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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Critical Factors in Cultural Immersion: A Synthesis of Relevant Literature

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Abstract This synthesis of the literature on cross-cultural immersion experiences gives emphasis to the need for effective pedagogy for enhancing multicultural counseling competency, with cultural immersion being a potentially valuable training tool. The authors examine the empirical literature towards identifying both helpful and hindering structural and process factors in immersion experiences. Consideration is given to enhancing training experiences and suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords Cultural immersion · Multicultural counseling · Counselor education and development

Introduction

The mental health field is growing rapidly with the counseling profession representing one of the fastest growing dimensions, having a projected growth of 18 % from 2008 to 2018 within the United States (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau Statistics 2010). Today, counseling professionals work with clients from a variety of different backgrounds in an increasingly pluralistic social context, increasing the need to espouse culturally competent practices (Coleman 2006). For counselors to better understand clients from diverse backgrounds, there is a need to focus on effective training methods that support the importance of understanding clients' cultural contexts and worldviews.

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A culture-centered approach to counseling recognizes that culture is a foundational and integral part of the counseling process. Viewing a client's cultural context as central to counseling is especially important given that counselors are vulnerable to the experience of cultural encapsulation (Wrenn 1962), defined as working with clients from an ethnocentric perspective in which their worldviews are not adequately understood or integrated into the counseling process (Miville et al. 2006; Pedersen et al. 2008).

A common theme in cultural encapsulation is the underlying emotion of fearing the unknown. This fear is perpetuated even more today than in the past as individuals are commonly faced with an increasing variety of cultures, people, worldviews, traditions, beliefs, and religions, potentially heightening the risk for cultural encapsulation to occur (Pedersen et al. 2008; Wrenn 1985).

Understanding cultural encapsulation is particularly important for counselor education training programs as they are at risk of perpetuating monocultural perspectives for trainees by focusing predominantly on technical skills and techniques, which researchers have found are likely to be insufficient (cf., Pedersen et al. 2008). Instead, the focus of development needs to be more on inter/intra personal elements, such as genuine acceptance of people from all backgrounds, multicultural self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in one's own ability to work with a variety of clients), and being aware of personal strengths and limitations (Collins and Arthur 2010; Pedersen et al. 2008). By focusing on developing counselors' internal processes and continuing to recognize that the person of the counselor accounts for more outcome variability than specific treatment modalities (cf., Ahn and Wampold 2001), educators may more effectively develop counselors who successfully meet the current challenges of multiculturalism and the mental health profession (Coleman 2006; Pieterse et al. 2009).

To this end, the purpose of this manuscript is to provide a synthesis of the literature on critical aspects of cultural immersion experiences to promote the necessary personal self-awareness and other-awareness that is needed to work with clients within an inclusive framework and to help build effective relationships with clients from varied backgrounds (Collins and Arthur 2010; Reupert 2006).

Need for Effective Pedagogy in Multicultural Counseling

There is wide acceptance that multiculturalism is a core component of the counseling profession and of counselor preparation. Scholars (cf., Chung and Bemak 2002; Coleman 2006; Holcomb-McCoy and Myers 1999; Kim and Lyons 2003), ethical standards of professional organizations (cf., the American Counseling Association 2005; Australian Counseling Association 2012; Health Professions Council of South Africa 2004) and accreditation standards (cf., Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs; CACREP 2009) all stress the significance of multiculturalism. Leach and Harbin (1997) investigated the similarity of ethical codes from 19 countries when compared to the American Psychological Association's (APA) codes. Results indicated that although there were significant distinctions across ethical codes, 15 of the 19 countries included some variation of the APA's code on "respect for people's right and dignity", indicating the relatively high global emphasis on multiculturalism (APA 2002).

Although attention to the need for culturally competent practices is clear, there is a relative paucity of literature on how to actually teach counselor trainees to be culturally competent (Arthur and Achenbach 2002; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005; Kim and Lyons 2003). Further, traditional pedagogical methods in the counseling profession originated from a

European-Western perspective, operating primarily within monocultural and monolingual frameworks (Sue et al. 1992).

In the United States, counselors are primarily from the mainstream culture; therefore, multicultural pedagogy needs to focus on avoiding cultural encapsulation (Burnett et al. 2004). In addition, despite counselor education preparation programs' efforts in multicultural counseling, graduates report feeling ineffective and unprepared to work with clients from culturally diverse backgrounds (Arthur and Achenbach 2002; D'Andrea and Daniels 2001; Ponterotto 1997). Therefore, it is imperative to re-examine existing pedagogical methods and to consider options for enhancing multicultural training.

Researchers (e.g., Coleman 2006; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005) have indicated that pedagogical methods for multicultural training remain primarily within the cognitive domain, rarely extending into the affective domain, although multicultural competencies indicate the need for individuals to be exposed to both cognitive and affective processes (Arredondo and Toporek 2004; Sue et al. 1982). Additionally, by primarily focusing on cognitive/knowledge domains of cultural competence, educators fail to impact counselor self-awareness, a key aspect in competency development (Pieterse et al. 2009).

Previously, researchers (e.g., Arredondo and Toporek 2004) have suggested that knowledge alone does not lead to behavioral or attitudinal changes among counselor trainees and, accordingly, pedagogical methods that focus solely on knowledge may actually reinforce culturally insensitive practices. According to Collins and Pieterse (2007), training must be directly applicable to trainees' daily lives, highlighting the need to bridge knowledge obtained in the classroom to situations experienced in real world settings. By challenging students to integrate theory into practice in real world settings, the likelihood of creating lasting learning outcomes is likely to be increased (Coleman 2006; Heppner and O'Brien 1994; Kim and Lyons 2003; Pompa 2002).

Several researchers (e.g., Arredondo and Toporek 2004; Canfield et al. 2009; Coleman 2006; Collins and Pieterse 2007; Kim and Lyons 2003) have supported the importance of extending multicultural training beyond the traditional classroom setting. For example, Heppner and O'Brien (1994) investigated student perceptions of helpful and hindering aspects of multicultural training. Results indicated that students found the most helpful aspects of multicultural training were experiential components, whereas the most hindering were the students' sense of lacking the ability to integrate knowledge gained. Coleman (2006) investigated student perceptions of critical incidents in multicultural training and found that positive critical incidents were centered on experiential components including: a) experiences with colleagues from diverse backgrounds during multicultural training, b) didactic and experiential course components, and c) experiences with people from culturally diverse backgrounds in their personal lives. In sum, researchers (e.g. Coleman 2006; Heppner and O'Brien 1994; Tomlinson-Clarke 2000) consistently have found that students value direct interactions and exposure to diverse cultures in their multicultural training, providing a strong rationale for student engagement in cultural immersion (Canfield et al. 2009; Coleman 2006; Lindsey 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke 2000).

Cultural Immersion

Cultural immersion, experiences that enable learners to have direct, prolonged, in vivo contact while immersed in a culture different than their own (Pope-Davis and Coleman 1997), is one example of experiential training that has been found to be effective in increasing multicultural competence for students in helping professions (Cordero and

Rodriguez 2009; Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke 2010). Theoretical support for cultural immersion is grounded in Allport's 'contact hypothesis' (Allport 1954), which emphasizes that experiencing diversity through experiential methods is more effective than didactic methods of learning that focus primarily just on reading and discussion. This hypothesis stresses the value of being in direct contact with others to heighten awareness and reduce misunderstandings and tensions. Given that Allport's contact hypothesis is "among the most researched psychological principles for reducing interracial prejudice" (Wittig and Grant-Thompson 1998, p. 798), it is surprising that it has not received more attention in the field of multicultural counseling training.

Cordero and Rodriguez (2009) provide an example of a 12-day international immersion experience for social work graduate students in Puerto Rico. Examples of student learning while immersed included attending lectures on the history of social work in Puerto Rico, visiting social work agencies and meeting with social work professionals and community activists. Students also had informal opportunities to connect with students at the local university, local residents, and business owners. Results from participants' qualitative journals found that they reported increased self-awareness, cross cultural knowledge, and commitment to social justice, supporting the influence of cultural immersion on increasing multicultural competence (Cordero and Rodriguez 2009).

In another cultural immersion experience, 14 graduate students in counseling, psychology, and education were immersed in South Africa for 3 weeks (Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke 2010). Prior to the immersion, students participated in four seminars and community-centered service learning to help them prepare for community work in South Africa and enhance the development of cultural sensitivity. While immersed, students engaged with community residents who had HIV/AIDS, provided services in primary and secondary schools, attended seminars with local educational leaders, participated in a structured group process, and were involved in guided reflection. The majority of participants reported changes in cultural competence because of their experience (Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke 2010).

Similarly, Boyle and colleagues (1999) facilitated an international immersion experience in Veracruz, Mexico for social work students, practitioners, and faculty members in one year for three and a half weeks and in the following year for 10 days. Participants stayed with host families, participated in language school classes, and engaged in a variety of activities with local social work professionals. Qualitative analysis of their reflective journals and pre- post-quantitative data supported cultural immersion as an effective pedagogical tool in increasing cultural competence for participants (Boyle et al. 1999).

In sum, multicultural scholars (e.g., DeRicco and Sciarra 2005; Diaz-Lazaro and Cohen 2001; Ishii et al. 2009; Lindsey 2005) have found cultural immersion experiences to be successful in challenging participant biases and in fostering personal and professional growth. As individuals engage in meaningful relationships in the immersion experiences, there appears to be a concomitant increase in cultural understanding and empathy.

Benefits of cultural immersion experiences have been illustrated across disciplines, including counseling (Alexander et al. 2005; Ishii et al. 2009), social work (Boyle et al. 1999), and nursing (Larson et al. 2010). Although it is widely accepted across disciplines that cultural immersion experiences positively impact participants (Arthur and Achenbach 2002; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005; Diaz-Lazaro and Cohen 2001; Kim and Lyons 2003; Paige et al. 2009), there has not been any synthesis of the literature to date that highlights the specific factors that impact participants in both positive and negative ways. Similar to Coleman (2006), we believe that literature on cultural immersion has focused predominately on largely self-reported outcomes of immersion experiences and given less attention to the actual process elements of cultural immersion experiences. As such, the literature that does

exist on cultural immersion processes is fragmented and not well integrated. To this end, the remainder of this article is focused on integrating research findings on critical structural and process factors of immersion experiences.

Critical Factors of Cultural Immersion

As research on the impact of cultural immersion continues, it is essential to explore the critical factors that enhance or impede the experience for counselor trainees. Factors discussed in literature on cultural immersion include both *structural factors,* such as the duration/location of immersion, language barriers, frequency of cross cultural interactions, group size and pre-trip planning, and *process factors*, such as facilitator support, emphasis on reflective processes, attending to group dynamics, expectations and personality characteristics of group members.

Structural Factors of Immersion

Successful immersion experiences seem to hinge on several course-related components (cf., Allen and Young 1997; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005; Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke 2010). Given that cultural immersion experiences are designed to provide participants with meaningful interactions with persons from diverse cultural contexts in order to increase cultural sensitivity, it seems that the most critical aspect of immersion is frequent and direct interactions with community members, enabling participants to experience the daily demands of living within the sociocultural context of another cultural group. In addition to frequent contact, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) emphasized that immersion experiences need to be long enough for participants to be confronted by and have to respond to the potential culture shock arising from being in another culture.

Pedersen (1995) discussed various phases of culture shock, emphasizing the multidimensional and interpersonal processes that individuals experience when in unfamiliar environments. Culture shock or cultural dissonance, defined as an uncomfortable sense of discord, disharmony, confusion, or conflict experienced by people in the midst of change in their cultural environment, is considered essential in increasing cultural awareness and sensitivity (Pedersen 1991). Given the subjective component of cultural dissonance, no specific periods have been established for the necessary length or duration of an experience; rather, facilitators are encouraged to consider cultural dissonance potentials in relation to determining the appropriate length of immersion and frequency of interactions when planning such experiences.

In addition to planning exposure aspects for participants, facilitators should carefully consider the location of the immersion as it relates to increasing cultural sensitivity and other related pedagogical objectives for the experience. Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) stated that immersion in sociocultural settings that differ from the usual national setting (in that case the United States) "create the optimal conditions that foster racial and cultural self-awareness" (p. 169), implying that international experience is directly related to maximizing multicultural growth experiences. Findings from a qualitative study conducted by Barden and Cashwell (in press) indicated that the experience of being 'other' was the salient theme in an immersion experience, emphasizing that experiencing being a minority may be more important than the specific location itself. More specifically, results indicated, that the magnitude of difference (e.g., in ethnicity, language, food, religion, traditions, etc.) in the immersion culture compared to the participants' personal culture had most influence on self-

perceived levels of change in cultural awareness and empathy (Barden and Cashwell in press). Participants described experiencing and overcoming language barriers and feeling connected in spite of language as being significant in changing their self-awareness, empathy, and self-efficacy several months after the experience (Barden and Cashwell in press). In sum, consideration of significant differences between the cultural contexts of immersion location compared to the cultural context in which participants usually reside may enhance changes in multicultural sensitivity.

Another structural component that appears to be beneficial is deliberately providing various experiences to ensure that participants have ample interactions with people from the host culture. Immersion experiences can be diversified by allowing participants to have both formal (e.g., planned visits to agencies, universities, and historical sites) and informal interactions (e.g., meeting local people in coffee shops/restaurants, going on independent excursions and other recreational activities).

According to Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010), providing a multitude of learning experiences that expose participants to the richness of the culture, including language, traditions, and cultural nuances, is essential. Similarly, Barden and Cashwell (in press) investigated the most positive and most negative critical incidents of immersion experiences, with results indicating that, although participants felt that visiting cultural sites and engaging in 'tourist' activities was enjoyable, the most critical experiences involved engaging in counseling-related interactions with community members (e.g., group counseling, working in schools, art therapy at a domestic violence shelter, etc.). Such engagements seem to promote a sense of global connection, or a connection that transcends language and cultural barriers, and increases a sense of efficacy and personal agency. For some, however, the one thing they would change about immersion experiences would be to have more informal time interacting with community members. Such findings highlight the need for facilitators to find a balance between structured and unstructured activities they plan for the immersion experience. In sum, encouraging participation in all aspects of local customs and traditions, both formally and informally, seems beneficial in exposing participants to the rich diversity and cultural nuances likely to be readily accessible during the immersion experience.

Group size appears to be another important structural consideration for immersion experiences. Barden and Cashwell (in press) reported that participants found group processing to be less effective when done in large groups (i.e., more than 10 participants). Participants seemed to feel more emotionally safe and willing to be vulnerable when processing in smaller, more intimate groups involving around four to five participants. However, it is not clear whether participants felt 'unsafe' in a large group or just 'more safe' in a smaller group. It would seem important for immersion facilitators to consider group size when planning and implementing immersion experiences. Whatever the size of the group overall, considerations about group size for processing would be important to plan for, to maximize opportunities for discussion, reflection and sharing awareness.

Finally, in addition to the kind of location, length of immersion, opportunities for interaction, and size of the group or subgroup units, immersion facilitators should consider having structured pre-trip preparation meetings. Pre-trip meetings can serve a variety of functions including: discussing expectations, learning about the socio-political history of the immersion setting, increasing facility with language, discussion of cultural norms, and beginning to establish group cohesion. However, such meetings should be tailored intentionally in regard to the specific immersion experience proposed (Allen and Young 1997; Cordero and Rodriguez 2009). For example, some researchers (cf., Cordero and Rodriguez 2009; Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke 2010) suggest that when immersing in countries or places where the primary language is different from that of the participants, undertaking some basic language training before and/or during immersion is likely to be beneficial.

In contrast to the recommendation to have pre-trip meetings, Barden and Cashwell (in press) found that, although most participants in their study considered such planning helpful, a few regarded this component as one of the more negative aspects. They stated that pre-trip information colored their perspective and did not allow them to fully encounter and appreciate the culture and newness of the experience. Implications from the findings overall suggest that although pre-trip meetings can be useful in establishing expectations and group cohesion, facilitators might consider the depth and breadth of information they offer, recognizing that some individuals might benefit more from forming their own perspectives based on their raw experiences.

Process Factors of Immersion

In addition to the structural factors of immersion experiences, several process-related factors need considering. These include matters of group safety, processing opportunities and dynamics, and post-immersion debriefing processes to enhance learning and positive outcomes. Inevitably, one of the goals of immersion experiences is to place participants in somewhat disorienting situations in which they will be exposed to unknown cultural challenges. As such, participants will be faced with a degree of emotional risk as they have to recognize and address their internalized biases and assumptions. In order for learning to occur, participants need to be able to process their feelings thoroughly and safely, while being encouraged to integrate their new knowledge and make sense of what it all means (DeRicco and Sciarra 2005). Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) argued that having frequent debriefing sessions while immersed is essential for supporting participants' reflections and growth processes. Ample opportunities must be provided for presenting and processing of thoughts, feelings and behaviors and connecting experiences to increase cultural sensitivity, with this being geared in the direction of working with clients. Therefore, encouraging discussion and reflection is an especially important factor due to the direct relationship between such processing and the fostering of critical thinking and creating new knowledge (Bloom 1956; Dewey 1933).

Barden and Cashwell (in press) emphasized the need for post-immersion reflections, stressing the importance of creating time to process and "unpack" experiences, honoring the intensity of what participants may have experienced while immersed. Facilitators might well encourage participants to share their experiences and reflections with friends and family, reread their personal journal entries, debrief with other immersion participants after returning back home, and share their experiences more widely with peers, colleagues and local communities. In addition to encouraging informal post-immersion reflection, participants are likely to also benefit from more structured processing after immersion. For example, Tomlinson-Clarke and Clarke (2010) discussed multiple debriefing activities designed to promote cultural competence for students and to evaluate their immersion experience. Examples included: a) contributing to a culminating event to share their experiences with the university community 3 months after returning home, b) sharing how cultural interactions influenced their multicultural development, c) completing formal evaluations of various course-related factors (e.g., pre-immersion seminars, adequacy of training, etc.), d) identifying critical incidents that influenced their experiences, and e) completing research assessments on perceived levels of multicultural competence.

Recognizing the importance of process and debriefing sessions, one critical factor in the immersion experience appears to be the extent to which facilitators create a safe environment for participants to share their experiences during the immersion itself and on their return. In order for participants to engage in honest reflective processes during and after immersion

experiences, group facilitators and group members need to be supportive and open to engaging with one another as they encounter the ongoing stress of intense engagement with another culture (Boyle et al. 1999). Barden and Cashwell (in press) support the need for group safety, finding that their participants commonly reported the most negative aspects of the immersion experience being related to group dynamics. Problems occurred when participants felt excluded from the group, when there were negative power dynamics between facilitators and group members, when participants felt a lack of connection with other group members and felt vulnerable when involved in processing or debriefing within the group.

Such findings support previous research (e.g., Arthur and Achenbach 2002) indicating that facilitators need to be alert to group dynamics when facilitating multicultural experiential learning. Arthur and Achenbach (2002) asserted that safety in multicultural experiential learning must be fostered to prevent counterproductive levels of stress that impede learning, stating that facilitators should limit students' levels of self-disclosure to prevent them from over-disclosing, and that they as facilitators must be prepared to manage and effectively process group dynamics as they occur. On the other hand, Collins and Pieterse (2007) stated that, although safety is imperative when discussing sensitive issues such as race, there is value in challenging the need for safety as potentially being a resistance to growth, asserting that acquiring racial competence often involves profound personal change and discomfort. Further, group dynamic scholars (e.g., Yalom and Leszcz 2005) suggest that one way to cultivate safety and cohesion in groups is to encourage risk-taking. By failing to encourage taking risks, facilitators may perpetuate undue guardedness and limit experiences that may be profound in terms of personal development. Therefore, there is clear support for immersion facilitators to work at creating and maintaining a balance between a safe and supportive environment for students to share their personal challenges in reflecting on the immersion experience, while also encouraging risk-taking and openness to challenge.

In order to create safety, facilitators may consider initiating common group dynamic strategies that typically encourage productive group environments (Yalom and Leszcz 2005). Some examples include: a) facilitating pre-trip meeting(s) in which facilitators explain objectives, b) encouraging participants to share their goals as well as areas of concern, and c) facilitating participants asking for what they need from the group to create safety while immersed. Prior to the immersion, facilitators may also ask participants to establish group rules for communication, such as how to share individual experiences and to ask questions on culturally sensitive topics, focusing on how they will create safety for one another. Candid discussions prior to the trip may allow group members to connect on a deeper level and provide the facilitator(s) with knowledge about what safety means to this particular group (as well as for each individual participant), and how to make sure a balance is kept wherein students feel safe and supported while also feeling challenged to grow.

Essentially, Allen and Young (1997) stated that facilitators should have sufficient cross-cultural and international experience themselves, so they are able to guide, discuss, and process key experiences. Facilitators should feel comfortable taking a multifunctional role, being active in problem-solving and troubleshooting in addition to managing debriefings and processing experiences, setting an example of being flexible and adventurous, and modeling for participants how to handle unanticipated challenges that typically occur during immersion experiences (Allen and Young 1997; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005). Immersion facilitators are encouraged, therefore, to reflect on how they are facilitating group cohesion, and modeling safety and flexibility throughout the experience.

Lastly, personal characteristics of participants, a factor largely ignored in the literature, appears to be an important factor. This emerged as a salient theme in the recent study

conducted by Barden and Cashwell (in press). Participants in that study discussed how their ability or inability to be open and adaptable influenced their experience, sharing how feeling settled or unsettled in their personal lives affected their ability to stay open and present during the immersion experience. They also shared how their own attitudes (e.g., pessimistic; homesick) as well as those of other group members influenced them, stating that negative group members were divisive within the group and detrimentally impacted cohesion.

Such findings illustrate the importance of personal characteristics for students and facilitators engaging in challenging experiences like cultural immersion. Although personal characteristics may not be changeable, it is critical for facilitators to consider and discuss the potential stresses and strains of the immersion on individuals, fully preparing participants to expect the unexpected. In addition to encouraging participants to share their personal needs with the group, facilitators may consider encouraging individuals with significant apprehension about immersion to seek support such as counseling or mentoring prior to the experience to alleviate apprehension and anxiety.

In sum, several structural- and process-related factors are significant in considering participants' cultural immersion experiences. Given the inevitable variance of individuals and their responses to immersion experiences, facilitators would be best not to conform to rigid guidelines related to immersion, but rather to be intentional in all aspects of the experience –planning, undertaking and reviewing – to best meet the unique personal and cultural sensitivity learning needs of the participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

Existing research on the utility and impact of cultural immersion as a vehicle to increase multicultural competence is promising (cf., Allen and Young 1997; Arthur and Achenbach 2002; DeRicco and Sciarra 2005; Diaz-Lazaro and Cohen 2001; Kim and Lyons 2003; Paige et al. 2009). Pedersen (2000) stated that, as a profession, counseling needs to shift from multicultural theory to relevant multicultural practice, with emphasis on developing self-awareness for counselor trainees. Similarly, Roysircar et al. (2003) found that including reflection and experiential multicultural interactions in training were significantly related to increased scores on multicultural competency assessments. It seems evident that cultural immersion is an effective pedagogical tool in moving towards enhanced multicultural practice and developing self- and other-awareness through direct contact with persons from diverse backgrounds and through guided reflections on such experiences.

However, additional research is needed and warranted to further understand critical factors of cultural immersion and their impact on counselor development and multicultural competence. Researchers (e.g., Diaz-Lazaro and Cohen 2001; Ishii et al. 2009; Lindsey 2005) have primarily examined the experiences of students who have participated together in the same immersion experience, highlighting the need for future research to sample participants from different immersion experiences and to examine if there are similar issues and themes between groups. Another area for future research is the influence of leadership styles and the extent of training that facilitators have had in group process on participants' experiences in cultural immersion. Specifically, research investigating helpful and hindering behaviors of immersion facilitators in creating a safe learning environment and the extent to which they use process and reflection tools while immersed could expand this body of literature.

Additionally, given that the majority of research on cultural immersion experiences has been qualitative, more mixed methods and/or quantitative research designs are

needed. For example, research using a time-series quasi-experimental design may increase our understanding of changes in counselor development that can be attributed to immersion experiences. Lastly, longitudinal designs assessing the sustained impact of an immersion experience would contribute to understanding how immersion influences counselor development over time.

Conclusion

The counseling profession has a deep commitment to providing effective counseling services to diverse clientele. As the endeavor to ensure quality counseling service continues, counselor education programs have a responsibility to implement effective pedagogical approaches that enhance the development of counselor trainees while utilizing a culturally inclusive framework. This present synthesis of existing literature provides information regarding key structural and process factors in cultural immersion experiences. There remains a need, however, for additional research on the impact of cultural immersion and other pedagogical tools that may lead to sustained change for counselors in training.

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