Topic: Diversity and Tolerance Issues.

From what I found in my resource map, which was structured around the mission statement of Community Academy of Science and Health (CASH), there were four primary areas that the school wanted to develop. I found that the areas that were least resourced were ‘Creating Safe Spaces for Students’ and ‘Integrating Student Voice.’ While engaging in conversations with my supervisor, indicating my interest in pursuing cross-cultural issues, diversity and tolerance, she expressed that there was a need for these types of conversations at CASH. There have been several students over the course of the year that have come into the guidance office, expressing hurt feelings and feelings of discrimination regarding race and ethnicity.

Therefore, the purpose of this intervention is two-fold: 1) To begin a conversation with students regarding issues of race, ethnicity and culture in order to acknowledge the relevance of these issues; and 2) To create a safe space for students to express and acknowledge these issues through discussion and self-reflection to develop cultural awareness, empathy and community.

Target Population:

I would like to address diversity and tolerance issues with the upperclassmen – juniors and seniors of the school. A heterogeneous group, including both males and females, with a range of ethnicities, cultures, races and backgrounds, is encouraged for the purposes of this intervention. The demographic population of the school is largely Haitian-American, African-American and Hispanic, with smaller populations of Caucasian and Asian students. Though there has been research that suggests simplicity and a potential for greater cohesion within homogenous groups (either gender, age or culture), it has been asserted that ethnically diverse groups can further increase multicultural awareness and reduce racial prejudice and discrimination (Chen & Han, 2008).

Greenberg (2003) suggests that groups do not include more than two grade levels, spanning more than one year apart (ex. Juniors and seniors), otherwise, power dynamics and subgroups among seniors may affect the group dynamics if freshmen and sophomores are included. Therefore, in order to foster group cohesion, minimize power dynamics between the grade levels, while also including students who may continue this conversation next year, this intervention will target juniors and seniors. At CASH, there is a general camaraderie among juniors and seniors.

It has not yet been decided if the group will remain open or closed, as both have advantages and disadvantages, and the group size has also not been determined. However, Greenberg (2003) recommends that the groups be no larger than seven or eight in order to balance opportunities of sharing.

It is important for the group that students are interested in the intervention and are willing and wanting to discuss issues surrounding diversity and tolerance. Therefore, recruiting students will be based upon: 1) Self-selected students who have shown interest in the topic and have identified themselves to the guidance counselor or myself; and 2) Teacher and staff recommendations of students they believe would benefit from this intervention.
References


In Carter and Vuong’s article, they assess a program that was initiated in an urban, secondary school (grades 7-12) entitled ‘Unity through Diversity’. This program was developed to address the desire of the school community to further augment diversity and multicultural education to increase knowledge, appreciation, understanding, acceptance, and cultural sensitivity among staff and students. Three cultural groups (Native Americans, Vietnamese and African Americans) were identified and each group was represented by students who organized and led separate, 2-hour assemblies to the school. School material was also given to Social Studies teachers to discuss the history, geography and traditions of the cultural group prior to each assembly. The culmination of the assemblies ended with an inclusive ‘International Day’ where many cultural and sub-cultural groups were celebrated. Carter and Vuong affirm through student and teacher evaluations that the assemblies, presentations and school material enhanced cultural cohesion and appreciation for the diverse backgrounds from which students belong. Though they questioned the replicability of the program in a school that was not as culturally diverse or a school that did not have as many creatively, talented and motivated students.

This article demonstrates the benefit of an intervention program by highlighting the cultures, traditions and celebrations of three prominent ethnic-minority groups within the school. By allowing students to organize and lead presentations and design the assemblies, it instilled empowerment, accomplishment, peer collaboration, ethnic pride, and an overall sense of cultural understanding among the students and the school community. This is a potential activity that is an example of what could be done with my students at the CASH Multicultural Day in May.


Chen and Han assess the effectiveness of group counseling Asians. Through theory and research, they identify that Asians are not as readily assimilated into the dominant, North American culture, and they explore the various stages specific to ethnic identity development in Asians. They offer ways to address cultural differences and values in a group counseling setting. In this type of setting, the more that Asians are acculturated to the dominant culture, the more they are willing to disclose personal information and explore themselves with a diverse group environment. Counselors may be able to use this information alongside the stage specific interactive approaches to better understand Asian culture and where Asian group members currently are in their ethnic identity development. Also, Chen and Han discuss the benefits, ease, risks, and tensions of facilitating either a homogenous group or an ethnically diverse heterogeneous group.

The article’s introduction of diverse groups versus matched groups allows me to consider the positive and negative aspects of each and how best to facilitate and engage a group
that includes Asian students at various stages of their ethnic identity development.


Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack perform a meta-analytic study of group counseling interventions performed in schools. Assessing session length, length of overall intervention, types of interventions and types of groups, they conclude that group counseling in schools is efficacious. The use of psychoeducational groups provide students with a social, real-world aspect, where students are able to practice and apply the skills and knowledge they have learned in the group while they are in school. Gerrity and DeLucia-Waak focused upon the various types of specific group interventions that occur in a school setting, such as bullying, eating disorders, social competency and pregnancy prevention. They found that groups that targeted mixed populations with individual treatment had the greatest overall positive effects. They strongly advocate for sessions to be short in length and short in overall time.

This article informs my intervention by acknowledging the length of sessions, the overall length of the intervention and the best practice of combining group work with individual check-ins. I will plan to add individual sessions with group participants to discuss or debrief any issues that resonated with them.


In Greenberg’s handbook, he outlines and categorizes the various types of groups (remedial, preventative or supportive), the procedures to initiating groups, including advertising, teacher resistance, recruiting and screening strategies, as well as outlines various group sessions from introducing group norms to terminating final sessions. He delineates the skills required for group facilitation and addresses group dynamics, struggles and the formation stages. Most importantly, he dedicates a chapter (8) to multicultural group counseling in the school setting. This addresses important topics such as student acculturation issues, ethnicity of the group leader, the importance of screening and recruiting and using group guidance instead of group counseling as an alternative way to discussing issues of prejudice, inequality, discrimination and tolerance. He also suggests activities that may be used in this setting, such as interviewing classmates of a different race to discuss each other’s experiences.

I found this book extremely helpful in determining which steps to take moving forward. The screening strategies I found particularly useful to ensure members’ awareness of expectations, goals and group participation. It was also very constructive to identify another way to address my intervention should there be many students who would like to participate through group guidance instead of group counseling. I will be using these strategies when screening and speaking with potential group candidates.

This guide produces 11 pages of diversity activities suitable for youth and adults ranging from icebreakers to activities that may fill an entire group session. Many of the icebreakers that are used begin to challenge how individuals’ self-impose limits on the way they think. These activities allow for self-reflection and thinking outside of the proverbial ‘box’ or ‘lines’ and set the stage for individuals to move forward with open thinking and confronting first impressions. Other activities include acknowledging universality among diverse individuals, and recognizing stereotypes and its association with discrimination.

There were many activities that would be practical as openers, icebreakers and ways to introduce difficult topics. I particularly appreciate that many of the activities do not require much setup or require many materials. I will likely amend a few of them to target the group of adolescents I will be working with in order to sustain their attention at an appropriate developmental level.


This PDF guidebook contains activities that cover various age groups (children to adults), includes individual and group counseling, and also addresses different counseling perspectives such as Gestalt, Cognitive-Behavioural, Behavioural and Adlerian theories. Though it spans a variety of topics and provides many activities, it was difficult for me to find activities that would be suitable for my intervention.

Although there were several different types of activities that could be used in many different ways, I found this guide was not specific or targeted to the group or topic with which I will be working.


This article emphasizes the positive and effective approach of group counseling with young people, especially when developing interventions that address multicultural issues when working with adolescents of Mexican descent. Ethnic identity development is important, particularly for adolescents of colour. It has been shown that positive ethnic identity development can be a protective factor and is related to academic outcomes, positive school adjustment and increased school engagement. Authors Malott, Humphreys and Martinez conducted same-gender groups for six adolescents (ages 13-16) of Mexican descent. Topics focused upon discrimination, ethnic labeling, ethnic pride, Mexican history, historical figures, cultural and familial beliefs and role models. Qualitative questionnaires, writing samples and interviews revealed that the intervention
was extremely successful. Students reflected that they felt connected, they acquired new
terminology, learned about their culture, improved relational skills to peers and
acknowledged their culture as part of their identity.

This study informs me that giving a space to adolescents of colour to develop ethnic
identity, learn, understand and appreciate their culture, enabled them to feel more
connected. Some of the topics that were introduced in this article were ones I previously
had not considered as topics to cover in my intervention. This article provides me with
salient topics and measures of assessment to help both students and myself to reflect upon
our experiences.

females. Professional School Counseling, 3(4), 264-269.

This article regarding group counseling for African-American females provided useful
information for topic and activity design. The 12-week, 45-minute group addressed
human developmental and life-management skills for young African-American females
at a suburban high school in Maryland. Nine females were selected from grades 10 and
11, with a variety of educational backgrounds (special education, honours classes) and
included a pregnant student. Two co-facilitators of European-American descent led the
group. Though they did present this as a potential issue, they initiated the conversation to
address race, ethnicity and other differences and intimated that these issues were
welcome and could be brought up for discussion at any point. Topics that were
highlighted included an opening session, influential women, expectations, discrimination,
barriers, a guest speaker, relationships, coping skills, future aspirations and termination.
In assessing outcomes of the group, the author indicated that other topics that may have
been beneficial to the group would have included issues regarding ethnic and racial
identity development.

For the purposes of the intervention, I will not be employing these specific topics because
my group will include both genders; however, a few of the activities, such as “It’s Not
Fair”, the processing questions, group norms, appropriate language and addressing issues
such as the group leader’s age and ethnicity would be important to include in my
intervention. I also really liked the opening session to introduce group norms and the
termination session activities that were used.

Ngo, B. (2010). Doing "diversity" at dynamic high: Problems and possibilities of multicultural

This article enlightened me with research regarding how schools often address
multicultural issues by celebrating cultures with a ‘day’ or a ‘week’. It shows that this
does not promote anything because cultures are ‘exoticized’ with food, dance, dress and
music, reinforcing that cultures are ‘quaint’ and to be thought of as ‘exotic’, further
increasing the power hierarchies and demarcations between ‘Us’ versus ‘Them’. Ngo
uses this article to critique and analyze multicultural education and practices that actually
do the opposite of what they are intended to do by looking at a large, urban, public high
school, Dynamic High School. Ngo spent 2 years at Dynamic High, observing,
participating and analyzing the multicultural practices that occur in the school, such as ‘The Asian Club’. He notes that though the school has a firm non-discrimination policy, his observations of student interactions during lunch in the school cafeteria are marked with racism, discrimination, homophobia and sexism. Students were interviewed and indicated that the multicultural practices in the school did not address the racial tensions that were part of their realities.

I have gleaned much information from this article and though it was only an observation of one high school, I would not want my intervention to be similar to others which do not address significant and real issues. It is my goal that students participating in my intervention would be able to present something deeper and more meaningful on Multicultural Day. Many of these types of ‘days’ singularize ethnic groups into one homogenous race, such as Asians, Africans and Hispanics and I would like to begin to dispel this at CASH. I have absorbed a lot of information and need to be aware of activities and topics that may undermine my intended goals for the group as well as goals that the students may also have.


Researchers Paone, Malott and Maldonado employed group counseling strategies that encouraged understanding family context and cultural considerations imparted by the family. They suggested through Glover’s research that understanding family culture and cross-generational differences would be necessary in successful multicultural counseling. The intervention targeted freshmen adolescents in a high school, ages 13-16. The group spanned 12 weeks with each session lasting for 50 minutes. There were various phases within the group setting, which began with an artistic activity, followed by discussion and then concluded with a 10-minute snack-period. Participants enjoyed the group setting and the various structures within each session and often used snack-time to share experiences that happened within and outside of the group.

Though I appreciate the ideas that are presented in this article, it may not be feasible to include a family component in this intervention as families operate differently, with various schedules and priorities. There may be other logistical concerns, such as transportation, scheduling and potential language barriers. Although this may be a positive and integral part of working with diverse students to further understand the contexts from which they come, there is not enough time to include this in the intervention. I very much liked the idea of a ‘snack time’ at the end of the session to allow for members to interact and debrief in a more casual setting before heading back to their various classes.


Rowell and Benshoff’s article describes the role of counselors and the importance of not only addressing multicultural issues, but also understanding one’s own assumptions,
prejudices and values in order to work with a diverse population. Though this article reflects a research study that was performed on students in education earning Master degrees in counseling, the implications are still relevant to the intervention I will be leading this spring. They advocate for the use of Personal Growth Groups (PGGs), where small groups enable students the opportunity to increase self-awareness and ethnic identity development, to challenge personal beliefs about different cultures and foster cultural understanding.

The key feature that I have taken from this article is that the group leader can affect the group members’ development and growth when addressing multicultural issues, cultivating ethnic identity development and encouraging cultural understanding. This article emphasizes the need for me to continuously reflect upon my own values, assumptions and biases when working with a diverse adolescent population and that my age, leadership style, personality and ethnicity are all contributing factors that I bring into the context of which I would like to discuss diversity and tolerance.


Biracial identity development model assessed by Moss and Davis shows a difficulty and complexity. Biracial or multiracial individuals can never be completely immersed in one of their cultures without completely eschewing the other. Therefore, these individuals must deal with specific issues such as labels and family messages and are further complicated when difficult issues such as divorce occurs. Moss and Davis use a case study of a 13-year old female who is half-Caucasian and half-African American. Her parents divorced and she was moved to a white suburban neighborhood to live with her white mother and moved away from her African American father, his family and the African American neighborhood where she grew up. The issues of displacement, identity formation and confusion, anger and the inability to communicate these issues was prominent and was expressed through behaviours of isolation, academic failure and depression.

This article is extremely important because it emphasizes the importance of how counselors need to be aware of their students and the contexts from which they come. Without having read this article, I would have not been aware of the various unique issues that are specific to biracial students. I am working in an ethnically diverse population and cannot assume that skin and hair colour will indicate to which culture, race or ethnicity a student belongs and associates. Therefore, it will be extremely important for me to continue to reflect upon my practices and to be consciously exercising care when addressing students.