One Counselor-Trainee’s Journey Toward Multicultural Counseling Competence:

The Role Of Mentoring In Executing Intentional Cultural Immersion

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Abstract

Though multicultural counseling training is required in counselor education, research suggests that beginning counselors continue to feel underprepared and are found to be ineffective in work with diverse populations. One often-employed training strategy is that of the multicultural immersion experience (MIE). After a brief review of themes and trends regarding the use of MIEs in the multicultural counseling competence (MCC) literature, the authors present a case study, the personal narrative of one graduate counseling student as she reflects upon her MIE to South Africa and Botswana. This reflection is considered in the developmental context of enhancing MCC, with a focus on how mentorship during the immersion fostered that growth. Recommendations for impactful cultural immersion in counselor training are provided along with thoughts on future research.

Keywords: multicultural counseling Competence, multicultural training, cultural immersion, mentorship
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Culture can serve as a vehicle for change rather than a barrier to counseling. Multiculturalism helps counselors break out of their inherent assumptions (Burnett, Long & Horne, 2005; Pedersen, 1991; Sue and Sue, 2008), understand their own values (Reynolds, 2001), and gain perspective and empathize (Chung & Bemak, 2002; West-Olatunji, 2010). Although scholars have argued for increased multicultural counseling competence (MCC) for more than 30 years (Burnett et al., 2005; Pedersen, 1991; Reynolds, 2001; Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1992; Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007), counselor-trainees remain unprepared to respond to the needs of diverse populations (Ancis & Sanchez-Huclès, 2000; Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2008). Based on self-reports, beginning counselors feel unprepared to work with ethnically diverse clients in particular (Allison, Crawford, Echemendia, Robinson, & Knepp, 1994; Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001; Kim & Lyons, 2003). Furthermore, external measures indicate that trainees possess racial and gender biases along with limited awareness, knowledge, and skills (Ponterotto, Fuertes, & Chen, 2000; Sue & Sue, 2008; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999), the three domains of MCC.

Cultural immersion (CI), direct contact with another culture in its context, is argued to increase trainees’ knowledge, skills, and awareness (Abreu, Gim Chung, & Atkinson, 2000; Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009; Ribeiro, 2004). In addition, there is an argument that immersed trainees are better able to respond to diverse clientele (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Pope-Davis, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). CI has gained extensive popularity as a MCC training strategy in the counseling field (Alexander et al., 2005; Boyle, Nakerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999; Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt,
However, the mechanisms whereby trainees acquire increased MCC during CI remain nebulous. There is no consensus model or structure for conducting CI. Thus, CI experiences vary dramatically, making it difficult to understand the immersion components that contribute to increased MCC. Pope-Davis and colleagues’ model (1997) has been extensively cited across the aforementioned CI experiences. The purpose of this paper is to portray the developmental impact that a particular instructional strategy, the Multicultural Immersion Experience (MIE; Pope-Davis et al., 1997), had on one counselor-trainee's MCC. A brief summary of the MIE model and constructs, along with an overview of the role of mentorship, is followed by a first-hand account of and reflection upon specific immersion components that fostered transformation in one student’s counselor development. Considerations for multicultural training, and cultural immersion are then discussed.

**Literature Review**

Multiculturally competent counselors visit with their own biases, recognize the importance of culture, respect diversity, and ensure that services are accessible, appropriate, and equitable (Pedersen, 1991; Sue & Sue, 2008). The process of increasing MCC is a developmental one that was originally described by Cross (1989) as moving forward along a cultural competence continuum since attaining “competence” is a never-ending journey. This journey is a long term, dynamic process requiring changes at the personal and professional levels. This process is challenging and requires not only visiting with one’s inherent assumptions, but also accepting responsibility for one’s actions and inactions (Kiselica, 1999). Specifically MCC development involves gaining: (a) awareness of one’s own enculturation and their values, beliefs,
and worldviews (Cole, 1999; Kottak, 2008; Sue & Sue, 2008), (b) knowledge of the worldviews of individuals with which one is working and an understanding of the sociopolitical systems and institutional barriers operating in clients’ lives (D’Andrea & Heckman, 2008), and (c) skills for effectively developing interventions based on a clients’ worldview as opposed to one’s own (Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1992; Sue & Sue, 2008). Though counselor educators have implemented many strategies to foster movement along the MCC continuum, the experiential nature of the MIE is argued to be a most effective training strategy.

CI positions participants to plunge themselves into the activities of an identified cultural group (Canfield et al., 2009) which is reported to be transformative for counselor trainees (Kottler, 1997). Trainees who experience CI are believed to gain genuine cultural understanding (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Toporek, Ortega-Villalobos, & Pope-Davis, 2004), increased knowledge of how groups define and view themselves (Pope-Davis et al., 1997), and increased awareness of their own biases, values, and worldview (Abreu et al., 2000; Alexander et al., 2005; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009; Ribeiro, 2004). Working in partnership with community members while immersed also fosters mutuality, inclusion, and collaboration, thereby cultivating self-awareness, peer learning, and community-centered perspectives (Burnett et al., 2005).

The MIE model (Pope-Davis et al., 1997) is widely cited among CI studies (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Diaz-Lazarro, & Cohen, 2001; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008, 2009; Ishii et al., 2009; Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009) and is grounded in the conditions of successful intergroup contact. A brief review of the conditions of successful intergroup contact provides an important context for understanding the MIE.

Allport’s Contact Hypothesis (1954), also known as Intergroup Contact Theory, rests upon the belief that contact between minority and majority group members is most effective in
reducing biases, tensions, and misunderstandings. Allport’s (1954) studies of intergroup relations, however, did not support a simple contact theory. He argued that Blacks and Whites living in close proximity did not eradicate racial tensions, but rather manifested prejudice. Allport and colleagues identified necessary conditions of intergroup contact that bring about the reduction of prejudice (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005).

DeRicco and Sciarra (2005) built upon the work of Allport (1954) and others to underscore core conditions of contact theory. Chiefly, contact must be of sufficient duration or frequency. There must be enough time and repeated interaction for individuals to develop genuine closeness and meaningful relationships between cultural group members (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). Contact is also more beneficial to reducing prejudice when members from different socio-cultural groups are mutually dependent on one another. Pope-Davis and colleagues’ MIE (1997) is grounded in this theory. The three phases of the MIE include planning prior to immersion and initial reflection; immersion with continued reflection; and debriefing, evaluation, and meaning making (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). While reflection is central to the model and fostered throughout the immersion process, the critical components that facilitators of immersion often employ include: (a) pre-deployment training, (b) interaction with culturally diverse others, (c) sustained time in the field, and (d) genuineness/depth of relationships formed.

Simply executing these critical components is not sufficient; a skilled facilitator is needed to facilitate meaningful reflection (Merta, Stringham, & Ponterotto, 1988) and foster personal support in learning (Tentoni, 1995). Often, the facilitator’s task is to help trainees step out of their cultural context and see from the perspective of another (Chung & Bemak, 2002). Ptak, Cooper, and Brislin (1995) argued that facilitating cross-cultural training is complex and requires an awareness of the dynamics of personal and cultural interactions, as well as experience
working with individuals who do not realize that complexity. In order to promote intentional reflection in their trainees, facilitators must possess multicultural (and self) awareness, as well as knowledge of the historical and contemporary social issues that influence the specific immersion context (Merta et al., 1988). The facilitators cannot respond to the needs of each trainee alone. Thus, they are more effective if peer-mentoring relationships are also established during the CI.

Some scholars have suggested that peer mentoring can serve as an alternative to conventional mentoring relationships that are often hierarchical and involve power dynamics (Pololi et al., 2002; Woessner, Honold, Stehle, Stehr, & Steudel, 1998). Peers are seen more as collaborators wherein their opinions are sought for insights, guidance, and support. In addition, mentoring fosters empowerment and extended resource development (West-Olatunji et al., 2007; Casto, Caldwell, & Salazar, 2005) while adding a dimension of safety (Mehta, 2011). In particular, peer-mentoring relationships have been shown to be less threatening for trainees’ self-evaluation and professional growth (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997). Overall, key advantages cited for peer mentoring include greater availability and enhanced understanding of everyday problems faced by trainees (Ramani, Gruppen, & Kachur, 2006). Thus, both hierarchical and peer mentoring are seen as integral to employing the MIE model for intentional MCC growth during CI. The purpose of this investigation was to explore the evolution of MCC articulated by one counselor-trainee during an international CI experience.

Setting

A CI experience in South Africa/Botswana actuated the critical components outlined in the three phases of the MIE (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). This CI also featured an additional clinical outreach component after the pre-deployment training and immersion. Before the critical components of this particular immersion are discussed, the context of the case study
participant will first be given. Since acquiring MCC is a developmental process, it is important to consider what the counselor-trainee case study brought to the CI that may have influenced its impact on her experience.

**Context of the Participant**

Sarah (pseudonym used), was a twenty-seven year old Caucasian female counselor-trainee who was mid-way through her CACREP-accredited Master’s/Specialist program in Mental Health Counseling. She attended a large university in the Southeastern United States and had three practicum experiences as a part of courses, but not a formal internship. Sarah had completed an introductory multicultural counseling course and reported being impacted by a previous MIE to New Orleans (West-Olatunji et al., 2007), which also incorporated the aforementioned CI components. Examples of immersion activities included visiting the Lower Ninth Ward, Center for Jesus the Lord, communities and agencies affected by Hurricane Katrina, and the University of New Orleans. These locations afforded Sarah opportunities to hear, visualize, and experience the narratives of New Orleanians. After attaining a better understanding of the disaster and socio-political context, Sarah engaged in supervised clinical outreach with charter schoolteachers. She reported assisting teachers in organizing their classrooms and responding to the stories of teachers and staff when appropriate. Sarah described herself as “transformed” by the experience, and expressed an increased desire to advocate. In addition, she felt an increased sense of self-efficacy and motivation to participate in future clinical outreach experiences.

**Critical Components of Immersion**

The MIE chronicled in this case study lasted for 23 days in South Africa and Botswana and consisted of an outreach team of 12 graduate students, 1 practitioner, 1 lay-person, and 10
counselor educators. Planning involved organizing the field experiences (e.g. selecting locations to visit, and agencies & African counselors with whom to connect) and the pre-deployment trainings. Six-hour pre-deployment trainings were held weekly and covered (a) socio-cultural and historical content, (b) introduction to the local language, (c) counseling issues in South Africa/Botswana, (d) culture-centered counseling interventions, (e) compassion fatigue and self-care, and (f) culture shock.

Interaction with culturally diverse others was encouraged throughout the MIE. Immersion activities involved visiting historical places in South Africa, such as the Apartheid Museum, the Hector Pieterson Museum (named for a child who died during the civil rights struggle), and Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela and other political dissidents had been imprisoned). These locations offered opportunities to learn about South African history, hear the narratives of community members, and dialogue with them. For instance, a former political prisoner led the visit to Robben Island, such that his narrative was a lived experience.

Interaction continued during a three-and-a-half day international conference, titled “Providing Culturally Competent Counseling Services in Trauma-Affected Communities”, in Botswana’s capital city of Gaborone. A panel of counselor educators from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds spoke with students about scholarship and career advancement. Counselors from both Africa and the U. S. gave keynote speeches, and counselor-trainees from both continents presented content sessions, paper presentations, and poster sessions. This structure fostered exchange of knowledge through sessions and also in-between sessions, often over tea. Counselors continued to dialogue during the conference luncheon and reception. Genuine relationships were established, demonstrated by three practicing African counselors inviting the
Americans to their home village. Dressed in their traditional attire, the African counselors hosted a visit to a local orphanage, museum, and a cave to view early markings on the walls.

Interaction was also fostered during the subsequent clinical outreach. Visits to the University of Botswana’s practicum and internship sites provided opportunities for American counselors and counselor-trainees to meet with mental health professionals in the community that may not have attended the conference. These sites included a domestic violence shelter along with elementary, middle, and high schools. Supervision and consultation was provided if requested and/or appropriate (Shannonhouse & West-Olatunji, 2009).

The U.S. faculty, professional counselors, and counselor-trainees were required to journal daily. Entries contained personal narratives of daily events, moments in which individuals were impacted, and questions/concerns that emerged. These entries provided a component of personal reflection. The MIE facilitator emphasized critical thinking among participants (during group process) to allow them to expand their knowledge and skills in working with diverse clients (West-Olatunji, 2010). This emphasis on intentional reflection is rooted within the framework of critical consciousness theory (Freire, 2000), asserting that reflection and dialogue aid counselors in taking social action, a key outcome of MCC.

When working with counselor-trainees, a core element of reflective process involves the presentation of a problem contextualized by the dilemma of effective practice. This process occurs in the space between the trainee’s ability to tolerate the ambiguity of not knowing and the safe space in which they struggle (Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). When facilitators provide safe spaces, permission to reflect, and knowledge about how to reflect, they can stimulate change among their trainees. In concert with the reflective process, the facilitator fostered peer mentorship opportunities to allow trainees to process their daily experiences with peers. In
addition, there was opportunity for dialogue between MIE participants at all levels using a structured group process component every evening. Group process lasted from one to three hours nightly. Thus, these training interventions, founded upon critical consciousness theory, sought to minimize counselor bias, increase self-awareness, and create new knowledge.

Pre-training, interaction, mentoring/peer mentoring, and reflection/group process were used throughout the experience to enhance MCC. These experiential methods were reported as transformative for the case study subject in her development along the MCC continuum. A doctoral student and counselor educator (who served as the organizer and facilitator for this MIE experience) read the trainee’s journal. Selected passages from her reflection journal are printed below to depict the impact of specific components of this MIE.

**Findings**

Several themes found in the cultural immersion literature are also evident in a review of Sarah’s MIE journal for her immersion in South Africa and Botswana. Her writing indicates that the MIE fostered MCC growth, especially in the awareness and knowledge domains. Specifically, she was emotionally impacted by the MIE, had shared experiences with group members and community members, and the mentorship/reflection components were vehicles through which she gained deeper understanding. In addition, she reported being “forever changed” as a result of the journey.

**Emotional Impact**

Sarah’s journals reflected that her immersion experience had a strong emotional impact. While walking through the Apartheid museum, she reported being moved by the video of Winnie Mandela (Nelson Mandela’s second wife) at the Rivonia Trial just after her husband was sentenced to life imprisonment, “Winnie Mandela said, ‘I will never lose hope and my people
will never lose hope...’ I felt humbled and inspired by her faith and resiliency.” Sarah also wrote on her feelings after reading about the *Sharpeville Massacre*:

> On the next display wall, I learned that 69 Black South Africans were killed, most shot in the back, when they didn’t have their passbooks [documents required for Black South Africans that listed employment information and travel permits]. I felt nauseous and horrified and realized that this isn’t that different from what we have done in the US.

She further shared:

> As I stepped into the replica of a solitary confinement cell, I felt disoriented, and eventually realized that it was time to leave. Though I had been alone and disconnected from my group for nearly two hours, I had barely seen a fraction of the museum.

**Shared Experiences**

A sense of connection to her peers and to those in the immersed community enhanced Sarah’s personal experience during the immersion. Feeling a sense of solidarity with others was important to her, as is evident in this passage, “Two students’ disclosures resonated for me. I was surprised to learn that others were feeling things too.” In these writings, she commented on instances of both peer and facilitator-driven mentorship. Two examples of reflections by other group members that impacted Sarah were the following entries:

> One peer of mine [Indian female] felt that she could escape conversations like this as she doesn’t identify with being Black or White. This afforded me another perspective and an opportunity to learn about my peers’ journey and their context.
Her experience touched me; she spoke from a place of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection.

He [White male] shared an experience about when a professor [Black male] stepped into a solitary confinement cell and asked him to close the cell door. The student said it was a hard thing to do, recreating a scene that played out all too often. In that moment we were all in touch with our feelings.

Another journal entry shows how Sarah’s experience was enhanced by the timely supervision of a facilitator during the group experience:

Then, one group facilitator [Black female] said it was okay to feel uncomfortable. I had been feeling uncomfortable for quite some time. Non-Whites were officially second-class citizens under Apartheid, but that academic fact became much more disturbing by what I had seen with my own eyes. I shared what I read about the conditions of the miners: the payment discrepancies, tuberculosis, death, murder, male rape followed by ridicule. I felt sick.

Sarah also discussed feeling a sense of connectedness to community members in addition to group members:

These images will never leave my mind; it isn’t something I can ignore. Though I was not a member of that community, I have had pain, loss, and struggles in my life. I felt a sense of shared humanity as understanding I could have had a similar experience was more genuine and less ‘othering’. This process of connecting will stay with me.
Increased Awareness

Increased awareness emerged as Sarah reported new understanding of her own values, beliefs, and worldview. Her writings also reflected a deeper understanding of community members’ values and socio-political context, along with new beliefs about mental health work. She noted, “At this clinic in Soweto we dialogued with over twenty para-professionals who, despite not having college degrees, have a powerful and genuine way of connecting… In this work they are more effective.” In her description of how she was affected by one paraprofessional’s story, Sarah touched upon her new awareness:

I spoke with one woman who was rejected by her family after contracting HIV. She had been alone for 12 years before finding this agency, but now she feels accepted. One of my cohorts joked, “Every story ends the same, ‘…and then I ended up here’”… After the staff members’ disclosure, I started to cry and so did she… it was so touching to hear her express that she felt like she belonged and was accepted… she has another family.

After exchanging knowledge and working within an agency, Sarah reported a deeper understanding of an agency worker’s beliefs:

Later, we heard the staff jointly sing a song, Never Give Up. I began to understand that there are variations in beliefs and values and that dancing and singing is therapeutic and meaningful within this culture and in this context it serves as a mechanism for resiliency. Somehow talking with this woman and hearing that song made me view African music in a new way. It tuned me in to the value of collectivism and I felt a sense of umoja [the spirit of togetherness]. I understood how the staff can be there, day in–day out, many of them working for
free. By helping others, they help themselves, reflecting the African saying, ‘I am because we are’. One para-professional commented, ‘Sometimes clients will say, How much do I owe you?’ I tell them, ‘I see it in your face, I get paid in smiles.’”

Awareness also emerged in another one of Sarah’s entries describing an agency visit:

One counselor there [Parent-Child Counseling Center] presented an extensive case conceptualization of a young girl who was raped and contracted HIV. When asked how she feels about her client, the counselor responded, ‘She is close to my heart now.’ I thought to myself, ‘Shouldn’t we feel our clients' stories?’ I asked another counselor at the site, ‘What is the most important thing to know about your work?’ She replied, ‘The situation is complex.’ She comprehends where her clients are coming from – their culture and sociopolitical context. I am so impressed by how the counselors and para-professionals I’ve met here connect with and understand their clients.

In addition to gaining new insight about herself and others, Sarah also reflected about her own process during the MIE:

In the Western world, it seems we are experts, having all the answers. By reading, immersing, and processing, I have been able to see from a different perspective. It is more genuine when connecting to the client’s context instead of my own. By coming to terms with my own wounds I hope to be able to facilitate a space for clients to heal themselves... Immersion is a powerful way to see through a different lens.
New Knowledge

Sarah reported acquiring new knowledge about what counseling looks like in other contexts. Here she reflects on a particular project from Cape Town:

They were trained in nutrition, assessed the mothers’ to find the most knowledgeable ones, provided further training and charged them to educate their neighbors. This empowerment tweaked me; it is preventative, contrary to Western ways where we frequently value reactionary methods, responding according to an illness orientation.

She also discussed encountering preventative practices in the work done at Cape Peninsula, University of Technology:

They have a regular HIV testing program and have periodic test drives. They provide psycho-education so that individuals who are HIV positive can care for themselves and those who are negative can take precautions. Their model is preventative and aimed to better the community. Their training methods are outstanding, they engage in peer mentoring, role plays, and their own immersions.

Immersion has also been known to foster critical thinking as exemplified in Sarah’s reflection, which compared responding through a missionary lens verses a counseling one:

On this immersion, I found strength and innovation. It felt very different from what I experienced when I grew up and went on church mission trips. Here, as a counseling student I saw those with vastly different lives and respected them for their hearts and their heads. While there is good that can come out of missionary work, after going on this trip and reading Paulo Friere, it seems that there are
other ways to interact which are more reciprocal and empowering. I didn’t go to Africa to help people, I went there to learn.

**Mentorship**

Sarah reflected upon what the group facilitator said and did throughout her journal entries. These thoughts ranged from recognizing how specific knowledge shared by the facilitator was helpful:

She educated us on the three different kinds of women in Botswana. She explained how their money (pula) was more than just currency. Pula literally means water. This caused us to reflect on the meaning of water to them.

to making meaning of the facilitator’s actions:

She led by example, gaining extensive knowledge of the cultural context beforehand. Her awareness enabled her to connect in such a way that it seemed that she was a cultural informant for us without being a part of their culture.

However, the facilitator’s role in mentoring Sarah along her journey is perhaps best displayed in this reflection:

She tasked us to explore our own personal narrative – to understand our context so that we could relate to each other. She encouraged us to be in the moment and feel our own story through others. In fact, she told me that was my gift – to help others feel as I shared.

**Forever Changed**

As Sarah reintegrated into her life in the US, she further reflected about how her life has changed and become richer as a result of her MIE. Here her words speak to her development as a clinician:
I found part of my personal narrative. Prior to my immersion in New Orleans and now Africa, I thought that if I just learned the right technique, or the right way to respond when a client said ‘X’ or ‘Y’, then I would be able to be a counselor and do this work. But there is no right answer or perfect response. It’s about really connecting with your client and understanding their context, cultural or otherwise, so that you know how to work with that client in that moment. I’m sure there are times for cookie-cutter interventions, but from what I saw on these trips was that the times that were the most powerful, were the ones built on connection to that person, place, and time.

She also developed new perspective on the nature of counseling and her worldviews regarding the profession:

This South Africa immersion experience has heightened my awareness of the Western view of monitoring and regulating mental health. I recently heard a counselor educator state that counselors are individualistic in nature and keep their doors shut; it’s about making their mark and achieving higher status. I challenge myself to think more along the lines of ‘I am because we are’.

Sarah’s final journal entry summarizes how this MIE has become a part of her journey along the MCC continuum:

I have learned that multiculturally competent counselors recognize the importance of culture to clients and the therapeutic relationship. They respect diversity and serve as advocates, ensuring that services are accessible and equitable. Gaining MCC not only helps us connect with individuals who have a different worldview, but also cultivates collaboration with the community. My journey towards
cultural competence is just beginning; it is the most significant journey I’ve ever attempted – it involves growing into the counselor I want to be.

Discussion

Researchers (Chung & Bemack, 2002; Ishii et al., 2009; Pope-Davis et al., 1997) have argued the positive benefits of immersion experiences in developing MCC of counselor-trainees. However, immersion experiences vary dramatically in terms of implementing the critical components originally outlined by Pope-Davis and colleagues (1997). While these components are argued to facilitate the acquisition of MCC in many CI studies, (Alexander et al., 2005; Canfield et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2008, 2009; Mehta & Cashwell, 2012; West-Olatunji et al., 2011), there is a lack of knowledge about how these components mature the MCC of counselor trainees. This study provided the first known in-depth narrative of the impact of a MIE, along with both peer mentoring and hierarchical mentoring, on the journey of one counselor-trainee. All four of the critical MIE components were incorporated in this particular CI experience and will be considered here along with the impact of mentorship.

The pre-deployment training that preceded this immersion may have proven valuable to Sarah’s understanding of the socio-political-historical context of the local population and armed her with strategies to cope with the stress of being outside her own comfort zone as the literature suggests (Allen & Young, 1997; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). However, any such impact was not explicitly apparent in her journal, although it may be inferred that knowledge precipitated awareness in several entries. In situ trainings by supervisors did seem useful, to Sarah which supports Chung and Bemak’s (2002) conclusions about the importance of a knowledgeable facilitator/supervisor to the success of an MIE.
There is no consensus about what ‘sustained’ time in the field is for a MIE, though it is reasonable to consider that longer immersions can provide for more breadth and depth of experience. Ishii and colleagues (2009) found stereotypes in trainees’ journals that immersed for one week, and asserted that trainees need longer to move from ethnocentric thinking to more cultural relativistic views. Similarly, West-Olatunji (2011) and West-Olatunji and Goodman (2012) posited that trainees need at least a few weeks to struggle through any resistance towards accepting ethnorelative perspectives in order to fully experience being the ‘other’. No such resistant behavior was noted in Sarah’s analyzed journals. Several of her entries, however, record her reflection on patterns that were likely observable only by having multiple opportunities across a long-form immersion. Her reflections on both how local healers connect with their clients and on the model of preventative care integrate many experiences that were scheduled over the span of this three-week MIE.

The presented case study supports previous arguments regarding the importance to a MIE of interacting with local peoples and forming genuine relationships while immersed (Alexander et al., 2005; Canfield et al., 2009; Kambutu & Nganga, 2008). Sarah’s journal was replete with emotional reflections and moments of recognized connection with all people, but the passages that stood out as most indicative of increased awareness and MCC were those in which she described interacting with the locals. Her experience of being an ‘other’ and observing her peers being ‘other’ (Gillin & Young, 2009) afforded her new knowledge about how groups define and view themselves. Noticeably, the interactions that spurred new perspective towards her identity as a multiculturally competent counselor were spawned in the midst of extended interaction with cultural ‘others’. Her words point to how those deeply genuine connections were some of the most impactful parts of her MIE to Africa.
The journal entries support the existing literature by chronicling how an MIE that incorporated the critical components resulted in statements from a counselor-trainee which indicate her growing MCC. Further, this case study demonstrates that the emotional impact of an immersion (and empathic connection through shared experiences) can for some trainees be a dominant developmental catalyst, which aligns with the argument that MCC growth is fostered through affective processes in addition to cognitive ones (Chung & Bemak, 2002; Sue et al., 1992). For Sarah, an academic understanding of oppressed South Africans’ experiences was disconnected from her awareness until her supervisor provided a safe space to acknowledge what that knowledge ‘felt like.’ That particular memory, as with many others from the examined journal, took place during group process and peer interactions, where the parallel (or dissimilar) paths of Sarah’s peers fueled further reflection. This case study supports research (Goodman et al., 2008; 2009, West-Olatunji, 2011) that both hierarchical and peer mentorship can be instrumental in making an immersion experience into an awareness triggering opportunity, opening the door for further MCC development.

**Future Research**

The use of MIEs is *en vogue* as a training strategy in counselor training, but many questions remain about how to most effectively use this pedagogy. In this case study, the knowledge and awareness domains of MCC were readily apparent in journal excerpts, but future research might explore how a MIE can mature MCC skills. More generally, future studies could explore which MIE aspects enhance specific domains of trainees’ MCC. There may also be overlap among the MIE critical components, as this study suggested that prolonged time in the field afforded the ability for greater depth of relationships with culturally diverse others. The
The counseling field may benefit from further research into quantifying the role (and overlap) of these components by developing a way to measure the impact of a MIE on a counselor trainee.

The role of mentoring was central to the discussion of this particular MIE, and it is apparent that there is room for more research into this topic. How do mentors/supervisors prepare for conducting successful MIE trainings for their students/supervisees? How useful is immersing in clinical settings or contexts to developing MCC in trainees? It is noteworthy that in this case study, the memorable, awareness-inducing aspects of Sarah’s Africa immersion were often connected to clinical components (e.g., visiting agencies or working with paraprofessionals). It would advance the MIE literature if researchers comprehensively examined what aspects of mentorship (or clinical supervision) during MIEs enhance the MCC development of trainees.
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