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Title: Are we doing enough to develop cross-cultural competencies for social work?

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Abstract

In the delivery of social work education, how can we devise relevant curriculum that addresses the development of cross-cultural competencies? Some of the assumptions that our students bring to their study program [many already work in different parts of the human services profession] are premised on outdated ideas that have as their source: prejudice, racism, whiteness behaviours, fear and mistrust, and a lack of knowledge and understanding about the complex layers in understanding situations of access and equity, discrimination, and the abrogation of human rights for marginalised communities.

In this paper I share some of the strategies and content material that we use at Charles Sturt University [CSU], Australia, together with professionals-in-the-field, in developing cross-cultural competencies to prepare our students for work in the profession. For example, as part of our current social work curriculum, students are introduced to intense debates that scrutinise the above phenomena-in-practice; in particular they scrutinise their own biases and entrenched worldviews that are often developed out of an ethnocentric monoculturalism. At the very least, a critical reflection framework explores assumptions embedded within practice; this is not a new dynamic for social work and is worth revisiting here, but ultimately, are we doing enough?

Key words: cross-cultural competencies; social work curriculum; social work

Introduction

There are four components of cultural competence: becoming aware of one's own assumptions, values, and biases about human behaviour; understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients; developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques, and understanding organisational and institutional forces that enhance or negate cultural competence (Sue, 2006). The CSU social work curriculum addresses all those components, as well as the specific condition of cross-cultural situations. For example, one of the fall-outs through looking at the political dimensions of social work is the extent to which marginalised people are defined through social and ethnic constructs. Therefore, the beginning journey for students studying cross-cultural competencies is to acquire historical knowledge about the situations of disadvantaged groups and to question the reification of culturalism (Booth 1999, Jamrozik, 2009) that allows for the continuation of abusive and oppressive practices, "all in the name of cultural integrity" (Ife, 2008, p.79).

Literature review

The discussion about developing cross-cultural competencies equates, at a fundamental level, to the idea that civil society is promulgated by the degree and level to which a country invests in the wellbeing and dignity of its people (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2002). Furthermore, two of the cornerstones of the AASW Code of Ethics (2007) include the same emphasis espoused by the International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] about the values of upholding individual wellbeing and engagement through a social justice framework (Bowles *et al*, 2006). Social justice, by its very makeup of equity, access, participation, and rights of people, raises an understanding of the heterogeneity of people and communities, and the CSU social work curriculum attempts to provide both a specific cross-

cultural framework, as well as an Indigenous-specific framework, from which to develop cross-cultural competencies.

Within such a specific cross-cultural framework, there are questions to ask about the monolithic treatment of people to their detriment. For example, the poverty of remote and regional people, especially Indigenous peoples in Australia, makes for a very poor civil society, but *why is that*? Overcoming poverty is never as 'simple' as just providing care and resources in a separated, compartmentalised, and managed way; at the heart of alleviating Indigenous poverty is the promotion of a 'sense of control' and mental wellbeing for communities following the debilitating effect of years of colonisation and demoralization (Taylor and Guerin, 2010). Cultural competence requires that social workers access this kind of information, and not just let it reside in some 'pocket of neglect', but to *do* something with it.

In many ways, the 'project' of 'dealing with' Indigenous Australians, plus Refugees and Migrants, is a metaphor for the ways that all marginalised groups, including people with disability, youth, women, and children in our society continue to be *socio-historicized*, *socio-politicised*, and *socio-economised*.

The principles behind the *Ethics in Social Work Statement of Principles* (International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2008, International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2005) include the upholding and defending of a person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity, and well-being. These principles call for an engaged, sometimes challenging, and dynamic presence on the part of social workers. Additionally, ongoing critical thinking and the art of *praxis* ought to be used to identify a number of potentially controversial issues involving personal values (Freire, 1972, Kirst-

Ashman, 2010). Therefore, in developing cross-cultural competencies in our social work students, adopting an indulgent practice framework serves little purpose for meaningful engagement with different cultural groups. Neither is this practice effective for culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] students despite the best intentions of wanting to celebrate cultural difference. Unfortunately, while this latter idea is premised on a universal theme of inclusion and access, it is often used unknowingly to promote whiteness behaviours that at best demonstrates indulgent practice, and at worst racialisation of peoples to maintain their marginalised status. In the above example, practitioners/social workers cannot practise 'unknowingly' otherwise they perpetuate racist behaviours. They require attention to a more participatory model that recognises the life experiences of individuals, but also the knowledge of individuals-with-communities to effect a more culturally appropriate and effective practice framework.

Combating ethnocentric monoculturalism

Being culturally appropriate involves intentional engagement that questions both the obvious and not-so-obvious dilemmas of behaviour. An ethnocentric orientation can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. Many social work students come to us with views that are not entrenched to the point of toxicity, but rather as the unconscious product of enculturation (Sue and Sue, 2008); there is potential redeemable quality to their situations. Where comparisons are made however, between an 'unconscious' ethnocentric monoculturalism compared to the act of racism as being 'conscious', and therefore in some way, worse, because of it, there is much work to be done. Conscious or not, racism in any form in Australia is illegal, and 'unconscious' makes for a very conscionable state of affairs in the practice of social work. Both ethnocentric monoculturalism and racism are culturally inappropriate and reflect a dysfunctional society that is at odds with the pluralistic and diverse communities that exist throughout many countries.

In order to combat the outcomes of an ethnocentric monoculturalism social work education needs to incorporate the naming of behaviours that accentuate 'blindness' and perpetuate the 'invisibility' of oppressive and marginalising structures within society (Sue, 2004). The manifestation of making the 'invisible', visible, is to note the insidious components of the phenomenon, with its central core of superiority, and to be especially aware of the *non-universality* of cultural experience.

Whiteness behaviours affect cross-cultural practice

Competing systems relate to differing discourses and worldviews about how knowledge is privileged and disseminated within society, that is, 'whose interest is really being served', and social work students have to continually critique that position. One view put forward is that whiteness behaviour, through a Western worldview, is the erasure of inequality because it presents as the norm in many professional practice situations; manifested as indulgent practice or intervention, but one that also reinforces the hegemony of normativity (Mlcek, 2009, Moreton-Robinson, 2004). The 'norm' in these kinds of situations is that 'position' is quite often indivualised into actions of power and privilege within a professional context, but more often than not, is not articulated as such. In contrast, an Aboriginal/Indigenous worldview is one that places knowledge within a spiritual realm; resituating the individual into the nexus between individual and cultural ties.

Historically, being 'white' was seen as a marker for how other racial categories were compared, that is, 'being white' was seen as a "sign of normalcy, importance and privilege" (Orbe and Harris, 2008, p. 77). Whiteness has evolved from this earlier focus by those who considered themselves to be 'unraced' compared to the 'other', to current definitions and practice of Whiteness that is still understood on several levels as a "social construction which

produces race privilege for white people by appearing 'neutral', unlinked to racial politics, universal, and unmarked" (Rowe and Malhotra, 2006, cited in Orbe and Harris, 2008, p. 77).

Recognising the potential for whiteness behaviours in social work ought not to result in a polarisation of ideas and positions that cannot and should not be tested and moved, or even shunned; after all, being a culturally competent practitioner acknowledges the reality that culture itself is neither static nor homogenous, but rather dynamically and heterogeneously placed along an ever-evolving continuum of engagement. Therefore, continuing a sense of non-defensive enquiry requires further insight into the effect of aspects of 'whiteness' on social worker practice. That is, another important aspect to this development of cross-cultural competencies is to recognise the reality of being able to work with validity, for example, with Indigenous communities in Australia – or not; where 'whiteness' is about privilege, historically this phenomenon has never been afforded to Indigenous Peoples. Whiteness can also reveal incorrect assumptions that are influenced by "colour or cultural blindness" (Walker and Sonn, 2010, p. 158), and these require constant vigilance and questioning. Indigenous students do end up as qualified 'privileged social workers', but this 'privilege' looks different because it has been achieved from a different place; from the pervasive transgenerational and monocultural influences of colonisation on individuals and communities. While the political preferred position in Australia is to have human services delivered to Indigenous Peoples by their own Indigenous social workers, the reality of their work is acute and challenging because it is their own cultural work, and in many situations there are just not enough of them. Alongside this phenomenon in certain situations, non-Indigenous workers need to embrace their understanding of the issues surrounding indigeneity, and be prepared to accept a certain level of 'non-acceptance' on the part of those who live without privilege every day of their lives.

Many lenses – a layered approach to developing cross-cultural competencies

Worldviews impact cross-cultural practice. Fundamentally, we move between several lenses and layers of awareness when viewing the world and a way of doing this is to develop a critical stance (Nakata, 2007). When applied to developing cross-cultural competence, one of the best examples is given through an Aboriginal cultural supervision model that facilitates discussion through layers of: *race*, *ethnicity*, *nationality*, *gender*, and *class* (Bessarab, 2012, p. 8). Bessarab notes that, "each layer is not totally separate; all are interrelated and must be considered in relation to each other". At the model's roots is the age-old question, 'what is knowledge'? Adopting an Aboriginal worldview to supervision, or ways of looking at the world generally, necessitates the application of a critical lens which "is essential in teasing out cultural nuances that may not be readily apparent and visible" (Bessarab, 2012, p. 85).

Through presenting an 'Indigenous worldview' to social work students, cross-cultural curriculum recognises the unique situation of Indigenous peoples to inform the way that social workers can engage in cross-cultural knowledge development in order to work in several different cross-cultural situations. That is, there is no way that cross-cultural curriculum can be delivered at CSU, or any other Australian university, without reference to Australian Indigenous Peoples because their cultural standing provides a touchstone with which to gauge current and future professional conduct and ethical guidelines of engagement. The manifestation of an Indigenous knowledge paradigm is maintained through cultural spiritual practices and despite the continual burden of the "colonising gaze" (hooks, 1992, p. 2). This process does not have to be framed around a logic of opposition (Nakata, 2007), but there has to be a place where Indigenous knowledges are always challenging dominant knowledges, whilst fully legitimated as actual knowledges in their own right.

Embedding cross-cultural competencies in social work curriculum

When designing social work curriculum in Australia, to develop cross-cultural competencies, CSU is guided by the inclusion of Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW] curriculum content into its social work qualifying courses. The CSU curriculum is also necessarily designed to incorporate current research that impacts cross-cultural education. For example, a recent joint 2011 *Challenging Racism Project* by academics from five Australian universities (UWS, 2011) found that while 'most Australians feel secure and comfortable with cultural difference, the data collected also indicates that most Australians recognise that racism is a problem in society'.

CSU social work students are presented with the idea that 'culture' is both a contested and contestable phenomenon in social work discourse; it is a continuing changing phenomenon related to individuals and communities and is socially-constructed. Furthermore,

> "*Cross-cultural practice refers to practice where there is a diversity of traditions and*
>
> *intergenerational issues; ideologies, beliefs and religions; and race and ethnicities.*
>
> *Cross-cultural practice can refer also to work acknowledging other diverse identities,*
>
> *such as sexual, political, professional and organisational. Where appropriate, these*
>
> *Standards therefore address these broader dimensions of cross-cultural practice. All of these*
> *dimensions impact on us as culturally diverse social workers and clients alike, and therefore should be*
> *acknowledged as core to good practice in whatever context"* (AASW, 2008 and 2010, p. 66).

The AASW acknowledges that the values and attitudes, skills and knowledge required for practice with Indigenous clients, are not specifically addressed by a carte blanche application of standards relating to cross-cultural practice; rather, the Association recognises that there are many significant differences within Aboriginal Australian experiences that are unique and

require even further complex recognition of the resilience against sustained racism, disempowerment from colonisation, annihilation of language and land, as well as assimilationist-driven policies to separate families (Purdie, Dudgeon and Walker [eds.], 2012, p. vii). Nevertheless, much of the cross-cultural competencies in the CSU curriculum is also applied to working with Indigenous peoples and communities, and social workers' practice will be necessarily informed by claims for social justice and recognition of human rights that are embedded in efforts to include self-determination for Aboriginal people. Calma (2008) notes that,

> *"Indigenous peoples claim not only recognition of their rights as citizens of Australia but also as Australia's first peoples. This claim has a specific history and relationship to land and territory which in turn gives rise to distinct cultural, social, economic and political rights. These rights are best articulated through the articles contained in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially Article 3 that asserts the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination".*

Social work students are advised to remember that *self-determination* is an ongoing struggle for all marginalised individuals and communities (Wiese and Parmenter 2009, in Moore [ed.] 2009), including those from disability or inter-generational situations. The following information outlines some of the specific cross-cultural curriculum content advised by the AASW (2010, p. 69).

Developing cross-cultural competencies – attitudes and values

1. *Respect for the person and his or her unique cultural identities.*
2. *Valuing cultural diversity and the complexity of that diversity.*
3. *An understanding of, and a critical engagement with, notions of universal human rights.*
4. *Acknowledgement of the need for continual critical reflection on our personal and professional cultural contexts.*
5. *Acknowledgement of the complexities of cultural identities and experiences.*

Developing cross-cultural competencies – knowledge

1. *A critical understanding of culture as a socially constructed and contested concept.*

2. *Knowledge of theories of ethnicity, race and whiteness, diversity, racism and power.*

3. *Knowledge of theories for understanding identity and migration.*

4. *Knowledge of culturally safe and sensitive practice.*

5. *Recognition of the language and worldview barriers experienced by many people in the Australian community that inhibit well-being.*

Developing cross-cultural competencies – skills

1. *Critically reflect on their personal and professional cultural identities and the influence they have in social work practice.*

2. *Critically reflect on the organisational and social factors influencing the capacity for practice to be culturally sensitive and safe.*

3. *Engage in continual learning about culturally-respectful, empowering practice.*

4. *Draw on their own cultural identities in effective social work practice.*

5. *Engage critically, and with flexibility and curiosity, in cross-cultural encounters.*

Transferring the above guidelines to specific curriculum never assumes that students should acquire these competencies in one go; by their very nature, competencies are best-achieved through an adult communication management perspective (Kaye, 2010) that is more about *process* than immediate acquisition.

Methodology

Qualitative observation was the lens through which an evaluation was made about how the specific CSU subject is delivered to students and how the latter engage with its content.

Diverse-background students, studying either via distance or internal modes, and the engagement and participation of those students, as well as their feedback, was collected through formal subject evaluations as well as informal communication channels such as online forums, email, or telephone conversations.

Overall, the student subject count had more than quadrupled from 72 in 2010, to 180 in 2011, and then 326 in 2012. Observations in this paper about the subject include interaction with 86 students undertaking the subject via mixed mode delivery in 2010, 2011 and 2012. These observations are integrated into the following findings and discussion sections around: what the students felt about the subject; what the students did within the subject, and what the students went on to do as a result of completing the subject.

In respect to ethical considerations, because the focus of the discussion here relates to participant-observation of practice to develop cross-cultural competencies, in keeping with CSU research guidelines, due consideration was given to a '*Minimal Risk Review Checklist'*, and in particular, '*participant vulnerability assessment'*. No 'covert observations' were conducted, and because the decision was made to report only that student feedback that was broad in nature and more general to a whole cohort, no '*discomfort*' was determined through observation.

Findings - The specific cross-cultural subject – Developing cross-cultural competencies

First, it was noted that integration and alignment across the whole CSU social work curriculum indicates both a broad and specific range of information and engagement regarding cross-cultural practice. The complex and multi-layered practice that is built in to

the case-based approach to teaching, at different levels and phases, starts to emphasise diverse identities within cross-cultural practice: ideology; political; cultural; sexual; language, and ethnicity.

Students start to incorporate and learn about values and attitudes, knowledge and understanding, and skills, for example, through transition. From the beginning first-year subjects, specific cross-cultural curriculum content is fielded in: communication and human services; introduction to fields of practice, and introduction to social welfare. Foundations of knowledge and skills are laid regarding: an ethos of scholarship; values; biases; assumptions; prejudices; AASW core ethical guidelines; cross-cultural communication; sense of self; identity development, and practice dilemmas. During these early stages, experiential learning is encouraged through dialogic engagement. There is differentiation made between: access and equity; participation and rights of individuals that is part of a social justice framework, and vulnerability and disadvantage. Critical reflection begins right from the start through problematising and *conscientisation* (Freire, 1972).

In the second year, students move from self, to the other – from thinking about self/identity, to thinking about how to interact in cross-cultural situations, through: *valuing, identifying, acknowledging, recognising, respecting*; through knowledge acquisition about theories and concepts of migration, immigration, settlement, containment, colonisation, grief and loss, acculturation, assimilation, cultural safety and practice. In this second year, they are introduced to social policy, social work theory, and preparation for field placement. Reflective engagement is increased through continued journalling, as well as: articulation; discussion; argument, and practice at a first intensive residential school. Frameworks of disadvantage are further explored through policy subjects and understanding the evolvement of the 'welfare state'. One arm of cross-cultural practice is the notion of 'social diversity',

and issues around this topic area are considered in relation to race, gender, culture, and age/inter-generational aspects.

By year 3 students can now undertake the specific cross-cultural subject or wait to complete that in year 4. They also concentrate on those subjects that deal with law for human services work, social work ethics and ethical practice, and more specialised study on human rights. All these subjects have an added concentration on the rights of individuals through the application of both a social justice and human rights framework. In this third year, the nexus between law and human rights is consolidated, for example in looking at anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice, and especially in the context of disadvantaged and marginalised peoples. Additionally, ethical practice is contextualised even further while 'complacency' is analysed and challenged through relevant practical field engagement.

Then in year 4, challenges continue in a dynamic critical learning environment to test; to apply; to extend; to build argument, and hone practice skills regarding empathy in different counselling situations, as well as to continue building *praxis*. The process is definitely not complete; in fact it is only the beginning of a journey towards practice wisdom.

The CSU human service subject WEL218 *Developing cross-cultural competencies*, is made up of two modules of select readings and targeted topic areas (Duncombe and Mlcek, 2011). In the first module, topic areas are designed to build knowledge awareness about culture, racism and discrimination, historical background to multiculturalism in Australia, barriers against culturally and linguistically diverse [CALD] communities, cross-cultural communication, and working against institutionalised racism. In this first module, the idea of a social work profession predicated on 'white, middle class ideals' is raised and discussed, as are ideas about 'whiteness' and accompanying behaviours of privilege. By the second module, students have been scaffolded into utilising tools that build towards a more culturally

skilled human service and social worker. They achieve this latter outcome through addressing racial/cultural identity development, assessing interventions with groups, communities and families from diverse cultures, and evaluating different cultural frameworks/worldviews.

The assessment items for this subject are critical to establishing validity and relevance in noting how students can be confident that they are working towards a rigorous education and engagement with cross-cultural practice. The two assessment tasks test both theory and pragmatic application; the first revolves around a true story of questionable effective social worker intervention in a Middle Eastern migrant family situation, and the second one allows students to nominate how they want to apply certain counseling intervention tools taken from Sue and Sue (2008) to a complex family situation of their choosing. The vehicle for the second assessment item is the choice of relevant and specific films that show the dynamics of family life from a cross-cultural perspective. Both assessment items invite the social work student to focus the spotlight in terms of questioning knowledge about access to and equity of services, the use of language and position to isolate and disempower, and the use of inappropriate communication to exact client disclosure where even they themselves would probably not participate. Students do feel that the case study above is 'harrowing' and unbelievable', and 'can't possibly happen in Australia', but it does and it did, and they often ask with deep concern, 'what happened to the woman after she left the women's refuge'? 'Was she reunited with her little boy'?

In the second assessment task, students must include a self-assessment related to placing themselves on the 'racial-cultural identity model', as well as undertaking critical reflection of how the value orientation of their own worldviews has the potential to influence counselling work with clients. According to the Helms white racial identity model (Sue, 2006, p. 119), several students comment on being 'on a continuous exploration of [self] as a racial being',

14

and 'trying to understand what it really means to be white and how [I] am privileged by the fact'. Hardly any students nominate themselves in the 'autonomy' stage of Helm's model, that is, they typically note something like, 'I understand our systems are not perfect and that I am not perfect. I now feel more empathy than sympathy and actively try to learn the appropriate ways to engage in situations where my skin colour may be a defining factor. One day I hope I can move into the Autonomy status of Helm's model, however I acknowledge that to do so I will have to no longer feel fearful, uncomfortable and intimidated by race'.

Discussion

In addressing confrontational material taken from real-life case studies about cross-cultural engagement, we want students to question the dynamics of working as a professional in a sometimes fractured world of 'boundaryless' marginalisation (Ife, 2008), oppression, and exploitation, for example, of country and people displacement, of refugee and migrant resettlement, and of the effects of changing government discourse around the projects of assimilation, multiculturalism and cultural diversity. But, we want also for students to witness the extent to which 'boundary-spanning' in knowledge development and capacity building (Ernst and Chrobot-Mason, 2010) can reap immense rewards in being able to recognise the richness of knowledge and skills within different cultural groups.

All students find the CSU cross-cultural curriculum a challenge, because it requires a high level of engaged personal reflection and critical analysis that many find problematic for a number of reasons. Many struggle with some of the content; as mentioned, some find the cases 'confronting', 'harrowing', 'dissatisfying', 'unrealistic', and 'questionable'. At the start of the developing-cross-cultural-competencies-journey, several students will suggest that questions asking for critical reflection on personal biases, as well as assessment of one's own

cultural/racial identity, are 'intrusive' and surely 'irrelevant'. At the end of this initial journey however, they begin to see that their knowledge and intervention skills can be useful in helping to achieve outcomes and perhaps influence government policy. But this engagement is only possible if it is all done in the spirit of *praxis* – of intent. Those students who come on this journey without that intent – even those who believe they 'have culture', or 'know about culture' – will be sorely disappointed in the results, unless there is a genuine attempt to change and embrace both new and 'old experienced' ideas.

There is little doubt that most students who undertake the subject acknowledge some or all of the following sentiments: being more willing to face personal biases; becoming more active in fighting racism and oppression; believing that studying social work and working in grass roots areas of service delivery helps to reach different stage of racial identity; racism is not something one can ignore when working in human services in this day and age, and nor is it something that students would want to ignore. Most students feel they still have much to learn, for example, 'I still worry about offending, hurting or unintentionally perpetuating racism on others without even knowing'.

Through undertaking the cross-cultural subject, students experience a "racial awakening" (Sue and Sue, 2008, p. 234) that has a defining impact on their racial/cultural identity development. They engage with intense critical reflection of self as part of the assessment process in utilising racial/cultural identity models as a potential valuable diagnostic tool in future practice. Without exception, every student who completes the subject will comment about one of two things; either about the revealing way that racial/cultural identity models exposes the sociopolitical influences in shaping the identity development of minority and

marginalised groups, and/or the way that such models allow informed critique of personal, previously 'unknown' racist beliefs that can be manifested through seemingly 'normal' behaviour, because 'everybody does it', or 'that's the way I was brought up'.

This third-year subject appears to have a powerful effect in moving students from a place of 'myopic narrowness' to one of racial cultural competence. They have already started to build a solid skills basis for critique, from previous years' subjects, and now experience a deepening "paradigm shift in thinking from hegemony to a methodology that promotes a critically reflexive agenda" (Beddoe and Maidment, 2009, p. 64) especially for social work engagement with all minority, marginalised, and oppressed peoples.

The issues of cross-cultural situations are underpinned by different values, perspectives, and ways of looking at the world. Over the years, several studies have been conducted around the creation of collaborative settings for joint productive activity as the single most important factor in producing critical reflection and change in many different professional settings. Earlier, Fullan (1993) explained that there is a ceiling effect on how much we can learn from our personal reflections if we keep to ourselves. He believed that the ability to collaborate was becoming one of the core requisites of post modern society. Personal mastery and group mastery feed on each other in learning organisations and without collaborative skills and relationships, it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as one needs, in order to be an agent for improvement or change (Mohan *et al* , 2008).

Other debates however, warn against losing sight of quality individualism when moving towards collaborative reflection. For example, Dorsett and Fronek (in Moore [ed.], 2009, p. 257) note that "to achieve cultural competency, practitioners must first understand the self and the impact of their own culture on their values, prejudices, personal development and professional lives". While isolation is a problem because it constrains personal inquiry

learning and solutions to the resources of the individual, the capacity to think and work independently is essential. In regards to cross-cultural competence, the key therefore is for individualism and collectivism to have equal power in the process of change and professional development.

In social work, we engage in collaborative learning particularly through field placement and discussions with supervisors and colleagues, in-the-field (Beddoe and Maidment, 2009). In a 'classroom setting' at CSU we do this through *deliberate acts of teaching* (Mlcek, Timutimu, Mika et al, 2009)that include confronting case studies, and the use of models such as the racial/identity model and the value orientation model of world views (Sue, 2006, Sue and Sue, 2008). The process is an ongoing one that includes reflection and critical analysis of the complexity of working with people of diverse cultures but is not meant to be prescriptively applied carte blanche to every encounter. As Taylor and Guerin (2010, p. 121) suggest, taking a "culturally blinkered" approach may prevent the development of knowledge and understanding required to move through "stages of sensitivity to (cultural) safety".

Making the curriculum 'enough' - 'new' directions for developing cross-cultural competence

Cross-cultural curriculum has to include 'structured reflection" (Kaye, 2010, p. 186). Tensions around what is reflection and/or critical reflection are minimised with the consideration of *praxis*, and the ability of social work students to think about working both deductively and inductively (Ife, 2008) [the case study examples used throughout the CSU curriculum offers students 'practice' along those lines]. Other actions for inclusion in the process of praxis include: *transformation, best practice, and transactional vs. reactional,* but essentially what students ought to be aiming for, is the development of a cross-cultural praxis.

Critical reflection provides a framework for exploring assumptions embedded in cross-cultural practice and for our students to gain deeper understanding of the skills and actions involved in critical reflection, revisiting primary sources of information is both worthwhile and pragmatic. For example, Dewey (1933) is acknowledged as the initiator of the concept of *reflectivity*. He defined it as,

> *active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads* (Dewey, in Calderhead, 1989, p. 43).

Reflection, he maintained, involves an *integration of attitudes and skills in the methods of inquiry* - neither will suffice alone - and he identified three attitudes imperative for reflective practice.

The first is *open-mindedness*, which is described as,

> *an active desire to listen to more sides than one, to give heed to the facts from whatever source they come, to give full attention to alternative possibilities and to recognise the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us* (Dewey, in Zeichner, 1981-82, p. 6).

The second attitude is *responsibility* by which Dewey meant careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads and the third attitude is *whole-heartedness*, which gives individuals the strength to move beyond abstract notions and put their ideals into practice. Reflection enables practitioners to direct their actions with foresight and to plan according to ends in view or purpose of which they are aware. It enables them to know what they are about when they act (Dewey, in Zeichner, 1981-82).

How then can the above ideas be reinvigorated and transferred to the 'real' practice world of for example, the rural social worker/human service worker? In developing 'new thinking', the above critical reflective approach provides a useful framework to address the dilemma of aligning theory to practice wisdom. It provides a way of thinking, and a process for analysing practice, which allows professionals to learn from, and redevelop their practice in an ongoing way. Used in a peer context, it also allows practitioners to learn from each other in a more systematic manner.

Often our practice may be based on deep-seated prejudices or outdated ideas which limit our ability to work effectively. Often we are capable of fooling ourselves into believing that because our stated beliefs are acceptable, then our practice must be of quality. It is critical to delve deeply into previously unexamined areas of our thinking and practice (Fook, 2004). As part of cross-cultural practice, social work students are guided to continually question assumptions and prejudices that would only normally surface in a cyclical fashion depending on the political climate at the time, about vulnerable people. Refugees and Migrants for example, are continually accused in the public domain of 'taking all our jobs and money'; of 'getting all the handouts from the Government Centrelink', and the same accusations are said about Indigenous Peoples, when in fact, the real facts are palpable. Marginalised people do not have the access and equity to resources that we might think they do. The question is, and should be, asked over and over again to social work students, *why is that*? Informative answers rest within the public/private divide; borrowing from the ideas of Ife (2008), making clear connections for students that social work is about both private troubles and public issues, actually lessens the 'divide' and makes a framing of social work as cross-cultural practice seem quite natural.

Identifying 'whiteness behaviours'

In the second assessment task for the subject, students express their 'fears' at not being able to reconcile 'whiteness behaviours' and knowledge about Whiteness privilege in relation to work with people of other cultures. In the CSU cross-cultural curriculum, participation in education and professional work opportunities for social work students is inevitably impacted by several different cultural elements including the presence of Whiteness and Indigenous knowledge paradigms that reveal contrasting situations of privilege and positioning. That is, being a social worker from the dominant culture holds several interpretative tensions because they also include sites of tension, and these challenges need to be continually raised with social work students. This is the ongoing dilemma for social work educators and no less so at CSU; how to take our students from believing cultural competence as mainly working appropriately with the 'other'; the non-white, without first acknowledging what it means to be white. If we do not, we perpetuate the 'other' as being raced, but in some way, not ourselves. We need to try to move away from only thinking about the era of white Australia as being only characterised by what it means not to be white (Moreton-Robinson, 2004: p. 79). The challenge is compelling, as Walters *et al* (2012, p. 241) suggest,

> "For social work educators, it is a sobering challenge to consider how, and the extent to which, social work education has contributed, and continues to contribute, to analysing issues of race via a focus on the non-white other against an unacknowledged backdrop of majority whiteness".

Cross-culturally, students need to understand the importance of reflecting on the racial and cultural identity of themselves as a worker who belongs to the dominant culture; the dominant Australian culture of Anglo/Celtic (Duncombe and Mlcek, 2010). That is, there are some basic tenets to accepting being part of the dominant culture, including that: racism is a

basic and integral part of Australian life, permeating all aspects of culture and institutions;

most white dominant culture people are racist as they are socialised in a society where they

adopt the biases, stereotypes and racist attitudes and beliefs of that society; and most white

dominant culture people pass through stages that are sequential in defining their own cultural

identity. The most preferred stage to affect the process and outcome of an interracial or inter

cultural exchange is the one where the Anglo/Celtic person acknowledges his/her whiteness

but does so in a non-defensive and non-racist manner (Duncombe and Mlcek, 2011, Orbe and

Harris, 2008, Sue and Sue 2008).

The impact of worldviews on cross-cultural practice

When social work students learn about 'worldviews, they tend to assume on one level that

this is merely a way of 'seeing the world' (Sue and Sue, 2008, p. 293), but they are soon

challenged to understand that if they maintain only their own perspective on reality, without

becoming aware of other views, they may end up "engaging in cultural oppression" (p. 294);

practising social work interventions that are culturally oppressive. An Indigenous

'worldview' on the other hand, is no less applicable to those who are traditionally viewed

through a non-Indigenous worldview; in fact this idea ought to be a benchmark because at its

heart is the notion that individuals can be profoundly supported through several levels of

communicative engagement. When our social work students are offered different ways of

valuing other worldviews, the outcome has a positive impact particularly in preparing

students for, or while they are already involved in field placement. For example, many see the

value of the Indigenous worldview to inform and improve their practice while working with

Aboriginal communities, especially because it allows for the plurality of cultural traditions.

However, the salient point is made to students that developing cross-cultural competencies must come with the recognition that while we can learn from the situations of individual cultural groups, we risk "an arrogance of 'knowing' (Dorsett and Fronek, in Moore [ed.], 2009, p. 256) if we think we can apply or transfer that 'knowing' to all cross-cultural situations. Many practices towards Aboriginal Australians were far worse in their severity and scale than the systemic and individual discriminatory practices used against migrants and their families seeking to settle in Australia (Duncombe and Mlcek, 2011). That is, "the claims for social justice and human rights by Indigenous peoples originate from a different source, both historically and in international law, than claims by other minority groups in Australia (Calma, 2008).

Blackstock (2008) suggests using questions related to comparing worldviews that privilege individualism (the more universal western/whiteness view) or collectivism (the more Aboriginal/Indigenous view) in order to determine the kinds of behaviours and systems that each view generates. She also uses and compares the self-actualisation motivational model made popular and famous by Abraham Maslow – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – to a First Nation's model whereby the hierarchy is 'turned on its head'. Instead of the individual rising through at least five stages of motivation to reach the level of 'self-actualisation', the Indigenous worldview shows self-actualisation as the beginning of questioning *who am I, where do I come from, where is my 'country', who is affiliated with me, who is my mob, who are my people, who is my family, who can I look up to, what is my community, who are the Elders I can go to for help, what is the knowledge I need to survive?* .

The Indigenous worldview provides a clear message of sustainability and cultural perpetuity (Blackstock, 2008), and is embedded with those ideas that we espouse for our social work students, including: awareness of self, of others, and of society, as well as the articulation,

realisation and protection of rights of people. Calma (2008) notes that respect for different

cultures is the pre-condition of reciprocity and social interaction between cultural groups, that

is, cross-cultural awareness. Furthermore, cultural background in the Australian policy

context is not a sign of superiority or inferiority but should be the starting point for a wider

social engagement and conversation.

Conclusion – practising knowingly

There are several dilemmas in the process of developing culturally and linguistically diverse

education in order to promote authentic learning, and not least of which is captured in the

preparedness of practitioners. That is, to prepare social work students to implement authentic

cross-cultural competence, they need to be provided with a different kind of professional

education that helps to identify and establish a multicultural framework of practice. This

framework has to include challenges to practices driven by racism, and notions of superiority,

whiteness blindness to injustice (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998), constructions of

Aboriginality from a colonial imagination, as well as a committed practice to Indigenous and

non-Indigenous dialogic action. The framework of practice must also move away from

whiteness behaviours in which "post-colonial accommodations of cultural difference run the

gauntlet of coopting, and appropriating, Indigenous difference in an effort to validate its own

claims to tolerance and diversity" (Carey, 2008, p. 9).

Developing cross-cultural competence asks social work students to question their own

epistemological stance. By comparing a western/whiteness worldview to that of an

Aboriginal/Indigenous worldview, we actually start to resituate 'whiteness', after orientation

to the western/whiteness worldview, and then re-orientation to the Aboriginal/Indigenous

worldview that is more in keeping with the idea of 'cultural perpetuity'. The process is

unapologetically uncomfortable yet enduring; in keeping with developing cross-cultural competencies.

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