

Assignment 3: Personal Competencies Paper

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### **Section A – Personal Competencies**

I believe I am more culturally competent compared to the beginning of this course as I have obtained many of the criteria outlined as attitudes, skills, and knowledge in the Multicultural Counselling Competencies from Collins and Arthur (2010) through our readings, discussions and learning activities. For example, three areas that I identified for growth at the beginning of this course were:

- a) Domain II, Competency 1 – Demonstrate awareness of the cultural identities of your clients (specifically in the areas of knowledge and skills),
- b) Domain II, Competency 2 – Demonstrate awareness of the relationship of personal culture to health and well-being (specifically in the area of knowledge).
- c) Domain III, Competency 2: Collaborate with clients to establish counselling goals that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity (specifically in the area of skills).

Although these areas are certainly not the only areas that I identified as places for growth, they represent three major categories of significant learning for me in this course. I continue to require ongoing development of my attitudes, knowledge and skills, which I outline in section 2 of this paper.

My ability to demonstrate awareness of the cultural identities of my clients began developing as I learned more about my personal cultural identity. In week 2, I made a family tree going back several generations and learned a great deal about the religious and ethnic roots of my ancestors, helping me to make sense of my own religious beliefs and culture of origin. It was at this point I learned that I am comprised of multiple

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identities that intersect to create a unique individual and my identification is dependent on context. Going forward, I have a much richer understanding of the complexities of culture for my clients and knowledge of various cultural groups, belief systems, within-group variance, and how cultural factors affect each individual's counselling process. Another learning moment that contributed to developing this competency was learning that culture is not limited to race and ethnicity, but includes religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, and contextual factors such as oppression or war.

Having a better understanding of my own culture led me to become competent in the ways culture influences health and well-being. The week spent studying First Nations counselling approaches was the most influential in helping me understand how oppression, marginalization, and acculturation greatly influence the well-being of both individuals and entire groups of people. Prior to this course I possessed strong biases towards members of my community who are uneducated, unproductive, and low income. I believed their situations to be a result of their lack of effort, poor decisions, or learned helplessness, a fault of their own. Although ashamed of these beliefs, I am proud to say that I now have a much clearer understanding of the societal and contextual influences that contribute to an individual's position in life. Oppression, discrimination, colonization, intergenerational trauma, poverty, lack of opportunity, sexism, ableism as so on, are powerful contributors to an individual's situation, unfortunately more so than his or her choices or will to succeed.

I strongly valued the learning I experienced through reading the articles on Indigenous healing practices, specifically the Wholistic Theory (Absolon, 2010) and the Medicine Wheel. I found the basic tenants of interconnectedness, circularity, and the four

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directions to compliment and enhance my existing spiritual beliefs. I also feel I have a better understanding of the implications of being a Caucasian therapist and working with First Nations, Metis and Inuit clients in Calgary now that I have a conceptual understanding of the historical oppression the Indigenous Peoples faced.

Additionally, I feel more equipped to collaborate with clients to establish counselling goals that are responsive to salient dimensions of cultural identity from my time spent learning about sexual minorities and immigrants/refugees. I have come to understand that although I may think a certain aspect of the client's culture is salient, they may not agree. It is important to first develop a working alliance in a way that compliments his or her cultural idiosyncrasies (such as story telling or sharing a meal) and then ask the client what elements of his or her culture would be important to address in counselling. I will often recall Day-Vines' et al. (2007) explanation that "issues related to race and representation will not undergird ever counseling issue; however, when issues related to race, ethnicity and culture are germane to the presenting problem, as determined by the client's self-avowal, the counselor has an ethical obligation to help the client determine the relevance of theses issues to her or his counseling concern." (p. 402).

Consequently, I strongly believe in the importance of culturally competent counselling and the need for counsellors to take responsibility for their own levels of competency. As Canadian demographics change, the need for culture-infused counselling practice becomes more evident. Not only do I have an ethical obligation to provide culturally sensitive treatments and interventions, I also have a moral obligation to help the client in ways that will be beneficial and healing. In the past, therapists have blindly dominated therapeutic interactions with professional language and meanings that are

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foreign or even contradictory to the client's cultural practices and beliefs (Wendt, Gone & Nagata, 2015) resulting in colonization, oppression, disempowerment, and discrimination (Pare, 2013). I was finally able to integrate this learning this past week as I presented a seminar to 100+ parents called "Healthy Parenting". I helped create this presentation two years ago, and as I read through the PowerPoint slides on Wednesday night, I felt highly anxious because I realized we were subtly imposing Canadian beliefs about how to be a good parent. I did my best in the moment to get through the presentation, however I feel as though my eyes have been opened now and I can't close them. I have already had a discussion with my team about the need to review the presentation with cultural sensitivity in mind so next year we have a more inclusive and sensitive presentation.

My personal definition of Multicultural Counselling and diversity is inline with Arthur and Collins (2005) who define culture-infused counselling as "the conscious and purposeful infusion of cultural awareness and sensitivity into all aspects of the counselling process and all other roles assumed by the counsellor or psychologist" (p. 16). The authors further explain how culture-infused counselling reflects the belief that "culture is a fundamental component of human experience and that no person or group can be fully understood in the absence of a purposeful inquiry into culture" (p. 16). In terms of diversity, I follow the Canadian Psychological Association Code of Ethics which states that clients will not be discriminated against based on culture.

### **Section 2 – Continued growth with Competencies**

I have listed below some of the way I will work to honour various cultures and belief systems:

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- If the client's religious beliefs conflict with ethical practice or research, as is common in the discussion about conversion therapy, then I would present the research in an objective way and help the client process and either accept or reject the research. I would get regular supervision to monitor my bracketing and follow ethical decision making models to help me navigate the grey situations that arise.
- Not being afraid to ask the client about their beliefs, spiritual or religious practices, and how they would like to integrate their beliefs into therapy.
- I will be flexible in my approach to the counselling process, in that there is not just one way to do counselling. I will work towards an integrated approach to counselling so I can draw on various theoretical and practical constructs to guide the counselling process.
- I will work to help the client develop deeper awareness on how their beliefs influence them psychologically without imposing my biases or beliefs on the client.
- I will aim to discuss cultural background and influences regularly with the client and explore the client's expectations of counselling from a cultural perspective—e.g. does the client want me to provide advice, allowing family members to be part of the process, pray before we begin our session etc.
- Continue to seek out learning opportunities for growth and development in the area of culturally competent counselling.

I have created the following table to outline the MCC's that I have identified as targets for continued professional development and how I plan on doing so.

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Competency	Means for increasing competency
<p><b>Domain 1, Competency 1</b></p> <p>Honestly acknowledge ethnocentric values and influences from your cultural socialization.</p> <p>Function at the autonomy level of cultural identity development by: engaging in thoughtful analysis of cultural factors in self and others and taking action to support non-oppressive practices.</p>	<p>I will continue to address my cultural biases in discussions with colleagues, peers, and supervisors. I will reflect personally on the ways in which my biases and stereotypes influence my work with clients. In this course, I gained foundational knowledge of my beliefs so the next steps is to engage in social justice endeavors within my community and with my clients.</p>
<p><b>Domain 1, Competency 3</b></p> <p>Maintain theoretical flexibility to organize information about your clients.</p> <p>Adapt Western theoretical paradigms for counselling across cultures.</p> <p>Incorporate non-Western practices where appropriate and within your scope of expertise.</p>	<p>An ability to maintain theoretical flexibility will likely come as I develop my own integrative theoretical practice and become competent in various interventions and approaches. In the process of learning how to apply specific interventions and theoretical constructs, I will seek out information on ways to adapt my approaches and training in a variety of practices to utilize depending on the client's cultural location.</p>
<p><b>Domain 1, Competency 4</b></p> <p>Be willing to work through your defensiveness and guilt as a member of the dominant population.</p> <p>Take active steps to develop and demonstrate nonracist, nonsexist, nonclassist, nonheterosexist, nonableist, and nonageist attitudes, beliefs, and practices</p>	<p>Although I believe I have come lengths and strides in this competency, I included it as an area for continued growth because I am confident I still have some underlying biases and guilt that did not surface in this course. A future area for focus is to move from a place of discussion about social justice, to a place of action (e.g. attending and participating in a Gay-Straight Alliance).</p>

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<p><b>Domain 2, Competency 1</b></p> <p>Avoid using general cultural knowledge in stereotypical ways with clients</p>	<p>This competency goes along with my plan for competency 3 (above) in that I need to be more knowledgeable about non-western healing traditions and become trained in a variety of approaches. At this point, I am at risk of generalizing because I have the most knowledge in western approaches to healing.</p>
<p><b>Domain 2, Competency 2</b></p> <p>Develop trusting relationships with community members for the purpose of consultation and referral.</p>	<p>I plan to start working towards this competency by consulting with my colleagues on the FNMI team in my office. I have already had two coffee talks with a co-worker about the Elders in our community and First Nations traditional healing approaches. Eventually, I would like to develop my own relationships with indigenous healers so I can call on them for support.</p>
<p><b>Domain 3, Competency 1</b></p> <p>Recognize that counselling skills, styles, and approaches may be culture-bound.</p> <p>Explain the conditions under which counselling styles and approaches should be modified to match client preferences and communication styles.</p>	<p>I do not feel I have a strong enough foundation in any particular approach to therapy (e.g. Narrative, CBT, Adlerian, etc) to successfully modify the approach in a culturally responsible way. First, I need to gain competence in the approach of my choice (Narrative) and then I need to obtain supervision and consultation for modifying the approach to match the clients cultural needs.</p>



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**Domain 3, Competency 2**

Demonstrate expertise in the use of both traditional and culture-specific assessment instruments and procedures.

- Use procedures and interpret findings in a way that recognizes the cultural characteristics of the clients.
- Modify assessment tools and qualify conclusions where appropriate.
- Recognize and work to eliminate biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices/contexts in assessment and evaluation.

Implement a multilevel, multimodal, and multisource approach to assessment to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance.

Incorporate assessment of contextual and systemic influences in case conceptualization and intervention planning.

Assist clients in deepening their understanding of their own cultural identities, values, and norms.

Similar to my trepidation of adapting theoretical approach, I am also unprepared to understand how assessment procedures need to be adapted to meet the cultural needs of clients. My plan for gaining competency in this area is to complete the assessment course coming up this summer, ask lots of questions about cultural influences on the creation of the assessment itself as well as how to adapt the assessment based on cultural factors. I also want to learn more about how to conduct research in a culturally sensitive way so the results reflect the general population, not the dominant, white population.

Moreover, although I have a much greater understanding of the various worldview, religions, and familial traditions/ structures, I believe the majority of learning how to help a client deepen his or her own understanding of their cultural influences will come from working with clients from various cultural backgrounds and learning from them. Thankfully, I encounter a variety of cultures in my current job so there is a lot of opportunity for me to learn.

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<p><b>Domain 3, Competency 3</b></p> <p>Demonstrate competence with a broad repertoire of counselling interventions, strategies, and techniques that draw on Western and culture-specific perspectives.</p> <p>Assess the impact of both your own cultural identity development and that of the client on intervention plans and outcome measures. Incorporate culturally appropriate help-seeking behaviours and treatment into the counselling process as needed.</p>	<p>I will continue to learn about various counselling interventions and strategies to build my repertoire of tools to draw on. I will seek out opportunities to learn about non-western methods of healing, and encourage my clients to identify healing practices specific to their cultural backgrounds that may be useful in the counselling process. I will continue to develop awareness around how my cultural identity influences the way I present information to clients, how I execute interventions, and how I prefer to conduct therapy.</p>
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I will know I have moved forward with my goals of continued development in the multicultural competencies by reflecting on the first time I highlighted the competencies. I used yellow to indicate areas I already felt competent in, blue to indicate areas that were in progress, and pink to indicate areas I had not yet begun to be competent in. At the beginning of this course, the pages were covered in blue and pink, with about 10 specific competencies highlighted in yellow. Now at the end, I have significantly decreased the amount of blue and pink, especially in the areas of attitudes/beliefs, and knowledge. Most of the pink remains in the skills categories. I plan to use this document as a guide in my development and have set a goal to highlight my areas for growth every year. Another indication that I have moved forward in my competence is that I will not feel anxious about counseling culturally diverse clients and I will have a variety of understandings and strategies that I can draw on or know how to access when working with any client.

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