Cultural Roadmap: Developing Cultural Learning Strategies During Internship

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Cultural training can be a difficult topic to address during the internship year and can be defined or approached in many different ways. This article describes a program designed to provide cultural training focused on increasing cultural awareness for psychology interns. The training program outlined is based in part on anthropological research methods and teaches interns a method for learning about different cultures. Interns focus on one cultural group, and go through a flexible sequence of several steps from gathering general information, meeting with community representatives, meeting specific groups of community members, to finally developing a project using the information learned to serve the group studied. An overview of the program is provided, with a recent project example to highlight the process. Reactions from interns have generally been positive. Examples are discussed of how the project has evolved to reflect intern and staff experiences.

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Cultural awareness training is an essential component of training as a psychologist (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003), but clear cultural training guidelines are lacking. Consequently, internship sites vary significantly in their perceptions of effective training (Brooks, Mintz, & Dobson, 2004; Constantine & Sue, 2005; Magyar-Moe et al., 2005). Cultural awareness is an exciting lifelong journey for the psychologist, and internship, the first immersion in intensive clinical experience, provides a crucial opportunity to advance interns’ cultural awareness by incorporating increased cultural self-awareness and persistent, lifelong curiosity about the contexts of patients’ lives. Culture is often defined as shared beliefs and values, as well as a general way of life or worldview; however, it “is fluid and dynamic and . . . there are both cultural universal phenomena and culturally specific or relative constructs” (APA, 2003, p. 380). Ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, age, gender orientation, region, and socioeconomic status form just some of the bases of culture (Cohen, 2009). Despite increasing emphasis in the field on developing cultural awareness, methods for integrating cultural awareness into all levels of training are sorely needed. No clear guidelines are available on how to incorporate cultural training into a 1-year internship that draws from a variety of graduate training programs and may be situated in an apparently homogeneous location. This article describes one method for educating interns about the communities and cultures with whom they work. The program is designed to be a practical experience that can fit into the internship year, but can also serve as a guide for the interns’ future endeavors.
While the goal is to develop psychologists who are culture-centered, internship programs face several dilemmas as they develop cultural awareness training. First, incoming interns vary widely in cultural awareness. In their graduate programs most interns have received some multicultural training, through a survey course on culture that examines various cultural groups, through culture group specific courses, or through cultural training that was integrated into existing courses. However, the extent of that training varies considerably in depth and breadth, and interns also vary in awareness of their own culture. Second, the competing clinical and research time demands of the internship year can make it particularly difficult to incorporate additional cultural seminars or courses focusing on culture. Third, there is no consensus about what is best to teach about culture during the internship year. A fourth dilemma faced by some internship programs is how to increase cultural awareness when the clinical population served by the intern does not include a significant presence of this country’s major ethnic and cultural groups. Internships are increasingly being encouraged to develop cultural awareness training that fits within the time constraints of the intern year. Yet, there is a lack of specific strategies for how to incorporate cultural training into the internship year in a way that is appropriate for a variety of student backgrounds and settings.

According to the Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organization Change for Psychologists (APA, 2003), psychologists in educational settings need to expand traditional training models of multicultural education. There are significant shortcomings to the two main approaches to cultural training. Programs may take a didactic approach by extending the graduate program approach and presenting seminars about specific cultures, including the interns’ own cultures. Some research suggests that the didactic approach may improve self-awareness (e.g., Brown, Parham, & Yonker, 1996). While psychologists should be aware of multicultural theories and information on specific cultures (APA, 2003), this didactic approach has limitations. Most notably, it is virtually impossible to provide training on all possible cultures within the United States. Further, research on many cultures within the United States is not available. A second option is focused on clinical contact; interns are provided with an ethnically diverse clientele and encouraged to discuss issues that arise. Difficulties with this clinical contact option are obvious; some sites are located in relatively homogenous regions of the country and students may be trained to work with specific populations within the internship area but miss out on learning about populations with whom they may eventually work. Expansion of the concept of cultural training during internship beyond these limitations is needed.

The method we describe below, labeled the “Cultural Roadmap,” attempts to address the limitations of the two main approaches to cultural training used previously. The Cultural Roadmap promotes cultural awareness by teaching interns a process of how to learn about specific cultural groups, rather than teaching them facts about such groups. Interns experience a method for becoming knowledgeable about a local cultural group or region, about community needs, how the community can best be served, and cultural factors to be aware of in clinical work with that particular cultural group. As a result, the Cultural Roadmap process has the advantage of being very transportable; students who learn these techniques can apply them with any culture with which they work in the future.

In describing this Cultural Roadmap approach, we will first discuss the overall approach and provide an example of what one internship class did in a rural setting. Finally, we will discuss our experiences with all the internship classes who have undertaken this project.

**Project Overview**

Throughout the course of the project, interns move from a macro level to a micro level of cultural knowledge. First, they learn a set of “landmark” questions that a psychologist should ask about any culture (see Appendix A), which was developed with the aid of an anthropologist at a local university. Next, through generally available public information, interns learn a general overview and background of a specific cultural group. Interns then identify subgroups to meet and develop an increasingly differentiated and face-to-face awareness. By the end of the internship year, interns demonstrate their accumulated knowledge of the culture to produce a final project that addresses an area of concern for the culture. It is important to recognize that this is not a linear process. For example, as interns achieve more intimate levels of cultural understanding, new information may lead them to return to a more general level to know better to incorporate this new information. Interns learn to use these steps as a flexible Roadmap for locating sources of new information. The paragraphs below include more detail.

Before undertaking the Cultural Roadmap project, it may be advisable to speak with a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the facility where the internship program is located. While our IRB concluded that this is a project undertaken for primarily educational purposes, provided no potential risks to patients or community members, and did not require IRB review, IRB approaches to this project could vary across locations.

The Cultural Roadmap model is introduced to interns at the beginning of the internship year. Multicultural education via this approach is included among the program goals that are discussed during internship interviews and orientation. The first group meeting for the project typically takes place during the first week of internship, at which time the Roadmap is explained in more detail. The importance, as well as the excitement, of learning about other cultural groups is discussed in the group setting. In this model, staff and interns alike take the role of students who will learn from the cultural members themselves. It is made clear from the beginning that the project is undertaken with the utmost respect for the group to be studied, and that the ultimate goal is not only to further the interns’ own cultural awareness and to gain appreciation for a different culture, but to find ways to better serve the community. Interns are given examples of local groups which may be of interest, and encouraged to think about which group they would most like to better understand. The expectation that interns will not only learn about a culture, but will synthesize what they have learned to produce a final project is also communicated at this
point. The landmark questions are introduced; however, they are presented as guidelines of possible areas of interest for psychologists. Interns are encouraged to refer to them throughout the process, and make modifications or additions as appropriate.

A local university anthropologist helped develop the Cultural Roadmap approach, based on fieldwork methods. If they are available to the program, anthropologists can provide guidance on methods for studying cultural groups. However, if an anthropologist is not readily available, a few general readings may give sufficient background to begin (e.g., Borofsky, Barth, Shwedler, Rodseth, & Stoltzenberg, 2001; Brightman, 1995; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Mitchell, 1988; Sussman, 2004). Either discussion with an anthropologist or introductory anthropology readings are strongly recommended in the early phases of the project, as interns need guidance about the best way to record their experiences. Interns are encouraged to use anthropology fieldwork-style notes throughout the project.

The program’s understanding of “culture” continues to evolve from thinking only of traditional racial and ethnic groupings of individuals who are all similar to each other and on average different from other cultural groups. There are multiple social identities and cultural practices shared by individuals that influence socialization, give lives meaning, shape world view, and also influence psychological help seeking (Cohen, 2009; Borofsky et al., 2008). Because of the predominantly European American culture of this region we have worked harder to help interns be aware not only of racial and ethnic groups, but also to discern groups based on other identities, such as region, town, ethnic heritage, SES, or shared cultural practices.

Interns select one cultural group as the focus for the internship year. Allowing interns to choose the particular group on which they will concentrate may lead to more interest and investment in the project. In metropolitan areas where several ethnic and racial groups are represented, many choices will be obvious to students. In more rural areas or sites appearing more ethnically homogeneous, staff may need to guide interns in identifying local cultures. For example, interns can be directed to smaller populations of ethnic groups, or to groups of different ethnic heritage, socioeconomic status, religion, or work histories (Cohen, 2009). Intern classes may select a culture that has already been studied by previous interns. This is fine; in our experience even though some classes of interns have selected the same culture, they approached the project differently and therefore shaped their own experience. In addition, the more familiar staff is with a chosen culture, the more they can guide interns toward general cultural information and local guides and gatekeepers. However, staff knowledge about local culture is not required because the Roadmap process is a learning experience for both students and faculty.

After the culture has been selected, interns start the process of learning about the culture by gathering general information such as history, demographics, and significant issues faced by the community (e.g., unemployment, homelessness). Information at this stage may be obtained from a variety of sources, including the Internet and research articles. The U.S. Census Bureau can be an excellent source of basic information about a community including distribution of race/ethnicity, language, sex, age, employment and education level, and poverty status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Depending on the community, other options such as local museums or newspapers may be available. Names of individual community contacts often emerge from these investigations. Interns are also encouraged to attend functions open to the public such as parades, festivals, fairs, and auctions to experience places, people, and events that are significant to the community. Interns gain an overview of the culture as they collect this background knowledge.

After gaining an overview, interns next meet with cultural guides, a few individuals who can provide general information about the community. The purpose of this step is to gain a more personal understanding of the culture from the perspective of someone who lives within or knows about the community. This contact with a member of the community provides exposure to potential differences in patterns of speech, dress, and customs and also provides an opportunity for interns to ask general questions about the culture from these individuals’ perspectives. As the community representatives have firsthand knowledge of community issues, they may be able to further clarify questions identified in the previous stage, as well as to lead interns to new areas of interest.

Guides can come from several sources. They do not need to hold formal leadership roles within the culture; being a member of the culture or familiar with it is all that is required. Suitable people may include staff, coworkers who are from the culture being studied, or contacts known by staff members who are familiar with the community. Depending on the culture chosen, it may be possible to speak with individuals who have moved into or out of the culture/community. They can provide a unique perspective if they have the ability to compare and contrast this culture with others. Interns can also talk with professionals or social service agency members who are very familiar with the culture. Staff should help interns be aware of the pros and cons of using various guides. For example, a guide’s experience may be limited to a particular subgroup within the culture.

As interns begin making contacts with guides, organizations, or other community members, some explanation of who they are and the nature of the project is appropriate. Any disclosure should be an accurate description of the people involved and the intent of the project, but tailored appropriately to the circumstances. For example, it would not make sense to have an introduction when observing a parade or sporting event, but would be necessary when making contact with a guide. An example of a possible statement would be “I am a psychology intern at X. My program is working on a project in which we want to find ways to learn about the community (or group). This is a part of our training, but we also want to use this project to find ways to provide better services to the community.” A concern among some groups may be that interns are engaging in knowledge gathering for their benefit alone. However, the purpose of the Cultural Roadmap in the long term is to produce culture-centered clinicians who will ultimately serve the groups studied more effectively, and the short term goal is to develop a final project that will serve the community either directly or indirectly. It is proper to inform interested individuals of both the educational and community-service nature of the project.

Interns gain deeper levels of knowledge about the culture and its individual members through meeting individual gatekeepers, small groups, and families. Whereas the previous steps focus on gaining general level information about the culture, these meetings provide more intimate, individualized awareness. To gain access to specific groups or members within a culture, first meeting with
“gatekeepers” can be helpful. Gatekeepers are individuals who hold key positions, either official or unofficial, within the community. Gatekeepers can include a wide variety of people, such as religious leaders, teachers, social service workers, physicians, or elected officials. In becoming acquainted with gatekeepers, interns are able to make these individuals familiar with who they are and the goals of the project. This is a good opportunity to continue to learn about the major issues facing the community. It provides a chance to refine the questions about where people turn for help and how community members view the mental health system. Many gatekeepers are directly involved in assisting community members by providing services or serving as a link to resources. These conversations provide deeper understanding of the culture, but also potentially lead to interactions with specific groups of interest within the community.

As interns begin preparation for the final project, they meet with specific groups within the community to gather various opinions about topics of interest (e.g., problem areas identified in the previous steps, utilization of mental health services, further identifying specific needs) and to increase interaction and familiarity with the culture. The groups chosen will in large part depend on the interests of the interns or on the issues identified in earlier stages. For example, interns interested in health psychology may wish to speak with community members coping with chronic illnesses to learn more about how they understand their illnesses, as well as their medical and psychosocial needs. Child clinical interns may want to meet with parents of young children to better comprehend child rearing practices within the culture. Barriers to mental health care that have been identified by gatekeepers or community representatives could also be a topic of interest, which students could discuss with the relevant community members. Based on their findings, interns will select an area to address that will benefit the community in some way, such as facilitating interactions with medical or mental health professionals, providing a seminar about an area of concern, or developing programs to improve the accessibility of care.

This model is intentionally flexible and adaptable, as the process of learning about a culture is not a linear process! While this model has been presented in a linear format, as mentioned earlier, it is not meant to be followed strictly. For example, after speaking with gatekeepers, students may well realize that their general knowledge in some areas is lacking, and they may go back to gathering general information for a period of time before resuming where they left off. New issues raised within specific groups in the “final” stage may similarly lead to stepping back briefly, by speaking with gatekeepers about the new issues. In the following section, we will describe how one class of interns used this model to explore the Pennsylvania anthracite coal region culture.

An Application of the Cultural Exploration Model

Preliminary Steps

Interns were given a brief overview of the scope of the project during a meeting in the first week of internship. At that time, different possibilities of local cultures were discussed, including the Amish, Hispanic immigrants, and residents of the Pennsylvania anthracite coal region. Interns were given their choice of cultures, and selected the coal region. Throughout the year, monthly meet-ings with faculty were scheduled to discuss the progress of the project and address any roadblocks encountered by the students.

During the first month, interns began collecting information on the coal region primarily via the Internet. Through this, they gained a range of basic knowledge about the area and its unique history and significance to the local population. They discovered that the coal region of Pennsylvania is comprised of various immigrant groups, including those of British, Eastern European, and Italian heritage. Individuals from these cultures came to the region to work in anthracite coal mines that were in operation during the mid- to late-1800s and early 1900s. Each ethnic group maintained close ties, while living side-by-side with the other groups. However, as the use of anthracite coal declined through the early to mid-1900s, the tight-knit coal communities began to decline as well. Young people increasingly moved away from the region to find jobs, although many remained loyal to the area. As a result, the population of the coal communities has been significantly depleted, and individuals are increasingly impoverished. This information provided background for learning more details about the culture. Through the Internet, interns also found interesting cultural details, such as the prominence of “fire houses” as social centers of the community, and explanations of regional dialect.

A second preliminary step was inviting an anthropologist from a local university to speak at the second monthly meeting. The anthropologist provided students with readings and discussed the use of various anthropological research methods. Through this meeting, interns learned about participant observation, the use of open-ended interviews, focus groups, and life histories, as well as general details about note-taking and facilitating meetings with other cultures. The anthropologist emphasized the need to spend time in the community and engage in important social activities with members of the culture to get a better understanding of the culture as well as to become more familiar to community members.

Learning About the Community

Once interns had background knowledge of the community and useful methods of gathering further information, they began to deepen their knowledge through meetings with community representatives and by attending social functions within the coal region. Two meetings were scheduled with individual community members. Both had been raised in the coal region, although one had moved away for a period of time. One was a contact of a staff member assisting with the project, and the other was a social worker in the psychiatry department where the interns were located. Meetings occurred in situations easiest for the community representatives; one was met in a restaurant in his hometown for dinner one evening, while the unit social worker attended one of the monthly project meetings during lunch.

Both representatives consistently described a culture involving close-knit families, religion, and a strong work ethic. Families were expected to remain very close (emotionally and geographically), which could result in extended family members attending medical or therapy appointments. Both community representatives indicated that there is often little for children to do, so they spend time playing in the streets or attending high school sporting events (especially football games). When asked who people would turn to
for help if experiencing distress, both reported that priests are the primary resource in the community. Psychologists or other mental health workers are often seen as separate from the community and as overanalyzing the problem. The social worker noted that people in the coal region often have difficulty interacting with medical or mental health professionals because they engage in what are seen as intimidating behaviors like “talking down” to patients, involving other organizations (such as Children and Youth), and citing research, creating a strong power differential. Further, many members of the culture do not view it as appropriate to involve others in their problems and believe that things should be handled within the family.

In addition to speaking with these community representatives, interns also began attending coal region events or visiting important places either individually or in small groups. Faculty members suggested events based on their own experience such as bingo halls and high school football games. Interns continued this throughout the year, including attending local fairs and festivals, parades, museums, and amusement parks. This provided further knowledge about the culture, but also gave interns the opportunity to interact with members of the culture first-hand.

Deepening Knowledge of the Culture

The final two steps of meeting with gatekeepers and specific groups in the community allowed students to gain more knowledge in specific areas where concerns were identified. The gatekeepers selected included a local priest, a physician, and Head Start workers. Questions to gatekeepers tended to be more focused, instead of general questions about the culture. Each group was able to identify specific issues or concerns in the community, and provided an alternate view of the culture than that provided by the community representatives. The priest cited several concerns, including increasing drug use among individuals ranging in age from teens to early adults. He noted that as a result, these individuals were becoming more isolated from their families, and often their children would be sent to grandparents to be raised. Local Head Start workers also cited drug and alcohol problems as frequently leading to young children being raised by elderly grandparents. Additionally, they identified the general low income, lack of insurance, and lack of community resources in the area as significant problems faced by many families.

Given the impact of drug and alcohol problems on families and the increasing frequency of grandparents raising grandchildren, interns chose to meet with a group of grandparents to better learn their role in the community. Grandparents agreed with Head Start staff, that financial concerns were significant, particularly as many were living on a very limited income. They struggled with balancing the needs of their grandchildren with their own physical and mental health needs. Each grandparent in attendance reported feeling alone in raising their grandchildren, with little to no assistance from other family members or community agencies. All agreed that more support would be helpful, and stated that they found talking with the psychology interns and other grandparents helpful, as it normalized their experiences and helped them feel more connected. Interns found this to be an opportunity to interact on a more personal level with individuals imbedded within the culture, but also gave clues of psychological services that would be useful for these families.

Intern and Staff Reactions to Use of the Cultural Roadmap

Six intern classes have completed this project to date, for a total sample size of 30 individuals. Each class has responded somewhat differently, and internship program staff has attempted to incorporate interns’ feedback to improve the project each year. Overall, interns have reported that they found the experience interesting and useful. Of the 30 interns who have participated in this project, only two (both from the same intern class) have verbalized negative reactions. Both of these individuals stated that they did not feel that psychologists should learn about specific cultural groups, because there was so much within group variation that any general observations about the Amish (the focus for that year) would be inaccurate and uncomfortable. In addition they did not see the need for training in personal cultural awareness because they believed they were already fairly sensitive to their patients’ culture and context. This led to interesting, and sometimes frustrating, discussions during monthly project meetings, during which interns and staff discussed the merits and drawbacks of both viewpoints. Interns ultimately chose a project which would make other mental health providers aware of different ways to view cultural awareness. Other intern classes have raised issues over the years, such as the need to make the final project more relevant for the community, but have generally approved of the project. However, that class’s reaction fostered intense staff discussion about how best to meet learning goals for the project.

First, staff realized that definitions of culture and the purpose of trying to learn patterns in cultural practices were not well articulated. Staff now tries to be more explicit with interns about the tension between our human cognitive tendency to discern patterns among groups of people, and the necessity of holding such generalizations lightly as we try to understand the individuals in front of us. We want interns to hold in their awareness the generalizations, places, events, customs, and metaphors that might be appropriate for understanding patients, but to treat each generalization as a hypothesis to be clarified as one gets to know the individual patient.

Staff understanding of “culture” continues to evolve as they experience this process with interns. Originally staff thought about cultural groups, such as racial and ethnic groups, as individuals with similar cultural practices who have wide within group variation, but are generally distinct from other racial and ethnic groups. Experience and further reading have challenged this rigid conceptualization of culture.

Interns’ interactions with different subgroups within the Coal Region showed discrepant world views; for example, some individuals spoke proudly of the family oriented, hardworking, nonhelp-seeking values, while grandmothers of Head Start children talked about how drugs had led their children astray and there were few resources to help grandparents parent grandchildren. Such experiences taught us again to make observations specific to certain groups, or certain towns, and to hold generalizations quite lightly. The interns now find it more useful to focus on specific groups and cultural practices. For example, it helps them in their clinical practice to know that some girls go to schools that have fairly traditional and restricted roles for achievement, activity, and affirmation whereas other girls attend schools that have a much wider range. Similarly interns noted that their own experiences of
being an “other,” vary in salience and frequency, depending on the situation, so it led them to question when culture is an important variable in an interaction. Our conceptualizations of culture have been advanced considerably to think less about static and discrete group similarities, and instead to focus on cultural practices that are tried and shared by different individuals at different times as they try to make a meaningful life (Borofsky et al., 2001; Brightman, 1995).

Second, in reaction to the interns’ comments questioning the need for cultural awareness training staff realized that more emphasis was needed to promote cultural self awareness sufficiently. Some internship classes, reflecting on their increasing knowledge of another culture, consistently reflected on their own socialization and world view. For example, after hearing an individual describe the medical center as uncomfortably far away because it was over two mountains and took about 40 min, an intern realized that she had grown up with a sense of “far” that encompassed hundreds of miles and many hours, that gave her much more range of opportunity. This self awareness did not occur as frequently as was desired, and staff realized the need to be far more explicit about encouraging self awareness. Interns now discuss in monthly meetings their own cultural awareness learning whether that is precipitated by their clinical work, their own history, or insights during the Roadmap process. At the beginning of the internship year, interns now present their own cultural awareness journey up to beginning internship, and at the conclusion of the internship they present their cultural awareness journey through the internship year.

Time. The Cultural Roadmap project, with its emphasis on getting out of the clinic to meet individuals in the community, competes for interns’ time. Though some are naturally excited by and drawn to the process, others see it as a burdensome addition to a schedule already full of patients, record completion, dissertation work, and family/friends. The program has tried to allow more time out of the clinic schedule on a flexible basis for the field work. Outside of the 1 hr per month group meeting, a few hours (e.g., 2–4 hr) each month should be quite sufficient.

Interns go to parades, festivals, community events evenings and weekends on their own time because of the nature of these events. Staff has organized dinners with community guides (e.g., Amish, Coal Region) twice during the year and both were attended by staff and interns. The program has tried to allow more time out of the clinic schedule for meeting community guides or talking to community members in public settings and usually interns have taken no more than 3 half days from the normal workday (a total of 12 hr for the internship year) for meetings and interviews. Interns and staff meet monthly to discuss cultural diversity for an hour as part of the program’s weekly seminar series, making up approximately a quarter of the seminars. Interns also find time to call community guides for information, and have met as a group to plan their final presentations.

In 2010–2011 we are experimenting with individual projects, to reduce the group organizational time required. Staff time has included the monthly meetings, 2–3 outings such as dinners after work, and probably 10–15 hr per year to help with special projects, arranging community contacts, planning and evaluation activities.

Supervision. Staff need to be mindful about which activities are appropriate for independent intern work, and which need more careful supervision. Before interns meet community guides and residents, staff review their planned approach and questions in the monthly meetings. Interns attend public events on their own, without supervision. In 2010–2011, interns will write a brief reflection paper for their portfolio on community contacts for review in monthly meetings.

Focus. In general the program expects a “final project,” which originally typically took the form of a presentation to the rest of the clinic staff. One recent intern class suggested that the focus should be on developing a final project designed to assist the community in some way. As a result, the intent of the final project has increasingly been focused on ways to make the project relevant and directly beneficial to the community. Ways of serving the community may be conceptualized fairly broadly. For example, the intern group who studied the coal region suggested creating some outreach services for local grandparents through an outpatient clinic in their community. Alternately, a later group considered developing an informational paper that would help other medical providers in the hospital better relate to Amish patients on their service. The final project ultimately should provide both a way for interns to not only to synthesize their experience, but to put the information obtained to use in a way that can directly or indirectly improve conditions for the group studied.

Although providing a direct benefit to the community studied is the ideal goal, such efforts have not yet been successful. Given the time constraints of the internship year, a way to successfully integrate adequately completing the cultural journey and creating a project with direct relevance for the community remains a goal, but also a challenge. Possible alternatives would be to: (1) condense the cultural journey to the first 6 months of the intern year and retain the final 6 months for completion of the project, (2) build upon the previous intern class’ experience and create a project based on their cultural journey, or (3) have interns present a project proposal to the internship site staff who could then implement the proposal even after the interns have left. The first two options have the disadvantage of interns missing out on part of the cultural journey experience, which may make it less meaningful and informative for them. In the third option, staff would be left to be responsible for implementation. Depending on the size of the site and other staff responsibilities, this may not be feasible. Thus, to date the majority of projects have had an indirect effect on the community. For instance, the informational sessions to clinicians provided relevant knowledge about specific cultures and may enhance interactions between the clinicians providing mental health services and specific populations.

Organization/Role of staff. Staff has encouraged the intern class to organize this project themselves. This has worked remarkably well in some classes that collaborate well and have clear leadership, but has been less successful in other classes. At this point, program staff provide structure, timelines, and accountability through monthly meetings, but still encourage the group to self organize. Because of the emphasis placed on self-organization and the general expectation that everyone involved with the project (including staff) will be active learners, the demands on staff time both for training as well as supervision are fairly small. Other than the monthly meetings, staff presence is not required (though often welcomed) during fieldwork. During the early stages of the project, interns may rely on staff more heavily to establish initial contacts.
Relevance to clinical work. Interns have questioned the relevance of the Cultural Roadmap project to their clinical work with patients. If they only see a few patients during the year with the particular cultural identities and practices that they study through the Roadmap process, they question its utility. Staff and interns have different perspectives. Staff believes that the Roadmap process teaches a process, cultural content, and self awareness that are useful in the long run for interns. Interns are managing their time tightly and understandably focus more on learning what will help them with the clinical problems they see now, or anticipate in the future. Staff now includes in the monthly meetings an open discussion of recent patients where interns, and staff, have learned about their own or a patient’s culture. For example, a recent discussion focused on home schooling, interns’ values opposing the practice, how a clinician learns to appreciate the context of home schooling, the context of the interns’ values, and how to manage such situations clinically. In addition, in the weekly case conference meetings, interns must include cultural factors in their written case conceptualizations and staff makes sure to highlight areas of the patient’s context and cultural practices during discussion. This includes all patients’ cultures, not just patients from the culture covered by the Roadmap process.

Conclusion

This article presents an overview of the Cultural Roadmap model used to prepare interns to learn about, interact with, and ultimately provide treatment to individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Through a series of several steps, interns are guided through a process of gathering various levels of information about a given culture. In our experience, interns have responded well to the project, and each class approaches it somewhat differently. It remains a work in progress. The goal, however, remains the same: to provide interns with a model of how to learn about new cultures and themselves.

References


Appendix: Landmark Questions for Clinical Psychologists

Essential Aspects of the Culture and Worldview That a Psychologist Should Know About to Work With Members of This Group:

1. What are typical family structures?
2. What are challenges and distresses typically experienced by this group?
3. What are positive aspects and strengths usually emphasized within this group?
4. What people, places, or events is the group proud of?
5. What are the spiritual beliefs/practices?
6. What’s the worldview about a successful, satisfying life and how it is achieved?

How Is Distress Experienced and Explained?

1. What is experienced as distressing?
2. How is distress labeled, for example, physical or feeling labels?
3. How is it typically expressed, for example, inhibited or intense emotions, acting out?
4. To what or to whom is distress attributed?
5. To what extent do people believe that invisible beings are part of the origins of the distress and its treatment?

How Is Suffering Managed?

1. Is it communicated to others?
2. If so, to whom?
3. Who is consulted to relieve distress?
4. Who is seen as an appropriate healer/counselor?
5. What triggers a decision to seek “outside” help?
6. To what extent do people seek help on their own or are they sent by others?

7. How are interactions with healers/counselors experienced?
8. Who are regarded as appropriate participants in the healing process?
9. How does the community view someone who is seeing a psychologist?

How Does Healing Take Place?

1. Is it public or private?
2. What different approaches to healing are likely to be considered?
3. What is expected from professionals?
4. How is a person expected to behave with a therapist, for example, detailed story telling, only respond to questions, limited eye contact, agreement while hiding reactions?
5. What is considered a successful outcome?
6. How would a person decide to continue or discontinue treatment?

What Can Psychologists Do To Bridge Cultural Gaps?

1. What stories, metaphors, or words communicate hope or ways to relieve suffering? (This will have to come up spontaneously in conversation; people are not usually able to tell you these “root metaphors.”)
2. What are acceptable ways for psychologists to acknowledge cultural differences?
3. How can psychologists learn more about a person’s cultural background?
4. How can the counseling waiting room and office either invite this group or discourage this community from feeling comfortable?

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