

Implications of Multicultural Counseling for Theological Education in Korea

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Five years ago when I first started teaching in a multicultural setting, I had an eye-opening experience. While advising a Japanese counseling student who was completing her thesis, a Korean student came into my office with a similar need for advice. I therefore simply continued the thesis-advising session, now with two students, assuming that giving guidance simultaneously, a common practice in Korean graduate schools, was helpful and advantageous to both students. I proceeded to point out several corrections in the writings of both students. Immediately after the session and after the Korean student left the room, the Japanese student began to cry uncontrollably. I was roundly caught off guard since I saw no reason for her to be so upset. As I carefully listened to the student, I began to understand that she was very hurt by what I had done. This student had never had a teacher point out her mistakes *in the presence of others*. The whole experience shamed her because in Japanese culture, the privacy of individuals is carefully guarded whereas in Korea they are not; Korean culture, in terms of personal privacy, is much more collectivistic.

That day, I was forced to realize that I lacked an adequate understanding of cultural diversity. The encounter with the Japanese student and other similar experiences motivate me to conduct this study. For the past 17 years, the percentage of foreign people in Korea has been increasing dramatically. *Gospel and Context*, a Christian journal, reported that in 1990, the total number of foreigners in Korea was 49,507 (or approx. 0.11 percent of the total population). In 2007, this number increased to 1,000,254 (or approx. 2.0 percent of the population). This twenty-fold increase suggests that Korea is fast becoming globalized in its demographics. Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology, where I have been teaching for five years, is already a culturally diverse setting with students and faculty from over 30 different countries. As a Korean professor in such a setting, I seek more culturally sensitive methods for teaching and guiding students.

Theological education in Korea has much room for improvement. Huh (2006) writes that Korean seminaries need to focus on specialization in order to provide contextually relevant theological education. He also emphasizes that the educational methodology in seminaries should be technologically updated to the level provided by other higher educational institutions. Further, Wang (2006) points out two shortcomings of Korean seminary education. The first is the tendency to import simply Western theological education or to copy Western philosophies of education. The second shortcoming is an intellectualism that emphasizes only the importance of scholarship and thereby underestimates the value of practical training.

Part of the problem is the lack of multicultural perspectives and basic cultural sensitivity in Korean theological education. From his experience of teaching theology in a Hindu-Buddhist-Muslim environment for several years, Dickinson (2002) says that he learned the following: (1) a greater awareness and appreciation for the faith and integrity of others, and (2) a strengthening (not hardening) and deepening of his own Christian faith. In other words, teaching students from non-western cultural backgrounds is a good way to overcome the limits of Western educational methods and intellectualism. Since the task of taking the gospel to every nation is the priority of theology and missions, theological education needs to become much more multicultural. Furthermore, the future workplace for seminary students will be churches in local communities and in mission fields. Pastors need to be sensitive and receptive to people of different personal, socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Chung, 1996).

In light of these needs, the purpose of this study is to examine how universal healing conditions in multicultural counseling can be applied to a multicultural, practicum-oriented seminary education. I believe that counseling skills can be applied to the education process to much benefit. Care must be used, however, because this study has some limitations. First, although counseling shares some similarities with education, I do not fully consider the differences between teaching and counseling. Second, this study does not review the content of theological education from a multicultural context because it is beyond my academic competency.

Universal Healing Conditions in Multicultural Counseling

Multicultural counseling is called the fourth psychology after first, the psychodynamic approach, second, the cognitive-behavioral approach, and third, the person-centered approach (Kim, 2005). Particularly in the

United States, multicultural counseling is receiving much attention from psychologists and counselors for a very practical reason. Counselors and psychologists in the United States meet people who come from various cultural, social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. The task of understanding and tuning into these diverse people groups is essential in the counseling setting. However, this can provoke much stress in counselors because no counselor is familiar with the backgrounds of all of their clients. The present study uses Choi's universal healing conditions for the multicultural counseling context (2008).

Universal healing conditions can be defined as conditions that produce common therapeutic effects on different kinds of people. Fischer, Jones, and Atkinson (1998) have identified four kinds of universal healing conditions: (1) therapeutic relationships, (2) counseling sessions through which the client's needs are met, (3) shared worldviews of the counselor and the client, and (4) self-awareness of the counselor concerning his/her own limitations in multicultural understanding. In order to help people understand different cultural backgrounds, counselors must first try to have intimate and trustful relationships with clients who are different from them. Second, in this relationship, clients must be able to put their expectations and trust in the counselor and hope for positive changes to occur in future. Third, in order to work with clients in a multicultural counseling setting and to achieve some therapeutic effects, counselors must be able to share the worldviews of their clients. Counselors should also be aware of their own limitations that can arise from the differences in their "world" and that of their clients.

Wampold & Ahn (2001) have performed a meta-analysis on effectiveness variables on counseling therapy and discovered three important facts. First, their study identified no difference in counseling effectiveness based on different counseling methods such as the psychoanalytic, cognitive, and behavioral approaches. Counseling theories and skills themselves did not produce any different therapeutic effect on people. Rather, it was the counseling theory and skill (approach) that the counselors (people) used that made differences in the healing conditions. The study also brought out four kinds of common therapeutic effects: healing context, the client's self-efficacy on positive change, working relationship, and the counselor's tuning ability to the client. First, in order to make positive changes in the client, the counselor should provide a good healing environment. Second, counselors should help clients to have positive expectations from counseling. This is related to the client's hope and motivation toward the counseling process. Third, creating a therapeutic relationship with clients is critically necessary for healing (Fischer et al., 1998). Lastly, counselors should be able to gauge the client's ability to understand the changing process and assist him/

her to acclimate. Also, Derald (1998) points out four things important for becoming a capable multicultural counselor; they are attitude, belief, knowledge, and skill. According to him, a multicultural counselor needs to have an open and positive attitude and show competency in dealing with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and thoughts in ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, and so forth. Also, he/she must possess discernment concerning the unique traits of his/her own culture and society and skillfully deal with clients' diversities.

In summary, the above survey shows the traits of being a skillful multicultural counselor in universal healing conditions. It is noted that all of the following factors contribute to the healing conditions: a trustful relationship with clients, an expectation for desirable changes in a client, an awareness of the limitation of a counselor in a multicultural context, a readiness to be tuned into the client's worldview, a problem-solving skill based on the knowledge of different cultures and societies, and a counseling skill to deal with the diversity of clients.

Applying Universal Healing Conditions During the Counseling Process

There are some similarities between counseling and education. First, the goal of counseling and education is the same, that is, to produce positive changes in people. Second, both counseling and education have the procedures across a time span from a given beginning to its end. Therefore, a theological educator can benefit from examining the basic counseling process with the above universal healing conditions applied or integrated in teaching.

In general, the whole counseling process is divided into three stages: the initial, middle, and final. In this procedure, specific tasks should be accomplished in order to produce a positive counseling outcome or effect (Park & Koh, 2006). For example, in the initial stage, a proper relationship between the counselor and the client must be established. The goals of counseling should be set in this initial stage. In the middle stage, the counselor and the client need to use and maximize their relationship in order to accomplish the counseling goals set in the previous stage, step by step. In the final stage, the counselor analyzes the whole counseling process with the client, evaluates their accomplishments, and plans for a better change in the clients' future life.

Theological educators can apply the knowledge of the counseling process suggested in the self-counseling procedure in their teaching process. They may be able to come up with strategies for self-development to become better theological educators in a multicultural context. In the beginning of each semester, they need to set specific goals in terms of

multicultural teaching. In the middle of a semester, they can check how much these goals are accomplished in their teaching process. At the end of a semester, they need to evaluate their teaching and plan to improve their teaching quality for multicultural education. The next section will integrate the procedural knowledge with universal healing conditions and apply it to theological education.

Applying Universal Healing Conditions in Theological Education

Kwon (2003) and Kim (2006) point out some negative aspects about Korean theological education. First, a theological education in Korea does not fulfill the essential goals of theological education, that is, to serve churches, to teach how to love God and people, and to lead people to be reconciled to God (Kim, 2006). One of the fields in which seminary students will be working after graduation is the local church. And the church is the very place where people's cultural backgrounds should be recognized and respected. However, theological education does not seem to focus on the issues related to diversity. A church is a place where people gather in order to worship God and build up a strong community based on human relationships. But theological education does not place emphasis on teaching how to understand people and build a good relationship with others. Second, theological education in Korea focuses on theoretical and intellectual training rather than practical and emotional development in ministry. The two aspects of theological education lead to the third problem, which is the lack of a holistic perspective in understanding and teaching people. Thus, integration of the knowledge of universal healing conditions in multicultural counseling and in the counseling process is needed in theological education.

Such integration of counseling skills and theological education produces the following suggestions for the *beginning* of a particular course: 1) Teachers should be aware of the diversity of their students. The students who will be future church leaders come from very different social and cultural backgrounds, and they will serve people who also come from various people groups. 2) Teachers should assess themselves about how familiar they are with their students' diverse backgrounds, and how much they can identify their advantages and disadvantages as instructors in terms of cultural sensitivity. 3) Teachers should spend some time explaining their cultural background to the students, and be familiar with diversities in student groups. 4) Teachers should make specific and practical goals in order to teach diverse groups of people. They need to be careful in their selection and use of words in teaching. They need to figure out the relationship patterns of different cultural or ethnic groups

represented in the student body. They must be able to recognize diverse values and belief systems of different students. 5) Teachers should know their own limitations and typical patterns or behavioral habits as persons who have unique cultural and social backgrounds. Thus, students from different backgrounds may understand their educators better and have a productive learning experience. 6) Finally, teachers must make a practical plan for change in their teaching.

Suggestions for the *middle* of a course (or while the course continues) are: 1) Teachers should make a practical effort to teach students who come from different cultural and social backgrounds step by step. They may try a small behavioral change in their selection of words or understanding student responses from different perspectives. 2) Teachers should try to ask some students who come from vastly different cultural or social backgrounds to give feedback about their teaching in terms of multicultural sensitivity. 3) Teachers need to evaluate carefully the student's level of understanding every week, and figure out what lack of cultural sensitivity may hinder their learning experience.

Suggestions for the *end* of a course are: 1) Teachers must evaluate their improvements in terms of adjustment to a multicultural classroom context. In other words, at this stage, they can evaluate a degree of achievement for themselves as teachers in the multicultural setting. They need to look back at their whole teaching process from the beginning and see how much progress they have made. 2) Teachers may ask the students to give some suggestions in order to improve cultural sensitivity as teachers and in the classroom environment. 3) Teachers should make actual plans to develop their sensitivity further. This plan should be put into practice in all classes.

Conclusion

This study suggests several implications for seminary teachers in multicultural contexts. First, theological education, especially in Korea, needs to consider the need for cultural sensitivity in an increasingly multicultural teaching environment. Second, in order to provide more comprehensive education, seminaries need to promote actively multicultural sensitivity among faculty, classroom environment, and probably in the curriculum as well. A seminary teacher should be a multicultural model by demonstrating cultural sensitivity. Third, applying the counseling concepts of universal healing conditions and the counseling process to theological education is helpful. The theological educator would do well to consider the counseling principles behind the counseling process, universal healing conditions, and multicultural counseling. According to universal healing conditions in a multicultural context, teachers should

build trusting relationships with students and set expectations for desirable changes among them throughout the teaching process. They should recognize and inform their limitations as teachers in the multicultural context to their students. Teachers should be tuned into different behaviors, worldviews, and belief systems of various groups among their students. They need to develop diverse teaching skills based on knowledge of different cultural backgrounds. They must consider how to apply these principles in teaching based on the counseling process from beginning to end. Should professors and instructors in the seminaries practice and actualize the suggestions above, theological education may produce better-equipped workers and leaders to the glory of God.

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