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Enhancing Social Justice and Multicultural Counseling Competence through Cultural Immersion: A Guide for Faculty

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Enhancing Social Justice and Multicultural Counseling Competence through Cultural Immersion: A Guide for Faculty

Abstract

Cultural immersion experiences can have a lifelong impact on counseling students' development and identity. The authors describe the connection between cultural immersion experiences and multicultural competence. The authors also offer their professional experiences with international cultural immersion, provide a framework for counselor educators to create these experiences for counseling students, and include practical examples of how to intentionally structure each component of the trip to enhance student growth and development.

Keywords

international immersion, study abroad, cultural competence, international counseling

Leaders within the helping professions have called to internationalize educational programs in counseling (Wathen & Kleist, 2015; West-Olatunji et al., 2011). As the mental health field continues to expand around the world, counseling professionals must engage in culturally competent practice with diverse clients (Barden & Cashwell, 2013). However, historically counseling students and graduates have reported a lack of preparedness in working with clients from various backgrounds (Barden et al. 2014), which may stem from insufficient andragogy that fails to foster multicultural competence and social justice (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). One strategy to internationalize educational programs and instill a culture of multicultural and social justice proficiency is to engage students in short-term cultural immersion experiences within another country. Cultural immersion involves intentionally being present in a culturally unfamiliar space in order to foster a deeper understanding of one's relation to self and others (Canfield et al., 2009). Cultural immersion can be a powerful training tool to enhance multicultural counseling competency and stimulate growth from ethnocentric thinking to an appreciation of various cultural traditions, values, and customs (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004). This article will review the literature on fostering multicultural and social justice competency in counseling students through cultural immersion experiences and describe methods for organizing cultural immersion opportunities within counselor education.

Multicultural and Social Justice Competency Training

Counselors are called to provide culturally competent services to diverse clients (ACA, 2014; Coleman, 2006). Counseling students are taught to be socially just, multiculturally competent practitioners (Ratts et al., 2015). The multicultural competencies (MCCs) developed by Sue et al. (1992) provided a framework for counselors to develop awareness of their own values and biases, knowledge and understanding of group cultural characteristics, and skills to provide counseling interventions in a sensitive and appropriate way. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) were written to revise and

update the MCCs with a clear focus on social justice (Ratts et al., 2015). The new framework highlights the intersectionality of multiple identities within individuals and emphasizes power and privilege within the counseling relationship.

The MSJCCs focus on counselors' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action in four areas: counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015). The MSJCCs support the notion that counselor self-awareness can increase by taking action to learn about one's assumptions and biases. One way to do this is through intentionally putting one's self in a culturally different environment. Cultural immersion provides the opportunity for counseling students to learn about themselves, gain a deeper understanding about privileged and marginalized identities, and explore how oppression influences experiences.

Multiculturally aware and socially-just counselors seek opportunities to engage in collaboration and communication that ignite discussion on stereotypes, privilege, and oppression and stress the importance of the application of various theories and identity development models to assess areas of personal and professional growth. Counseling students can become more open to other's important cultural identities and develop cultural humility by immersing oneself in diverse communities and working through the discomfort that comes with learning about privileged and marginalized identities (Ratts et al., 2015).

Counselor educators are called to enhance counselor multicultural competence (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004) and integrate a variety of teaching practices throughout the counseling curriculum to instill the MSJCCs in their students. Revisiting counselor preparation and andragogical methods, including cultural immersion, is paramount to considering other options for multicultural and social justice training.

Enhancing Multicultural and Social Justice Competency

Ethical and accreditation standards (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016) place requirements on counselors to accept multiculturalism as a core component of the counseling profession (Barden & Cashwell, 2013).

Counselor educators must develop and utilize effective training methods to help counseling students come to understand the cultural contexts, perceptions and worldviews of others (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; McDowell et al., 2012). Counselor educators need to train counseling students to move beyond ethnocentric perspectives and instead learn to integrate client worldviews into the counseling process (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Pedersen et al., 2008). In order to practice cultural proficiency, counseling students must develop self-awareness, appreciate clients' worldviews, navigate privileged and marginalized statuses present in the counseling relationship, and implement culturally responsive counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015).

Fostering multicultural and social justice competence requires counseling students to experience an internal shift in the way they think about and perceive the world. For this shift to occur, counseling students need to experience cognitive dissonance (Brown et al., 2014). When faced with cognitive dissonance, choose whether to face their own values and biases or ignore the challenge (Cranton, 2011). Counselor educators should consider andragogical methods that balance the focus of challenging students to face this internal tension while providing support and safety (Brown et al., 2014).

Traditionally, counseling curriculum has focused on theoretical or conceptual knowledge through lecture and readings that emphasize knowledge of cultures, but these methods do not teach practical skills that leads counseling students to effectively counsel diverse clients (Cates & Schaeffle, 2009). Additionally, when counselor educators emphasize the cognitive/knowledge domain of cultural competence and may miss the opportunity to enhance counseling students' cultural self-awareness (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Pieterse et al., 2009). There is further argument that simply learning about cultural differences in clients fails to address the social justice issues and the systemic and oppressive factors in clients' lives that impact mental health and wellness (Ratts & Wood, 2011).

In order to bring learning beyond culture and knowledge dimensions, counselor educators can focus on active learning principles such as discussion groups, case studies, role-plays, reflections, experimental learning and immersion experiences (Brown et al., 2014). These activities require students to become involved with and be challenged by material in a deeper way, facilitating more substantial learning (Halx, 2010). The likelihood of creating long lasting learning outcomes increases when educators challenge students to integrate theory into practice (Pompa, 2002). Additionally, counselor training is most effective when new concepts are directly applicable to students' daily lives (Collins & Pieterse, 2007). Therefore, counselor educators must bridge knowledge obtained in the classroom to situations experienced in real world settings. Counselor educators do this by meeting students where they are at developmentally and fostering opportunities to connect existing knowledge with new experiences (Burnes & Manese, 2008). Given that imparting knowledge via the cognitive domain does not lead to self-awareness or mimic real-world settings (Arrendondo & Toporek, 2004), active learning strategies applied to counseling students' lives are more effective at facilitating deeper learning (Brown et al., 2014; Collins & Pieterse, 2007), a cultural immersion could be a way to extend clinical training beyond classroom learning (Arrendondo & Toporek, 2004).

Cultural Immersion Experiences

Counselor educators can enhance the counseling curriculum by offering cultural immersion experiences for students. When counseling students engage in a cultural immersion, they are invited to enter into a different culture in an effort to see the world through different eyes. The goal of cultural immersion within counselor education is for students to be introduced to new ways of living, interact with persons from other cultures, recognize their own biases, and consider how to use this knowledge to become multiculturally proficient counselors. While counseling students may have previously encountered cultural differences related to gender and race, when immersed in a cultural other than one's own, students are confronted with intercultural differences they may not have previously considered such as diet, hygiene, personal space, and

family dynamics issues (Goode, 2007). Being immersed in a different culture allows counseling students to practice cross-cultural communication skills, gain cultural self-awareness, and develop an appreciation of global social justice issues. However, there are many factors for counselor educators to consider in order to create a successful cultural immersion experience for students.

Counselor educators should be cognizant of the various intercultural dimensions to expose students too throughout the entire experience as these experiences allow counseling students to have direct and extended contact while immersed in a culture different than their own (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Barden et al., 2014). Cultural immersion experiences can vary in many ways, but may allow students opportunities to attend lectures on the history of the counseling field in the host country, participate in site visits, meeting and talking with other mental health professionals and community members (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009), engage in seminars and service learning, provide services, and participate in groups and guided reflection (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; Shannonhouse et al., 2015). The integration of a cultural immersion experience, in conjunction with reflective experiences, supports the aim for students to graduate from the program with cultural knowledge, skills, and awareness (Shannonhouse et al., 2015).

Cultural immersion experiences allow students to build on their own personal multicultural identity as well as their professional identity. Immersion experiences can help students move beyond classroom knowledge (Gesinski et al., 2010) to enhance their cultural awareness and sensitivity along with knowledge and skills, which are necessary to be culturally competent (Burnett, et al., 2004; Canfield et al., 2009). Exposure to and contact with persons from diverse backgrounds via cultural immersion may increase multicultural and professional identities as well as cultural empathy, awareness, self-efficacy, and competence (Barden et al., 2014). In addition to cultural competence development, cultural immersion experiences have promoted reflection about social justice and advocacy (Dietz & Baker, 2019). These affective processes are

essential building blocks to developing cultural competence and ethical practice within counselor education (Pieterse et al., 2009).

Students who participated in cultural immersion experiences reported changes in cultural competence because of their experiences (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). They also report enhanced cultural self-awareness about discrimination and prejudice, cultural pride, and cultural sensitivity (Smith-Augustine et al., 2014). Additionally, researchers have found that cultural immersion experiences are successful in challenging counseling student's biases as well as fostering personal and professional growth (DeRicco & Sciarra 2005; Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen 2001; Ishii et al., 2009; Prosek & Michel, 2016). The transformative learning that occurs while abroad has lasting effects even after students return home (Smith et al., 2014).

Facilitating Cultural Immersion Experiences

Given the support for cultural immersion experiences to enhance multicultural and social justice competence in the areas of increased self-awareness and challenging biases (Prosek & Michel, 2016; Smith-Augustine et al., 2014), it is beneficial to consider how to organize and facilitate these experiences for counseling students. Barden and Cashwell (2013) outlined critical factors to consider when creating a cultural immersion experience including structural factors such as considering timing, location, and organization, and process factors including the relational and group dynamics involved before, during, and after the experience. Below we will extend the discussion regarding structural and process factors of a cultural immersion experience and give specific examples of how to plan and implement such a trip. We will integrate examples from cultural immersion experiences and student quotes from evaluations to highlight the value of these factors.

Structural Factors

Planning for cultural immersion experiences requires considerable thought, planning, and preparation so students can get the most out of the experience. It can be helpful for faculty members to develop a proposal to effectively plan for the cultural immersion. We have included a number of structural factors that would be helpful to consider, including: university support, location and timing, designing the curriculum, organizing the schedule, determining the budget, and practical planning tips.

University Support

Many factors go into designing and implementing a successful immersion experience, and it is important to consult with the Study Abroad/International Office to determine processes to follow and supports available within the university. The types of services offered vary by university, and may include guidance to develop a budget, advertising the immersion to prospective students, hosting pre and post-departure meetings, and helping faculty members prepare for and navigate emergencies while abroad. For example, at the university where we hosted cultural immersion experiences, the International Office developed a system for faculty to lead cultural immersion experiences which included an application and required approval from the Department Chair, Dean, and Provost at our home institution as well as at the university we hosted the cultural immersions. Within this system, the International Office staff conducted screening interviews with students, obtained travel and health insurance for students and faculty, arranged payment, communicated departure and arrival dates with campus police, and provided tips for traveling abroad.

If the university does not have a Study Abroad/International Office, or the services are limited, these processes must be established and coordinated by the faculty member(s) leading the immersion. This can allow for greater autonomy, but less guidance through the process. Thus, in addition to developing a proposal exploring structural factors, we recommend consulting with colleagues within the university and at other universities who have led cultural immersions. Faculty members are strongly advised to attend a cultural

immersion as a participant and/or travel to the immersion destination on a scouting trip prior to leading their own. For example, the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) offers Institute Trips that counselor educators can attend. It is also beneficial for at least two faculty or staff members to participate in the immersion, which allows for shared responsibility throughout the process.

Location and Timing

One of the first steps in setting up a cultural immersion experience is to determine the location and time of year. Locations must be carefully considered, as should andragogical perspectives for adult learners. Counselor educators should begin by looking for opportunities to foster racial and cultural self-awareness throughout the experience (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Barden and Cashwell (2013) also emphasized the importance of students' feeling different as a pertinent theme among immersion experiences. Providing students with privileged identities experience living within a minority position may be more important than the location itself. In fact, counseling students' levels of self-awareness increased most when exposed to differences in ethnicity, language, food, religion, and traditions (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; McDowell et al., 2012). Thus, counselor educators should keep these factors in mind when selecting a location.

Practically, counselor educators could choose a country where there is a pre-established connection either with a university, service provider, school, mental health organization, or counseling association. For example, the National Board of Certified Counselors-International (NBCC-I) has helped advance mental health around the world and has regional offices in several countries including Argentina, Bhutan, Bulgaria, Greece, Malawi and Mexico. Additionally, many countries have their own counseling associations. For example, when participating in cultural immersions in Ireland, we partnered with the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

If counselor educators do not have an established connection, there may be administrators, colleagues, friends or family members with connections in a university overseas. Even if it is a connection in

a department not related to counseling, those professors may be able to connect counselor educators to a more relevant department. Since counseling is not an established profession all over the world, counselor educators may look for connections in psychology, social work, human/public relations, or medical departments. Another way of finding a connection is through international students as they often have a connection to a university in their home country that could be explored. Additionally, many counseling colleagues from around the world meet at national and international counseling conferences. If there is no preestablished connection, consider a cold call connection or scheduling a meeting with a potential colleague when traveling.

The timing of the immersion experience is important. The literature on cultural immersion experiences notes different time frames for various experiences; however, Barden and Cashwell (2013) reported that since cultural dissonance is subjective, no specific length or duration of an immersion experience has been suggested. However, counseling faculty need to consider the safety of the identified location, the weather, and time of year. We have facilitated cultural immersions at different times throughout the year (e.g., January, March, May, September, December) depending on the location. We tend to look for time periods during school breaks so students can attend without missing many classes. We also considered weather when scheduling European immersions in the spring, summer, and fall and Thai immersions in the winter. Additionally, we are mindful that scheduling immersions around National and International holidays can affect costs, availability of accommodations, ease of travel, and cultural expectations. Knowing the this timing context of the country being visited is important for preparing for cultural sensitivity as well. For example, the first year we scheduled a trip to Thailand, the King had recently passed away. We learned the people in Thailand spend a year in mourning for their king and show respect by wearing only black. We needed to adjust our packing list to include black clothes to show respect for our hosts.

The university or program schedules of the other countries also need to be weighed. For example, in Ireland we have stayed in the university residence halls during their scheduled summer break, which would

not be available during the academic school year. As counselor educators create the schedule, they should build in time to arrive at least a day or two ahead of the students. This allows time for unexpected travel delays, acclimation to the time zone and to arrange on-site logistics prior to students arriving.

Designing the Curriculum

Cultural immersion experiences are most successful when connected to course-related components (DeRicco & Sciarra 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke 2010). There are a few options for setting up the course requirements. One option is to create an elective or independent study course, which allows for more freedom in terms of curriculum covered in the course. For example, we have offered electives focused on counseling in specific regions of the world or certain counseling modalities, such as play therapy. A second option is to offer a required course in the counseling program as the study abroad cultural immersion course. For example, we have designed and taught courses that met CACREP standards for social and cultural diversity, human growth and development, and career development in cultural immersion trips to Thailand, Italy, Ireland, and France. We developed both masters and doctoral or advanced-level courses to satisfy educational requirements for students in different programs.

If the immersion experience is set up to meet a specific course in the program, then the counseling faculty can arrange readings and assignments required before, during, and after the trip in order to meet course requirements. Before the trip, students can be required to read about counseling in the country they are visiting, the political climate, and cultural issues they may encounter. For example, to prepare for a cultural immersion in Ireland, students read about the history of the counseling profession in Ireland as well as the historical conflict between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (referred to as the Troubles).

The assignments for cultural immersion course are similar to those required as a course taken on ground in the U.S. (Alexander et al., 2005). For example, students in both the cultural immersion and on-ground sections of a social and cultural diversity class are assigned the same seminal readings (e.g. ACA-

adopted competencies, critical race theory) and expected to discuss and reflect on learned information. However, instead of only writing a paper, as the on-ground students do, students participating in the immersion select a topic in which they would like to study and interview a Thai person regarding the subject area and its relevance in Thailand.

Critical reflection through journaling can provide students with a space to process emotions and facilitate self-discovery during their experience (Keller-Dupree & van der Hagen, 2015). During the trip, the students can be required to complete readings and journal reflections. The students can also be required to present during the trip as an assignment. Students can deliver presentations to an audience of their peers or to an audience in the host country, which can be a more rewarding experience. American students in the cultural diversity course in Thailand presented to medical students and faculty on issues of mental health and had the added component of considering the cultural adaptations of the topic for their audience and presenting with an interpreter. Often discussions during these presentations can be a starting point for valuable cultural conversations between the local and US audience members. After the cultural immersion, students can be asked to do a final project to synthesize the learning experience. The courses intentionally developed to meet CACREP standards are enhanced through the cultural immersion. The students who have attended the courses have confirmed in their feedback on the course the usefulness of these assignments. One stated:

All the material and assignments were challenging professionally and personally, as each student was moved toward a better understanding of their own personal bias and the importance of the multicultural experience in challenging these biases ...The faculty assigned appropriate online assignments and discussion, but also provided engaging topics for debate and discussion multiple times each day, connecting various experiences and parts of the course.

Organizing the Schedule

When designing the schedule for the trip, several experiences should be included. Learning experiences can be considered formal or informal. Formal experiences typically consist of scheduled meetings with “agencies, universities, and historical sites” (Barden & Cashwell, 2013, p. 291), whereas informal experiences may consist of interactions with locals on daily cultural excursions, eating at local restaurants, and other scheduled activities. We included a balance of formal learning and sightseeing opportunities to provide both informal and formal learning when organizing the schedule. For example, on a fifteen-day trip, we plan for two travel days, eight formal learning days, and five days of cultural excursions. Counselor educators can work with travel agencies that specialize in cultural immersion to design a relevant and realistic schedule.

Formal learning can be scheduled to take place via a conference or at a specific organization or university. We planned the Thailand immersion experience in a way that invited speakers from a Thai university, counseling faculty, and counseling students who were studying abroad. The students presented and exchanged information on mental health that was relevant, applicable, and requested by the Thai people. Another option is for presentations to take place in existing classes in a host university where scheduling would be dependent on their course offerings. When working with a travel agency that specializes in cultural immersion, staff members can arrange for local speakers in the field. For example, during a cultural immersion in France, several social service providers presented to us about their training and current work using mindfulness, Transactional Analysis and Psychoanalysis. Counselor educators can also work with travel agencies or local guides to set up tours and meetings within mental health agencies and schools. These site visits are memorable formal learning opportunities that allow for students to discover how mental health providers support clients in clinical and educational settings in the host country. Examples from our experiences include visiting a child and adolescent counseling center, a psychiatric hospital, a school for

individuals who are visually impaired, a tour of homeless services, college counseling centers, and substance addiction treatment centers, among others. Finally, service-learning projects can become part of the trip for students. Barden and Cashwell (2013), reported that students participated in service-learning opportunities prior to the immersion experience as a way to enhance the development of cultural sensitivity. If engaging in service-learning projects, it is important to partner with local experts to ensure services are provided as part of an on-going, sustainable, and culturally responsive delivery program.

Informal learning takes place via excursions, which are a vital part of the immersion experience. Existing tour guiding agencies provide private tours and is a helpful way to explore an unfamiliar location and get accurate historical information in an intimate setting. These tour guides are accustomed to working with larger groups, offer transportation, arrange meals, and share rich knowledge about the country and culture throughout the tours.

Students' feedback has been very positive regarding informal learning opportunities. One student stated,

Having guides for the excursions we went on were massively beneficial because while we can read up and learn before going to a certain place, being guided by those who already live this way and teaching us through their eyes was a whole different way of learning. It was like having an inside look at the way Thai people live and answering questions we didn't even know to ask.

Determining the Travel Budget

Setting the budget is a major part of cultural immersion experiences. Budgeting can be done a variety of ways and sometimes the University may guide counselor educators through the process. Typically, the most hands-off approach is to coordinate with a study abroad company such as the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE). These companies are helpful if there is little experience with traveling, booking, and managing accommodations. Study abroad companies ask for specificities such as hotel type

preferences, locations, and agenda. The companies then do the groundwork and will provide a quote for the whole trip. However, if you plan cultural immersion experience yourself, there is more flexibility and it can be less expensive.

We have been involved in the planning for these trips, and strongly recommend the following items be considered in the budget: airfare, ground transportation, lodging, excursions, food, travel insurance, miscellaneous emergency money, and leader costs. We have summarized each of these areas below.

Airfare. There are a couple options regarding airfare as it can be included in course costs or left for students to cover on their own. We have not included airfare in the cost of the trip since this price can vastly vary. Additionally, some students prefer to fly back on different days or fly to/from different locations. Students can buy their own flights, and faculty set a day and time to arrive by, which is clearly spelled out so that there is a common meeting time for the group to begin the immersion experience. If students want to travel together, the faculty have recommended one flight set at a good price, travel time, and the students take it upon themselves to book/buy that flight. If the university works with a travel company, this company can also search for flights and lock in fares for a group.

Lodging. It is important to select hotels in safe, centralized locations to reduce ground transportation needs. Hotels near public transportation and a variety of food options make it easier for students to explore during free time. Additionally, you can arrange for participants to stay in on-campus residence halls or apartments. We select lodging with breakfast, so that at least one meal per day is provided in the trip costs.

We have used travel websites such as Travelocity and booking.com to search for costs when setting up a budget. In an effort to save money and make the trip more affordable for students, we planned for two students per room.

Excursions. Counselor education faculty need to decide the number of days allotted for sightseeing. Excursions are typically offered in either half or full day options. We recommend contacting the tour agencies

to obtain a quote for the dates you are available and provide the projected number of students/faculty in attendance. This way, the price per participant for the sightseeing can be budgeted. Researching the agencies online and reading reviews is an important way to select a reputable agency for the tours.

Ground transportation. Ground transportation needs to be considered for getting to and from the airport, the hotel, the university or agency, and to site visits. Hiring a local van or bus and driver is a reliable and convenient way to get the group from place to place. When asking for a quote, faculty can determine the number of days and locations that the drivers will be required in order to ask what the extra costs for fuel or mileage might be. Other types of transportation to consider is moving from different cities during the trip. Local flights, vans, or trains and use of public transportation are options and should be included in the trip price for the students.

Food. Group meals are a nice way to bond over local food and discuss the experiences each attendee or participant is having. When budgeting for the trip, it is good to set aside money for one or two group meals at the beginning of the trip, and especially at the end to say goodbye and wrap up the experience.

Leader expenses and miscellaneous costs. Leader expenses are calculated by adding up lodging, expected flight costs, tours, and dividing it by the minimum number of students attending. Group size is something to consider in terms of structural factors. Cashwell and Barden (2014) recommended groups of ten or less in order to help participants feel safe throughout their vulnerability, and to encourage deeper processing of experiences. We have found smaller groups make it easier to facilitate meaningful discussions. Unexpected expenses such as tips or unexpected taxes can arise, so it is important to plan in advance and have some extra money in the budget. Travel insurance and gifts for hosts should also be considered in the budget.

We have found the cost for students to be the most prohibitive part of the cultural immersion experience. The International Office at the university we hosted the cultural experience through offered small \$500 grants for students attending cultural immersions. Faculty could look for grants and external funding as

a way of subsidizing the trip. We have looked for external funding as a way of subsidizing the trip for students, but we have not discovered many options. Some counselor educators coordinate fundraising events to help off-set the costs. However, most students pay for the cultural immersion with their own funds. We do encourage students to speak with staff within financial aid in the university to discuss options, as some students have used student loans to cover the costs.

Practical Planning Tips

After the schedule, dates, and budget are in place, it is time to advertise the course to all the eligible students. To advertise, a flyer with basic information such as dates, the course outline, highlights of the trip, and dates of informational sessions, is sent out to all eligible students. As a way of reaching more students, consider if students from other programs will be allowed to audit the course and attend without being responsible for the assignments. Faculty should also visit new student orientations and other courses in person to spread the word and answer questions. We have invited previous attendees to speak at orientations to share the value of the experience from their perspective. Consider focusing on the value for the students as well as university as new international relationships are formed.

We recommend student completion of a formal application and screening process to ensure that students are academically and dispositionally prepared for the trip. The application can include a short essay asking students why they want to participate in the trip, what they would bring to the experience, and/or about how they cope with stress and unfamiliar situations. Faculty leaders can also facilitate interviews to discuss the trip and ask similar questions. Setting application deadlines is critical as the budget determines the minimum number of students needed to sign up. If those numbers are not met by the deadlines set, then the trip is not financially feasible. In our programs, students are asked to for a \$500 deposit to ensure their commitment to the trip. A sample timeline for a trip that takes place in January is included in the table.

Table 1*Sample Timeline*

Month	Faculty Tasks	Student Tasks
February	Initial planning with host county to set agreed upon dates Set budget	
April-September	Advertise for cultural immersion experience	
August-September	Host information sessions to answer questions about the trip Accept applications for the trip Begin review process of applicants	
October 1	Confirm Conference topics Create Syllabus and plan for readings and assignments	Deadline for applications Deposit due
October 15-October 31	Buy airline tickets Book hotels and excursions	Buy airline tickets
Early November		Additional payment due
Mid-November	Host pre-departure meeting Meet at a restaurant to begin building	Begin assigned readings Assign presentation topics if applicable
December		Final payment due
January	Depart for cultural immersion experience	Depart for cultural immersion experience

Pre-departure meetings

Pre-departure meetings are best when structured and tailored to each specific immersion experience (Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009) and used to discuss and share expectations, learn about the socio-political history of the immersion setting, and increase knowledge regarding language and cultural norms. Pre-departure meetings can also aide in the establishment of group cohesion (Barden &

Cashwell, 2013). We suggest creating an outline of topics to discuss in pre-departure meetings including basic information (e.g. types of clothes needed including formal and professional dress, passports, currency, and electronic adapters, flight information, insurance coverage, and emergency contacts; health and communication). Faculty should check the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website for the recommended vaccines and the socio-political state for the country being visited.

Communication is an important aspect to consider prior to departure. Creating a Facebook or Whatsapp group can be used to make announcements and to send reminders prior to the trip, to communicate throughout the trip, post pictures during the trip, and to re-connect once students return home. Many places have internet access to connect over the WhatsApp texting app, but if students do not have an international plan, they may not be able to communicate when outside of a Wi-Fi zone. Therefore, pre-departure meetings can be used to encourage students to contact their carrier to set up a temporary international plan. Additionally, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) suggested that when choosing a location with a different primary language, pre-departure meetings can also be used to introduce some basic language before the immersion. Thus, we suggest providing students with a cheat sheet of basic or common words, statements, greetings in the native language.

Process Factors

In addition to the structural factors discussed above, several process factors also need to be considered. Process factors refer to group safety, embracing ambiguity, honoring one's needs, modeling authenticity, and post-immersion debriefing. Each of these elements are utilized to enhance learning and positive outcomes (Barden & Cashwell, 2013).

Group safety

Cultural immersion experiences can be beneficial as they place students in “somewhat disorienting situations in which they will be exposed to unknown cultural challenges” (Barden &

Cashwell, 2013, p. 291). Students may face emotional risks as they begin to recognize and address internalized biases and assumptions. Critical incidents like these have been shown to lead to a wide range of positive, negative, and diffuse emotional reactions among students (Coleman, 2006). Counseling students engage in the learning process while facilitators encourage group processing of feelings, which needs to be done in a safe environment. DeRicco and Sciarra (2005) noted that students should be “encouraged to integrate their new knowledge and make sense of what it all means” (p. 297). We suggest several ways to facilitate this feeling of safety and learning for students. Faculty members should communicate the need for students to show up with an attitude of flexibility, respect, and the ability to take responsibility for their own “okayness.” During the trip, faculty should be accessible and create space for students to debrief their experiences and emotions.

Embracing Ambiguity

Experiencing cognitive dissonance can be an important part of increasing multicultural competence in counseling students (Brown et al., 2014). During cultural immersion experiences, students will naturally have many opportunities to experience this internal tension. When traveling, many unexpected events will arise, from students’ flights being delayed, to programming falling through, to transportation issues, to unfamiliar foods or cultural norms. Thus, it is important for the leaders and the students to have an attitude of flexibility and to adjust, as needed, to these changes. Faculty can encourage an atmosphere of respect and curiosity, rather than judgment and rigidity. This respect should be given to the group, as in respecting time and showing up at the meeting times promptly, and respect to the culture and country they are visiting. In Thailand, students learn the greetings prior to going as well as specific signs of respect (e.g., pointing the bottoms of the feet towards others or to Buddha statues is seen as very disrespectful).

Honoring One's Needs

Another aspect that can be challenging when traveling in a group is that personal space and desires may not be met in the same way they are home. Students need to be prepared to take care of their own important needs. For example, if someone knows they like to snack throughout the day, they should consider how they will be able to do this on long tour days. Students may get homesick and miss their personal space, so they should be prepared for how they may need to work through these challenging feelings. Counseling faculty can assist by checking in with students, encouraging group reflection, and scheduling personal time for students. Scheduled personal time allows students the chance to recharge and take care of themselves.

Modeling Authenticity

Faculty members should model authenticity and accessibility to the students. Authenticity can be shown by sharing their own fears or challenges of travel and how those challenges have been overcome. This type of vulnerability can model flexibility and adaptability in challenging situations. Being a warm presence for the students and available to the students to process their challenges and the experience is also important. An example of how vital this is for the students became clear when one student wrote in their feedback of the trip,

The faculty were incredibly supportive in helping us navigate our trip and our discussions. While we may have had questions or thoughts on certain social or cultural situations, it was them who let us feel comfortable to actually ask these questions and constructively have discussions about them. They encouraged us to go outside of our limits of thought and experiences and explore why we felt or thought certain ways based on our bias or our own personal cultural experiences. They were leaders but also peers during this trip, allowing us to explore where we wanted to go and still helping us learn valuable lessons along the way.

Debriefing Meetings and Activities

Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) suggested frequent debriefing sessions during the actual immersion experience to support opportunities for reflection (e.g. the processing of one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) and student growth, which leads to increased cultural sensitivity. Students participating in the professor-facilitated multicultural and social justice conversations with peers creates an opportunity for "coproduction of knowledge and enhanced personal agency for students" (Brown et al., 2014, p. 308). Faculty leading a cultural immersion should set up times to have these debriefing opportunities. These can happen formally during a set time at the end of a conference day, or informally during transportation or meal time. We planned in advance and brought specific cultural discussion questions for students to reflect on during these formal and informal times.

One student noted these discussions as being a highlight of the learning:

While the assignments we had and readings we were given were helpful in learning more about how to work with others in counseling who may be different from us socially or culturally, the most important things I learned were from the discussions we had together in person. It was real and it was all around us, occasionally questions would get asked about the culture or social environment happening when driving past certain towns and cities which spark a discussion.

Post-immersion reflections have also been found to be helpful (Barden & Cashwell, 2014) as they address the importance of taking time to process and "unpack" experiences. As students reflect on their experiences, faculty suggest sharing their stories with friends or family. Additionally, students are encouraged to reread their personal journals and debrief with fellow students once returning home. Finally, students are encouraged to share their experiences on a macro level with colleagues and their local community members (Barden & Cashwell, 2013).

In addition to post-immersion reflections and discussions, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) recommended that facilitators should plan for multiple debriefing activities (e.g. a culminating event, opportunity to share how the experience influenced their multicultural development, completing formal evaluations, identifying critical incidents that influenced their experiences, and completing assessments on perceived levels of multicultural and social justice competence) so that participants can evaluate their immersion experience. Students can consider ways to share the experience with students and family back home. One student made a blog for students and friends and family of the whole experience. Another student made a video montage of the trip and the faculty were able to post it on the program's Facebook page to share with students back home. Other students shared their experience during orientation and classes.

Conclusion

Cultural immersion experiences can be a powerful learning opportunity for students and counselor educators, as the real-world exposure to diverse cultures helps to bring awareness, knowledge, and skills beyond the cognitive domain for counselors-in-training (Arrendondo & Toporek, 2004). All persons in the counseling profession need to consistently assess for their own intercultural development and counselor educators can continue to explore best practices to facilitate students' intercultural development (Goode, 2007). Future research is needed to determine which parts of cultural immersion experiences have the greatest impact on fostering counseling students' multicultural and social justice competencies, as well as to determine if these changes impact skill development and if learning extends into the future work of counseling students as clinicians. If these findings can be supported, then there is evidence to support the cultural immersion is experience is valuable (DeRicco & Sciarra 2005; Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen 2001; Ishii et al., 2009; Prosek & Michel, 2016).

There are several ways in which educators can plan for cultural immersion experiences, and we have extended the previous literature to include numerous practical tips throughout the process. We recognize that many colleges and universities do not provide faculty with formal preparation for cultural immersion experiences. Thus, to better prepare counselor educators, workshops with specific content can focus on how to navigate the logistical and intercultural dimensions present while facilitating cultural immersion experiences (Goode, 2007). We specified strategies to develop collaborative partnerships, ideas for scheduling time for education workshops and sightseeing experiences, meaningful and intentional andragogy, and specific tips for both structural and procedural processes. By building ongoing partnerships in various host countries curriculum can be altered and infused to address vital multicultural and social justice issues for the counselors-in-training as well as working towards meeting needs of the host countries. We believe these tools can be applied and adjusted to a variety of education settings and international locations in order to enhance multicultural and social justice competencies around the world.

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