

Education for Multicultural Social Work Practice

CRITICAL VIEWPOINTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

EDITORS

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10 The Integration of Multicultural Competency and Organizational Practice in Social Work Education

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The purpose of this chapter is to begin a dialogue about the relationship between multiculturally competent social work education and the teaching of organizational practice. With a definition of key terms and an overview of the past, the main focus of this work is the proposal of a framework that consists of 10 essential organizational components, reassessed and redesigned through the lens of multicultural competency.

The most commonly held definition of *culture* comes from Schein (1991): "A pattern of basic assumptions—invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration—that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 9). Therefore, we know that *all* systems (i.e., individuals, groups, organizations, and communities) have a culture that essentially provides the social or normative glue that holds it together. As this chapter will show, social work education's approach to organizational practice can benefit from having usable tools to move into a cultural competence framework, and more important, into a multicultural competence framework.

Definition and Historical Overview of Key Terms

Over the past several years, many authors have offered definitions of *cultural competence* (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Dana, Behn, & Gonwa, 1992; Freeman, 1994; Green, 1995; Leigh, 1998; Lum, 1999; Pinderhughes, 1997; Weaver, 1997). This paper uses the term as defined by Orlandi (1992): "... a set of academic and interpersonal skills that allow individuals to increase their understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities, within, among, and between groups" (p. 3). In addition to the noted "skills," "understanding and appreciation" is herein equated to content knowledge and personal and professional values. As is true with mastering all competencies,

the process of achieving cultural competency is developmental in nature, requiring both conceptual growth and experiential opportunities to reflect upon further, and/or change one's base of knowledge, skills, and values in working with diverse client systems. For this reason, we amend the term cultural competency to *multicultural competency* to reflect the needs of all social workers (i.e., not just the majority cultural group) with all systems (i.e., not just individuals, groups, organizations, communities of color, or the underrepresented).

Social work academic programs use the term *organizational practice* to refer to the interaction between and among groups, organizations, and communities and the membership therein. While the concepts of individual, group, and even community diversity/multiculturalism/pluralism have been studied for more than 30 years (Banks, 1977; Lum, 1992; Norton, 1978; Pinderhughes, 1989; Sue & Sue, 1990; Van Den Bergh, 1991), an organizational, or mezzo-level, perspective has really only been under close scrutiny for the past decade. A review of the literature by Muller & Parham (1998) reveals three theoretical orientations used to discuss diversity/multiculturalism in the workforce: the legal perspective (which focuses on individual and organizational knowledge of the law), the anthropological perspective (which focuses on subcultural/group and cultural awareness), and the sociopolitical perspective (which focuses on similarities and differences among individual, group, and organizational knowledge, skills, and values).

The classic Workforce 2000 report (Johnston & Packer, 1987) looks at a four-level organizational typology of diversity largely from a sociopolitical perspective. Similarly, Cross et al. (1989) offer a six-phase continuum of cultural competency looking at organizational attitudes, practices, and policies. Putting these two models side by side results in a rich topography for assessing multicultural competency in an organizational context in terms of analyzing an organization's current status and using it as a tool to facilitate development.

Level 1 is the *Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) organization*. In these organizations, people of color and women are hired in accordance with EEO laws, yet they have little or no real power and authority. Some of them may even be in middle management positions, but these "tokens" of difference must function in strict concurrence with the agency's status quo to remain successful. In this type of organization, which corresponds with the Cross et al. (1989) phases of *cultural destructiveness*, underrepresented (sub)cultures are either eradicated or subject to "separate but equal" treatment.

Level 2 consists of *affirmative action organizations*. These systems recruit and hire people of color and women, while also prohibiting racist and sexist language and behaviors. However, the password necessary for the select few to gain membership into positions of any authority is assimilation; the rest of these "newcomers" (especially those who attempt to deviate from the prevailing norm) quickly encounter what has been euphemistically referred to as the glass ceiling, or in the case of women of color the Lucite ceiling. This type of organization corresponds with the Cross et al. (1989) stage of *cultural blindness* with a "there is only one culture here" attitude reinforced by system-wide practices and policies.

Level 3, the *self-renewing organization*, diligently and systematically assesses its culture. It uses the findings from this self-evaluation to design strategies that enhance individual and organizational satisfaction and productivity. This type of organization actively searches for ways to uncover and incorporate all the different perspectives of the organization into its culture. Cross et al. (1989) refer to this as a *culturally pre-competent*, moving toward a *culturally competent* organization. In this case, the organization's practices seek not only to embrace multiple cultures but also to reach into the community for input and recommendations to incorporate.

Level 4 describes the *pluralistic* or *multicultural organization*. Organizations at this highest level of evolution best enact the definition of pluralism offered by Brown University (1986): "a state of affairs in which several distinct ethnic, religious, and racial communities live side by side, willing to affirm each other's dignity, ready to benefit from each other's experience, and quick to acknowledge each other's contributions to the common welfare" (p. 9). This kind of organization not only supports a culture of true diversity or pluralism through its hiring and promotion practices while sanctioning all forms of discrimination, but also proactively seeks alliances with organizations of similar values and behaviors. Cross et al. (1989) would see these collective activities as the indicator of true *cultural proficiency*.

Research in this area of mezzo-level multicultural competency has explored the interactions among the worker, the client, and the organization at-large, with special attention paid to requisite areas of knowledge, values, and skills for effective leadership (Nixon & Spearmon, 1991; Thomas, 1996). Scholars and practitioners alike would agree that moving toward Level 4, organizations of cultural proficiency, requires organizational administrators to create an institutional culture that rewards the enacted appreciation of differences, while honoring the similarities among all.

Returning to Schein's (1991) description of culture provides some additional clues for what is needed to achieve a mezzo-level mastery of multiculturalism. Schein extends the delineation of organizational culture by looking to secondary mechanisms that are embedded in the organization and that can be used by organizational leaders to begin to instill, transmit, and change an agency's culture. These mechanisms are: (1) the organization's design and structure; (2) the organizational systems and procedures; (3) the design of physical space, facades, and buildings; (4) the stories, legends, myths, and parables about important events and people; and (5) the formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds, and charters (p. 231). Yet, even these mechanisms do not tell us the whole story. To build the model of the multiculturally competent organization proposed here, we need to draw on other resources in organizational developmental theory.

Key Components for Developing Mezzo-Level Multicultural Competency

In their study of the culture and practices of Japanese corporations, Pascale and Athos (1981) offered a framework of seven critical ingredients for organizational effectiveness. What follows is an adaptation of that work for nonprofit organizations, titled the 10-S Framework. The 10-S Framework allows for a clear and thorough assessment of any nonprofit organization, by looking at each of its essential components and both its level of independent integrity and function, as well as its level of function within the total system. Only when each of these organizational components adheres to the tenets of multiculturalism is the organization able to fully master this competency and be accurately experienced as multiculturally proficient by its internal and external stakeholders. Such organizations embody attitudes, practices, and/or policies that value and respect cultural differences and seek to enhance the multicultural competence of service provision through cultural research, the dissemination of those findings and facilitation of true interconnection among diverse groups (Allen & Kraft, 1984; Gutiérrez, 1992).

Figure 1 portrays the 10-S Framework with the adaptations to the original 7-S model in italics. As with the original 7-S model, this is a true systemic framework, the diagram of which (Figure 1) illustrates two basic assertions: (1) Each component has reciprocal relationships with all other components, whereby a change in any one component elicits a change in all others; and (2) The components are nonhierarchically interconnected, i.e., no component is more important to the culture or to a change initiative than another. While this framework challenges the earlier teachings of "form follows

function” (Chandler, 1962), it is an accurate portrayal of how most effective leaders of today and all leaders of tomorrow must work with their organizations. Table 1 provides a brief definition of each component.

Using the 10-S Framework to achieve mezzo-level multicultural competency requires that each component be assessed and, if necessary, redesigned to actively contribute to this organizational goal. Asking four basic questions regarding each of the 10 components is a way to apply this tool and to begin advancing an organization’s degree of multicultural competence. This could be done by any person charged with the assessment, including leadership and membership. The four questions are:

1. How is this organization’s “S” sensitive to and representative of multiple cultures?
2. What can be done with this “S” to institutionalize an active culture of pluralism, in both the short and the long terms?
3. What are the barriers (perceived or actual) to change in this “S” and what are some of the ways in which they can be addressed?
4. How can this organization seek out and secure interorganizational alliances with others of similar attitudes, practices, and policies?

Each question needs to be answered with an orientation to active response and a view to operationalizing the next steps needed to move the organization closer to its goal of multicultural proficiency. This type of questioning also needs to be an active and ongoing process, leadership placing it at the center of an organization’s priorities. It also needs to involve input from all parts of the organization, and not just a “top down” or “outside in” approach to information gathering and change.

Figure 1. 10-S Framework for Nonprofit Organizations

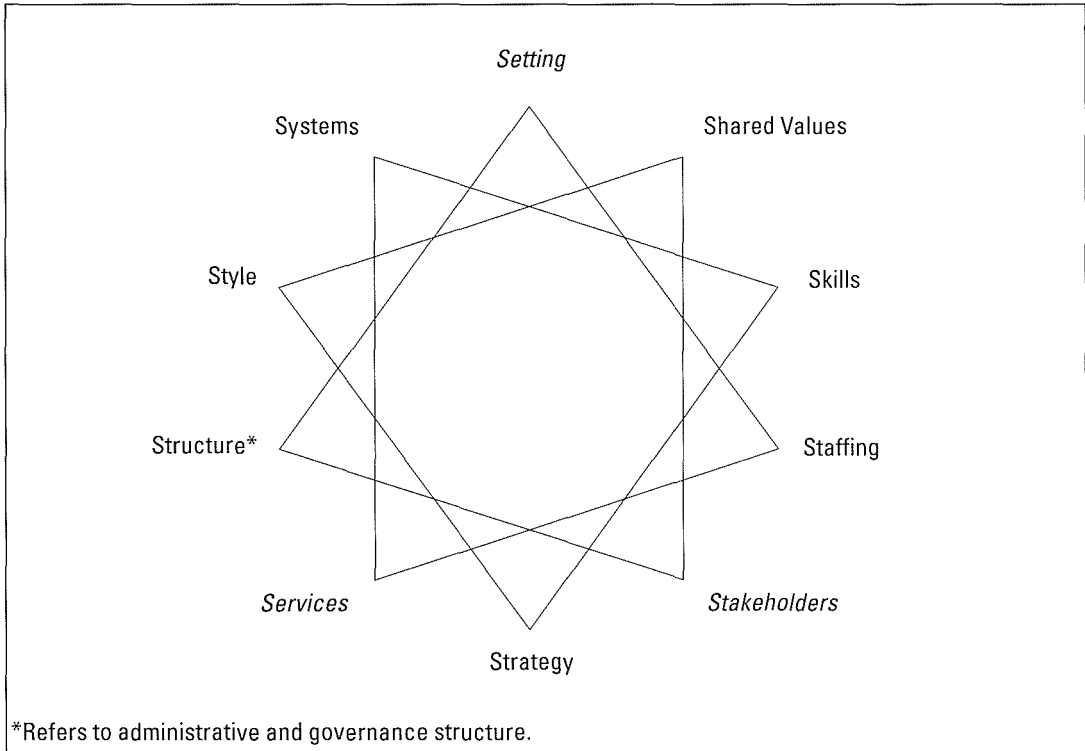


Illustration concept adapted from Pascale & Athos (1981).

Mezzo-Level Multicultural Competency in Social Work Education

Social Work Education Programs—Teaching Tools for Change

Considering the importance of achieving multicultural competence within our human service organizations, it is critical that we, as educators, increase our focus on these issues throughout the social work curriculum. In this way, we can better support social workers as they move into positions of administration and practice where they are able to facilitate these organizational change efforts. Incorporating this content into our diversity and oppression classes is one obvious approach toward furthering development of values, knowledge, and skills in this area. But similarly, this content can and must be integrated into our practice and methods courses (micro, mezzo, and macro), as well as policy and research courses. This can inculcate and sustain an ongoing process for our students as developing professionals; it becomes a tool to use in identifying organizational practices that support multicultural competence and those that do not.

In the end, we serve our students, and ourselves, best by teaching models and practices of good inquiry—that is, models and practices of critical thinking and purposeful questioning, which can lead to necessary improvements in our applied work. The 10-S Framework provides one such model, or tool, through which the formulation and answering of targeted questions related to the multicultural competence level of each component (“S”) of the organization necessarily gives rise to initial identification of areas in which to generate and direct change. More generally, this is also a mechanism by which to garner a sense of how the whole organization is functioning, as well as a means to evaluate how change, or lack of it, in any one area affects the rest of the system. Table 2 shows an example of how an entire organization can be assessed using a process of targeted questioning; the first of the four main questions is applied generally, followed by more specific questions that evaluate each “S.”

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIONS OF 10-S FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS

10-Ss	Descriptions
Setting	Organizational location(s) and physical work environment
Shared values	Guiding concepts and fundamental values around which the organization is built
Skills	Basic organizational competencies, particularly those residing with organizational members
Staffing	Human resources—both paid and volunteer organizational roles and responsibilities
Stakeholders	Individuals and groups who have an interest (i.e., stake) in the organization and its work (e.g., funders, consumers, and community)
Strategy	The way(s) the mission is operationalized within the organization
Structure*	The way(s) tasks and administrative personnel are divided within the organization (e.g., executive director and department administrators); and the way(s) tasks and people are divided on the board of trustees
Services	The way(s) the mission is operationalized within the community (or communities) the organization serves
Style	Leadership styles of the executive director and board as well as the overall operating style of the organization
Systems	Formal programs, plans, and procedures that guide the functioning of the organization (e.g., bylaws, budgeting, communication, planning, etc.)

*Refers to administrative and governance structure

This is an exercise in which organizational behaviors can be used as clues to identify areas that need to be changed (or maintained), with the goal of heightening the organization’s multicultural competence.

Students can be assisted in understanding this process through small group exercises that ask them to identify strategies for institutionalizing multicultural competence in specific “S” areas. To align these exercises more with organizational practice, students also might be asked to present their plans to the class as they would if they were members of an organizational work group charged with facilitating improvement in this area within an organization. The exercise can be made more challenging by asking the class to react to the presentation as they would if they were members of the organization who did not share the same level of commitment to the vision of a multiculturally competent organization as the presenters. Sufficient time needs to be given to process this exercise because of the intense emotion that some of these discussions may elicit.

Students can use this experiential process to explore how organizational change moves from assessment, to change efforts, and to incorporation of new process and standards, thereby moving

TABLE 2. ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT FOR CULTICULTURAL COMPETENCY

<i>Q1: How is this “S” in the organization sensitive to and representative of multiple cultures?</i>	
Framework component	• Question for Consideration
Setting	• Is the organization accessible from all surrounding communities and to all potential stakeholders (e.g., those with physical challenges or those working second or third shifts)? • Does the physical space (e.g., artwork, layout of furniture, etc.) include elements that value, and do not offend, multiple cultures?
Shared values	• Does the mission statement explicitly include a reference to multicultural competency? • Is the organization’s value for multicultural competence clearly and continually articulated to all organizational members and other stakeholders?
Skills	• Are there formal and informal opportunities for organizational members to share their skills and learn from each other (e.g., retreats)? • Are opportunities provided for organizational members to enhance their own multicultural competence?
Staffing	• Is the organization’s staff representative of its current and potential stakeholders’ cultures? • Are the organization’s recruitment policies designed to attract staff from diverse cultures?
Stakeholders	• Does the organization model multicultural competence in its interactions with stakeholders? • Are opportunities provided for stakeholders to give feedback for enhancing the multicultural competence of the organization?
Strategy	• Is the organization’s value of cultural competence reaffirmed through its brochures, publications, and other communications? • Are organizational activities evaluated with respect to their alignment with the overall goal of delivering the organization’s products or services in multiculturally competent ways?

... table continues

closer to the pluralistic, Level 4 organization (Johnston & Packer, 1987). Students exploring this process can learn how this level of change requires that organizational stakeholders develop and implement strategies to address weaknesses uncovered in the self-assessment process and to build new strengths. Consistent with the goal of achieving multicultural competence in all organizational components, action planning and implementation need to be inclusive processes; stakeholders involved with the organization on multiple levels need to participate in order to facilitate shared ownership in the process. The creation of such shared ownership is essential for organizational efforts such as these to be sustained and institutionalized.

Following the typology suggested early in this chapter, at the next phase of organizational multicultural competence, organizations need to seek out and secure interorganizational alliances with others of similar attitudes, practices, and policies with the goal of enhancing organizational practice. Education for students regarding this practice is slightly more complex because many may have a limited understanding of how to develop interorganizational alliances, let alone forming them for this purpose. Providing students with some basic information on types of alliances and alliance development processes may be useful prior to exploring this area in more detail (Bailey & Koney, 2000).

TABLE 2. ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT FOR MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCY (cont.)

Structure*	• Is the organizational leadership team representative of the stakeholders? • Is dialogue around the organization’s multicultural competence a regular part of administrative meetings? • Is the board representative of the organization’s stakeholders? • Is dialogue around the organization’s multicultural competence a regular part of governance meetings and/or committee work?
Services	• Are the people, organizations, and communities that are served by this organization meeting the diverse cultural needs represented in the community? • Does the staff reflect the diversity present in the service populations? Are they matched in ways that are multiculturally competent or proficient? (e.g., Are there providers who are multicultural, can speak the language(s) of consumers, know other cultures well enough to respect cultural practices in the context of service delivery?)
Style	• Does the leadership team model multicultural competence through words and actions? • Does the leadership team overtly encourage multicultural competency through the inclusion of multiple perspectives?
Systems	• Do the organization’s policies and procedures reinforce a shared value for cultural competency? • Does the organization’s marketing system (e.g., Website, brochures) reflect multicultural philosophy? • Does the organization celebrate the cultural holidays of its stakeholders? • Are efforts to enhance multicultural competence within the organization rewarded? • Are the organization’s appraisal systems consistent and appropriate for measuring individual and group performance given the diversity of its staff? • Are systems in place to help mediate should cultural differences become a source of friction in the workplace?

*Refers to administrative and governance structure

Again, students could work in small groups to explore how an organization would create an alliance that would further the organization's work toward cultural competence around one or more of the 10-Ss. Students may be asked to create an alliance of agencies to address multicultural competence in a specific area such as: improving physical access to the organization (setting); conducting training seminars or brown bag lunch discussions designed to increase individual cultural competence (skills); developing a staffing pool of interpreters who will work with member organizations as needed (staffing, services); and working with a local job-training or vocational guidance workshop to find ways to assist workshop participants in transitioning to a competitive workplace (staffing). The students would need to identify the types of organizations that would be appropriate for membership in the alliance, as well as how they would bring them together and what they would do. Once again, time to process this exercise is important to support the students' understanding of culturally competent practice and participating in interorganizational alliances.

Finally, students need to understand how they, as organizational leaders and members, can actively advocate for increasing multicultural competency in each "S" area within the community. This discussion can build on the students' knowledge of public policy and may focus on topics such as working with government officials and transportation providers to enhance transportation and access to services for staff, consumers, and other stakeholders (setting), or sponsoring educational forums for the community to raise awareness in a specific area(s) to improve culturally competent policies locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally (systems).

Social Work Education Programs—Doing Our Homework

There are many opportunities to integrate this content in the curriculum; but also we need to step back and examine ourselves as social work education programs. If modeling is one mode of teaching, how do our schools measure up as multiculturally competent organizations? We, too, need to assess the organization by looking at its components. For example, we could start with staffing, remembering that staffing is defined as the roles, responsibilities, and skills of paid and volunteer staff. Using the four questions above, we can begin to operationalize the model. For example:

1. How is your school's staffing sensitive to and representative of multiple cultures?
2. What can be done with your school's staffing to institutionalize a culture of pluralism?
3. What are the barriers, perceived or actual, to changes in staffing makeup or patterns, and what are some of the ways in which they can be addressed?
4. How can your school's staffing be utilized to seek out and secure interorganizational alliances with others of similar attitudes, practices, and policies?

This type of experiential analysis can assist social work education programs, like all nonprofit organizations, in becoming more multiculturally competent. It is a tool we can use ourselves and it is another way to offer students a learning opportunity by inviting them to become participants in this process in their school settings as well as in the field. Programs can participate in active advocacy for competency through analysis and change in our own organizations and in the community. Integrating this practice into the school's culture of self-assessment is a key means to furthering this goal for the school community and for all its stakeholders.

Within the past decade, "checklists" have become available for organizational scholars and practitioners alike to use in assessing mezzo-level multicultural competency (Child Welfare League of America, 1993; Dana, Behn, & Gonwa, 1992; Mason, 1994; Thomas, 1991). The proposed 10-S Framework joins this growing area of research, providing a comprehensive tool for assessment to ensure organizationwide reflection for action.

Conclusion

Cultural differences have existed since the beginning of humankind. During the past few decades, academics and practitioners have realized the importance of acknowledging and, most recently, attending to the needs of those who identify with cultural groupings outside of the perceived majority culture. Cultural sensitivity, as a core value of the social work profession, is mandated by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (NASW, 1996) and continues to be evaluated by the Council on Social Work Education. However, most accredited professional schools continue to limit this material to one or two required courses, despite the recognition of the need to thoughtfully integrate multicultural content throughout our schools' curriculums (Hooyman, 1996).

This chapter proposes one way for teaching and learning the concept and process of multicultural competency at the mezzo level. Using the components of the 10-S Framework furthers our current understanding of multicultural competency and introduces an effective tool to move our organizations from tokenism to true multiculturalism, for use by academics, researchers, and practitioners alike.

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