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Cross-cultural bridges : closing the gaps in direct services with immigrant and diverse populations

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Recommended Citation

Chen, L. (2015). Cross-cultural bridges : closing the gaps in direct services with immigrant and diverse populations. *New York : Bank Street College of Education*. Retrieved from <http://educate.bankstreet.edu/independent-studies/30>

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Cross-Cultural Bridges:
Closing the Gaps in Direct Services with Immigrant and Diverse Populations

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Dual Degree with Columbia University School of Social Work

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Science in Education

Bank Street College of Education

2015

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Abstract

The shifting cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the United States is expected to become more diverse in the coming decades. Population trend data projects that by the year 2060, the percentage of the number of individuals who identify as foreign-born or with a minority group will make up a large portion of the overall population. This has important implications for direct service professionals, including social workers and educators. An overview of culturally sensitive, responsive, and competent practices is provided for work with immigrant and diverse populations to assist professionals in the process of crossing cultural bridges, overcoming privilege, and building bridges.

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Introduction

That dream of a land in which life should be better and fuller and richer for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement...It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams, as cited in Ştiuliuc, 2011, pp. 363-364)

The American dream, a term coined and defined by James Truslow Adams (1931) amidst the events of the Great Depression, has become “the cultural expression of North American identity” (Ştiuliuc, 2011, p. 364). Perceived as the land of opportunity, the United States has historically been a destination for immigration and resettlement. Prior to 1965, immigrants to the United States were predominantly of European descent, including the British, German, and Irish (Falicov, 2007; Hatton, 2015). The landscape shifted in 1965 when “the Hart-Celler Act amended the Immigration and Nationality (McCarran-Walter) Act”, eliminating the national origins-based quota system and transitioning to an eight-part preference system based on hemispheres (Hatton, 2015, p. 347). Under this system, preference was given to workers based on skill or occupation, non-immediate relatives, and refugees (Hatton, 2015). Immediate relatives, including spouses, children, and parents of citizens, were not subjected to this system for family reunification purposes. As a result, in the following decades, immigrants to the United States came increasingly from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Falicov, 2007; Hatton, 2015).

In light of the eight-part preference system it enacted, the United States did not intend for this shift to transpire (Hatton, 2015). Given its preference for highly skilled or trained

workers and the reunification of family members, the United States had hoped to preserve its European-dominant immigrant population. Yet, despite being unqualified for immigration through skill- or occupation-related preferences, the family reunification process significantly assisted the inflow of further members from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Falicov, 2007; Hatton, 2015). These dynamics drastically transformed the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the United States, and remains of current relevance, particularly in the direction and implementation of services for immigrant individuals and families. It requires direct service professionals to reconsider traditional approaches, in a way that emphasizes sensitivity to backgrounds, experiences, and personal narratives.

Population and Demographic Trends

The overall population of the United States continues to grow significantly, despite a slight drop in growth percentage compared to the 1990s (Mackun, Wilson, Fischetti, & Goworowska, 2011). According to the 2010 Census, the United States experienced a 9.7 percent increase between the years 2000 and 2010, reaching a reported total of 308.7 million people. This growth is attributed to “increases in those who reported their race(s) as something other than White alone and those who reported their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino” (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011, p. 3).

To collect this data, the 2010 Census used two self-identification questions in accordance with the United States Office of Management and Budget’s “mandate that race and Hispanic origin (ethnicity) are separate and distinct concepts” (Humes et al., 2011, p. 2). The first question requires individuals to respond regarding their identification with Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, as it relates to “heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United

States” (Humes et al., 2011, p. 2). The second question requires individuals to respond regarding their identification with a race category, including White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Some Other Race (Humes et al., 2011). Those who identified as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin may also identify with any of the race categories.

Responses to the two questions offer specifics into the shifting makeup of the overall population in the United States between the years 2000 and 2010. The 9.7 percent, or 27.3 million people, increase in the overall population was due in large part to the growth in the Hispanic population, which accounted for more than half of the development (Humes et al., 2011). During the decade, the Hispanic population experienced an increase of 43 percent, or 15.2 million people, reaching a reported total of 50.5 million people. In terms of race categories, “the Asian alone population experienced the fastest rate of growth and the White alone population experienced the slowest rate of growth” (Humes et al., 2011, p. 5). The Asian alone population experienced an increase of 43 percent, or 4.4 million people, while the White alone population experienced an increase of only 5.7 percent, or 12.1 million people (Humes et al., 2011). For those who identified as of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin, more than half identified as White and approximately one-third as Some Other Race, where responses mirrored their Hispanic origin and ethnicity. Also, while the majority, 97 percent, identified with only one race category, the option to identify with two or more race categories was available. Despite only 2.9 percent of the population identifying as such, the group experienced an increase of 32 percent, or 2.2 million people. In particular, those who identified as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander and American Indian and Alaska Native reported more than one race at a higher rate.

These shifts are expected to continue in the coming decades, “an indication of the changes in diversity” across all regions of the United States (Portman, 2009, p. 22). A recent report from the United States Census Bureau summarizes population projections through the year 2060, when the overall population in the United States is expected to reach 417 million people (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Of this total, approximately one in five is projected to be foreign born. In terms of race and ethnicity, by 2044, more than half of the population is projected to identify with a minority group, any group besides non-Hispanic White alone. Specifically, by 2060, the non-Hispanic White population is projected to comprise only 44 percent of the total population. The Two or More Race population is projected to experience the fastest rate of growth, with an increase of 227 percent, accounting for 6.2 percent of the total population. The Asian alone population is projected to increase by 128 percent, accounting for 9.3 percent of the total population. The Hispanic population is projected to increase by 115 percent, accounting for 29 percent of the total population. The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone population is projected to increase by 63 percent, accounting for 0.3 percent of the total population. Lesser growth is expected for two other race alone groups, Black or African American and American Indian and Alaska Native. They are both projected to increase by only 42 percent, accounting for 14 percent and 1 percent of the total population, respectively. Similarly, of the growing foreign-born population, Hispanic will comprise the largest group at 42 percent. Non-Hispanic Asians follow with 27 percent.

Conceptualizing International Migration

Given the projected increase of the foreign-born population in the United States, it is crucial to have an understanding of theories attributed to international migration, particularly

in regards to motivations that spark the process (Yang, 2010). An abundance of theories have been developed to explain the phenomenon, which, according to Yang (2010), may be categorized accordingly: classical push-pull theory, economic models, sociological models, and integrated theories.

Classical Push-Pull Theory

Emerging from the works of Ernest Ravenstein (1889) and Everett Lee (1966), this theory describes international migration in terms of push factors that motivate individuals to leave the country of origin and pull factors that attract them to the host country (Yang, 2010, pp. 2-3). Push factors include natural disasters, economic difficulties, and political unrest. Pull factors include economic opportunities and political inclinations. Ravenstein, in particular, argues the influential significance of pull factors over push factors in decisions to migrate. Yet, others have maintained that the two sides function parallel to one another; where there is a push, there is a pull. Lee also noted “intervening obstacles between the place of origin and the place of destination”, include distance and immigration policies that may hinder the process (Yang, 2010, p. 3).

Economic Models

Based on factors including “supply and demand, costs and benefits, and price and utility”, economists have contributed several theories about international migration, including equilibrium theory, human capital theory, segmented labor market theory, and new home economics of migration (Yang, 2010, p. 7). Equilibrium theory proposes that international migration emerges due to an imbalance between the country of origin and the host country in terms of labor supply and demand (Yang, 2010, p. 4). This supply and demand is directly

related to differentials in wages. As a result, migration occurs to repair the imbalance, returning the labor supply and demand, and wages, back to its equilibrium.

Larry Sjaastad's (1962) human capital theory describes international migration as an outcome of expected "positive net return...In other words, expected future returns to migration or better opportunities (for example, better jobs, higher wages, and a more satisfying lifestyle) motivate people to move" (Yang, 2010, p. 5). Generally, individuals select places where the returns are expected to be the greatest (Yang, 2010).

Michael Piore's (1979) segmented labor market theory suggests that international migration occurs because of pull factors, specifically the demand for immigrant labor in developed countries (Yang, 2010, pp. 6-7). The labor market in these sectors typically is unskilled, have lower wages, and have fewer benefits and security. To fill this demand, employers recruit immigrants, who are often eager workers despite the conditions.

The focus of the above economic models is on the individual level (Yang, 2010). Oded Stark and David Bloom (1985) transferred this focus to the household level in their model, new home economics of migration, detailing migration as a decision-making process that involves members of the same family unit (Yang, 2010, pp. 5-6). In migration, the goal is to increase the expected household income.

Sociological Models

Sociologists, on the other hand, have utilized social factors to explain the process of international migration in world system theory and migrant social network theory (Yang, 2010). Emerging from the works of several theorists, including Elizabeth Petras (1981), Alejandro Portes and John Walton (1981), and Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich (1984), world system theory describes international migration as a result of historical linkages

established between the country of origin and the host country (Yang, 2010, pp. 7-8). These military, political, ideological, and economic connections are present in the demand for and supply of labor, wage differentials, and immigration policies.

Migrant social network theory, based on the works of John MacDonald and Leatrice MacDonald (1974) and Douglas Massey et al. (1987), proposes that international migration takes place because of the presence of social networks in the host country (Yang, 2010, pp. 8-9). Social networks exist in the form of relatives and friends who immigrated prior, as well as established ethnic associations in the host country. These networks offer assistance and support to individuals during the migration and settlement processes. Also, immigration policies within the United States, particularly in terms of family reunification preferences, require individuals to access these networks for international migration.

Integrated Theories

In an attempt to offer comprehensive explanations as to why international migration occurs, theories have integrated individual and structural factors into several constructs, structural determination theory and cumulative causation theory (Yang, 2010). Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut's (2006) structural determination theory was initially developed to explain undocumented migration (Yang, 2010, pp. 9-10). Yet, this theory may be applied to other patterns of migration to suggest that the process occurs because of "societal structural changes, deliberate labor recruitment, changes in individual lifestyles and relative deprivation" (Yang, 2010, p. 10). As a result of these shifts, individuals seek better opportunities in other places (Yang, 2010). Continuous migration leads to the emergence of social networks, maintained as additional individuals arrive in the host country.

Gunnar Myrdal (1957) and Douglas Massay's (1990) cumulative causation theory proposes that migration endures because of "the expansion of networks, the distribution of income, the distribution of land, the organization of agriculture, the culture of migration, the regional distribution of human capital, the social meaning of work, and the structure of production" (Yang, 2010, p. 10). Here, international migration appears because of events that have occurred prior, often influential in decision-making processes about migration.

Components of Culture

The changing population and demographic trends of the United States, particularly in the growing foreign-born and minority populations, require direct service professionals to have an awareness and understanding of cultural processes. As the landscape of the United States becomes increasingly diverse, there will be a surge in the number of groups who identify with cultures that differ from the dominant culture (Jandt, 2012).

Culture can be defined as the totality of components shared by a group of people, including experiences, beliefs, values, behavioral norms, attitudes, thoughts, customs, and traditions (Ford & Kea, 2009; Jandt, 2012; National Education Association [NEA], 2011). These components can be categorized accordingly:

Symbols refer to verbal and nonverbal language. Rituals are the socially essential collective activities within a culture. Values are the feelings not open for discussion within a culture about what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, normal or abnormal, which are present in a majority of the members of a culture, or at least in those who occupy pivotal positions. Heroes are the real or imaginary people who serve as behavior models within a culture. (Jandt, 2012, p. 6)

Thoughts and behaviors associated with these components are gradually learned through interactions within the family system and community, normally passed down from previous generations (Ford & Kea, 2009; Jandt, 2012). An individual's view of the world is also guided by these learned thoughts and behaviors.

The Acculturation Process

Immigrants typically settle in host countries, where the culture differs considerably from that of their countries of origin. Prior life experiences and individual attributes, including age at the time of migration, developmental stage, and length of residence in the host country, influence the ways in which immigrants may adapt to the cultural environment of the new country (Falicov, 2011). Dependent on the presentation of these factors, the acculturation process may manifest in one of four distinct ways (Evanoff, 2006; Tahseen & Cheah, 2012). The integrated style occurs when the "heritage culture" is maintained in interactions with the "host culture" (Tahseen & Cheah, 2012, p. 431). The marginalized style occurs when both the heritage culture and host culture are rejected (Tahseen & Cheah, 2012). The assimilated style occurs when the heritage culture is rejected and the host culture is maintained. The separated style occurs when the heritage culture is maintained and the host culture is rejected.

The acculturation process also involves two specific components, behavior and psychology (Tahseen & Cheah, 2012). The behavioral component refers to an individual's ability to adhere in external and recognizable ways to the cultural practices of the heritage or host culture, specifically in cultural settings. The psychological component refers to an individual's identification with the components of the heritage or host culture, including symbols, rituals, values, and heroes.

Generally, individuals who have acquired integrated and assimilated styles of acculturation are those who immigrated at young ages and had lengthier residences in the host country (Tahseen & Cheah, 2012). These experiences allow for individuals to become more exposed to components of the host culture, particularly in interactions with cultural members. Such exposures, as well as higher educational attainment and income levels, assist in increasing behavioral and psychological identification with the host culture.

Presentation of Cultural Gaps

Integrated and assimilated immigrants ordinarily do not have difficulties navigating the dominant culture of the host country, due to their acceptance and maintenance of cultural components. Marginalized and separated immigrants, on the other hand, may experience difficulties due to their rejection. Recently arrived immigrants may have a similar experience, given their shorter length of residence and fewer opportunities for interactions with members of the host culture. Yet, when immigrant groups interface with these members, differences in thoughts, beliefs, experiences, values, and other components of culture are presented. This is referred to as a cultural gap and may appear in different forms.

Individualism and Collectivism

The dominant culture of the United States aligns with individualistic expectations and practices, where independence, personal choice, self-expression, and private property are valued (Hsueh, Hu, & Clarke-Ekong, 2008; Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, & Garcia, 2009). Conversely, many immigrant groups, including those from Latin American, Asian, and African countries, originate from cultures that adhere to collectivistic expectations and practices, where interdependence, respect, social relationships, and shared property are valued. The expression of individualism and collectivism is “associated with different child-

rearing goals, norms of communication, notions of social roles, and concepts of development” (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009, p. 475).

Differences in child-rearing goals, norms of communication, and concepts of child development were exemplified in a research study by Greenfield, Quiroz, and Raeff (2000). Analysis of parent-teacher conferences between immigrant Latino parents and their children’s elementary school teacher, identified as European American, revealed several reoccurring dynamics. The teacher viewed individual success as positive development, whereas parents viewed family success or the child’s involvement in it as positive development. The teacher utilized praise to reward the child’s accomplishments, whereas parents utilized criticism to encourage model behavior. The teacher stressed cognitive skills, whereas parents stressed social skills. When the teacher did highlight social skills, such as speaking with other students, it was often discussed negatively. The teacher viewed oral expression as a component of cognitive skills, whereas parents viewed respect for authority, in the form of listening, as a component of social skills. Finally, the teacher encouraged parents to teach at home, whereas parents believed teaching was the teacher’s obligation.

Notions of social roles present in beliefs about parental care. Parental care refers to financial assistance with daily expenses and tasks, and emotional support in the form of visits and phone calls, for aging adults (Hsueh et al., 2008). In individualistic cultures, parental care is not assumed to be the adult children’s obligation. Still, based on values of individuality and personal choice, adult children may choose to accept the responsibility. In collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, parental care is an expectation, as a return for the care parents provided during the children’s upbringing. Collectivism-based filial values “reinforce interdependence; unconditional loyalty and devotion to parents and family; the

ability to endure existential difficulties; a lifelong commitment to self-sacrifice for family needs; and filial responsibility governed by rules of primogeniture and gender roles” (Hsueh et al., 2008, p. 776). Specifically, in Chinese culture, parents are expected to reside with married adult sons (Hsueh et al., 2008). Unmarried adult daughters live with parents until marriage, at which point they are expected to care for parents-in-law. Adult sons are responsible for financial support, while unmarried adult daughters and daughters-in-law are responsible for personal and emotional support. As such, Chinese immigrants who adhere to collectivistic values often reside in households that span several generations. In these households, caretaking roles of children may be shared between two generational systems, parents and grandparents.

Religion

Religious affiliations, commonly associated with cultural identity, are understood to have considerable influence on individual thoughts and actions (Ning, 2013). Within the United States, the dominant religious culture is that of Judeo-Christianity. Yet, Chinese immigrants may abide by Confucius, Buddhist, or Taoist beliefs. Similar to individualism and collectivism, these differences in religious beliefs lead to distinct opinions about how one should think and act. Members, who adhere to Judeo-Christianity, are expected to be more concrete, using logic and analysis in their decision-making processes. Alternatively, immigrants, who adhere to Confucius, Buddhist, or Taoist beliefs, are expected to pay particular attention to experiences, senses, and intuitions. As a result, their judgment of others may present ambiguously.

Medical Interventions

Selection of medical interventions can be informed by religious affiliations (Fontes, 2008). “For instance, if a Cuban mother practices the Afro-Caribbean religion of *santería* and her child falls ill, she may consult her *santero* godparent before agreeing to comply with medical treatment” (Fontes, 2008, p. 15). Here, if the godparent suggests a religious intervention over medical intervention, it is likely the mother will adhere to the advice (Fontes, 2008).

Immigrants may also select and adhere to interventions based on familiarity and understanding (Fontes, 2008). Traditional Western medicine, as practiced within the United States, is based on reductionist practices (Ning, 2013). The human body is viewed using a compartmental approach, where each body part is considered separate from another. Treatment generally involves analyzing each body part for symptoms and cures. Conversely, traditional Chinese medicine is grounded in holistic beliefs, where human and nature, and individual and group, units are formed together to become a whole. Aligned with these beliefs, traditional Chinese medicine views “the human body [as] an organic whole whose balance needs to be maintained” (Ning, 2013, p. 24). Thus, illness is a result of the imbalance, and treatment involves returning the human body back to its balance (Ning, 2013).

This can be a dilemma for supporters of traditional Chinese medicine when they access care in traditional Western medical settings (Fontes, 2008). Medical professionals typically prescribe medicine dosages based on how much and how long they believe it is needed. For antibiotics, in particular, this can range from days to weeks. Although adherence is reported in initial days, Chinese patients often take themselves off the antibiotic

when illness symptoms fade, despite medical advice to remain on it for a particular time period. Their belief is that the body has returned to its balance and that additional antibiotics would only create problems, or imbalance. Such patients may become mislabeled as being incompliant with medical advice.

Help Seeking Structures

Immigrants from Latin America and Asia often come from cultures where “formal help structures”, similar to those in the United States, do not exist (Goh, Wahl, McDonald, Brissett, & Yoon, 2007, p. 69; Suinn, 2010). These structures include counselors and social workers, whose services are regularly accessed for support and guidance (Goh et al., 2007). In these respective cultures, however, support structures present informally, in the form of family, friends, and others within the community. This is representative of the collectivistic nature of the cultures, particularly in values of interdependence and social relationships. Thus, immigrants from these cultures may be less likely to seek support and guidance from formal help structures and to an extent, uncertain about how to access such services. Beliefs about maintaining personal affairs as private matters, particularly within related immigrant communities, also prevent these groups from seeking help (Yan, 2008). In doing so, they bypass the risk of having others disclose or gossip about their personal affairs. Associated with this is the notion of saving face, a desire to “not [draw] attention to one’s personal weaknesses and perceived failure to preserve relational harmony” (Wong, Tran, Kim, Kerne, & Calfa, 2010, p. 321). Again, this is representative of collectivistic values, as the primary relationship that is preserved within this desire is that of the family’s (Wong et al., 2010). A person’s help-seeking actions are considered to have a direct, correlating relationship with the family’s reputation.

Disciplinary Practices

The dominant culture is generally presented and recognized through enforced structural laws, which direct service professionals are expected to abide by (Yan, 2008). Specifically, in child welfare, social workers and educators are noted mandated reporters, expected to report suspicions of abuse. This action may clash with the norms of certain immigrant cultures, particularly those that enforce disciplinary practices that are unfamiliar to members of the dominant culture. An example Fontes (2008) provides is a common disciplinary practice found in Asian and Latino cultures, children kneeling on uncooked rice. In the case of one social worker, she believed “the practice was so bizarre that she thought it might have been a sign of the parents’ mental illness” (Fontes, 2008, p. 71). Despite no obvious signs of injuries and the punishment only taking place for ten minutes, the social worker decided to report it as a case of child abuse (Fontes, 2008).

Other practices that may cause professionals to report abuse include washing the mouth with soap, belting, locking up a child in a closet for extended prayer, and drinking laxative-like liquids (Fontes, 2008). Despite these being rooted in cultural norms and religious teachings, this does not prevent a reporting of abuse. Professionals need to consider the force, length of time, and duration of the act in deciding whether it constitutes as abusive behavior. In the above example, had it been only a single incident, it would most likely have not been considered a child abuse case. In light of these dynamics, to ensure permanent custody of children, this requires immigrant parents to “recognize the need to shift from corporal or other forms of excessive punishment”, abiding by values and norms recognized by the dominant culture (Falicov, 2007, p. 164)

Gender Roles

In the United States, the dominant culture adheres to a social structure, where men and women are considered equal partners (Barry, Bernard, & Beitel, 2006). This has an effect on family dynamics and gender expectations. Within the dominant individualistic culture, women are permitted and invited to enter workforces, forgoing expected familial obligations that some immigrant heritage cultures abide by. Thus, a gap may present between the dominant culture and the heritage culture in terms of how they view gender roles. This is described in an example of East Asian immigrants, where “Confucian philosophy stresses the collective welfare of the family or clan” (Lu & Lin, 1997, p. 196). Four roles are present within each family unit: spousal, parental, filial, and worker, all of which work together to sustain the unit (Lu & Lin, 1997). Beginning as early as birth, males and females are socialized into their expected roles within this unit. Males learn to be independent and assertive, skills necessary for worker roles. Females learn to be dependent and expressive, skills necessary for parental and spousal roles.

Language

Immigrants typically arrive in the United States without knowledge of the language required to navigate the dominant culture, English. This creates a number of barriers between members of the heritage and host cultures, especially in social, professional, political, and cross-cultural interactions. The absence of proficiency in the dominant language prevents a thorough understanding of dialogue used by professionals within institutions such as schools (Goh et al., 2007). Within schools, this absence affects their navigation of the mainstream educational system, specifically in accessing services and interfacing about student progress (Goh et al., 2007; Yohani, 2013). Involvement of families

is considered crucial to student success, offering understanding of progress and the ability to access services before additional difficulties arise (Goh et al., 2007). Yet, when parents do not have the language skills or support to engage in and process the exchange, a barrier to communication surfaces.

Language involves both explicit and implicit rules, in the form of verbal output and gestures or tones, respectively (Ning, 2013; Yohani, 2013). These rules are generally learned over time in interactions with members of the language group. Also, these rules translate into social norms.

For example, when Americans make an invitation, they usually add *come if you want to* to express their respect towards guests' choice, but Chinese may sense a lack of sincerity from this expression. While Chinese accept an invitation, they usually add the words *I will try to come* to show their politeness, which make[s] Americans at a loss for being not sure whether they will come or not. (Ning, 2013, p. 24)

The example is provided to offer insight into how cultural rules, such as politeness, may present in the explicit output of language (Ning, 2013). English speakers stress specificity and directness, traits that may be interpreted as disrespectful in cultures that stress politeness and indirectness (Ahn, Kim, & Park, 2008). For members of distinctive cultures, such rules may become lost in translation, misinterpreted to meanings not implied by the act. Even when directly translated, word order, structures, and phrases of one language may be nonexistent in the language of translation. The absence of parallel words between the two languages often leads to hidden cultural meanings being lost in translation. This presents also in areas of daily communication, in greetings, acknowledgments, and apologies. English speakers typically use direct greetings, whereas Chinese speakers greet in consideration of

situations, asking if a person has eaten or where they are going. For English speakers, this may feel similar to a probing question, which can result in an awkward interaction.

Implicit rules of communication include the use of eye contact, a common feature of social interactions (Akechi et al., 2013). Eye contact presents differently dependent on cultural rules and norms. In Western European or North American cultures, equivalent to the dominant culture of the United States, direct gaze direction is perceived to be respectful and polite. Conversely, in East Asian cultures, these traits are presented in averted gaze direction. Thus, individuals from East Asian cultures often display less eye contact than those of the dominant culture and embrace the belief that “a face that is making eye contact is more unpleasant and unapproachable” (Akechi et al., 2013, p. 3).

Also, within the same heritage culture, dialectical variations can present the same barriers that exist across languages. Dialectical variations are dependent on place of origin (Tan, 2012). For instance, the primary dialect of immigrants from southern China may be Cantonese, whereas the primary dialect of immigrants from northern China may be Mandarin. Other regional dialects include Hokkien, Teochew, Taishanese, Fujianese, and Hainanese. These dialects differ considerably from one another, in terms of word structure, intonations, and word usage, and are “not mutually intelligible” (Tan, 2012, p. 341).

Generational

Immigrant adults generally arrive in the United States with young children or looming plans to start a family. For separated individuals who choose to maintain the heritage culture and reject the host culture, they often will choose to teach and enforce components of the heritage culture when raising children. Against the backdrop of the dominant culture, 1.5-generation and second-generation children are placed in unique positions. They generally

learn the explicit and implicit rules of the heritage culture at home, and those of the dominant culture through their interactions with members at school and within the community (Yohani, 2013). This presents a gap between the teachings of the heritage culture and the dominant culture.

Parents who are rigid in their enforcement of components of the heritage culture, including behavior norms, values, customs, and traditions, are likely to engage in conflicting relationships with their children. This happens especially as children attempt to find their place within the two cultures. As a result of intergenerational conflicts and high parental expectations, the parent and child systems become immersed in control-rebellion patterns, where parents attempt to control through enforcement and children attempt to separate by rebelling (Falicov, 2007; Suinn, 2010). These patterns can lead to children acting out in school, depressive symptoms, and suicide attempts. With regard to behaviors, parents are often resistant about adapting American cultural ideals, such as permissiveness, due to concerns about drug use, acts of crime, and sexual promiscuity (Falicov, 2007). However, as these gaps between the parent and child systems increase, the conflicting relationships will only intensify (Ahn et al., 2008).

As children continue to engage with members of the dominant culture, their exposure to, knowledge of, and understanding of cultural components increase (Goh et al., 2007). When this occurs, especially in the acquisition of the language of the dominant culture, role reversals emerge. Children become interpreters for parents at school meetings, government agency appointments, and other exchanges that require proficiency of English. In these exchanges, children serve as a link between the two cultures, helping their parents understand the structures of related institutional systems. Consequently, children become parentified, as

the responsibility in navigating the school system and other English-based institutions falls exclusively on them.

Role reversals and intergenerational conflicts take place even in adulthood. Referencing the filial practices previously discussed, there may be an extant gap in understanding about the roles of adult children in parental care. Collectivistic cultures hold strong beliefs about adult children, particularly oldest sons, caring for their aging parents (Hsueh et al., 2008). Conversely, children raised in individualistic cultures, such as the United States, may not be so willing to provide such care. Their beliefs about parental care can present in different ways. They believe that the oldest son is not obligated to be the sole financial and emotional supporter, and that the obligations should be shared with the government and all adult children. Specifically, the government has many resources that may be accessed by aging parents, including healthcare, home aide services, and financial assistance in terms of Social Security and retirement funds. Also, individual and personal circumstances should be considered in deciding who will provide care amongst the adult children. Parents do not necessarily need to live in the home, and can remain close by or at a distance.

Conflicts also exist in decision-making processes involving dating and marriage, when parents attempt to control their children's choices (Ahn et al., 2008). Whereas parents believe the decision is based on collective thoughts, children may adhere to individualistic ideals of choice. "In doing so, rather than being respectful and obedient to their parents' decisions and recommendations, children may begin to challenge the authority of their parents" (Ahn et al., 2008, p. 360).

Recommendations for Direct Service Professionals

Cultural gaps exist and present in various forms, markedly noticeable in cross-cultural interactions. Awareness of this process is especially critical for professionals who regularly interface with members of cultures whose values, behavioral norms, attitudes, traditions, and customs differ from those of the dominant culture. Given the shifting cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the United States, these interactions will become increasingly common in direct service settings, such as schools, mental health clinics, hospitals, and community service organizations. In order to provide “culturally sensitive and culturally competent” services, direct service professionals will need to identify ways in which they can cross cultural bridges, overcome privilege, and build bridges (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2001, p. 8). Privilege, in this context, refers to the advantageous status of being a member of the dominant culture.

Social Workers

Traditionally, the social work profession uses a person-in-environment framework to assess the levels of interactions between members of various systems, particularly those of importance to the focus individual (Fontes, 2008; NASW, 2001). Adapted from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system, Fontes (2008) used an ecosystemic framework that emphasized the place of ethnic culture and social service systems. The inner circle, or system, is the individual, including his or her genetic makeup, experiences, and developmental level. The second circle is the individual’s home and family. The third circle is the ethnic culture, or other aspects of culture. The fourth circle is the proximal social systems, including the individual’s neighborhood, school, providers, and peer group. The

outer circle is the wider social systems, including state policies and national policies whose impacts trickle into the other systems.

The framework's emphasis on culture allows social workers to consider the individual's background, in terms of values, norms, and beliefs (Fontes, 2008). Specifically, this steps away from individualism's emphasis of self towards collectivism's emphasis on social relationships and interdependence, which is valuable when working with members of certain heritage cultures. Also, identification of the focus culture allows social workers to place themselves within the individual's ecosystem. Those who find themselves outside of the circle will need to gain an understanding of the focus culture before an alliance can be forged. This can be achieved by utilizing cultural literature, attending cultural events, and engaging with members of the heritage culture.

This aligns with Section 1, Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients, of the *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*, which social workers are required to adhere to:

1.05 Cultural Competence and Social Diversity

- (a) Social workers should understand culture and its function in human behavior and society, recognizing the strengths that exist in all cultures.
- (b) Social workers should have a knowledge base of their clients' cultures and be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of services that are sensitive to clients' cultures and to differences among people and cultural groups.
- (c) Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color,

sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

(NASW, 2015)

Here, cultural competence “refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures...in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities” (NASW, 2011, p. 11).

To acquire cultural competence, social workers must first culturally and socially identify their selves, in terms of values, thoughts, feelings, and actions (Fontes, 2008). This process is an extension of the work within the ecosystemic framework and requires social workers to reflect on the cultural and social components, such as race, ethnicity, class, and religion, that they identify with (Fontes, 2008; Watts-Jones, 2010). Reflection allows social workers to become self-aware of themes and patterns of interaction that affect their thoughts and actions, especially in direct service work with clients (Watts-Jones, 2010). These themes and patterns of interaction may present in the assumptions, biases, and stereotypes social workers subconsciously reinforce because of differences in values and beliefs to those of their clients (Fontes, 2008). For instance, biases about child-rearing practices of certain heritage cultures may lead to assumptions of abuse.

Thus, it is essential for social workers to engage directly with clients to gather information and to use the person-in-environment framework to organize information (Fontes, 2008). In this process, social workers need to be considerate of cultural norms of hierarchies and greetings, being mindful of customary practices. Names need to be respected as well, dependent on cultural norms in how clients would like to be addressed. For instance, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian cultures use double names, which people prefer to be

addressed by. Hence, social workers working with these cultures need to be mindful to not omit one of the names. Also, through the model of location of self, social workers can begin a dialogue with clients about similarities and differences in how they each identify (Watts-Jones, 2010). This can help to blur some of the professional-client hierarchies to create a partner relationship.

George Saba and Denise Rodgers (1990) provide guidelines that can be used to ensure culturally competent practices in direct service work with clients, referred to below as the family:

1. Clarify your assumptions [about the members of the group];
2. Realize that your perceptions may vary considerably from the family's;
3. Accept that a climate of mistrust exists;
4. Understand that mutual stereotypes enter the interview room first;
5. Be conscious of the power relationships between you and the family;
6. When uncommon events occurs, consider alternate explanations in addition to the obvious ones;
7. Accept and admit your fallibility;
8. When you discover your discriminatory behaviors, do not give up. Make change and continue to work;
9. Explore your setting for structures that foster prejudice;
10. Cultivate safe collegial relationships which will permit discussion of clinical discriminations; and
11. Most importantly, be open to learning from the families you treat.

(As cited in Fontes, 2008, p. 12)

Specifically, in work with immigrant individuals and families, certain strategies can be utilized to ensure clients receive culturally sensitive and culturally competent services. Formal help structures, such as social service agencies, are typically not familiar institutions to immigrants (Fontes, 2008; Goh et al., 2007; Portman, 2009). Traditionally reliant on informal structures, such as family and friends, they are often hesitant to engage with direct service professionals. To overcome this barrier, social workers can provide concrete support to clients, including letter translation, phone interpretation, class enrollment, and service coordination, as a way to build a trusting relationship. This relationship strengthens as immigrants begin to realize that social workers are there to provide support and assistance.

The social worker's demonstration of warmth, care, and respect in interactions with clients can also help to build the working relationship (Fontes, 2008). "This can be achieved by remembering details about the client's situation, starting meetings with time to socialize, and truly listening to the client's concerns" (Fontes, 2008, p. 52). With regard to time, it is imperative to have a cultural understanding of the concept (Fontes, 2008). For instance, Vietnamese clients employ lateness as a technique to not appear eager.

Further strategies described below are intended to be utilized by social workers, or counselors, within the context of a school environment. Social workers can familiarize immigrant students with the formal help structures of the United States "by using small-group work or a buddy/mentor system" (Goh et al., 2007, p. 69). Small groups may contain members of the heritage culture, dominant culture, or both, and can function to deliver information to students about structures of help and how to access services (Goh et al., 2007). These groups also build a supportive network for students to become more familiar with

components of other cultures and the dominant culture, which can serve as a protective factor.

School climate is another arena social workers can utilize to build cultural awareness amongst students, families, and staff (Goh et al., 2007). Social workers need to be mindful to not “present the lessons on cultural differences or culture shock in isolation. Rather, they should create a comprehensive program that makes the lesson an integral part of school life” (Goh et al., 2007, p. 70). This can happen in the form of cultural appreciation weeks, where all students are engaged in learning about a particular heritage culture (Goh et al., 2007). Samples of cultural artifacts, including clothing, games, and art, can be displayed throughout the school. Cultural members from students’ families and communities can be invited to engage students through conversations, activities, and presentations. Similarly, social workers can engage students in dialogue about immigrant experiences in terms of culture shock, adjustment, and value systems. This, in particular, will help to raise awareness and understanding about immigrant peers for members of the dominant culture. Activities that can help to facilitate these conversations include simulations and role-plays. Throughout these processes, it is crucial that social workers and other related professionals have a concrete awareness and understanding of the cultures within the school community at large (Portman, 2009).

Educators

Within the school community, educators are also important participants in the process of providing culturally sensitive and culturally competent services. Children, individuals under 18 years of age, comprise a substantial portion of the overall population, accounting for 24 percent or 74 million people, according to the 2010 Census (Howden & Meyer, 2011).

The shifting cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the United States is best represented within school settings, particularly public schools. Nearly two in five public school students identify as Black or African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or American Indian or Alaska Native (NEA, 2011). Yet, teachers, who identify as White, comprise 90 percent of the teaching force. Given these demographic trends, it is imperative for educators to increase their awareness and understanding of different cultures. Willingness on the part of educators to partake in these processes

- a) affirms our need to prepare students for their responsibilities in an interdependent world;
- b) recognizes the role schools play in developing attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society;
- c) values cultural differences and affirms the pluralism that students, their communities, and teachers reflect; and
- d) challenges all forms of discrimination in schools and society through the promotion of social justice.

(NEA, 2011, p. 2-1)

However, simply increasing awareness and understanding of different cultures is not sufficient. The goal is for educators to become culturally responsive, where they “work proactively and assertively to understand, respect, and meet the needs of students from cultural backgrounds that are different from their own. Cultural responsiveness is [also] the recognition that students are similar to, but also different from, each other” (Ford & Kea, 2009, p. 1).

Similar to social workers, it is crucial for educators to first self-reflect on their cultural and social identities, in order to overcome assumptions, biases, and stereotypes they may have about their students. Such thoughts can hinder the relationships between educators and students, which can have an encompassing effect on student achievement. Thus, in order to truly become culturally responsive in their teaching practices, educators need to have an awareness and understanding of their own cultural background; an awareness and understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds; and be comfortable integrating their own culture, students' cultures, and the dominant culture using methods that build on students' strengths (Coggins & Campbell, 2008; Ford & Kea, 2009).

Muschell and Roberts (2011) offers suggestions for how educators may engage in dialogue and reflection about their own, as well as their students', cultural backgrounds. Close readings of picture books by Leo Lionni, *Frederick* (1967), *Cornelius* (1983), and *Tico and the Golden Wings* (1964), and others, can serve as inspirations for conversations about "complex and difficult topics, such as race and racism, religious difference, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression" (Muschell & Roberts, 2011, p. 338). These discussions can be continued in future literature circles, where facilitators guide conversations and educators are invited to share their viewpoints (Muschell & Roberts, 2011). Also, autobiographical explorations allow educators to critically reflect upon experiences that have influenced their personal, cultural, and racial beliefs, values, and expectations.

Once this awareness is obtained, integration of the three areas, the educator's heritage culture, the students' heritage cultures, and the dominant culture, can happen through the use of culturally responsive teaching techniques (NEA, 2011). Techniques focus on student-centered instruction, bi-directional teaching and learning, multiple expressions of teaching,

flexible grouping, the inclusion of collectivistic cultural values alongside the dominant cultural values, and collaboration (Ford & Kea, 2009). These techniques communicate to students the acceptance and inclusion of all backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs. Students who identify with cultural components that differ from the dominant culture are embraced in a nonjudgmental manner. For instance, educators need to be aware of students who may be uncomfortable with oral language usage, offering participation alternatives, such as small group work (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009). Thus, the classroom becomes a community of integrated cultures, rather than that exclusively of the dominant culture.

Also, instruction can build on student experiences from outside of school and within their cultural communities, creating a link between the heritage culture and the school culture (NEA, 2011). This can happen in curriculum activities, including information gathering or data collection, community service projects, neighborhood walks, learning about cultures present in the classroom community, interviewing members of other cultures, and exploring cultural identity within a name study. The inclusion of multicultural children's literature about language, religion, geographic region, gender roles, names, and nationality can assist in directing some of these activities (Gunn, Brice, & Peterson, 2014; Muschell & Roberts, 2011; Nathenson-Mejía & Escamilla, 2003).

Yet, there are several criteria that need to be considered in the selection of books, including country of origin, language, and the type of literature (Nathenson-Mejía & Escamilla, 2003). Educators need to be mindful of the countries of origin of their students, in order to select books of personal relevance to the students. For bilingual students, and even English language learners, the inclusion of books both in the home language and school language creates a connection between the cultures of the two places (Nathenson-Mejía &

Escamilla, 2003; NEA, 2011). Moreover, it allows English language learners to engage in classroom activities, despite not being proficient in the dominant language (Nathenson-Mejía & Escamilla, 2003). Contemporary literature, both fiction and nonfiction, can assist in raising cultural awareness for educators and students, through the realistic experiences portrayed. Similarly, sharing circles can be utilized to increase awareness and understanding of various cultures (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009). Sharing circles invite students to “bring an object from the home to school and to share about it – describing it and explaining why it is important” (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009, p. 479).

Culturally responsive teaching practices are crucial to raising awareness and understanding about students and families. Yet, many of the above practices are applicable primarily in classroom settings. Thus, it is imperative that educators integrate a cultural competence lens, similar to the one described for social workers, to their work with families. Despite apparent difficulties in engaging parents, including linguistic barriers and time constraints, parent engagement is a known factor that contributes to students’ academic success (NEA, 2011). In light of this data, it is crucial for educators to allocate time and effort to the home-school engagement process.

Again, this begins first with educators culturally and socially identifying their selves and students’ families in terms of cultural components, including values, beliefs, thoughts, and behavior norms. Armed with this knowledge, educators can begin to engage directly with families. This can occur within the development of curriculum that encourages interactions between students and their families (NEA, 2011). Educators can plan units and lessons that allocate time for parent-student interviews, cultural cooking sessions guided by family members, and visits to affiliated cultural associations and institutions. This allows

families to become an integral part of the classroom community, where they are considered essential resources for learning. Educators can also informally engage with families during drop-off and dismissal periods (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009). Simply as a way to form connections, these conversations do not need to be about children and can be about trivial matters, such as the weather.

Home visits are another way for educators to directly engage with families (Maldonado-Colon, 1999; Tran, 2014). They “allow [educators] to take an active role as the learner to develop a more symmetrical relationship with families and where knowledge is exchanged, expectations are communicated, and partnerships are established for the overall academic excellence for children” (Tran, 2014, p. 25). Prior to a visit, as a way to learn more about students and their families, educators compile a list of questions they would like answers to. Information gathered can later be used to inform the culturally responsive teaching practices within the classroom, described above.

Sawyer (2015) offers the BRIDGES framework to assist educators in the family engagement process. The steps are summarized below:

1. Build: Identify related strategies and goals
2. Recruit: Gather input by giving parents a voice
3. Individualize: Accommodate differences in family engagement
4. Dialogue: Engage in ongoing and accessible communication
5. Generate: Offer strategies for parents
6. Empower: Provide knowledge and skills to improve parent-child relationships
7. Strengthen: Maintain an effort to sustain relationships

Within the constraints of the educator's responsibilities, engaging in all the above practices may appear overwhelming. Yet, the endless benefits associated with culturally responsive teaching and culturally competent and sensitive practices should provide reassurance that student achievement will only improve with these in place. In an attempt to consolidate these practices, the National Education Association (NEA) (2011) offers a checklist for educators for reflective purposes. Rated on a continuum of *I do this a lot*, *I do this a little*, and *I haven't done this*, the indicators are listed below:

1. I know the cultural background of each of my students and use this knowledge as a resource for instructional activities.
2. I know the culture of my classroom environment and behaviors and how it affects all of my students.
3. I design lessons that require students to identify and describe another point of view, different factors, consequences, objectives, or priorities.
4. I integrate literature and resources from my students' cultures into my lessons.
5. I know the English language levels of each of my students (e.g. Language assessments such as Bilingual Syntax Measure, LAS, Woodcock-Munoz, IPT, and CELDT).
6. I provide instruction that helps to increase the consciousness and valuing of differences and diversity through the study of historical, current, community, family, personal events, and literature.
7. I consistently begin my lessons with what students already know from home, community, and school.

8. I design my instructional activities in ways that are meaningful to students in terms of their local community norms and knowledge.
9. I incorporate local norms and perspective into my classroom instruction on a daily basis by talking to students, parents, and community members, and reading relevant documents.
10. I collaborate with students to design activities that build on community resources and knowledge.
11. I provide opportunities for parents to participate in classroom instructional activities.
12. I vary activities to address students' learning styles (e.g., multiple intelligences, differentiated instruction).
13. I understand the differences between school academic language and my students' social language and I use scaffolding techniques to bridge between the two.

(p. 2-4)

Cultural Liaisons and Brokers

Despite the conscientious efforts of social workers and educators to engage with individuals and families of different heritage cultures, there may be hindrances to the formation of a working partnership. These include conflicting beliefs about particular roles in the education and socialization of children; cultural, social, and financial backgrounds; personal experiences; and language (Sanders, 2008). On these occasions, cultural liaisons, or cultural brokers, can become supportive networks for direct service professionals, individuals, and families. Cultural liaisons are often members of the conflicting heritage

culture and serve as a bridge between the community and the direct service organization, including schools and social service agencies (Nelson & Guerra, 2011; Yohani, 2013).

Cultural liaisons participate in a number of related roles during the process of increasing family engagement, awareness, and education (Sanders, 2008). They offer direct services to families, who are uncertain about how to navigate the formal systems, and to professionals, who do not yet have the knowledge and skill set to work with families of different backgrounds, in the form of a middle person. In this role, cultural liaisons help both sides to interpret conflicting cultural components and to model strategies that can be applied to similar future interactions. Also, cultural liaisons can provide education to direct service professionals about the cultural components of specific heritage cultures (Nelson & Guerra, 2011; Yohani, 2013).

Interpreters and Translators

Language can also serve as a hindrance to the working relationship between individuals, families, and direct service professionals. Federal laws require organizations that receive federal assistance to “provide services that are accessible to people with limited English proficiency” (Fontes, 2008, p. 54). This is to ensure that clients can understand and partake in the communication exchange (Fontes, 2008). Similarly, speakers of the dominant language may require interpreters to assist them in decoding technical terms (Wiener, 2014). For instance, the special education system comprises of an abundance of terms generally used by professionals in the field. To unfamiliar individuals, the terminology can be overwhelming. Interpreters serve as a bridge, to help them decode and understand the language.

Thus, professionally trained interpreters should be employed in these exchanges (Fontes, 2008). However, due to related financial reasons, it can be difficult to access such quality services. Fortunately, cultural liaisons, who can demonstrate fluency in both languages, can also serve as interpreters. Their awareness and knowledge of the cultural components, as well as the explicit and implicit rules of language, of the two cultures are assets to the process (Ning, 2013). Simultaneously, Fontes (2008) and Sawyer (2015) suggest avoiding the use of informal interpreters, including family members, friends, and children. Often untrained, these interpreters may be too disturbed by the material to provide an accurate interpretation; attempt to help the client save face by leaving information out of the interpretation; misinterpret, delete, or insert information; and be unfamiliar with the rules and words of similar dialects (Fontes, 2008).

Also, translators are critical to the process of ensuring accessible services. Service delivery generally requires clients to sign forms that state background information, treatment plans, and stipulations (Fontes, 2008). Yet, many often do not have a thorough understanding of the information provided. Bilingual professionals may offer to translate the documents in the moment, but this strips immigrant individuals and families of the chance to thoroughly review and consider the information before making a decision. Thus, it is imperative that paperwork be provided in the languages of the client population, as a way to empower clients in the decision-making process. At the same time, organizations need to ensure that the translations are readable, understandable, and without errors.

Administrators

Despite the well intentions of direct service professionals, the implementation of culturally sensitive, responsive, and competent practices is not feasible without the support of

administrators (Goh et al., 2007; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009). Those who believe in these practices ensure their part in the culture of the organization, through the availability of related services, support for staff, and professional development during the learning process. They lead by example, as direct participants and organizers in trainings, activities, and events. Specifically, “professional development would need to include knowledge and skills with culture, including language and learning activities” (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2009, p. 483).

Conclusion

The shifting cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of the United States is expected to become more diverse in the coming decades, across all regions of the nation, particularly in the percentage of individuals who identify as foreign-born or with a minority group. These dynamics have critical implications for the direction and implementation of direct services in multicultural settings.

For professionals employed in formal structures, such as schools, social service agencies, and mental health agencies, this change will present prominently in the client population attempting to access services. Forgoing traditional mentalities and hierarchies in professional-client relationships, direct service professionals will need to reconsider their approaches within several service delivery processes: engagement, information collection, alliance building, maintenance of the working relationship, and interventions. Crucial to this process is the location of clients within an ecosystemic framework, specifically in the members that make up their immediate systems and how they may self-identify culturally and socially. To the same extent, it is imperative that professionals also reflect on their identities, both culturally and socially. Acknowledgment of similarities and differences

between professionals and clients are important in moving the work forward, specifically in how professionals choose to cross cultural bridges, overcome privilege, and build bridges. Thus, it is necessary for professionals to proactively ensure that culturally sensitive, responsive, and competent practices are essential components of their work with clients of different heritage cultures. Such work requires an in-depth understanding of personal backgrounds, experiences, and stories.

This approach is applicable not only to professionals and clients who identify differently from one another, but also to those who identify within the same categorical groups of culture, race, ethnicity, and language. Such groups are often not homogeneous, with differences presented depending on place of origin, experience, and teachings. A common way in which these differences exist is in dialectical variations, often considered so drastically distinct from one another that they can, in essence, be considered two separate languages. Given this, it is important for professionals to be mindful of their identification with similar clients. While they may present alike, professionals still need to engage in the reflection process to ensure that they do not make assumptions. Similar identifications should not equate to a know-it-all mentality on the part of the professional.

Reflection

The culmination of these ideas has offered me a reflective opportunity to consider my previous and current work with children and families in direct service settings, as a caseworker, teacher, and social worker. Specifically, I find the last point about similar identifications especially relevant.

My experiences began at a local nonprofit agency in New York City, working with individuals and families who identified as Chinese or Chinese-American. In my initial

months, while I was nervous about the responsibilities of the job, I was confident about the engagement process, specifically because of my background. I was born in China and had immigrated to the United States at thirteen months. Growing up in New York City as a member of the 1.5-generation, I was raised in a bicultural environment. At home, I learned and utilized two dialects of Chinese in interactions with immediate and extended family members. At school, I learned and utilized English in interactions with peers and teachers. Aside from learning the languages of my heritage culture and the dominant culture, I became immersed in both of their cultural components, in terms of beliefs, values, behavior norms, thoughts, customs, and traditions. Given my daily exposure to both cultures, I soon became fluent in their languages and cultural components, and was able to fluidly navigate between the two cultures. I consider myself an integrated individual, able to maintain my heritage culture even in interactions with the host culture.

Thus, when I began my direct service work, I believed my understanding and place within both the heritage culture and host culture would be beneficial in my interactions with clients. This was particularly true in the coordination of services, connecting clients with related services and resources within social service agencies and governmental organizations, including the Social Security Administration and New York City Human Resources Administration. Specifically, my language skills were of utmost importance, as it assisted clients in their navigation of the different formal systems. Despite the growing Chinese population in New York City, clients and I often arrived at agency offices that had limited interpretation or translation services. Without access to these services, many were dependent on older children, family members, and friends. Similar to the information presented above, these individuals mean well in their willingness to help. Yet, in these exchanges, there were

times when information became lost in translation due to individuals being unfamiliar with the help structures, unclear about word usage in the heritage language to describe technical terms, and unsure about the client's purpose in accessing services. As a result, applications could have been rendered incomplete or denied. Nevertheless, I eventually realized that, prior to appointments, previewing clients served as a helpful tool. Clients were generally informed of the process and made aware of specifics that would be a part of the visit. This information not only helped clients to settle their anxiety, in regards to my unavailability, but it also helped the interpreters they utilized to become aware of the process and purpose.

Personally, this lost-in-translation phenomenon occurred several times, particularly in the beginning stages of my work. Relatively untrained in the technical terms of social service agencies and the special education system in both dialects of Chinese and English, I found myself stumbling in interpretation moments to find words to describe the information being communicated. It was not long before I realized that I needed to self-educate, in terms of finding parallel terms and having a concrete understanding of their usage in both languages. To gather this information, I reached out to colleagues and members of the community, who, in essence, became my cultural liaisons. These individuals assisted in bridging the gap between the social service and special education systems and me.

Similarly, I became acutely aware that my language skills were not beneficial to all clients, who were attempting to access services at the agency. There exist numerous distinctions within the overarching Chinese culture, notably in dialectical variations. I personally speak two southern Chinese dialects fluently and have knowledge of Mandarin. Yet, given the changing demographics of the Chinese population in New York City, these dialects may not be useful in interactions with particular groups. Specifically, in recent

years, there has been a surge in immigrants from Fujian province. While many speak Mandarin, there is a considerable percentage of the population who do not, relying primarily on their native dialect, Fujianese, for communication. In these instances, I often needed to rely on others for interpretation or referred them to a colleague since the dialect was extremely different from the ones I spoke.

Related to language is my identification with and awareness of certain components of my heritage culture. This was particularly resourceful in my interactions with members of the 1.5-generation, due to our similar identifications. Despite this, there existed a percentage of clients, who potentially could have viewed me as an outsider, given the sorts of privileges I have been afforded as a member of the 1.5-generation. These include higher education, stable employment, and opportunities not available to non-English speakers. Although never explicitly communicated to me by clients, I have come to realize, through experience and this research that clients may not necessarily connect with me, in part because of this difference. Given my identification and privileges, they may wonder if I really understand their struggles and stories. To some extent, I do, particularly because of how similar they are to those of my parental system. This, however, should not imply absolute awareness and understanding, as experiences may vary depending on specifics.

Also, this presented in terms of values. As an individual raised in a bicultural environment, I have been presented with choices, to choose the values, beliefs, behavior norms, and traditions I would like to adhere to. This differs drastically from first-generation immigrants, especially those who identify solely with their heritage culture. Throughout my work, there have been moments when I disagreed with clients regarding certain thoughts and practices. In one instance, it became a heated argument, both attempting to express personal

views. With both in such charged positions, I eventually realized that I needed to take a step back. In hindsight, this was not the best approach to engaging with clients. Rather than imposing my views, I need to be conscious of the backgrounds and experiences of my clients, acknowledging that their norms, values, and beliefs are equally as valid.

My nearly three years at this agency taught me many lessons about crossing intercultural bridges, overcoming privilege, and building bridges. The beginning awareness and understanding that I acquired there were extremely beneficial as I moved forward into roles as a teacher and social worker, where I engaged in direct service work with individuals and families of both the same and different heritage cultures. The initial lessons I learned about intercultural relations provided the foundation for how I would engage clients during our interactions, being sure to consider each individually. Yet, a critical lesson I have since learned, from education and social work coursework and field experiences, as well as this research, is the importance of using the ecosystemic framework to locate the client and myself. This requires that I engage in a process of reflection, to culturally and socially identify the client and myself. Only in this way can culturally sensitive, responsive, and competent practices emerge, all of which will help to move the professional-client relationship forward.

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