and understanding. This will open up conversations regarding a person's traditions and beliefs and this is also an area where more information is gained by a client. Other ways to build skills would be to ask open ended questions and to pay attention to verbal and nonverbal actions that may give the counselor clues as to what a certain culture may find appropriate or not. (de Guzman, Druden, Taylor, Guzman, & Potthoff, 2016)

Further Education and Training

Graduate study programs have one class on multicultural competency that is a requirement of the curriculum. It is said that this isn't enough and multicultural competency should be taught in all classes at the graduate school level, it is something that one class can't touch. There are so many aspects and areas of multicultural competency that this is an area where the education needs to continue beyond one class. This is an area that continues to grow and change as people in our society continue to grow and change. It is up to the counselor to seek out other educational opportunities and continue to learn and grow in this area. Websites offer continued education classes where a counselor can earn continued education credits as well as learn more about multicultural competency. There are articles and books on multicultural competency that are available as well. One way that a person can become multicultural competent is to develop relationships

with people of different cultures and make it a point to learn about historical and current events that surround these diverse groups. A person can become a successful multicultural therapist by going above and beyond in their graduate work. Being willing to continue to learn and being open minded about other cultures and diversity is key.

Multicultural Counseling

Multicultural counseling is defined and occurs when a counselor is working with a client from a different cultural group which includes difference in religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location and family history to name a few. This brings about the issues of how this will affect the counseling sessions and interactions between the counselor and client.

Multicultural counseling is applying everything that a counselor has studied and educated themselves on in regards to multicultural competence and putting that to work in their therapy sessions with their diverse clients.

Multicultural counseling is known as a type of talk therapy or psychotherapy.

The Skilled Counseling Training Model (SCTM)

The Skilled Counseling Training Model is a training program that helps the client with skill building. This model is divided into three skill stages: exploring, understanding and acting. The first stage is the exploring stage. This is where the client talks what their problems and what is going on in their life and where they are in regards to their problem. The counselor listens with minimal interruptions during this stage and asks open ended questions, paraphrases and summarizes what the client has said. This is the stage where empathy, positive regard and acceptance comes in and where the client feels supported by the counselor. The second stage is the

understanding stage. At this stage the client recognizes where they want to be and how they want to face their problems. When this stage concludes the client has gained new insights regarding the challenges that they are facing in life. This is a positive step in their realization of where they want to be. The third stage is the acting stage. This stage the decision making stage that helps clients figure out what they need to do to get to the point that they want to be at in regards to their problems and making decisions to get there. (LeBeauf, Smaby, & Maddux, 2009)

RESPECTFUL Counseling Model

The RESPECTFUL Counseling model was developed and it supplies the counselor with tools needed to form a relationship with their client and helps to keep the relationship on track between the counselor and the client. Each letter represents ten factors that may influence a client's personal well-being and development.

“ In developing this model we have focused on ten different factors that impact a person's psychological development and sense of personal well-being. This includes a person's: (R) religious-spiritual identity, (E) ethnic-cultural-racial background, (S) sexual identity, (P) psychological maturity, (E) economic class background, © chronological-developmental challenges, (T) threats to one's personal well-being, (F) family history and dynamics, (U) unique physical characteristics, and (L) location of residence.” (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001)

As the authors state this isn't an inclusive list of all factors of multidimensionality of a person but it is a good starting point. This type of

counseling model combined with other therapies can help a counselor become a well-rounded multicultural counselor. It is important for the counselor to really get to know their client and then apply the therapies that they feel will work the best with each client individually. Using both The Skilled Training Model and the RESPECTFUL Model during multicultural counseling helps the counselor have a base to work from.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism is something that will always be around and it is important for counselors to realize that this is an area that will continue to change and grow. There is always going to be a need for multicultural competent counselors and it is important for a counselor in training or a seasoned counselor to be open to continue their education and grow in this area. Self-reflection will always need to be revisited so that the counselor can make sure to keep any of their oppositions to their diverse clients in check.

Learning about different therapies and how these would better serve their clients is another area that a counselor can work on as well as realizing that not everyone fits into the same mold; they will have to find a therapy that works for each person. Being culturally competent isn't about being tolerant but about understanding and being empathetic to diverse clients that seek therapy.

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