Multicultural Counselling in the New Millennium: Introduction to the Special Theme Issue

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the special theme issue of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling* on Multicultural Counselling in the New Millennium. First, the cultural diversity of Canadian society is described with an emphasis on changing population demographics in the foreseeable future. Next, perspectives about the multicultural counselling movement are outlined. The discussion then turns to culture-centred counselling competencies in the domains of self-awareness, knowledge, skills, and organizational competencies. Counsellors are invited to consider ways of incorporating culture-centred competencies into their professional practice, future research, and professional development.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article constitue l'introduction du numéro spécial de la *Revue Canadienne de Counseling* sur le thème du counseling multiculturel pour le nouveau millénaire. Tout d'abord, la diversité culturelle de la société canadienne est décrite, tout en mettant l'accent sur les changements démographiques prévus dans les prochaines années. Ensuite, des perspectives du mouvement de counseling multiculturel sont esquissées. La discussion s'oriente ensuite vers les compétences du counseling axé sur la culture, notamment la conscience de soi, les connaissances, les compétences et les habiletés d'organisation. Les conseillers sont invités à examiner les moyens d'incorporer les compétences du counseling axé sur la culture dans leur pratique professionnelle, dans leurs futures recherches et dans leur perfectionnement professionnel.

The theme of this special issue was chosen to demarcate the fundamental changes in the ways we think about counselling services in Canada. Based on the premise that all helping originates in a cultural context (Sue et al., 1998), the counselling profession has been challenged to incorporate the tenets of multiculturalism into its practices. During the past century, attention was drawn to changing populations in North America, the ways that counselling services have traditionally been delivered were called into question, and the importance of culturally-responsive counselling practices was demonstrated.

Canada's population is changing in ways that emphasize the need for counsellors to be prepared for multicultural counselling. For example, approximately 3% of Canada's population is comprised of Aboriginal People. The Aboriginal population is growing more rapidly than the total population and this is most evident in the Aboriginal population ages15-24 (Statistics Canada, 1996a). Ethnic diversity in Canada is increasing due to shifting patterns of immigration and

expanding source countries. Nearly 30% of the total population reports their ethnic origin to be other than the British Isles, French or Canadian (Statistics Canada, 1996b). There are growing numbers of people with multiple ethnic origins due to intermarriage between people whose families have lived in Canada for several generations (Statistics Canada, 1996b). Since the 1970's, more than half of Canada's immigrant population has been a member of a visible minority group, increasing to more than three quarters of the immigrant population in the 1990's. Visible minorities are currently 1 in 9 in Canada and are expected to reach 20% of the adult population and 25% of children by the year 2016 (Statistics Canada, 1995). These changes in Canada's population mirror changes about the potential counselling clientele of the future. The rationale for multicultural counselling is now well documented.

One key direction in this century is to define how best to prepare counsellors. Counsellor educators, professional organizations, and community agencies are challenged to consider how to develop and implement training, professional development, policies, and methods for evaluating the effectiveness of multicultural counselling.

DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVES ABOUT MULTICULTURAL COUNSELLING

There is debate about the advantages and disadvantages of targeting groups on the basis of specific cultural variables such as ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and age. One perspective suggests that defining multicultural counselling on the basis of specific cultural variables risks stereotyping and perpetuating the marginalization of diverse populations. Cautions are given against assuming that the needs of clients from specific cultural groups are uniform. For example, criticism can be levied against diversity training in which the focus remains solely on knowledge about specific cultural groups. Although education about the general populations of our local communities has heuristic value, counsellors must also consider how processes such as acculturation to dominant and non-dominant groups in our societies influence individual clients. Rather than utilizing group membership as a classifying variable to determine client needs, others have proposed a generic approach to counselling. This perspective considers that every encounter with a client has the potential to be a cross-cultural one, in that there will be relative similarities and differences between the worldviews of counsellor and client (Pedersen, 1991; Weinrach & Thomas, 1996). It bespeaks the need for counsellors to get beyond the visible characteristics of culture to consider the worldview and unique needs of each client.

Another perspective advocates the need for a continued focus on specific groups in order to promote social equity. A recent example in Canada is the case of employment equity and the status of visible minority workers within the Federal Public Service. Despite employment equity legislation (Employment Equity Act, 1995), visible minorities remain seriously under-represented in the public service as a whole, and have made few gains in occupational mobility within employment settings. Specific recommendations have been made to address organizational change that is needed to support long-term change (Task Force on

the Participation of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service, 2000). Advocates of employment equity argue that continued deliberate efforts are needed to improve the employment status of visible minorities, Aboriginal people, women, and persons with disabilities.

A focus on the culture-specific behaviours of their clientele does not override the responsibility for counsellors to understand the social influences that shape their personal and professional practices. Failure to attend to the influence of one's cultural background may lead to cultural encapsulation in training practices, research, and delivery of counselling services (Casas & Mann, 1996; Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996; Pedersen, 1995). The axiom, "Counsellor, know thyself!" emphasizes the need for counsellors to increase their self-awareness (Sue et al., 1998). It follows that counsellor education must include curricula that not only explore the social and cultural bases of behaviour, but must also challenge counsellors to examine the cultural contexts that have influenced their own behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs. There is growing recognition that counsellors must be assisted to move from a position that assumes a singular, monocultural reality, to that of adopting a worldview that is respectful of multiple belief systems (Arthur, 1998; Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996).

CULTURE-CENTRED COUNSELLOR COMPETENCIES

Pedersen and Ivey (1993) suggest that counsellors adopt a "culture-centred" or a "culture within the person" perspective. This perspective involves an awareness of the broad spectrum of similarities and differences in society's norms that govern interpersonal behaviour as well as the many social systems variables that contribute to a client's worldview. By maintaining the notion of "culture in the person," counsellors are better able to identify the relevant social variables that influence a client's behaviour. To effectively do this, counsellors need to develop culture-centred counselling competence (Lecca, Quervalú, Nunes, & Gonzales, 1998; Sue et al., 1998).

Simply stated, culture-centred counselling competence is the counsellor's ability to provide services effectively to individuals with a different worldview (Diller, 1999). There are a number of competencies, comprised of attitude, knowledge, and skill components that serve as parameters within which to develop culture-centred counselling competence (Sue et al., 1998). These competencies may be subsumed under the following four dimensions: an understanding of multiculturalism and its implications for knowledge of self and others in a culturally pluralistic society; an understanding of the terms related to multiculturalism such as ethnicity, diversity, race, dominant and non-dominant groups; the ability to appropriately use counselling skills with clients from non-dominant groups; and, a commitment to organizational development that reflects the values of multiculturalism.

Culture-Centred Counselling Competencies: Self-Awareness

Counsellors must develop attitudes that demonstrate both respect for and comfort with diverse groups within society. They must understand their personal

cultural background and the degree to which this worldview is reflected in their professional education. To accomplish these competencies, counsellors need to be aware of the complexity of culture (Matsumoto, 1996; Pedersen & Ivey, 1993). Culture is an interaction of a number of ethnographic, demographic, socio-economic, and relational variables (Pedersen, 1994). People learn patterns of behaviour based on a number of assumptions inherent within the culture (Matsumoto, 1996). They learn to understand and interpret both their intrapersonal and interpersonal world. Identity is formed through examining the similarities and differences perceived between themselves and other individuals and/or groups (Matsumoto, 1996).

Counsellors must become aware of their cultural background and socialization as well as an understanding of how their heritage may have influenced other groups within a culturally pluralistic society. When they understand their cultural heritage and its associated worldview in comparison to other cultural heritages, counsellors avoid cultural encapsulation (Pedersen, 1994). Counsellors, who minimize cultural differences, are likely to impose their worldview upon their clients. On the other hand, overemphasizing cultural differences may result in polarized positions between counsellors and clients, resulting in difficulty finding common ground upon which to build a counselling relationship. The ideal is to maintain a balance between recognizing the importance of similarities and differences and striving to understand these to maintain facilitative communication within the counselling relationship (Pedersen, 1994).

Counsellors need to understand how the history of their heritage has helped to shape their beliefs about human functioning and concepts of normalcy. In addition, counsellors need to understand their social impact on others. Ridley and colleagues (Ridley, 1995; Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeier, & Zenk, 1994) have suggested that counsellors' cultural sensitivity is related to perceptual schemas that are developed through cultural conditioning. The perceptual schemas possessed by counsellors influence how information in the environment, including client behaviour, is defined and interpreted. Ridley (1995) suggests that counsellors need to examine themselves for any beliefs or attitudes about race, ethnicity, and culture that may discriminate against clients from non-dominant groups. These beliefs or attitudes include the illusion, termed colour blindness, that a client from a non-dominant group is no different from a client from the dominant group. Another belief is the view that the client's problems originate from being a member of a non-dominant group, a position Ridley terms colour-consciousness. Further, he suggests that counsellors may have a tendency to cultural transference caused by over-identification with a non-dominant group. When unaware of this tendency, counsellors may project their feelings onto a client from a non-dominant group. Additionally, counsellors should be aware of their tendency to use the majority norm as a measure of normal behaviour, to overvalue individualism and independence, and to overly rely on a linear thinking style. Counsellors should realize that their effectiveness depends partially on their awareness of their personal "culture within" and how it differs from that of a client from a non-dominant group, that is, an idiographic perspective (Ridley, 1995).

Counsellors need to seek out training programs which promote awareness of their conceptual notions and/or emotional reactions to different cultural groups, strengthen their competencies to work with diverse clients and foster the development of a non-racist identity. Programs such as those reported in the Employment Equity Career Counselling materials (Employment Equity Career Development Office, 2000), by Rungta, Margolis and Westwood (1993) and Pedersen (1994) are excellent examples of balanced educational experiences designed to develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills of helping to assist clients who come from non-dominant groups. Further, one of the most important outcomes for counsellors of these experiences should be the development of a non-racist identity — an identity that includes an understanding of self as a cultural being, an awareness of the influences of racism, a respect for cultural diversity, and a commitment to eliminating oppression (Sue et al., 1998).

Counsellors have responsibility to seek out information which enhances their competence to provide service to culturally diverse groups. For example, Darou (1987) asserts that there is evidence that the psychological structure, emotional make-up, attitudes and beliefs and values of Native persons are different from those of non-Natives. Native people give great credit to communication with the unconscious, tend not to express anger, rely strongly on non-verbal communication and may view questioning as interference. Additionally, they have a tendency to organize by space instead of time. Further, McCormick and Amundson (1997) suggest that First Nations clients may see health and well-being from a perspective of balance between all elements of personal and collective life — mental, physical, emotional and spiritual. Also, the behaviour rehearsal process used to develop social competence as outlined in Amundson, Westwood, and Prefontaine (1995) is a useful resource for counsellors.

Culture-Centred Counselling Competencies: Understanding the Worldview of Culturally Different Clients

Counsellors need to possess knowledge about the history, values, and socialization practices of cultural groups within Canadian society and how their heritages, including the socio-political issues facing these groups may have influenced their personal and social development. As has been indicated earlier in this article, the Canadian social landscape is diverse and will continue to become more so within the foreseeable future (Statistics Canada, 1995). Cultural knowledge includes information about the client's cultural roots, values, perceived problems and preferred interventions, as well as any significant within-group diversity, including differing levels of socioeconomic status, acculturation and racial-identity commitment. These influences play a significant part in shaping an individual's worldview (McCormick & Amundson, 1997). Counsellors who understand their client's worldview are able to establish a relationship based on a common understanding of the client's perceptual framework and are able to appropriately respond to the client's level of need for counselling.

The Canadian Counselling Association (1999) and Canadian Psychological Association (1996) ethical guidelines emphasize the importance of working with clients in a non-discriminatory manner. When counsellors understand the political, economic, historical, social and psychological development specific to a particular cultural group, they have an appropriate conceptual scheme within which to understand clients from non-dominant groups. In the counselling relationship, counsellors should not rely on clients to explain their culture.

Counsellors need to be aware of the degree of acculturation a client from a non-dominant group has adopted. Intergenerational conflict, a common source of stress between non-dominant cultural group children and their parents, is primarily due to the acculturation process (Sodowsky, Kuo-Jackson, & Loya, 1997). Intergenerational stress is often expressed in role conflict emanating from parental expectations. When non-dominant group family members differ about the appropriateness of the social norms of behaviour, role conflicts between family members could result. The degree of acculturation will influence how clients present themselves and the degree to which they identify with the dominant group in society (Paniagua, 1998). Ishiyama (1995a; 1995b) discusses the impact of cultural dislocation for clients and has developed an assessment process for examining sources of self-validation.

Counsellors need to understand how discrimination may have influenced the psychological well-being of different cultural groups and the barriers that restrict the availability of mental health services to them. Without cultural information, counsellors may engage in faulty information processing which could restrict clients with a non-dominant group heritage from access to a full range of counselling services (Diller, 1999). To illustrate, many first generation Asians in North America tend to show little or no affect in counselling interviews, and may express emotional difficulties by stressing symptoms as headaches, or other physiological difficulties (Lecca, Quervalú, Nunes, & Gonzales, 1998). To avoid processing information inaccurately, counsellors need to determine what is relevant behaviour within the client's current cultural context that may be quite different from that of the dominant group. For example, in the dominant North American context individual responsibility is a key component in decision-making; however, in the North American Asian context, family values may be a priority in decision-making (Pedersen, 1994).

Counsellors would do well to become involved in multicultural events within their community. Such involvement has both intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits (Rungta, Margolis, & Westwood, 1993). It gives counsellors an experiential understanding of cultural groups, and, as well, it helps to build bridges between dominant and non-dominant groups within their community (Diller, 1999).

Culture-Centred Counselling Competencies: Intervention Skills and Techniques

For different cultural groups, counsellors need to develop an attitude of respect for the language, the beliefs about physical and cognitive functioning, and the helping practices within each community. Counsellors need to free themselves

from definitions of counselling which focus on the individual, and value verbal and emotional expression, self-disclosure, and insight (Diller, 1999; Sue et al., 1998). They need to expand the boundaries of helping by becoming more action orientated and directive in the counselling relationship. For example, North American Chinese immigrants tend to prefer helpers who are authoritarian, directive, and paternalistic in their approach to counselling (Diller, 1999). Also, counsellors need to engage in other roles, additional to that of counsellor, such as advocate, adviser, teacher, or facilitator, to provide help in a culturally appropriate manner. They need to learn from models of helping (Diller, 1999; Lecca, Quervalú, Nunes, & Gonzales, 1998) that are holistic in perspective, accent the spiritual dimension, and use diverse ways to view reality. Axelson (1999) reviews a number of models that place the same importance and attention on the events, conditions, and experiences in the client's life as the client's self-concept and overt behaviours.

McCormick and Amundson (1997) outline a culturally relevant career-life planning model for use with First Nations people based on connectedness, balance, needs, roles, gifts and aptitudes. This model acknowledges the perspective that change occurs within the context of community and family, not within the perspective of individual responsibility, for First Nations clients.

Counsellors need to understand how the characteristics of counselling may clash with the values of some cultural groups, and recognize the norming biases inherent in assessment instruments. They should have knowledge of the values and beliefs about how the family functions, and how different cultural groups understand their identity formation. To accomplish these competencies, counsellors need to be able to use a variety of verbal rapport building skills (Diller, 1999) and be aware of the influences of nonverbal behaviours on communication such as gaze and visual behaviour, interpersonal space and proxemics, and gestures (Matsumoto, 1996). They can consult with other professional counsellors or respected persons within the non-dominant client's community when they realize the limits of their professional competence (Paniagua, 1998). They can also seek to offer services in the language of the client — either through an interpreter or referral to another professional (Diller, 1999).

Counsellors need to assume the role of a cultural guide (Amundson, Westwood, & Prefontaine, 1995). The cultural guide helps the client from a non-dominant group translate past experiences into ones that are adaptable to the present context. For example, asking a client who has recently immigrated to Canada to identify the main skills used during employment in the country of origin may be helpful for initiating a job search process in Canada. This analysis will enable the counsellor to develop some common ground for understanding the client's background and upon which to develop a working relationship.

An important skill for culture-centred counsellors is cognitive complexity (Pedersen & Ivey, 1993). Cognitive complexity enables counsellors to keep track of a number of cultural variables and counselling hypotheses concurrently, as well as assess the number of variables that change as the counselling relationship

unfolds. Cognitive complexity allows the counsellor to view the client's context from a number of perspectives while understanding how a client's culture differs from that of the counsellor. Complexity allows for a tolerance of ambiguity, differentiated thought, the ability to see connections between a number of possibilities, and, finally, helps counsellors to avoid making premature conclusions.

Cultural-Centred Counselling Competencies: Organizational Development

The systems and organizations that surround counselling must also be carefully examined to consider ways that institutional culture may impede culturally responsive services. While individual counsellors are challenged to consider how their worldview may be subject to monocultural thinking, counsellor educators and managers of counselling agencies are challenged to consider how organizational structures, policies, and practices may serve particular stakeholders while excluding members of non-dominant groups. The emphasis of multicultural counselling competencies has been placed on individual counsellors. However, the practice of counselling occurs in a context. Organizations which fail to embed diversity into its structures and whose business and practice surrounds counselling will not be relevant to consumers and will be at risk for survival (Sue et al., 1998). Multicultural organizations can demonstrate commitment to diverse representation throughout all levels of the organization. Organizations can also ensure that ongoing operations are responsive to the diverse needs of its staff and be prepared to address issues that block access and effective service to clients served by the organization.

Counsellors have an advocacy role to influence the policies and procedures of organizations and to create positive changes for the delivery of services to culturally diverse clients. Within organizations, there needs to be a feedback loop where client perspectives are invited and responded to. What may appear to be an obvious point is often controversial in organizations, particularly when consumer demands challenge existing structures of power. Moving beyond an organizational mandate to the implementation of practices that support diversity requires concerted efforts at both individual and organizational levels.

We would encourage our readers to publicize the methods through which they have implemented successful initiatives. There are undoubtedly practices that are in common between various types of counselling settings as well as unique practices that have evolved to serve specific client groups. Additionally, we would encourage counsellor educators to collaborate about ways they have addressed organizational planning for diversity. There are a variety of ways that educational institutions in North America have addressed multicultural counselling, ranging from single specialized courses to models which infuse curricula with diversity content. Next, we need to consider how our educational programs are making a difference in the development of students' multicultural competencies. The articulation of multicultural counselling competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1998) provides a template for targeting education and training curricula. However, the teaching and

learning methodology that best supports the acquisition of multicultural counselling competencies are only beginning to be examined (e.g., Arthur & Achenbach, 2000; Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Neville et al., 1996). Efforts to redesign curricula in counsellor education must be accompanied by efforts to evaluate their effectiveness. Standardized instruments have been developed which are recommended for evaluating the effectiveness of multicultural counselling training (Sue et al., 1998). These instruments include the (a) Multicultural Awareness/Knowledge/Skills Survey (MAKSS; D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991), (b) Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994), (c) Multicultural Counseling Awareness Scale – Form B (MCAS-B; Ponterotto et al., 1996), and (d) the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised (CCCI-R; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991). However, the self-report format of these instruments is prone to influences of social desirability and their capacity to measure competencies such as multicultural case conceptualization has recently been called into question (Constantine & Ladany, 2000). Multiple sources of data, including qualitative methods, are recommended for identifying aspects of multicultural counselling training that are meaningful to students (Arthur & Achenbach, 2000; Heppner & O'Brien, 1994). Additional research is needed on methods for evaluating the development of culture-centred competencies in both individuals and organizations.

It appears timely to answer some fundamental questions about efforts to promote culture-centred counselling competencies in individual and organizational development; for instance, what works, what are the methods that work, and in what ways do our efforts translate to meaningful change in the lives of culturally diverse clients? Some may view the ambiguity surrounding multicultural counselling as a sign that this movement in the counselling field is not working. In contrast, we are reminded that any change process involves a period of transition during which defining new ways of working require considerable commitment and creativity. There is little doubt that many challenges lie ahead as we attempt to translate the rationale for multicultural counselling competencies into effective individual and organizational practices. However, with those challenges are tremendous opportunities to impact the field of counselling and the lives of clients in our local communities.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF CANADIAN JOURNAL OF COUNSELLING

In the first article, Pedersen elaborates upon the paradigm shift that has occurred in the fields of psychology and counselling as a result of multicultural perspectives. Pedersen offers a culture-centred perspective as a dimension that enhances and gives meaning to the three central theories of psychology: psychodynamism, behaviourism, and humanism.

Next, Pettifor addresses the need for counsellors to understand their cultural heritage and the cultural underpinning of their helping profession. She outlines

three criticisms levelled against professional helping codes of ethics, i.e., the lack of a moral philosophical foundation, promotion of unintentional racism, and the trivialization of multicultural issues.

In their article, Arthur and Januszkowski address the issue of culture-centred counsellor competence. They describe the results of assessing Canadian counsellors in four domains of multicultural competence: awareness, knowledge, skills, and counselling relationship.

Daya provides readers with an overview of central debates over the way we approach multicultural counselling. Discussions include the etic position, the emic, or culture-specific approach, and the use of a common factors paradigm.

Poonwassie and Charter remind readers of the importance of respecting worldviews and the legacy of domination that has permeated social-psychological services for Aboriginal people. They provide us with an overview of Aboriginal worldviews and traditional philosophies in the form of cultural imperatives for working in First Nations communities.

The need for White male counsellors to both understand their worldview as well as the history, values, and cultural experiences of First Nations clients is addressed in the article by Smith and Morrissette. They discuss five different themes that were found in their qualitative study.

Finally, Grant, Henley, and Kean outline the development and implementation of a model for providing family counselling to immigrant and refugee families. Their work describes how narrative approaches can be used to guide practice with culturally diverse clients and the need to provide accessible and equitable counselling services in languages other than English.

The articles in our special issue offer a diverse range of theoretical approaches, empirical and discussion papers, ideas for counsellor educators, as well as practical suggestions from counsellors who are *doing* multicultural counselling. We hope that readers will learn from these articles, be reflective about the challenges that they convey, and seek opportunities to enhance their skills for working with culturally diverse clients. We also hope that this special issue will highlight many topics that deserve further debate, research, and publication in future issues of the *Canadian Journal of Counselling.*

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