

Cross-National Emailing as Cultural Immersion in Multicultural Counselor Training: A Pilot Study

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Multicultural counselor training has utilized cultural immersion to stimulate students' multicultural competency development. This article discussed a pilot study which experimented with a new instructional strategy of cultural immersion in a multicultural counseling class. This strategy intended to study the effectiveness of a cross-national emailing project (CNE) on students' multicultural competency development. Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994) was used to measure the multicultural competencies of 13 female counseling students from the United States in this semester-long project. Both quantitative and qualitative results supported the positive development of multicultural competency in cross-national emailing.

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Multicultural competencies have been defined by three major domains: Awareness of own culture, awareness of client's worldview, and culturally appropriate interventions (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Within each domain, three competency dimensions were created: Cultural awareness, knowledge and skills (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992). Hence, multicultural competency development has become the primary objective in multicultural counselor training (Arredondo et al., 1996; Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and

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Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2001). Multicultural counseling courses become the essential training modules for successful development of multicultural competency (Coleman, 2006; Dickson, Jepsen, & Barbee, 2008; Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Neville et al., 1996). Many scholars also proposed to align the multicultural counselor training with the development of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills (Pedersen, 2002; Smith, Constantine, Dunn, Dinehart, & Montoya, 2006; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994; Sue & Sue, 1990).

Multicultural Instructional Strategies

Current instructional strategies in multicultural counselor training could be categorized into three types: The traditional strategies for reading and lecturing, the exposure strategies for cultural experiential learning, and the participatory strategies for introspection and reflection (Dickson & Jepsen, 2007). All strategies may be mixed and combined to form a single multicultural curriculum (Dickson et al., 2008). Previous studies of multicultural counseling courses endorsed the use of exposure strategies, in addition to other types of instructional strategies, to achieve students' multicultural competency development (Dickson et al., 2008; Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Neville et al., 1996). Guest speakers (Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Neville et al., 1996) and service learning (Burnett, Hamel, & Long, 2004; Roysircar, Gard, Hubbell, & Ortega, 2005) were certain instructional strategies of experiential learning to expose students to multicultural experiences for competency development.

Besides traditional methods of reading and lecturing, experiential learning was deemed a crucial component in multicultural counselor training (Coleman, 2006; Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen, 2001; Malott, 2010). Results from many studies signaled the effectiveness of experiential learning (Burnham, Mantero, & Hooper, 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ellenwood & Snyders, 2010; Ishii, Gilbride, & Stensrud, 2009; Pope-Davis, Breau, & Liu, 1997; Roysircar et al., 2005; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Current CACREP standards publicly supported the use of experiential learning in multicultural counselor training (CACREP, 2009). Scholars especially called for an increase in cultural immersion as experiential learning in multicultural counselor training (Diaz-Lazaro, & Cohen, 2001; Malott, 2010).

Cultural Immersion

Cultural immersion has been used by various disciplines to promote cultural competency and sensitivity (Caputo & Crandall, 2012; Harrowing, Gregory, O'Sullivan, Lee, & Doolittle, 2012; Larson, Ott, & Miles, 2010; Liaw & Johnson, 2001; Marshall & Wieling, 2001; Platt, 2012; Sequist et al., 2010). Counselor education has adopted cultural immersion as a method of experiential learning in multicultural counselor training (Burnham et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ishii et al., 2009; Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Roysircar et al., 2005). Community field experiences (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005), field trips (Ishii et al., 2009), foreign tours (Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010), and face-to-face contact with foreign students (Burnham et al., 2009; Roysircar et al., 2005) emerged in the

cultural immersion literature with reports of positive development of multicultural competency.

Simulated Cultural Immersion

Simulated cultural immersion is a variation of traditional cultural immersion. Cultural immersion, as mentioned in the above section, involves real-world experiences in a cross-cultural environment. Simulated cultural immersion adopts activities that do not need the real-world and face-to-face contacts with individuals from other cultures. Literature shows many forms of simulated cultural immersion had been implemented or discussed. Several forms, such as movies (Villalba & Redmond, 2008), role play (Patrick & Connolly, 2009; Patrick & Connolly, 2009; Pedersen, 1981; Seto, Young, Becker, & Kiselica, 2006), and discussion and reflection (Pieterse, 2009; Wolf & Rickard, 2003), have been studied for multicultural competency development without real-world immersion (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002).

Purpose of Study

Cultural immersion does need a lengthy period of time to achieve its effectiveness (Harrowing et al., 2012). Short foreign tours could take only 10 to 17 days (e.g., Fawcett et al., 2010; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2010). Although foreign tours may be essential for understanding domestic cultures in different countries, these tours could have limited effectiveness due to the limited number of traveling days and become less practical because of the expensive costs and the time taken for the trips. Domestic field trips (Ishii et al., 2009) could be an alternative method to reduce international traveling costs but still demand excessive amount of time from instructors and students. Several methods of the short term immersion were studied in face-to-face contact with foreign individuals (e.g., Burnham et al., 2009; Ellenwood & Snyders, 2010; Roysircar et al., 2005); however, Harrowing, Gregory, O'Sullivan, Lee, and Doolittle (2012) argued that a short term immersive experience may not be intensive enough to stimulate students' multicultural competency development. Even though cultural immersion is a powerful instructional tool for multicultural counseling courses, current immersive strategies have shortcomings on the platforms used to deliver the real-world cultural immersion.

Rationale for this Study

In search of a new instructional strategy of cultural immersion, it is necessary to consider the existing limitations in different immersive strategies discussed above. The demands on travel expenses and time appear to undermine the instructional effectiveness to achieve the full potentials of real-world cultural immersion. Traditional field experiences in multicultural counseling classes are similar to the multicultural action project (MAP) described by Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, and Bonham (2011). The field experiences require students to seek multicultural experiences in their local communities. While traditional field experiences may appear to be convenient and inexpensive, their

deficiencies are no less than those of other immersive strategies. When students experience different cultural groups in their communities, their contacts with random cultural groups could become either short term or one time only. The lack of consistent and continuous contacts with a specific culture will decrease the effectiveness of field experiences. This pilot study was aimed to study the implementation of a new instructional strategy of cultural immersion. This strategy would replace a traditional field experience in a multicultural counseling class. Through this pilot study, we intended to explore a less expensive and more practical immersive strategy to satisfy the time demanded for immersion and test innovative features for future development of immersive strategies.

Technology and Internationalization

The purpose for studying a new instructional strategy was to find an alternative platform for conducting cultural immersion. We expected this platform to become less demanding on monetary costs and traveling time and deliver intensive cultural immersion. Moreover, this platform should utilize emerging trends in counseling. Two trends, technology in counseling and the internationalization of counseling, were particularly noticed to be potential influences in the search of a new instructional strategy.

Many domains of professional counseling such as clinical practices, teaching and supervision, have embraced the use of technology and the Internet (Ancis, 1998; D'Andrea, 1995; Kirk, 1996; Myrick & Sabella, 1995; Sampson, 1983; Wagman, 1984). Pioneers in multicultural counselor training had called for increasing the use of the Internet and technology (Ancis, 1998; D'Andrea, 1995); however, this call was only responded recently when Ellenwood and Snyders (2010) designed a curriculum project to have 13 American and South African students communicate over the List Serv in six weeks. As technology in counseling continues to grow, it is inevitable that multicultural counselor training should explore the use of technology and the Internet in multicultural curricula.

The emerging trend of internationalization addresses the widespread practices of counseling in foreign countries. American Counseling Association (ACA) recently published a ground breaking book with a collection of articles discussing the history and development of professional counseling in 40 countries (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013). American counselors also devoted their expertise and services to the counseling profession and to people in other countries (Shallcross, 2011). Ng (2012) predicted that internationalization of counseling will rise as the next wave in counseling. In light of this new trend, it is crucial to incorporate this feature in multicultural instructional strategies.

This study intended to experiment on a new instructional strategy, which would echo the emerging trends of technology and internationalization in professional counseling. The new instructional strategy was designed to use the Internet as a platform to bring students a cross-nation experience. This cross-cultural experience would allow students to undergo cultural immersion. The results of this study should show the practical use of the concepts of technology and internationalization in the teaching of multicultural counseling.

Methods

Participants

The recruitment of participants went in two directions. The American counseling students were recruited via a convenient sampling because these students had enrolled in a multicultural counseling class offered by a CACREP-accredited counselor education program at a southeastern public university. Thirteen American counseling students enrolled and voluntarily participated in this study. All students were female and their ages were between 22 and 39. They were introduced to the contents of this study in the first class meeting and had signed the consent for research participation.

The recruitment of foreign email partners had the original goal of finding counseling students from one of the chosen foreign countries. The second plan was to include partners from different foreign countries when the first recruitment failed. The country of Taiwan was chosen because of the nationality of the first two authors. They were able to write and communicate with Taiwanese counseling departments in the native language. An invitation letter in their native language was sent to major counseling departments in Taiwan to gain permission of study and invite student participation. Eight Taiwanese students from two Taiwanese counseling departments responded to the invitation and signed the consent for participation. Four Taiwanese students later withdrew as evidenced by discontinued email responses.

The recruitment of partners continued since the amount of Taiwanese students was less than the American students. Nine email partners were recruited to make up the difference between the numbers of the American and Taiwanese students. These additional email partners were recruited online through personal connections of American students. These nine email partners were friends or acquaintances of American students and they were from different cultures and countries. All partners signed the consent to volunteer their participation. Table 1 displays the demographic information of the 26 participants and their pairing in this study.

Table 1
Demographics: American Students and Email Partners

American Students (n=13)			Email Partners (n=13)		
Major	Gender	Ethnicity	Major	Gender	Ethnicity
CLP	Female	African American	Law	Male	Asian Australian
CLP	Female	Caucasian	n/a	Female	European Caucasian
CLP	Female	Caucasian	n/a	Female	African American
CLP	Female	Caucasian	COP	Male	Taiwanese (Asian)
CC	Female	African American	MBA	Female	European Caucasian

CC	Female	Caucasian	SC	Female	Taiwanese (Asian)
COP	Female	Caucasian	n/a	Male	Caucasian
COP	Female	Caucasian	n/a	Female	Asian American
COP	Female	Caucasian	n/a	Female	Bahamian
COP	Female	Caucasian	SC	Female	Taiwanese (Asian)
SC	Female	Bahamian	Med	Female	European Caucasian
SC	Female	Caucasian	n/a	Female	Asian Australian
SC	Female	African American	SC	Female	Taiwanese (Asian)

Note. CLP = Clinical Psychology; COP = Counseling Psychology; SC = School Counseling; CC = Community

Design and Procedures

The new instructional strategy of cultural immersion had to be implemented by replacing an original strategy in the multicultural counseling class. The design of this study started from the initial attempt to change a traditional field experience, which only required counseling students to explore few multicultural experiences in their communities, to a cross-national cultural immersion. The tasks for establishing the new cross-national cultural immersion focused on the use of technology, which would not ask students to allocate time and money for foreign travel but still deliver the cross-national immersion. It was important that this instructional strategy also warranted a long-term process to achieve the significant multicultural competency development (Harrowing et al., 2012). Thus, cross-national emailing strategy (CNE) was set to last an entire semester to ensure students and email partners had the high quality of cultural immersion.

Online Platform

The cornerstone of the new instructional strategy rested on a platform which allowed counseling students to communicate with foreign individuals through the Internet. Two major types of online communication were considered for this study. Synchronous communication (Oztok, Zingaro, Brett, & Hewitt, 2013) and asynchronous communication (Johnson, 2006) were common communication platforms for individuals to converse on the Internet. The use of communication platforms, such as Live Chat and Instant Messaging, allowed synchronous real-time communication (Oztok et al, 2013). Synchronous communication provided simultaneous audio and video communication but it would tie individuals online at both ends during the communication. On the contrary, asynchronous communication, such as List Serv and email, did not require real-time and simultaneous communication. Asynchronous communication allowed delayed responses (Johnson, 2006; Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2011) which released individuals from being restricted to stay online during the time of their communication. This feature was essential in cross-national online communication because the time differences between countries should be considered a

factor for successful online communication. Thus, we selected email for its ease of use and the convenience in cross-national communication.

Immersive process

Cross-national emailing (CNE) was the main exposure strategy in this study. Students were instructed to learn partners' cultures and discuss freely on all topics. However, a participatory strategy was added in the classroom to assist students in processing their immersive experiences. The combination of two instructional strategies aimed to strengthen the effectiveness of cultural immersion (Dickson & Jepsen, 2007). In addition to reading and lectures assigned to this class, students were required to complete the following tasks:

1. Maintain at least two email exchanges per week.
2. Keep a journal to document the multicultural experiences.
3. Attend weekly class discussions to reflect multicultural experiences.
4. Participate in an exit interview to discuss their learning in cross-national emailing.
5. Take a pre- and post-test of the Multicultural Counseling Inventory.

Measures

The quantitative measurement of multicultural competency development was completed by the pre-test and post-test scores of the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI). The MCI (Sodowsky et al., 1994) is a 40 item self-report measure with four subscales: Awareness (10 items), Knowledge (11 items), Skills (11 items), and Relationship (8 items) in a Likert-like scale of 1-4 (1=very inaccurate to 4=very accurate). These subscales are intended to measure the development of multicultural competency in respect to multicultural sensitivity (Awareness), treatment, case conceptualization and research (Knowledge), multicultural counseling skills (Skills), and interaction process with minority clients (Relationship). These aspects measured in subscales partially conform to descriptions of multicultural counseling competencies: cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue et al., 1992).

The literature indicated that MCI had the solid psychometric evaluations with reports of .80 reliability coefficient for Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills subscales and .73-.87 on coefficient of construct validity (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, & Sparks, 1994; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1994; Sodowsky et al., 1994). The internal consistency was reported to be .90 (Ponterotto et al., 1994). MCI showed a satisfactory performance on its psychometric properties for the purpose of assessing multicultural counseling competence (Ponterotto et al., 1994).

Data Analysis

Data collected in this study included both quantitative and qualitative formats. The pre- and post-test MCI scores were collected as the quantitative data. The MCI scores were examined with the paired-samples t-test to study whether or not there was a statistical

explanation on students' multicultural competency development after they went through the CNE in a multicultural counseling class. Paired-samples *t*-test served the purpose of comparing mean scores of the pre- and post-test MCI scores in the one-way within-subjects design (Erford, 2008; Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). The with-in subjects design tested the mean difference on the scores generated by the same group of individuals through repetitive assessments. This analysis used all MCI subscale scores and the total MCI scores in paired comparison.

The qualitative data came directly from students' immersive tasks. Students were instructed to keep journaling their thoughts and learning in the semester-long emailing. The journals were collected for the qualitative analysis to support the research findings. Students' emails with their partners were not collected to ensure privacy and lift the pressure in the emailing process. However, students could voluntarily submit their emails to the researchers. One student had submitted her complete exchange of emails. Exit interviews and class discussions had been documented to reflect specifically what students had learned in CNE.

The qualitative content analysis was selected to study the qualitative data. The content analysis had three distinct approaches: conventional, directed, and summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this study, the directed content analysis was used in analysis process. It would allow the use of existing theoretical frameworks to code and organize the contextual concepts and schemes (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This study subscribed to the multicultural counseling competencies and used the competency dimensions: cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992) to interpret qualitative data. The first researcher conducted the qualitative data analysis with assistances from a professor who taught classes of qualitative research methods.

Results

Quantitative Results

The mean scores of the subscales and MCI total score showed an increase in all post test results. The post-test scores observed the following mean increase: Awareness subscale=1.69, Knowledge subscale=3.23, Skills subscale=1.54, Relationship subscale=1, and MCI total=7.46. Table 2 displays the results of paired-samples *t*-test.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare the pre- and post-test scores of four MCI subscales and the MCI total score. The test results indicated two statistical significances on two post-test scores, the knowledge subscale, $t(12) = -3.84$, $p < .05$, and the MCI total score, $t(12) = -2.94$, $p < .05$. The results of awareness subscale, $t(12) = -1.81$, $p > .05$, skills subscale, $t(12) = -2.01$, $p > .05$, and relationship subscale, $t(12) = -1.21$, $p > .05$, indicated there were no significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores.

Table 2
Pre and Post MCI Assessment: Paired-Samples t-Test

Scale Paired (Pre-Post)	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig. (2- tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
Awareness	Pre 28.69 Post 30.38	3.376	-3.732	.348	-1.807	12	.096
Knowledge	Pre 33.54 Post 36.77	3.032	-5.063	-1.399	-3.842	12	.002*
Skills	Pre 36 Post 37.54	2.757	-3.205	.128	-2.012	12	.067
Relationship	Pre 23.54 Post 24.54	2.972	-2.796	.796	-1.213	12	.248
MCI Total	Pre 121.77 Post 129.23	9.162	-12.998	-1.925	-2.936	12	.012*

Note. $n=13$. * = $p < .05$

Qualitative Results

Qualitative data analysis involved the reviewing and coding of American counseling students' journals, transcripts of exit interview, field notes of classroom discussion, and one set of cross-national emails. These qualitative data reflected students' direct experiences in CNE; thus, the contexts could more accurately represent the multicultural competency development experienced subjectively by students.

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness is aimed to help students understand their own and others' cultures in multicultural counselor training (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Sue et al., 1992). During the exit interview, students were asked how CNE could improve their awareness and sensitivity towards cultures of their own and others. This is one student's response:

I learn to affirm and embrace my cultural identity. It is disheartening but not surprising to know that Blacks are not viewed positively. Sometimes my soul looks back and wonders what it is that keeps going and why we are disliked so.

Cultural awareness also involved the process in which students will be able to realize their own stereotypes towards other cultures (Arredondo et al., 1996). In one class discussion, an American student described how her cross-national emailing with a foreign partner had helped her detect the stereotypes she held against that foreign culture:

She has described her communication on how she had learned what her partner's view is about her own country, Taiwan. She also admits her stereotype toward cultures in Taiwan. The topic of pollution brings in the feeling of similarity, and the description of Taiwan people and the society helps her see her stereotypes.

These statements showed the essential power of cultural immersion and that this transforming power could be achieved through online communication. The qualitative data presented here described how cultural awareness could be achieved in CNE.

Cultural Knowledge

Some important characteristics of cultural knowledge included the understanding of other persons' cultures and cultural influences in therapy and assessment (Sue et al., 1992). One of the benefits of CNE was to provide an immersive environment which ensured the personal contacts and freedom in learning foreign cultures. One student described how CNE could contribute to her learning of other cultures:

I really learned a lot. It was much more interesting than reading a book about a different culture. Um, so it was really a good experience. The fact is that it is so free to ask things and makes it easier to really ask the kind of things you want to ask...

It was also important to notice that cultural knowledge could be transmitted through contact with individuals from a specific cultural background. Cultural immersion, even on the Internet, would produce desirable effects for learning cultural knowledge as was the experience of one student:

I think it definitely helps my understanding of her culture more than mine. I think, one of the reasons, it is so valuable because we often learn about different cultures without meeting any individual who is part of that culture. Even if we do so, I think a lot of time it is impersonal. There is just a lot of politeness or certain things you don't talk about [when in face-to-face], but the email makes it easier to talk explicitly about certain things.

These data entries described the important factor of personal contact and how it could help students feel a real connection with knowledge of other cultures through emailing their partners while providing a sense of comfort due to the impersonality of an online format.

Cultural Skills

Cultural skills connoted the criteria related to culturally sensitive features in counseling practices such as education, research, and treatment methods (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Arredondo et al., 1996). Although the CNE project had not delivered clinical training, it did provide educational opportunities for students to recognize and discuss multicultural issues, which would influence their future counseling practices. One student documented how she talked about racism and stereotypes in emails:

I feel like I am really starting to make a strong connection with my email friend. We have started to talk about more serious issues like racism and stereotypes, making our discussion very interesting. I continue to really learn and grow from this experience. I feel like my email friend is opening my eyes to a whole new world and culture.

Another student further discussed her understanding through the conversation of racial issues with the email partner:

Giving a part of me also means facing things that I might not want to or even like when someone else offers their opinions. Race is such a sensitive topic and I guess no matter what culture you're in. You know the boundaries and limits when it comes to bringing up this topic. Even if I am offended [by racial issues], I realize that not knowing racial issues may put up a barrier between my clients and me.

These messages showed how students discovered their deficiencies in multicultural counseling by realizing their stereotypes and racism. The discovery of stereotypes and racism would continuously influence students' future counseling practices in multicultural settings.

Discussion

Experiential learning is listed as an essential instructional strategy in multicultural counselor training (CACREP, 2009). Cultural immersion as a method of experiential learning uses exposure strategies to enhance students' multicultural competency development (Dickson & Jepsen, 2007) and has been proven to be an effective instructional strategy in many studies (Burnham et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ellenwood & Snyders, 2010; Ishii et al., 2009; Roysircar et al., 2005). A combination of cultural immersion with other instructional strategies also strengthens the effectiveness of cultural immersion (Dickson et al., 2008; Fawcett et al., 2010).

This pilot study intended to explore a new instructional strategy, which contained new and improved features in cultural immersion, by implementing this strategy in a multicultural counseling class. A multicultural instrument and a collection of qualitative data were used to evaluate students' progress by the end of the pilot study. This study was unique because the cross-national emailing carried the focus on incorporating the use of

technology and internationalization in the multicultural instruction. The fast development of the Internet and the emerging trend of internationalization in counseling could expand the scope of traditional exposure and immersive strategies, which typically have relied on field experiences or foreign traveling. It also included a long term cultural immersion to achieve the desired intensive levels of cultural immersion (Harrowing et al., 2012).

The Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI) has been a valid measurement of multicultural competency development (Ponterotto et al., 1994). This study conducted a pre- and post-test measurement with MCI. Students who went through CNE had completed one MCI prior to CNE and another MCI after they finished the CNE by the end of the semester. A paired-samples t-test was selected to analyze the pre- and post-test MCI subscale and total score. The t-test results showed two significances at $p < .05$. The post-test scores of knowledge subscale and the MCI total score were suggested to be significantly higher than the pre-test scores. The post-test scores of awareness, skills, and relationship subscales had not shown a significant increase as compared to the pre-test scores.

A possible explanation for such mixed results was that CNE created an online contact with foreign individuals without face-to-face interaction. The lack of face-to-face interaction might reduce the development on multicultural aspects measured by the awareness, relationship, and skills subscales. However, the findings partially confirmed to those reported in previous studies (Burnham et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ellenwood & Snyders, 2010; Fawcett et al., 2010; Ishii et al., 2009; Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Roysircar et al., 2005) which endorsed the overall development of multicultural competency in cultural immersion.

The qualitative analysis discussed in the previous section showed a different aspect for evaluating the effectiveness of CNE on multicultural competency development. The selected presentation of data entries described students' direct and subjective experiences in CNE. Students had provided strong support for the use of CNE and indicated their levels of multicultural learning in this study. The qualitative analysis certainly reflected what CNE could contribute to the learning process and the development of multicultural competencies in a class adopting this instructional strategy.

The findings of both quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated positive effects of CNE on students' multicultural competency development, although specific dimensions of multicultural competencies, i.e., awareness and skills, were found in quantitative analysis with less success. The results of qualitative analysis showed certain supports on multicultural competency development. The qualitative results could supplement the mixed findings of quantitative analysis to assist the formation of a positive conclusion regarding the effectiveness of CNE on multicultural competency development. Further research are needed to expand the sample size of this study and test refined research designs to accurately examine the effectiveness of CNE and further study factors contributing to the mixed findings in this study.

Limitations

Limitations existed in this pilot study. With a small participant size from a convenience sample, this study had limited the statistical power in data analysis. Its

quantitative analysis also faced potential biases. The within-subjects design used in this pilot study was lack of a control group or group comparison, which are common in between-groups designs (Erford, 2008). The small sample size and the research design certainly limited the generalizability of results reported in this pilot study.

While this pilot study was designed to be implemented in a multicultural counseling class, it only replaced one component of the existing curriculum. This condition might cause the results to be confounded by other instructional methods, i.e., reading, lecturing and presentation, which continued to be used in this class. It became clear that the MCI would have measured the effects of both CNE and the co-existing instructional methods. Thus, it would be difficult to contribute the effectiveness of multicultural competency development solely on CNE. The use of MCI suited the purpose of this study; however, there was a potential concern on social desirability that might influence students to respond positively on the post-test MCI. Considering these potential limitations, it is necessary to forewarn readers of these critical concerns while readers attempt to draw any conclusions based on the quantitative results.

The qualitative data were collected only for the CNE activity. The qualitative results would provide a closer look on the effectiveness of CNE. However, the limitations existed in the nature of qualitative results. Readers should understand that qualitative data contained subjective opinions and interpretations from students and the researchers. The subjective views hindered the potential use of the qualitative results for the generalizability and replication of similar studies. Furthermore, the email partners came from several cultures and countries. They only represented a small proportion of cultures and countries in the world. These email partners also represented the regional cultures they were in but did not necessarily stand for a general identity of the cultures in any foreign countries. Readers are urged to consider these limitations while they are absorbing the qualitative data presented in this article.

Conclusions

This study intended to examine a unique design of an instructional strategy for multicultural counselor training. While contemporary studies used face-to-face culture immersion (Fawcett et al., 2010; Ishii et al., 2009) or a combination of face-to-face and online immersive methods (Ellenwood & Snyders, 2010), this study applied only the online platform for cultural immersion. Its results had shown positive development on the three dimensions of multicultural counseling competency (cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills). The results certainly leveled the ground for future research on the effectiveness of online cultural immersion and the factors contributing to the positive development of all multicultural competency domains and dimensions.

An essential lesson from the execution of this study was the implementation of a new instructional strategy to replace a traditional field experience in a multicultural counseling class. Current multicultural counselor training adopts either the single course or the infusion approach (Reynolds, 1995; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994). Both single course and infusion curriculum will be able to incorporate the CNE in addition to the existing instructional strategies. The design of CNE aimed to bring up several advantages in

multicultural counselor training. First, the CNE expanded the cultural immersion beyond communities or state lines. Counseling students will be able to meet foreign individuals who reside in their native cultures and countries. This advantage can enrich students' cross-cultural experiences and broaden their worldviews. Secondly, the CNE adopted a semester-long immersive activity. Students will maintain a long term contact in cross-cultural experiences. The lengthy immersion will ensure students' multicultural competency development (Harrowing et al., 2012). Thirdly, the CNE was designed with a low cost approach. It will not require foreign tours that may demand students and instructors to commit to the time and money taken for tours. The use of the online platforms, such as the email in CNE, will dramatically reduce the expenses and inconveniences in domestic or foreign tours. Fourthly, the CNE can be further modernized by adopting the new and emerging social media, e.g., Facebook or Twitter. Counselor educators can adopt new technology or the Internet tools to improve the experiences of cultural immersion across the globe.

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