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Use of Technology, Pedagogical Approaches and Intercultural Competence in Development

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Use of Technology, Pedagogical Approaches and Intercultural Competence in Development

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Social work education has placed central importance on the development of intercultural competency and more recently, cultural humility. Strategies for effectively leveraging technology, logistics, place and pedagogy are essential within increasingly diverse education and practice settings. This study explores how two Western Michigan University (WMU) social work faculty members teaching at off-campus sites developed an on-line learning course in Chicago in collaboration with sociologists from the Chicago Center for Culture and Urban Life. Following four weeks of online and Skype-based learning, master's level social work students interacted directly with diverse communities over an intensive four-day travel experience. Utilizing Freirean pedagogy, they engaged with communities through participation in dialogue and critical reflection of current social and economic conditions in the City of Chicago. Students also visited Hull House, a site of the Settlement House Movement that preceded the rise of the profession of social work. Following completion of the course, students reported its impact on their learning experiences which included: increased awareness of their own beliefs, biases, and values; increased knowledge of stigmatized communities; and critical reflection on their own experiences of power, privilege, and oppression. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of student reflection papers showed development of cultural humility and intercultural competencies. This model may be useful for faculty

and students in traditional university settings and distance education programs, as well as for practitioners in need of continuing education and professional development.

Key Words: cultural competence, development, distance education, diversity, online teaching, technology

Introduction

What should be the strategy and mission of the social work profession? This article contends that the cross-cultural education of social work practitioners is central to the strategy and mission of the profession. As educators and practitioners, we continue to work within and against systems that confer power, teaching students how to analyze and confront structural oppression that produces dehumanizing effects on people. Education is a key feature of social and economic development. Emancipatory approaches to education (Freire, 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. At the micro-practice level, education for human development is core to our mission, vision and values as social work professionals (Gielser, 2013; Hernández & Dunbar, 2007). At the mezzo and macro-practice levels, education lays a foundation for social and economic development, as well as the advancement of human rights and civil liberties.

The *International Council of Social Work (ICSW) Global Agenda* suggests the following professional goals: to promote social and economic equality, to promote the dignity and worth of all people, to work toward environmental sustainability, and to increase recognition of the importance of human relationships (ICSW, 2012). Likewise, effective strategies to “harness technology for social good” align with the *Grand Challenges in Social Work* (Sherraden et al., 2015). We propose that leveraging technology, logistics, place, and pedagogy in an intercultural social work course is an approach strategically aligned with the profession’s current aspirations and global agenda. We present a mixed methods study of a social work distance education

course that combines online and experiential learning in order to develop students' intercultural knowledge, skills, and values.

Current Challenges in Teaching Diversity and Intercultural Competence

Cultural competence places emphasis on the knowledge, values and skills needed for practitioner proficiency in diverse professional-client relationships (NASW, 2007), whereas cultural humility focuses on addressing systemic causes of oppression and injustice and a commitment to lifelong learning (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington, & Utsey, 2013; Ortega & Coulborn Faller, 2011; Schuldberg et al., 2012). Building self-awareness of one's own privileged and oppressed identities begins a lifelong process of confronting one's beliefs and biases about persons different from oneself. This on-going transformative process is necessary, but not without difficulties. As faculty, we are challenged in helping students and future practitioners to understand the complex intersectionality of gender, race, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and other cultural dynamics (Lee & Priester, 2014). Approaches to teaching the requisite knowledge, skills, and values for competent social workers may range from traditional classroom methods to consciousness raising, field experiences, study abroad, service learning, and online learning.

Deepak, Rountree, and Scott (2015) found that "class discussions related to diversity, power, and white privilege engender strong emotions and strained interactions among students and faculty, who need the skills and self-awareness to navigate these challenging moments" (p. 110). Social work faculty must be willing and able to work through these conflicts and normalize the discomfort that accompanies sharing differing opinions and experiences in a classroom setting. However, sometimes they are not willing or able to "go there." As one participant observed, "the inability to 'go there' can lead some instructors to act as referees [among students], preventing the classes from discussing difficult topics" (p. 116). Emotional and intellectual engagement is needed in learning environments and is supported by developing rules of engagement for dialogue, modeling, encouraging difficult conversations and emphasizing critical thinking and

self-reflection on how social justice relates to them personally and professionally.

Faculty concerns about course evaluations may be an additional factor in the effective teaching of this topic. In the same study, one instructor reflected that all but one faculty member that teaches the course at this university were at the adjunct level. This was attributed to the fact that tenure-track faculty avoid teaching the diversity course because student evaluations tend to be lower due to the nature of the content (Deepak et al., 2015). White/European American faculty members may struggle with concerns about legitimacy because they are sometimes perceived as lacking the life experience and insider knowledge about the lives of people of color (Le-Doux & Montalvo, 2008). Moreover, they may be operating with the false assumption that race is only relevant to people of color (Miller, Hyde, & Ruth, 2004).

By contrast, faculty of color may face students' defensiveness, disinterest, or denial of racial oppression (Le-Doux & Montalvo, 2008); student challenges to their objectivity and competence (Miller, Donner & Fraser, 2004; Wong, 2004); and feeling overburdened with the responsibility for diversity content and concerns (Le-Doux & Montalvo, 2008). Discomfort is a sign that we need to continue the conversation and consider appropriate action. If education is about learning to see the world in new ways, then it is bound at times to leave us confused, angry or challenged. It is essential that White/European American social workers view themselves as being *inside* race relations, rather than apart from them (Todd, 2011). Concerns about *whiteness* and its implications may be "an opportunity for working with students to construct professional identities through ambivalence, understanding that practice is always haunted by unresolvable histories and unintended effects" (p. 131). Deepak, Rountree and Scott (2015) contend that being "*inside* relations of racism is to recognize that White privilege is a benefit of racism, even when unwanted and unintended. White social workers cannot save communities of color but can work alongside as allies as they embrace the ambivalence of being implicated in relations of racism" (p. 110).

Service Learning

Service learning for some may be a powerful learning experience, but for many it is viewed as a privilege. The goal of service learning is to synthesize learned theory and knowledge with experience, while also promoting critical theory and reflexive process (Butin, 2006). Sherraden, Lough, and McBride (2008) observed that international volunteers from Europe and the United States tend to be young, affluent and White. The concept of service learning is predicated on the student who is childless, single, has full-time student status and is financially stable. Moreover, demographics in post-secondary education continue to change, with students increasing in age as well as pursuing education on a part-time basis (Butin, 2006). Koch, Ross, Wendell & Aleksandrova-Howell (2014) evaluated a service learning course where students traveled to Belize for ten days and worked in conjunction with a planned project at an elementary school. Service learning students reported the following impacts: changes in diversity attitudes, professional development, knowledge immersion, personal development, group and interpersonal relations, cultural identity, and emotional impact of relationships.

Immersion Learning

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 learning may be used to challenge students’ biases and stereotypes and encourage self-reflection and exploration. Drabble, Sen, and Oppenheimer (2012) describe a classroom-based transcultural immersion, with an 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.

The Need for Integrative Use of Technology

Adding to the pedagogical complexity of teaching diversity, social work educators continue to seek creative ways to integrate learning with advances in technology in the educational experience (Anderson-Meger, 2011; Coe Regan & Freddolino, 2008). Students interact with their peers (and arguably future clients) in online environments. E-learning forums, particularly when used in a hybrid or blended-learning environment, may be a useful tool for social work professional socialization (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Phelan, 2015). Moreover, social workers must demonstrate sensitivity to cultural diversity in face-to-face and online interactive formats. Social workers have an ethical obligation to appropriately integrate technological tools in order to best serve clients (López Peláez & Díaz, 2016; Malamud, 2011). Likewise, educators are responsible for preparing students to be able to perform this task (Coe Regan & Freddolino, 2008; Robbins & Singer, 2014).

Course Development and Context

The *Intercultural Social Work* course in Chicago merged concepts from the online learning, cultural plunges, and consciousness raising methods described above. Informally, we described the course as a “study-abroad-within” a U.S. urban center. The course was developed over a two-year period in collaboration with the Chicago Center for Urban Life and Culture (CCULC). Faculty from the university worked with CCULC to develop course content that aligned with planned experiences in Chicago and included sociological and social work perspectives. The course was launched in 2013. As distance education partners situated about 70 miles apart in Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids Michigan, course instructors identified an opportunity to facilitate dialogue across off-campus sites using Skype-based technology so that students at the two locations could begin to dialogue about their life, work, learning experiences, as well as discuss the course readings and planned activities. Benton Harbor is a racially diverse community, with African American students representing a majority of the students in the MSW Program. The Grand Rapids area is less diverse, socially conservative, with White/European Americans representing a

majority of MSW students at this location. Prior to the course, the Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids sites had very limited if any direct social interaction.

The *Intercultural Social Work* Chicago course was organized into three online modules of sequenced readings, videos, writing assignments and discussion forums. At the conclusion of each module, students posted an online response to questions such as *what new insights did you gain from the readings? How does this shape your understanding of culture, race, ethnicity, institutional inequality and oppression? How does the past shape and influence present and future relationships among diverse people/cultures?* Students also composed a *Letter to Self* at the beginning of the four-day weekend. Each letter was returned at the end of the course so the students could compare and contrast against their initial and current beliefs and opinions in composing a final self-reflection paper.

Immersion Experiences

Students visited Chicago for four days, interacting directly with several communities with whom they previously had limited access or understanding: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) seniors at the LGBT Center on Halsted, homeless veterans at the Featherfist agency, young muralists in the Pilsen Mexican-American community, urban gardeners in the Puerto Rican community, Indian small business owners of Devon Street, and leaders of the African-American southside communities. Students also visited the Jane Addams Hull House, the site where settlement house movement originated as a precursor of the profession of social work. Staff from the Chicago Center for Urban Life and Culture (CCULC) served as guides as students traversed cultural and geographical city boundaries on foot, by bus, and by public transportation. CCULC teaches the use of “first voice pedagogy,” engaging students in dialogue with individuals situated in communities in order to view the world from their perspective (Chesebro, Nelson, Schmidt, & Holloway, 2010). A lead sociologist from the CCULC and course instructors co-facilitated group debriefing discussions with students following interactions with communities. Students were thus able to see how the social contexts, including language,

economics, culture, and geography, interacted to shape the lives of the people with whom they met.

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 (Ortega & Coulborn Faller, 2011). The authors explored the impact of the hybrid-experiential intercultural course in Chicago on graduate students' development of intercultural competencies. To meet this goal we utilized a mixed method approach. The authors obtained Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) approval and written permission from each student for anonymous use of self-reflection papers. The request for permission was sent after course grades were posted to reduce the potential for demand characteristics and possible undue influence on students' consent to participate. Qualitative information was obtained from students' self-reflection papers, which students composed within one week of the course travel experience. An open coded analysis of themes was generated using the approach described by Denzin & Lincoln (2005).

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 from two courses, 38 were female (93%) and 4 were male (7%). A total of 14 identified as African American, two as Hispanic/Latino, one as Asian American, and 24 as Caucasian. A total of two students identified as having a disability and one as a member of the LGBT community.

Data Collection and Analysis

Students' written self-reflection papers were submitted via electronic drop boxes on the course learning management system. Following the posting of course grades, written permission was obtained for anonymous use of self-reflection papers. Students were asked to write a six- to seven-page paper that described 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 is likely to impact their social work practice in the future.

Following the course travel experience, students additionally completed retrospective self-assessments of their understanding of the 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, LGBT 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

Student self-assessment data were collected in a pre-test and post-test format, prior to and after the completion of all course readings, discussion forums, and travel activities. The initial results showed that students may have been overestimating their pre-course knowledge of marginalized communities. For example, students may have overrated their levels of understanding of a particular community. After the completing the course, one student commented “I didn’t know, what I didn’t know.” The student had self-evaluated as a 3.0 or “good” prior to taking the course and 2.5 after the course.

Although this student’s knowledge had improved, the growth was not reflected in the traditional pre-post model of assessment. Students’ post-course self-assessment scores trending downward was more a reflection of a realization of the limits of their pre-course knowledge. For the purpose of this study and ongoing assessment, we revised the administration of student self-assessments to a retrospective process (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). Students evaluated their pre-course knowledge retrospectively at the end of the course, “knowing what you now know.” A summary of retrospective self-assessment data is displayed in the table below.

Table 1: Retrospective Student Self-Assessment Data

Community	Before	After	Difference
Muslim	1.68	3.58	1.90
Homeless Veteran	2.21	3.53	1.32
Mexican American	1.37	3.84	2.47
East Indian	1.37	3.89	2.52
LGBT Seniors	2.58	3.95	1.37
Persons with Disabilities	2.63	3.95	1.32

These data suggest improvement in students' perceived cultural knowledge of the communities they learned about in the course. Their understanding of the history, culture, strengths and resiliency of marginalized populations expanded at the same time they developed a newfound appreciation of the limits of their own knowledge and thus a sense of cultural humility. Statistical analyses were not conducted, however we believe the difference in pre and post-course ratings has practical implications.

Self-Reflection Paper Excerpts

Qualitative information gathered from the students' self-reflection papers was organized around four themes representing major areas of acquisition of knowledge, learning and personal growth. A fifth theme emerged describing the impact of their experiences on their professional identities as social workers and their future social work practice.

Increased Knowledge of Marginalized Communities

Students are often very surprised, even shocked, to learn that communities they visit are very different from what they anticipated. They become intensely aware of how little they know about people unlike themselves and may feel ashamed of their ignorance (Nieto, 2006). This promotes a new desire to learn about cultural groups with which they are unfamiliar. For example, students commented about their gained knowledge of diversity and gender roles within Muslim communities:

I also was not aware of the diversity within the Muslim community of Chicago. According to Numrich, (2005) [assigned reading], 'the Muslim community reflects ethnic diversity of global Islam established by Bosnians, Arabs and African Americans.' This diversity was evident in the Mosque that we visited, as men from various ethnic backgrounds were present and participating in the prayer service.

Mr. Ali [Muslim community leader] also provided an interesting explanation of why women are separated from men in the worship area. I had always assumed that the separation was one of subjugation, and had not thought about there being a logistical cause of the traditional separation, or that women may have felt more comfortable in the back, where they were not "on view" for all of the men.

Students visited several neighborhoods in the Southside reflecting the economic diversity of the area. They observed the poverty and lack of grocery stores in one region with middle and upper middle class families a few blocks away, and the expensive home of former civil rights leader Malcolm X. One student was struck by the lack of access to restrooms in an impoverished neighborhood we visited. Another noted the diversity and celebration of culture:

Taking a tour of Southside of Chicago was interesting. One of the first things which surprised me was to learn was that the police station was considered a 'safe place' to use the restroom ... This was explained to us [by locals] that was a 'safe place' due to south side having a high homeless population and shop owners did not allow the public to use the restrooms.

Through our various stops at agencies and communities I felt I heard from many voices of Chicago. I feel I celebrated in the communities and learned of their cultures.

Likewise, a student expressed a sense of ignorance of the plight of veterans following our visit to a homeless shelter for veterans:

Veterans are an extremely neglected population and it causes me great shame to admit this. Remembering the individuals

who put their life on the line for us privileged Americans, to come back home to nothing, is disheartening.

Students were able to connect personal observations with course readings. It was essential that they acknowledged their positive and negative thoughts and feelings about what they learned. Faculty members also emphasized the limits of their knowledge as social and economic systems are constantly changing.

Experience Being an Outsider

In many instances, students felt like outsiders during the trip to Chicago. Their own social identities and previous life experiences contributed to this sense of being an outsider at certain points during the course. Nieto (2006) notes that “many Euro-American students have managed to avoid being in a situation where the predominant ethnicity is different than their own” (p. 80). Feeling like an outsider is helpful in building empathic skills in social work students, if they receive support in this process. Students shared their emotions and discomfort. Helping students transition from personal to professional values requires supportive listening, clarifying questioning, and ongoing acknowledgement of these feelings of being an outsider.

When I walked in, I felt very uncomfortable. I felt like everyone was staring at us, knowing that we did not belong there. Once inside and we were watching the [Muslim] service and prayer, I felt more comfortable being a silent observer.

Nonetheless, stepping out of a car as a young white woman into the place of worship of a population I am not a part of quickly pushed me into a place of awareness. Awareness that I was quickly turned into a minority, that no amount of education can prepare you to be immersed into an uncomfortable situation, and that my current feelings of nervousness were ones felt by many within this population daily.

Students in our course came primarily from West Michigan, Christian backgrounds, and had had little or no exposure to non-Christian faiths. In discussion groups we asked students where their ideas about non-Christians came from, what types

of information such sources might omit, and whose interests are served by these limited or incomplete views.

Students also experienced the feeling of being the object of another's gaze while visiting a community organization for persons with disabilities:

During parts of the weekend, I experienced being a part of the minority group, or the group of 'outsiders.' People in the community sometimes stopped one of us to ask about our group, but other times I noticed people just staring. When we were touring the [Disabled Persons] Access Living building, I even saw one of the employees come over and take a picture of our group from across the room. I felt a bit odd in those situations, but it made me think about how other minority groups feel on a regular basis. Even when they are not treated differently, there are probably often others watching them, just because they look different than the norm.

Another student noted her discomfort in feeling like an outsider in the LGBT community:

This trip caused me to be thankful for my conservative city and state. I felt completely out of place and most uncomfortable in the LGBT communities. I do not consider myself homophobic, but maybe I am according to other's definitions.

Having a new reference point to view and evaluate herself, the student felt temporarily upset or challenged. In her paper, she questioned whether she was "homophobic" by professional standards. This is an important beginning from which one can develop intercultural competencies. Feeling unsafe about expressing their views because they may be judged may lead to a culture of silence in the classroom, which can in turn prevent personal and professional development. Faculty members should acknowledge at what stage the student is and respectfully challenge him/her to move from the personal to the professional to help them to better advocate on behalf of LGBT persons, couples, families, and communities.

Increased Awareness of Beliefs, Biases, and Values

Students had the opportunity to ask questions and further examine their own experiences through their exposure to individuals, families, and community leaders in various neighborhoods. Cultural immersion experiences expose students to groups with whom they never may have had the opportunity to interact. Students shared how their experiences increased their awareness of beliefs, biases and personal values. Some students commented about segregation in Chicago and how their personal beliefs had been challenged:

Another personal misconception I had created in my mind was the negative ideas in relation to segregated communities within Chicago. I have viewed these distinct and separate communities as a negative in which groups were forced to live within the confines of an area.

The thing which shocked me the most was how self-segregated Chicago still seems today. I was always under the impression that since Chicago is a northern city, it would not have the same influences or problems with segregation as cities further south.

Similarly, students were challenged to reexamine their beliefs and ideas about Muslims, homeless veterans, and women from India. They were able to find common ground and a shared sense of humanity with people they had initially perceived as very different from themselves:

In the past, I have perceived Muslim males to be chauvinistic, angry and controlling men, with overly subservient wives ... I also did not think that they believed in God.

I have no idea what world I have been living in, but if I would have been asked to describe a homeless vet it would not have looked like either of the men that stood before me. I might have said a white man in a wheelchair, dirty, on a street corner with no legs. I was disappointed in myself for my judgment.

This [experience] immediately shattered the image I had of [East] Indian women being meek, mild, and subservient.

In the diverse communities of Devon Street, students were able to appreciate the ordinary lives of people different from themselves after visiting a hair salon, grocery stores, and human service agencies. Faculty members debriefed students while moving through the city, asking students to share their reactions and observations. Students reflected upon the varying social and economic conditions.

Increased Awareness of Power, Privilege, and Oppression

The course challenged students to consider the many ways in which systems of power, privilege and oppression operate within our society today. Two different types of awareness became evident in the student narratives. Several students felt challenged as a result of seeing privilege, power or oppression in institutions serving the interests of the elite, while other students noticed their own role as oppressors. Both types of awareness encourage students to challenge themselves and the systems and institutions around them:

Through these experiences, I realized just how much oppression was ingrained into our world and industries. Having male and female bathrooms is a way that society is pushing out transgender or gender non-conforming individuals when in reality they could be more included very easily with a simple change.

I was surprised by my personal feelings of fear within this moment and then regretful of having these emotions, because in my mind I am not a racist person and I do not oppress groups. However, I cannot truly say that due to unconscious feelings and through my unearned personal privilege as a white woman I oppress without trying to.

For the first time, some students were coming to terms with personal, internalized conflicts around a privileged and oppressed identities, and the social and economic implications of these identities.

Impact on Professional Identity and Future Practice

As social work educators prepare students for professional practice, they must focus on the value of cultural humility. A truly effective course should prepare students to take action when they return home. We worked towards the integration of students' learning experiences in the course and their future practice as social workers:

I learned how to participate in a group that is diverse in age and opinions. But what I am most proud of is that, I believe I have matured enough to listen and respect other cultures.

I learned that I had the obligation to respectfully hold that student [peer] accountable ... I learned that I could have recognized this as an opportunity to advocate for myself as an African American [rather than being silent]. Otherwise, I may not recognize opportunities to advocate on behalf of a client.

I intend to educate and advocate others who are unaware of the stigma and discrimination that LGBT older adults face.

I recognize that cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness are something I must practice daily.

Students were able to identify the potential long-term impact of the course on them personally and professionally. The ability to confront one's personal biases, acknowledge the limits of one's understanding of others, and develop cultural humility are essential to the education of social workers within systems of power, privilege and oppression. We contend that these are also skills that must be consistently modeled by social work educators.

Discussion

Analyses of self-assessment data and self-reflection papers revealed that students benefitted from the experience of being an outsider. Educational outcomes included increased awareness of their own beliefs, values, and biases; increased knowledge of marginalized communities; and increased awareness of the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression. Their experiences impacted their perceptions of themselves and others,

and will undoubtedly influence their future social work practice. Emancipatory educator Paulo Freire notes, “those who authentically commit themselves to the people must reexamine themselves constantly” (Freire, 1970, p. 60). For social workers to engage with others effectively, they need to continually think critically about personal biases and how they may intentionally or unintentionally contribute to systems of power and oppression.

Affective and experiential educational models may help students increase awareness and cultural understanding. “Too often, racism is taught as an abstract construct with emphasis on knowledge of oppression and discrimination, but with little focus on how to really change that which must first be changed: ourselves” (Loya & Cuevas, 2010, p. 292). It can be challenging for faculty members to teach students to confront the oppressive assumptions that are built into societal discourses. To effectively confront oppressive structures in society, social workers must first engage in ongoing self-examination to confront the oppressor within themselves (Quiñones, 2007).

Educational institutions may unintentionally perpetuate discrimination and biases through the way courses are assigned to faculty members. Diversity courses may be taught almost exclusively by adjunct faculty and/or faculty of color due to perceived and actual concerns about students’ course evaluations, and the nature of the content. This may lead to professors and content becoming marginalized (Le-Doux & Montalvo, 2008). Diversity and social justice content may focus on “each other” rather than on the meaning and significance of the personal and institutional dimensions of privilege and power (Jani, Pierce, Ortiz, & Sowbel, 2011; Rothenberg, 2016).

Cultural immersion experiences combined with critical consciousness-raising challenge students to actively examine themselves, their own biases and their roles as oppressors. As a result, students grow in self-awareness and cultural humility. The skills and awareness developed in this course are not quickly converted to mastery, but rather begin the practice of questioning ourselves from a cultural humility stance. Cultural humility is a reflexive skill we should continue to develop throughout our careers as social workers.

The extended weekend format is both feasible and attractive to distance education and non-traditional students. The

hybrid format supports high quality instructional delivery and a feeling of safety in preparing for discussion and interaction with stigmatized communities. The course also developed students' 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 increasingly important as students seek employment, opportunities for advocacy, and social change within the global context.

Limitations

This approach to teaching cross cultural competence and cultural humility may be useful for teaching similar social work courses and seminars. However, the authors have identified several limitations of this model. For those located in a region near Chicago, travel may be feasible. This intensive course was not feasible for students living too far from the Chicago region. Several other students were not able to participate due to time or cost constraints. This may have led to sample bias. Another limitation involves the small number of participants, two groups of 21 and 20 students, respectively. Finally, the inclusion of faculty members as participants in the reflexive learning process may have contributed to bias. In spite of these limitations, this study serves as a starting point for future studies aiming to identify ways in which intercultural competencies are developed among social work students and practitioners.

Conclusions and Implications

We need to address the lack of congruence between the mission and values of social work and social work practices, particularly in academia (Deepak et al., 2015). Social work students are typically required to complete a course on cultural competence and diversity. However, such a course may not fully prepare them to see how they are connected to systems that confer power and privilege. Without such understanding, social workers are not able to confront systems of power, privilege and oppression within and outside themselves. Knowledge-based curricula serve to educate students about marginalized groups,

such as members of the LGBT community. Nevertheless, without a critical analysis of structural and institutional features of oppression, such curricula may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and alienate those with whom we work (Rothenburg, 2016). Cultural humility is needed to empower communities and promote social and economic development.

Well-planned and evaluated hybrid-experiential learning programs can stimulate academic inquiry and promote interdisciplinary learning, civic engagement, career development, intercultural competence and other professional and intellectual skills. Arguably, the needs of distance education students may be well served by modifying the traditional face-to-face classroom methods of teaching diversity in social work and combining online and immersion learning models. Such courses may also serve to develop students' e-social work skills, which is of strategic importance to the profession (López Peláez & Díaz, 2016).

The course proposes a model for professional development and continuing education of more advanced practitioners. Finally, the course provides a general framework for development of collaboration between social workers and sociologists, urban centers for culture, and distance education sites seeking new approaches to developing intercultural competency and cultural humility from across the globe.

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