

# **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INSTRUMENTS USED TO MEASURE THE MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS**

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this discourse is to look at the different types of inventories used to measure school counselor multicultural competence. Perceived multicultural competence is discussed as a significant indicator of a school counselor's ability to effectively deal with students from diverse backgrounds. Multicultural competency instruments are presented as the basis for identifying competency, and a discussion of the instruments is offered to include instrument types, multicultural competency domains, and the perceived multicultural competence of school counselors.*

With the increasing number of diverse children in the school system in this country, it is the responsibility of the school counselor to gain the knowledge needed to understand and effectively educate the school population about multicultural competence. In order for school counselors to accomplish this goal, they must become aware of their own multicultural identity as well as the cultural identity of others. School counselors must also increase their knowledge of diversity in order to effectively communicate with diverse students. In addition they need to create diversity programs in order to help teach others about diversity. Therefore, the instruments used to measure school counselor's competence must continue to be evaluated for reliability and validity. Research shows that valid multicultural competent instruments provide important information about the multicultural competence of school counselors.

Multicultural competence is defined as a counselor's attitudes/beliefs, knowledge and skills in working with ethically and culturally diverse persons (Sue et al., 1998). In general counseling literature, multicultural counseling competence has been described as having three domains: awareness, knowledge and skills (Sue et al., 1982; 1998). "The first domain, awareness, stresses a counselor's understanding of personal beliefs and attitudes and how counselors are the products of their own cultural conditioning. The second domain, knowledge, addresses the counselor's understanding of the worldviews of culturally different clients. And finally, the skill domain deals with the process of actively developing and practicing appropriate intervention strategies needed for work with culturally different clients (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005)". Wampold and Casali (1995) further asserted that multicultural counseling competence is one's ability to demonstrate to clients that their world, not just their psychological self, is understood. Other perspectives include understanding the history, current needs, strengths, and resources of individuals (Pope-Davis, Renolds, Dings & Ottavi, 1994), and one's ability to acquire, develop and use an accurate cultural schema (Ridley et al., 1994). One challenge with multicultural counseling in schools is that traditional theories and the intervention designed for them have not been adequately tested with racially and ethnically diverse students. According to D'Andrea and Daniels (1995), it is imperative that school counselors become familiar with counseling

interventions and approaches that are appropriate for this student population(e.g., Franklin, 1982). There is limited literature that exists on the competencies necessary for school counselors to effectively serve diverse populations. This limited literature does specify the importance of school counseling graduate students having curricular experiences which explore the implications of sociocultural, demographic, and lifestyle diversity relevant to school counseling (CACREP, 1994). In addition to circular experience, it is beneficial for school counselors to understand the different types of inventories being used to measure multicultural competence

There are four types of inventories used to measure multicultural competencies and those are: the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory Revised (CCCI-R; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991); The Multicultural Awareness Scale—Form B, Revised Self Assessment (MCAS B; Ponterotto, Sanchez, & Magids, 1991); The Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI; Sadowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994); and the Multicultural Awareness knowledge and Skills Survey (MAKSS; D’Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991).

The CCCI-R is based on 11 cross-cultural counseling competencies that cover three general areas: cross-cultural counseling skill, sociopolitical awareness and cultural sensitivity. The MCAS-B discusses knowledge, skills and awareness. The MCAS-B is conceptually based on Sue et al. (1982) multicultural counseling competencies (Holcomb-McCoy and Day-Vines, 2004). Sue et al. (1982) has the following subscales: Multicultural Skills, Multicultural Awareness, Multicultural Counseling Knowledge, and Multicultural Counseling Relationship. The MCKAS (Ponterotto et al., 2000) is a revision of the Multicultural Counseling Awareness Scale-Form B (MCAS-B; Ponterotto et al., 1996). The MCKAS consists of 32 items with a 7-point Likert format that ranges from not at all true to totally true (Kitaoka, 2005).

The MCI is also based on Sue et al.’s (1982) multicultural counseling competencies. The only difference is that the fourth subscale, Multicultural Counseling Relationship, refers to the aspects of the counselor’s interpersonal processes with minority clients, including “counselor trustworthiness, comfort level, stereotypes of minority client and world view” (Sadowsky et al., 1994, p. 142). Finally, the MAKSS measures the effect of instructional strategies of counseling trainees’ multicultural counseling development. The items on the MAKSS reflect three main areas: awareness of one’s attitudes towards ethnic minorities, knowledge about minority populations, and cross cultural communication skills (Holcomb-McCoy and Day Vines, 2004). It is interesting that none of the previous mentioned instruments are based on the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development’s (AMCD’s) Multicultural Competencies and none focus on the aspects of multicultural counseling in the school setting (Holcomb-McCoy and Day Vines, 2004).

In 1999, Holcomb-McCoy and Myers developed the Multicultural Counseling Competence and Training Survey (MCCTS). The purpose of this survey is to assess a counselor’s perceived multicultural counseling competence and training based specifically on the AMCD’s multicultural counseling competence (Holcomb-McCoy and Day Vines, 2004). The MCCTS is a self report which has five principle components: Multicultural Knowledge, Multicultural Awareness, Definitions of Terms, knowledge of Racial Identity Development Theories and Multicultural Skills (Holcomb-McCoy and Day Vines, 2004). These components improve the chances of reaching the goal of developing measures that produce valid and reliable estimates of Multicultural Counseling Competency MCC (Kitaoka, 2005). The MCCTS instrument consist of 32 behaviorally based statements assessing school counselors perceived multicultural counseling competencies (i.e., “I can discuss how culture affects the help-seeking behaviors of students”). Participants assess their multicultural competence for each item by

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responding on a 4-point Likert-type scale (4= extremely competent, 3= competent, 2= somewhat competent, 1= not competent, Holcomb-McCoy and Day Vines, 2004).

In a study conducted in 2004 the multicultural counseling competence of 209 school counselors was examined using the MCCTS. The finding of this study suggested that participants' perceived multicultural counseling competence on the multicultural knowledge and terminology domains differed significantly based on whether they had taken an entry level multicultural course (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). The results suggested that professional school counselors perceive themselves to be at least somewhat competent on all of the domains of the MCCTS (i.e., multicultural knowledge, multicultural terminology, and multicultural awareness). Although this result is encouraging, one must be cautious about inferring that school counselors are practicing culturally appropriate strategies and interventions (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). According to Holcomb-McCoy (2005) the most significant result of this study is the fact that school counselors who had taken a multicultural counseling course rated their multicultural knowledge, their ability to define multicultural knowledge and multicultural terminology, significantly higher than those who had not taken a multicultural counseling course. This study is limited by the fact that only school counselors who are members of the ASCA were included in the sample. It is possible that school counselors who choose not to join the ASCA differ from those counselors who join ASCA (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005). There are several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results of using the MCCTS. The primary limitation is that it is of the self report nature, and responses may reflect a participants' desire to appear competent (i.e., social desirability) rather than report accurate levels of multicultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005).

MCC surveys attempt to measure competency through various subscales including Relationship, Comfort, Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge and Skills. Although these several surveys have been developed to measure the construct of multicultural competency, they are all relatively new surveys and only moderately tested (Anderson, Batka, Kocarek, and Talbot, 2001). Another limitation is that when the MCC assessments are examined, the domain of awareness is not represented by items that speak to an individual's self awareness; rather awareness items tend to be client focused (Kitaokam, 2005). This is important because D.W. Sue et al., (1998) have repeatedly stated the importance of counselors' awareness of themselves as cultural beings and the impact of this on the counseling process (Kitaokam, 2005).

With the increasingly diverse student population of today's schools in this country, there is a critical need for school counselors to be able to effectively guide and counsel students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Progression toward this goal and more meaningful assessment of school counselor cultural competence can be better measured with the improvement of MCC assessments. These inventories must continue to improve and the research of best strategies must continue to be revisited in order to provide diverse students with the best counseling practices in the school setting. Furthermore research must be conducted to see if there is a correlation between taking a multicultural perspectives course and improved counselor's self awareness.

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