

Social Justice and Cultural Diversity: A Professional Collaborative Effort

Dr. F. A. White

Assistant Professor

Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling

The Whitelaw R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Member of the Texas A&M University System

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to examine the Multicultural Competency developed to address social injustices and cultural issues facing today's client. A professional collaborative effort between professional social workers and professional counselors is needed. The Multicultural Counseling Competencies were developed by professional counselors to provide guidelines for ethical practice from a multicultural and culturally perspectives. Culturally Competent Counselors and other professionals are encouraged to use the multicultural competencies for an effective counselor/client relationship.

Introduction

Social justice and cultural diversity tend to be important societal issues in the 21st century. Moreover, as race and cultural diversity issues increase, there appear to be a need to bridge the gap between social justice and cultural diversity (Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi, & Bryant, 2007). The field of counseling is paying close attention to social justice advocacy and emphasizing the importance for students in their programs to become advocated for social changes. Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ) is a professional affiliate of the American counseling Association (ACA). It is an association of counselors, counselor educators, graduate students, school and community leaders and other professionals, who seek a fair distribution of common resources to all people. Therefore, this association addresses the issues related to social justice as well as cultural diversity. The goal of this organization is a principle of social adjustment, where the self

interest of an individual, when allowed to function on its own, produces results that afford the best possible outcomes for the community as a whole.

Social justice reflects a fundamental valuing of fairness and equity in resource, rights, and treatment of people in our society (Constantine et al.2007). In order to address social issues and cultural diversity, in the United States, many professional organizations focus on global and international changes (Osborne, Collison, House, Gray, Firth, & Lou 1998). Both the domestic and international level of involvement tend to help citizens of our U.S. Society to deal with the personal, societal, and institutional barriers that impede academic, personal, social, and career development.

Social justice is both a philosophical and political issue. It can be argued that everyone may wish to live in a just society, but different political ideologies have different conceptions of what a “just society” actually is.

Vera & Speight (2003) contend that the concept of social justice is one that many counselors would likely support, but they tend to question the ambiguity of how one integrated a commitment to the concept. Moreover, an examination of the definition philosophy, and goals of social justice as it related to cultural diversity, and the multicultural competency is a good beginning for counselors’ support and commitment. Social justice has always been the core of the multicultural competency (Royosicar, Fuertes, Pontorotto, & Toporeck, 2003).

Historical Context

The evolution of the multicultural counseling competencies development process emerged from social justice behavior that is evident throughout the Civil Rights era of the 1950’s and 1960’s (Arrendondo & Perez, 2003). The Civil Rights movement, which is often identified as a political movement about social change, gave rise to the emerging of political activists and professional organizations associated with social justices and cultural diversity. Organizations such as the Association of Black Psychologists and the Association of Non-White Concerns (ANWC) emerged and were among a few of the organizations that contributed to the multicultural competency movement. Leaders of these associations had to respond to the injustices of scientific racism promoted by psychologists subscribing to hypotheses of intellectual inferiority of Blacks (Jensen, 1969). The historical context of a partnership between social justices and the multicultural competencies continued to unfold in 1981, with then president Allen Ivey, President of Division 17, commissioned Derald Wing Sue to chair a committee to develop multicultural competencies (Arrendondo & Perez, 2003). The multicultural counseling competencies were developed by professionals in the field at the request of Thomas Parham, then President of the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development, previous called ANWC to provide guidelines for ethical counselor practice from a multicultural and culturally specific perspective (Arrendondo & Perez, 2003).

Multicultural Counseling Competencies

The multicultural competencies are strategies and interventions that represent social justice in action as it relates to cultural diversity (Vera & Speight, 2003). The multicultural counseling competencies tend to suggest a three (domain) dimension approach based on counselors belief, attitude, knowledge and skills for the culturally diverse population.

The first domain, counselor awareness of ones assumptions, values, and biases, is the initial first domain for beginning the process of multicultural competencies (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis 1991a, 1992b). One should first know his or her belief, values and assumptions about one's own culture. Counselors ability to assess their qualification, to meet the cultural diverse client's needs, based on self assessment of domain one, is inclusive in the first step. Constantine & Ladny (2000) states that counselors' self awareness involves counselors' abilities to understand their own multicultural identities and now these will influence their interpersonal experiences. Self awareness is not an end to the beginning of counselors' awareness, rather self awareness is a jumping-off point to becoming knowledgeable of and sensitive to clients issues that have cultural implications (Roysircar et al. 2003).

The second domain focuses on counselor awareness of clients' worldview. Knowledge about communication patterns with the client, family, education, and community are important (Roysircar et al. 2003). Culturally competent counselors possess specific knowledge and information about the particular group they are working with. An awareness of the life experiences, cultural heritage and historical background may be linked to the clients' identity in his or her worldview (Sue et al. 1992a). Specific information about the clients' worldview may assist the counselor in examining his/her views about what is "normal" (Roysircar et al. 2003). In addition it is important that the culturally competent client understand and modify theoretical approaches to address in the clients' worldview. Finally, general knowledge about sociopolitical content of the client, the historical context of racial issues in the environment, and issues of oppression seem to provide a foundation writing which the counselor may view the client' worldview.

The third domain is culturally appropriate intervention strategies (Royosircar et al. 2003). Within the category of culturally appropriate intervention strategies counselors are experts in (a) institutional barriers that prevent minorities from using counseling services, (b) have knowledge or biases in assessment procedures, and (c) attend to and work to eliminate bias, prejudice, and discriminatory context in conducting evaluations and providing interventions (Vera & Speight, 2003). According to Arrendondo & Perez (1996), the competency in the third domain provides explicit statements about the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills that will facilitate the recognition of oppression and racism. Therefore, one may posit that culturally appropriate intervention strategies may be related to the clients' racial and oppression experience in his or her world view.

Selected Research in the Areas of Multicultural Competencies and Social Justice

Constantine & Ladany (2000), identifies nine specific social justices that appear important for counselors as they work with the cultural diverse population. These competencies are as follow:

1. Become knowledgeable about the various ways oppression and social inequities can be manifested at the individual, cultural, and societal levels, along with the ways such inequities might be experienced by various individuals, groups, organizations, and macro systems.
2. Participate in ongoing critical reflection on issues of race, ethnicity, oppression, power, and privilege in your own life.
3. Maintain an ongoing awareness of how your own positions of power or privilege might inadvertently replicate experiences of injustice and oppression in interacting with stake holding groups (e.g., clients, community organizations, and research participants).
4. Question and challenge therapeutic or other intervention practices that appear inappropriate or exploitative and intervene preemptively, or as early as feasible, to promote the positive well-being of individuals or groups who might be affected.
5. Possess knowledge about indigenous models of health and healing and actively collaborate with such entities, when appropriate, in order to conceptualize and implement culturally relevant and holistic interventions.
6. Cultivate an ongoing awareness of the various types of social injustices that occur
7. Conceptualize, implement, and evaluate comprehensive preventive and remedial mental health intervention programs that are aimed at addressing the needs of marginalized populations.
8. Collaborate with community organizations in democratic partnerships to promote trust, minimize perceived power differentials, and provide culturally relevant services too identified groups.
9. Develop system intervention and advocacy skills to promote social change processes within institutional settings, neighborhoods, and communities (p.25).

In a further review of the literature, Fuertes, Bartolomeo, & Gretchen (2001) offers suggestions to counselors interested in the multicultural competencies. Constantine et al. (2007) found a relationship between clients' rating of counselors' implementing the multicultural competencies in therapy and clients' satisfaction with the competency in general. A plethora of research on social justice and cultural diversity far exceeds the ramifications of the multicultural competencies.

Concluding Remarks

Social justice and cultural diversity are issues that have implications in the multicultural counseling competency (Vera & Speight, 2003). Cultural competent counselors are expected to use the multicultural competency for an effective counselor/client relationship. The multicultural counseling competencies were developed as a guide for professionals to address future issues of clients in a cultural diverse society (Sue et al. 1992). Counselors must continue to think about how to address social justice and cultural diverse issues in training of graduate students and professionals in the field (Constantine et al. 2001). Taking a position on social justice issues and an affirmative position on the multicultural competencies seems to have a far reaching effect on future outlook in the counseling profession.

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