

St. Catherine University

SOPHIA

Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers

School of Social Work

5-2016

The Development of Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice and Education

Laura Carpenter

St. Catherine University, carp0041@stthomas.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carpenter, Laura. (2016). The Development of Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice and Education. Retrieved from Sophia, the St. Catherine University repository website:
https://sophia.stkate.edu/msw_papers/568

This Clinical research paper is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Work at SOPHIA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers by an authorized administrator of SOPHIA. For more information, please contact amshaw@stkate.edu.

Running Head: DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL
WORK

The Development of Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice and Education

by

Laura L. Carpenter, B.A.

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members

Lisa Kiesel, PhD

Donna Hauer, MS

Sister Stephanie Spandl, MSW, LICSW

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the University Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

This research set out to examine the development of cultural competence as a concept, education tool, and practice model in social work. A narrative review was utilized to analyze data collected from articles and primary documents retrieved from scholarly and archival databases. Cultural competence (formerly known as diversity education or practice) was analyzed through a historical and theoretical lens to provide context for its current functioning in social work practice and education today. This research examined social, political, and academic influences on the development and conceptualization of cultural competence as it appears in the National Association of Social Workers and Council on Social Work Education Education policy statements and standards. The findings indicated that social work has been largely reactionary to external social and political influences in its development of policy and curriculum when it comes to cultural competence. Future research on cultural competence development in social work should focus on social worker's perspectives in engaging with the cultural competence model and a critical examination of its implementation and outcomes.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice and Education | 3 |
| Methods..... | 8 |
| Findings | 10 |
| What is culture? | 10 |
| Diversity & Social Work | 11 |
| Social Work and Cultural Competence..... | 16 |
| Social Work Practice..... | 19 |
| Social Work Education | 26 |
| Criticism of Cultural Competence | 37 |
| Discussion..... | 41 |
| Implications for Social Work..... | 47 |
| References..... | 51 |
| Appendix A..... | 55 |
| Appendix B..... | 56 |

Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice and Education

Social work has been established as a discipline dedicated to serving the needs of all individuals and communities with a focus on the poor and vulnerable. In doing so, social work adheres to various principles and ethics that guide our work as practitioners to support optimal outcomes for the communities we serve. *Cultural competence* is recognized as an essential principle of social work education and practice. As the population in the United States continues to diversify rapidly, the need for culturally competent social work services is just as crucial as it ever has been. In the last decade, a cultural competence mandate was established in both The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) and the National Association of Social Work (NASW) Code of Ethics. Cultural Competence practice models also make a prominent appearance in social work practice education tools and training materials.

NASW operationally defines *cultural competence* as “the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes” (NASW, 2015).

In light of the recently updated 2015 CSWE *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* and NASW *Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence*, an opportunity is presented to critically examine the direction social work education and practice is going with regard to this subject, in addition to potential influences that prompted the updated standards for social work. Mounting criticism in recent years regarding the framework of cultural competence as it was previously presented in NASW

and CSWE standards will be explored in this research. A historical overview of the relationship between social work and the framework of cultural competence will be provided as context for the newly updated standards by CSWE and NASW.

The updated standards reflect growth in the understanding of cultural competence in field of social work. This includes an extreme broadening of the definition of ‘culture’ to include aspects of identity like sexual orientation, gender identity, immigration status, family structure and religious or spiritual beliefs (NASW, 2015). Included in the updated cultural competence standards, NASW defines relevant *social work competencies* to encompass 10 core competencies required for social work education. The 10 competencies include: 1) ethics and values; 2) self-awareness; 3) cross cultural knowledge; 4) cross cultural skills; 5) service delivery; 6) empowerment and advocacy; 7) diverse workforce; 8) professional education; 9) language and communication; 10) leadership to advance cultural competency (NASW, 2015).

While the standards continue to reflect cultural competence in social work practice as defined by attitudes, knowledge and skills, it introduces the concept of *cultural humility* as an additional framework to consider. Cultural Humility is employed in the updated standards to place emphasis on the role of the social worker as a learner in the client-practitioner relationship. Additionally, cultural humility focuses on empowerment of the client to be experts in their own life rather than the subject of a practitioners accrued knowledge and awareness of cultural information (Fischer-Borne, 2011; Ortega & Faller, 2011; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

The establishment of cultural competence as a major facet of social work practice through an NASW mandate, the inclusion of cultural humility as an influence, displays a

commitment to improving cross cultural services. However, there still exist considerable limitations within the social work profession regarding the conceptualization and delivery of services (Herzberg, 2013; McPhatter, 1997; Resich; 2007, Weaver, 1999). An established limitation is that the social work profession is not immune to a lack of diversity in its student bodies, educators or practitioners (Fischer-Borne, 2011; Jani, 2011; McPhatter, 1997; Ortega, 2011). This being the case, the process by which social work continues to professionalize and require higher levels of education and licensure, without adequate financial or institutional accommodations for obtaining them, poses a challenge to the integrity of commitment to embracing diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Beyond problematic demographic components regarding social work practitioners, another limitation is the tendency to practice from the historically ethnocentric and western foundation of social work (Fischer-Borne, 2011; Ortega, 2011; Weaver, 1999). Many definitions of cultural competence are constructed using theoretical orientations concerning ethnocentrism and post-colonial theory (Herzberg, 2013; McPhatter, 1997; Weaver, 2013). However, a major criticism of the cultural competency framework in particular, includes the emphasis on attempting become an expert in understanding or “knowing” another’s culture or identity, the focus on managing comfort levels with ‘others’ framed as self-awareness, and not holding workers accountable for challenging systematic inequalities (Fischer-Borne, 2001; Ortega & Faller, 2011; Weaver, 1999).

In the past, a focus of cultural competence on establishing “knowledge” about different ethnic, racial, or cultural groups presents a simplified understanding of identity

formation. Previous NASW standards do acknowledge that ‘cultural competence is never fully realized, achieved, or completed’, and is ‘a lifelong process’ but go on to emphasize developing skills and competence that alludes to its achievability (NASW, 2001, p.11). This paradox can reinforce the misconception that cultural groups can be “known” by virtue of observable and predictable traits (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Ortega & Faller, 2011). In fact, mounting evidence shows that culture and identity is better understood as intersectional and comprised by both fixed and fluctuating characteristics (Ortega, 2011; McPhatter, 1997). By compounding the misconception of a monolithic cultural identity, working from a cultural competence framework supplies practitioners with a false sense of confidence about their degree of knowledge about people who are culturally different (Herzberg, 2013; McPhatter, 1997; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Weaver, 2013).

Although most cultural competency models integrate the importance of self-awareness in some form, the larger focus tends to be on increasing a practitioner’s comfort level with others, instead of how their world view may impact their work with a client from another background (Fischer-Borne, 2011; McPhatter, 1997; Weaver, 1999). Similar to the ‘tolerance model’ of increasing one’s ability to withstand the presence of diversity, previous cultural competence models failed to recognize *critical* self-awareness as an integral part of creating an open and safe environment for clients.

In summary, the strongest criticism regarding cultural competence is its failure to hold social workers accountable for actively challenging systemic inequalities that directly impact marginalized communities. As it currently stands, the 2015 NASW standards do address barriers to treatment by attempting to prepare practitioners to deliver

competent care, it effectively maintains the status quo by not establishing a “transformative agenda to address inequalities” (Fischer-Borne, 2011). Without an established active model for cross-cultural work it is difficult to uphold a social work commitment to serving marginalized communities.

Conceptual Framework

Postmodern critical theory (PMCT) provides a foundation for this study’s analysis of the development of cultural competence in social work practice and education. PMCT rejects the conceptualization of one universal truth or the ability to be in possession of a totality of knowledge; it asserts that reality is created experientially and through social constructs rather than inherently predictable traits or behaviors (Ortiz; 2011). Critical theory honors the unique experiences of the individual and views cultural identity as intersectional and inextricably linked to structural societal forces (Ortiz; 2011). This theoretical position will be used to critically analyze the conceptualization and implementation of cultural competence as a practice and education model in terms of epistemology, power dynamics, and basic assumptions.

Critical theory was incorporated into the analysis of data in hopes of breaking down existing tensions surrounding contradictory and (at times) unachievable mandates proposed in many aspects of cultural competence practice and education standards. Information was analyzed through the lens of power dynamics inherent in the practitioner-client-community relationship when navigating difference and privilege.

Methods

The purpose of this research study was to conduct a critical examination of cultural competence as a practice model and concept throughout its development in the social work discipline. This study investigated the assumptions posited by the cultural competence model for social work both currently and in a historical context and strives to evaluate the influences and trajectory of cultural competence as a framework. Cultural competence in the discipline of social work is defined in two realms in this study: in education and practice. This research was conducted to contribute to a better understanding of how cultural competence has developed in social work in these two areas specifically.

Data Collection

A narrative review was conducted, synthesizing the findings of literature retrieved from academic databases, historical archives, and current and historical policy and practice statements. The narrative review began with a broad search using SocIndex with full text, Social Work Abstracts, and PsychInfo databases. A variety of research documents were reviewed, including empirical, theoretical, archival and pedagogical approaches. Search terms included: Cultural Competence, Diversity, Cultural Sensitivity, History of Social Work Practice and Social Work Education. After literature was discovered the titles and abstracts were reviewed to determine if the article met established selection criteria. Selection criteria required the inclusion of cultural competence (or related search terms noted above) directly related to social work practice or education. More specifically, this included literature regarding past and present CSWE or NASW standards, the actual CSWE and NASW standards themselves (some of which

were identified in archival data searches), and academic research or theoretical commentary about cultural competence as a concept and practice model. See Table 1 (Appendix A) for a list of source date, type, and author used in this study.

Archival data was identified through consultation with the University of Minnesota Social Welfare Archives library staff. Consultation about the research questions and research focus helped staff identify the Council on Social Work Education records from 1960-1970 as being applicable for the purpose and scope of this research study. This archival collection included primary documents like correspondence papers, meeting minutes, and proposed updates to social work education. The focus of this collection was the documentation of minority groups demanding better representation in the curriculum of schools of social work and in the profession. Groups included Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinos in task force groups like the National Association of Black Social Workers and the Commission on Minority Groups. Because the NASW standards are still too recent to be included in archival collections, available archival data focused mainly on CSWE standards, thus resulting in more robust social work education data.

Data Analysis

Table 2 (see Appendix B) was used to organize the findings of articles and documents that were included in the narrative review. Data analysis conducted with the following guiding questions: How is cultural competence defined? Is there an alternative to cultural competence referenced? Is there information about a theoretical framework? Information about social or historical influences? Furthermore, what does the source say

about cultural identity formation and the responsibility to challenge oppressive structures?

Through the data analysis emerged six themes: What is culture? Diversity and Social Work, Social Work and Cultural Competence, Social Work Practice, Social Work Education, and Criticism. Within some of these themes emerged specific corresponding codes. For Diversity and Social Work, the code of *theoretical frameworks* became more specified into analyzing applicable theoretical frameworks throughout diversity development in social work. For Social Work and Cultural Competence there emerged the codes of *knowledge, awareness, skills, and social justice*. The next theme with corresponding codes was Criticism with corresponding codes of *ethnocentric, unachievable, social justice, and alternatives*.

Findings

What is culture?

The 2015 NASW standards for cultural competence define culture by citing the authors Link & Ramanathan: “culture is a universal phenomenon reflecting diversity, norms of behavior, and awareness of global interdependence” (2015). In order to move forward in understanding the results of this study, an exploration of how culture is defined in the research will be discussed.

Culture is defined in a multitude of ways throughout the data. Most of the academic literature defines culture as encompassing elements of personal or collective values, beliefs, worldview, communication, knowledge, customs and traditions (Fischer-Borne, 2013; Herzberg, 2013; Jani, 2013; McPhatter, 1997; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Weaver, 2013). This could include things like language expression, religious or

spiritual views, social structure, behaviors, attitudes, and social norms. The term “culture” includes ways individuals or communities experience the world around them. This experiencing of the world around can be shaped by ability or disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, immigration status, religion or spirituality, and social class.

Throughout the development of cultural competence in social work practice, definitions of culture have evolved from what was an understanding of culture based mostly on race and ethnicity, to encompassing all of the different ways a person’s identities can shape their world. The current NASW standards (2015) acknowledge culture and identity formation as being *intersectional* in that all aspects of culture, personal identity, and oppressive structures are interconnected and inextricably linked. Furthermore, these oppressive structures can be reflected in the client-practitioner relationship if power dynamics in that context are not addressed by the practitioner or agency (Fischer-Borne, 2013; McPhatter, 1997, Reisch, 1997).

Diversity & Social Work

Beginning in the mid 20th century, the profession of social work increasingly recognized the importance of acknowledging and understanding diversity. This understanding is recognized as an essential element to the profession of social work and its mission (NASW, 2008). However, diversity content in social work education curricula was not emphasized a great deal until the last few decades (Schmitz & Sisneros, 2001).

Excluding much of the settlement house work done in the late 1800’s, which intended to focus on structural or environmental factors that perpetuated the

marginalization of certain communities, much of social work history found in the data focused more on the “melting pot mentality” that was adopted to categorize and integrate the “other” into the mold of Western living (Jani, 2011). Continuing that trend the 1950’s the school of thought concerning social work practice and education was to focus on assimilation. In general, social work educators and practitioners were working from a *cultural deficit* model, attempting to get at the core of what was “wrong” with particular marginalized communities rather than emphasizing respect for differences or analyzing structural causes. This was very in keeping with the psychiatric or diagnostic direction that the ever professionalizing field of social work adopted, a strong hold still existed in mainstreaming others to fit the dominant or “right” ideological perspective (Reisch, 1997).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 led to the *legal protection based on nondiscrimination* of persons based on race, color, or national origin. This protection prohibited any exclusion, denial, or discrimination based on race, color, or national origin by or from federally funded programs. Having a strong presence in government agencies and organizations partially or fully funded with federal money, this law impacted the way social work services had to be delivered. In the early 1970’s, following suit with the movement and legislation of the times, social work educators began to study particular ethnic groups so as to include more content about minorities (Jani, 2011). At this time, CSWE began their promotion of diversity content in social work education regarding minority populations.

In the following decade between the late 1960’s and 70’s, the *ethnic minority* perspective emerged due to social and political movements led by minority groups.

Particularly in social work education, minority students formed groups to challenge the status quo of social work educational bodies. This student driven push demanded more content, student, and faculty representation (CSWE, 1969). Groups found in the literature such as the Chicano, Asian American, and Black student advocacy groups challenged the social work curriculum to be more representative of the increasingly diverse society the profession serves (Jami, 2010).

Following such a large paradigm shift, *cultural pluralism* took hold as the major framework for diversity education and practice in social work throughout the 1980's and 1990's. This framework emphasized a respect for human differences and an acknowledgement of more complex identities. Additionally, this framework went beyond conceptualizing difference solely based on race, ethnicity or gender (Ortiz, 2013). The term *diversity* had now expanded to include cognitive and physical differences along with sexual orientation. In keeping with cultural pluralism, multiculturalism began to take hold shortly after the 2000's and informed the direction social work and other related fields took in their scholarship and practice models (Reisch, 1997).

Interestingly, with such an emphasis placed on diversity education and curriculum, a meta-analysis conducted using the three major social work journals (*Social Casework*, *Social Service Review*, and *Social Work*), from 1970 to 1997, showed that issues concerning diversity were included in only 8% of the articles (Lum, 2000). This suggests a common finding in the data of social work academics being slow to define or distinguish their stance on pressing societal issues (Fischer-Borne, 2011; Kohli, 2010; Reisch, 2007).

Theoretical Frameworks

Numerous theoretical frameworks have been identified throughout the development of cultural competence in social work practice and related fields. Beginning as early as 1980, it was observed in the literature that social work theories were being used to move the cultural competence agenda forward (Kohli, 2010). For social work in particular, four different grounding frameworks were discovered in the literature as being influential to the development of this theory in social work practice. Theories including social constructionist, postmodern, critical theory and cultural humility appeared most frequently in the theoretical and critical literature regarding cultural competence or diversity. The following frameworks are explored chronologically as to follow the trajectory and development of cultural competence from its earliest academic appearance.

Social Constructionist. The social constructionist viewpoint focuses on diversity as a social construct rather than solely inherent or biological traits (George, 1999). This approach acknowledges that aspects of identity like race and gender are the result of social influences and categories that shape and reinforce social norms into identification categories. Ortiz and Jani argue that because “race is a relational concept, its primary societal function has been to classify people for the purposes of separation and stratification” (2013, p.178).

This framework is reflected in the early attempts of CSWE to provide inclusionary content on “specific ethnic minority groups” in a way that unintentionally reinforced inherent differences between races or ethnicities, rather than honor the structural aspects of marginalization and oppression. Social constructivism does point out

that race or culture is a dynamic concept that is ever changing and is often considered a driving force behind postmodernism (Lum, 2000).

Postmodernism. Postmodernism in the data appears as the rejection of universal truths or an objectively dominant pedagogy of dialogue. Postmodernism upholds the concept that in science, especially social science, there can and should exist multiple subjective truths. This concept pushes back at modernism and the idea that truth seeking should be intrinsically singular and based on hard scientific evidence (Ortiz; 2013). Especially because marginalized communities have long been excluded from fields of research as either subjects or researchers, it would be impossible to assert a dominant truth based on research data sourced from unrepresentative samples.

Critical Theory. Critical theory is similar to postmodern theory in that it does not encourage the use of universal truths or master narratives that strive to encompass all knowledge or phenomena (Reisch, 2007; Ortiz, 2013). Critical theory is sometimes more specifically applied in cultural competence work as Critical Race Theory (CRT), which is based on the assumptions that race is a social construction, race impacts all aspects of social living, and ideologies based on race are well established throughout society (Ortiz, 2013). Due to CRT's strong ties to the systemic nature of oppression, it is inherently grounded in a commitment to social justice and exploring intersectionality.

Proponents of critical theory, especially CRT, promote this epistemology as a way of thinking and existing in the world. Keeping that in mind, CRT is to be taught as a distinct paradigm, rather than an attachment to other already existing theories. CRT promotes institutional changes while also recognizing individual factors of distress and

resistance, presenting macro and micro level considerations as being inextricably linked (Resich, 2007; Ortiz, 2013).

Cultural Humility. Cultural humility was first established as an alternative, or enhancing, framework to cultural competence by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia in 1998 in their article about physician training outcomes in multicultural education. This framework has been adopted in areas of social work like child welfare and practice with immigrants and refugees (Ortega & Faller, 2011). Cultural humility posits that all human cultural experiences are unique and should be honored rather than using the over-emphasis on shared group characteristics. The over-emphasis on shared group characteristics, according to this framework, gives privilege to worker expertise about a client's culture and compounds the power imbalances between practitioner and client. This framework encourages practitioners to be inclusive of their client or communities culture differences and to liberate themselves from expectations of cultural expertise (Ortega & Faller, 2011).

Social Work and Cultural Competence

As a central pillar of social work, cultural competence emerged from culturally specific practice frameworks from a variety of fields that include psychology, medicine, and nursing. Early conceptualizations of cultural competency came about as a response to the growing awareness and study of disparate health and life outcomes of historically marginalized communities. Historically, research and attention has been focused on the economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, and immigrant groups being less likely to have access to needed services due to a lack of culturally specific care (Fischer-Borne, 2015; Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Essential elements of cultural competence have been categorized in three major areas: a) knowledge; generally regarding specific cultural groups; b) awareness; in the context of the practitioner's own cultural identity and values, beliefs, biases, and comfort level in cross cultural situations; and c) skills; this element refers to the practitioner's ability to utilize culturally appropriate methodologies and resources for best client outcomes (NASW, 2001; NASW 2015; Lum, 2003). These three categories combined create the framework for what is considered culturally competent practice in the profession of social work and other related fields (Kohli, 2010).

A fourth element, referenced less frequently, is that of anti-oppression or social justice action as part of the framework for cultural competence (Fischer-Borne, 2013; Ortega, 2011; Ortiz, 2013). This element acknowledges the inherent power dynamics that exist in the practitioner-client relationship and challenge providers to actively address social justice issues. Proposed methods for action include: advocating for policy that addresses social injustice and working to empower clients and communities by working in partnership with them (NASW, 2015).

Knowledge. Knowledge appears as a fundamental aspect of cultural competence in almost every source that defines cultural competence. Even in early conceptualizations of incorporating diversity content in education, knowledge about diverse contexts and populations is cited as integral to the development of a competent social worker, organization, or educational institution (Fischer-Borne, 2015; Kohli, 2010; NASW, 2001; NASW, 2015; Ortiz, 2010). In almost every single reissuing of CSWE's Education and Practice Standards, accessing knowledge about diverse populations is used as a broad stroke equated with a successful social work curriculum.

Knowledge in a cross-cultural context is defined in the literature in a broad sense as having relevant information about group history, world-views, communication styles, commonly held beliefs, social structure, values and behavioral characteristics (Ortega & Faller, 2011). In earlier years, knowledge about diversity generally referred to race, ethnicity, and to a certain extent, religion. Social workers who identified as being part of the dominant cultural group were encouraged to learn information about ‘other’ cultural groups (i.e. nonwhite, non-heterosexual, non-Christian, non-English speaking). In more recent years, *knowledge* has evolved to include a more encompassing understanding of ‘difference’ that involves, but is not limited to, gender, sexuality, religion, age, nationality, language, ability and socioeconomic status (NASW, 2015).

Self- Awareness. The definition of self-awareness or awareness has changed multiple times throughout the development of cultural competence standards. Specific examples of what constitutes “self-awareness” will be explored in more detail in subsequent sections of this paper. However, to briefly explain *current* conceptualizations of “self-awareness,” it is regarded as awareness of one’s own culture and identities in order to appreciate another person’s identities, and secondly, is an awareness of the social workers own privilege and power and to acknowledge how this impacts their work with clients (NASW, 2015).

Skills. Culturally competent *skills* in social work practice, according to the data, involve the use of appropriate techniques and methodologies that reflect the worker comprehension of the role of culture in their practice (NASW, 2011; NASW 2016; Ortega & Faller, 2011). For instance, possessing skills to work cross culturally would signify the utilization of appropriate assessment tools, therapeutic interventions, or

connection to appropriate resources. The following sections will outline in greater detail the definition and implementation of skilled culturally competent education and practice.

Social Justice. Only in recent years has the concept of action or social justice work been explicitly included in cultural competence standards for practice or education (NASW, 2015). Action includes work on mezzo and macro levels of social work practice and education and inherently recognized power differentials in the practitioner-client relationship. Cultural competence frameworks that include action or social justice commitment argue that because social work has a commitment to serving vulnerable populations, practitioners of social work must demonstrate active participation in dismantling oppressive systems.

Social Work Practice

In 2015, The NASW issued the *Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*. This most recent development from NASW is a fifty-five-page document developed by the 2015 NASW National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity. The 2015 standards are quite a departure from the earlier, 2008 NASW standards, that were almost half the length (thirty-two pages) and included much less framing in terms of providing definitions, rationale, and context. The 2008 Standards did not include a standard devoted to language *and* communication (NASW). Another distinguishing characteristic of the 2015 standards is its inclusion in introductory paragraphs leading up to the 10 standards, the inclusion of cultural humility as a framework for practice (NASW, 2015).

The new 2015 update provided guidance and goals to the social work profession about culturally competent practice. This most recent issuing included the definition of

each standard followed by a section titled *interpretation* and then a list of *indicators*. The interpretation and indicators sections are not included explicitly in the following presentation of data; however, a summary and example of both will be provided (see below). The summary and examples are presented as closely as possible to the original language of the NASW document to reflect the intent and impact of the language and concepts used. The ten standards that characterize cultural competencies are:

Standard 1. Ethics and Values: *Social Workers shall function in accordance with the codes, ethics, and standards of the NASW (2008) Code of Ethics. Cultural competence requires self-awareness, cultural humility, and the commitment to understanding and embracing culture as central to effective practice.*

The NASW *Code of Ethics* (2008) section 1.05, Cultural Competence and Social Diversity, that is referenced in this standard states that all social workers should understand and recognize that strengths exist in all cultures. It goes on to explain that all social workers should demonstrate their acquired knowledge of their clients' cultures and seek to understand the nature of diversity. The NASW code of ethics is a mandate and guide for professional obligation for all social workers and social work students regardless of their professional role, setting, or population they serve. An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent ethics and values is the ability to identify and negotiate tension and congruity between professional and personal values in relation to other cultures.

Standard 2. Self-Awareness: *Social Workers shall demonstrate an appreciation of their own cultural identities and those of others. Social workers must also be aware of their own privilege and power and must acknowledge the impact of this privilege and power in their work with and on behalf of clients. Social workers will also demonstrate cultural humility and sensitivity to the dynamics of power and privilege in all areas of social work.*

Social Workers should reflect on their own cultural identity and backgrounds and apply insights into their work with clients and communities. Using these insights, and awareness of power and privilege, social workers should utilize cultural humility and empowerment frameworks to develop their client- practitioner relationship. An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent self-awareness is to create and apply strategies that challenge and adjust any detrimental beliefs, attitudes, or feelings.

Standard 3. Cross-Cultural Knowledge: *Social workers shall possess and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding that is inclusive of, but not limited to, the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expressions such as race and ethnicity; immigration and refugee status; tribal groups; religion and spirituality; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; social class; and mental or physical abilities of various cultural groups.*

Social workers are urged to expand their cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of the various factors and information that comprised cultural expression and identity. Possessing specific knowledge about the components of an individual's identity formation is important to obtaining reliable cross cultural knowledge. Being that the concept of cultural identity formation is dynamic and ever changing, social workers must participate in frequent adjustments to their understanding of diversity (CITE). This expanding knowledge should be applied to micro, mezzo, and macro social work systems so as to best serve the individual or population. An example of an indicating characteristic of cross-cultural knowledge is the possession of specific knowledge about global cultural and political systems and how they help or hurt client groups. Additionally, knowledge about barriers to service that are institutional, linguistic, or structural in nature.

Standard 4. Cross-Cultural Skills: *Social workers will use a broad range of skills (micro, mezzo, and macro) and techniques that demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the importance of culture in practice, policy, and research.*

Cross-cultural skills include a wide array of essential elements like active listening, empathy and employing strengths-based interventions. Critical thinking and an ability to tolerate ambiguity when in a position of “not knowing” are also central to cross cultural skills as they are defined by NASW (2015). Using an approach like cultural humility as a compliment to cultural competence engaged the client or community in shared decision-making. Cross-cultural skills are also important when examining the policies and research that inform our professional work. An example of an indicating characteristic of cross-cultural skills is the ability to conduct comprehensive assessment of clients with respect to the differentiation of culturally normative behavior from symptomatic behavior.

Standard 5. Service Delivery: Social Workers shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services, resources, and institutions and be available to serve multicultural communities. They shall be able to make culturally appropriate referrals within both formal and informal networks and shall be cognizant of, and work to address, service gaps affecting specific cultural groups.

Culturally competent service delivery involves the skillful use of resources, services and institutions to best assist clients and communities. To this end, social worker’s organizations must support the evaluation of service delivery methods in terms of meeting cultural competence standards. This ranges from monitoring supervision, evaluations, training, and client feedback. It also means evaluating recruitment and retention of multicultural staff. An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent service delivery is to identify the formal and informal resources in the community. After identification, delineate the strengths and weaknesses of these resources and complete referrals when appropriate and culturally relevant.

Standard 6. Empowerment and Advocacy: *Social workers shall be aware of the impact of social systems, policies, practices, and programs on multicultural client populations, advocating for, with and on behalf of multicultural clients and client populations whenever appropriate. Social workers should also participate in the development and implementation of policies and practices that empower and advocate for marginalized and oppressed populations.*

Social workers should be aware and educated about macro level issues affecting their client and client populations. Using this knowledge, social workers should take action to confront inequality and oppression and/or advocate for social justice initiative using advocacy to empower individuals and communities to promote education, consciousness raising, self-awareness, and personal power to work toward social change. An important aspect of empowerment and advocacy in social work is working from the strengths perspective when considering cultural factors in shared decision-making and empowerment. An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent empowerment and advocacy is to employ practice approaches that guide a client's connection to their own power in a way that is appropriate for their cultural context.

Standard 7. Diverse Workforce: *Social workers shall advocate for recruitment, admissions and hiring, and retention efforts in social work programs and organizations to ensure diversity within the profession.*

The social work profession has indicated their commitment to inclusion, diversity, and affirmative action. Despite this professional commitment, current statistics show that social workers in the United States are still predominantly white and female (86.0 percent), 8 percent African American, 3 percent Latina, and 3 percent identify as other (NASW, Center for Workforce Studies, 2006) with statistics of male social workers following in close percentage order. Due to social work demographics, client populations are found to be much more racially and ethnically diverse than the social work profession. With the general population of the United States continuously increasing in

racial and ethnic diversity, steps have been taken to facilitate the need for more diversity in the workforce. Federal funding of education and training programs for health and mental health professions is one example of the response to this need.

With the assumption that people with similar backgrounds can better understand each other, there is an understandable need to increase the diversity in social work in terms of achieving culturally competence services. An example of an indicating characteristic of a culturally competent and diverse workforce is the ability to achieve a multicultural staffing throughout all levels of an organization. Furthermore, a staff that reflects the clientele served. A culturally competent organization will require cultural competence as a required aspect of job performance by including it in work training and promotions.

Standard 8. Professional Education: *Social workers shall advocate for, develop, and participate in professional education and training programs that advance cultural competence within the profession. Social workers should embrace cultural competence as a focus of lifetime learning.*

Professional education often serves as the strongest link between theoretical and practical knowledge that exemplifies social work expertise. Great emphasis is placed on remaining current in training and education to fit the needs of a constantly changing and multicultural client population. Cultural competence and diversity aim to be addressed in social work curricula and practice. This standard pushes for the inclusion of cultural competence as a core component of social work education at every level including undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs. Continuing education and organizational training should include material on cross-cultural practice. This also applies to professional supervision and being responsible for "setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries" (NASW, 2008, p. 14).

An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent professional education is the promotion of the integration of cultural competence curricula in social work programs at the BSW, MSW and PhD levels. Additionally, an institution must be committed to conducting research that contributes to the enhancement of culturally competence social work practice.

Standard 9. Language and Communication: *Social workers shall provide and advocate for effective communication with clients of all cultural groups, including people of limited English proficiency or low literacy skills, people who are blind or have low vision, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, and people with disabilities (Goode & Jones, 2009).*

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is titled “Improving Access to Services for persons with Limited English Proficiency.” This executive order, “requires Federal agencies to examine the services they provide, identify any need for services to those with limited English proficiency (LEP), and develop and implement a system to provide those services so LEP persons can have meaningful access to them” (LEP, 2015). The LEP order requires organizations and practitioners who receive federal funds to provide language services at no cost to the client.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 mandates that all institutions “ensure effective communication with individuals with disabilities...[and] companions who are individuals with disabilities. Accommodation shall not require an individual with a disability to bring another individual to interpret for him or her” (ADA, 1990). Similar to the LEP order, the ADA requires federally funded organizations to facilitate the communication of information (written, verbal, etc.) effectively and at the appropriate level of understanding for the client.

An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent language and communication is the use of graphic or descriptive representations (like pictures or symbols) for people with limited English proficiency or limited literacy.

Standard 10. Leadership to Advance Cultural Competence: *Social workers shall be change agents who demonstrate the leadership skills to work effectively with multicultural groups in agencies, organizational settings and communities. Social workers should also demonstrate responsibility for advancing cultural competence within and beyond their organizations, helping to challenge structural and institutional oppression and build and sustain diverse and inclusive institutions and communities.*

Social workers should embody leadership qualities that drive forward policy grounded in social justice principles in their organization and beyond. This leadership entails the ability to facilitate difficult conversations that lead to growth and understanding within their personal and professional contexts. Being an advocate for the development of knowledge about culturally competent practice with diverse groups is essential to social work leadership. Overall, social work leaders will display an understanding of the dynamics of power and privilege, cultural humility and social justice in relationship to their own practice and the environment in which they work.

An example of an indicating characteristic of culturally competent leadership is to work in partnership with clients from marginalized communities and encourage client-community empowerment.

Social Work Education

Since the late 1960's there have been several iterations of CSWE Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) that incorporate guidelines about curriculum and content approaches in social work education regarding the inclusion of diversity content. This content is mandated or recommended in the literature in two major ways: Through accreditation standards and curriculum or educational policies. Policies and

standards have generally been directed toward the provision of programs that treat specific (diverse) groups in a nondiscriminatory manner. Throughout the development of these standards and policies, the focus has evolved from nondiscrimination to being more sensitive, acquiring knowledge about groups, and finally to adjustment in attitudes and behaviors.

Similar to the historical perspectives about diversity in social work in general, social work organizations, like CSWE were influenced by social movements of the 1960's and 70's. Affirmative action policies as a result of the executive order under President Johnson were being implemented throughout the nation, increasing the awareness and attention on this subject (Reisch, 1997). The focus on affirmative action policies was on increasing access to existing structures, not challenging or changing existing ones.

In 1969 CSWE created a "project to enhance to competence of social work personnel to understand and work with minority groups" as part of the development of the ethnic minority curriculum (Ethnic Minority Curriculum, 1969). CSWE's rationale for this approach was that the "special needs" of various minority groups in the country posed an urgent problem for society. Additionally, as "health and welfare services [were] being pressed to "devote more resources" to these problems social workers needed to know to "deal with them effectively." (Ethnic Minority Curriculum, 1969). The most effective approach to the problem, as CSWE saw it, was to enrich the curriculum of schools of social work by creating *Source Books* that "deal[t]" with the ethnic minority groups which were most urgently needed: Blacks, Chicanos (Mexican Americans), Puerto Ricans, American Indians, and Orientals.

Each source book contained two types of materials: articles or excerpts from literature that highlighted “issues and problems” related to the particular minority group and case records from “actual practice” (Ethnic Minority Curriculum, 1969). Designated “special staff consultants” with “expertise” in developing teaching material were hired to assume the responsibility for each source book, along with an advisory committee to aid in the logistical implementation of said material. The advisory committee was to consist of leading educators and practitioners, individuals from the minority group, as well as special experts on each group. These source books were distributed to the over 70 graduate schools at the time, over 500 colleges and universities for undergraduate social work education, and to state and local social agencies for “in-service” training. These source books were also to be of use by students and faculty of related disciplines (medicine, law, urban planning, and psychology).

It was noted in the development of educational planning that separate staff and advisory committees were needed for each source book since “knowledge relevant to one minority group is not automatically transferrable to others” (Ethnic Minority Curriculum, Project to Enhance the Competence of Social Work Personnel to Understand and Work with Minorities, pg. 2, 1969). They used the example that problems of Mexican Americans were very different from those of African Americans or American Indians. Concerns were voiced by CSWE about whether or not funding for the program would be supported by the National Institution of Mental Health in correspondence regarding the desire to form task groups and create quality curriculum. However, CSWE and the corresponding Ethnic Minority Committees did continue to meet for planning sessions (Task Force Review Committee, CSWE, 1971).

In addition to increasing content, there was recognition that the social work programs did not reflect in their student bodies or faculty the demographics of the communities they served. These realizations influenced the development of Standard 1234, an EPAS approved by CSWE in 1971. It stated:

A school of social work must conduct its program without discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, ethnic origin, age or sex. This principle applies to the selection of students, classroom and field instructors and other staff [and] to all aspects of the organization of the program of the school. (CSWE, 1971).

Furthermore, the standard required each school to demonstrate “special efforts” it was making to enrich its program by facilitating racial and cultural diversity in student body and faculty (CSWE, 1971). At this point, federal education requirements only affected admission and recruiting of students from diverse backgrounds to ensure non-discriminatory practices.

It wasn't until 1973 that CSWE responded to the call of students and faculty of color to make institutional and environmental changes to schools of social work. A modified 1234 standard (1234A) emerged and introduced the idea of a “receptive milieu” for minority faculty and students. This required that schools must make “continuous efforts” to enrich their program by providing educational supports research and faculty that are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse at all levels of instruction (CSWE, 1973; Jani, 2013). In other words, CSWE was transitioning policy away from nondiscrimination to an active role in programs and their diversification. Elements in a receptive milieu included redesigning the practicum, moving beyond university constraints, providing supportive services, and analyzing the plan to meet standard requirements.

Additionally, in 1973, there was explicit language regarding the importance of social work curriculum reflecting knowledge of racial and ethnic minority groups in terms of historical contexts in the United States.

“The primary purpose of Standard 1234A [was] to achieve the incorporation of knowledge of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, their generic components as well as differences in values and life styles, and the conflicts these generate in the configuration of American society.” (CSWE, 1973).

In the mid 1970’s, social work was prompted to respond to the second wave of feminist movements and an increasingly large number of women in positions of power in the social work field. In 1976, CSWE modified the MSW and undergraduate 1234 standard to specifically include nondiscrimination for women. This clause applied to all program operations and host institution in its nondiscriminatory practices. CSWE cited many changed requirements in related institutions like the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Equal Opportunity Legislation, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and the efforts of the Women’s Movement. These influences, CSWE attested, led to the Commission on Accreditation and the Task Force on Women (CSWE, 1976; Jani 2013).

A distinguishing characteristic of this particular addition to standard 1234A was the specific inclusion of content that “promotes the student’s understanding of the changing role of women and their place in modern society” and to enhance student’s capabilities to “provide sensitive and effective social work interventions” (CSWE, 1976). For the first time, the 1234A guidelines recognized the importance of moving beyond attaining knowledge to the adoption of different behaviors. Instead of stressing a focus on knowledge and content inclusion, a request was made to examine a potential change in attitudes in order to offer proper service delivery.

While this marked an important transition for social work education, there was some backlash about the conceptualization of gender identity (for women) as being “dynamic” and changing, while it seemed that ethnicity and race was seen as static. This criticism came from both within and outside social work. The lack of language or content about institutional racism reflected an assumption that “conflicts” regarding diversity were the result of differences between groups or individuals rather than structures or institutions (Jani, 2013). Additionally, the 1976 update implicitly grouped all women into one group rather than distinguish important factors like education, race, sexuality, socioeconomic status. This reflected the assumption of dominant second wave feminist theory that faced criticism. In the 1980’s the political climate of the Regan/Bush years influenced social work to completely revise the CSWE curriculum policy and accreditation standards. It is speculated in the data that with little hope of passing policy through government, social work thought it advantageous to include more discretionary measures of inclusivity for diverse or “special” populations (Jani, 2013). The new guidelines emphasized more of an attitudinal component to social work education, using language like *understanding* in terms of work with diverse clients or communities. The update required programs to include content on “ethnic minorities of color and women [and] other special population groups relevant to the program’s mission or location” (CSWE, 1982).

The increase in attention to content on special populations was the result of continuing activism and advocacy efforts by students and faculty to disrupt patterns of long standing ethnocentricity in social work education. Another influence at this time were the growing numbers of immigrants and refugees in the United States from

Southeast Asia and Central America (National Conference on Social Welfare, 1981).

With a definite lack of knowledge or content regarding “new” populations of color, CSWE took this development into consideration for revising frameworks for advanced concentrations (Jani, 2013).

In 1982, CSWE added Evaluative Standard 11 which expanded the definition of nondiscrimination to include “race, color, gender, age, creed, ethnic of national origin, handicap, or political or sexual orientation” (CSWE, 1982). The standard also required programs to display “specific, continuous efforts in...recruitment, retention, promotion, tenure, assignment and remuneration” in terms of “class, field, research and other faculty, administration personnel, and support staff” (CSWE, 1982). Standard 12 titled *cultural diversity* and standard 13 *women* addressed content requirements for programs to “make specific, continuous efforts” to enrich the “educational experience it offers by reflecting racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity,” including women, “throughout the curriculum and in all categories of persons related to the program” (CSWE, 1982). In other words, programs were required to have objectives that incorporated content on racial and ethnic perspectives and women.

The period of the 1990’s marked a significant shift in developing scholarship on the topic of multiculturalism and the effort to advance research and evidence-based practice in social work education and practice. The establishment of the Society for Social Work Research, the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research, and the National Institute on Mental Health Task Force on Social Work Research reflect a deepening commitment to this scholarship. This is reflected in the competency expectations for baccalaureate and masters level students to encompass “practice within

the values and ethics of the social work profession and with an understanding of and respect for the positive value of diversity” and should “understand the forms and mechanisms of oppression and discrimination and the strategies and skills of changes that advance social and economic justice” (CSWE, 1994). For the first time, the standards recognized the connection between structural oppression and discrimination and emphasized the importance of an attitudinal component in social work education. What wasn’t explicitly noted in the language was an actual mandate to cover specific populations in educational material or clear directions about how social workers were to address said structures of oppression in their practice.

The 2001 EPAS updated the characteristics for nondiscriminatory practices stating that graduates of accredited programs should be able to “practice without discrimination and with respect, knowledge, and skills related to clients’ age, class, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, family structure, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex and sexual orientation” (CSWE, 2001). The inclusion of language reflecting respect, knowledge, and skills (similar to awareness, knowledge, and skills) marks the beginning of the transition in social work education from content driven education to competency driven education.

The 2008 EPAS are the first set of standards shifting a great deal toward grounding diversity and cultural competence education in the understanding of the *relationship* between oppression and marginalization. An appreciation for how difference shapes life *experience* rather than life situation was incorporated into the learning curriculum, highlighting the “interlocking and complex nature of culture and personal identity” (CSWE, 2008). As such, implicit curriculum and more freedom was granted to

programs to add competencies based on their mission and goals (CSWE, 2008). The 2008 EPAS also recognize the position of the social work practitioner as one of an ongoing “learner” in their work with individuals and communities. Cultural competence and diversity education also stressed social work objectives like assessment, intervention, and research incorporate important cultural considerations.

The current (2015) CSWE EPAS have 9 core competencies. These competencies reflect the complete transition in education model of curriculum design focused on *content* (what students should be taught) and structure (the format and organization of educational components) to one focused on student learning *outcomes or competencies* (CSWE, 2008; CSWE, 2015). The 9 competencies identified in the educational policy describe the skills, knowledge, values, and affective and cognitive process that embody the competency, followed by a set of behaviors that incorporate these components.

Of the 9 competencies, 7 include explicit language and behaviors related to cultural competence or work with diverse populations. Table 1 below illustrates the 7 competencies most related to culturally informed practice, with specific terminology italicized.

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Competency 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make ethical decisions by applying the standards of the NASW Code of Ethics, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, ethical conduct of research, and additional codes of ethics as appropriate to context; • <i>use reflection and self-regulation to manage personal values and maintain professionalism in practice situations;</i> • demonstrate professional demeanor in behavior; appearance; and oral, |
|---|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>written, and electronic communication;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use technology ethically and appropriately to facilitate practice outcomes; and • use supervision and consultation to guide professional judgment and behavior. |
| Competency 2: Engage Diversity and Difference in Practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>apply and communicate understanding of the importance of diversity and difference in shaping life experiences in practice at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels;</i> • <i>present themselves as learners and engage clients and constituencies as experts of their own experiences; and</i> • <i>apply self-awareness and self-regulation to manage the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse clients and constituencies.</i> |
| Competency 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic, and Environmental Justice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>apply their understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice to advocate for human rights at the individual and system levels; and</i> • <i>engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice.</i> |
| Competency 5: Engage in Policy Practice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify social policy at the local, state, and federal level that impacts well-being, service delivery, and access to social services; • assess how social welfare and economic policies impact the delivery of and access to social services; apply critical thinking to analyze, formulate, and <i>advocate for policies that advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice.</i> |
| Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other</i> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p><i>multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to engage with clients and constituencies; and</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>use empathy, reflection, and interpersonal skills to effectively engage diverse clients and constituencies.</i> |
| <p>Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collect and organize data, and apply critical thinking to interpret information from clients and constituencies; • <i>apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies;</i> • develop <i>mutually agreed-on</i> intervention goals and objectives based on the critical assessment of strengths, needs, and challenges within clients and constituencies; and • select appropriate intervention strategies based on the assessment, research knowledge, and <i>values and preferences of clients and constituencies.</i> |
| <p>Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • critically choose and implement interventions to achieve practice goals and enhance capacities of clients and constituencies; • <i>apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment, person-in-environment, and other multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks in interventions with clients and constituencies;</i> • use inter-professional collaboration as appropriate to achieve beneficial practice outcomes; • <i>negotiate, mediate, and advocate with and on behalf of diverse clients and constituencies; and</i> |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitate effective transitions and endings that advance mutually agreed-on goals. |
|--|---|

Criticism of Cultural Competence

Despite how pervasive the cultural competence model is in social work practice and education standards, quite a bit of criticism has mounted that challenge the assumptions of current cultural competence frameworks (Fischer-Borne, 2014; McPhatter, 1997; Ortiz, 2010, Kohli, 2010; Ortega & Faller, 2011; Saunders, 2015; Reisch, 2007). While criticism has existed throughout the development of social work and social welfare history, the development of the NASW standards in the last decade brought more attention to the subject (Reisch, 2007). Major criticisms of cultural competency frameworks include an ethnocentric foundation and implementation, a contradictory and unachievable set of objectives, and a lack of focus on social justice action or accountability for social workers.

Ethnocentric. Both current and historical criticism about cultural competence raise questions about the inherently white, western culture from which social work has developed (Fischer-Borne, 2011; Kohli, 2011; McPhatter, 1997; Nada; 2013; Ortiz, 2010). As the historical context of development of diversity education and practice content showed, social work has continuously framed this issue in terms of ‘other.’ From the dawn of “diversity” information, the message has been about understanding those that are “different” than the social work body of students and practitioners (largely white and middle class). This implicitly defines the ‘other’ as being ‘nonwhite, non-western, non-heterosexual, non-English-speaking, and non-Christian’ (Wear, 2003, p. 550). As was evident in CSWE standards, for a great period of time, barriers between provider and

client existed solely as grounded in a lack of ‘knowledge’ as opposed to understanding structural oppression and inequality.

For quite some time, another major factor contributing to the ethnocentric or monolithic conceptualization of cultural competence was the use of racial and/or ethnic identity as the primary identity for any minority person or group. As reflected in NASW and CSWE standards, it isn’t until the 1980’s that multiple identities or the concept of “multiculturalism” takes hold of conceptualizations regarding cultural competence.

Additionally, while most cultural competency frameworks and explicit policy statements include content regarding self-awareness (as part of awareness, knowledge, and skills) there has been a focus on the practitioner’s capacity for feeling ‘comfortable’ or ‘capable’ or working with someone different than themselves instead of understanding power differentials or how their own identity construct may affect the working relationship. Many critical voices argue that cultural competence frameworks don’t encourage *critical* self-awareness that pushes students or practitioners to examine power imbalances or their own privilege and instead focus on exposure to diverse populations (Fischer-Borne, 2013; McPhatter, 1997).

Unachievable. While the most recent NASW standards recognize that working toward cultural competence is an “ongoing process” that is “never achieved,” many argue that working from a competency framework suggests otherwise (Fischer-Borne, 2013; NASW, 2015; Ortiz, 2011; Saunders, 2015). In general, competence suggests that engaging with educational and professional training content about a variety of diverse groups and their “experience” can translate to knowing the life experiences of a client. The danger found in this approach is the nature in which the culture of the ‘other’ is

presented, as singular, and able to be known by another simply through exposure to information. This practice implication is a tendency to reaffirm or create stereotypical vignettes of group identities (Ortiz, 2011; Weaver, 1999).

Additionally, much of the cultural competence language encourages a competency-based focus on *what* practitioners or students think rather than *how* they think. Though the awareness piece does touch on shifting attitudes and self-regulation, many critics argue it doesn't go far enough to really push practitioners to challenge their own biases and assumptions about others (Fischer-Borne, 2013; Ortiz, 2013).

Social Justice. Time and time again the most consistent criticism found in the literature of cultural competency as a framework for social work practice is the lack of social justice and personal accountability it requires from practitioners (Herzberg, 2013; McPhatter, 1997; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Weaver, 2013). Jani, Pierce, Ortiz, and Sowbel (2011) caution that 'by relying on cultural competence as a conceptual guide, social workers have neglected to pursue a transformative agenda and have defaulted to positions on practice that inadvertently reinforce the status quo' (p. 269).

Until the most recent NASW standards (2015) there was little to no language addressing macro level involvement as being important to a commitment to culturally competent work or a culturally competent social work agenda. The lack of a "transformative agenda" for culturally competent care and education has caused many authors to argue that cultural competence is inherently contradictory to its original intent (Fischer-Borne, 2013; Jani, 2013; Nadan, 2013; Ortiz, 2013). Additionally, there is little attention given to the fact that social justice and social action cannot be universally applied to all marginalized groups with one overarching approach (Reisch, 2007). Social

justice concepts in social welfare ostensibly have developed on a parallel track to that of racial, ethnic, gender, nationality, sexuality, or disability equality. And yet it is difficult to extract the true meaning of social justice as it relates to cultural group of individual identity(ies).

Alternatives. Cultural competence has not existed as the sole framework that influences social work practice, however it has been the most developed and pervasive in the discipline. Other approaches like *cultural sensitivity*, *cultural responsiveness*, *cultural awareness* also appear in social work education materials, content, and practice approaches (Fischer-Borne, 2105). One other framework, that was incorporated in to the 2015 NASW practice standards, is called *cultural humility*. Cultural humility is an alternative framework that has gotten the most attention and endorsements from social work practitioners in the last decade (Ortega & Faller, 2011).

Cultural humility refutes the concept that practitioners can ever achieve expert knowledge about another culture and questions the way this approach influences the relationship between client and practitioner. This framework reflects a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation, addressing power imbalances, and the development of “mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and defined populations” (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 123).

Following this breakthrough article, the framework of cultural humility was adopted in specialized areas of social work training and practice like child welfare (Ortega & Faller, 2011). This adoption, along with academic articles supporting the integration or transition to a cultural humility framework led to its inclusion in the NASW *standards for cultural competency* in 2015.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the development of cultural competence as a concept in social work practice and education. More specifically, the purpose was to analyze the historical, social, and theoretical influences that have shaped cultural competence as it stands today. In the research, the current state of affairs for cultural competence was examined through the narrative information collected from NASW and CSWE practice and education standards as well as academic articles regarding cultural competence. Historical and developmental sources included past NASW and CSWE standards, primary source archival documents, and scholarly articles. Data revealed that much has changed throughout the course of development for the framework of cultural competence in social work education and practice. These changes reflect movement of social work as being “with the times” rather than much further ahead of social, political, or theoretical developments with regard to the meaning and implementation of cultural competence.

As was found in the results of the narrative review, cultural competence in the discipline of social work is deeply grounded its relationship with education and practice with diverse populations (Reisch, 2007; Kohli, 2010; Ortiz, 2010; Jani, 2010; Perry, 2006). This foundation was influenced both by *internal* and *external* forces pushing for more inclusion of information regarding social work and diverse populations. These external and internal forces have continuously pushed social work as a discipline to not only include information about diverse populations, but to actually invest in them. An investment demonstrated by recruiting and maintaining student bodies, faculty, and staff that reflect the population social work has committed to serve, integrating education

content about cultural identity development and cultural identities, and fulfilling the social work commitment to social justice action that combats institutional oppression.

External forces catalyzing the inclusion of practice and education standards regarding diverse populations include The Civil Rights Movement and subsequent passing of The Civil Rights Act of 1964, The Women's Rights Movement, LGBT Rights Movement, Equal Opportunity Legislation, The Americans with Disabilities Act and organizations like the Department of Health and Human Services. External forces impacted social work in that they required or mandated social work (either implicitly or explicitly) to update their education and practice standards to fit an ever diversifying society.

Examples of explicit requirements would be legislation passed that legally binds social welfare agencies to change policies and practices of organizations and institutions in relation to diversity practices. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 *legal protection based on nondiscrimination* is cited as being the most influential and impactful piece of legislation in terms of changing the language and position of social work and diversity practice (cultural competence) and education. The set into motion the reformatting of social work agencies policies and practices as far as how services were distributed and accessed. It also forged a standard for the non-exclusion of students based on specific demographics. However, it is seen in the data that these updated policies and procedures tend to take much longer to actually make an impact in real time. It isn't until 2001 that NASW creates explicit policy language about standards service delivery and practice with diverse groups (NASW, 2001).

Implicit influences are powerful social movements or paradigm shifts as a result of activism and awareness building like the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement. These implicit influences were demands made by disenfranchised groups not represented in explicit legislation or those who were not satisfied with the legislative process and impact. The Disability Rights Movement was essential in influencing later legislation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and fighting more representation in curriculum content and inclusionary practices (NASW, 2015; Jani, 2013). Without the push from marginalized groups to have their unique histories and stories shared this information may not have entered classrooms of social work at all. The Women's Rights movement, specifically the Second Wave Feminist Movement called for the inclusion of updated information about female identity as being dynamic and progressing. These movements challenged the discipline of social work to move from simplified understandings of "society" to more nuanced and honest representations of "minority groups." These challenges, however, generally resulted in small steps forward and reserved developments in terms of conceptualizing "difference" or acknowledging institutional oppression.

Internal forces, like the proliferation of academic criticism surrounding the concept of diversity practice, what would later be called cultural competence, also had an influence on the development of policy language and implementation. Several authors in the data waged heavy criticism of the ethnocentric roots of cultural competence, its impracticality and achievability, and lack of real commitment to social justice (Fischer-Borne, 2013, Jani, 2013; Kohli, 2011; Ortega & Faller, 2011; Ortiz, 2011). This type of pressure toward NASW, CSWE, and social work as a discipline can be connected to the

massive overhaul on the NASW practice standards in 2015. More language was included about transforming knowledge into action and ways to demonstrate a commitment to cultural competence beyond knowing information about specific groups.

Seemingly in an effort to comply with the push for evidence based practice in the discipline of social work, education curriculum shifted from content based to outcome based. This is most evident in the 2015 EPAS which go into great detail about indicators and examples of specific demonstrations of competencies. However well intended the measurable outcomes may be, it still raises much tension about the concept of being “competent” in another’s culture or the assumption that one can master these skills. It would be difficult to argue that CSWE had any *intention* of setting students up to attempt mastery of a concept that in its most honest form is one that is never achieved, however, the competence model does still possess the contradictory notion that one should strive for competence.

Overall, when comparing historical social and political forces to the timeline of developments made in social work diversity education and practice, movements reflect a reactionary stance on behalf of social work. In many instances, it wasn’t until federal laws required organizations that were funded using federal dollars to implement specific policies and practices that ensured the inclusion (or least not exclusion) of minority or marginalized groups that social work institutions implemented explicit policy statements or mandates for the discipline. This is most obviously seen in the CSWE EPAS which have gradually increased inclusionary provisions for different minority and marginalized groups as awareness and pressure to do so grew (CSWE, 1971; CSWE, 1973; CSWE 1976; CSWE, 1982; CSWE, 1994; CSWE, 2001; CSWE, 2008; CSWE, 2015).

Regardless of these legally binding requirements, social work still lacks ethnic and racial diversity in its educational institutions, especially at the graduate level and in the practicing field of social work. Social workers in the United States are still predominantly white and female (86.0 percent), 8 percent African American, 3 percent Latina, and 3 percent identify as other (NASW, Center for Workforce Studies, 2006) with statistics of male social workers following in close percentage order. Compared to American Psychological Association (APA) workforce statistics in 2005 the percentage of active psychologists broken down by race, psychologists are predominantly white (90.6%), 3 percent African American, 3.5 percent Hispanic, 2.5 percent Asian, and 1 percent “other” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Considering being an active psychologist can mean an individual possesses either a master’s or PhD level degree, and social work requires at the most a master’s level degree to practice independently, the small difference represented in the statistical breakdown of race is concerning. Additionally, considering the APA doesn’t even have a specific cultural competence standard in the *APA Code of Ethics*, this is even more concerning.

This is just one example of the lack of diversity in social work practice used to illustrate the inability of social work to uphold its commitment to being culturally competent on institutional and professional levels. Many more could be used when looking at the representation of social workers with disabilities, non-citizens, non-Christians, or those who are transgender. Race and ethnicity happen to be the demographics most historically reported as is reflected in the history of social work practice and education focusing on the orientation of “diversity” existing mainly in those structures.

Steps Forward

Inclusion of cultural humility as a framework to be incorporated into social work practice in many ways symbolizes a shift in thinking about how social work has historically centered its own professional identity in western dominant cultural thought. Furthermore, theoretical and practice developments informed the changing approach of how social workers must be aware of their own cultural identity and how this shapes interactions with others (Fischer-Borne, 2013, McPhatter, 1997; Weaver, 1997). This development in thought went beyond just *what* a practitioner or student knows about others but also focuses on the internal experience of navigating difference in an authentic way that validates intersectionality and individual life experiences.

The inclusion of cultural humility marks an NASW response to long standing criticism about relating to their clients as “others” (Fischer-Borne, 2013, Jani, 2013; Kohli, 2011; Reisch, 2007; Ortiz, 2011; McPhatter; 1997; Weaver 1997). Positioning the social worker in a role that is focused on increasing their comfort level in working with someone categorized as belonging to a “diverse” cultural group further objectifies the individual experience and identity development in a way that deconstructs the original intent of employing a cultural competence framework. Cultural humility, however, works from a position of honoring the strength and intrinsic value of different cultural approaches in the world rather than in relation to a western/white model of understanding the world (Ortega, 2011).

Rather than approaching cultural inclusion as an add-on to dominant social work cultural thought this approach recognizes the cultural experiences and beliefs of our individual clients and/or their communities as equally valid and important. Furthermore,

the cultural humility framework emphasizes the equal value of various cultural beliefs and experiences as intrinsically part of social justice work as it shifts the conversation from the possession of “competence” about the “other” to a position of responsiveness, assuming an active role as a practitioner rather than a stagnant one. This added further definition the incredibly complex and dynamic nature of the interaction of cultural identities between and among individuals and groups. This is an especially important consideration for social workers in a practice setting where the practitioner-client relationship serves as its own microcosm of power dynamics and cultural meanings.

Moreover, transitioning from a reactive to an active or *responsive* framework from which a social work practitioner, organization, or educational institution may operate adds to the accountability of the social work identity to be active in constructing legislation and policy that erodes the structural forces of oppression (Ortega, 2011).

Implications for Social Work

This research provided a brief look into the history, development, and current context of cultural competence in social work practice and education. For further implications it is suggested that studies examine the experiences and opinions of social work practitioners, educators, and students about cultural competence. Rationale for this was discovered as part of the research process in that social workers themselves are often the vehicles for the implementation of cultural competence standards in social work practice and education and therefore are likely to have valuable information on the subject.

This research also revealed a great deal of tension within the discipline about how cultural competence should be (or should have been) approached in the past, present and

future. As social work is continuously pushed to address the stark contrast between the demographics of its student bodies, faculty, and practitioners in comparison with the populations it serves it begs the question, why is this still the case? Surely, cultural competence standards are not the origin of social stratification, but they do seem to have a pattern of reflecting the social climate in which social work exists and operates. Being mindful and aware of this connection gives social work the opportunity to be at the forefront of advancing an active role in social justice.

More developments have been made in creating access to social work education and licensure through constructing different avenues for obtaining credentials like honoring work experience as qualification for licensure while working toward a Bachelor's degree. Another option would be to create an Associate degree option for students who want to complete education but may not be able to complete a four-year degree within the necessary timeline. Many individuals already working in social work or related fields, who identify as being part of a marginalized or minority group, could add incredible depth and knowledge to our discipline if given a reasonable option to complete requirements. Having a shorter program more fit for older or "non-traditional" students with families and different life experiences may open up the field for the inclusion of the diverse students and practitioners it is committed to working in partnership with.

Another consideration is to review student and practitioner interpretations of what cultural competence means to them and compare and contrast this with the intent and mission of NASW and CSWE standards. Do they match? Should they? Where are the gaps and why do they exist? Additionally, to what extent do social work students and practitioners engage in active social justice work? Taking stock of which agencies and

institutions require social workers to be active and accountable for social justice action on the mezzo and macro level may bolster the drive to keep each other engaged. If institutions do hold themselves and their community of social workers accountable, how is this done? Investigating in a very intentional way the level of action social workers are expected to take may reveal more clearly the meaning of the identity of a culturally competent social worker.

Limitations

While this research was able to contribute to a growing body of information regarding cultural competence in social work practice and education, there were limitations within this study including subjectivity of the researcher and methods used to identify sources. Using the method of a narrative review makes the results of this research less generalizable and inherently less objective.

The sources used in this research study were limited to literature, policy, and archival documents that are published and publicly available. Relevant information about cultural competence implementation at the organizational or agency level may have been helpful in understanding in greater depth the scope of this topic, however, this type of information is not always available for public use. Additionally, hearing the experiences of social work practitioners, educators, and students may be beneficial for future research on this subject as to add to the personal context of cultural competence.

Another limitation is the subjectivity of the researcher in defining the results of the narrative review. It was unavoidable using this method to not have the lens of the researcher impact the way the results were defined, organized, coded and analyzed. Due

to the lens of the researcher, another individual or analytical tool may have interpreted the data differently and thus resulting in different findings.

Conclusion

This dialogue is not meant to detract from the profound and important clinical work that is done every day in classrooms and agencies, for that too is taking action and a commitment to cultural competence. It is simply a reminder that, especially when it comes to cultural competence, the micro and the macro are not mutually exclusive. To be a culturally competent practitioner means to understand, react, and *respond* to the power dynamics that exist in our role as a social worker. It is evident that throughout the history of its development diversity practice and cultural competence has been a reaction to social influences that have forced the hand of social work to evolve.

With the reactionary path cultural competence established in its historical development, what needs to change? The updated NASW and CSWE standards were a step in the right direction, but not a huge one, and clearly not enough. Taking stock of the political climate of *today* we find ourselves as social workers and human beings in a place not so unfamiliar. Pervasive anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, elitism alive and well, police brutality taking Black lives, open bigotry and misogyny, hatred toward transgender individuals, and more internationally displaced people than ever before in history. Knowing that a commitment to cultural competence is just as important now as it ever has been, what is our response?

References

Council on Social Work Education. (1969). Project to Enhance the Competence of Social Work Personnel to Understand and Work with Minority Groups. Social Welfare Archives, (Box 3: Ethnic Minority Curriculum, 1969). University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Council on Social Work Education. (1971). Task Force Review Committee. Social Welfare Archives, (Box 3: Ethnic Minority Curriculum, 1969). University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Council on Social Work Education. (1971). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (1973). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (Rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (1976). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (Rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (1982). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (Rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (1994). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (Rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (2001). *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards* (Rev. ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (2008). *Education Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved on September 15, 2015 from, <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=41861>

- Council on Social Work Education. (2015). *Education Policy and Accreditation Standards*. Alexandria, VA: Author. Retrieved on October 30, 2015 from, <http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=81660>
- Fisher-Borne, M., Montana Cain, J., & Martin, S. L. (2015). From mastery to accountability: Cultural humility as an alternative to cultural competence. *Social Work Education, 34*(2), 165-181. doi:10.1080/02615479.2014.977244
- George, U., Tsang, K.T. (1999). Towards an inclusive paradigm in social work: the diversity framework. *The Indian Journal of Social Work, 60*(1), 57-68.
- Herzberg, L. (2013). Shared decision-making: A voice for the Lakota people. *Child & Family Social Work, 18*(4), 477-486. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00867.x
- Jani, J., Pierce, D., Ortiz, L., & Sowbel, L. (2013). Access to intersectionality, content to competence: deconstructing social work education diversity standards. *Journal of Social Work Education, 47*(2), 283-301. doi: 10.5175/jswe.2011.200900118
- Kohli, H., Huber, R., & Faul, A. (2010). Historical and theoretical development of culturally competent social work practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 30*(1), 252-271. doi: 10.1080/08841233.2010.499091
- Lum, D. (2010). *Culturally competent practice: A framework for understanding diverse groups* (3rd ed.) Florence, KY: Cengage Learning.
- McPhatter, A. R. (1997). Cultural competence in child welfare: What is it? how do we achieve it? what happens without it? *Child Welfare, 76*(1), 255-278. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.stthomas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=24228937&site=ehost-live>

- Murray-García, J., Tervalon, M., Dong, X., & E-Shien Chang. (2014). The concept of cultural humility. *Health Affairs*, 33(7), 1303-1303. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2014.0564
- Nadan, Y., & Ben-Ari, A. (2013). What can we learn from rethinking 'Multiculturalism' in social work education? *Social Work Education*, 32(8), 1089-1102. doi:10.1080/02615479.2012.723686
- National Association of Social Workers. (2001). *NASW standards for cultural competency in social work practice*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on September 15, 2015, from <http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/NASWculturalstandards.pdf>
- National Association of Social Workers. (2015). *NASW standards for cultural competence in social work practice*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/PRA-BRO-253150-CC-Standards.pdf>
- National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *NASW standards for cultural competency in social work practice*.
- Ortega, R. M., & Faller, K.C. (2011). Training child welfare workers from an intersectional cultural humility perspective: A paradigm shift. *Child Welfare*, 90(5), 27-49. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.stthomas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=74015048&site=ehost-live>
- Ortiz, L., & Jani, J. (2010). Critical race theory: A transformational model for teaching diversity. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(2), 175-193. Retrieved from

<http://ezproxy.stthomas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=51457095&site=ehost-live>

- Perry, C., & Tate-Manning, L. (2006). Unravelling cultural constructions in social work education: Journeying toward cultural competence. *Social Work Education, 25*(7), 735-748. doi:10.1080/02615470600905986
- Resich, M., (2007). Social justice and multiculturalism: persistent tensions in the history of U.S. social welfare and social work. *Studies in Social Justice, 1*(1), 67-92.
- Schmitz, C. L., Stakeman, C., & Sisneros, J. (2001). Educating professionals for practice in a multicultural society: understanding oppression and valuing diversity. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 82* (6), 612 (611)
- Saunders, J. A., Haskins, M., & Vasquez, M. (2015). Cultural competence: A journey to an elusive goal. *Journal of Social Work Education, 51*(1), 19-34.
doi:10.1080/10437797.2015.977124
- Tervalon, M. & Murray-Garcia, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, 9*, 117-125.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2013). *ACS Files 2005-2013*. Retrieved from
<http://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/13-dem-ac/s/table-6.pdf>
- Weaver, H. N. (1998). Indigenous people in a multicultural society: Unique issues for human services. *Social Work, 43*(3), 203–211.

Appendix ATable 1:
Article Form

| Author | Year | Type of source |
|--|----------------------|--|
| Council on Social Work Education | 1971-2015 (multiple) | Official organizational document; policy statement |
| Council on Social Work Education | 1969 | Archival; correspondence document |
| Council on Social Work Education | 1971 | Archival; committee meeting notes |
| Fischer-Borne | 2015 | Critical analysis |
| Herzberg | 2013 | Critical analysis |
| Jani et. Al. | 2013 | Historical analysis |
| Kohli | 2010 | Historical; critical analysis |
| Lum | 2000 | Historical analysis |
| McPhatter | 1998 | Critical analysis |
| Murray-Garcia | 1998 | Critical analysis; conceptual |
| Nadan | 2013 | Conceptual analysis |
| National Association of Social Workers | 1998-2015 (multiple) | Official organizational document; policy statement |
| Ortega | 2011 | Critical review; conceptual |
| Ortiz | 2010 | Critical analysis |
| Perry | 2006 | Critical analysis |
| Saunders | 2015 | Critical analysis |
| Reisch | 2001 | Historical/critical review |
| Weaver | 1998 | Critical analysis |

Appendix B

Table 2:

Data Abstraction Form

| Data | Notes from reviewer |
|--|---------------------|
| Title of Study | |
| Author, year | |
| Research Method | |
| Data Source/Sample | |
| Results | |
| Is cultural competence defined? If so, how? | |
| Is an alternative to CC defined? If so, what and how? | |
| Information about origins of CC? Theoretical framework? | |
| Information about challenging oppressive structures? To what extent? | |
| Information about cultural identity formation? | |
| Information about social influences of CC? | |
| Distinguishing characteristics of this article | |
| Limitations/concerns about the study | |