

Valuing Diversity in the Schools: Learning from Multicultural Counseling for Teachers in the Greek Educational Setting

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This paper explores the challenge of diversity in an increasingly multicultural world, and adopts the position that the valuing of diversity can be taught – especially within the context of teacher training and education in general. It gives an overview of major components of diversity training within the context of multicultural counseling, and stresses what counseling can offer teacher training in regard to diversity issues and competencies for the Greek educational setting. Finally, it examines key notions of difference and ‘otherness’ in Greek thought, which can inform contemporary discourse on diversity and multicultural counseling theory and practice.

KEY WORDS: diversity; multicultural counseling; teacher counselors; otherness.

Nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, the Greek historian Herodotus, reflecting upon his many travels in Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt and the vast Persian empire (which for a time included most of the known world), expressed the following notable moral of human experience: “If all existing customs could somewhere be set before all men [sic], in order that they might select the most beautiful for themselves, every nation would choose, after the most searching scrutiny, the customs they have already practiced.” He went on to say that he had many proofs based upon tales and observations that people felt this way about their customs, and that “unless thereupon a man [sic] is mad it is not likely that he would mock the holy rites and long-established practices of other cultures.” The historian then concluded that “Pindar was right,” when he said that “custom is the king of all” (*Herodotus, Book III, 38*).

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In this narrative, Herodotus described a very common tendency among people; namely, to regard the customs, traditions, values and practices of one's own culture (group or society) as better than or superior to those of other cultures. This attitude coupled frequently with a lack of respect and recognition for the culturally different (something akin to the madness referred to above by Herodotus), has been a major source of difficulties throughout history and poses a significant threat to intercultural communication, cultural exchange, and the valuing of diversity in an increasingly multicultural world.

In the "postmodern" era the challenge of diversity takes unprecedented dimensions, given among other things (a) a tendency to go beyond monocultural discourse and the universalizing claims of "modernity" (Lyotard, 1984; Taylor, 1994), (b) the social-intellectual movement of multiculturalism and its philosophical premises (Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Taylor, 1994), (c) today's ever-expanding communication technologies, which continue to remove barriers of space and time and facilitate socio-cultural interchange among diverse groups and societies (Gergen, 1991), and (d) demographic trends that point to increased cultural and ethnic diversity in many parts of the world including American and European societies (Damanakis, 1998).

This paper adopts the position that the valuing of diversity can be taught, especially within the context of education, and needs to be part of a school's guidance program. It gives an overview of major components of diversity training models within the context of multicultural counseling, and underlines the importance of counseling attitudes and skills in teacher training regarding cross-cultural issues and counseling competencies for Greek schools. Finally, it briefly touches upon the notions of "otherness" in unity and unity in "otherness" within the context of Greek thought and its implications for contemporary discourse on diversity and multicultural theory and training.

MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING AND THE CULTURALLY COMPETENT TEACHER

The Case of Greece

Like many other countries, Greece faces the reality of diverse populations and its subsequent impact upon schools and education. Beginning in the late nineteen eighties, with the numbers increasing into the nineties, Greece saw an influx of immigrants and political refugees from various areas, including but not limited to Albania, Poland, the former Soviet Union, the Philippines and Pakistan. In the mid-seventies the Greek state began to receive significant waves of repatriated Greeks from Western Europe, America and Australia, as well as the Greeks of the Diaspora (such as "historical" communities of Hellenism in the former Soviet Union, and Albania). Already present, were the cultural communities of the Rom,

the Pomakoi (Pomacs) and the Muslim population of Thrace (Damanakis, 1998; Georgas et al., 1999; Hatzichristou & Hopf, 1995; Marvakis, Parsanoglou, & Paulou, 2001).

As the make up of the student body has changed rapidly, and more and more students come from a variety of cultural, ethnic, linguistic, educational and socioeconomic backgrounds, awareness of diversity and cultural competence become essential for teachers in order to (a) better understand, motivate and teach each individual student, (b) foster mutual understanding, communication and a sense of community among students of different backgrounds, and (c) facilitate cultural exchange and mutual enrichment among diverse communities.

This paper proposes that teacher training in cross-cultural counseling attitudes and skills may prove especially useful in addressing today's challenge for culturally competent teachers. The literature, both internationally and in Greece, has already shown that teachers can benefit from basic training in communication and counseling skills (Bovair & McLaughlin, 1993; Gordon, 1974; Hargie, 1995; Malikiosi-Loizos, 2001), and has described extensively the characteristics of the effective teacher-counselor (Brouzos, 1999; Demetropoulos, 1992; Hatzichristou, 2004; Hill & O'Brien, 1999; Kalantzi-Azizi, 1985; Wittmer & Myrick, 1989). Similarly, teachers could benefit from training in intercultural communication and diversity issues, and from learning the cultural determinants of behavior as addressed in the context of multicultural counseling. Such training could (a) facilitate intercultural communication between teachers and students, and (b) provide the basis upon which teachers can model and specifically teach to students cultural competence and understanding, in a diverse school environment.

Diversity Training

A number of diversity training models have been proposed in the literature (e.g., Atkinson, Thompson & Grant, 1993; Carney & Kahn, 1984; LaFromboise & Foster, 1992; McRae & Johnson, 1991; Pedersen, 1994; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). Although these models differ in terms of objectives emphasized and instructional strategies used, they operate within similar frameworks. The original American Psychological Association Division 17 position paper on cross-cultural counseling competencies (APA, September, 1980) and the revised multicultural counseling competencies outlined by Sue, Arredondo and McDavis (1992) are often used as frameworks for developing and assessing multicultural training models, especially in the United States. Most models of cultural competence focus mainly on a combination of three dimensions: (a) awareness of self and others (b) knowledge of other cultures and the worldviews of the culturally different and (c) skills necessary for intercultural communication and work with culturally different people (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1992; Sue, 1981; Sue et al., 1992). Diversity education focuses on changes in participants'

thinking, affective reactions, and actual behaviors. It fosters a climate whereby trainees feel comfortable to express their viewpoints about diversity issues as well as to challenge the instructor and peers. It includes in-class discussions and experiential exercises in a safe space in which emotional reactions are processed as a means toward increased awareness and understanding (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994; Reynolds, 1995).

Awareness of Own Assumptions, Values, Attitudes and Biases. The culturally skilled individual is one who has moved from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to his or her own cultural heritage and how it has shaped personal values, attitudes, and worldviews. Culturally skilled people have moved from ethnocentrism to valuing and respecting differences, and they are not likely to have a condescending attitude, to patronize or impose their values onto others. Moreover, they avoid stereotypes, and are aware of their biases and how they may affect culturally different persons (Sue et al., 1992).

Awareness of Own Thoughts, Beliefs, and Feelings. Intercultural encounters produce affective reactions. Feelings and expressions of anger, guilt, frustration, silence, resistance and guardedness are commonly experienced as one moves beyond one's ethnocentric biases, and develops an awareness of others and an appreciation for diversity issues (D'Andrea & Daniels 1997; Goodman, 1995).

Knowledge of Cultures Different than One's Own. The culturally skilled person needs to (a) possess specific knowledge and information about the cultural group he or she is working with, (b) be aware of values, history, experiences, current problems and life-styles of particular cultural/ethnic groups, (c) be knowledgeable about sociopolitical factors and institutional barriers that affect diverse populations, and (d) understand the differences as well as the commonalities among distinct cultures in a pluralistic society (Pedersen, 1994; Sue et al., 1992).

Skills. The culturally skilled communicator is able to generate a wide range of verbal and non-verbal responses, and, as well, to be able to send and receive both verbal and non-verbal messages accurately and "appropriately" – considering cultural cues operating in the communication process (Ivey & Authier, 1978; Sue et al., 1992).

Characteristics of the Culturally Competent Teacher

Taking into account the major dimensions of diversity training models presented above, this section provides an outline of important aspects for the culturally skilled teacher, which can be taught within the context of multicultural training. Once such cultural skills are developed within teachers, it provides the basis upon which they can model and specifically teach to students the attitudes, understandings and skills suited to function effectively within diverse cultures and multicultural settings. This can be done indirectly, but should also form the basis of structural learning within regular and guidance-oriented curricula.

A number of generic teacher-counselor characteristics are necessary, although by no means sufficient, for the culturally competent teacher to be an effective educator in multicultural classrooms and broader school contexts. Drawing mainly upon the literature on diversity training (cf., Goodman, 1995; Pedersen, 1994; Sue et al., 1992; Sue, 1981) it is proposed that the culturally skilled teacher needs to be able to do the following:

1. Express respect and care for the culturally different students in a manner that is felt and understood by them. Respect may be communicated either verbally or nonverbally with eye contact, body language, tone of voice, rate of speech and verbalization on acceptable topics.
2. Feel and express empathy for culturally distinct students. This refers mainly to the teacher's ability to place him or herself in the place of the other and to understand the point of view of the other.
3. Understand that culture influences every aspect of a student's life including his or her own feelings, thoughts, values, expectations, actions, sense of self and of others.
4. Know that cross-cultural relationships are likely to involve miscommunication and misjudging.
5. Withhold judgment until one has enough information and adequate knowledge and understanding of the world of the student.
6. Tolerate ambiguity and develop the readiness to react to different, new and unpredictable situations.
7. Value one's own cultural heritage and examine the behaviors, feelings, actions, and values that are important in one's own views of teaching and learning.
8. Realize that it is difficult to challenge one's own assumptions about culturally distinct students even though one wants to think that he or she is impartial and unbiased with them.
9. Become aware of his or her own negative stereotypes and emotional reactions toward other cultural and ethnic groups.
10. Understand the sociopolitical influences that affect the lives of diverse cultural and ethnic groups due to issues such as immigration, unemployment, poverty and racism.
11. See the student as both a unique person and as a member of a distinct cultural/ethnic group, and acknowledge her or his biculturality and/or bilinguality.
12. Recognize the unique learning styles, vocational goals and life purposes of individuals and develop appropriate interventions in regard to facilitating these.
13. Realize that in a pluralistic society cultures do not exist in a more or less stable form—they influence one another.

14. Cultivate a school environment where multiple voices and diverse narratives enrich students' learning and experiences.
15. Foster cultural interchange, dialogue and a sense of community among all students.

So far we have looked at how contemporary multicultural counseling understandings and principles can contribute to teacher training and development in cross-cultural communication attitudes and skills. Diversity training in the Greek educational setting can also draw from understandings and insights on issues of diversity as they have been, historically, conceptualized within the context of Greek thought. Along these lines, the following section explores the notions of “otherness” and difference in the philosophical thought of Aristotle and the Areopagitical writings.

Diversity in Unity and Unity in Diversity

One citizen differs from the other but the preservation of the koinonia (communion, society) is the common business of all and this koinonia is the constitution of a polis (Aristotle, Politics, 1276 b27–31).

A number of scholars have pointed out that excessive emphasis on difference can result in increasing the distance between cultural/ethnic groups. Moreover, it can create feelings of isolation, alienation, separation and fragmentation that undermine intercultural dialogue, understanding and communication. In other words, it can work against the very foundations of a diversity perspective (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). Yet, examining the notions of difference and otherness in Greek thought, we find that they are closely associated with the notions of unity and *koinonia*.

Aristotle, in his *Politics*, referred to the particular, the different and the other in conjunction with the concept of *koinonia* and *polis*. He pointed out that a polis is made up of people who are unlike and different: “Again a *polis* is not made up only of so many men [sic], but of different kinds of men; for similarity does not constitute a *polis*” (*Politics*, 1261 a22–24). Likewise, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he stated that a *koinonia* is not formed between two physicians, but between a physician and a farmer, and generally between persons who are completely different [other], and who may be unequal, though in that case they have to be equalized (1133 a 16–18).

As Anastasiades (2003) observed in connection with the preceding passage and with *Politics* (1276 b27–31) (see above), in Aristotle, “communion [*koinonia*] preserves the otherness.” Likewise, in the philosophical thought of the Areopagitical writings, *koinonia* becomes the place [*topos*] of “the united and the distinct, the identical and the other [different], the like and the unlike, the communion of those which are against each other and the unmixing of those which have been united” (p. 33). Here, otherness and communion are not in contradiction but coincide;

difference does not imply division, fragmentation or separation, and unity does not lead to the dissolving of diversity but to the affirmation of otherness in and through love.

CONCLUSION

In this paper emphasis has been given to the significance of diversity training within the context of multicultural counseling. It has also been stressed that the skills associated with this perspective can contribute a lot to teacher training in regard to understanding diversity issues and developing competencies for the Greek educational setting. As well as drawing from contemporary knowledge and principles within counseling literature for underpinning this, it is considered that diversity training in the Greek context in particular can also draw from historical perspectives and indigenous philosophical constructs, views and metaphors to broaden its theoretical base. More specifically, it would seem that an alternative dimension of the notion of difference as it has been historically conceptualized within the context of Greek philosophical thought, can contribute to contemporary discourse and inquiry on the issue of diversity in unity. An incorporation of local knowledge and indigenous concepts in diversity training, in Greece and elsewhere, could enrich the scope of training, and facilitate learning and performance of cultural competence for teachers and students by taking into consideration the socio-historical reality and experience of teacher trainees and the students with whom they will engage.

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