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Fernando Estrada

*Loyola Marymount University*, [fernando.estrada@lmu.edu](mailto:fernando.estrada@lmu.edu)

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# The Teaching Alliance in Multicultural Counseling Course Education: A Framework for Examining and Strengthening the Student-Instructor Relationship

Fernando Estrada<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** This article explores the idea of the teaching alliance as a framework to help instructors of multicultural counseling courses advance student learning by attending to and strengthening the student-instructor relationship. To this end, and drawing on extant literature, two questions are conceptually addressed: (1) what relational qualities comprise the teaching alliance in a graduate-level multicultural class? and (2) what instructional strategies might help strengthen that alliance? The article concludes with a discussion of teaching considerations and directions for future research.

**Keywords** Teaching alliance · Multicultural counseling education · Student-instructor relationship

## Introduction

Multicultural counseling education varies by how culture is defined, as well as by the overall goals, scope, and length of training (Ancis and Ali 2005). Generally, it involves interventions that promote the thoughtful use of socio-cultural factors in counseling, like race, gender, and sexual orientation, as well as addressing issues of oppression and privilege, identity development, and social justice (Sue and Sue 2012). Despite meta-analytic support for the overall positive effect of multicultural counseling education on student development (Smith et al. 2006), the factors driving that change remain to be fully discerned. Until then, counselor educators who teach such courses are limited in their ability to employ evidence-based strategies in the classroom. This is important to address because (a) the primary method of multicultural counseling training for many academic programs continues to be a single 11- to 16-week course in multiculturalism or diversity (Alvarez and Miville 2003; Malott 2010;

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✉ Fernando Estrada  
fernando.estrada@lmu.edu

<sup>1</sup> Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive Suite 1519, Los Angeles, CA 90045, USA

Smith et al. 2006) and (b) teaching such courses have been described as one of the most difficult challenges in counselor education (Sue et al. 2011).

A critical understanding of multicultural counseling education suggests that course learning is significantly impacted by interpersonal dynamics, particularly between student and instructor (Brotherton 1996). As a consequence, in this article, the teaching of a multicultural counseling course was conceptualized through the notion of the teaching alliance, which contends that changes in a learner hinge on the quality of the interpersonal bond with the educator, as well as the degree of mutual agreement over the learning goals and the course tasks or activities. A relatively new area of inquiry in higher education, a conceptual consideration of the teaching alliance in multicultural counseling course education has the potential to generate new insights and questions that can guide much needed research. First, however, a brief overview of the counseling literature can help locate the idea of the teaching alliance within a relevant educational theoretical framework. Then, the alliance will be used to explore a relationally driven understanding of multicultural counseling course teaching and learning. The article ends with a discussion of pedagogical considerations and questions for future research.

## Multicultural Counseling Course Education

An academic course in multicultural counseling is recognized as an important source of learning for students from all backgrounds (Curtis-Boles and Bourg 2010) and has been shown to be associated with gains in domains like cultural self-reflection, cognitive complexity towards racism and oppression, and overall confidence in working from a multicultural perspective (Malott 2010). The typical syllabus indicates that students go over, some for the very first time, topics like ethnocentric monoculturalism, microaggressions, and social privilege (Pieterse et al. 2008; Priester et al. 2008). Such thought-provoking material inevitably makes the learning process more than just an intellectual endeavor. For example, assigning students to read an article or chapter focused on race and racism can unveil prejudices that for some generate a sense of curiosity and excitement, while for others it can trigger skepticism, guilt, even outbursts of anger (Curtis-Boles and Bourg 2010; Rothschild 2003; Tatum 1992).

The intellectual-emotional terrain that an instructor of a multicultural counseling course has to traverse with each student and the collective class elevates the importance of having a theoretically informed approach for strengthening the quality of the student-instructor relationship. A more nuanced understanding can be achieved by considering the critical pedagogy approach (cf., Darder 1991) commonly employed for teaching multiculturalism.

## Multicultural Education Pedagogy

Implementing a theory-driven course on diversity relies on pedagogy, or a culling of educational strategies that, according to Simon (1987), is “...more complex and extensive than teaching, referring to the integration in practice of particular curriculum content and design, classroom strategies and techniques” (p. 371). Pedagogy in multicultural education is typically a collection of postmodern teaching frameworks focused on transforming students into culturally oriented individuals who have the capacity and the will to work towards social change (Banks and Banks 2012). In mental health, that also means equipping professionals with the requisite skills to advocate for clients, facilitate identity integration, build on client

strengths, and promote consciousness raising (Goodman et al. 2004). Accordingly, pedagogy in multicultural counseling education draws from critical (cf., Darder 1991) funds of knowledge in multiculturalism, feminism, social justice, Freirean-liberatory and queer theory, which tether student outcomes to the interpersonal environment, and notably the relationship between student and instructor (cf., Bemak and Chung 2011; Cheshire 2013; Enns et al. 2004; Frank and Cannon 2010; Steele 2008).

To illustrate, Brotherton (1996) asserted that because counselors possess the power to impose norms and values, counselor training has to promote open inquiries into issues like cultural politics and the history of knowledge. Logically, skills for self-awareness are important to cultivate among students so that societal contradictions and forces of domination may be openly discussed in class; permitting, for each student, the emergence of a consciousness of themselves in relation to the social environment. By simultaneously agitating and supporting students in this way, Brotherton (1996) maintained that the instructor is able to use the interpersonal milieu to promote meaningful multicultural learning.

### **The Student-Instructor Relationship in a Multicultural Counseling Course**

Despite its prominence in pedagogical theory, there is little scholarship on how the quality of the relationship between student and instructor influences outcomes in a multicultural counseling course. In a qualitative investigation, Sammons and Speight (2008) looked at course-level factors associated with learning outcomes in a diversity class and found that positive perceptions held by students of their course instructor was associated with gains in multicultural knowledge and positive shifts in attitudes; but students who perceived their instructor as either inexperienced or lacking interpersonal skills reported stifled learning. Around that same time, Priester et al. (2008) reviewed over 60 multicultural counseling course syllabi and concluded that in order to advance this area of training “...research should proceed not in the direction of explicitly comparing the relative efficacy of interventions, but should concentrate instead on the learning environment... the teaching alliance and other relational and contextual issues” (p. 37). Doing so has the potential to bring greater alignment between educational theory and classroom instruction.

Culturally responsive models of teaching (e.g., Gay 2010) maintain that a teacher can establish an interpersonally affirming relationship with her or his students by making available to them a diverse range of learning objectives, getting to know their individual strengths, and displaying a caring disposition. However, that area of scholarship focuses largely on adolescents and young adults and does not account for additional interpersonal conditions important for adult learners; namely self-direction and autonomy, flexibility, and recognition of lived experiences (Vella 1994). To that end, the idea of the teaching alliance might help multicultural educators in general, and particularly in counselor education, to advance an understanding of the interpersonal milieu most conducive to bringing about change and growth among graduate-level trainees.

### **The Teaching Alliance**

The teaching alliance has been proposed as a framework for understanding and directly working with the dyadic student-instructor relationship in an academic classroom setting. According to Myers (2008), it is comprised of three (tripartite) dimensions: learning goals/

objectives, course tasks/activities, and the interpersonal bond. A strong teaching alliance, conceptualized as a student and the instructor sharing agreement over the learning objectives and the course activities, as well as experiencing a positive human connection (Koch 2004), is believed to enhance the overall relational milieu in class, thereby safeguarding the delicate learning process involved in graduate training in mental health (Ursano et al. 2007).

The teaching alliance descends from Edward Bordin's (1979; 1994) notion of the therapeutic or working alliance between counselor and client—in other words, involving a shared agreement on counseling goals and tasks, and a positive interpersonal bond. According to Bordin (1994), a strong working alliance is crucial for the client to be able to meaningfully engage in therapy and fundamentally experience the change she or he desires. The working alliance has been considered a good measure of the quality of the professional relationship or partnership strength (Hovarth 1994).

In a therapy setting, the alliance model emphasizes the active participation of both client and counselor and is one of the reasons why it is an ideal framework for postsecondary education (Myers 2008; Ursano et al. 2007). Other frameworks exist and have added value in relationship building with students, such as mentoring (cf., Cullingford 2006) and rapport building (cf., Ryan 2006), but the teaching alliance is thought to be more comprehensive and essential for student change and is tantamount to the “common (interpersonal) factor” associated with client change in therapy (Rogers 2009).

### **The Teaching Alliance in a Multicultural Counseling Course**

The idea of an instructor of a course in multicultural counseling directly attending to the relational milieu in class with interventions focused on establishing and maintaining mutual agreement with each student on the goals and tasks of the course, as well as collaboratively working with them to strengthen the dyadic bond, has not been the focus of prior published investigations. Given the inherent complexities of teaching, a conceptual application of this perspective at this time might permit a creative re-organization of existing knowledge that could reveal important terrain for scholars to explore in future research.

To that end, two questions guided the current conceptualization of the teaching alliance within multicultural counseling training: (1) what relational qualities comprise the teaching alliance in a multicultural counseling class setting? and (2) what teaching strategies are important when trying to strengthen that alliance? To answer the first question, a working composite of the alliance was generated by looking at counselor education pedagogy in multiculturalism through the lens of the tripartite factor structure (i.e., goals, tasks, and bond). The second question was answered by contextualizing that alliance and its related qualities within extant scholarship on multicultural counselor training.

To generate the initial profile, PsychINFO and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) were used to identify scholarship with a major focus on (1) multicultural counseling education or training and (2) pedagogy or teaching. The second criterion substantially reduced the number of hits from thousands to just a few hundred. The published works were reviewed by the author and one graduate research assistant for written, descriptive evidence of (a) learning outcomes or goals, (b) learning tasks or activities for students to undertake, and (c) relational qualities comprising the bond between the student and the instructor. Many of the retrieved works discussed teaching in a secondary way or as a subheading, while others focused on a highly specific aspect of teaching, like ethics (Fier and Ramsey 2005), which limited any references to goals, tasks, or bond, and so were subsequently omitted. Those with a

substantial pedagogical focus tended to target one of three training levels: (1) a course, (2) a program or academic unit, or (3) the development of a specific skill. Descriptive evidence for goals, tasks, and bond was extracted from 20 publications, with a minimum of five works for each training level. Given the exploratory nature of the current inquiry, that number was deemed adequate.

Descriptive evidence, ranging from one or two sentences to full paragraphs, was catalogued as goal, task, or bond, and later summarized to facilitate a synthesis. On a few occasions the phrasing appeared to describe more than one dimension, such as a task and the relational bond (e.g., “While feminist teachers acknowledge the traditional role of student and teacher, they also attempt to challenge power structures in the classroom and empower students;” Smith-Adcock et al. 2004, p. 410). Resolutions in regard to cataloguing were reached via group discussions with two graduate research assistants and, in the example case, the phrase was catalogued under ‘Bond’ and summarized as “Empower and challenge”. To ensure that the essence of a phrase was retained in the summaries, a faculty member with over 15 years of experience in teaching multicultural counseling was consulted during the process.

Table 1 displays the results and represents the working composite of the teaching alliance in multicultural counseling course education in relation to the material examined. The Table includes author reference, theoretical foci, and the summarized evidence. In the sections that follow, the extant literature is used to conceptualize what it might take to strengthen each dimension of the alliance. The article ends with a discussion of additional teaching considerations and areas for future research.

## Goals

When learning objectives are meaningful and developmentally appropriate, a teacher can expect to see an enhanced social milieu in class (Kirby and Lawson 2012; Ursano et al. 2007). Table 1 shows a range of learning goals associated with multicultural counseling, and many of those identified related to the comprehensive yet parsimonious ‘Knowledge-Awareness-Skills’ model of professional multicultural counseling competency (Sue et al. 1992).

In a review of multicultural course syllabi, however, Priester et al. (2008) found a disproportionate emphasis on goals focused on gaining cultural knowledge, substantially less so for self-awareness, and little evidence for skills-oriented goals. This restricted range of goals can compromise attunement between learner and instructor (Gay 2010; Vella 1994). For example, a study by Chao et al. (2011) on the moderating effects of multicultural counseling training found that, compared to their White peers, racial/ethnic minority students reported higher levels of multicultural awareness. For them, a lack of opportunities for more in-depth training was associated with a sense of disengagement and an interpersonal distance in class. The findings, while limited by being self-report data, raise important questions with implications for enhancing the student-instructor relationship; namely, how do suboptimal learning goals impact the relationship between a student and the instructor, and how does that, in-turn, affect learning?

Multicultural counseling course education is comprised of a wide range of objectives that, understood developmentally, can help instructors initiate discussions with students related to opportunities for tailored learning. For example, learning objectives focused on revealing one’s own cultural dimensions might be suitable for a student in an earlier stage of multicultural development. But a student with more multicultural experience might benefit from goals

**Table 1** Multicultural counseling pedagogy and the teaching alliance

Scope	Source	Theory	Goals	Tasks	Bond
Single Course	Alvarez and Miville (2003)	Multicultural	Tripartite competencies Accurate and critical knowledge	Self-reflections on values and assumptions Critical dialogues Experiential activities Interdisciplinary readings	Trust and cohesion Collaborative and less hierarchical Open and honest exchanges
	Brubaker et al. (2010)	Social Justice	Knowledge and skills for social change Awareness of injustices in counseling	Self-exploration of values and assumptions Experiential exercises Community involvement	Striving for equality Appreciation of multiple perspectives Critical yet supportive instruction
	Locke and Kiselica (1999)	Multicultural Critical Race	Tripartite competencies Cultural awareness and cross-cultural sensitivity	Dialogue on privilege, race, and merit Experiential activities on resource distribution	Trust and honesty Mutual learning Active participation
	Pack-Brown et al. (2012)	Multicultural	Awareness of biases and assumptions Framework for social justice work	Experiential activities Immersion assignments	Supportive instruction Strategically challenging
Counselor Education	Rothschild (2003)	Critical Race	Understanding of racialized experience Appreciation of multiple identities	Group discussions on race and racism Challenging stereotypes Experiential activities	Respect, honesty, and trust Critical yet supportive
	Ancis and Ali (2005)	Feminist Multicultural	Understanding of different worldviews Positive shifts in attitudes and modes of communicating Capacity to understand a diversity of client experiences	Critical self-reflection on identity issues Examination of intersections Experiential exercises on privilege and discrimination	Flexibility in disposition Respectful and collaborative
	Benak and Chung (2011)	Social Justice	Gaining a holistic perspective Action-oriented work focused on redressing inequities	Open processing of interpersonal challenges Field-based activities Accommodating with flexible work style	An openness to critique Mentorship Supportive supervision

**Table 1** (continued)

Scope	Source	Theory	Goals	Tasks	Bond
	Brotherton (1996)	Critical Theory	Critical awareness Strengthened praxis	Critical exploration of worldviews Field-based learning Group dialogue and presentations	Shared value for restoring inequities Instructor as facilitator Approach resistance and challenge assumptions
	Cheshire (2013)	Feminist Intersectional	Student empowerment Leadership skills Culturally appropriate work with LGB clients	Self-reflection Reflective writing assignments Critical group dialogues	Asymmetrical power is addressed Instructor as role model Open processing in groups
	Enns et al. (2004)	Feminist Multicultural	Actively challenging racism Reduction of racial prejudice Increased self-awareness	Interactive learning Attending to content and process Examination of intersections	Recognition of individual characteristics Appreciation of multiple identities
	Frank and Cannon (2010)	Queer Theory	Multicultural competence Reflective scholar-practitioner	Critical dialogues Positioning of self Challenge assumptions	Authenticity in engagement Active participation
	Henriksen (2006)	Multicultural	Reduction in prejudice Gaining multidimensional view of clients	Self-reflective activities Service learning	Affirming of diverse experiences Sense of community Welcoming of challenges and resistance
	Locke and Faubert (1999)	Critical Theory	Critical awareness	Action-oriented activities Critical self-reflection and group dialogues	Lived experiences are honored Welcoming of challenges and resistance
	Smith-Adcock et al. (2004)	Feminist	Gaining a multi-perspective orientation Leadership skills for social change	Self-reflection as cultural being Journaling Group dialogue	Mutual learning Collaborative
	Steele (2008)	*Freiren Liberatory	Critical consciousness Skills for advocacy	Service-action assignments Group dialogues	Empowerment of student Welcoming of challenges Work seen as interdependent



**Table 1** (continued)

Scope	Source	Theory	Goals	Tasks	Bond
Domain Specific	Brown and Perry (2011)	Freiren	Developing critical consciousness Sustaining action	Critical reflections on assumptions Journaling activities and use of multimedia Community involvement	Instructor also discloses Shared value for justice work Honest feedback and open exchanges
	Collins and Pieterse (2007)	Multicultural	Awareness of automatic racial assumptions	Critical dialogues Sustained self-reflections Open processing of resistance	Sense of safety, honesty, and accountability Value for shared experience
	Kim and Lyons (2003)	Multicultural	Tripartite competencies	Large and small group discussions Experiential and game-based activities	Instructor as facilitator, challenger, and encourager Welcoming of processing challenges
	Leonard (1996)	Freiren Liberatory	Awareness of multicultural functioning of society Raised consciousness	Critical dialogue Participation in consciousness-raising groups	Committed to active participation Welcoming and safe exchanges Mutual sharing and learning Recognition of multiple perspectives
	Roysircar (2004)	Multicultural	Expanded cultural awareness	Self-exploration and evaluations Confront biases and challenge worldviews	Commitment to dialogue Instructor as facilitator Supportive exchanges

\*Teaching approach that draws from the principles of Paulo Freire

focused on critical awareness, which requires more vigorous and dynamic self-reflection that might not suit every student (Brotherton 1996; Steele 2008). Brubaker et al. (2010) also noted a synergistic energy produced out of simultaneously raising cultural awareness and enhancing skills for social change. Enns et al. (2004) noted that teaching students to simply understand oppression could lead to feelings of discouragement and hopelessness. But making efforts to also challenge that oppression, whether through leadership (Cheshire 2013) or advocacy (Steele 2008), might help counteract such reactions, thereby possibly safeguarding a positively charged student-instructor relationship and classroom milieu.

Learning goals in multicultural counseling are essentially life-long processes (Brown and Perry 2011; Frank and Cannon 2010; Locke and Faubert 1999). Ongoing assessments are important as they can help determine optimal objectives to pursue. Ursano et al. (2007) recommended that educators in mental health engage in ‘educational diagnosis,’ or an ongoing assessment of student learning needs and outcomes that both student and instructor are active participants in. In that process, Koch (2004) would contend not asking students what they wanted to learn but, rather, asking them how they wanted to change, with this leading potentially to a more revealing discussion on meaningful goals.

### *Tasks*

According to the composite teaching alliance, tasks in multicultural course training are largely participatory and experiential, which Dickson et al. (2008) found predicted positive attitudes toward racial diversity among a national sample of masters-level counseling students. The open-ended nature of experiential learning makes it important for instructors to establish transparent procedures, promote silent reflection, and hold debriefing sessions following emotionally-laden exercises (cf., Kim and Lyons 2003; Roysircar 2004); best practices that call on instructors to be the “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage.” But carefully considering a student’s life experiences can greatly enhance a task and, therefore, also the alliance (Myers 2008).

For example, Coleman (2006) found that students-of-color preferred the experiential aspect of their multicultural training more than White students, and concluded that experiencing racism on a personal level facilitated a meaningful and positive perception of experiential activities, whereas less personal exposure to oppression was associated with an overly intellectual experience. In a recent study by Seward (2014), a lack of depth and complexity in multicultural course content was found to be associated with a sense of withdrawal and alienation among racial minority trainees. For an instructor, findings like these point to the importance of collaborating with students to design multicultural activities that are rigorous and meaningful, and that nourish a positive interpersonal experience.

Ancis and Ali (2005) suggested that tasks to increase racial awareness among students with less multicultural experience can occur using role-plays, whereas actual cross-racial encounter activities might be better suited for advanced students. Similarly, Collins and Pieterse (2007) noted that attempting to work on automatic racial processes, like with dialectical thinking (Brotherton 1996) and positioning (Frank and Cannon 2010), can prove overwhelming for some students, given the spontaneous, highly reflective, and at times confrontational nature of such tasks.

Principles of adult learning (Vella 1994) would maintain that a student’s subjective reality, whether rich in multicultural experiences or not, must not only be assessed by the instructor but also honored. As with goal setting, identifying multicultural tasks that resonate with

students requires a process of evaluation and formative feedback (Alvarez and Miville 2003). Important in this process is the use of benchmarks that can help students track their own multicultural growth as they move from activity to activity, which, according to Brown and Perry (2011), can empower students as well as enhance the classroom environment.

### *Bond*

A positive interpersonal bond between student and instructor is important for almost any learning outcome (Myers 2008). Table 1 shows that the student-instructor bond in multicultural counseling course education is characterized by an affirming relationship where trust is safeguarded and a spirit of openness pervades all exchanges (cf., Locke and Kiselica 1999; Collins and Pieterse 2007; Leonard 1996). Citing Tatum's (1992) work, Alvarez and Miville (2003) recommended that instructors establish classroom norms related to confidentiality, speaking for oneself, and a zero tolerance policy for hostile humor. Helping students to develop their own guidelines for safe participation can also maintain a feeling of student-instructor solidarity (Brown and Perry 2011).

Demographic variables are also important to consider. As a White female professor teaching multiculturalism at a diverse urban college, Rothschild (2003) experienced criticism from students over what they perceived to be "a White person trying to gain minority status" (p. 34). To cultivate trust in that context, Rothschild came to start the semester with a discussion on reactions by students related to having a White professor teach them about multicultural topics. At a predominantly White university, where the initial challenge was students' defensiveness to multiculturalism, Rothschild recommended an early focus on issues of Whiteness.

The student-instructor bond is fortified when instructors help give voice to diverse student perspectives, as doing so can help them "...feel affirmed for their multiple cultural identifications... acknowledged, not overlooked or discounted, because they cannot relate to a one-dimensional cultural discourse" (Henriksen 2006, p. 182). To that end, instructors who openly discuss power differentials and remind students that even the "wrong answer" is okay can expect to observe positive interpersonal effects (Brubaker et al. 2010; Cheshire 2013; Locke and Kiselica 1999).

Other scholars (cf., Kim and Lyons 2003; Pack-Brown et al. 2012) identified discomfort and tension as typical qualities of the student-instructor bond in multicultural counseling course education. Knowing the nature of the emotional discomfort can help inform an appropriate response. For Smith-Adcock et al. (2004), multicultural anxiety can stem from a perceived threat by the student to their freedom of choice. Those authors subsequently suggested that multicultural curricula have available a wider range of assignments for students to consider. In a conceptualization of resistance in multicultural counseling courses, Jackson (1999) described 'character resistance' as anxiety from perceived expectations related to publicly addressing diversity, whereas 'resistance to content' involved the perception of judgment and hostility from others during those discussions.

At minimum, addressing multicultural anxiety requires broaching difficult issues with students. As experts in interpersonal work, counselor educators are uniquely positioned to dialogue openly and compassionately with students on a range of sensitive issues (Day-Vines et al. 2007), thereby helping to cultivate a healthy, supportive, and encouraging bond with them.

## Further Considerations for Teaching

The teaching alliance is dynamic and grounded in the realities of the classroom (Ursano et al. 2007). Journaling, for example, can reveal unique experiences related to multiculturalism that can help individualize the training experience for a range of students (Mio and Barker-Hackett 2003). Done recursively and collaboratively, this process can further imbue the relational bond with a sense of trust and support over the period of a course.

The working alliance in psychotherapy has evolved to reflect many possible definitions (Hovarth and Greenberg 1994). While the focus here has been on the teaching alliance operationalized as the tripartite (goal-task-bond) model, Jones et al. (2008) identified two additional dimensions: (i) the management of negative incidents and (ii) skills for appropriate boundary setting. For Ursano et al. (2007), the most important aspect of the teaching alliance was the ‘educational diagnosis’ or the ongoing process of identifying individual learning needs.

A critical postmodern perspective of education eschews the use of just one instructional paradigm, promoting instead an integrated approach where benefits and drawbacks of a select set of teaching frameworks are weighed against other factors, like existing curricula and level of expertise of the instructor. The teaching alliance revealed in the current conceptual application demonstrates flexibility, giving it a transtheoretical quality reminiscent of the working alliance in psychotherapy (cf., Wampold 2000).

Lastly, the teaching alliance focus invites educators to ponder how issues of transference and countertransference manifest in the multicultural classroom. More typical of a psychodynamic practice of counseling, using subconscious projections and reactions in the classroom as a way to advance student learning outcomes taps into the expertise of many counselor educators and might help sustain a relationally-oriented practice of teaching.

Jackson (1999) described multicultural transference as a negative stereotype about multiculturalism held by a student and projected onto the instructor. Jackson argued that such occurrences, if not addressed, could potentially trouble the student-instructor relationship by compromising the sense of communication and trust, as well as undermining overall learning. Robertson (1999) added that signs to look for that might indicate the occurrence of transference include a student suddenly distancing herself/himself from the instructor, abrupt passivity in involvement, or an inexplicable block in participation.

Responding to transference is a delicate endeavor for even the most seasoned counselor educator. Thus, a fuller understanding of transference in an academic context is still needed, particularly when considering that teaching multicultural counseling coursework involves navigating delicate ethical challenges not commonly experienced in other, more traditional courses (cf., Fier and Ramsey 2005).

## Summary and Future Scholarship

The critical, theoretical undercurrent of a multicultural counseling course inevitably makes this form of education an interpersonal endeavor between student and instructor. No small undertaking, managing the teaching alliance can help bring into focus relationally-centered interventions that promote meaningful learning. Such interventions include collaborative strategies for tailoring goals and activities based on a student’s lived experiences, as well as a transparent disposition for cultivating mutual trust and openness, which a constructivist-developmental approach to counselor education can facilitate (cf., Brotherton 1996).

Relational patterns are complex and the teaching alliance framework focuses somewhat narrowly on the dyadic relationship, which could signal an important limitation to the model. However, it is not a stretch to consider the quality of the alliance that the instructor has with each student as having a ripple effect within the class (Ursano et al. 2007). Also, because the pedagogical literature is written for educators and not students, the conceptualization here focuses on efforts that the instructor can take, but does not suggest that the contributions of students are any less valuable; rather, they are simply not reflected in the literature.

Other than serving as a useful reference for educators seeking to diversify their theory-driven approach to teaching, the material in Table 1 charts the interpersonal horizon of multicultural counseling education as seen through the alliance framework. More research is needed to elucidate, for example, the effects that a flexible style of teaching or a collaborative approach to goal setting have on the quality of the student-instructor relationship. It would also help to know how students contribute to a strong alliance, and the extent to which observed effects extend beyond the dyadic relationship to the overall social milieu.

Drawing from Bordin's (1994) work, Jones et al. (2008) constructed the 'Teaching Alliance Inventory', a 22-item instrument that assesses the quality of the student-instructor relationship and as such can assist with future quantitative inquiries. Qualitative research, on the other hand, can deepen the understanding of the subjective experience of the alliance for students and instructors.

There is, in fact, much more to know about the teaching alliance and its contribution to outcomes in multicultural counseling course education. To conclude, a short list of questions are offered that, if pursued, could advance this area of scholarship.

- How do students in multicultural counseling classes experience the teaching alliance? How important is it to them in comparison to other aspects of a course? How does the alliance differ based on demographic characteristics like race and gender? How do other factors like prior exposure to diversity affect the maintenance of a strong alliance?
- How do instructors experience the alliance? What dimensions do they consider most critical, and how prepared are they to attend to such facets in the classroom?
- What is the association between the teaching alliance and multicultural learning outcomes? What is the strength of that relationship and how does it compare to other course-level factors?
- What moderating factors exist? What influence do proximal variables, such as racial attitudes and 'colorblindness', have on the maintenance of a strong alliance? How do distal factors like the cultural climate of the university impact the alliance?
- What further insights can be drawn from conceptualizing the alliance using a specified set of pedagogies? How is the alliance conceived based on a multicultural-feminist framework versus a queer theory, or a social justice paradigm of teaching?

Multicultural education is designed to both inspire and challenge. A better understanding of how to harness relational dynamics in a multicultural counseling course can capitalize on the expertise of counselor educators to help ensure that trainees are prepared to provide culturally responsive services to clients from all walks of life.

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