Cultural Humility: Lessons Learned through a Counseling Cultural Immersion

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Abstract

Counselor educators are called to promote the development of cultural competence in counselors-in-training (CITs). The challenge of this process is in assessing competence as well as knowing andragogical strategies to facilitate this development. Cultural humility, in comparison, is a process-based framework that requires life-long self-reflection and open-minded stance towards others. Providing cultural immersion opportunities for CITs could be a teaching method to promote deeper cultural humility. This qualitative study examined the perceived impact of a cultural immersion experience on CITs and their cultural competence. Training implications for counselor educators and supervisors are also provided.

Keywords

cultural immersion, international, multicultural competencies, transformative learning, curriculum development

Cultural Humility: Lessons Learned through a Counseling Cultural Immersion

Cultural humility is the practice of respecting and accepting the different cultural identities of others (Hook et al., 2013). Tervalon and Murray-García (1998) introduced the concept of cultural humility and described it as a life-long process of self-reflection and contemplation. Counselor educators and supervisors (CESs) encourage this process in counselors-in-training (CITs) and teach them to be culturally responsive by promoting self-reflection, unpacking privilege, and recognizing biases. This process is a vital part of clinical training as clients have reported that a strong therapeutic alliance leads to successful counseling experiences (Davis et al., 2016), and counselors' cultural humility is mediated by that therapeutic alliance. Therefore, when ruptures occur based on cultural factors, and counselors practice cultural humility, clients are more likely to engage in the repair process when the alliance is seen as stronger. Thus, through much examination counselors evolve in their own cultural identity development and their cultural humility increases.

CESs are dedicated to increasing knowledge, skills, and awareness when it comes to cultural and social justice issues, and cultural humility via curriculum design (Canfield et al., 2009). Andragogy, the practice of teaching adult learners, supports strategies to instill cultural humility. For example, CESs can engage students in short-term international cultural immersion experiences. This article will review literature on multicultural competence, cultural humility, and counselor preparation and will highlight results from a qualitative study regarding perceptions of CITs that participated in a cultural immersion.

Multicultural and Social Justice Competence

Counselors are tasked to provide culturally responsive services to diverse clients (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Coleman, 2006), and CITs are taught to be

multiculturally competent (Ratts et al., 2015). Ethical and accreditation standards (ACA, 2014; The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016) place requirements on counselors to integrate multiculturalism as a core component of the counseling profession (Barden & Cashwell, 2013). The American Counseling Association (ACA) endorses multicultural competence and the integration of a variety of teaching practices throughout counseling curricula to instill the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCCs) in CITs (Ratts et al., 2015). The MSJCCs highlight the intersectionality of various cultural and social identities of individuals and emphasize power and privilege within the counseling relationship. The MSJCCs also focus on counselors' attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills, and actions in terms of counselor self-awareness, client worldview, the counseling relationship, and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015). However, even with the inclusion of such practices, counselors have reported a lack of preparedness in working with diverse clients (Arthur & Achenback, 2002; Barden et al., 2014; Constantine, 2001; D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001; Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999), which may result from insufficient training and preparation, and andragogy (e.g., methods used in adult education) fails to foster multicultural competence or cultural humility (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005).

Foraging Cultural Humility

While cultural competence is an aspirational goal, it may not be realistic as it implies that it is possible to reach a certain ultimate accomplishment of acquiring all the knowledge available (Hook et al., 2017). Given that a state of perfection is not necessarily possible, cultural humility may be a better way to conceptualize the desired outcome for CITs. Cultural humility is a process that requires individuals to continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Rather than being an

endpoint one can arrive at, cultural humility is something counselors will need to actively engage in and includes having a more open mindset that encourages counselors to grow and examine their own complex identities, as well as how they may impact the power dynamics that are part of the helping relationship (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). To practice cultural humility, CITs must develop self-awareness, appreciate clients' worldviews, navigate privileged and marginalized statuses present in the counseling relationship, and implement culturally responsive counseling and advocacy interventions (Ratts et al., 2015).

Culturally humble counselors seek opportunities to engage in collaboration and communication that ignite discussion on stereotypes, privilege, and oppression to assess areas of personal and professional growth (Lorelle et al., 2021). CITs can become open to other's cultural identities by immersing themselves in diverse communities and working through the discomfort that comes with learning about privileged and marginalized identities (Ratts et al., 2015). CESs must develop and utilize effective training methods to help CITs come to understand the cultural contexts, perceptions, and worldviews of others (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; McDowell et al., 2012).

Counselor Education Strategies

Effective andragogical practices encourage educators to teach logically (e.g. explaining, inferring, demonstrating, or defining) and strategically (motivating, counseling, evaluating, encouraging) (Elias, 1979). CESs also participate in reflective practices, examine their own self-awareness, acknowledge these biases, and use examples in the classroom to meet the needs of diverse students while acknowledging possible discomfort present in the room (Chan et al., 2018). Further, CESs evaluate CITs' cultural competence throughout their training, as they are gatekeepers to the profession (CACREP, 2016).

Yet, cultural competence is difficult to measure as assessments have been challenging to create and validate (Hook et al., 2017). Many of the ways to evaluate cultural humility are done through self-report, which may be unreliable (Hook et al., 2017). Gaps remain regarding how to teach multiculturalism in counselor training programs. Multicultural coursework is often woven throughout counseling curriculum, yet power, privilege, and oppression may not be fully integrated (Chan et al., 2018; Motulsky et al., 2014). In addition, CITs may find it challenging to confront initial awareness of their own biases and identities, which may limit their willingness to process these (Chan et al., 2018). Furthermore, CESs face additional challenges in addressing intersectionality in curriculum because they often adapt content in class based on students' responses in the learning environment (Fier & Ramsey, 2005; Reynolds, 2011). CESs also must meet various accreditation standards and consider how various andragogical methods may vary per CES skillset and identity development, which impacts the learning process as well (Chan et al., 2018).

Counseling curriculum has focused on theoretical or conceptual knowledge through lectures and readings that emphasize knowledge of cultures, but these methods do not teach practical skills that lead CITs to effectively counsel diverse clients (Cates & Schaefle, 2009). Additionally, when CESs emphasize the cognitive/knowledge domain of cultural competence, they may miss the opportunity to enhance CITs' cultural self-awareness (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Pieterse et al., 2009). There is a further argument that simply learning about cultural differences in clients fails to address the systemic and oppressive factors in clients' lives that impact mental health and wellness (Ratts & Wood, 2011). Thus, CESs need to consider various andragogical strategies to meet student needs.

Andragogical Perspectives

Adult learners tend to be more self-directed, have work and life experience to draw from, awareness of role orientation, a desire to apply material, and an introspective lens (Kramer & Wrenn, 2010). Andragogy encompasses students' lived experiences and are likely to be more effective. Collins and Pieterse (2007) reported that counselor training needs to be directly applicable to CITs daily lives. Therefore, CESs must bridge knowledge obtained in the classroom to situations experienced in real world settings.

CITs may have encountered cultural differences, yet when immersed in another culture, confront intercultural differences (Goode, 2007; Lorelle et al., 2021). CESs can foster opportunities to expose CITs to various intercultural dimensions via cultural immersion (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Barden et al., 2014). While immersions experiences can vary (e.g., lectures in host countries, site visits, intentional discussion, service learning), the act of integrating such an experience supports the goal of CITs graduating with cultural knowledge, awareness, and skills (Lorelle et al., 2021; Shannonhouse et al., 2015) as they allow CITs to build on their own multicultural and professional identities. Immersions can enhance cultural awareness and foster cultural empathy and competence (Barden et al., 2014; Lorelle et al., 2021). Shannonhouse et al. (2014) reported that immersions may be more effective than traditional approaches as they foster cultural dissonance, which is essential to increasing cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Thus, the aforementioned limitations make it difficult to know if current implementation of andragogical strategies used in CES training programs are effective. Teaching effectiveness and student learning are closely connected to content learning and the teaching skills of instructors, and thus CESs need not only grasp and fully understand intersectionality but also examine their

current andragogy using an intersectional framework (Chan et al., 2018; Jones & Wijeyesinghe, 2011).

A critical part of teaching multiculturalism is allowing ample time for CITs to process information from readings, class discussions, and classroom activities or assignments. For CESs to foster cultural humility or competence, they may need to incorporate experiences that tap into the cognitive and affective domains (Arredondo & Toporek, 2004; Sue et al., 1982). Longer lasting learning outcomes are more likely to increase when students are challenged to integrate theory into practice (Coleman, 2006; Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Kim & Lyons, 2003; Pompa, 2002).

Active and experiential learning requires CITs to take risks, especially when the material is sensitive or controversial. Chan et al. (2018) suggested implementing an intersectional framework where CESs implement questions in class and facilitate discussions (Shen, 2015) that help CITs analyze their various identities and intersections. CESs should consider andragogical methods that balance the focus of challenging students to face their internal tension (Brown et al., 2014) while providing support and safety to foster environments that are trusting spaces to allow learning to take place (Cross-Denny & Heyma, 2011).

Cultural immersion experiences provide opportunities to create new experiences that are directly applicable to CITs' lives and may align with the andragogical principles of inviting students into a challenging environment while providing support as they face the unknown. Cultural immersion experiences are valuable training tools that emphasize the need for effective andragogy to enhance multicultural counseling humility and competency. CESs can use immersive experiences to bridge knowledge obtained in the classroom to situations experienced in real world settings. Thus, bringing the learning process beyond the classroom.

Cultural Immersion Experiences

Cultural immersion involves intentionally being present in a culturally unfamiliar space to foster a deeper understanding of one's relation to self and others (Canfield et al., 2009). Cultural immersion can be a powerful training tool to enhance multicultural competence and cultural humility and stimulate growth from ethnocentric thinking to an appreciation of various cultural traditions, values, and customs (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004). Cultural immersions foster CIT awareness of global perspectives (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011) and influence transformative learning opportunities for counseling students (McDowell et al., 2012), which means students' current perspectives are challenged through critical reflection. Through these experiences, CESs can assist CITs' self-awareness by creating spaces for them to learn about their own world view and biases.

Cultural immersion experiences have the potential to allow CITs to learn about themselves, gain a deeper understanding about privileged and marginalized identities, explore how oppression influences experiences, and reframe their perceptions and beliefs. Exposure to persons from diverse backgrounds via cultural immersion may increase cultural empathy, awareness, self-efficacy, and competence (Barden et al., 2014). When the primary focus of andragogy is on didactic instruction or in the cognitive domain, counselor educators may fail to assess for counselor self-awareness, which is key in competency development (Pieterse et al., 2009).

The exploration of how cultural immersion, as an andragogical strategy, in counselor education may impact CITs' cultural humility and multicultural competence has been relatively absent in the literature. Given that multicultural competence is something that is unrealistic to attain and difficult to measure, it is helpful to begin by exploring the perceptions of CITs who have experienced a cultural immersion through a qualitative lens. These perceptions could provide

insights into the internal processes, states of awareness, and knowledge that is gained through a cultural immersion experience that could promote cultural humility. This study seeks to understand how participants of a cultural immersion perceive the experience and how it impacted their growth.

Current Study

A Midwest CACREP accredited counseling program offered cultural immersion courses in Thailand for counseling masters and counselor education doctoral students for three consecutive years in 2016, 2018, and 2019. As part of the course, the U.S. university collaborated with a university in Thailand to offer a 2-week conference on the topics related to mental health and counseling. Given that the counseling field is not officially established as a profession in Thailand, mental health services are integrated into the healthcare field and provided by medical professionals. Therefore, the medical school of the Thai university partnered for this conference. American and Thai students, faculty, and members of the community attended the conference to exchange cultural knowledge and application of counseling skills and theories to integrative health care. Course objectives for the American students included enhancing multicultural competence, as MSJCCs were woven throughout the cultural immersion curriculum.

The cultural immersion experience consisted of professional and educational opportunities to learn about mental health and counseling, as well as excursions to learn about the country and culture. Assignments, such as readings, reflection papers, interviews, and presentations, were required during the trip, and a research paper was due upon returning home to meet the requirements of the cultural diversity course that was offered at the U.S. institution. The CESs who facilitated the cultural immersions grounded the course delivery in Kouzes and Posner's (1987, 2007) Transformational Leadership Model, as they believe that the relationship among leader and followers is crucial for creating meaningful change.

Guth and colleagues (2014) reported that research in cultural immersion experiences is typically anecdotal. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of current and former counseling students who participated in a cultural immersion experience. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach designed to uncover meaning within individual and collective experiences (Hays & Wood, 2011). The authors followed a constructivist paradigm, assumed each participant had a unique and valuable experience to share, and collectively would describe the phenomenon under investigation (Hays & Singh, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Social constructivist qualitative research seeks to understand the participants' world and understand the meanings they make from the experience (Creswell, 2013). The researchers sought to understand the meanings the students made out of the experiences of the cultural immersion trip, especially surrounding the area of multicultural competence and cultural humility.

Methods

The following research question guided our inquiry: What are the lived experiences of counseling and counselor education students who participate in a cultural immersion? And how do students who attended a cultural immersion course in Thailand perceive how the cultural immersion affects the development of their multicultural competence and cultural humility?

Participants and Procedures

After obtaining institutional review board approval for a qualitative research design that aligned with the ACA research code of ethics, the researchers used purposive sampling to invite current and former students who had participated in one of the three cultural immersion trips sanctioned by the university. The researchers for this study lead the cultural immersion courses and had contact information for all participants. A group of 11 students attended the first year, four students attended the second year, and six students attended the third year. One of the participants

identified as a Black/African American cisgender female, other white gender nonconforming, four white cisgender females, one white cisgender male. One participant fell between age range of 20-30, four participants were in the 30-40 age range, and two participants were between 40-65. The seven individuals participated in three focus groups and an individual interview. Each of the groups consisted of two participants, except the last interview, which ended up having one individual when one of the participants did not show. Each focus group consisted of members from the same cultural immersion cohort. There were three doctoral students and four master's students.

The CESs who facilitated the cultural immersion courses conducted the focus groups and interview with participants to allow them to share their experiences in Thailand. The semi-structured interview protocol acted as a guide to open questions and allowed the researchers to ask follow-up questions. The researchers asked participants to describe their experiences during the cultural immersion course and how they related to their perceived development of cultural competence and cultural humility. A sample question also included, "how has your professional practice changed, if at all, as a result of the cultural immersion?" The video-conference recorded focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes; they were transcribed by the Zoom recording feature and password protected. These were then reviewed by the authors for errors. Participants chose pseudonyms to keep their identity and information private. No identifying information was transcribed.

Research Team and Strategies for Trustworthiness

The research team consisted of two faculty members housed within the same CACREP-accredited counseling program at the time of data collection and analysis. The authors have training in qualitative research and have published qualitative studies. The authors employed several methods to ensure trustworthiness including the use of a research team, bracketing

assumptions, researcher reflexivity through memos, consensus coding, and in-depth meetings to debrief the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). The authors shared several assumptions including (a) it is important for students to immerse themselves in cultures other than their own, (b) individuals can learn to enhance their cultural humility via cultural immersion, and (c) counselors who are trained in accountability, leadership, and advocacy will be well equipped to successfully reflect on biases and cultural humility. To decrease potential for researcher bias, the authors continuously reviewed participant responses and included a thick description of data (Hays & Wood, 2011). Data collection and analysis continued until no additional constructs emerged from the data. The researchers also adhered to appropriate ethical research standards outlined by the ACA ethics codes and the Association of Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) best practices.

Data Collection and Analysis

The authors used phenomenological data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) to examine individual interview data and identify collective accounts of the lived experiences of CITs. First, the authors bracketed their assumptions to dismiss personal judgments about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The authors discussed these assumptions before starting the research and throughout the process to challenge each other's perspectives and hold each other accountable. This also served to ensure a fresh perspective to understand the phenomenon through the lens of the participants. Given that the authors had facilitated the immersion experiences and participated in the conversations, they had some ideas about what the students learned. The authors discussed it as a research team and journaled about their expectations so they could clearly bracket those and go into the interviews with a clean slate. Next, the authors read each verbatim transcription and individually identified meaning units through the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994).

The authors included notes in the margin regarding the essence of what each statement could mean. Then, they started the process of clustering statements into common themes or meaning units. Interim analysis was also employed, in which data was collected, analyzed, coded, and then more data was collected in an ongoing cycle (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Memoing was used for reflective notes on what emerged as the transcripts were coded. During consensus coding meetings, the authors compared notes and discussed similarities and discrepancies between themes and meanings (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Data management tools, including codebooks and memos, were used throughout data analysis.

Results

The researchers sought to discover the lived experiences of current and past CITs who participated in a cultural immersion experience. The themes are organized into three sections: (a) multicultural counseling competencies, (b) personal growth, and (c) factors impacting growth. Participants' quotations, identified by pseudonyms, are used to describe and illustrate these themes.

Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies

Three themes aligned with the MSJCCs categories of awareness, knowledge, and skill. For the awareness competency theme, the subthemes identified were (a) privilege, (b) bias, and (c) position in the world. For the knowledge competency theme, the subthemes were (a) food, (b) communication, and (c) traditions. For the skill competency theme, the subthemes were (a) patience and flexibility, (b) do not assume, and (c) advocacy.

Concerning the competency of awareness, the subthemes of *privilege, bias,* and *position in the world* emerged. The privilege theme was the concept of how students became aware of their own privilege and the advantages they have from their personal social position. For example, a

participant stated, "That just kind of puts it under perspective a little more when you're driving to school and thinking about that there are millions of people all over the world who don't even have a chance to drive a car, and here I am driving to a master's program where I can educate myself to, you know, integrate into society." Another participant stated:

> . . . Our privilege. . . our American privilege and then there's a white privilege and male privilege and all of those things. . . I didn't necessarily believe in a lot of those things and thought that they were just kind of like social constructs to make people who are in minority groups feel better about themselves and that was that was how I felt then. But it was during those conversations. . . something was said. . . but it really got me thinking more about how a lot of the things that I've been taught, and the way that I've been raised and the privileges that I have in my life are so apparent. That it was kind of blinding me to even see that they're there.

Participants also became aware of their own *bias.* For example, one participant stated, "it's like sometimes you just see people and write them off because you know the stereotypes, but it's like, that might be true." Finally, participants became more aware of their *position in the world*, meaning they became aware of the intersectionality of their cultural identities and how it fits into a greater context. For example, one participant stated, "It's how you have been culturally formed to believe the world is in the environment you're in, and I think getting out of that environment cracks that open. And once it's cracked open, you'll be a better counselor, a better counselor educator, a better human being." Another participant stated, "I do think it felt disorienting. And I am almost thinking like, if we have this tiny little world view of this is how the world is, and this is how the world works." While another stated:

It's just really eye-opening to know that there's just like people who. . . It's like they live

the same, but they live completely differently than how I do and we're all like. . . It sounds

so cheesy: we are all like on the same planet but like we all just experience things so

differently. . . So just kind of seeing things differently when it comes to even just like

family systems and work environments and school environments, how it's just completely

different, but still the same, because people are people. And like we want to have

relationships and be connected.

Concerning the cultural competency of knowledge, the subthemes of *food, communication,*

and *traditions* emerged. Knowledge regarding the differences in traditional Thai food was

different, how communication styles differ whereas the Thai tended to be polite and kind, and

religious and cultural traditions were common in the interviews. For example, one participant

stated, "I've never tasted this seasoning before and like so when I got back, one of the first things

I did was I started finding places I can get Thai food. I found like a Thai grocer online so you can

order stuff so you can make Thai food at home." And another stated, "Thai people communicate

to you in ways that are different from the way that certainly Americans approach each other. It's

much more like caring and loving and friendly." And another stated, "seeing how like religion

plays such a major part and in their culture. In here, it's just completely different, because

everybody practices different religions and even if you do the same religion, it's still like different

from household to household, but it seems to be like more unified there."

For the skill competency theme, the subthemes of *patience and flexibility, don't assume,*

and *advocacy* emerged. *Patience and flexibility* included ideas that participants realized they need

to have these characteristics when working as future counselors. For example, one participant

stated:

It taught me more like patience as a counselor, and we're also so quick to move in cycles and, you know, get to them and process them and be like, okay let's do it. And it's like the pace was even just different (in Thailand). . . I'm like, I do not have patience; I'm like, ABC Let's get it done. So I think that I've actually seen that in my personal life too, like with my son and family, just having more patience even since I got back."

Don't assume also emerged as a subtheme for multicultural skills, which is defined as having the realization of past judgments. The participants described a need to be more mindful to put those assumptions aside when working as a counselor in the future. For example, one participant stated, "how I can grow as a competent counselor is to kind of remove judgment from various aspects of the culture where I think Americans hang on to quite a bit of privilege and ignorance." Another participant stated, "I think it will challenge me as a person and even as a professional, as a counselor one day. That you never know. Like, who you're going to meet and what their experiences are that are coming to you, you might have all these preconceived biases of what that person should be like based on what you see, but you have no idea what their experiences are or what they've grown up doing, so it changes the way that I will look at people in the future. Won't be so quick to judge."

Finally, the subtheme of *advocacy* emerged, which captured the ideas the participants spoke about needing to focus more on this role as a counselor or counselor educator. For example, "I think the way to expand my counselor identity was kind of looking at advocacy and the role that that plays…. I think what I picked up on a lot was Thai values, right. So looking at like communication values, the way that they respect one another."

Personal Growth

There were three themes in the personal growth category which included (a) increased malleability, (b) increased courage/strength, and (c) gratitude. Many participants described an *increased malleability* in their personal lives, which means they found themselves generally more flexible and open. For example, "it was like life changing for me and it sounds cheesy again, but it was. I think about things totally differently. And like, not just in myself, but in like, you know, the people around me and in life and hopefully you know how I interact with clients in the future." And another stated, "I know what we'll be doing, but who knows where that is, or what that is. . . I had a total like, you know, blank slate type of mentality going into this trip. And I think that really helped me to adapt." The theme of *increased courage/strength* also emerged when participants described how they felt braver or stronger as a result of the experience. One participant described it as "like this overwhelm, this fear this like, 'what's happening' chaos at the beginning, and then there was a let-go to it, like, 'oh, I'm not gonna die'. Okay. And that can kind of built the confidence in a way, like, 'oh, I have the resources to deal with what comes'."

Gratitude also emerged as a theme as participants described appreciating things about their own lives as well. For example, one stated, "I definitely found myself being way more grateful in my everyday life."

Factors Impacting Growth

Students also reflected on what most impacted the growth and change described in other parts of the focus groups and interviews. The participants identified six themes of what most contributed to their growth, which included (a) conversations with Thai, (b) conversations with fellow students, c) being challenged by instructors, (d) assignments, e) the intensity of differences, and (f) safe relationships.

Almost all students identified *conversations with the Thai* people as being an important part of their experience. For example, one student said:

My favorite parts were actually the breakouts in the classroom. And when we got to tour different places at the university or so….but the breakouts, to me, was where I really got to hear how somebody was thinking differently than me.

Another participant said, "the more you talk to people and the more you hear about them and their stories, it just kind of like really helps make you grow more." Many participants also described the *conversations with fellow students* as vital. For example, one student said:

The conversations on the bus. Even if we weren't talking specifically, like in a more formal classroom, kind of dialogue. And we were just having open conversations. It was like after we had experiences like being immersed, then we would kind of join back and it would just be like us. And then people kind of sharing their viewpoints and ideas. . . then the other thing that was very impactful for me was actually the nighttime conversations that I had with some of my colleagues. It was really good. There was a few of us that would kind of get together and really have, I mean, hour long conversations, share experiences and we would go back and forth and challenge each other a lot too.

Participants also described a theme of being *challenged by instructors* as also impacting their growth. For example, one said, "when I would say something, and you would challenge me but really to just kind of get my thought process going." Another participant stated, "you…would just chime in with just the question and then you'd back right out and let us dive back in and it was almost like you're delegating between a group conversation, but you weren't like a professor where you're the one leading the discussion and we're responding." Other students described the *assignments* as being helpful to their growth. For example, one student stated, "So I was thinking

about like the journal that um I kept while we were there. And I think what was helpful from that point would be like the prompts, like if we were given, 'here's an article, read this and then write about it.' Journal prompts would be what I always appreciate those because like I said, I don't know what I don't know."

The theme of *intensity of differences* also emerged from the interviews. This theme captured the sensory overload along with being forced to face all of the differences as having an impacting on their growth. For example, one participant stated, " it's almost like when you suddenly are in something very different. And you can't even read or understand how people are reacting with each other. . . its like everything breaks apart and you're disoriented and then you have to figure out how to make order of it again and put it together." Another participant said, "when everything is so different that we're so outside of what's comfortable and what's normal, that you're kind of forced. Not only you're like adapting on 12 different friends and then we're having these really deep, meaningful conversations challenging the way we believe in the way we think and the way we formulate a lot of our assumptions about people and it just, it's an added variable in all of these that you're trying to calibrate at once."

Finally, the theme of *safe relationships* emerged, which captured how the participants stated the relationships were an important part of the learning process. For example, "appreciated like the openness and you know like the friendly demeanor and everyone just kind of felt like old pals like on this trip together like experiencing this new culture." One student wished that there would have been more relationship building prior to the trip, "I wish that the only thing I would change is if we could have done, I don't know, like, just some activities to kind of like get to know each other, whether it's like games or whatever. Just something small, just some time just to kind

of get to know each other's personalities better, because I even feel like, even just like being able to feel comfortable talking to them, leading up to the trip."

Discussion

There is support that cultural humility is an important factor in how clients view successful counseling experiences (Davis et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2016). However, attempting to incorporate culture into counseling interventions does not ensure that counselors will be effective (Owen et al., 2016). More information is needed on how counselor educators can facilitate the development of cultural humility in CITs and encourage responsiveness to culture and diversity (Owen et al., 2011). Cultural immersion could be one strategy that would support these efforts.

Multicultural Competence and Cultural Humility Implications

In the present study, the authors were interested in the lived experiences of participants of a cultural immersion and how these students perceived a cultural immersion regarding their development of multicultural competence and cultural humility. Cultural humility is a process that allows counselors to become aware of their own identities, power, and privileges that can impact the counseling relationship (Hook et al., 2013). These processes of cultural humility and competence aligned with the participants' perceived awareness, knowledge, and skills gained through the experience. Participants described an increased awareness of their privilege, bias, and position in the world (Barden et al., 2014; Canfield et al., 2009; McDowell et al., 2012). Hook et al. (2013) posited that the effective ability to work with diverse individuals is connected to the counselors' commitment to examining one's inclination to view one's beliefs and values as superior. Participants described having more awareness regarding their own bias in these areas, which suggests they were in alignment with the process of being culturally humble. McAuliffe (2012) suggested CITs must begin learning to tolerate ambiguity and see their own world view as

just one of many possibilities. It appears that the cultural immersion experience has the potential to create an environment that allows students to have these sorts of revelations. Participants of another qualitative study suggested that privilege and oppression is not adequately addressed in counseling programs (Hays et al. (2007). The tool of cultural immersion may help to bring awareness to these concepts.

Participants also described gaining knowledge about Thai culture, especially in terms of food, communication, and traditions. These results struck the researchers as being somewhat limited in what growth can be accomplished in a short immersion. The complexities of culture extend beyond these topics but may be the most prominent part of a culture to stand out during a two week trip. To improve cultural competence, counselors need to remember the intricacies of these complexities beyond food and religious traditions, which can include values about education and work, values about family including the structure and power dynamics, experiences with oppression and discrimination, or beliefs about health and help-seeking practices (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

Participants perceived growth in the skill domain by describing more personal patience and flexibility, the ability to not make assumptions, and the need for advocacy. While their perceived improvement of skills in these areas does not mean that their actual skills have improved, previous studies have supported a correlation between perceived multicultural competencies and empathy. For example, client ratings of counselors' multicultural competencies correlated with empathy and the therapeutic alliance (Fuertes et al., 2006).

Part of the lived experience of the cultural immersion went beyond academic learning and included perceived personal growth as well, which aligns with the concept of cultural humility being a personal process that goes beyond knowledge and skills of multicultural competence to be

more of a mindset and a way of being (Hook et al., 2013). Cultural humility is way of being that is other-focused, open, and curious about cultural identities (Hook et al., 2013). In alignment with this mindset, participants perceived themselves to have an increased malleability, courage, and strength, as well as gratitude through the immersion experience.

Flexibility has been explored previously in relationship to multicultural competence. Cognitive flexibility typically includes at least one of three elements: (i) a willingness to adapt or the ability to change, (ii) an overall awareness that alternatives exist, with the ability to consider a variety of concepts, and (iii) an ability to acknowledge and consider various perspectives and ideas (Martin & Rubin, 1995; Moore, 2013). Cognitive flexibility is associated with multicultural competence as "high levels of cognitive flexibility may enable counselors to consider multiple perspectives, especially those different from one's own, adapt to new situations and considerations, and understand clients from diverse backgrounds" (Martinez & Dong, 2020, p. 294). The theme of increased malleability aligns with this ability to understand the complexities of identities and how others' world view as different from their own, suggesting that this new personal flexibility they described may support their multicultural competence as well being in a cultural humble stance. Given the participants perceptions, cultural immersions have the potential to create experiences that can support this more flexible way of thinking.

The perception of improved courage/strength also has the potential to be a positive counselor trait that aligns with cultural humility. Zhu et al. (2021) described that cultural humility includes "holding and leaning into the discomfort" (p. 81), which was supported by a participant who said, "It takes a lot of energy and courage to be quiet and learn" (p. 82). In fact, there is a call for counselors to have courageous conversations, which are "brave, affirming, and humanizing

spaces, or intergroup and difficult dialogues" (Guth et al., 2019, p. 10) as part of the process of challenging systemic inequities and promoting social justice.

Gratitude has been found to have psychological advantages such as increased positive affect, energy, and enthusiasm for people in general (Arnout & Almoied, 2020). As far as gratitude for counselors, this construct has been explored as a protective factor for counselor burnout and has been supported to be one of the strongest negative predictors to burnout (Browning et al., 2019) and is correlated with counseling creativity (Arnout & Almoied, 2020). While not specific to cultural humility, Kruse et al. (2014) reported a correlation between gratitude and humility, where one's mindset is less self-focused and more other focused. This mindset aligns well with cultural humility. Given the current literature, this sense of gratitude the participants described could not only benefit them personally but could support their work as counselors as well.

CES Andragogical Implications

The results also shed light on what part of the cultural immersion experiences are most important for the potential growth in cultural humility. These factors point to specific strategies counselor educators can do to help promote this growth. Participants shared great value in being able to converse with Thai professionals and fellow students about values, culture, and worldviews. This theme aligns with what has been found previously in the literature. For example, to promote multicultural competence in teachers, German students visited Turkey for a week and described that learning in small intercultural groups was an important part of their growth as "all students reflect on their perspectives within the group, and as a consequence 'something new emerged'" (Brendel et al., 2016, p. 209). CESs should encourage and provide opportunities for CITs to have meaningful interactions with people from various cultures and backgrounds to encourage the development multicultural competence (McAllister & Irvine, 2000).

The participants also suggested that being challenged by their instructors contributed to their growth. Arthur and Achenbach (2002) explored potential benefits and ethical responsibilities of counselor educators using experiential learning to promote multicultural competence in CITs. Having an experience with another culture does not automatically result in growth and insight, and in fact without being processed or reflected upon, some experiences may result in frustration by CITs if strong emotional reactions are not debriefed. Arthur and Achenbach (2002) suggested CESs should invite "students to be reflective about the environmental and contextual conditions that affect their learning and provide the background for considering the systemic influences of the lives of culturally diverse clients" (p. 8). Similarly, cultural immersion experiences require the CES leaders to be in tune with reactions and help students to make sense of what they are learning. In culturally mediated instruction, educators need to challenge some of the initial assumptions and beliefs students make about the experience (The Educational Alliance at Brown University, n.d.).

Another factor that participants perceived to impact their growth was the intensity of differences they experienced. The participants discussed how shocking it was to be immersed in the country that had so many new sights, sounds, and experiences, and how this forced them to wrestle with how to adjust to these new perspectives. From the Constructivist theory of counselor education, exposure to the highly contrasting worldviews could be a decentering experience and can create cognitive dissonance (McAuliffe, 2008). It appears the cultural immersion has the potential to create this sort of decentering experiences allowing CITs to rethink their assumptions.

Finally, the safe relationships CITs experienced also emerged as important to the growth process throughout the cultural immersion experience. Safety and attending to the relationship are important for learning to take place (Cross-Denny & Heyma, 2011). The teaching approach of modeling by instructors can be useful, as they provide examples of how to be open about their

identities and beliefs. Instructors can talk about their own racial identity development, including negative and positive experiences and emotions, which can provide a sense of safety that invites students to engage in the same process (Torino, 2015).

Limitations and Future Recommendations

Although the current study makes important contributions to the understanding of how CITs perceive cultural immersion experiences to impact their cultural humility, the findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the researchers were also the leaders of the cultural immersion experience. While the researchers saw the pre-existing rapport established as a significant strength, as it made the process of sharing content for participants easier to share; however, a potential limitation is that because focus groups were facilitated by the authors and immersion leaders, participants may have felt less confident to share parts of the trip that did not go well. However, most participants did freely share what they would have preferred to be different and appeared to share their experiences honestly. In addition, several students who had gone on the cultural immersion did not participate. It is unknown if they have perspectives that would add or counter the themes found.

Regarding implications for practice, these results are the perception of the participants, and it does not reveal in a measurable way whether the CITs actual cultural humility increased or if it has an impact on their practice with clients. Future researchers should examine measurable outcomes in cultural immersion participants such as implementation of the Multicultural Counseling Self-Efficacy Scale-Racial Diversity Form (MCSES-RD) or the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey-Revised (MCCTS-R). The MCSES-RD is a self-report tool that measures one's perceived ability to counsel racially diverse clients and the MCCTS-R measures the multicultural competence of counselors (Shannonhouse et al., 2015).

These measures would provide quantitative data to support the efficacy of cultural immersion experiences.

Conclusion

Research on cultural immersion experiences in counselor education is in a relatively early stage. As research accumulates, it will help clarify how these experiences complement existing theory regarding the andragogy of cultural humility and that of immersive experiences. Now that several studies have documented initial evidence that cultural immersion experiences can influence CITs' cultural humility, we encourage researchers to shift toward designs to test the causal relationships implied by this chain of experience. Findings from this study suggest that training approaches, such as cultural immersions, can provide counselors with practical experiences that foster personal and professional growth and development and cultural humility.

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