DEVELOPING INTERCULTUAL COMPETENCE IN CHICAGO – SOCIAL WORK FACULTY AND STUDENT PERSEPCTIVES ON A HYBRID-EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL

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Abstract

Within increasingly diverse global practice settings, social work education places central importance on the development of intercultural competency and more recently, cultural humility. Strategies for effectively leveraging technology, logistics, place and pedagogy are essential. Intercultural competency courses are often taught in face-to-face class room settings. University campuses may offer "centers" which may promote diversity and provide resources to faculty and students (International, Multi-cultural, LGBT, Veteran, Women). Within the context of distance education, such resources for faculty and students are very limited. Social workers must be proficient with both online and face-to-face interactions, as they pertain to intercultural competencies. This paper explores how two distance education partners at Western Michigan University combined efforts to create a new approach to teaching intercultural competency in social work. The course blended online and experiential learning in Chicago, where students interacted with several diverse communities over an extended weekend: Muslim, LGBT, East Indian, Mexican American and African American. Utilizing "first voice pedagogy" students engaged with communities through their participation in activities, dialogue, and personal reflection. Students also visited Hull House, the site of the charitable social innovation that gave rise to professional social work. Instructors implemented this course in collaboration with sociologists at the Chicago Center for Culture and Urban Life. Faculty and students who participated in

the course relate their experiences as they traversed boundaries and cultures across the city. Retrospective student assessment data and qualitative data from student reflection papers demonstrate student development of cultural humility and intercultural competencies. This model has merit for faculty and students in distance education programs, as well as continuing education and professional development.

Resumen

Dentro de cada vez más diversos escenarios de práctica a nivel mundial, la educación del trabajo social coloca una importancia central en el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural y, más recientemente, la humildad cultural. Estrategias para el aprovechamiento eficaz de la tecnología, la logística, el lugar y la pedagogía son esenciales. cursos de competencias interculturales, se suelen enseñar en la configuración de la sala de clase cara a cara. campus universitarios pueden ofrecer "centros" que puede promover la diversidad y proporcionar recursos para profesores y estudiantes (Internacional, multi-culturales, LGBT, veterano, mujeres). En el contexto de la educación a distancia, tales recursos para profesores y estudiantes son muy limitadas. Social los trabajadores deben ser competentes con las interacciones en línea y cara a cara, ya que se refieren a las competencias interculturales. Este trabajo explora cómo dos socios de educación a distancia en la Universidad de Western Michigan esfuerzos para crear un nuevo enfoque para la enseñanza de competencias interculturales en el trabajo social combinado. La por supuesto mezclado en línea y el aprendizaje experimental en Chicago, donde los estudiantes interactuaron con varias comunidades diversas durante un fin de semana largo:. musulmana, LGBT, de las Indias Orientales, americana y africana mexicana Utilizando los estudiantes "primera pedagogía de voz" que realizan con las comunidades a través de su participación en actividades, diálogo y la reflexión personal. los estudiantes también visitaron la casa del casco, el sitio de la innovación social de caridad que dio origen a la obra social profesional. Los instructores implementan este curso en colaboración con sociólogos en el Centro de Chicago para la cultura y la vida urbana. Profesores y estudiantes que participaron en el curso relacionan sus experiencias a medida que atraviesan fronteras y culturas a través de la ciudad. los datos de evaluación del estudiante retrospectivos y datos cualitativos de documentos de reflexión de los estudiantes demuestran el desarrollo del estudiante de la humildad cultural y las competencias interculturales. Este modelo tiene ventajas para los profesores y estudiantes en programas de educación a distancia, así como la formación continua y el desarrollo profesional.

Introduction

  The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development articulates recognition of the need of the profession to promote social justice, human relationships, cultural diversity and self-expression, particularly among marginalized peoples (CSWE, 2012). Cultural competence places emphasis on the knowledge, values and skills needed for practitioner proficiency in professional-client relationships (NASW, 2007), whereas, cultural humility places emphasis on addressing systemic causes of oppression and injustice and a commitment to lifelong learning (Ortega,& Coulborn Faller, 2011; Schuldberg, Fox, Jones,Hunter, Mechard & Stratton, 2012; Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington & Utsey, 2013). Helping the learner to appreciate the intersectionality of gender, race, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and other cultural dynamics can be challenging for social work educators (Lee & Priester, 2014). Adding to the pedagogical complexity of teaching diversity, social work educators continue to seek creative ways to integrate learning with advances in technology (Anderson-Meager, 2011; Coe Regan & Freddolino, 2008). E-learning, particularly when used in a hybrid or blended learning environment may be a useful tool for social work education (Arnold & Palus, 2010; Phelan, 2015). Moreover, social workers must demonstrate sensitivity to cultural diversity in face-to-face and online interactive formats. The purpose of this paper is to explore an approach to teaching and learning in social work that addresses aspects of cultural competence/ humility by integrating on-line, traditional class room, experiential and cultural immersion learning methods in a graduate level distance education course at Western Michigan University, facilitated in collaboration with the Chicago Center for Urban Life and Culture.

Experiential Learning

  Based on Schon's (1983) reconceptualization of "reflection-in-action," experiential learning is a process through which students develop knowledge, skills, and values from direct experiences outside a traditional academic setting. Experiential learning embodies a variety of activities including internships, service learning, research, study abroad, and other creative and professional work experiences. Learning that is considered "experiential" contain all the following elements: 1) reflection, critical analysis and synthesis, 2) opportunities for students to take initiative, make decisions, and be accountable for the results 3)

opportunities for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially, or physically, and 4) a designed learning experience that includes the possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes. Colleges and universities typically offer many opportunities for learning aspects of culture experientially. However, as in our case as off-campus distance education sites, exposure to campus-based cultural activities may be limited, as are centers for women, international students, or students with disabilities. This calls for the utilization of on-line and community-based resources for teaching and learning cultural diversity to enhance global learning opportunities..

Cultural Immersion Learning

As a form of experiential learning, we define cultural immersion as a travel experience which involves both academic learning and community-based experiences designed to enhance student awareness of cultural differences, intersectional aspects of culture, and systemic causes of social inequality and oppression. Cultural immersion learning is an effective means of teaching cultural competency skills (Koch, Ross, Wendall, and Aleksandrova-Howell, 2014). Immersion learning may be used to challenge student's biases and stereotypes and encourage self-reflection and exploration (Howell, et al., 2011). Drabble, Sen, and Oppenheimer (2012) describe a class room based transcultural immersion, with a five-pronged approach that de-emphasizes the role of the instructor as experts about culture, and honors instead the positionality and self-reflexivity of students who implicitly struggle with privileged and oppressed identities. Geisler (2014) utilized consciousness-raising groups to replicate cultural immersion experiences in the classroom. His analysis of self-reflection journals revealed five themes in student's experiences 1) being pushed into discomfort zones; 2) expanding one's own cognitions; 3) altered understanding of the meaning of diversity; 4) increased empathy; and 5) comfort in disagreement.

Immersion experiences may or may not include a service component. Marshall and Wieling (2000) describe immersion experiences as "cultural plunges" where students develop cultural understanding and empathy through brief encounters with members of a host culture in a local setting. Simply put, a cultural plunge is individual exposure to persons or groups markedly different in culture (ethnicity, language,

socioeconomic status sexual orientation, and/or physical exceptionality) from that of the individual taking the plunge.

Immersion experiences may be used to confront racism. For example, Ishii, Gibride, and Stensurd (2009) found that one week immersion resulted in cognitive, affective and perceptual reactions in students, including "cognitive dissonance". Cognitive dissonance is a temporary state of distress and/or feeling confusion in a social situation in which one's paradigms for understanding the world seem to break down. However, inducing cognitive dissonance may be useful if not necessary for transformational learning outcomes that challenge the existing assumptions and worldview of students (Brewer & Cunningham, 2009).

Transformative Learning

According to Mezirow, transformative learning involves a change in one's frame of reference as "the structures of assumption through which we understand our experiences" (1997, p.5). These culturally and social constructed structures of assumption both shape and constrain our perceptions, cognitions and feelings, providing taken-for-granted points of view and courses of action. Transformative learning is often triggered by a "disorienting dilemma" whereby these structural assumptions are question, assessed and even radically transformed (Kiely, 2005, p. 11). Emancipatory approaches to education (Friere, 1970/2007; Mezirow, 1997) encourage learners to take note and reflect on what is happening around them, in order to understand the larger systems of privilege and oppression that impact their lives and the lives of others.

Study abroad programs are primary means for cultural situations that induce cognitive dissonance, reflective learning and cultural adaptation. When coupled with academic and social support system, these programs facilitate transformative learning. McDowell, Goessling, and Melendez (2010) found that graduate students in a family therapy and counseling program, developed multicultural competence through immersion in international courses in the Middle East and Asia. Their qualitative analysis revealed that the course 1) increased students' awareness of social structures 2) changed their worldviews 3) increased their sense of social responsibility, 4) increased global awareness 5) increased their recognition of their own privilege 6) and clarified their own cultural values. Implications of the students' transformative learning experiences included a

clarification of and commitment to professional goals, enhanced contextual and systemic thinking, and improved ability to work cross-culturally.

Employers seek graduates in health, human services, business and education with the knowledge, skills and values needed in the global economy. University strategies and mission statements reflect a clear emphasis on global learning. Despite increasing calls for global competence from the American Council on Education (ACE) beginning in the early 1990's, study abroad remains an exclusive venue. In the 2013-2014 academic year, the number of students studying abroad increased grew 5.2% from 289,408 students to 304,467 students. Yet, this represents only about 1.5% of all students enrolled at institutions of higher education in the United States and 10% of graduates, according to an studies by the: Association of International Educators (NAFSA, 2015).

Hybrid/Blended E-Learning

Social workers also have an ethical obligation to appropriately integrate technological tools in order to best serve clients (Malamud, 2011). Likewise, educators are responsible for preparing students to be able to perform this task (Coe Regan & Freddolino, 2008; Robbins & Singer, 2014). There are three types of interactions that are significant if a student is going to have a meaningful learning experience in an online learning environment. They are between the student and the content, between the student and the other students, and the interaction between the student and the instructor. Few studies have been done of the interaction between student and student and on student and instructor (Cho and Kim, 2012). Student self-regulation (SR) is a key factor in the success of that student's experience. Motivation constructs are enjoyment of interaction with peers, self-efficacy in interacting with professors, and the desire to contribute to the online learning culture. They found that students that enjoy interacting with their colleagues and instructors are more likely to utilize reflective and responsive writing strategies.

Course Development

The *Intercultural Social Work* course merges concepts from online learning, cultural plunges, and transformative learning approaches described above which we termed a "study-abroad-within" an U.S. urban center experience. The hybrid-experiential weekend course was developed over a two year period, beginning

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with a weekend faculty retreat in 2013 that was organized social work faculty in collaboration with the Chicago Center for Urban Life and Culture (CCULC). Sociologist and CCULU director, Dr. Scott Chesbro worked together with social work faculty from WMU to develop a series of intercultural experiences that would provide exposure to diverse communities and a framework for critical dialogue. Faculty participants provided feedback on the strengths and limitations of the experience, as well as suggestions for improvement. Following the retreat, course instructors began to develop a list of readings, videos and assignments which aligned with the weekend experiential content. As distance education partners situated about 70 miles apart in Grand Rapids and Benton Harbor Michigan, we identified an opportunity facilitate dialogue using Skype-based technology so that students at the two distance education sites could begin to collaborate in their learning experience. We facilitated conjoint, collaborative discussion of the course readings and planned activities across the two distance education sites with students and faculty. A total of 21 graduate students participated in the course offered in 2014 and a total of 20 graduate students in the course offered in 2015.

Course Design

The Intercultural Social Work Chicago course was organized into three online modules of strategically positioned readings, writing assignments and thought-provoking discussion threads. Module 1, *"Personal Reflection for Professional Growth"* introduced the students to the course, the requirements, and asked them to define their individual learning goals and expectations for the experience. Structuring the experience so that students would begin the experience by defining their own learning goal is a key step to developing a professional practice of self-reflection; and this step created an opportunity for students to survey their level of self-awareness as well as their emerging profession identity. Learning assignments and activities in Module 1 include selected readings on the history of Chicago, the religious institutions, political culture, and work for social scientists in the city, from the online Encyclopedia of Chicago History (2015) published by the Chicago Historical Society.

Module 2, entitled *"Exploring and Experiencing Diversity: Our Own and Others,"* was designed to build on the growing familiarity and sense of online community developing among the students. This section contained readings and other activities to challenge students' preconceived ideas and/or beliefs about power,

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privilege, oppression, race, ethnicity and gender. Students also read about the history of race riots in Chicago, unionization, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), White Power in Gage Park, and trade groups and workers' rights. Students reviewed readings entitled "White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" by Dr. Peggy McIntosh (1989) and "Consciousness in Action" by Dr. Raul Quinones Rosado (2007).

Module 3, *"Learning with the Lens of Experience,"* continued to propel students toward questioning and confronting preconceived ideas and beliefs in order to face the uncomfortable truths rising into their awareness regarding lack of awareness/cultural knowledge, race, ethnicity, sexuality, privilege, and historical and institutionalized marginalization. This module included a reading from international activist, Prexy Nesbitt, entitled, "In Obama's backyard: Global Chicago and global apartheid" (Nesbitt, 2002) along with over 25 selected readings from the Encyclopedia of Chicago History on the following topics: 1) Operation PUSH; 2) Chicago Women's Liberation Movement; 3) Neighborhood Succession; 4) School Desegregation; 5) Entertaining Chicagoans; 6)Shoreline Development: Race Division on Public Beaches; 7) History of African Americans in Chicago; 8) History of Native Americans in Chicago; 9) History of West Indians in Chicago; 10)History of Muslims in Chicago; 11) History of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Chicago; 12) History of Indians and Indian Americans in Chicago and Devon Street; 13) History of Pakistanis in Chicago; 14) History of Chinese in Chicago; 15) History of Swedes in Chicago; 16) History of English in Chicago; 17) History of Czechoslovakians in Chicago; 18) History of Dutch Settlers in Chicago; 19) Boystown; 20) Gays and Lesbians in Chicago; 21)Pilsen Neighborhood; 22)Lower West Side ; 23) Little Village; 24) Refugees in Chicago; and 25) Hyde Park.

At the conclusion of each module, students posted an online response to the following questions: *"What new learning or insights did you gain from the readings? How does this shape your knowledge of race, ethnicity, institutional inequality and oppression, discrimination, perseverance, advocacy, activism, and civic action? How does the past shape and influence present and future relationships among diverse people/diverse cultures?"*

Module 3 also contained final reflective writing assignments. Students composed a *Letter to Self* and submitted in a sealed envelope at the beginning of the four day weekend. Each letter was returned, unopened to the owner, to reflect upon, and compare and contrast against their initial attitude and opinions at the start

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8

of the course to that of an informed and transformed student at the end of the course. Students also wrote a *Challenging Assumptions* paper, which was a comprehensive 6-7 page paper where each student describes his or her initial assumptions about culture, ethnicity, race, politics, economics, religion, gender/gender identity and sexuality, poverty, oppression, privilege, resources and summary worldview that were explored and challenged as a result of the "study abroad within experience." Finally, students completed a retrospective self-assessment survey of their pre and post course knowledge of the communities with whom they interacted.

Immersion Experiences

Students visited Chicago for four days, interacting directly with several communities with whom they previously had limited access or understanding: LGBT Seniors at the LBGT Center on Halstead, homeless Veterans at the Featherfist agency, young muralists in the Pilsen Mexican American community, urban gardeners in the Puerto Rican community, small business owners of the Devon Street Indian and Pakistani families nearby, and leaders of the African American Southside communities. Students also visited the Jane Addams Hull House, the place of the original social innovation that gave rise to professional social work. Students were able to see how the social context, including language, economics, culture, geography interacted to shape the lives of the people with whom met. Students also earned from a "first voice" pedagogy, which enables them to learn directly from dialogue with individuals (Chesbro, Nelson, Schmidt. & Holloway, 2010). Students wrote a reflection paper that described how the course challenged their previous assumptions and prepared for action as professionals in their own communities. Often they were communities that were previously "invisible" to them.

Course Evaluation Methods

Our research relies on a critical, intercultural approach which includes an analysis of the interplay between culture, social location, and societal systems of power and privilege from a stance of cultural humility (McDowell &Fang, 2007; Ortega & Coulborn Faller, 2011). Arguably, critical theory is a research perspective that transcends any one methodological approach. The purpose of this research was to explore the impact of the hybrid-experiential intercultural course in Chicago, on graduate students' development of intercultural

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competencies. To meet this goal, we utilized a mixed method approach. Qualitative data were derived from students' self-reflection papers, which were written and collected two weeks after the course travel experience. An open coding analysis of themes was generated using the approach described by Dezin & Lincoln (2005). Written permission for utilization of paper excerpts was obtained from each student. Quantitative data were collected from retrospective self-assessments that students completed one week after the course travel experience. Data were analyzed using simple exploratory methods comparing mean scores on a 5-point Likert-scaled survey. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 50 years of age. Of the 41 students, 38 were female (93%) and 4 were male (7%). A total of 14 identified as African American, two Hispanic/Latino, one Asian American, and 24 as Caucasian. A total of two students identified as having a disability and one as a member of the LBGT community.

Data Collection and Analysis

Student's written self-reflection papers were submitted in electronic drop boxes on the course learning management system. Following the course, written permission was obtained for use of paper excerpts. Students were asked to write a six to seven page paper that: describes their assumptions about culture, economics or worldview and how they were challenged as a result of the course. Students were also asked to reflect upon how what they learned will impact their social work practice in the future.

Likewise, students completed retrospective self-assessment of their understanding of the respective communities with whom they interacted, before and after the course. Students ranked their level of understanding on a five point Likert-scale, with 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Very Good, and 5=Excellent with regard to their knowledge of seven communities: Muslim, homeless veterans, Mexican American, Indian, LBGT seniors, persons with disabilities, and Jane Addams Hull House. Simple mean scores for each question were calculated. Mean score before and after the course were compared. If they improved, students were asked to share what they attributed the improvement to, e.g. course readings, assignments, discussion forums, debriefing experiences, presentations from instructors, and/or interactions with community members.

Results

Students are often quite surprised, even shocked to learn that communities they visit are very different than what they anticipated. They become intensely aware of how little they know about people like themselves and may feel ashamed of their ignorance (Nieto, 2006). This promotes a new desire to learn about different cultural groups. A summary of retrospective self-assessment data are displayed in the table below:

FIGURE 1: Retrospective Student Self-Assessment Data – SWRK 6350

COMMUNITY	BEFORE	AFTER	DIFFERENCE
Muslim	1.68	3.58	2.58
Homeless Veteran	2.21	3.53	2.53
Mexican American	1.37	3.84	2.84
Indian	1.37	3.89	2.89
LGBT Seniors	2.58	3.95	2.95
Persons with Disabilities	2.63	3.95	2.95
Jane Addams Hull House	1.89	3.71	2.71

These data show improvement in students' perceived cultural knowledge of the communities they learned about in the course. Their understanding of these potentially stigmatized populations expanded at the same time they developed a new found appreciation of the limits of their own knowledge, and thus a sense of cultural humility. Statistical analyses were not conducted due to the small sample size. However, the difference in pre and post course ratings appears to be significant in a practical sense.

Challenging Assumptions Paper Excerpts

Qualitative data gathered from the students' self-reflection papers are organized around five themes representing several of communities with whom they interacted. A sixth theme emerged from the student papers, reflecting a new sense of awareness of their own power and privilege, as well as the impact of the course on the development of their professional identity as social workers.

Muslim Faith

Students were able to describe their expectations and assumptions about the Muslim faith. They also described their thoughts feelings during the cultural experience and discussion with Mr. Umar Ali, our cultural guide. Responses ranged from admiration, empathy, shock, relief, to disorienting dilemmas that challenged their worldviews:

> I had always been taught that Islam and Christianity were polar opposites, but listening to Umar made me realize that the religions are a lot more alike than I had previously thought. I was also impressed by the absolute dedication that it takes to be a Muslim and was really struck by the beauty of their prayer service.

> [Our discussion with community leaders] made me realize how difficult it must be for Muslims living in America today. First off, the tragedy of September 11 has really skewed many people's beliefs about what it means to be a Muslim, and it causes many individuals to have major misconceptions about the religion.

> I was shocked and relieved to learn that many elements of the Muslim community closely parallel those of my own faith. With the ideas and understandings that I had in my own head of the Muslim community coupled with the training I received in the military, my blood pressure was 'through the roof' the entire time we were in the Islamic neighborhood. It was a great relief to have my mind set at ease and to understand that culturally though we may be different there are always similarities in everyone.

> Attending the service, sitting on the floor in the men's area I felt a little bit like a rebel.

> I was most nervous about the Muslim Community Center, as I did not want to offend anyone.

> Having the opportunity to hear Mr. Ali speak was a pleasure. Honestly, he was not what I expected. I expected him to be older with a beard and attire similar to the gentleman who led the midday prayer. That was one of my assumptions blown away. Mr. Ali appeared to me to be an individual that I would pass while walking at the beach or the mall. He appeared to be very hip or trendy in his style and appearance (another assumption that was blown away.)

Indian Communities

Students related their thoughts and feelings about experiencing food and cultures of the East India communities on Devon Street, led by Dr. Ranjana Bhargava, an Indian community organizer. Students had an opportunity to interact with business owners, families, and community leaders. From these experiences, students reflected on culturally defined concepts of time, gender roles, food, clothing, and family traditions:

> Devon Street showed beautiful culture in food, clothing, and art. In this day and time they still hold true to various customs and values. Arranged marriages, sparked my attention how Asians/Indians value marriages, so much to place advertisement in the newspaper for husbands.

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My assumptions about this culture were particularly challenged when the topic of arranged marriages came up. I had always assumed that arranged marriages were oppressive and that individuals who were in them were miserable. However, the opposite seemed to be the case. Ranjana told us about how she enjoyed her marriage and about how she would also like to arrange marriages for her children.

It made me think about how different cultures view time and the respect of other people's time very differently. In some cultures it is acceptable to use a schedule as a suggestion instead of something that should be strictly followed. In some cultures being late is rude; in other cultures being late is the social norm. Some cultures live life in a fast pace; other cultures have a much slower pace to life. Simply put, cultures have different concepts of time

As we visited the Sari shop, the jewelry stores, and the market, I felt as though I were actually visiting India. It was affirming when our guides would verify some of the information we learned in the readings before the trip. The women of India really value their Sari's, jewelry, and family…I never really understood or learned about the Indian culture before this class, so I now feel a lot better-rounded in the culture now. India is so diverse, that even within its own culture, it can be comprised of other various dimensions.

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LGBT Seniors

Students also had an opportunity to reflect on their visit to the Howard Browne Clinic with registered nurse, Ms. Cecilia Hardacker. She shared from the training program that she developed for health practitioners, on understanding the needs of LBGT aging adults. Responses were generally centered on a new awareness of their sense of hetereosexual privilege, a desire to affirm the dignity and worth of LGBT seniors, with special regard for their needs as they age:

With the passing of the marriage equality bill, I assumed that the hardest hurdle had been overcome for LGBT members...Cecilia spoke about the hardships that LGBT members go through as they age and the fear that comes from the stigma and lack of education on the part of those entrusted with caring for them. It seemed to me that all elderly and aging people should be able to find a facility that fits their needs where they feel welcome and free to be themselves. Foolishly, it never occurred to me that members of the LGBT community would face discrimination and hatred as they neared the senior years of their life.

I like when Cecilia said, "To be observant but not to assume." I was inspired to hear directly from the community about the LGBT population and their needs. My true experience makes me want to implement HEALE in the community where I live and work.

In recent years the need for elderly care for the LGBT baby boomers has become clear. Cecilia explained that when going into a nursing home, it is not uncommon for LGBT members to hide their sexuality. They may have a roommate or staff that would discriminate against them. That meeting with Cecilia was very eye opening to the medical needs of LGBT individuals.

Once again, because of my unspoken privileges, I am not aware of the struggles and barriers that others who are different from me face on a daily basis. This is why is it so crucial to gain as much

knowledge as possible within diverse communities throughout the world, because it will bring more awareness to biases and assumptions. The LGBT community has continuous complications during their lives, even towards the tail end of life as well.

Jane Addams Hull House

One of the key components of the weekend in Chicago was a visit to the Jane Addams Hull House, the place where professional social began in the form of an expansive settlement house. Most social work students have course work that covers the role of Jane Addams and her work at Hull house. However, seeing the site in person still proved to be a powerful and educational experience:

> The one experience that really tied this whole trip together for me was going to the Hull House. I was absolutely in awe of how progressive all of the things that Jane Addams did were for her time. In fact, I think if someone were to open up a settlement similar to the Hull house in our times, they would still be viewed as progressive.

> I also loved hearing about how she was willing to work with all different types of people, regardless of skin color, employment or income. I think that the current city of Chicago has a lot of things that they could learn from their history of the settlement houses and Jane Addams."

> I was impressed with the amount of work and growth that the Hull House produced. It was refreshing and empowering to see the social and societal change due to the activities there. I was shocked that the Hull House grew as quickly as it did.

> The portion of the trip that I was most interested in was by far the Hull House. Jane Addams has been an idol of mine since I first stumbled across the social work profession in 1995 as an undergrad.

Persons with Disabilities

Students wrote about their visit with Dr. Bhuttu Matthews at the Access Living Center for persons with disabilities. Dr. Matthews presented his work in advocacy and policy reform and provided an extensive tour of the facility. Students expressed a new awareness of their privileges of sight, hearing, mobility, and speech, which provoked a desire to learn more and to take action:

> I never thought about working with individuals with a disability until after I toured there. Our cultural guide Bhuttu Matthews stated that "At one point in our lives, each and every one of us will have a disability." This statement had me really thinking because I never would have thought of that.

> Visiting Access Living was very eye opening for most of us, as we learned about what the facility was all about. There was so much thought, time, and effort put into producing the building that the average person would not even notice just walking into the building. I thought it was so fascinating how accommodating everything was for individuals with disabilities. It was so amazing to me to step back and evaluate how privileged I am being able to walk into, talk with, and use the common facilities in every single building I come into contact with. It brought me back to when I was ready

"The Invisible Backpack," and how there are so many things we often take for granted when we do not even realize we have them.

I had never even thought of many of the accommodations that were done around the building for those with disabilities. That just goes to show how closed-minded I am in thinking that if it does not affect me, I do not even think about or consider how it affects others. This is the primary reason why I was so glad to have attended this tour. It has made me so much more aware of the world around me!

Reflections on Power, Privilege and Professional Identity

Overall, students described a compelling experience in the Intercultural Social Work course that was indicative of transformative levels of learning. Students expressed gratitude for the opportunities to interact with diverse communities that they had not previously known about. Moreover, students shared a sense of new found sense of professional competence, cultural humility, and appreciation for cultural differences. Students reflected on their own awareness of power and privilege, and the need to embrace some ambiguity, dissonance, or discomfort which is essential for growth as professional social workers.

I am glad that I chose this class is the starter for my MSW journey. This is an experience that over the four days in Chicago I feel that I learned more than I have in the last four years. It gave me an opportunity to not only reflect on myself, but also to reflect on the people around me and know that there is such a thing is privileged and that I should be thankful for the life that is been given to me. I will never again afford myself the luxury of unchallenged judgment as I have learned that you never quite know your neighbor's story.

This trip made me appreciate the little things I may sometimes take for granted. I also would say that this trip made me even more culturally sensitive and a more competent social worker…This experience will stay with me forever and I will be able to pass my knowledge down to others and also recommend future social work students to take this class

Being partially submerged into someone else's culture gave me a deeper understanding of the community and traditions of these cultures. Every experience that I had provided me with new and valuable information that I can use in my professional and personal life. Being open to new opportunities and feeling uncomfortable in these settings can provide the best information needed to continually grow.

The trip had much more of an impact when I had time to process individually about my experiences. Although it was helpful to engage in group discussions, I found my critical thinking and awareness to come later on.

Intercultural Social Work in Chicago compelled me to examine various assumptions and personal viewpoints about cultures, ethnicities, different communities, and religions. Moreover, the study-away course presented me with the opportunity to look critically at myself, my assumptions and viewpoints, and the reasoning by which those came to be. My time learning from the diversity that Chicago holds helped me to realize, understand, and appreciate aspects of myself that I had never before thought to acknowledge

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In summary, students shared their experiences of personal and professional growth as a result of the course activities, assignments, readings, and direct interactions with community members in Chicago. They were able to process their thoughts and feelings through self-reflection, writing, dialogue and online discussions. Five content areas were generated from the qualitative data: Muslim faith, Indian communities, LGBT seniors, Jane Addams Hull House, persons with disabilities, and reflections on power, privilege and professional identity. Given the length and space constraints of the paper, additional data were not included, but could be in future publications.

Discussion

We have entered a new frontier of human experience in a rapidly changing world. As social work educators, practitioners and social change agents, we believe that it is important that we adapt to "evolving human interaction in the context of technology that is constantly evolving itself" (Lopez, 2012, p. 36). Preparing culturally and technologically competent social workers in an increasingly complex world can be challenging for teachers and students. We found that when online content about cultural diversity is combined with an intensive weekend of intercultural activities, the results in learning outcomes are compelling.

A monitored online course environment can provide a perceived safety zone while generating a stimulating learning discourse (Lee, 2013). Pedagogical lurking, a student's stance of observing and non-posting behavior in online classes can provide another avenue of perceived safety (Arnold and Paulus, 2010). A student can have the benefit of reading posts and becoming reflective before posting. This can offer the student time to process controversial material and find a frame of reference within which to respond.

Following the online modules to prepare students, the four day intensive intercultural experience prompted students to move out of their zones of comfort. Study abroad "within" a U.S. urban center can work with similar dynamics of inducing moderate cognitive dissonance and low level culture shock-adaptation processes. Students reported feelings of surprise, shock, admiration, appreciation, frustration, guilt, gratitude and respect. They also reported having critical insights about social systems that confer power and privilege to

some groups, while marginalizing others. Excerpts from their *Challenging Assumptions* self-reflection papers reveal growth in their cultural sensitivity, increased self-awareness, and a reduction of bias toward the stigmatized communities with whom they interacted.

Students and faculty experienced the process of "giving up control" during the intensive intercultural weekend in Chicago. They were, in essence letting go of the resistance to the frames of reference that are firmly embedded in their own structures of assumptions. At this point, they were able to "go with the flow," and begin the process of merging new information with existing knowledge and skills. Students and faculty moved from a stance of personal awareness and expression of thoughts and feelings, to professional awareness in line with the values of social work.

An ongoing commitment to active listening, self-reflection, coping with ambiguity, and working through conflict is needed for effective learning across cultures (Samavar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). During their interactions with diverse communities, some students experienced disorienting dilemmas that produced a shift in their paradigms of understanding. This elusive perspective shift comes from a deeper, more critical cultural immersion experience that includes empathy—the ability to see things from another point of view and evaluate situations not as American students (how would I feel in your place), but as local community members (how do you, the other, feel in your place). For example, students a reported a new found sense of empathy for the Muslim faith, both for the beauty of their beliefs and a deeper appreciation of the persecution that they face, through a relational connection with Mr. Ali and participating in a prayer service. They saw the world through his eyes anew.

While building empathic relationships is essential, there is also some value in being an "outside" observer of a community, facilitated by a cultural guide. In our own communities we may consciously or unconsciously comply with hidden boundaries of social segregation. When visiting a city that is new to us, such as our visit to Chicago, we are less able to see the boundaries that we tend to observe in our daily routines and are thus able to the traverse segregated borders of stigmatized populations.

Limitations

These findings hold promise for the development of similar courses for social work students and perhaps, continuing education trainings for social work practitioners for developing intercultural competencies and cultural humility. For those located in a region near Chicago, travel may be feasible. The cost of international travel, however, could be a major obstacle. Many cities have centers for urban life and culture, and the course could serve as a general framework for development. Only Chicago has the Jane Addams Hull House, which is central to the history of professional social work. Another limitation involves the participant sample size, which was somewhat limited to two groups of 21, and 20 students respectively. Other limitations include potential researcher bias. We were involved as participants and faculty in the reflexive learning process and some confirmation bias is possible. In spite of these limitations, we belief our study serves as a basis for future qualitative studies, that further clarify the ways in which intercultural competencies are developed among professional social workers.

Conclusions and Implications for Social Work Practice

The Intercultural Social Work hybrid-experiential course in Chicago offered an opportunity to examine self in relationship to a broad range of people, places and ideas. Moreover, it enabled students and faculty to develop empathetic understanding, to stigmatized groups with whom they previously had limited interactions. By modifying he traditional classroom methods of teaching cultural competency/humility in social work by combing e-learning online and immersion learning models, we were able to meet distance education student's needs, and promote student learning and development. Well-planned, supervised and assessed experiential learning programs can stimulate academic inquiry by promoting interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, career development, cultural awareness, leadership, and other professional and intellectual skills. Utilizing "first voice" pedagogy students engaged with communities through their participation in activities, dialogue, and personal reflection.

We blended an extended weekend experientially based course in Chicago with a hybrid online learning format. This model emphasizes the notion that "place matters." Place matters, in a practical sense, with regard to how our extended university students need to structure their learning around work and family

commitments. Likewise, place matters from a philosophical stance, particularly when learning intercultural competency from an intersectional stance, as well as the related concept, of cultural humility.

The course is an excellent alternative for non-traditional and distance education students, who want a transformative learning experience with a variety of cultures, but may not be able to study abroad due to family/work commitments, or lack of funding. An extended weekend (rather than a several weeks for on-site learning is both feasible and attractive to distance education students. The hybrid format supports high quality instructional delivery and a perception of safety in preparing for discussion of and interaction with stigmatized communities. The course also developed student's capacity for critical reflection—an awareness of how one is informed by one's own culture and makes sense of cultural differences subjectively. These skills, though difficult to define and quantify, are becoming increasing important as students seek employment, opportunities for advocacy, and social change within the global context.

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