Understanding the Contextual Factors That Influence School Counselors'

Multicultural Diversity Integration Practices

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Abstract

This study explores the contextual factors that influence a school counselor's decision to actively integrate multicultural diversity in his/her work. Through using the Integrating Multicultural Diversity Questionnaire (IMDQ) the effectiveness of multicultural diversity training, the types of multicultural diversity practices that are used with frequency and the challenges experienced and/or anticipated in integrating multicultural diversity practices in educational settings are investigated. Results indicate a significant number of participants do not daily integrate multicultural diversity practices because of a reported lack of skills and support as well as ineffectual pre-service multicultural diversity training.

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The racial and ethnic demographics in the United States are rapidly diversifying. The changes in the student population of our public schools are indicative of the dramatic changes in the race and ethnicity of the U. S. population. According to The Center for Public Education (2008), "Compared with the last century, we are increasingly aging and white on the one hand, and young and multi-hued on the other" (p.1). It is estimated that by the year 2050, almost 60% of all school-age children in the United States will be students of color (Yeh & Arora, 2003). Current demographic studies indicate that the southern region of the United States has seen more of a significant increase in the number of students of color in comparison to northeastern and mid-western parts of the country.

The South showed a population increase of 17.3% from 1990-2000 compared to 5.5% in the Northeast and 7.9% in the Midwest. A 42.9% increase is projected in the South by 2030 (The Center for Public Education, 2008). The enormous projected growth in the population may be explained, in part, by the significant influx of Hispanics and other immigrants of color. This significant demographic change will strongly impact the number of racially and ethnically diverse students in southern public schools with many schools having a considerable majority of students of color.

Although it is projected that the racial and ethnic demographics of students will change dramatically, the demographics of school personnel, especially professional school counselors will not mirror these changes. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002), approximately 85% of teachers are Caucasian. Approximately 95% of school

psychologists are Caucasian (Curtis, Grier, Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002). Currently, there are approximately 90,000 school counselors providing services for 47 million students in the U.S. (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], n.d.a; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004). Research indicates that the statistics on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of school counselors have strong similarities to those of teachers and school psychologists, with the majority of school counselors being Caucasian (Mathai, 2002).

Despite this imbalance, all professional school counselors will need to possess multicultural diversity competencies in working effectively with racially and ethnically diverse students (Constantine, 2002; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Yeh & Arora, 2003). According to Canada (2005), "For school counselors, understanding diversity begins with understanding how students function on several levels: on an individual basis; with their peers; and also how they function within their environment, in their family, school, community; and ultimately in the broadest sense, in the world" (p.9).

In an effort to prepare all counselors for the racial and ethnic demographic changes in the United States, the American Counseling Association (ACA) has adopted multicultural competencies for all practitioners and counselors in-training (ACA, 2003). The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) mandate that all counselors in-training have "…an understanding of the cultural context of relationships, issues, and trends in a multicultural society" (CACREP, 2009, p. 9). It is also expected that all courses in the counseling curriculum integrate multicultural diversity competence training. CACREP (2009) specifically suggests that school counseling curriculums provide students with experiences which explore the

implications of social, cultural, demographic, and lifestyle diversity relevant to school counseling. First adopted in 1988 and revised in 2004, The American School Counselor Association specifically addresses this issue in a position statement on school counselors and cultural diversity which states that professional school counselors need to have an increased "awareness and understanding of cultural diversity" and should "take action to ensure that students of culturally diverse backgrounds have access to services and opportunities that promote maximum academic, personal/social and career development" (ASCA, 2004, p.1).

Twenty years after the ASCA diversity position statement was first adopted, there is evidence of a significant increase in the number of programs that offer multicultural diversity training through single required courses and/or infusing training throughout the curriculum. This training has resulted in a direct positive outcome on the knowledge and awareness areas of competency (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). However, little is known about the degree to which multicultural diversity training aids school counselors in effectively translating what they learned into daily practice once they enter the workforce. There is also a paucity of research on the specific types of multicultural diversity practices school counselors use regularly as well as the types of challenges typically experienced and/or anticipated in attempting to integrate the practices in their daily work.

Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to explore the contextual factors that influence a school counselor's decision to actively integrate multicultural diversity practices in their work. Specifically, this study sought to investigate participants' perceptions regarding: (1) the effectiveness of multicultural diversity counseling training,

(2) the types of multicultural diversity practices school counselors utilize most and (3) the challenges experienced and/or anticipated in integrating multicultural diversity practices in educational settings. Multicultural diversity practice, as defined by this study, refers to effectively practicing the concepts of freedom, justice, equality, and equity to affirm racial and ethnic minorities (Banks & Banks, 2004; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2003).

Review of the Literature

The literature on multicultural diversity training and competence is vast and wide. However, most of that literature is devoted to discussions of best practices, models and methods. A 20-year review of the research literature (1989 to 2009) reveals a small number of empirical studies addressing counseling competence with multicultural and diverse groups. This type of research was initially complicated by the lack of an operational definition of multicultural competence, without which instruments could not be developed (Granello & Wheaton, 1998). Sue et al. (1982) defined three domains of competence which most of the instruments measure: a) awareness of the counselor's own cultural values and biases b) knowledge of the client's worldview and c) skill to adapt interventions to the client's cultural needs. The definition of these domains led the way to instrument development.

What we have learned about diversity training of counselors through the available research involves the assessment of these three domains of competence. Using a variety of instruments, researchers consistently found that didactic and experiential training results in high levels of self-reported competence in these domains.(Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen, 2001; Dickson, Jepsen, & Barbee, 2008; Heppner &

O'Brian, 1994; Neville, Heppner, Thompson, Brooks, & Baker, 1996). Another consistent finding is that multicultural courses increase trainees' levels of self-reported cultural competence (Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Yeh, 2001). Although taking courses in multicultural diversity seems to help with a counselor's perception of his or her competence, Steward, Morales, Barbee, and Miller (1998) discovered that "the completion of or exposure to multicultural competency coursework or literature does not necessarily indicate an acceptance of or valuing of multicultural counseling literature" (p.13). Steward et al. surveyed 48 doctoral and master's counseling students who received grades of B or better in multicultural diversity training. They found that a third of the participants thought that the training was meaningless and unnecessary.

Whatever their perception of coursework in diversity, counseling respondents tended to rate their skills competencies higher than their competence in awareness and knowledge (Pope-Davis & Ottavi 1994; Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings & Nielson, 1995; Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson & Carey, 1998). In 1994, Pope-Davis and Ottavi questioned the likelihood that someone could have effective skills without cultural self-awareness and adequate knowledge. However, those findings were replicated by studies subsequent to theirs (Pope-Davis & Ottavi 1994; Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings & Nielson, 1995; Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, Richardson & Carey, 1998).

A possible explanation for these puzzling results may come from Granello and Wheaton (1998) who paired the use of the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI; a popular measure of cultural competence) and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. They found that scales on the MCI were correlated with the Marlowe-Crowne for both African American and European American counselors. Consequently, the authors

suggest that self-reports of competence may reflect these counselors' desire to look good. In fact, African American, Asian American, and Latinos/as tended to rate themselves higher than European Americans on both the knowledge and awareness domains (Granello & Wheaton, 1998; Pope-Davis & Ottavi; Pope-Davis et al, 1995). Another troubling finding was reported by Cartwright, Daniels, and Zhang (2008) who found that participants reported their competence level in multicultural diversity higher than the observers who watched videotapes of the participants' counseling sessions.

Most of the research on cultural competence has been conducted on students earning a master's degree in counseling and on doctoral students in clinical and counseling psychology. A few of the studies listed above were conducted on practicing professionals (Pope-Davis et al; Granello & Wheaton, 1998). Studies on cultural competence of professional school counselors are very limited (Constantine, 2001; Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Yeh, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999; Holcomb-McCoy, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005).

Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) suggested that rather than three competency domains there were five. In the creation of the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey (MCCTS), Holcomb-McCoy and Myers added "knowledge of terminology" and "racial identity" to the existing domains. In other research, Holcomb-McCoy (2000; 2001) has found that the school counselors reported that they were culturally competent in all five domains. However, counselors indicated that they felt most competent with the multicultural awareness and multicultural terminology domains and least competent in the knowledge and racial identity domains. In 2005, Holcomb-McCoy found that those who had taken courses in multicultural counseling scored

significantly higher on knowledge and terminology than those who had not taken courses. Constantine's (2001; Constantine et al., 2001; Constantine & Yeh, 2001) research included a number of variables but also consistently showed that the number of courses students took was predictive of their multicultural knowledge.

The literature is extremely limited regarding the ways that school counselors or counselors, in general, use their multicultural diversity training. We know even less about how ethnic minority counselors use that training (Sanchez-Hucles & Jones, 2005). Consequently, the major questions that guided this study are: (1) What is the effectiveness of multicultural diversity counseling training experienced by the participants? (2) What are the types of multicultural diversity practices school counselors use with frequency? and (3) What challenges are experienced and/or anticipated by school counselors in integrating multicultural diversity practices in educational settings?

Method

Participants

Participants were 53 school counselors in the Southeast. Of those 53 school counselors, 48 were women (90.6%) and five were men (9.4%). Additional demographic data revealed 17 (32.1%) participants identified themselves as African American, three (5.7%) as Latino/Hispanic, 30 (56.6%) as White/Caucasian, two (3.8) American Indian/Native American, and one (1.9%) identified themselves as "other" but did not specify a race/ethnicity. Of the participants, five (9.4%) were 20-29 years of age, 28 (52.8%) were 30-39 years of age, eight (15.1%) were 40-49 years of age, ten (18.9%) were 50-59 years of age and two (3.8%) participants were 60 years of age. All of the

school counselors had advanced degrees with 14 (26.4%) having earned a master's degree, 33 (62.3%) had an Educational Specialist degree or a master's degree plus an additional 30 credits, and six (11.3%) had a doctoral degree.

Participants were asked about the racial/ethnic diversity in their schools among students and faculty. When asked to provide an approximation of the racial/ethnic demographics of the student population of their schools, 12% of respondents reported working in schools that were up to 25% Caucasian, 44% worked in schools that were 26-50% Caucasian, 19% reported a 51-75% Caucasian population, while 15% reported 76-100% Caucasian student body. Of the 53 participants, ten percent reported not knowing the demographic make-up of their schools. Six percent reported that up to 25% of the teaching faculty at their school was Caucasian, 29% reported having 26-50% Caucasian faculty, 27% reported having 51-75% Caucasian faculty, while 26% reported having 76-100% Caucasian faculty. Twelve percent of teachers reported not knowing approximately how many Caucasian faculty members teach at their schools.

Procedure

Because of the significant projected increase in the students of color in southern public schools, school counselors were sought specifically from this region. Participants were recruited from a school counselor listserv hosted by a State Department of Education and by word of mouth. An invitation to participate was sent via an e-mail to a state-wide school counselor listserv. The invitation included an electronic link to complete a survey created on an online web survey design program. Before completing the survey, participants were provided with an informed consent assuring their confidentiality, explaining possible risks of participation and instructing them that they

could log out of the survey during any part of the process. Approximately thirty-five minutes were needed to complete the questionnaire.

Instruments

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic questionnaire was used to obtain information on the gender, age, racial/ethnic background, and educational history of the participants. Participants were also asked about the racial/ethnic diversity in their schools among students, faculty, school counselors, and staff. In addition, they were also asked to share information regarding their multicultural diversity pre-service and post-service training.

Integrating Multicultural Diversity Questionnaire (IMDQ). The IMDQ (Packer, Jay, & Evans, 2007) was developed by the authors. For this project, multicultural diversity referred to practicing the concepts of freedom, justice, equality, and equity to affirm racial/ethnic minorities. The instrument consists of 11 open-ended questions to assess the following four areas: (1) the influences on school counselors decision-making to integrate multicultural diversity into their daily practices, (2) the impact of multicultural diversity training on their ability to integrate multicultural diversity practices, (3) the most common multicultural diversity techniques and activities used by school counselors, and (4) the challenges experienced and/or anticipated by school counselors in their attempts to integrate multicultural diversity practices.

Data Analysis

All open-ended responses were analyzed using procedures suggest by Glesne (2006), Lincoln & Guba (1985), and Marshall & Rossman (2008). This analysis procedure drew on a structured process meant to ensure a systematic and meaningful

method for sorting through, and making sense of, participants' responses. The procedure began by organizing responses by survey question. Then each author reviewed the responses several times in an effort to discern the essential concepts, ideas, and/or meanings contained within the responses; and, as they were identified, a potential list of codes was generated. The compiled list of codes was then discussed at length, consolidated and expanded as necessary, and given preliminary descriptions. Next, the consolidated list was used to re-code the responses after which a process of inductive analysis was engaged allowing for the generation of categories based on the codes (and the actual responses they 'represented'). These categories (as well as the relationships between them) were then examined in an effort to construct the larger themes around which the data are presented below.

Researcher Subjectivity Statement

Qualitative inquiry encourages the acknowledgement of researcher subjectivity. In keeping with this practice, the authors acknowledge that as women of African decent who train future school counselors and teachers that there may be biases and assumptions present due to our race, gender, and current academic positions. We further recognize that our interest in the integration of multicultural counseling and education may also be linked to our multiple identities and can also create a source of researcher subjectivity. In acknowledging the ways in which our researcher subjectivity inevitably impacts the analysis and interpretation process, reflective thoughts and comments were recorded throughout the analysis process. New questions, potential explanations, and relationships between codes, categories and themes were also documented. Consequently, this reflective process served to provide a means for the

authors to clarify and explore their biases and assumptions regarding the data, in addition to examine their possible effects on data interpretation process (Knesting & Waldren, 2006).

Results

Demographics

An analysis of the demographic data reveals, of the 53 participants, 50.9% of the participants were in the position of school counselor for five years or less, 15.1% for six to ten years, 11.3% for 11 to 15 years, 7.5% for 16-20 years, 3.8% for 21 to 25 years and 5.7% for 26 or more years. Participants indicated any multicultural diversity training that they completed during their degree program that prepared them for their current position. Participants reported that 43.4% had two or more three-credit courses which covered diversity (e.g., culture, race, sexual orientation, religious minorities, people with disabilities, etc.), 39.6% had a single three-credit course, and 5.7% did not have a stand-alone multicultural diversity course in their training. Participants further reported that 35.8% of them attended training programs in which multicultural diversity content was covered across the curriculum, while 3.8% reported that multicultural diversity was not covered in their programs.

Participants were also asked to indicate the number of multicultural diversity trainings that they have completed since entering their position as a school counselor (e.g., workshops, in-service, conferences, reading groups, etc.). Of the 53 participants, 47.1% attended one to five trainings, 9.5% attended six to ten trainings, 3.3% attended 11 to 15 trainings, and 3.8% attended 20 or more trainings. The results also reveal that 18.9% have not attended any multicultural diversity training since becoming a school

counselor. Of the participants who attended trainings after becoming school counselors, 79.2% reveal that trainings they attended were mandatory.

When asked how helpful their multicultural diversity training has been in working with students with diverse backgrounds, 26.4% report that the training was extremely helpful, 47.2% report that the training was somewhat helpful, 20.8% report that is was somewhat unhelpful, and 5.7% report that the training was not helpful. When asked how often participants use what they have learned in their multicultural diversity training, 32.1% report using what they learned daily, 26.4% use it once a week, 22.6% once a month, 7.5% once a year, and 11.3% report never using the training. School counselors, who have been in their current positions for fewer than five years, reported using what they learned in their multicultural diversity training more frequently with 30.1% of them applying what they learned at least once a week. Results also indicate that 7% of school counselors who have been in their position for six to ten years use what they learned at least weekly. Of the school counselors who have been in their positions for 11 or more years, 3.7% use what they have learned in their multicultural diversity training at least once a week.

Open-Ended Responses

The questionnaire encouraged participants to reflect on their day to day experiences with multicultural diversity in four primary ways: 1) the influences on their decision to integrate multicultural diversity into their practice; 2) the impact of prior training on their ability to incorporating multicultural diversity into their practice; 3) common techniques and activities used to incorporate multicultural diversity; and 4) challenges they faced in their attempts to incorporate multicultural diversity. Though

each of the four factors is discussed below separately, each factor is interconnected with the others. Indeed, when viewed holistically, a counselor's ability to engage in multicultural diversity practices may largely be influenced by a combination of personal and professional motivations, pre-service and in-service training, and numerous contextual factors in their work setting. The interactive nature of these factors gives rise to the dynamic and complex context in which each counselor enacts their practice.

Influences on Decision to Integrate Multicultural Diversity

The open-ended responses began with the question, "What influences your decision to integrate multicultural diversity into your daily practice?" All 53 participants responded to the question, offering a mix of perceived influences ranging from the populations of their respective schools to their personal upbringing and backgrounds. Consequently, responses were categorized into one of five themes: make-up of school population/clientele; personal ethics and standards; necessity/reality; upbringing/background; and "for the students."

Make-up of school population/clientele. Nearly half of the respondents (47%) indicated that their decision to integrate multicultural diversity was influenced by either the make-up of the student body in the schools where they worked or by the backgrounds of specific clientele with whom they worked. A total of seventeen respondents indicated that their decision was influenced by the diversity they perceived to be present in their work setting (six of whom made specific reference to the different racial/ethnic groups reflected in the student body). Responses such as "I work in a school that serves a diverse population," "the student population I work with," and "the needs and backgrounds of our students" were common. Other responses reflected that

the type of school (e.g. an "international school") implicitly indicate the school's diversity. Similarly, eight respondents spoke about the diverse backgrounds of their clientele. For example, one responded simply stated, "the client's background" while another noted, "It all depends upon whether the counseling relationship differs with respect to cultural background, values and lifestyle."

Personal ethics and standards. The theme of *personal ethics and standards* encompassed those responses in which participants attributed their decision to incorporate multicultural diversity to their personal values, ethical standards, and religious or faith-based attributes. Among these 14 responses, comments such as "treating people fairly" and "treating others with respect" were common, as were notions of "equality," and respect for "individuals." Several responses reflected a combination of personal influences, as indicated in the following statement:

My personal belief system, my ethical standards, my gut instinct that in order to achieve any level of long-term peace and equality in human existence, we must believe that in the eyes of God we are all lovable and truly meant to coexist as children. God is color blind…he sees and knows the hearts and minds of each.

Necessity/reality. Perhaps the most interesting responses were those that indicated participants' decisions were a reflection of the "reality" that we "live in a diverse, multicultural world." Indeed, the *necessity/reality* theme incorporates three references to meeting students'/clients' "needs," three references to it being a "necessity," and six references that denoted participants' lack of "choice" in the matter in light of "reality." This lack of choice is reflected in the response of one participant who asserted, "It is not a decision. I work daily with people from different racial/ethnic

minorities." Similar comments include, "…it's not really a decision but more of a way of life" and "I have no other choice with the population of students that we serve."

Upbringing/background and "for the students". Responses that indentified participants' background or upbringing as the influential factor in their decisions as well as those that cited the benefits for students comprised the fourth and fifth themes respectively. The six responses that alluded to participants' backgrounds, included references to "my background," "the way I was raised," and "my life experiences." The six responses which indicated that participants' decisions to incorporate multicultural diversity practice were related to the perceived benefit for students reflect counselors' desires to enhance their ability to work effectively with their students (e.g., "I integrate it in order to reach all students. I think it's important to understand cultural differences as they relate to the students' issues or struggles") as well as a larger concern for their students' general welfare and future success (e.g., "…well being of all students" and "The goal is to ensure my students become productive and successful citizens"). Finally, of the 53 respondents, only one stated that he or she does not incorporate multicultural diversity into his or her daily practice.

Impact of Prior Training on Multicultural Diversity

Participants were asked to reflect on their prior training in multicultural diversity issues and to assess the ways in which that training influenced their ability to integrate multicultural diversity issues into their practice. The responses were coded under one of three themes: knowledge about/understanding of/appreciation for group/individual differences; increased awareness of multicultural issues and cultural differences; and enhanced self-understanding.

Knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for different groups. Nearly

half of the responses to this questions reflected that what participants gained from their

training could be categorized as either: 1) general knowledge about different cultures; 2)

a better understanding of different ethnic/racial groups, and in particular, unique cultural

characteristics associated with those groups; 3) a deeper appreciation for groups

culturally or racially different from their own; or 4) information and strategies for working

with one particular ethnic group. Responses were spread evenly across those four

categories with each receiving five mentions. Interestingly, within these responses, only

five participants named the specific culture in question (i.e. African American-2

mentions, Latino-1 mention, Asian-2 mentions, Jewish-1 mention). The remaining

responses made reference to "other cultures," "specific cultures," "various cultures"

"different cultures" "different racial groups" or just "cultures."

Increased awareness. Of the responses, nine made reference to the ways in

which the training has raised participants' awareness of multicultural issues or

cultural/group differences. For example, one respondent reflected, "…I became aware

that I needed to make a concerted effort to talk about issues openly and honestly."

Another stated, "It made me more aware of…the differences within and between

groups." A third noted, "My training enhanced my awareness of the need to utilize

different strategies when dealing with students of different cultures."

Self-understanding. Responses that were coded as "self-understanding" reflect

two different types of understanding: one regarding recognizing/acknowledging personal

beliefs and biases, and one regarding dispelling misconceptions and incorrect

assumptions. Responses that spoke to participants' deepened understanding of self

include, "It helped me to look outside of my own perspective," and "The course raised my self-awareness and allowed me to reflect on how I judge others." Noting the role played by peers in their training, one respondent reflected, "Dialogue and discussion with peers highlighted how things that we perceive as minute may be so detrimental that a client from another culture may not return. [In]sensitivity to other cultures severely affects the ability to establish rapport." Comments that reflected an interrogation of misperceptions included "I had to challenge myself to look inside and root out the misperception perceptions that I owned" and "The coursework helps me avoid misperceptions, inappropriate responses and assumptions."

While 40 of the responses offered to this question indicated that their training had been helpful in some way, two respondents indicated that their training provided them with "no assistance with integrating multicultural diversity issues" into their practice. Two additional respondents indicated that the training had been generally "unhelpful."

Common Multicultural Diversity Techniques

In order to get a better understanding of the ways in which participants incorporated multicultural diversity into their daily practice, they were asked to list up to three techniques that they use frequently. The responses to this question revealed a wide-range of activities, techniques, practices, and dispositions that could be characterized as reflecting cultural sensitivity. Responses were categorized under one of two themes: classroom/school-based activities and intrapersonal characteristics/ interpersonal dynamics.

Classroom/school-based activities. Culturally sensitive activities associated with the classroom or school context fell into one of four categories: instruction-based

activities, small group work, special events/guest speakers, and multicultural materials. The first was category, instruction-based activities, consisted of responses that reflected the ways in which counselors drew on standard activities or techniques used during classroom guidance lessons that lent themselves to incorporating multicultural diversity. References to activities such as role playing, bibliotherapy, and modeling were evident in 11 of the responses.

While group work was also mentioned as an instruction-based activity, it warranted its own category as references were made both to "small group work" as a classroom-based activity and to "group sessions" as counseling activity. Interestingly, several of the responses regarding group work were accompanied by indications of counselor sensitivity in assigning students to groups. For example, one responded noted that he or she would, "…pair them [students] with another student of the same ethnicity if possible so students will not feel out of place." Reflecting a similar sensitivity, another participant indicated, "When conducting groups, I try to have a balance of white/black/Hispanic students and males/females so that no one feels isolated based on race/gender."

The third and fourth categories were special events/guest speakers and multicultural materials respectively. Eight respondents spoke directly about special events or fairs where diversity was celebrated in some fashion such as abilities fairs, multicultural awareness weeks, and holiday celebrations. Unfortunately, responses in this category did not reflect whether or not the counselors played an active role in these events (e.g. sponsoring the event, participating in the planning/execution of the event) or simply attended them with their students. Finally, four respondents indicated that they

incorporated multicultural diversity into their practice through the use of materials that reflect cultural and ethnic diversity such as literature, videos, posters, and toys.

Another facet of the classroom/school-based activities theme was activities that specifically sought to fostering dialogue related to issues of diversity and multiculturalism. Ten respondents discussed the ways in which they attempted to foster such conversations with students and clients, often making reference to "discussion," "dialogue" "group discussion" or "open discussion." For example, one respondent talked at length about using the "student fishbowl." The respondent explained:

> This activity forces students to listen to the experiences and perspectives of a specific group of people without being part of the group. Once the fishbowl is completed, I open the conversation up to all of the students in the group for their perspective on what happened.

Participants spoke both of fostering intentional dialogues and of using dialogues in an effort to respond to specific circumstances. Regarding the latter, a participant noted, "When dealing with racial tension here, I speak with the group, give them the opportunity to be honest about their feelings, resolve the issue at hand…"

Intrapersonal characteristics and interpersonal dynamics. The second major theme regarding the techniques and activities that participants' use frequently to incorporate multicultural diversity reflects intrapersonal characteristics and interpersonal dynamics. The responses associated with this theme indicate that some participants may believe that multicultural diversity has more to do with *who* they are than *what* they do. Specifically, several participants' responses list their personal attributes and dispositions. Of the 15 responses coded under this theme, nine included references to

personal characteristics such as "accepting," "empathic," "understanding,"
"approachable" and "active listener." These respondents "practice the Golden rule," and
"keep it real." They are also "genuine in their approach when speaking to students," and
"shake their hands and welcome them with a smile."

A second aspect of this theme involved the interpersonal dynamics that were
reflected in the participants' responses. Several respondents talked about the ways in
which they take students'/clients' background characteristics (i.e. race, gender,
socioeconomic status, religion, religion, etc) into consideration when working with them.
For example, one participant asserted, "I try to counsel students with a knowledge of
their socioeconomic background and culture in mind. While I try to treat all students
alike, I find I must adjust according to each student." Another noted, "I practice to work
with the client's system: his or her attributes, lifestyle characteristics and socio-historical
perspectives." In addition, recognizing the importance of language as an essential
characteristic of culture, three participants referenced using/respecting students'
language in their response. One asserted, "I speak Spanish when needed," while
another simply indicated, "use of and respect for mother tongue language."

Challenges to Incorporating Multicultural Diversity

Participants were asked to talk about any challenges that they experienced in
their attempts to incorporate multicultural diversity into their daily practices. By and
large, the most often cited challenge was lack of time. Of the responses to the question,
"What do you believe are the biggest challenges that you face in integrating multicultural
diversity in your daily practice," 18 respondents noted that lack of time was their biggest
challenge. While most responses consisted of a simple declaration regarding the lack of

time, a few respondents contextualized their response citing the numerous responsibilities counselor must handle. Comments such as, "Lack of time - Counselors are asked to wear too many hats" and "Lack of time. Counselor's responsibilities have changed and other requirements have been added" indicate that, for some, their inability to incorporate multicultural diversity to the extent that they might like appears to be hampered by the multiple other responsibilities that they must attend to throughout the day.

The second most cited challenge was lack of institutional support. Responses included under this theme fell into one of three categories. The first category included those who simply mentioned a general lack of support. The second included responses regarding a "lack of funding" or a "lack of resources." The third category included responses that specifically associated the lack of support to other colleagues. For example, one respondent noted that, "Not everyone (other staff) is as unconditionally accepting of differences in students; some adults feed into negative stereotypes and encourage students to behave the same way, whether advertently or inadvertently." Another responded, "Lack of understanding about the importance of celebrating each person's unique-ness by some staff members. This does not prevent or inhibit me from doing what I do, I just continue to explain why I do these things." A third stated, "Lack of institutional support and resistance of acceptance by cultures different from mine." These responses add a new dimension to popular notions of institutional support which is more often associated with administrators or administration-related support mechanisms. After institutional support, the most frequently cited responses indicated

that they experienced "no challenges" implementing multicultural diversity practice,

followed by classroom climate and lack of knowledge.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that although a majority of participants are

receiving multicultural diversity training through coursework and/or post degree training

and that multicultural diversity training increased participants' self-awareness,

knowledge and appreciation for different groups, none reported gaining specific

multicultural diversity skills that they could implement in their daily practice. These

responses differ from previous research which reported that counselors felt competence

in their multicultural skills (Constantine & Yeh, 2001). It leads to questions regarding

whether counselor perception of competence is related to their multicultural training or

other training they may have received. Most respondents reported using multicultural

diversity techniques. Some outlined specific skills such as deliberate consideration of

cultural issues (e.g. race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, language). On closer

inspection, many techniques listed were not specific to multicultural diversity (role-

playing, bibliotherapy) and others were limited to special events and festivals rather

than daily activities. It is especially notable that several respondents included their

personal characteristics as multicultural diversity techniques. They believed that by

using good basic counseling skills (active listening, understanding, accepting), they

were culturally competent. This belief is not uncommon but it is in opposition to the

assumptions of multicultural training (Sue & Sue, 2008; Arredondo, et al., 1996; Chen,

2001).

It is not surprising that the major influence that motivates counselors to use their multicultural diversity training is student need. It appears that counselors are experiencing the impact of diversity of in their schools and are beginning to see a need for those skills. Interestingly, respondents cited personal, rather than professional ethics as a reason for using these skills, even though both the ACA (2005) and ASCA (2004) ethical codes address multicultural diversity competence.

Curious was the fact that counselors listed lack of time and resources as a challenge to implementing multicultural diversity practices. No further information was given, but it appears that some participants perceive implementing these practices as more work and as extra duties rather than activities that should be woven into their daily practice. The data indicated that the perception of multicultural diversity for some is limited to the idea of festivals and food. Yet, the most troubling of the challenges cited are those comments which indicated a lack of support from colleagues and administrators and the references to classroom climate as problematic. These responses suggest that even in the face of changing demographics, counselors may face systemic or institutional resistance to multicultural diversity.

Limitations

There are limiting factors to this research. Respondents were recruited primarily from the southeastern part of the United States and their perceptions of multicultural diversity may differ from those in other areas of the country. Further, because of the static nature of the qualitative questionnaire, there could be no follow-up inquires to clarify the respondents' intent when they answering the open-ended questions. Also, as is the case with all self-report measures, social desirability may be a factor in that

respondents are inclined to want to look good. Indeed, in the case of this study, they may have even perceived that they were doing more integration of their multicultural diversity training than they actually were.

<div align="center">**New Directions and Implications**</div>

Future research should include professional school counselors from other parts of the country to get a better idea of how multicultural diversity is approached given the different regional demographics. Some regions are more ethnically diverse than the southeast which could have a major influence on multicultural diversity practice. In addition, following an online survey with focus groups or individual interviews may provide for a more in-depth look at how counselors are integrating these skills and which skills they believe reflect multicultural diversity. Further research is also needed to investigate the possible influence of social desirability as well as the effectiveness of existing tools used to measure multicultural diversity competence (e.g. Holcomb-McCoy's School Counseling Multicultural Competency Checklist).

The results from the study indicate a fundamental short-coming in the multicultural diversity training of school counselors. Participants reported that they did not gain specific knowledge about diversity through those classes and when asked about their multicultural skills, many reported using basic listening skills and offering special events rather than higher order multicultural diversity counseling skills. Some cited their own personalities as a reason why they can effectively counsel across race, culture, and ethnic lines. These kinds of responses indicate that counselor knowledge of multicultural diversity has not been internalized. If multicultural diversity training yields such unpreparedness in counselors, school counseling programs could benefit from

adopting the School Counseling Multicultural Competency Checklist (SCMCC) (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). This instrument can assist school counselor educators in assessing strengths and weaknesses in training and in recognizing the multicultural diversity skill sets that need to be integrated in each preparatory course. Further, due to the fact that individuals tend to overestimate their multicultural competencies, supervisors must incorporate multicultural training that includes direct observation of these skills (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008). If multicultural diversity skill development is regularly monitored from the first course until completion of the internship, pre-service counselors could develop the ability to incorporate multicultural diversity practices in their daily work. The SCMCC is equally useful to assess and enhance the skills of practicing school counselors.

An additional effect of counselor misconceptions of multicultural diversity skills is that counselors reported that they lacked the time and resources to practice multicultural diversity. Apparently counselors believe that multicultural diversity is an "add-on" to their practice, rather it being all that they practice. It is imperative that school counselor educators make clear that all counseling is multicultural diversity counseling even if the student and school counselor are of the same racial/ethnic background.

Related to the above issue is the lack of support for multicultural diversity work that the participating counselors receive from colleagues and administrators. Perhaps some counselors see multicultural diversity as an "add-on" because it is perceived that way by powerful others in the schools. Social justice, therefore, needs to become a major part of future multicultural diversity training. Counselors need to acquire skills that

will help them to recruit allies in serving all the students in the school. Training in social justice and social action will provide them with these skills.

Finally, it is disturbing that participants did not readily report that part of their professional ethics was to become competent in multicultural diversity. To give them the benefit of the doubt, perhaps it did not come up because it was such an obvious point. However, it still needs to be said that responsible counselors need to maintain membership in their professional organizations, stay up to date with the professional ethical codes, and incorporate the code and standards of practice into their professional identity.

Conclusions

With the rapid change in racial and ethnic demographics in today's schools, school counselors need to be prepared to integrate multicultural diversity practices in educational work settings on a daily basis. This will require school counselors to be specifically trained on how to translate what they learn in multicultural diversity counseling courses into action. In order to prepare future school counselors to work effectively in racially and ethnically diverse school communities, school counselor educators are encouraged to engage students in integrating multicultural diversity counseling skills and practices throughout pre-practicum, practicum, and internship experiences.

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