



Service-Learning in Multicultural Counselor Education after Disaster Situations: A Case Study

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Service-Learning in Multicultural Counselor Education after Disaster Situations: A Case Study

Raul Machuca and Elissa Martinez

In this article, the authors describe participants' experience in an international post-disaster service-learning project, in multicultural counselor education. The author's findings indicate service-learning is a powerful experiential learning activity. The themes of caring anxiety, preparedness, uniqueness, empathy and compassionate awareness, cross-cultural communication, and deeper self-reflection are highlighted. Implications for counselor education, supervision, research and service-learning after disasters are discussed.

Keywords: *service-learning, counselor education, post-disaster, multicultural counseling, multicultural education*

Aprendizaje en Servicio en la Formación Multicultural de Consejeros Escolares tras Situaciones de Catástrofe: Un Estudio de Caso

Raul Machuca y Elissa Martinez

En este artículo los autores describen la experiencia de participantes en un proyecto internacional de aprendizaje en servicio tras una catástrofe, en el ámbito de la educación multicultural para consejeros escolares. Los descubrimientos del autor indican que el aprendizaje en servicio es una poderosa actividad de aprendizaje experiencial. Destacan temas como atención de la ansiedad, preparación, singularidad, empatía y conciencia compasiva, comunicación intercultural y profunda autorreflexión. Se discuten las implicaciones para la educación para consejeros escolares, la supervisión, la investigación y el aprendizaje en servicio tras situaciones de desastres.

Palabras clave: *aprendizaje en servicio, educación para consejeros escolares, post-desastre, consejería multicultural, educación multicultural*

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Service-learning is an ideal strategy to enhance counseling students' learning and application of multicultural and social justice counseling competencies. The Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) is the primary accrediting body for Counselor Education programs, and provides the standards for the learning of multicultural counseling, advocacy and social justice competencies in counselor education. These competencies have been operationalized by members of the profession and endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA), the flagship professional

organization in counseling, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD), and the Association for Counselor Educators and Supervisors (ACES), ACA's primary divisions involved in the promotion and education of multicultural counseling, advocacy, and social justice among current and future counselors.

The authors, who are faculty in a CACREP accredited counselor education program, have used service-learning as an experiential learning strategy for several years, to enhance the learning of multicultural competencies as well as specific multicultural concepts. Following the traditional way in which service-learning projects occur, the authors selected first the specific class concepts targeted by the service-learning project. Second, the authors provided class instruction and facilitated discussions on service-learning, advocacy and social justice, as well as multicultural counseling competencies. Readings for this portion of the experience came primarily from section one of *Counseling the Culturally Diverse* (Sue et al., 2019). Third, the authors established contact with a community partner and collaboratively agreed on the activities that would be performed by the students, depending on the identified needs of the community partner. Once the collaboration was established, the professor led the class through a series of visits to the community partner's site where students performed the planned activities. This article is the result of a service-learning project, which took place in an international setting, after a natural disaster, and whose purpose was to enhance the learning of advocacy and social justice counseling competencies.

Service-Learning

Service-learning is defined by the researchers' university's Center for Community Services Initiatives (CCSI) as "...a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with course work and reflection to enrich the learning experience, foster civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (CCSI, 2013, Pag. 1). When students engage in service-learning, they integrate academic learning goals intentionally in a community engagement project, fulfilling the needs of a community while meeting learning objectives from the classroom (Keller-Dupree et. al., 2014). Service-learning projects provide an opportunity for students to become more engaged with their community and aligned with their identities as future counseling professionals (Toporek & Worthington, 2014).

Engagement in service-learning makes students feel more connected to their university and future career path (Bandy, 2016). It also helps them in developing self-identity and social responsibility (Giles & Eyler, 1994), as well as develop multicultural competence and gain exposure to the strengths of communities highlighted during challenging times (Burnett et. al., 2004). The service-learning experience introduces students to important concepts including cultural awareness (Burnett et al., 2005), and facilitates academic achievement, civic engagement, and social activism (Astin et al., 2000). For counseling programs, the engagement in service-learning provides an opportunity for the promotion of multicultural and social justice counseling competencies endorsed by the American Counseling Association (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011; Ratts et al., 2016). For communities, like those affected by crises such as Hurricane Katrina, service-learning experiences help rebuild structures and influence civic engagement, particularly when resources are low and mental health concerns are high (Evans-Cowley, 2006). There is relatively little existing research on the benefits to community members from service-learning projects; however, one large-scale study found that 725 community-based organizations that engaged in service-learning projects were effective in teaching useful skills to community members (Helms-Stevens et. al., 2019).

Multicultural Counselor Education

Counselor education is a professional and academic field dedicated to the education and supervision of counselors in training (Okech & Rubel, 2018). This field is guided by a set of standards supported and enforced by a professional organization (Okech & Rubel, 2018). The main focus for counselor educators is the preparation of counselors in the application of counseling theory for the social, vocational, educational, and personal development of their clients (National Center for Education Statistics).

Multicultural counselor education is a subset of the counselor education field that attends to the development of multicultural, social justice and advocacy competence among counselors in training; as such, it aligns with a multicultural and social justice counseling perspective. In multicultural counselor education, the emphasis is on either infusing multicultural, social justice and advocacy knowledge and skills in the counselor education curriculum, or the design of specific courses to teach students about different cultural groups, address their biases, and develop knowledge of culturally-competent counseling skills (Celinska & Swazo, 2016).

Multicultural and social justice counseling is an approach that attends to diversity and social justice issues (Okech & Rubel, 2018). The main goals of a multicultural and social justice approach to counseling are for counselors in training to become aware of their own biases regarding their clients' cultural background, develop knowledge to better serve clients who are not part of the majority groups, and employ counseling skills that are culturally appropriate for their clients (Matthews et. al., 2018). In addition, it is expected for counselors to use social justice and advocacy skills to address any given inequalities (Ratts, 2009). The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, developed by Ratts et. al., (2016), is a framework for implementing defined competencies into theory, practices, and research. According to this framework, the developmental domains that lead to counselor multicultural competency are counselor self-awareness, client worldview, counseling relationship, and counseling and advocacy interventions (MSJCC, 2015). Counselor self-awareness refers to the counselor's attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills and actions relative to their own self-awareness and worldview (MSJCC, 2015). Client worldview competencies address the attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills and actions that demonstrate understanding of the client's worldview. Counseling relationship competencies focus on the counselor's attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills and actions related to the role that the counselor and client's privileged and marginalized statuses play in the counseling relationship (MSJCC, 2015). Finally, the competencies on counseling and advocacy interventions address the areas in which the counselor can intervene with or on behalf of the client: intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and international/global levels.

Service-Learning in Multicultural Counselor Education

Service-learning has been used in counselor education to enhance the learning experience of future counselors (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011), to facilitate the learning and practice of counseling skills, counseling theory, as well as advocacy and social justice (Murray et. al., 2010). One of the benefits of engaging in service-learning from a multicultural counselor education perspective is students developing positive attitudes towards individuals from diverse backgrounds (Arnold & McMurtery, 2011). Service-learning is uniquely tailored to facilitate the learning of central topics in multicultural counselor education such as advocacy and social justice. Both the American Counseling Association (ACA), and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) indicate the importance of counselors engaging in advocacy for individuals who are oppressed, and maintaining self-awareness as a means of adhering to the ethical standards of the counseling profession (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016). More specifically, engaging in service-learning projects aids counseling students in better understanding the American Counseling Association's advocacy competencies (Murray et. al., 2010).

Service-learning projects support multicultural competency training and knowledge (Midgett et. al., 2016) by having counseling students engage, advocate and support marginalized groups (Burnett et. al., 2004, Langellier et. al., 2020), encouraging a commitment to taking social action (Baggerly, 2006), exposing them to diverse populations, and affording them the ability to engage in learning opportunities that support personal and professional growth (Burnett et. al., 2004). In one study, students involved in the Traverse Outreach Project (TOP), a service-learning model utilized at the University of New Mexico, supported school counseling students' exposure to the realities of working in the school setting (Arman & Scherer, 2002). Students involved in the TOP reported that their experiences supported their learning and prepared them in understanding the needs of the community which they would serve in their careers as school counselors.

A recent trend in the literature reflects a focus of the use of group engagement in service-learning activities in counselor education programs (Minton et. al., 2018). Students participating in service-learning projects feel more connected to their peers, as well as a heightened sense of pride for the counseling profession in general (Alvarado & Gonzalez, 2012). The group experience also promotes self-reflection and awareness, which is an important component in the process of professional identity development (Burnett et. al., 2004)

Service-Learning in Counselor Education After Disasters

University students and faculty are known to engage in service-learning projects in post-hurricane situations (Bowen et. al., 2012; Evans-Cowley, 2006; Steiner & Sands, 2000), however there is a lack of research regarding service-learning projects in post-disaster situations among counselor education programs specifically. Existing literature does indicate that multicultural counselor education's focus on social justice advocacy is of "critical importance" for responding to disasters (West-Olatunji & Goodman, 2011). In one study, counselor education students participated in an eight-day outreach experience in New Orleans, in response to Hurricane Katrina (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009). The students interacted with survivors of the hurricane, after engaging in a four-day orientation and learning about the community's specific needs through the preparation with a local counselor educator. The researchers concluded that the masters students engaged in activities that supported the development of cultural competencies (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009). A few studies among higher education in helping professions (Heilman, 2012; Steiner & Sands, 2000; Bowen et al., 2012) have described the reciprocity of benefits for the community who suffered from hurricanes and other natural disasters, and for the students engaged in the service-learning projects. These studies highlighted the uniqueness of the experience and the connection to the victims, as well as the concept of civic engagement (Bowen et. al., 2012, Heilman, 2012, Steiner & Sands, 2000), the students' response to the community (Dominguez & Yeh, 2020), and the favorable response by the community partners (Evans-Cowley, 2006).

Method

This qualitative research used a case study approach with the purpose of recounting the counseling faculty and students' experience of participating in a service-learning project in the aftermath of a natural disaster. A case study approach was selected given the uniqueness of the phenomenon as well as the timing and context in which this service-learning experience took place. The overarching research question that guided this case study was, how do counseling students and faculty describe their service-learning experience in the aftermath of a natural disaster?

Background and Research Context

Previous case studies indicate that engagement in service-learning increases students' empathy and decreases their fears (Gardner & Emory, 2018). Given the significant benefits for counseling students of participating in service-learning projects, particularly in terms of multicultural learning, the current study sought to describe counseling students' experiences participating in a service-learning project during a post-disaster situation. Service-learning projects after natural disasters have been reported in the literature sporadically, however they represent a unique opportunity for graduate counseling students particularly in placing them in a context where they are able to apply more directly the knowledge and skills learned in the classroom (Bowen et. al., 2012; Evans-Cowley, 2006; Steiner & Sands, 2000).

Authors' search for graduate level service-learning engagement studies conducted in the last seven years produced limited results. Early on, Servaty-Seib & Tedrick Parikh, (2014) reported on the scarcity of service-learning research with graduate students and the primary focus of these studies on undergraduate students. This lack of opportunity is even more evident in looking at the existing literature on service-learning in counselor education programs. There are few studies that directly describe counselor education students' experiences, especially within the context of a post-disaster situation.

Service-Learning Components

The service-learning project at the core of this case study was implemented with master-level counseling students in a Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling class. The main goal of the service-learning project was to enhance the learning of advocacy and social justice concepts; however, its impact was expected in multiple areas of multicultural competence. The class took place at a university branch in the Caribbean, and course preparation and instruction related to the class concepts associated with the service-learning project included an introduction to service-learning, as well as class lectures, discussions and skills training on the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al. 2016), and the updated version of the American Counseling Association Advocacy Competencies (ACA, 2018). In preparation for the service-learning experience, students also participated in counseling first aid training focused on reviewing active listening skills, and in an orientation to the shelter facilitated by local counselors.

The service-learning project took place at a local community center in the same Caribbean Island where the class took place. This community center served as a shelter for approximately sixty individuals affected by Hurricane Dorian. Students in the class facilitated the connection with this community partner, and the service-learning project took place in a span of five weeks. The hurricane survivors at this shelter consisted of children, adolescents and adults, most of them were natives from the islands and spoke English, and a small group were immigrants from Haiti who spoke Haitian Creole as their primary language. The majority of the shelter residents were Black Caribbean and Christian. Most of the residents at the shelter were adults except for around 20 children and adolescents. All shelter residents came from neighboring islands heavily affected by Hurricane Dorian. The Haitian immigrants at the shelter came from an impoverished area, particularly vulnerable to natural disaster because of its location. The needs of the community partner for which the counseling students' support was required included recreational and wellness activities for all shelter residents.

The service-learning activities performed by the participants consisted of chaperoning shelter residents to local community organizations to pick up donations, recreational activities, self-care, and wellness activities. Recreational activities included board games, floor games, as well as art and craft activities. Self-care and wellness activities included exercise and personal grooming activities. As the counseling students were doing the activities at the shelter, they identified ways in which the shelter managers were advocating for and with the residents, using the ACA Advocacy Competencies (ACA, 2018) as reference. They also sought opportunities to advocate with and for the residents and identified unique social justice issues affecting them. As a consequence, activities in the last two visits were adjusted based on the students' findings during their first and second visits. The counseling students and faculty visited the shelter on three occasions and spent a total of 15 hours per graduate student directly doing activities with the shelter residents. The course faculty conducted debriefing and support sessions for all participants in the service-learning experience at the end of each visit to the shelter, as well as during their biweekly class. During their debriefing experience, students shared their immediate reactions to the experience, as well as their impressions and feelings connected to the activities and interactions with people at the shelter.

Students completed pre, mid, and post reflections on the experience. These reflections were completed as discussion boards in the course management system. The instructors provided a list of reflection questions to facilitate a richer deliberation on their experience as well as to enhance their critical thinking. One example question was "What are the social justice issues impacting the community and how will my engagement in service-learning help me as a counselor?" In addition to their posts, students were required to comment on at least three other students' posts. Students were required to post first before commenting on other students' posts.

Evaluation of the service-learning experience was done through peer and instructor feedback using a discussion board. As students wrote their reflections on the experience as posts on the discussion board, their peers and instructors were able to comment on their post. The faculty and teaching assistant evaluated the post and the comments to establish the degree in which students were able to respond to the class topic-related questions. Evaluation with the community partner was done through post-service exploration with the contact person at the shelter on the impact students made with the shelter management and its residents.

The Case or Unit of Analysis

Case study designs are used to explore a specific phenomenon (definition) within its context, utilizing a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994), and are bound by time and place (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The phenomenon examined in this study was the experience of participating in a service-learning project during a post-disaster situation, as part of a master's level multicultural counseling class. The service-learning project took place at a local community shelter, over a five-week period, in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian (fall 2019), in one of the Caribbean islands affected.

The data sources for the case study consisted of class documents such as guides for class exercises and discussions, as well as the syllabus and the detailed service-learning project description. It also included notes from class discussions, instructor comments to the discussion boards, as well as communications with the community partner. However, the most important source of data was the student and instructor reflections and field notes on the service-learning experience. The student participants all resided and studied in Nassau, New Providence island, The Bahamas, and the instructors lived in the United States. The faculty member would travel to The Bahamas throughout the course of the semester and was present during the visits to the community shelter. The doctoral student teaching assistant engaged virtually during classroom instruction, providing feedback and support to students through optional office hours as well.

Participants

Participants in the study were 13 master's level counseling students enrolled in a Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling class, as well as two instructors, who were participant observers, a full-time faculty member and a doctoral student teaching assistant. All but one counseling student identified as Black, one student identified as White. The full-time faculty identified as mixed White and Native of the Americas and was familiar with the local culture as he has been teaching on the island for three years. The doctoral student teaching assistant identified as White and was teaching on the island for the first time. Two participants identified as male, and 13 participants identified as female. The 13 student participants were native to the island where the service-learning took place. The two instructor participants resided in the southeast of the United States. In terms of their religion, participants belonged to a community and a country with strong Christian religious beliefs. The full-time instructor identified as agnostic and the doctoral teaching assistant as Jewish. In the context of the study, the instructors were participant observers. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was obtained as a post-event study with data obtained throughout the course rather than set up prior as an intentional research study; the data was de-identified to ensure participants' anonymity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through both a manual coding process and an automatic coding process using Nvivo. The manual coding process was performed and corroborated by each of the researchers, and the codes and themes were agreed upon after continuous examination of the data. A second independent automatic data analysis was done using the Nvivo 12 software. The results from the Nvivo automatic coding was then compared with the manual coding and an adjustment and depuration of codes and themes was performed by the two researchers. The coding process was done using thematic analysis as described by Nowell et al., 2017, this included becoming familiar with the data, formulating initial codes, searching for and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

Trustworthiness

In this study, trustworthiness was sought through elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was pursued by prolonged engagement with the experience as participant observers, the persistent observation of data obtained through the service-learning experience, and the consequent adjustment of themes. Credibility was also pursued through triangulation using multiple sources of data including class documents, class discussions, student

reflections, researcher participant observations and field notes, as well as the involvement of multiple researchers in the process.

Transferability of the study was sought through the use of a thick description of the service-learning experience, and its dependability was established based on the consistency between the case study design and our process of analysis. Confirmability was pursued in our intention to base the thematic analysis on the actual data collected through the service-learning experience rather than on our personal views. Finally, reflexivity was approached through the awareness of who we are as counselor educators and service-learning researchers, as well as the impact of our ideas, experiences, and background in the way we analyzed the data.

Positionality Statement

Researchers are a full-time counseling faculty and main instructor for the Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling course, and a doctoral student who served as teaching assistant in fulfillment of her teaching internship requirements. The researchers were both participants in the service-learning experience from which this research study originated. The main faculty researcher has extensive experience with service-learning projects, as well as with teaching and research related to multicultural issues in counseling. He has taught on the island for three years, and is familiar with the local culture. The second researcher has participated as a doctoral student in service-learning projects, as well as in the design and implementation of service-learning projects for master's level counseling students. She has been involved in the development of a regional chapter of Counselors for Social Justice for South Florida, where the main campus of the university is located. Both researchers are from a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with a long tradition in the use of community-based experiential learning.

The researchers involved with this study recognize their positions as it relates to several contexts of this study. A position statement allows for transparency for researchers regarding their intentional avoidance of researcher bias (Rowe, 2014). Both researchers reside in a different country than the participants, with the full-time counseling faculty member attending the service-learning experience in person with the participants. As the project took place in a country with strong Christian religious beliefs, the researchers acknowledged their differences with participants in their religious practices, particularly because religion was a theme frequently discussed in class, especially as connected to the Haitian immigrant population of the islands. The researchers also recognize that they were not personally impacted by the natural disaster, as neither of them are from the Caribbean and were not physically present when the hurricane struck the islands. The full-time faculty researcher was a resident of New Orleans and was impacted by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The researchers recognized the cultural differences between their experiences, the participants' experiences and those of the evacuees. The researchers spent time during class preparation discussing how helping through a service-learning project needs to fit the needs of the community, which differs from the researcher's own lived experiences. These recognitions allowed for researchers to analyze the data from an outsider's perspective, allowing the data collected to develop into themes not biased by the researcher's personal experiences.

Limitations

A possible limitation of this research study is the fact that it is a post-event study research, and as such it was based on data collected through a natural experiential learning process rather than through an intentional research study designed in advance to capture the experience. However, the richness of data, as well as the conscious effort by the researchers to take an unbiased look at the data collected naturally, and the use of a rigorous adherence to elements of trustworthiness enhances the possibilities for application of these findings to similar contexts.

Findings

This study highlighted the importance of service-learning in the process of multicultural counselor education of master's level students, particularly through the unique experience of engaging with the community after a natural disaster occurred. The following themes arose as evidenced through the reflection of students and instructors engaged in an international service-learning project in a post-disaster situation.

Caring Anxiety

Caring anxiety, as expressed by the participants, describes their internal and interpersonal anticipatory anxiety experiences, which highlighted their caring for those affected by the disaster. A majority of the participants reflected on how the time leading up to their first trip to the shelter was a significant source of anxiety with two major elements. The first element was internal anxieties related to being an effective helper in this post-disaster situation. As one participant stated, "I've learned that I can sometimes allow my fear of saying something wrong or being misinterpreted... hold me back from trying and engaging." The other way caring anxiety manifested was as a concern for how the participants would be perceived by the evacuees. As one of the participants articulated, "Based on the stories of the hurricane that I had heard, I did not know how the evacuees would have received me as a student counselor." This theme was evident also for the researchers through the questions received from the students prior to their first visit to the shelter.

Preparedness

This theme reflects the participants' awareness and valuing of a thorough preparation for, and orientation to the service-learning experience. The participants' reflections suggested the preparation done prior to the first visit with the survivors of the hurricane was an imperative component of their service-learning experience. They felt the class discussions, the education around multicultural competencies and skills, advocacy and social justice issues, counseling first aid, and consultation with professionals in the community, aided them in being most effective in their engagement with individuals at the shelter. As one participant described:

The conversations in class about the multicultural issues faced around the world helped me to understand more about the difference between refugees and immigrants. In class we spoke about various things related to what it is to be an immigrant versus being a refugee and how it impacts one's life forever.

In terms of the usefulness of learning multicultural skills, one participant stated, "The culturally competent counseling interview in class helped with communicating with the evacuees. The cultural self-disclosure and commonalities helped spark a conversation with an evacuee."

The participants' reported that the in-class preparation aided in their engagement throughout the service-learning project. The classroom discussions provided an opportunity to ask context-specific questions in order to continue to engage in an appropriate and helpful manner. Participants reflected that in working to support community members, specifically the evacuees, it was important to feel prepared and trained for this type of learning and partnership experience.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Under this theme, participants described the essential role that seeking a non-verbal connection with individuals at the shelter, particularly those who spoke a different language, played in facilitating their communication and understanding. This theme is further defined as the participant's understanding of the need to be culturally competent and resourceful in their ability to function across cultures. This was particularly relevant because due to the language barrier between the participants and many of the evacuees

who were immigrants, there was a large number of ideas and emotions expressed by the participants related to being able to effectively communicate. As one participant shared in their reflection,

The most difficult aspect of the engagement was not being able to speak the language of the immigrant group. I believed I would have been able to speak to more individuals had I known to speak their language. However, by showing a warm smile and making gestures by helping to distribute items from the church sufficed.

This statement from participants also highlights the input offered by local counselors, who serve as consultants during the service-learning preparation phase, which centered on the importance of acknowledging the immigrant residents who did not speak English even if just through open and inviting body language. Consequently, the participants shared that they were acutely aware of the importance of maintaining prosocial body language, including friendly and inviting facial expressions. Even when the participants spoke the same language as the shelter residents, they recognized the importance of their non-verbal presence supporting their spoken communications. One participant reflected, “I used non-verbal communication, watching them and allowing them to open up.” Many of the participants noted that using active listening skills and mindful observation were essential techniques in their exchanges with immigrant evacuees. Although it was not necessarily easy, as evidenced by the language barriers participants faced, they were able to find ways to interact and communicate. One participant shared in their reflection that,

It was difficult for me in starting a conversation with the immigrant group because of the language barrier. I felt more comfortable speaking with the English speakers and non-immigrants there, and I had to get adjusted and find ways to effectively communicate with the immigrant evacuees.

Because there were both immigrants and natives of the island at the same shelter, the participants utilized culturally competent and creative means of interacting and communicating. They also recognized the power of the relationship and the skills needed when engaging with the survivors, as one participant stated, “I utilized communication skills, cultural disclosure and commonalities to communicate with the evacuees.”

Unique Learning Experience

Under this theme, participants recognized the uniqueness of the service-learning experience in a post-disaster situation, as well as its invaluable contribution to their growth, their learning, and the application of multicultural counseling concepts. The participants reflected that the engagement with individuals in a post-disaster scenario required them to be in the moment during the service-learning project, to understand the experience of the evacuees. One participant reflected, “Interacting with these persons first-hand gives me a real perspective on their experiences of surviving a crisis.” Several of the participants noted that the experience was very unique for them. For example, one participant noted, “It felt so surreal, and this experience really helps you develop those necessary skills to help people in a crisis and assist in a multicultural aspect.” It appears without the service-learning experience occurring when individuals were in immediate need, the participants would not have been able to put to practice the skills learned in the classroom in such a direct and immediate way.

Empathy and Compassionate Awareness

The empathy and compassionate awareness theme is defined as participants' own recognition of, and understanding of these particular skills as essential for serving victims of a disaster. As one participant noted, “Showcasing an abundance of empathy was a vital skill used due to the nature of the crisis.” Further, the participants recognized that being in the presence of the survivors of the disaster brought out their empathy and compassion towards others, which they would not have tapped into as deeply if they had not been physically in their presence. In another reflection, a student stated, “This experience I believe has caused us all to tap into our empathetic side more than we usually do.” Seeing the survivors in the shelter

brought up strong emotions for participants, with increased experience of compassion towards the individuals with whom they engaged.

Deeper Self-Reflection

This theme is defined as the participants' awareness of bias (both personal and institutional), and descriptions of enhanced reflection and critical thinking skills, particularly in connection with their personal interactions with others, as well as their future work as counselors serving diverse populations. The participants reported engaging in meaningful self-reflection and questioning experiences, as a result of the service-learning project. Additionally, they developed a deeper awareness of the characteristics of effective counselors. As one participant shared:

Because of my service-learning experience, I am more aware of my personal biases. This encouraged me to take a moment to carefully assess my response or actions toward people I encounter daily. This helps to be more open and willing to learn about individuals' unique ideas and perspectives towards life which fosters a non-judgmental atmosphere in counseling.

The participants recognized their gained awareness and privilege, and the way they can leverage that privilege in advocacy of those less fortunate. As one of the participants remarked, "working with the community gave way to interesting and profound conversations within myself and my peers about self-criticism and the process itself, empathy, and practical action." Participants' recognition of their own biases was accompanied by the recognition of this post-disaster service-learning experience's value in facilitating a faster change in their perceptions of the immigrant population. They also highlighted the importance of this process to better serve those affected by the disaster. One participant shared, "I was challenged by managing my own bias toward the immigrant evacuees."

An additional element of deeper self-reflection was the awareness of institutional discrimination which was present during the class discussions particularly around biases. Although some participants were already aware of the institutional discrimination towards immigrant groups specially, the service-learning experience facilitated for all participants to recognize the reality of this phenomenon in their community.

Discussion

As it was intended with our overarching research question—how do counseling students and faculty describe their service-learning experience in the aftermath of a natural disaster?—this case study facilitated a description of a service-learning experience in multicultural counselor education in a post-disaster situation. In connection with our findings, participants described their experience as a unique learning opportunity in which they were able to recognize, feel and express caring anxiety for self and for others. This finding relates to the transformational learning, and the connection with disaster victims, described by Heilman (2012) in a previous study. Transformational learning, as described by Mezirow, states that knowledge is created through interpretations based on unique experiences (Mezirow, 1996). This view on transformational learning is constructivist in nature, through the utilization of reinterpretation of experiences. The participants in this study visited the shelter multiple times and were asked to reflect at several time points. Participants also highlighted the importance of being prepared for the experience, particularly through the orientation, learning, discussions, and class activities that took place before, during and after the service-learning project. The participants' experience also emphasizes the usefulness of the CACREP curriculum standards connected to multicultural counseling, as well as advocacy and social justice (CACREP, 2016) in their preparedness for engaging with the evacuees at the shelter. Participants engaged in activities that demonstrated advocacy and support of individuals who are part of an oppressed group, in this case, the immigrant evacuees. Their engagement, aided by preparation in the classroom activities and readings, enhanced their learning and application of advocacy and social justice related CACREP standards. Other studies have highlighted the importance of preparation for the service-learning experience, particularly in a post-disaster situation as having clear concepts, common goals, and

collaboration for the success of a service-learning experience post-disaster (Bowen et al., 2012; Dominguez & Yeh, 2020).

Students and instructors also described the impact this experience had on their perceptions and attitudes towards the immigrant residents of the shelter, and as a response, the resourcefulness that took place, as well as the skills used during cross-cultural exchanges with the shelter residents. A special feature of the experience of participating in a post-disaster service-learning experience was the idea of cross-cultural communication, or the fact that participants intensely sought a genuine connection with shelter residents mainly through non-verbal communication. This attitude was supported by their awareness of the role that empathy and compassion played in their efforts to serve the displaced communities. Other authors have described how direct involvement with people in the community has a significant impact in the students' perceptions and attitudes (Alvarado & Gonzalez, 2012; Burnett et al., 2005; Heliman, 2012).

A significant element of the participants' description of their experience was their encounter with real life examples of institutional discrimination; a process that occurred in parallel to their own identification, understanding and confrontation of personal biases. Although students spoke of the social justice issues as a possibility in their communities, the service-learning experience facilitated for them to become direct witnesses of it. It also prompted the development of a higher sense of social and civic responsibility. This finding relates to the usefulness of service-learning to amplify the learning and application of specific class concepts (Eyler & Giles, 1999), and its influence in social justice efforts and civic engagement (CCSI, 2013).

Finally, similar to what was described by Campbell & Oswald (2018) the participants described this experience as an opportunity to develop awareness and apply critical thinking skills particularly related to specific concepts such as advocacy and social justice issues. They also showed a higher level of self-exploration and questioning of the realities around them. In their reflections, participants described a progressive development in their capability to reflect, to discuss multicultural issues and ideas meaningfully, their higher insight into the realities of their immediate and more distant communities, as well as their ability to hold more productive and deeper discussions with their peers. Additionally, these findings indicate a desire among participants to support individuals who are oppressed in culturally sensitive ways, in a similar way as described by Langellier et. al. (2020).

Compared to the experience of participating in service-learning in counselor education, as described by Stewart-Sicking et al. (2013) as a process of development from personal engagement, being overwhelmed, and leveling expectations, to a reconstruction of a counselor identity, in our study, participants' process of development was focused on multicultural competence, and more specifically advocacy and social justice related learning. Such a process included an initial caring anxious response, regulation of their initial reaction through preparedness, increased awareness, connection through cross-cultural and communication skills, and deeper self-reflection and questioning of the realities around them, all of this in the context of a unique learning experience.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this research study have multiple implications. The use of service-learning in multicultural counselor education represents a more comprehensive experiential way of enhancing the learning of multicultural counseling. In addition, service-learning in multicultural counselor education offers an opportunity for improving the learning dynamics for counselors in training, as well as increasing the community resources for prevention, advocacy, mental health and education.

In future service-learning projects in multicultural counselor education in a post-disaster situation, it is recommended first for students to have a basic knowledge of counseling theories and skills. This would likely increase their sense of efficacy in their interactions with disaster victims. Second, in the context of multicultural counselor education, these service-learning projects need to be closely supported by class lectures, application exercises and discussions. Third, the incorporation of counseling first aid training is essential to support the use of basic active listening skills, and the conceptualization of disaster victims from a strength-based and wellness perspective. Fourth, a thorough orientation to the post-disaster service-

learning experience is necessary, including the use of counselors in the local community as consultants, as well as the use of close and continuous communication with the community partner. Fifth, the use of guided reflections as well as the posting of such reflections in an open forum for group discussion as this seems to facilitate richer and deeper insight. Sixth, a good understanding of the service-learning approach is important for both the instructors and the students, and particularly as related to the centrality of the reflection process. Finally, the service-learning activities in multicultural counselor education need to attend to the level of student development, the specific context of the experience (crisis, disaster), and most importantly, the specific and immediate needs of the community served.

The description of the experience of participating in a service-learning project after a natural disaster in the context of multicultural counselor education reinforces the idea that direct experience with other cultural groups promotes cultural sensitivity and development. It also promotes the recognition of the values of those who are different from oneself, in addition to enhanced knowledge about cultural groups' experiences (Burnett et. al, 2004). This was a unique opportunity for counseling students to approach the realities of the local community, and to experience the ethnic, racial and language dynamics present every day, and particularly during a crisis situation.

Areas for Future Research

The findings from this study highlighted the need for further research in multiple areas starting with the effects of counseling first aid training, as well as specific class content and activities in the students' perception of and or performance in their multicultural learning experience. Second, there needs to be further exploration on the effects of open reflection versus private reflections. In our service-learning experience, students provided their reflections in an open discussion forum and they received comments from their classmates and instructors. The reflections in service-learning are usually private and or presented as a final product for the class. Connected to this is the idea of comparing the use of open or unprompted reflections versus the use of cued or prompted reflections. Third, research would be beneficial on the impact of students' identity in service-learning, and particularly the impact in their learning process of intersecting identities such as race, immigration generation, religion, gender, etc. Finally, since this was a group service-learning experience, research could be done to compare its differences with individual service-learning experiences

Conclusion

The post-disaster service-learning experience represented an invaluable experiential learning opportunity for students and instructors in the context of multicultural counselor education. As reflected by the findings, the post-disaster service-learning experience provided a unique scenario for students to apply multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills, as well as advocacy and social justice skills. That is, they were able to exemplify the learn to serve ideal of a true service-learning experience. They were also able to demonstrate an increase in well-known service-learning outcomes such as intellectual growth, social and civic responsibility, and appreciation of diversity (CCSI, 2013).

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