

Symposium: Cross-cultural Conversations: Forefronting Voices through Qualitative Exploration

Chair/Discussant: PARÉ, David, PhD, University of Ottawa

Cross-cultural awareness—which includes awareness of “self”, awareness of “other”, and how the two intersect—is an important competency for counsellors given increasing diversity in their work. Heightened cross-cultural awareness can also be viewed as a social justice tool in service of empowering the individuals and groups counsellors work with in collaborative efforts towards health, wellbeing, and fulfillment.

This symposium, based on the results of two qualitative research studies and a reflexive self-exploration, aims to provide tools to heighten counsellor awareness while forefronting three different cultural contexts through the exploration of: international students’ counselling experiences in a university setting, Aboriginal youth experiences of becoming active participants in community healing, and a counsellor’s experience as a “cultural outsider” when working with a marginalized group in a developing community abroad.

Whether forefronting the perspective of client, counsellor, or community, these three presentations aim to identify considerations that arose when giving voice to three different cross-cultural experiences. The findings are in service of assisting counsellors in building upon their competencies when working cross-culturally.

Counsellor reflexivity in a cross-cultural context: From awareness to engagement when crossing borders

AUDET, Cristelle, PhD, University of Ottawa

Increasingly we are expanding our counsellor role as we witness human suffering and social injustices in communities abroad. Counsellors may be crossing borders with good intentions but limited training. I am professionally preoccupied by how my presence in communities abroad, and that of other counsellors who “cross borders”, is experienced by the host culture and the extent to which our practices are culturally informed. My experiences working with children orphaned by HIV/AIDS in a poverty-stricken community in post-colonial Kenya have brought to light cross-cultural considerations that reflect a unique intersection. They also highlight the importance of engaging in reflexivity to identify how I can best situate myself as a “cultural outsider” while navigating a cultural environment unfamiliar to me. As it can be difficult to conduct research in another country to learn more about cross-cultural considerations, I draw from my experiences abroad to engage in a structured self-reflection grounded in the limited literature and research on international counselling. I argue that reflexivity can unveil our cultural leanings as they intersect with our understanding of the socio-political environment in which we practice. I also discuss reflexive tools that may generate insight into how we individually position ourselves in consideration of “other” when working cross-culturally, and do so in the spirit of heightening cross-cultural awareness and discourse.

Culture in counselling: A qualitative exploration of international students’ university counselling experiences

NAJMI, Setareh, BA, University of Ottawa

A review of the literature suggests that there are cross-cultural barriers that interfere with international students having their needs met through the counselling process which, in turn, create challenges for counsellors working in university settings. This presentation will focus on a data set stemming from a larger qualitative study which explored three international students’ experiences of receiving counselling

services in a university setting. In order to gather rich and descriptive information, a phenomenological qualitative approach was used. The participant sample consisted of two female international students and one male international student who were recruited using criterion sampling from two universities in eastern Canada. Interview questions were derived from the literature and were tested through a pilot study. Data collection was conducted through a face-to-face semi-structured interview with each participant. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed for analysis. During member check, each participant received a summary of the interview to provide feedback. Upon completion of member check, necessary changes were made to the interview summaries. Data analyses consisted of a within-person analysis for each participant and a between-person analysis. For the within-person analysis, each transcribed interview was read multiple times to obtain a general understanding of the interview. A list of significant statements and “units of meaning” were developed and verified by the help of an auditor. Through within and between-person analysis, specific and common themes were developed for each interview. The final step of data analysis consisted of developing clusters of meaning units and themes which helped illuminate the phenomenon under study. Eight main themes emerged of which the following three themes will be presented in the context of understanding cultural implications of working with international students: 1) expectations of counselling, 2) perceptions of counsellor, and 3) perceptions of culture in counselling. It may be of value for counsellors to consider cross-cultural considerations when working with international students from different cultural backgrounds.

Specifically, counsellors may enhance counselling experiences of this population through a judicious balance between demonstrating knowledge they possess of the client’s cultural background and acknowledging client uniqueness within their culture. This and other findings will be discussed in the context of cultural competencies that may be useful when working with international students.

Youth engagement as a tool for empowerment and healing among Aboriginal communities

CALLINGHAM, Christina, University of Ottawa

There exists a general perception that the youth population is “at risk”, unable or unwilling to contribute positively to their own development or to the common good. Aboriginal youth in Canada are no exception, particularly given the health and social challenges stemming from a history of marginalization and social injustice. Despite these challenges, Aboriginal youth across the country have expressed a need to be valued as contributors to community health and healing, and have taken initiative to this effect. One way Aboriginal youth have taken initiative is through participation in programs that promote youth engagement. Through this engagement, Aboriginal youth have a presence and bring fresh perspectives to the Aboriginal healing movement. Youth engagement provides opportunity for meaningful engagement of young people in leadership and decision-making for the betterment of their communities, and can occur in many settings including both a community and counselling contexts. In communities, engagement can be integrated into programs where youth are supported and given opportunity to plan and develop initiatives. In counselling settings, counsellors can engage youth in the therapeutic process through adapting a client-centered approach and providing space for collaboration in therapeutic youth groups. This presentation will (1) explore strategies for promoting youth engagement, (2) introduce links between youth engagement and Aboriginal healing, (3) present a case study demonstrating perceived impact of youth engagement for a young Aboriginal youth, and (4) explore opportunity for engagement strategies to be integrated into the counselling environment.