Multicultural Counseling Reflection

Growing up in a rural Germanic town in the middle of northeast Ohio, I was not exposed to much diversity. In fact, I was exposed to very little diversity. My experience with people from different cultures and race slowly accumulated in college and more so when I moved to Phoenix, Arizona for the past four years. While I haven’t personally grown up surrounded by diversity, I have always been interested in people different than me and majored in Anthropology in college. I loved learning about different cultures and realizing that each culture has a different way of approaching situations in life and not a single one is “better” than the other. This mentality has allowed me to interact and well with people of different backgrounds. However, while I had good intentions, experience is the best learning method for dealing with different cultures. While one can read about as many cultures possible in a book, the best test on multicultural competence comes when one finds themselves face to face with someone of a different background.

My biggest hesitation when interacting with others has been how they view me. Do they think I’m racist? Did I say something that offended them? Do they dislike me because I’m white? This fear of upsetting others has held me back in terms of acknowledging differences and asking the person how they feel about the situation and what we can do together to make the relationship more comfortable for them. Coming into this class, I had only counseled one client and he was a homosexual young male. While I had developed great rapport with this client and felt that counseling process was effective, I did not directly ask the client how he felt about talking to me about his sexual preferences. I did ask some questions regarding his experience coming out, but I did not ask as many as I probably should have out of fear of making him uncomfortable since I am a heterosexual who has never experienced this situation. Looking back, I could have developed the counseling experience further had I not been afraid to delve
Rachel Libben  
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deep into his experiences as a gay student in high school and how that has affected his current relationships with family members.

By looking at my cultural competency ratings from the beginning of this course, it is clear that I felt more competent with Hispanics and Homosexuals in general. This is due to personal relationships that I have developed with those backgrounds. Having homosexual friends and having an aunt from Mexico, I have become comfortable with the differences between myself and Hispanics and Homosexuals. My weakest ratings are with African Americans. This comes from minimal interaction and with intimidation due to a fear of being seen as racist and afraid of doing something wrong as a White female.

From this course, I realized right away that I am making mistakes by being afraid to address the differences between self and others, especially when it comes to interactions with clients. It is important to acknowledge any differences that may cause the client to feel uncomfortable with having a white female as a counselor. By addressing these concerns, the counseling relationship can be more honest and provide for better self-exploration on both the client and counselor’s part. In addition if through this discussion it becomes clear that the client is uncomfortable due to the differences, I will be able to refer the client out to someone who can provide the client with appropriate services. By being afraid to address differences, I am providing a disservice to my client.

I am currently interested in exploring ways to offer counseling services outside the current counseling model based off of middle class white male counseling framework. If the current model of providing counseling services in an office in 50-minute increments weekly, is not beneficial or appropriate for different economic or ethnic backgrounds then as a counselor, I want to be able to offer services in a way where more demographics can take advantage of the
services. While being a school counselor offers free resources to students while they are in the school, there is room to provide additional support and resources for the students outside of school and for the parents in order to facilitate a healthy environment for the students in their homes.

While reviewing my cultural competencies and the progression over the course, I have realized that I have become more knowledgeable on issues concerning African Americans than I have with Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Heterosexuals. While a singular course over the span of a quarter on multicultural counseling can provide a great start to a counselor’s education and awareness of multicultural issues in counseling, it in no way covers all topics that a counselor should be aware of. For a majority of the competencies, I can apply what I have learned in regards to working with the African American population to other minorities in general terms. In order to acquire more specific knowledge on the other populations I may work with, I will have to make an effort to educate myself over the course of my career.

I plan to continue to become more knowledgeable about different populations and specifically focus on skills that can and should be used with each population. By attending professional conferences and workshops on diversity training and multicultural counseling, I can continue to evolve my knowledge and self-awareness. I also intend to become more knowledgeable on resources for my clients of different backgrounds. By being able to connect them with services and assistance outside of the school counseling office, I can provide them with a more comprehensive counseling plan. It is important for everyone to consistently reevaluate their self-awareness as we have new experiences and interactions throughout life. As I have reflected on my self-awareness and current cultural competency levels, I’m aware that
I’ve just reached the tip of the iceberg in terms of cultural awareness and skill with counseling multicultural clients.