THE IMPACT OF IMMERSION COURSES ON SELF-PERCEIVED
MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

By

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DEDICATION

To those that continue to inspire me from heaven:

Reina Fazana As-Salaam

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&

Ricardo Q. Ilias
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ABSTRACT

MERCIA NNA R. OLIVER
THE IMPACT OF IMMERSION COURSES ON SELF-PERCEIVED MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE
Under the direction of SUNEE THA B. MANYAM, Ph.D.

Counselor education programs have a responsibility to ensure the training of competently trained professionals to meet the growing multicultural needs of our country. Immersion courses have grown in popularity as a method of instruction to influence the awareness, skill and knowledge necessary for multicultural competence. The purpose of this study is to determine if immersion courses have an impact on self-perceived multicultural competence, and if so, what particular critical incidents of the course are viewed as helpful, hurtful, or desired from a student’s perspective. Utilizing a qualitative design, specifically the Critical Incident Technique, 17 interviews were conducted with participants previously enrolled in a counseling immersion course at a private, Southeast university. Emerging from the analysis, the themes considered as critical include global awareness, self-awareness, curriculum design, group dynamics, and informal immersion. The implications of considering these themes when creating immersion curriculum are discussed.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As the demographic makeup of America drastically diversifies, the need for culturally competent counselors is on the rise. It is the responsibility of counselor education programs to provide the training to ensure that counselors have the awareness, knowledge, and skills to treat clients from any cultural background (ACA, 2014). However, there is a general lack of research and evidence supporting exactly what means of instruction is sufficient to prepare counselor trainees to be culturally competent (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). This study sought to explore the effectiveness of immersion as a method of instruction from the students’ perspective, in hopes of providing insight for curriculum committees and counselor organizations, nationally and worldwide.

Background of the Study

Historically, the counseling field was built on theory, interventions, and assumptions from a Eurocentric perspective, which no longer matches the needs of many clients from different cultural backgrounds (Brooks, et al., 2015). As people from various ethnic communities begin to embrace the need for mental health services, counselors are challenged to change their perspectives to meet the needs of the client. Taking into consideration that most counseling scenarios involving minority clients are conducted by White counselors (Sue, 1990), there is an even stronger urgency to develop an awareness
of the dynamics influenced by race and culture. Many minority clients have a negative preconception of counseling, placing significant weight on their perception of the counselor's multicultural competence as a measure of therapeutic efficacy (Owen, Leach, Wampold, & Rodolfaf, 2011). Counselors have a responsibility to their clients to recognize the impact that culture has in the therapeutic relationship.

The need for multicultural perspectives and skills in the counseling field has been a concern for over six decades. Research and debate in the 1960s and 1970s regarding minority client needs made way for an influx of support for and eventual formation of multicultural competencies (MCCs) in the 1980s (Watson, Herlihy, & Pierce, 2006). By 1995, not only had MCCs been explicitly defined and operationalized, but standards were also in place to hold counselors responsible to their minority clientele (Brooks, et al., 2015).

Multicultural competence refers to a counselor's awareness of the impact of their worldviews and their client's perspective, as well as the knowledge of how these worldviews interplay to apply culturally appropriate skills and interventions (Arredondo, et al., 1996). Multicultural competencies were created and operationalized to aid counselors in recognizing the areas of growth necessary to be a culturally competent counselor. Currently consisting of 31 standards, the MCCs focus on the awareness, knowledge, and skills in areas of 1) the counselor’s own values and beliefs, 2) the counselor’s awareness of the client’s worldview, and 3) the strategies and skills appropriate from a cultural perspective (Arredondo, Rosen, Rice, Perez, & Tovar-
Gamero, 2005). Though the concepts of culture and diversity have expanded throughout the decades, for the sake of this study, ethnicity, and race are the perspectives of focus.

Originally developed and defined within a division of what is now known as the American Counseling Association (ACA), the MCCs have been accepted and applied to standards in organizations that influence counselor education (Adkinson-Bradley, 2013). The ACA officially endorse the MCCs in 2002, which led to the incorporation of the competencies in the 2003 Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014). This was historical, as it officially recognized the ethical responsibility of counselors to meet the needs of culturally diverse clients as both therapists and advocates. This charge led to the reorganization of required standards from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP, the main organization responsible for evaluating and accrediting counseling programs, has incorporated over 60 standards based on cultural diversity. This influenced the necessary changes in counselor education programs to infuse multicultural training in the curriculum.

Standards put in place to promote multicultural training in counseling programs are more concise regarding representation than in actual methods of instruction (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008). The 2016 CACREP standards state requirements for programs to make efforts to have diverse faculty to meet student and training needs, however, allow for more leeway concerning how the curriculum incorporates MCCs. Formats of popular instruction range from a single core course in diversity to the evidence of multicultural infusion at all levels of training (Furr, & Carroll, 2003). To focus on trainee awareness, knowledge, and skills, supervision and internship, as well as
service learning projects have been incorporated. At a higher level of experiential learning, some courses or programs promote the use of cultural immersion to challenge students.

Cultural immersion is the experience for counselor trainees to experience a different culture through direct contact, for a prolonged amount of time (Derico & Sciarra, 2005). Research has suggested that this form of instruction enhances the student's self-awareness of their own biases and beliefs, while also enhancing cognition and flexibility regarding interventions. Immersion courses allow all of these growths under the guidance of a qualified instructor, who is representative of a safe space to explore new challenges. Throughout the literature (Ishii et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2013), many immersion experiences are conducted locally and as an assignment within a required course. For the past four years, however, there have been a small number of publications that focus on the lived experiences of international immersion. As more programs incorporate cultural immersion into the curriculum, there is a need to measure the effectiveness of the course in terms of MCCs.

MCCs as proponents of cultural competence and training standards have been tested by some quantitative instruments, in an effort to provide empirical evidence of their validity and effectiveness. The Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI), Multicultural Awareness Knowledge Skill Scale, Revised Form (MAKSS-CE-R) and the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised (CCCI-R) are the most widely used instruments (Constantine & Ladany, 2000). Utilized for research purposes and as
evaluation measures in counseling education programs, the inventories were created from the MCCs. Of all the instruments available, only the CCCI-R relies on information from an observer as a measure of competence. The MCI and MAKSS-CE-R both rely on self-reported scores as a measure of competence. Research suggests that the influence of social desirability and other bias factors contribute to the report of perceived competence as opposed to demonstrated competence in most cases (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008). In an effort to provide a better picture of the effectiveness of MCCs, it is suggested that the results from these instruments be supported by qualitative research as well.

Qualitative studies provide invaluable insight into the concepts and techniques that make training in multicultural counseling effective. Supporters and critics of MCCs both agree that qualitative findings related to MCCs are needed to enhance current empirical instruments and create new ones. By understanding that cultural competence is a process, much of the literature available with a qualitative focus seeks to explore the personal impact from the trainee’s perspective. This is especially the case in publications with an immersion focus. Through qualitative data, insight is available regarding how multicultural competence develops over time, which can inform possible measures of demonstrated competence.

Problem Statement

After a thorough review of the literature available regarding multicultural training and the effectiveness of MCCs as standards, there is a clear need for specific evidence of effective curriculum (Dillon, et al., 2016; McRae & Johnson, 1991; Pope-Davis, &
Courses that simultaneously address the awareness, knowledge, and skill of counseling trainees’ may be most beneficial, as is often the case when utilizing immersion as a learning experience. According to the aforementioned background information, there is a gap in the knowledge of measures available to develop effective immersion courses within counseling education programs. While more programs are beginning to understand the urgency for such measures, there are minimal empirical studies into the impact of immersion courses as a valuable teaching method.

Most program evaluations are based on self-reported perceptions of multicultural competence from students enrolled in counseling graduate programs (Brooks et al., 2015). As self-reported scores are often inflated due to social desirability and bias, more effective tools of evaluation are necessary to validate the effectiveness of multicultural training. To provide empirical evidence of the effectiveness of immersion courses, there first needs to be more insight into what components of the immersion experience were crucial, from a trainee's perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore which aspects of cultural immersion experiences, if any, enhance perceived multicultural competence from the trainee’s perspective. Using a qualitative design, the researcher sought insight from current and recent students enrolled in a graduate counselor education course with a focus on international immersion. By specifically pinpointing critical incidents of growth and
hindrance of competence during the process, the objective is to reach an understanding of specific themes or concepts that proved beneficial to the immersion experience.

Most of the research on counseling immersion courses focuses on the lived emotional experiences of the students within the immersed community (Ishii et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2013), without much inquisition into their feelings and thoughts of the course itself. This study is designed to specifically identify aspects of the course, evaluated from students’ narrative feedback. It is the objective of the research to add to the literature, in the promotion of more immersion courses.

Theoretical Framework

For a study to be conceptualized, a frame of reference, or theoretical framework, is of utmost importance. The emphasis of a theoretical perspective informs all aspects of the design, from the questions to the data analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In an effort to understand the relationship between training methods and perceived multicultural competence, the researcher combined theories of multicultural counseling/therapy and transformative learning to provide perspective.

In an effort to shift from a traditional, Eurocentric focus in therapy, Sue (1990) theorized Multicultural Counseling and Therapy (MCT) throughout the 1990s. MCT emphasizes a collectivistic approach to counseling and counselor education, due to Sue’s belief that counseling from an individualistic perspective is oppressive to minority clients. Understanding that norms of behaviors and emotions are based on assumptions from White males, minority clients are often told they are to be fixed (Jun, 2010). It is the
goal of MCT that clients are helped to see themselves and their choices in a cultural context, known as liberation of consciousness, instead of relaying the message that something is wrong with them. By focusing on the context that the client is responding to which led them to seek counseling, and not the individual, the client is empowered to make different choices. That empowerment relies on the counselor’s ability to match the client with culturally appropriate interventions. The tenets of MCT have clear influences from the multicultural competencies and require a learning process to shift therapist awareness and knowledge.

A development learning theory conceptualized by Jack Mezirow, transformative learning theory recognizes the influence of new experiences and schemas on preconceived views throughout the learning process (Prosek & Michel, 2016). While conventional learning is considered to be a cognitive process, transformative learning theory postulated that students learn best when they are challenged emotionally and cognitively. Transformative learning requires the student to go a step further than conventional learning to identify the emotional response to what is being learned. This form of learning affects the trainee both intellectually and emotionally by provoking self-awareness (McDowell, Goessling & Melendez, 2012).

The process of transformative learning is crucial to counselor trainees attempting to develop as culturally competent counselors. As a teaching method, immersion experiences utilize the learning process to increase self-awareness cognitively and emotionally. It is with this perspective that the researcher recognizes the interplay of the
MCCs and the rich learning opportunities possible in immersion courses that need to be identified.

Research Questions

The possible benefits and hindrances of immersion experiences in a counselor education course are to be explored from the students’ perspective in this study. Using a narrative research design, former students were interviewed to investigate the following questions:

Q1: To what extent do immersion courses have an impact on self-perceived multicultural competence?

Q2: What particular themes or components of an immersion experience had the most impact on perceived multicultural competence?

Q3: What particular themes or components were perceived to be a hindrance to the development of perceived multicultural competence?

Q4: What, if any, possible components can be added to the immersion course to enhance students’ perceived multicultural competence?

As this study is exploratory in nature, the research purports no hypotheses in an attempt at objectivity.

Definition of Terms

The current study explores the perceived impact of immersion courses on a student’s multicultural competence. For the sake of uniformity throughout the rest of the study, key terms and concepts are defined.
**Counseling students/trainees:** Individuals currently or recently enrolled within the past 3 years (2014-2017) in a counseling education program, at either a masters or doctorate level.

**Critical Incident:** An event or turning point that stands out as impactful in the development of professional growth, according to the student (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988).

**Immersion:** A cross-cultural experience that allows for direct and prolonged contact, under instructor supervision, in order to purposefully enhance student awareness, knowledge, and skill set from a diverse perspective (Barden & Cashwell, 2013)

**Multicultural competence:** A counseling trainee’s self-awareness of the worldviews and attitudes shaped by their social reality, while also being able to recognize and empathize with a client’s viewpoint. Said counselor should also have the knowledge of a client’s cultural group in terms of identity, acculturation and sociopolitical experiences (Roysircar, 2003; Cannon, 2008).

**Nature of the Study**

Qualitative research designs involve the use of the researcher as the primary instrument to collect inferable data through the use of interviews or surveys. In this particular study, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is to be applied during narrative interviews to determine what aspects of a cultural immersion experience impact the perception of multicultural competence, if any. Using a semi-structured format, the researcher audio-recorded 17 interviews with students who have participated in an international immersion course at a local university within the past 3 years. In
conjunction with the demographic questionnaires distributed during the interview, the researcher used transcriptions of the interviews to identify and code common critical incidents and themes that presented themselves for discussion.

Delimitations and Assumptions

This study depends on the responses from counseling students with past experience in an international immersion course. With the understanding that some limitations may present themselves that are not to be controlled for, assumptions are necessary. It is an assumption of the researcher that the participants in the study answer honestly and to the best of their ability. It is also assumed that all participants have some knowledge of the concepts of multicultural competencies and competence, based on their enrollment in a counselor education program.

Delimitations of a study recognize measures purposely put in place in order to control for possible interference with the data. One such delimitation involves the amount of time that has passed since the immersion experience took place, which is 3 years maximum. This attempts to control for possible misinformation due to memory lapse. Another delimitation is the requirement that the immersion experience took place internationally, under the supervision of a counselor instructor. As self-awareness and knowledge is influenced through personal, educational, and professional experiences, by specifying educational immersion, the identified experiences can be tied to the immersion course itself.

Limitations of the Study
While qualitative research can provide an abundance of rich data and context, there are drawbacks to using this particular design. Qualitative studies rely heavily on subjective perspectives and insights, which do not allow for impartial verification (Creswell, 2013). The results and themes that emerge from qualitative research are based on researcher interpretation which can be influenced by factors such as personal interactions and biased experiences. Without the power of statistical analysis available in quantitative research, it is difficult to determine causality and generalizability (Tracy, 2012). Therefore, at best, qualitative research design is often used to develop theoretical implications as opposed to concrete significant findings.

A major consequence of qualitative research design lies within its participants and the use of the researcher as the primary instrument (Creswell, 2013). Due to the small participant size and sample pool location, the proposed study lacks overall generalizability to other counselor education programs. Also, based on the voluntary sample used, issues of bias could affect results. Due to the fact that international immersion courses are often elective courses, it is possible that interest in multicultural competence and issues was already high prior to enrollment. As discussed in the background and later the literature review, multicultural competence is currently a measure of perception, which can be inflated. In that regard, the use of the researcher as the main interviewer and coder of the data is a possible issue due to researcher bias and interest in the subject matter. Adding to the concerns of possible bias are the researcher’s previous enrollment in the immersion course and possible dual relationships as a result. Attempts to control for this possibility lie in the use of the CIT and semi-structured interview, however bias is still a possibility.
Significance of the Study

This study is significant to the counseling field in terms of providing valuable insight that can be implemented into the curriculum design for counselor education programs. Organizations such as CACREP, ACA, and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) could benefit from the identification of critical incidents in immersion courses to emulate the study on a larger scale and research other applications of CIT to evaluate overall course design. University coordinators will be able to utilize this data to fine-tune their focus when creating enriching immersion courses to strengthen student MCC.

In an effort to address the gap of research to better enhance instruments of MCCs, this study could be impactful in the identified experiences from the participants and what is effective towards multicultural competence. Many of the constructs used to measure self-perceived competence in the MCI and MAKSS-CE-R can be reexamined from the data provided through some of the narratives from this study.

Summary

Chapter 1 focused on the background of multicultural competence, its educational implications, and the need for more insight in counselor education programs. Recognizing the gap in research, the researcher introduced the purpose, theoretical framework, research questions, and summary of the research design. With a full understanding of the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the proposed study, it is the purpose of this study to explore students’ perceptions regarding the effectiveness of immersion courses with enhancing multicultural competence.
The following chapters in this study will further explore the available research and end results of the study. Chapter 2 is an extensive literature review on multicultural competencies, educational implementations of MCCs, and the available instrumentation. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative design used to explore student perceptions. Chapter 4 includes the results and themes presented from the study, and Chapter 5 addresses the interpretations, limitations, implications of the results, as well as recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the cultural makeup of society exponentially diversifies, emerging counselors need to be properly prepared to meet the needs of an array of multicultural clients. For the past four decades, multiculturalism has been a driving force behind many standards of training and practice in the field of counseling. As a guide to grooming culturally competent counselors, Multicultural Competencies (MCCs) were developed. This literature review seeks to explore the history, components, and applications of MCCs, particularly as they apply to counselor education. The author then delves into the available body of research in support of the MCCs, making sure to explore any criticisms and/or gaps that require further investigation.

Cultural Needs in Counseling

In many scholarly realms, multicultural and diversity are often interchangeable terms. The two terms are using in the counseling field to encompass different aspects such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social status. As subcultures begin to emerge, there rose a need to distinguish and conceptualize the terms. It became accepted that “multicultural” would focus specifically on ethnicity, race, and culture, while “diversity” would represent the broader differences that include age, sexual orientation, and religion (Arredondo, et al, 1996). For the scope of this literature review and study, ethnicity and race will be the focal point of multiculturalism.
Eurocentric Views in Counseling

Historically, counseling theories and interventions stem from a Eurocentric worldview. In most, if not all cases, Whites are considered the normative group by which other minority groups are compared and measured (Arredondo, et al., 1996). In counseling scenarios, approaches to effectively help the client are based on clinical assumptions from White clientele. Empirically and practically, the majority ethnic group of counseling clientele are White men and women. This pattern extends itself to the typical counseling interaction itself, where most counselors are themselves White.

Counselors have a responsibility to be aware of the power dynamics inherent to the counseling relationship, including any possible racial connotations. Most counseling interactions among people of color involve a White counselor (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). It would be unethical of the counselor to ignore the social constructs that affect therapeutic alliance, however, some White counselors adopt a stance of color blindness when treating patients of minority clients. The concept of color blindness postulates that race and ethnicity are not factors in counseling interactions (Chao, 2013). Though considered to be an acceptable worldview in acceptance of ethnic differences, studies show the exact opposite. Attitudes of color blindness negatively affect the therapeutic relationship, as it results in lower knowledge and awareness of other cultures viewpoints (Johnson & Jackson Williams, 2014; Chao, 2013). Decades of research and theory provide insight in many key differences between Eurocentric and minority cultures.

Multicultural Populations and Counseling Needs
Trademarks of effective counselors center around their ability to develop a positive working alliance with their clients and make appropriate decisions regarding effective interventions. Communication styles, nonverbal cues, and theoretical orientation are often considered to be effective in Eurocentric clients may not be effective for other cultures (Sue, 1990). Rapport is built through attending and communication, however, not all clients respond identically. In similar regard, certain techniques may hinder growth if the client does not respond well from a cultural perspective. Theories and techniques can result in positive therapeutic outcomes if cultural issues are taken into context when utilizing them with multicultural clientele. “It is … that proper selection, approach and packaging of the process may be utterly incompatible and misdirected out of cultural ignorance and lack of cultural empathy.” (Johannes & Erwin, 2004, p. 331). The counselor would be able to better help the client if they are aware that multicultural clients express symptoms of psychological stress differently and have varied beliefs about counseling (Hill, 2003).

Minority populations underutilize counseling services as a result of the unpopular and negative opinions associated with mental health services. Asian Americans with mental health issues seek professional help less than 20% of the time (Wang & Kim, 2010), and African Americans tend to avoid therapy on the anticipation of negative outcomes and mistrust (Ford & Milner, 2006, pg. 71). In the Latino/Hispanic community, seeking out help in the form of therapy is often a last resort (Ivers, Ivers, Sr., & Duffey, 2013) as family and religion are held in higher regard. On the chance that counseling is initiated, minority groups are less likely to continue seeking mental health services if they
experience a negative interaction at the start (Caldwell, et al. 2008; Fisher, Matthews, Kurpius, & Burke, 2001; Pope-Davis, et al., 2002; Rogers-Sirin, Melendez, Refano, & Zegarra, 2015). The client’s perception of the counselor often colors their view of counseling as necessary and effective.

The relationship fostered between client and therapist is most important in counseling scenarios, and therefore holds the most weight for overall client satisfaction. Competence is strongly associated with overall client satisfaction (Fuertes et al., 2006, Constantine, 2002). A client’s perception of the counselor’s competence positively affects the working alliance and overall wellbeing of the client in a therapeutic relationship (Owen, Tao, Leach, & Rodolfa, 2011; Fuertes et al., 2006). Per report from minority clients, multicultural interventions and sensitivity were positively associated with a more favorable perception of the therapist as competent (Wang & Kim, 2010). A counselor’s ability to interact with clients from a cultural perspective has an overall positive effect on client alliance and other important therapeutic factors (Tao, Owen, Pace, & Imel, 2015).

Taking into account the obvious need for a multicultural perspective on the counselor’s part, researchers and theorists sought to identify standards of competence. In 1992, a call for action was issued to the counseling community (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) that 1) recognized the need for a multicultural approach due to changing racial demographics and climate, 2) proposed a framework for standards towards multiculturalism, and 3) called for changes to be made to the ethical obligations and training standards of counselors.
Development of Multicultural Competencies

Historical Trends Towards Development

Though counseling as a whole is a young profession, cultural concerns have been a major focal point for a majority of its existence. The National Office for Non-White Concerns was formed in 1969 (Watson, Herlihy, & Pierce, 2006) to focus on cultural concerns within the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA). The 1970s brought forth a rise in theoretical formulation and publications related to counseling minority clients and with it a necessary name change to the cultural division. In 1972, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) was formed, as White was officially recognized as an ethnic group (Collins & Arthur, 2010). Multiculturalism was coined as the “fourth force” of psychology (Arredondo & Perez, 2006) and the framework for eleven multicultural competencies (MCCs) was published in a 1982 APA journal.

The last 30 years of multicultural counseling have had the most impact in terms of MCCs. In 1992, the APGA transitioned into the American Counseling Association (ACA), and with that change the AMCD division made strides (Robinson & Morris, 2000). At a multicultural summit hosted by the ACA, the MCCs were defined and increased to 31 components and multicultural training initiatives were encouraged. Around this time a racial identity development theory was formulated by Janet Helms, and was implemented. In 1995, the ACA Code of Ethics specifically recognized multicultural competence as an ethical obligation and Counseling Today included columns dedicated to MCC (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). By 1996, MCCs were
officially operationalized and expanded to include a model of Personal Development. In the most recent revision, conducted in 2015, the AMCD recognized the need for an emphasis on advocacy and renamed the competencies to the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Collins, Brown & Kennedy, 2015).

Definition of Multicultural Competence

Multicultural competence is best defined as a counselor’s self-awareness of the worldviews and attitudes shaped by their social reality, while also being able to recognize and empathize with a client’s viewpoint. Said counselor should also have the knowledge of a client’s cultural group in terms of identity, acculturation and sociopolitical experiences (Roysircar, 2003; Cannon, 2008). The definition is based on the concepts and standards pinpointed in the AMCD’s breakdown of MCCs.

In-Depth Breakdown of Multicultural Competencies

“The groundbreaking work of Arredondo, et al., (1996) set out to not only distinguish diversity from multicultural and introduce a personal developmental model, but took on the task of operationalizing the 31 MCCs. The document breaks down 9 attitudes/beliefs, 11 knowledge, and 11 skills components into 131 concise explanations (see appendix), summarized as follows.

The MCCs postulate that a multicultural competent counselor possessed awareness, skills, and knowledge of themselves, their clients, and culturally appropriate interventions and strategies (Arredondo, et al., 1996). Awareness addresses the counselor’s need to recognize their own biases and worldviews, and consider how that view influences their work with clients of another culture. Skills refer to the counselor’s ability to apply their
knowledge and beliefs when choosing interventions, taking into account what is culturally appropriate for the client. Finally, knowledge components require the counselor to understand the background and possible experiences that influence the client’s worldview and their understanding of counseling. The ability to accurately and properly interweave awareness, skill, and knowledge in counseling situations is the trademark of a competent counselor.

Organizational Implementation of Competencies

Once MCCs were explicitly defined and given credibility, organizations in the psychology and counseling field sought to incorporate them into standards of practice. The ACA began to take the steps to find applicable strategies and in 2002 the MCCs were officially endorsed by the parent organization. The ACA Code of Ethics was revised to incorporate MCCs that promoted advocacy and social justice in 2003 (Ratts, 2011). Each revision since then has taken strides to further define multicultural practices and recognize the ethical responsibility counselors have towards clients of all cultures. The most current edition of the Code of Ethics has woven multiculturalism in all sections of the document, particularly in Section F11, which focuses on multicultural competence in counselor education programs (ACA, 2014). According to the Code of Ethics, graduate programs have an ethical obligation to not only employ faculty that is representative of the diverse community, but must make efforts to diversify the student population.

Founded in 1981 to address the growing needs for a governing body for counselor education programs, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has set standards for over 63% of counselor education programs.
across the country (Honderich & Lloyd-Hazelett, 2015). CACREP-accredited programs are considered to be gold standard due to the rigorous process for accreditation. Programs that meet CACREP standards are understood to have a great curriculum to create competent and professional counselors, which now includes the expectation of carefully implemented MCCs. CACREP first implemented MCC standards in 1994, though competency according to CACREP is inclusive of all cultural differences, not just race/ethnicity (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). As of the most recent standards, advocacy is now an expected part of CACREP standards (Adkison-Bradley, 2013; CACREP, 2015b). Cultural competence in counseling programs is an expectation to be a competitive institution in the realm of counselor education.

Academic Efforts to Implement Competencies

The need for more training in multicultural competence is constantly growing. Ponterotto and Casa (1987) conducted a study to identify leading programs in MCC to emulate across the country, as a call of action to other schools and organizations. Suggestions included a need for more licensing requirements, CACREP standards, and continued training in areas of multicultural issues. Findings also suggested that most counselors attribute their multicultural competence to experiences with minority clients after graduating from counseling programs through work (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999) instead of through their educational training. Recently, both narrative reviews and meta-analysis’ confirm the overall positive effects of multicultural education programs within the mental health community (Smith, et al., 2006), as counselors from these programs are better equipped to effectively treat culturally diverse clients.
Both the ACA Code of Ethics and CACREP standards call for counselor education programs to meet minimum requirements for the promotion of multicultural competence (Ponterotto, Alexander & Grieger, 1995). Educational responsibilities for counselor training programs begin with the faculty itself. Every program is required to have a set percentage of culturally diverse faculty members to be representative of the student body (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2015). Diversity among faculty promotes awareness and exposure to other cultures to which students may not be accustomed (Coleman, Morris, & Norton, 2006). Both organizations also require continued education and training for faculty (Hill, 2003), in an effort to keep instructors up to date on culturally diverse topics and therapeutic interventions. Along with faculty requirements, the student body itself must be representative of the cultural makeup (Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995).

Counseling education programs have the added requirements of providing students with proper multicultural access, research and evaluation measures. One major requirement is the inclusion of multicultural activities and a safe environment for students of culturally different backgrounds (Coleman, 2006). Not only does this allow for more opportunities to interact with peers from other upbringings, which aids in long-term cultural development, but it also provides an environment of inclusion for minority students. Research opportunities from a multicultural perspective is one additional avenue in which students have access to diverse clientele, while also allowing counseling students from minority backgrounds to be represented within the publishing community. Many programs rely on various evaluation measures of both the educators and students,
as the feedback from trainees and faculty can provide a more accurate assessment of MCC training efficacies (Inman, Meza, Brown, & Hargrove, 2004), especially from within the curriculum itself.

**Didactic Learning and Knowledge**

At a minimum, counselor education programs recognize the need to incorporate MCC within core classes. According to CACREP standards, at least one core class at a master’s level must center on multicultural counseling (Brooks, et al., 2015). A variety of learning methods and styles are utilized to provide a didactic experience for the students. Focusing largely on the knowledge component of the competencies, effective means of instruction include autobiographies, movies/video clips, games and research assignments (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Cormier, 1988; Estrada, Durlak, & Juarez, 2002), often pinpointing the cultural aspects of minority populations. Using games (Kim & Lyons, 2003) allows trainees to confront biases and social constructs within a safe space. These assignments meet the necessary standards, though they only scratch the surface. Notably, a large majority of doctoral programs do not have advanced courses in cultural diversity, as it is not an explicit requirement in the current standards (CACREP, 2015). Recognizing that one class is not sufficient for competency development, many programs attempt to infuse multicultural training and education throughout programs (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell, & Green, 2000; Hill, 2003).

In an effort to go beyond the minimum requirements, counselor education programs that recognize the importance of training superior counselors often weave the MCCs throughout various courses and applied trainings. Aside from advanced courses in
multiculturalism, internships and supervision are great avenues of instruction that provide
the students with the skills and awareness necessary to be competent (Coleman, Morris,
& Norton, 2006). There needs to be a focus on process and not just content within
counseling education, and training and supervision are integral to that experience
(Vereen, Hill, & McNeal, 2008). Training in the form of internships, where students have
the chance to interact with clients, integrates awareness and knowledge into applicable
skills (Hill, 2003). The incidents experienced during internship require feedback in the
form of supervision.
Supervision and Skills

Supervision within counselor education is integral to the development of a
competent counselor and is often the determining factor in the successful integration of
skill, knowledge and awareness (Vereen et al., 2008). Counselor education programs
often utilize a group supervision format to provide the most effective means of feedback.
Group supervision allows for diverse peer interactions, feedback and increased
knowledge (Lassiter, Napolitano, Culbreth, & Ng, 2008; Cannon, 2008). Within the
group process, supervisors use a number of assignments and techniques that have proven
to be most impactful, such as case conceptualizations and role-plays. Case
conceptualizations (Jones, Sanders, & Booker, 2013) require the student to consider the
whole picture and system of the client, and not just what was presented in session.
Multicultural awareness and knowledge are especially honed during this process.

Utilizing Bloom’s Taxonomy and developmental supervision to address MCC
awareness over time (Ober, Granello, & Henfield, 2009), the supervisors are tasked with
ensuring that the student trainees are confident and well-versed in diverse situations. However, according to studies as recent as 2015, students report a serious lack of MC focus in supervision, often leaving them feeling unsupported and incompetent to work with diverse populations during practicum and internship (Collins, Arthur, Brown, & Kennedy, 2015). This includes the MCC of the supervisors themselves, as barriers to positive supervision experiences were attributed to the lack of cultural awareness on the supervisor’s behalf (Fukuyama, 1994; Pope-Davis, Toporek, & Ortega-Villalobos, 2003). In order to increase student competence, supervisors are tasked with increasing their own awareness, knowledge and skill.

Experiential Awareness

The use of experiential assignments requiring students to interact within a cultural setting helps to increase awareness of self and other worldviews. Self-awareness during cultural interactions is highly indicative of MCC (Constantine, 2001), suggesting that more experiential training leads to more competent trainees (Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings, & Ottavi, 1994). Learning and practicing self-reflection during these exposures allow counselor students to recognize the effect of their personal worldviews when working with MC clients (Bermudez, 1997; Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2006). Awareness of defense mechanisms in the face of cultural issues can be addressed more effectively through experiential learning (Ivers, et al., 2016), while also addressing the student’s racial identity development (Hill, 2003). Higher levels of racial identity led to increased interest in MCC training (Chao & Nath, 2011). This level of exposure often takes place through service learning and immersion.
Community outings and short-term volunteering that places trainees in a position to challenge stereotypes of minority cultures (Sperling, 2007) is also known as service learning. In these scenarios, the students often provide service in a location or population that has a need, while gaining exposure to the culturally diverse. Service learning can be an effective tool if structured within the curriculum and combined with supervision as a way to process any stress factors that may appear as students are confronted with their own awareness (Lee, Rosen & McWhirter, 2014). Educators, however, must be careful to explore the power dynamics at play in terms of marginalized populations.

Multicultural Counseling Immersion Courses

Immersion courses enhance the benefits of service learning through the application of extended contact and extreme exposure to other cultures. According to the Contact Hypothesis, (Brown as cited in DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005) reduction of cultural tension occurs through the contact between different cultural groups. Contact must occur 1) over a period of duration and frequency, 2) between people of equal status, and 3) requires a mutual objective to ensure cooperation. Applying the contact hypothesis, most immersion courses place students in unknown locations, and involve, at a minimum, a cultural autobiography, journals, and a reflective follow-up assignment to process the information (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). In order for an immersion experience to have the intended educational experience, a supportive educator must be involved to help students process their feelings and insecurities (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). Immersion courses addresses self-awareness of the trainee by placing them in situations where they
are the cultural minority, which in turn enhances cognitive development, creativity, and cultural flexibility (Ivers, Ivers, Sr., & Duffey, 2013; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005).

International Immersion Courses

International immersion allows for exposure to limited populations, which helps to challenge American ideology (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005). Students benefit from the experience by building international connections, exploring social constructs and global awareness in the counseling profession (McDowell, Goessiling, & Melendez, 2012). As an added bonus, witnessing peer growth and sharing the experience with others adds to the impact long term (Prosek & Michel, 2016). Of more than 20 articles related to immersion courses in counseling, only four have been published since 2005, with 3 published within the last 4 years (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; McDowell, Goessiling, & Melendez, 2012; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Platt, 2012).

Quantitative Measures of MCC

MCC instruments created over the decades help provide empirical information for identifying MCC weaknesses among counseling programs and professional development (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008). Research in the area of multicultural competence and training relies heavily on self-reported information from students and professionals. Of the small number of instruments available, the Multicultural Counseling Inventory (MCI) and the Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge, Skills Survey: Counselor Edition–Revised (MAKSS-CE-R) are the most widely used instruments in research and program assessments.
Developed in 1994, the MCI is the most popular instrument among counselor education researchers. Complied as a 40-item, 4-point Likert, self-reported measure, the inventory measures overall competency, with subscales of MC Knowledge, Awareness, Skills, and Relationships (Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). Though it mainly focuses on behaviors (Pope-Davis & Dings, 1994), the MCI shows a highly reliable relationship between perceived MCC and credibility (Sodowsky, 1996) and has high convergent, content and predictive validity across 6 studies (Pope-Davis & Nielson, 1996). The MCI is used often in educational, training and supervision settings to explore perceived increase in knowledge, skill, and awareness (Green, et al., 2005; Pope, Davis & Nielson, 1996).

The MAKSS-CE-R was revised and created to measure the perception of one’s multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills in counseling. Though the original MAKSS was 60-items, the revised version was shortened to a 33-item questionnaire (Kim, Cartwright, Assay, & Andrea, 2003). The MAKSS-CE-R uses a 4-point Likert type scale to measure overall competence as well as specialized competence among the three subscales. Higher scores indicate higher self-reported competency. The scale has a reputation for its conciseness, reliability and validity, and is often chosen as the go-to in many counselor programs.

There is only one measure normed to counseling that does not rely on the self-reporting of the participants. The Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory-Revised (CCCI-R) is based off the scores of a rater who observes the counselor in question on areas of awareness, skill, and knowledge (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, & Sparks, 2001). Revised
by LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez in 1991 from the 1985 edition, the current inventory addressed social desirability factors and generality amongst counseling grad students. The measure itself is a 20-item, 6-point Likert scale, with consistently appropriate levels of internal consistency and validity. Completed by an evaluator to measure counselor awareness, knowledge, and skills, the measure is used widely in supervision and internship, as well as research areas.

Research Efforts Regarding MCCs

Research Trends

The area of multicultural competence in counseling has spurred debate and research over the past three decades, though the trends themselves are lacking. Alarmingly, there is a very small number of contributing scholars to the conversation of MCC (Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007; Ponterotto, Fingerhut, & McGuiness, 2012) which limits creative research outlooks and questions. An ever-changing concept, many of the publications regarding multicultural competence available are theoretical in nature. Only 47% of publications between 1986-2005 were research based and not theories (Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007; Arredondo, et al, 2005). Of the theoretic articles, most were culture specific (Arredondo, et al., 2005), focusing mainly on African-American or Latino clientele. A majority of the research articles published are quantitative in nature (Pope-Davis, Ligiero, Liang, & Codrington, 2001) and utilized university settings (Arredondo, et al., 2005) to the neglect of community clientele and outpatient services.

Quantitative Findings
Qualitative research findings have yielded very few definitive impacts to the field of multicultural training for a number of reasons. There is limited statistical evidence of overall validity of the MCC assessments (Hays, 2008) due to the fact that most assess perception instead of actual competence (Cannon, 2008; Cole, Piercy, Wolfe, & West, 2014). Based on a singular factor analysis of the three most popular self-report measures, more research is necessary to statistically evaluate demonstrated MCC versus perceived MCC (Constantine, Gloria, & Ladany, 2002). Self-reported measures such as the MCI and the MAKSS-CE-R may be affected by social desirability, which may mask the actual need for more training in MCC (Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Constantine, Juby & Liang, 2001). Compared to ratings found in the only observer rated assessment, the CCCI-R, self-reported scores in the MAKSS-CE-R were inflated, cautioning against use of self-reports as only means of assessment (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008; Glockshuber, 2005; Worthington, Soth-Mcnett, & Moreno, 2007). With only one instrument available that does not use self-report, the importance of qualitative research is staggering.

Qualitative Findings

Many supporters and theorists of multicultural counseling frown on the idea of collecting numerical data regarding competence. The belief that “…multicultural competence is a process whether than an outcome variable” (Coleman, Morris & Norton, 2006, p.29) holds weight considering the subjective nature of culture and human interaction. More research of the qualitative nature could inform researchers and educators of the more subjective nuances that make multicultural counseling so complex.
Qualitative research can provide insight into the evolution of MCC as trainees and professionals have increased training and diversity exposure (Holcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). Many immersion articles provide insight through qualitative data (Ishii, Gilbride, & Stensrud, 2009).

Gaps and Criticisms in the Literature

Immersion Research

There was a total of 8 immersion studies published, all based on qualitative methods. Four studies used an open-coding, peer debriefing method to review journals for internal themes related to the emotional experience by the participants (Ishii et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2013). The immersion experiences themselves included volunteer work or case study projects over the term of a semester, but no more than 15 hours. In all of the articles, the researchers were also the participants, calling into question possible bias.

The remaining four immersion articles specifically focused on international immersion courses. Of the four, one considered the theoretical task of creating a international immersion experience for students, as an added experience, without focus on the experiences of the students (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005). The others utilize a varied population of students and professionals from different areas of psychology and counseling (McDowell, Goessiling, & Melendez (2012) to explore the emotional impact and lived experiences of the trips to other nations (Platt, 2012; Prosek
None of the immersion articles purposely explored student’s feedback regarding MCC growth in terms of the course effectiveness itself.

Issues with the Practice of Multicultural Counseling

At the turn of the 20th century, as MCC was becoming widely accepted, critics expressed issues with the implementation of the competencies. Due to lack of research regarding the effectiveness of MCCs, possible overgeneralizations, and ramifications for racial discourse and competency claims, critics denounced the need to adopt the MCCs (Smith, Constantine, Graham, & Dize, 2008; Thomas & Weinrach, 2004; Weinrach & Thomas, 2002; Weinrach & Thomas, 2004). One critic took the position that counseling was not a field to be broken down into such concrete areas of skill, technique, and knowledge (Patterson, 2004). By doing so in the name of multiculturalism, it makes the statement that client differences matter more than similarities.

Supporters of MCCs responded, imploring critics to recognize the competencies as a necessary work in progress that address the racial climate of America (Vontress & Jackson, 2004). Some even point to the ethical implications necessary to recognize cultural differences for the sake of the client (Arredondo & Toporek, 2004). It still stands however, that many of the same criticisms are still valid more than a decade later, particularly regarding empirical evidence of MCCs as necessary tools of competence.

Issues with Research Focus

When it comes to the research surrounding multicultural competence, obvious issues stand out with the data collected and the tools used. Most popular MCC instruments are based on Euro-Centric data in terms of reliability and student validity (Gamst, et al.,
2004). Not only does this show a lack of global focus on MCC and counseling practices (Chao, Okazaki, & Hong, 2011), but it also negates any cultural factors on the part of the test taker. Equally detrimental is the fact that most do not focus on actual skill development (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, & Sparks, 2001). Less focus should be on pre- and post- self-report assessments as evaluation tools due to unrealistic expectations of major score increased over the course of the semester (Cartwright, Daniels, Zhang, 2008). It’s suggested that research regarding the client perceptions of MCC variance over training would be more telling of actual competence ratings (Pope-Davis, Liu, Toporek, & Brittan-Powell, 2001).

The Counselor Trainee

There is little focus on how a counselor’s personal life and experiences over time influence their professional competence (Toporek, 2001). One main influence was ethnicity and race. Black and Latino American trainees were rated much more competent than White peers by clients due to perceived lived experience with racial issues (Constantine, 2001; Ivers, 2012). Latino Americans trainees also benefit from cross-cultural exposure and possible bilingual attributions (Dickson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya, 2010; Ivers, Ivers, Sr., & Duffey, 2013). Ethnicity is associated with differences in self-reported competence (Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 2001). Asian and Hispanics counselors reported more knowledge than White counterparts, and African American, Hispanic and Asian all rated higher than Whites in terms of awareness. It’s necessary to consider these factors when designing an inclusive course in multicultural counseling.
Studies show that due to unbalanced training curriculums, although knowledge scores are the same across ethnicities, white trainees experience an increase in awareness scales, while minority students don’t experience a significant change (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011). Counselor trainees of color reportedly responded more to didactic and experiential aspects of MC training than White counterparts (Coleman, 2006). This is due to the understanding that personal attitude about MC has a positive relationship with MCC, and most minority trainees have a more vested interest (Reynolds & Rivera, 2012). MCC training needs to be tailored to address trainees from within a cultural context, i.e. ethnic and background differences (Chao, 2013).

Research also suggests that MCCs need to be expanded to include racial identity development and a thorough grasp of multicultural terminology as necessary components to develop into fully competent counselors (Holcomb-McCoy, 2000). Adding these objectives to curriculum standards may narrow the differences between perceived and demonstrated multicultural competence.

Summary

The review of the literature associated with multicultural competencies, counselor training and research findings provide a wealth of insight. The information provided demonstrates the need for more insight from the students themselves regarding what is effective in increasing MCC, particularly thorough the use of qualitative measures. There is a gap between what is perceived to increase competence, and what is actually effective.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study is to explore the possible benefits and hindrances of participating in an immersion course in conjunction to the development of multicultural competencies. This chapter provides the methodology and outlines the procedures utilized to carry out the study. The remainder of this chapter includes the discussion of the research design and sampling, reiteration of the research questions, and a detailed breakdown of the data collection and analysis.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was determined to be the best method of inquiry for this study based on the exploratory nature of the research questions. Qualitative research allows for researchers to explore moments and occurrences as they happen naturally in society (Creswell, 2007). Highly subjective and inductive, qualitative research gives researchers insight into lived experiences through the narrative of the participants involved (Tracy, 2012). Unlike quantitative designs, research is often exploratory and flexible, depending on narratives instead of numbers to provide rich data and create themes (Kline, 2008). Considering this study’s intent to utilize students’ narratives about their experiences in an immersion course to develop common themes, a qualitative approach becomes the most beneficial.
Used often in counseling research, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a specific qualitative approach designed to specifically explore key moments that help or hinder the development of a skill or competence (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). Originally utilized in World War II to determine optimal crew members, CIT has been used as a viable research method in fields of education, psychology, and counseling (Flanagan, 1954). CIT utilizes the researcher as the main instrument to conduct interviews, with the intent of identifying common critical incidents (CI) among participants with a specific experience or field of knowledge. Critical incidents, or perceived significant moments of professional development (Skovholt & McCarthy, 1988) are identified with the hopes of increasing overall productivity or effectiveness. Given that the gaps in literature center around the effectiveness of immersion courses in general, CIT directly addresses the need in counseling education research.

CIT is a very direct approach to qualitative research, relying heavily on predetermined protocol and trustworthiness checks to ensure objective interpretation of the data through a five-step process (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). Step 1, determining the aim and frame of reference, is necessary in order to create clear objective for the study. For this study, the aim of the study is to identify specific components of immersion experiences that were helpful in developing multicultural competence. Step 2, making plans and setting specifications, is to come up with the design and parameters of the study. Along with deciding on the sample population, it is also important to create an interview guide. The interview guide allows for all the
interviews to follow the same protocol. Collecting and analyzing the data are Steps 3 and 4, with the final step, Step 5, concluding with the interpretation and reporting of the data. Steps 2 through 5 will be explained in detail throughout the remaining sections that follow.

Research Questions

Q1: To what extent do immersion courses have an impact on self-perceived multicultural competence?

Q2: What particular themes or components of an immersion experience had the most impact on perceived multicultural competence?

Q3: What particular themes or components were perceived to be a hindrance to the development of perceived multicultural competence?

Q4: What, if any, possible components can be added to the immersion course to enhance students’ perceived multicultural competence?

Sampling and Participants

Purposive and snowball sampling are the chosen approaches to determine the participants interviewed in this study. Purposive sampling occurs when researchers choose participants that fit specific parameters related to the purpose and objectives of the study (Tracy, 2013). By doing so, participants can provide detailed and expert insight into the constructs being researched. For this study, participants consisted of individuals enrolled in a counselor education immersion course at a private Southeastern university during the 2014-2017 academic years. The population identified in this study is uniquely qualified due to their involvement in an immersion course through a working adult
counseling education program. The immersion course focused on utilizing narrative theory to explore professional and personal growth. Purposefully created as an 8-week summer course, the curriculum incorporated 3-4 on-campus sessions and a ten-day study abroad component. Assignments were purposefully chosen with multicultural exposure in mind, including primary text by an African-American author, sites and tours ranging from many cultural viewpoints and the inclusion of coleaders of different racial backgrounds. The snowball technique depends on the recommendations of participants to recruit others based on their connections and shared experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Participants in this study were able to identify volunteers with whom they were enrolled in the course.

When conducting interviews using CIT, exhaustiveness is necessary when determining the number of participants needed (Flanagan, 1954; Butterfield, et al., 2009). Exhaustiveness occurs when new categories and critical incidents are no longer identified. According to literature, an appropriate sample size has a minimum of 6 participants (Butterfield et al., 2009; Creswell, 2007). This researcher sought to identify and collect data from 17 participants previously enrolled in a counselor education immersion course at a Southeastern university. The researcher involved more participants in an effort to provide more validity to the themes recognized.

Data Collection

Following the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher began the process of recruiting participants by contacting professors in the counseling department from a Southeastern university for a roster of prior masters and/or doctorate
students enrolled in an immersion course during the 2014-2017 academic years. Once a list was compiled, the researcher utilized the program directory, personal inquiry, and social media to gather updated email addresses of possible candidates for participation and dispersed an invitation letter via email to determine possible interest. Eligible participants were both current and former students who were enrolled in an immersion course at the university at all counselor levels, which include students training to be counselors, unlicensed counselors, provisionally licensed counselors, and fully licensed counselors. The distinction between graduate level and program of study had no bearing on eligibility. After receiving responses to the invitation letter from interested participants, face-to-face interviews were scheduled via email or telephone call. At the time of the interview, the participants were advised of the purpose of the study and given a demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form. The form explicitly reviewed the potential risks and benefits of participation, advised of audio-recording that will take place along with the use of pseudonyms to provide anonymity and confidentiality, and advised of the participant’s right to withdraw from the interview and the study at any time.

Once consent was obtained, the researcher commenced with the interview, utilizing a semi-structured approach. Through the establishment of rapport and the interview guide, the participants were asked to discuss and share their experiences from the immersion course, including the critical incidents they perceived to have been beneficial or detrimental to their multicultural competence development. The interview
continued until all CIs were exhaustively explored, after which the researcher debriefed with the interviewee prior to close of the interview.

Upon completion of the interview, the audiotapes were copied to two separate forms of electronic backup in an effort to secure information. Within 3 days of the conclusion of the interview, each audiotape was transcribed verbatim in an effort to maintain research integrity. The transcripts were also backed up electronically then used for data analysis and coding. All transcripts and audiotapes were identified using pseudonyms in an effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Instrumentation

Researcher

A major component of a qualitative approach to research is the implicit use of the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection (Creswell, 2007; Tracy, 2013, Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Considering the implied biases and assumptions inherit in being the main source of data collection, researchers have an ethical responsibility to attempt objectivity through bracketing. The process includes suspending all personal beliefs, biases, and preconceptions related to the topic during the data collection and analysis stages (Creswell, 2013; Kline, 2008).

The primary researcher is an African-American, female doctoral candidate in a counselor education and supervision program at the southeastern university where the study is conducted. The researcher’s curriculum specialization centers on multicultural therapy and she previously participated in an immersion course. The researcher is aware of personal biases and assumptions due to professional and life experiences. In an effort
to minimize researcher influence and bias, reflexive journaling was utilized throughout
the data collection and analysis process.

Interview Guide

Step 2 of CIT calls for the preparation of an interview guide prior to the data
collection process. The interview guide serves multiple purposes as a record and backup
of the interview, a resource for follow up, and most importantly, a guide to ensure that
CIs are properly identified from all participants. Based specifically from the CIT
technique standards, the interview guide constructed included both contextual and CI
components. The contextual component served to include the informed consent and
explanation of the study script, as well as questions to ensure that the participant meets all
the parameters of the study. The CI component provided prompts for both helpful and
hindering incidents in order to properly extract the participant’s CIs, along with examples
and clarifications. In order to meet the objective of identifying possible strategies that the
participant would have found helpful, a wish list component was added. The interview
guide was viewed only by the researcher to decrease possible influence and later backed
up electronically along with the audiotapes.

Data Analysis

Coding Process

The process of analyzing the CI into categories and themes requires a specific
method of coding. Upon the transcription of all the interviews, the interviews were coded
manually. Three interviews were randomly selected, each transcription reviewed in detail
to identify the CIs, as well as the wish list items. Once all three interviews were
exhaustively reviewed, categories of CIs were created from each individual transcript. This process continued for the second and third transcript as well. As the transcripts were explored a second time, the categories became more succinct and operational. Once the categories from the first three interviews were identified and operationalized, the remaining interviews were put through the same process, three at a time, in comparison with the categories and CI identified originally. As was the expectation of CIT that by the fifth interview, no new CIs had been identified, however all interviews were exhaustively reviewed. Armed with a comprehensive list of CIs and categories, the researcher then began the process of interpreting and crosschecking the data compiled in NVivo.

In an effort to maintain the integrity of data interpretation, follow-up interviews and theoretical agreements were the final crosschecks that occur prior to official interpretation of the data. Once the CIs were identified and categorized, the participants were contacted by email to follow up with the individual CIs identified for confirmation and congruency. If the participants had any discrepancies or questions regarding the analysis, further follow up occurred via telephone call to address all concerns. At this point, the participants were informed of any note taking pertaining to the conversation. Once all participants approved the final analysis, the researcher reviewed available literature to identify any theories or concepts that correlated to the information obtained. New themes and concepts emerged from the final interpretation.

Trustworthiness Checks

CIT is an effective approach to qualitative research due to its ingrained trustworthiness checks throughout all steps. In Step 2, the interview guide is created in an
effort to create an objective interview process and Step 3 utilizes the use of audiotapes to maintain integrity of the data, along with exhaustive debriefing with the participant to ensure that all information provided is not inferred. Exhaustiveness is also incorporated as a measure of trustworthiness during the coding process ((Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009; Orb, 2001). The final step seeks to control for any bias through the follow-up with the participants and overall review of the literature. Throughout the entire process, reflexive journaling by the researcher is utilized to help recognize emotional responses and observations that may otherwise taint the process.

**Summary**

Chapter 3 provided a detailed explanation of the researcher’s methodology to explore the impact of immersion courses on students’ perceived multicultural competence. Utilizing the qualitative method of Critical Incident Technique (CIT), the researcher interviewed 17 participants regarding their experiences and insight based on past enrollment in an immersion course. Focus on the researcher’s involvement, sampling measures, and trustworthiness checks were also discussed. Chapter 4 will provide a discussion of the results determined from the study itself.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of immersion on self-perceived multicultural competence and identify critical components of immersion that were influential, hindering, or missing in the development of MCC from a student’s perspective. In this chapter, the first section presents the demographic data of the sample utilized. The remaining sections address the results and themes that emerged utilizing the CIT method of triple coding and participant checks, organized by research question.

Demographics

There was a total of 23 participants who initially expressed interest in participating in the study. However, four were excluded due to not meeting the enrollment timeframe criteria and two were excluded due to lack of availability for the interviews. A total of 17 participants were included in this study.

Personal, educational and professional questions were included in the demographic questionnaire administered. Figure E in the Appendices presents the individual demographic characteristics for the participants of this study (n=17), which include: sex, age group, race, professional level, years in the field, semester studied, education level, professional setting, number of multicultural courses taken, and number of immersion experiences attended. Tables 1-2 and Figures 1-3 present the frequencies and percentages of the demographics presented.
**Table 1**

**Personal Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
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<td>36-49</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>17.60</td>
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<td>Asian-Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biracial</td>
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<td>5.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal demographics obtained in this study included sex, age group, and identified race. Fifteen (88.20%) of the 17 participants were female with the remaining two (11.80%) being male. Nine of the participants (52.90%) were ages 36-49, followed by eight (47.10%) participants fitting between ages 26-35. Of the 17 participants, a majority identified as African-American (70.60%), followed by Caucasian (17.60%), Asian-Indian (5.90%) and Bi-racial (5.90%).
Figure 1. Percentages of professional level among participants.

Figure 2. Percentages of years in the field among participants.
Figure 3. Percentages of professional setting among participants.

Professional demographics obtained in this study included professional level, years in the field, and professional setting. Seven of the participants were licensed associate professionals (LAPC) (41.20%), while six identified as either training (n=3; 17.60%) or licensed professional counselors (LPC) (n=3; 17.60%), two identified as unlicensed (11.80%) and two identified as other (11.80%). In regard to years in the field, four reported less than 3 years (23.50%), four reported more than 15 years (23.50%), six reported either 3-5 years (n=3; 17.60%) or 5-10 years (n=3; 17.60%), two reported still being in internship year (11.80%) and only one reported 10-15 years (5.90%). Private practice was the most identified professional setting (n=5; 29.40%), followed by outpatient agency (n=3; 17.60%), multiple settings (n=3; 17.60%), other (n=3; 17.60%), university counseling center (n=2; 11.80%) and inpatient facility (n=1; 5.90%).
Educational demographics obtained in this study included highest educational level, semester enrolled in the course, number of multicultural courses taken, and number of immersion experiences. Of the 17 participants included, seven (41.20%) were doctorate students, six (35.30%) identified with master’s degrees, and four identified as either masters students (n=2; 11.80%) or having obtained doctorate degrees (n=2;
Nine of the participants were enrolled in the immersion course in 2015 (n=3; 17.60%), 2016 (n=3; 17.60%) or 2017 (n=3, 17.60%), while four (23.50%) enrolled in 2014 and four (23.50%) enrolled in multiple years for the course. A majority of the participants report having taken only one MC course (n=9; 52.90%), followed by five (n=3; 17.60%), two (n=2; 11.80%), three (n=2; 11.80%) or four (n=1; 5.90%) MC courses. Of the 17 participants, six participants (35.30%) report having two immersion experiences, three participants (17.60%) report having three immersion experiences, three participants (17.60%) having five immersion experiences, two participants (11.80%) having four immersion experiences, one participant (5.90%) having four immersion experiences, and two participants (11.80%) identifying only one immersion experience.

**Research Question I: MCC Influence**

Research question I sought to determine to what extent immersion courses impact self-perceived multicultural competence. In order to gain insight into this aspect of the study, 10-point Likert scale questions were incorporated into the interview guide to get a measure of overall self-perceived MCC, as well as the participant’s insight into how well the immersion course addressed the specific areas of MCC, based on skills, knowledge and awareness. Participants were asked to rate each area on a scale of one to ten, with one being none at all and ten being superior. Table 3 presents the minimum, maximum and mean ratings for each area.
Table 3

*Multicultural Scale Scores*

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall MCC</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Skills</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Knowledge</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Awareness</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to rate self-perceived multicultural competence, participants averaged at a 7.53 out of 10, with the minimum rating being a 5 and the highest rating being a 10. In terms of the course’s impact on specific areas of multicultural competence, the majority of participants (94.10%) agreed that the course had an impact on their multicultural competence. The skills ratings ranged from a three to a ten, averaging at a seven. The knowledge rating has a mean of 7.71, ranging from 3 to 10, while the awareness rating had the highest overall average of 8.35, ranging from five to ten.

Analysis of the interview data also yielded results regarding the impact of the immersion course on MCC influence, resulting in two central themes: a) global awareness and b) self-awareness. The operational definitions of the themes follow, along with examples from the participants.
Global Awareness

13 of the 17 participants recognized global awareness as a direct impact of the immersion experience. Global awareness is defined as the altered perspective students gained from being immersed in an international culture. Many of the responses addressed the direct effect of international travel on a changed mindset as an expected outcome going into the experience. According to Grace, currently still in the internship phase of her career, “… I feel like once you're dropped into someone else's world, you can't help but to change and see other things.” A majority of the participants shared this same notion, though some also acknowledged more specific aspects of change.

A key component of global awareness is a noticeable shift in perspective regarding one’s place in the world. Eight of the participants made mention of their awareness of their how their views expanded in the global sense as a result of traveling. As someone who has been involved in the immersion course more than once, Jasmine shared,

“Any time you travel, it's eye-opening, and it sheds a line on the diversity and differences of cultures in particular. It's always a great refresher. I remember being there and feeling really strong that my perspective is so tiny, and there are so many different perspectives in the world and ways of doing things in our culture, compared to in the States, it was very different. That piece was very eye-opening.”
Exposure to other cultures required many of the participants to recognize their limited schema of cultural differences strictly from an American outlook, as evidenced by Dariea’s take on her experience,

“Prior to the trip, conceptually in the construct of my mind, my multicultural experience was just settings here in America that I had come across. So, just to go someplace that I had no perceived notion of what it would be, helped broaden that lens for me.”

By acknowledging their limited viewpoints, participants generally increased their multicultural awareness of others and themselves, which in turn, directly impacted their overall multicultural competence. As stated by Iris, “When you experience it, it just integrates.”

Self-Awareness

The second emerging theme, self-awareness, refers to the student’s ability to recognize cognitive and emotional biases, perspectives, strengths and weaknesses within themselves. 15 of the participants reported an increase in self-awareness as a byproduct of enrolling in the immersion course. The experience allowed for unexpected awareness for many of the participants, as evidenced by Grace, who stated, “I didn't expect to have so much personal insight”, and Meredith, who said, “I learned about myself, the strengths. The hidden strengths were exposed, and I was like, "I can do this."

One of the main areas of self-awareness for participants centered around their recognition of the need for growth in both professional and personal areas. Ellis shared, “… it gave me a greater awareness of areas of weakness for myself, as well as areas to be
conscious of or things to explore with people”, while Francine was able to note, “I think as far as my own competence, it just made me aware of the issues that I still have. It made me aware of my desire to still fight for justice, for myself and/or others.” For one of the participants, Kay, there was a more specific change in perspective relating to her own biases. Kay shared,

“I don't think I handled it well, just seeing people be really ignorant. Seeing them be ignorant made me passive aggressive … it made me take a look back at why do I think everyone should know how to travel and know how to act? So I realized later that I was kind of making myself be elitist and I wasn't being culturally aware for people in my own community.”

Participants noted that they were grateful for the moments where they were able to step back and consider their need for growth. Quinton said, “I had misconceptions about Amsterdam, Paris, the whole nine yards. I said, "If I have misconceptions … that's a problem with that.” That's a problem with my thought process as to how I've been conditioned to think.” Bailey shared, “You didn't see that as a negative so much as just, it made you more aware of where you needed to grow.”

Self-awareness also presented itself for many participants in the form of a changed perspective of their own personal issues. Halimah shared, “I went there and was like…You can exhale for a second. You don't have to constantly be mindful of your blackness… there was a part of me that felt really jealous and envious at the way they live there.” In a different personal regard, Iris stated,
“I came to this feeling several times on the trip, just how small we are individually, if that makes sense … my perspective opened so much. The things that I was worried about at home, really felt like they got smaller, especially while I was over there.”

The impact of self-awareness towards increased multicultural competence was necessary on a personal level to enhance growth. As stated by Quinton,

“Being able to really explore your own personal narrative, like what makes you you, and this experience added to my narrative. It broadened and expanded my narrative to where it's created ... I still have a desire to learn more.”

Question II: Helping CIs

The second research question sought to determine the particular themes or components of an immersion experience had the most impact on perceived multicultural competence. All seventeen participants identified multiple aspects of the experience that enhanced their self-perceived multicultural competence in significant ways. Of the 301 references complied, three significant themes emerged, a) curriculum design, b) group dynamics, and c) informal immersion. The operational definitions of the themes follow, along with examples from the participants.

Curriculum Design

Of the three emerging themes, curriculum design had the most significant impact among participants as helping critical incidents. Curriculum design is defined as any component of the course purposefully incorporated as part of the experience by the professor. The components of curriculum design were further broken down into
subthemes based on obvious patterns that focus on activity balance, formal immersion and professional exposure. All of the participants pointed to some aspect of curriculum design as meaningful in their experience.

Activity balance. 52.94% (n=9) of the participants noted the importance of activity balance towards a positive, helping theme, specifically while traveling. Activity balance refers to the purposeful flexibility given to participants to balance structured activities and personal exploration. Being allowed such flexibility resonated with a number of the students, including Halimah, a 2017 participant with over 15 years of counseling experience, who stated, “The flexibility in most of the scheduling really gave us a lot of time to kind of make the trip our own, as a group and as an individual, find the things we want to.” Accordingly, Christopher noted, “the class was very clear on what to expect” and Grace agreed, stating,

“I think it was designed very purposefully … I think it was a great balance of free time and of structured activities. We crammed a lot into days, I feel like I got my money's worth. And I grew from the experience.”

The incorporation of flexibility as a component of the curriculum design enhanced the overall competence of a majority of the participants.

Many of the students recognized the activity balance as an intentional element of the curriculum design, specifically noting the professor’s aim to provide a balanced experience. For example, one participant, Quinton, found this approach to be influential in his ability to gain the most from the experience, as evidenced when he said,
“We had plenty of time to do what you want. (The professor) structured it. Again, I don't like to be micromanaged. I loved his approach. His approach was we have our moments to sit down. We'll talk, but then I want you to experience. Go. See something. Go explore something. For me, that was right up my alley.”

By considering what would make the ten-day experience most memorable, the professor was able to recognize the need for both structured and unstructured activity. Meredith was able to sum up many of the participant’s perspective with the following insight,

“From my perspective, it (the trip) was very well-planned, organized. We got to see things beyond the curriculum, and also have some personal time. That helped us to bond with the students, and to understand who we are as students and therapists, who we are going to be. I think that the way he let us be students, be adults at the same time helped. For me it helped to grow a strength in myself.”

Formal immersion. The second subtheme, formal immersion, refers to the structured components of the course intended to immerse the participants in the visiting culture. These parts of the curriculum design focused on incorporating an educational aspect to mainly tourist locations, typically accompanied by assignments meant to engage the participants in intentional processing. 14 of the participants were able to pinpoint critical incidents in this subtheme as helpful towards their multicultural development. As shared by Iris, “You know, just all the places that we went, each one had its own kind of special meaning and influence.”

Museums and tours were considered to be the most impactful in terms of formal immersion for many of the participants. Common places mentioned included the Anne
Frank Museum, the National Museum of Ethnology, the Escher Museum, and the Louvre in Paris. Participants were able to make personal connections with many of the exhibits visited, with 11 of the participants specifically noting a significant cognitive or emotional shift as a direct result of visiting a museum. According to Francine,

“The museum of Ethnography, I think, was probably one of the most if not the most profound experience that I had. It was there that I was able to really make the link between a lot of things that we do in the African-American culture that are also done in countries in Africa. A lot of traditions and a lot of rituals, going to that museum helped me to really be able to establish that link between those that I had not been able to do before. It made me aware, or really open my eyes, to how much of our culture has really been lost.”

While Francine was able to make a stronger connection to her own culture, Kay was able to recognize commonalities between her African-American culture and Jewish culture from visiting the Anne Frank house. Kay noted,

“This is probably going to lend to- it did open my cultural awareness, because as an African-American, I'm big on our history and slavery, right? So even though I hear the stories about the Jewish Holocaust, I still kind of get frustrated as a black person, like okay, I don't hear this much fight about slavery. However, when I went to the Anne Frank Museum, for some reason, that was the highlight for me. I was always comparing them to us, and you know, as a human, I made our struggle worse. And not that either one is worse, I made our struggle worse so I... in order to do that, I had to minimize theirs.”
Not only were participants able to make cultural connections, but many reported personal insights as a direct result of assignments given to accompany their experience at the museums. Nearly half of the participants relayed the significance of visiting the Louvre.

Christopher shared his favorite assignment, stating, “You asked about assignments, there was an assignment where we had to go to the Louvre and find a piece that spoke to us and why.” Meredith agreed with Christopher about the impact of the Louvre assignment, stating, “One life-changing one was... You find one of the artwork and you relate to that. I was able to release stuff that I was kind of dragging along.” Grace shared,

“And then for me, in doing that assignment, I found a really religious piece. And I'd kind of been struggling with finding my own style of religion, and not just what I was raised doing. And there's a painting in the Louvre that really spoke to me. And so once I started writing, I felt like I was able to work through some of that.”

Of the five participants that noted the Louvre assignment, all expressed some spiritual connection to the piece they chose similar to Grace.

Secondary to the tours and museum assignments, part of the formal immersion purposefully structured into the experience were process groups. Seven of the participants noted the time spent in reflection groups as a helpful critical incident. LaToya expounded on the experience, sharing,

“I think it was the Luxembourg Garden … it was so beautiful. But we kind of went around and reflected on our own experiences as well as the things we had been learning and talking about. And I just remember that being impactful, I
guess, because everybody's stories, like the things we thought we knew about them, and just how this impacted them personally, and how that changes your viewpoints as counselors and perspectives.”

Allowing for intentional reflection in the park allowed for students to slow down and process everything explored. As Jasmine said, “There was one moment where we were all sitting in a park, just having a really nice discussion specific to narrative therapy, and just the experience as a whole was nice.”

Professional exposure. The final subtheme of curriculum design involves the structured professional exposure included as part of the formal immersion. For the purpose of this study, professional exposure refers to the structured activities built into the immersion experience to enhance participants’ competence as it directly related to the counseling profession. Eleven participants noted the positive impact of professional exposure as a critical incident.

Participants from every year of the immersion course acknowledged the presentation from Leiden counselors as a helpful critical incident. Participants were given the opportunity to learn about the process and perspective of counseling from an international viewpoint. Jasmine shared, “It was a presentation given by Dutch counselors, and they were talking about their counseling in the Dutch culture ... That piece in particular was very different from American counseling and the way mental health is viewed.” Participants were allowed to ask questions and interact one on one with the Dutch counselors, as noted by Meredith, who stated,
“I was able to talk about techniques, about consoling, what's different that you would do. I had questions about how the component of spirituality comes into counseling for them and how they address it. I still have relationships with these professors we met there, so that was a highlight for me.”

The experience was viewed by those who mentioned it as insightful and positive. Per Iris, “It was just overall a really interesting experience to see your profession in a whole other country, and where they are and how they see things, how they interact with us.”

Though there were varied response from participants regarding which professional incident was most impactful, most took away from every experience with a similar notion as that shared by Ellis, “To also be able to have a better understanding of narrative therapy, which was new for me. It increased my skill level, it increased my awareness … I think those experiences, as well, helped me a lot in shaping the emerging experience and increasing my competence.”

Group Dynamics

The second theme to emerge from research question II as a helpful critical incident was group dynamics. Group dynamics is defined as the interpersonal connections and shared experiences of the group involved in the immersion experience each year, including the professor(s). 14 participants the mentioned the group dynamics as a positive aspect of the immersion experience, with 61 individual references. From those responses, group dynamics is further categorized based on a) shared experiences and b) professor interactions.
All the participants who identified group dynamics as a critical incident towards increased competence made note of group cohesion. As stated by Dariea,

“I feel like there was definitely some group cohesiveness. Of course, you know, I went on a trip with some people who I already knew, but there were other people who I didn't know at all, and I still felt like I was able to build some group cohesiveness with the people that I didn't know.”

Some participants recognized the impact of being involved in a group with so much diverse cultural representation. For example, Bailey said, “I think something that helped is that there were some multiculturalism within the group that went, and I felt that that was helpful. And multicultural as far as ethnicity, and age, and education level.”

Francine, an African-American female, shared,

“… because of the conversations that I have with Caucasian students in the group, it made me really, really for the first time have a firsthand experience with people who just have no clue and hear them say that out of their mouths…. I think that was the first time that I really had a chance to talk to someone, and understand that yeah, they really were unaware. And that they did have a desire to change.”

Like Francine, participants were able to enhance their multicultural experience simply by interacting with their fellow group members. Bailey put it best when she said, “You're bringing a cluster of people together to share an experience, and they're coming from all different walks of life, which always enhances your multicultural thought of other people's experiences.”
Shared experiences. Group dynamics were greatly influenced by participants’ identification of shared experiences. 64.29% (n=9) of those that recognized group dynamics as a critical theme identified shared experiences as a necessary component of building group cohesion. Halimah shared, “To see others experience things for the first time was cool too. And to be able to share that with them.” Meredith has similar sentiments, as she stated, “... some of them had for the first time traveled, to see that how enriching it was for them and how scary it was for them at the same time too. That helps me with compassion.” Dariea had her own input, stating, “Everybody was involved because we were kind of on the side, helping each other process.”

Shared experiences had a great impact towards the level of connection and safety in the group. Olivia shared, “I think that was just so enriching because everybody had a different story and yet still the trip meant so much.” As the immersion experience continued, Francine shared, “Everybody had a chance to share a piece of their story in terms of what was important to us. I think it definitely impacted the trip because we had a chance to, number one, let our guards down.” Feeling safe among group members because of shared experiences impacted not only the cohesion in a positive way, but it enhanced the overall experience of most. Per Ellis, “I felt more relaxed, maybe because I made more connections.”

Professor interactions. While the interactions between group members was important to participants perceptions of the group dynamics as positive, there was as much emphasis in the interaction between the participants and the professor. Eight
participants mentioned critical incidents with their professor as helpful towards multicultural competence. Per Quinton,

“(The professor) structured it. Again, I don't like to be micromanaged. I loved his approach. His approach was we have our moments to sit down. We'll talk, but then I want you to experience. Go. See something. Go explore something. For me, that was right up my alley.”

Aside from the professor’s approach to the group as a whole, some participants noted specific moments where the professor was able to make them feel safe throughout the experience. Iris shared, “I think (he) was really encouraging, just kind of... I guess encouraging is a real concise way to say it, and kind of nice about the whole, this is my first whole thing.” For Olivia, the professors patience went a long way towards her positive experience, as she shared, “He was very caring and direct, but he didn't get to the point of frustration”. Meredith expressed overall gratitude towards the professor for not only his personal interactions, but his commitment towards providing a chance for participants to experience international immersion.

“And here he's doing something so awesome, and maybe he knows a part of it, but I wanted him to know the level of... the depth of that, what he does. There's a depth for it, and I had to go thank him, because it changed my life.”

Informal Immersion

Informal immersion, or the unstructured and personal interactions participants experienced, is the third theme to emerge directly from the identified helpful critical incidents. 15 of the 17 participants noted specific, often spontaneous, moments of
adventure and interaction as positive contributes towards their self-perceived multicultural competence. Participants from all years noted appreciating the cultural differences, specifically in Leiden. Iris noted, “Leiden felt really homey” and Bailey stated, “I felt very welcomed every place that we went, and especially in Holland. I felt very welcomed.”

On a grand scheme, the cultural nuances of Leiden and Paris allowed for some of the participants to expand their worldview of what is considered typical behavior. Bailey shared,

“Being an American and a black American, going to another country, it made me look at the black people there and the differences that I saw, so that was interesting. I'd never been to a European country, so that was different. Seeing their dress, and how they wear their hair, and how they speak, and it was different.”

Witnessing international traditions and customs was eye-opening for Ellis, as evidenced by her statement, “… there were costumes, people were enjoying themselves, they were on house boats and regular boats, just enjoying life. It was just a really interesting experience that showed me what their culture was like. It was very laid back.” Patrice said, “… here in the U.S. it's like the bigger the refrigerator the better. There it was like, no we buy our food fresh every day, so we just need a little small refrigerator.”

Differences became even more apparent as participants fully immersed in everyday activities.
Part of the informal immersion for many participants included taking part in the day-to-day rituals of the international community. Meals and shopping excursions served as critical incidents for some participants. Dariea said, “Even though that was the throw-in, hey, we're just gonna go shopping, it still was reflective to me, in a sense, that just culturally, the differences.” Ava shared, “When we had dinner, I was more aware of what I didn't know was the norm for others but wouldn't necessarily was in the norm for me … something as simple as ordering whatever was on the menu.” Speaking also of the importance of meals, Olivia said, “Like to me, it forced you to realize the importance of having a meal, enjoying the person that you're with, and not be so rushed.” The simple acts of leisure exploration had a large impact on LaToya in the same regard, “Yeah, I think so, when we were out just kind of walking around on our own, going visiting a coffee shop or a bar or something like that. Just going in and talking to people.”

While engaging in informal immersion, some students noticed an overall difference in how the international citizens interacted with each other and visitors as compared to interactions in the United States. Quinton shared, “They're not viewed as citizens. They're viewed as a part of a collective family.” On one specific occasion, several participants were even able to join local citizens in rituals that displayed their collectivism. Christopher said, “We walked to this church that was doing the rehearsals and we got to sing with the choir that was doing, practice some of the stuff. It was a good immersion.” The collective approach stuck with other participants as well, including Iris, who shared, “Just seeing their openness. That was really modeled.”
Informal immersion interactions with international citizens at a personal, one-on-one level seemed to have the most emotional and cognitive impact for many participants. Being accepted and welcomed on an individual level was regarded as a positive critical incident. Grace said, “You know, there was that. Like, they will stand and talk to you, especially if they know you're not from there. And talk with you and give you all the information they can.” Being able to engage in dialogue was helpful for LaToya, who said,

“I think just talking to the people that were there, connecting with some of the locals and things like that, just having little conversations. I think just all their questions and curiosity about our lives back home and our perspectives on things, and what they see and what we feel like is better.”

Interactions on an informal level allowed for a more integrated experience for all 15 of the participants. As shared by Patrice, “You felt more immersed in it because you were able to talk to someone face to face versus just on the outside looking in.”

Question III: Hindering CIs

Research question #III asked participants to identify particular themes or components which were perceived to be a hindrance to the development of their perceived multicultural competence. Only 13 of the 17 participants were able to identify critical incidents that had a negative impact on their immersion experience and competence. After analysis of the 72 responses, three themes emerged as possible hindrances, a) curriculum design, b) group dynamics, and c) informal immersion. As
these themes were operationally defined in the previous research question, this section will focus on the specific impacts from a hindrance perspective.

Curriculum Design

The first theme to emerge as a possible negative impact towards multicultural competence is the issue with the curriculum design. Eleven participants identified critical incidents related to the curriculum design that had a negative impact on their immersion experience such as lack of information regarding cultural traditions and historical perspective. Some participants made note of the lack of detailed information prior to the travel component of the experience. As stated by Bailey,

“I don't think that we were given a lot of information of what to expect per se. Even in a multicultural aspect. Again, it was a foreign country, so we didn't really talk about that country before we got there. So, it was sort of like, "you're going, and you're going to tell us what you're experiencing while you're there," so we weren't really prepared for anything.”

Aside from wanting more general information as it related to the visiting culture, some participants also addressed a lack of knowledge of historical aspects of the experience that were assumed to have been known by all involved. Ava shared, “Anne Frank… this may sound bad, but I really didn't have much of a background in knowing her story because I'm not from here and we didn't really study it.” The lack of detail and instruction was noticed by others in regard to preparedness in other manners as well.

Some participants noted that there was an overall lack of organization that detracted from their time and ability to feel safe to fully immerse. Grace noted, “And just
in general, sometimes our teacher didn't have everything planned out. Like he didn't have
tickets printed out, so we had to wait for the tickets to be printed out, and so on and so
forth.” Christopher shared the same sentiment, stating, “So it's like, if this was done
beforehand, we wouldn't have to worry about it. So just a little kink in the experience is
just like, "Ugh. Why you got me to do this?" It was the general consensus of the
participants that lack of information and organization took away from their immersion
opportunities.

Activity balance. A majority of the participants who identified negative critical
incidents in the area of curriculum design has issue with the level of activity balance. As
defined previously, activity balance refers to the flexibility purposefully incorporated
within the immersion experience. Nine of the 11 participants mentioned hindering
incidents focused on the participants feeling of being rushed and lacking time to take in
all of the new knowledge. Halimah said, “So, everything was limited in terms of time.
We felt rushed. Everything felt rushed”, while Iris has a similar statement, “It really felt
like it was kind of go, go, go.” Some participants mentioned specific incidents where they
felt rushed during assignments, which hindered their ability to fully immerse. Per
Meredith,

“In the museum, the assignment that we had, it should have been maybe he would
have given us more time, and give it to him the next day, or give it to him a
couple of days, something like that. I think that would have been beneficial
because I feel that 30 minutes I would have used to see around. I felt like it was
taken away.”
Not only were the actual assignments affected, but participants expressed an inability to fully process due to time constraints. Ava shared, “we did do a little reflection like when we stopped at certain points, but I don't think that was enough. Like the little five minute, "Ok, we're now here". At some point I felt rushed.”

While time constraints where a point of contention for some, others has concerns about the lack of flexibility allowed for personal immersion. Unlike some participants in the previous question, there were respondents that felt discouraged against exploring their environment on their own time. According to Christopher,

“I think maybe having some level of being able to get into everyday ... a little bit more of everyday culture might have helped. I wanted to kind of get out and see more of what was everyday life like outside of this little block area that we walked or were on. That, I think, might have been where I wanted to explore more, but didn't feel like I had the freedom to do so.”

The lack of personal freedom resonated with a few of the participants, particularly those that felt their age should have allowed for more consideration. Kay stated,

“Not immerse ourselves in the assignment, there were times when we kind of just wanted to ... especially those of us who would think we're adults, over 40, kind of just wanted to have a day to explore the country. But that was stifling to me… to go to a new place and not be able to be a tourist part of the time was frustrating.”

Meanwhile, others saw the lack of flexibility as a hindrance to their professional development, based on their desire to explore relevant immersive experiences that would enhance their knowledge and skill set. Bailey shared,
“Again, the people in my group were going to leave and the professor was like, “What do you mean, you’re going to leave?” I’m a sex therapist. If I choose to go to Amsterdam to a sex museum, I’m able to do that … So, I think that dynamic, we kind of had to get through as well.”

Group Dynamics

Based on the responses given by 11 participants, it is evident that not all involved in the immersion experiences had positive experiences within their group. Eleven participants noted group dynamics to be a hindrance to their immersion and consequent competence. For some participants, lack of group cohesion was noticeable. Jasmine noted, “I would've loved to have had the larger group move more fluidly and more cohesively in that experience”. According to Grace, “I feel like there were cliques within the group” and Ava noted, “…knowing your group too, because you notice the divide, in some ways”, in regard to the separation between master’s and doctorate students. Nia also spoke of the same experience, stating,

“I think it would have just given me the opportunity to get to know faces that I didn't know necessarily before… I really didn't know anybody coming in, but I think it would have been nice to mix it up a little bit.”

While some participants were able to make connections within the divided groups, there were others that were not able to find a good dynamic among other group members. Jasmine shared that she was unable to make those links, “I was uncomfortable in some of the situations, just because I wasn't close to anybody there, or nobody wanted to do exactly what I wanted to do or different have that same set of values.”
Lack of group cohesion led to lack of safety within the group for some participants, much like Jasmine. Bailey shared, “I don't think that the environment was created in the group to feel comfortable to really discuss all the things that were going on.” LaToya also shared this critical component as a hindrance in her immersion, stating, “The group dynamics...detoured me from getting as involved as I wanted to, 'because I didn't feel a real connection with anybody in particular... I don't feel like I had the tools at that time to get the cohesiveness that I was looking for, at least directly... It felt like a missed, not just opportunity... A missed opportunity for connection, really.”

In the opinion of multiple participants, there was a lack of facilitation on the professor’s part to help nurture the group cohesion. Speaking towards the obvious divide she noticed between students at different educational levels, Ava said, “Professor kind of shut down, like he didn't understand what was happening.” LaToya also called into question the role of the professor as facilitator, however noted the responsibility to enhance group dynamics was shared among the students as well. She stated, “I think there was room to bring it up in the group, but I also don't know if the professors that were leading, or facilitating, the group ... felt like that was their place. Or maybe it wasn't. Maybe that was something that only needs to be done within the group of students.”

Informal Immersion

The third theme developed from the question of hindering critical incidents centers around participants experiences while immersed in daily interactions while in an
international environment. Though only four participants noted negative critical incidents while engaging in informal immersion, the theme is significant as it speaks to the possible inability to fully immerse. Four participants shared incidents where they felt unwelcome or unsafe in local environments. Christopher shared, “I felt welcome by the people that I interacted with but as far as walking down the street and stuff like that, there are moments when you feel like you're just in the way.” Meanwhile, Iris shared fear surrounding moments where she momentarily got separated from the group. Of all the responses, Bailey reported several incidents where she was aware of feeling uncomfortable due to her skin tone.

“There were times when I felt discriminated against or looked at differently because I was black. It happened at the museum, it happened when we were in the train station, and they were checking people just to make sure they had tickets…I didn't like that. I didn't feel safe. In that environment (Anne Frank museum), I didn't feel safe…So, I didn't like that at all.”

Question IV: Wishlist Items

The final research question of this study, QIV, seeks to determine what, if any, possible components can be added to the immersion course to enhance students’ perceived multicultural competence. Participants were asked to provide feedback on what they would add to the trip if they were to enroll in the course again. Nine of the participants even addressed the question from the perspective of the professor due to their educational background in the doctorate program for counselor education. Only one participant, Quinton, had no feedback regarding wishlist items, stating he found the
immersion experience to have been perfect the way it was conducted. Of the remaining 16 respondents, two repeating themes emerged from the results, a) curriculum design and b) informal immersion.

Curriculum Design

The majority of responses given for wishlist items to enhance the immersion experience centered around curriculum design. As previously defined, curriculum design refers to the purposeful components of the experience intended to increase knowledge, awareness and skill for the participants. For some participants, the changes were small adjustments that allowed for more student involvement in the itinerary or assignments. For instance, Ava suggested that there be more group discussion before the travels, which allows for more direct understanding for the participants. Ava said, “I would have the students probably fill out some questions that they prior to and submit it and then we spend a class just talking through those points. Because, you won't always know someone's fears or apprehensions about traveling.” Nia would have liked more hands-on experience with narrative therapy, stating, “I think that I could have used a little bit more practice as far as the techniques are concerned”. LaToya also wanted more focus on the narrative process, suggesting participants utilize their own experience as a practice case, “…being able to process how your own narrative fits…”. As a common overall suggestion, many participants noted a change in the type of assignments given while abroad. Francine wished for a more narrative approach, stating, “I think sometimes when you put those questions out there, the student is very busy trying to make sure they give you what it is they're looking for. They're
trying to keep it in APA. They're trying all of these things. I feel like it's richer. I think when you just allow people to talk, and be more flexible with it, and let them freestyle it, then they get to come out. Not just, what's the question, you're trying to answer, but the richness of their experience comes out more. I think people learn more that way. I think students get more experience that way.”

Keeping in line with the issue from Question #3, seven of the participants would add more information pertaining to the cultures of the countries being visited before the actual travel experience. Bailey shared, “A discussion of the culture that we are going into, that we're getting sent to see… Kind of some history of their counseling and how it evolved and all that before we went.” Ava has a similar wish, stating, “We could have done more about the people there and their customs and their practices. We could have had a chance to research some of the places that we went to, have a little bit more hands-on experience.” Christopher suggested a shift in the way classroom time was designed, stating, “I would have a course specific to that culture… because it’s good to cover the nuances. But to have that first class to go over the nuances and the second class to be ... This is narrative, how to fix your story and what we're going to do and assignments and then, "Here's stuff on Leiden. Here's stuff on Amsterdam. Here's stuff on Paris." You're open minded when you get there…and making sure you don't offend culture.”

By most participant’s standards, more information beforehand would have enhanced the immersion experience by allowing for more involvement. Ellis said, “I think that giving
the participants some level of autonomy beforehand, if they have looked things up, or things that they would like to experience, they feel like they've had a hand in what they're doing while they're there.”

Process time. A subcategory specific to the wishlist subtheme of curriculum design is process time. Process time refers to intentional reflection within the group for the purpose of the study. Seven participants noted a true desire to incorporate more time for reflection and process in order to enhance the immersion experience in the future. Iris would add more process time in between major structured moments, as she suggested, “I think if there were just a little bit more time in between each thing that was done, to allow for a little more integration and processing during”. Dariea shared a similar wish in order to integrate her emotions into the experience, stating, “Build in that purposeful process time after each of those things, just to make sure that we had time to actually process what we were feeling”. Some participants were more specific as to how to incorporate more reflection, as evidenced by Ava’s suggestion,

“I felt like even at dinner or something, we could kind of talk a little bit more about what we reflected on the night before, or what we wrote, if people were comfortable enough, you know. I think they should be, especially as counselors.”

As the main objective of the immersion experience is to enhance one’s abilities and skills as a counselor, participants sought to challenge themselves emotionally and intellectually, some more than others.

Professional exposure. Challenging professional exposure was a significant wishlist item for six participants when asked for enhancements to their immersion
experience. Some participants wanted more access and time to explore the counseling field in Leiden. Jasmine shared she would like to actually explore the profession from a student’s perspective,

“Leiden University. I would've loved to, like, been more immersed in that in some capacity. I don't know what that would look like, but I think it's so interesting, seeing other people experiencing university or college life in such a different experience.”

Meanwhile, other participants wanted additional information and interaction with international counselors. LaToya shared, “But I think I would want to know more about the people that we met, their views on therapy, and help, and access to things there that they feel like is accessible to them as an individual.” Halimah said, “The biggest thing is, being able to actually either see counseling being done or doing it ourselves.” In Nia’s opinion, “Just kind of immersing yourself specifically more into the professional aspects, and not just kind of sight seeing what was happening culturally” would be a welcome addition to the immersion experience. Latoya expounded on her wish in detail, stating, “I wanted to know more of their perspectives of what multicultural counseling was... kind of taking the stigma out of counseling for their culture and making things accessible.”

Informal Immersion

The final wishlist theme to emerge from the interviews conducted is informal immersion. As discussed previously, informal immersion refers to the unstructured interactions participants engaged in while immersing in the visiting culture. Eight participants noted they would simply like more flexibility and time to explore the daily rituals of the native citizens. Ellis shared, “I think maybe if there were more opportunities
for emerging in everyday culture instead of tourist culture.” Jasmine also wanted to interact more, as she said, “Being able to eat out more and experience the culture in a more relaxed way would've been really cool.” According to Kay, “You got to give us room to explore, just like if you go on a cruise, you got so ... you have excursion time off the ship. You have to build in that time.” All the participants mentioned one common item as their final wish, more time overseas to immerse themselves and soak up the experience.

Summary

17 participants were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Demographic information was collected regarding the participants personal, professional and educational background and presented in the first section of this chapter. This study sought to answer four primary questions utilizing coded responses from the interviews. Combining Likert scale data and narrative data, two themes, global awareness and self-awareness, were extracted to address the first question regarding the impact of immersion on multicultural competence. Critical incidents of immersion experiences that were deemed helpful were broken into three themes, curriculum design, group dynamics, and informal immersion. The themes of curriculum design, group dynamics, and informal immersion were also drawn from the third question of this study, identifying critical incidents that were considered a hindrance to self-perceived MCC. The fourth and final question of possible enhancements of an immersion experience were distinguished by themes of curriculum design and informal immersion. Based on the results in this
chapter, Chapter 5 will address the conclusions, discussion, limitations and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a final discussion of the study conducted. The first section will serve as a summary of the purpose, methodology, research questions and results. Discussion of the findings and their implications will then be presented, followed by limitations of the study. The next section will discuss recommendations for future applications and research. This chapter will conclude with a final summary of the research presented.

The purpose of this study was to explore which aspects of immersion courses, if any, contribute to multicultural competence from the perspective of the trainee. Applying a qualitative design, the research sought to identify critical incidents that occurred during a purposefully designed immersion course. 17 participants from a private, southeastern university, all of whom had enrolled in a summer immersion course during the 2014-2017 academic years, were interviewed. Participants were asked to identify critical incidents or moments from their experience and from those responses, themes were formed to answer the questions raised.

Q1: To what extent do immersion courses have an impact on self-perceived multicultural competence?

Findings: The majority of participants agreed that immersion has a positive impact on self-perceived multicultural competence. Upon further investigation, awareness was
highly rated, with qualitative analysis suggesting that global and self-awareness were specific areas of growth.

Q2: What particular themes or components of an immersion experience had the most impact on perceived multicultural competence?

Findings: Participants considered components of curriculum design, group dynamics and informal immersion to be helpful towards developing their multicultural competence.

Q3: What particular themes or components were perceived to be a hindrance to the development of perceived multicultural competence?

Findings: Issues with curriculum design, group dynamics and informal immersion emerged as a hindrance towards self-perceived multicultural competence among participants.

Q4: What, if any, possible components can be added to the immersion course to enhance students’ perceived multicultural competence?

Findings: In an effort to enhance the immersion experience and positively impact multicultural competence, participants would add components of curriculum design, such as more process time and professional exposure, and informal immersion to the course.

Review of Findings

Immersion Impact on Multicultural Competence

The first question sought to determine the extent of immersion courses impact, if any, on self-perceived multicultural competence. Based on the results from the 10-point Likert scale questions, involvement in the immersion course had a positive impact on multicultural competence, specifically in the area of awareness. This finding became
even more evident based on the qualitative evidence that supported the themes of global awareness and self-awareness.

Global awareness. Global Awareness, ones’ perspective of culture and identity on a global scale, was a prevalent theme among participants in this study. Directly linked to increased multicultural competence, global awareness is often reported as a byproduct of immersion (Dericco & Sciarra, 2005; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Proseck & Michel, 2016). Christopher noted the impact of immersion as an enhancement, stating “I got to actually be in the culture. It’s one thing to read it and see it, but actually being in it helps out a lot because I feel I’m hands on”. A counselor’s ability to understand from a global perspective increases their ability to address the needs of clients from different cultures more readily. According to Proseck and Michel (2016), students who report global awareness from immersion often see a direct link in both personal and professional areas. The notion is evident from Latoya’s perspective, as she specifically noted that the immersion experience “forced me to broaden my perspectives on what multicultural counseling means and competency means”. The findings of this study suggest that by becoming more globally aware, participants are also becoming more competent.

Self-awareness. Participants of this study reported an increase in self-awareness from aspects of their immersion experience. A counselor’s understanding of themselves in terms of their perspective, biases, strengths, and weaknesses are crucial to their level of multicultural competence. With the exception of two participants, increased self-awareness was explicitly mentioned as recognizable consequence of the immersion experience. Ava was able to recognize her lack of patience personally and professionally,
while Iris was able to recognize her own growth outside of the group. Francine shared, “It made me aware of my desire to still fight for justice, for myself and or others”. Increased self-awareness has been associated with immersion experiences in many studies (Dericco & Sciarra, 2005; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Proseck & Michel, 2016), so this finding matches current literature, from a participant’s perspective.

Critical Incidents

The final three research questions sought to determine specific themes and components associated with immersion that participants considered either impactful, detrimental or desired towards building their multicultural competence. Critical components of an immersion experience deemed to have the most impact on multicultural competence were the curriculum design, group dynamics, and informal immersion. As an interesting development, participants overall identified similar themes as both helpful and hindering in every aspect. For the purpose of this section, the themes will be discussed as they pertain to their significance for immersion courses instead of the questions individually.

Curriculum design. Curriculum design, or anything purposely structured as part of the immersion experience, had a great impact on the development of multicultural competence. Through structured activities like museums, tours, and reflection groups, participants were able to increase their multicultural competence in areas of awareness and knowledge. For example, Francine shared the impact of visiting a museum as, “It was there that I was able to really make the link between a lot of things that we do in the African-American culture that are also done in countries in Africa. It really opened my
Professional exposure through the interactions and conferences from international counselors allowed participants to grow as counselors in all areas of multicultural competence. Ava, Bailey, Christopher, Ellis, Halimah, and Jasmine all mentioned their experience with international counselors as an impactful aspect of their travels. Barden & Cashwell (2013) also found structured activities and professional interactions as a critical factor in the literature review of immersion impact. The findings from this study suggest that students would benefit from having a clear understanding and knowledge of the location and activities planned prior to the actual immersion.

Participants benefitted from a balance of both structured activities and free time to explore the culture they visited. Meredith shared, “From my perspective, it was very well-planned, organized. We got to see things beyond the curriculum, and also have some personal time… it helped to grow a strength in myself.” Participants who reported a well-balanced experience recognized its positive effects on their ability to get the most from the course, however, when structured activities dominated the immersion experience, participants were unable to fully immerse in the experience. Both Kay and Grace noted a hinderance towards their immersion experience due to activity overload. Research suggests a balance in activity type was an important aspect of immersion (Barden & Cashwell, 2013). Finally, it is suggested that frequent process time should be incorporated at both levels of activity (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Derrico & Sciarra, 2005), which is evident based on over 40% of wishlist responses from participants focusing on the need to process.
Group dynamics. Participants held group dynamics in high regard as an impactful component of immersion experiences. Engaging in group cohesion among other students involved in the immersion course had a positive impact on participants multicultural competence. According to Francine, “I think it definitely impacted the trip because we had a chance to, number one, let our guards down.” Shared experiences increased the sense of connection and safety within the group, which allowed participants to take risks necessary for transformative learning to take place. Barden and Caswell (2013) also found group dynamics to be a critical factor in immersion experiences, while Proseck and Michel (2016) noted findings of increased multicultural competence as a result of students having shared experiences. Participants unable to make connections within the group, such as Latoya, reported feeling unsafe and were able to note the effect it had on their involvement. She shared, “I don’t feel like it was as transformative as to who I am…cause I didn’t feel a real connection with anybody in particular”. which supports the research.

Participants also attributed their level of connection within the group to the positive interactions with the professor. Iris noted the professor as “encouraging”, while Olivia shared the professor’s “caring and direct” nature as a positive element of the experience. Instructor support has been discussed as a critical element in positive immersion (DeRicco & Sciarro, 2005). Participants unable to positively engage in shared experiences within the group often expressed the desire that the professor had been able to facilitate a better group dynamic. Bailey, Ellis and LaToya shared their disappointment at missed opportunities for cohesion as a result of poor facilitation. Ellis noted that the
professor "shut down, like he didn’t know what was happening” during an emotional charged moment during her trip, which affected her ability to trust the group. According to Barden and Caswell (2013), empirical evidence suggests that the facilitator, in this case the professor, should play an active role in creating safety in the group by being aware of group dynamics and encouraging risk taking among participants, while also taking into account personality factors as possible deterrents. Participants in this study reported safety when they were able to actively engage with the professor and were encouraged to discuss any concerns or fears.

Informal immersion. Engaging in informal immersion, the unstructured, daily ritual interactions within the visiting culture, was a helpful component for participants in some capacity. Quentin credited his time exploring and interacting with the locals as the most influential component of his travels. “I’m very experiential, so the experience in itself, stepping foot into Holland or Amsterdam, Paris, for a brief moment. The interactions were dope.” Frequent and direct contact within the visiting culture was cited as the most critical component of immersion (Barden & Cashwell, 2013) and has been directly associated with increased multicultural competence (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012). Participants most common requests or issues centered around either their lack of time within the community or their lack of preparedness to properly immerse in the visiting culture. Olivia addressed this need, stating, “Somehow to make it a through and through experience, not just a brief experience” while Ellis shared a similar viewpoint, adding that “I think that might have
helped enrich the experience some.” Informed and frequent informal immersion appears to be a critical factor for increased multicultural competence based on the findings.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that immersion courses impact multicultural competence, particularly areas of global and self-awareness, through factors of curriculum design, group dynamics and informal immersion. Viewed through the theoretical framework of transformative learning, immersion allows for participants to change their perspective of multicultural counseling and challenge their competence because of the emotional and cognitive shifts they have experienced. Transformative learning through immersion increased multicultural competence by challenging counseling students emotionally and cognitively (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Murphy, Park, & Lonsdale, 2006). Immersion promotes critical thinking and allows for more creativity as a result of increased self-awareness (Ivers, Ivers, & Duffey, 2013), which allows for counselors to better adapt to work with multicultural clients.

This study adds to the available literature by filling gaps in immersion research in a number of ways. From the 24 articles reviewed regarding immersion, only seven specifically focused on critical components of the course design itself. Of those seven, three articles reviewed possible critical factors from a theoretical or metanalysis framework (Barden & Cashwell, 2013; Delsignore, et al., 2010; Ivers, Ivers & Duffy, 2013), while the remaining four collected narrative data from participants to make inferences regarding factors. The results from this study are compiled specifically to gather first hand perception of the critical incidents from students.
Barden & Caswell (2013) noted factors of curriculum design, group dynamics and informal immersion as critical to the immersion experience, however, the study was conducted as a review of theoretical research articles. By design, participants in this study were intentionally asked to identify components critical to their multicultural competence. By doing so, this researcher was able to confirm critical factors from actual participants in an immersion course that ensure a positive immersion experience. Participants identified various critical incidents, such as process time and curriculum design, as helpful from some and a hindrance for others. This paradox sheds light on the importance of these critical factors as a standard implementation in immersion courses.

This study also serves to fill the gap in research by conducting interviews of participants from multiple years of the same immersion course, allowing for common incidents to be considered. The interviews specifically address what students find critical towards their own self-perceived multicultural competence, while previous research has used case studies, groups, or journals as sources to infer critical factors (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; DeRicco & Sciarrra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Hipolito-Delgato, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2013; Ishii et al., 2009; McDowell, Goessiling, & Melendez, 2012; Platt, 2012; Prosek & Michel, 2016). By obtaining insight into components of immersion courses from the students themselves, the impact of immersion on multicultural competence has more validity.

Limitations

No study is without limitations, specifically when utilizing qualitative methods. The use of interviews from a private, southeastern university about a course led by the
same professor over a number of years does not allow for generalizability across all immersion courses. The sampling method and availability of participants are also limitations to be considered. Purposive, snowballing sampling was an effective method; however, some participants may have had biases regarding the experience or multicultural courses in general that drew them specifically to the study. As an incentive to travel abroad for the first time, many students were offered a partial scholarship, which may have influenced their motivation for the immersion experience. Participants may have purposely minimized any critical incidents as a result of self-reporting bias and their advanced training. Nine of the participants have taken advanced doctorate courses which suggest a higher understanding of curriculum design that may have contributed to biased responses. Consideration of the possible altered memories due to time lapse since the experience may also serve as a limitation. Finally, the researcher’s role as a former participant in the immersion course, potential dual relationships, and sole researcher for this study cannot be overlooked as a potential limitation.

Recommendations

Based on the finding in this study, the following recommendations are presented for future counseling education curriculum design and research in the area of multicultural competence and immersion.

Counselor Educators

The three recommendations for the future design of immersion courses within counselor education programs concern student feedback, attention to group dynamics and preparing students properly for immersion. Immersion courses would benefit greatly
from involving more student feedback immediately following the immersion experience.

Follow up interviews and surveys specifically targeted to determine what was effective or ineffective during the experience can assist in continuous evaluation of the course curriculum for future students. Secondly, it is recommended that the facilitator or professor consider all aspects of group dynamics, from size of the class to personality interactions, when designing the curriculum and activity structure. Group dynamics was the second most referenced critical factor, with over 80 mentions among all 17 participants. Adopting the position of group leader may allow for proper attention to be given to the development of group cohesion and safety, which finding suggests impacts participants’ immersion. Finally, it is suggested that the pre-planning stage of the immersion experience is a thorough as the actual immersion. As a wishlist item, many participants expressed a desire to have more knowledge and input prior to traveling. Ava noted, “We could have had a chance to research some of the places that we went to, have a little bit more hands-on experience with that versus being given an itinerary.” Students should be well prepared and knowledgeable regarding the customs, history and traditions of the visiting country prior to immersing, in an effort to increase their comfort level with taking a risk at full immersion. By continuously incorporating students’ feedback, immersion courses can have a significant and consistent impact on multicultural competence.

Future Research

Future research is needed to determine how counselor education programs can implement and successfully evaluate the effectiveness of immersion in curriculum to
increase multicultural competence. One recommendation is to replicate this study on a larger scale, extending across the country to find participants willing to provide qualitative data regarding the effectiveness of immersion towards multicultural competence. By incorporating CIT feedback immediately following immersion courses, not only will the sample size increase, but the accuracy will be more valid. It would also be beneficial to add to the study by utilizing student journals, surveys, and even scales of multicultural competence available to get a more objective sense of the critical incidents present, while decreasing self-reporting bias. Finally, it would be prudent to incorporate more triangulation by having a team approach and controlling for dual relationships and interviewer bias.

Conclusion

Multicultural competence is a necessity for current and future counselors to meet the increasing demand of culturally diverse populations. Immersion has been considered an effective method of teaching counselor trainees due to its ability to positively influence the cognitive and emotional growth necessary to promote global awareness and self-awareness (Prosek and Michel, 2016). When creating immersion courses, educators should pay careful attention to critical factors of curriculum design, group dynamics, and informal immersion (Barden & Cashwell, 2013). This study bridges the gap in the counseling literature by providing evidence of immersion as an effective learning model specifically from a students’ perspective. As educators and program coordinators seek to create successful curriculum that meet the standards of multicultural needs of society, it is
apparent that immersion can be a powerful method of instruction when designed with the students’ needs in mind.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

MERCER INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER
Friday, February 9, 2018

Ms. Mercianna R. Oliver
Mercer University
College of Health Professions
3001 Mercer University Dr
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: The Impact of Immersion Courses on Self-Perceived Multicultural Competence (H1801026)

Dear Ms. Oliver:

On behalf of Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 16-Jan-2018 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with Federal Regulations 21 CFR 56.110(b) and 45 CFR 46.110(b) [for expedited review] and was approved under category(ies) 06, 07 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 09-Feb-2018. The protocol expires on 08-Feb-2019. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

**Item(s) Approved:**

New Student Application for a qualitative design study using semi-structured, one-on-one personal interviews with the participants to gather information from Mercer University students who have enrolled immersion courses and the impact critical incidents experienced while studying abroad has had on their competence as counselors.

**NOTE:** Please report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and **ALL** accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our **Satisfaction Survey** and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

[Signature]

Ava Chambless-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CMM
Associate Director of Human Research Protection Programs (HRPP)
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization’s (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone: 478-301-4101 | Email: IRB Mercer@Mercer.edu | Fax: 478-301-2329
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001
APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE LETTER
Dear Participant,

My name is Mercianna R. Oliver. I am a doctoral candidate in Penfield College’s Counselor Education and Supervision program at Mercer University-Atlanta Campus. I am conducting a qualitative research study about the impact of immersion courses on former counseling students’ self-perceived multicultural competence. This letter is to inform you of this research and to ask for your contribution by participating in a semi-structured, face-to-face, audiotaped interview. Mercer University’s IRB requires investigators to provide informed consent to the research participants.

**Title of Project:** The Impact of Immersion Courses on Self-Perceived Multicultural Competence

**Student Investigator Name:** Mercianna R. Oliver, MS, LPC, NCC

**E-Mail Contact Information:** mercianna.renee.oliver@live.mercer.edu

Participation in the study is open to former Mercer University Counseling Program students enrolled in an immersion course between the years 2014-2017, at all counselor levels (counselors in training, unlicensed counselors, provisionally licensed counselors, and fully licensed counselors).

If you would like to participate or have any questions or concerns pertaining to this study, please contact me further at the email noted above.

Mercer University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the study #1180102 and approved it on 07-Feb-2018.

If you have any questions about your rights or are dissatisfied at any time with any part of the study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (478) 301-4101 or email at ORC_Research@Mercer.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation in this research!

Mercianna R. Oliver, MS, LPC, NCC
Doctoral Candidate | Counselor Education and Supervision
Penfield College | Mercer University

Mercer University IRB
Approval Date: 02/09/2018
Protocol Expiration Date: 02/08/2019
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT
Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: The Impact of Immersion Courses on Self-Perceived Multicultural Competence
Student Investigator Name: Mercianna R. Oliver, MS, LPC, NCC
E-Mail Contact Information: mercianna.renee.oliver@live.mercer.edu
Faculty Advisor: Suneetha B. Manyam, PhD, LPC

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted through Mercer University. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Purpose of the Research
This research study is designed to explore the impact of international immersion courses on a counseling students’ self-perceived competence with multicultural clients. The information from this study will be used to identify specific components of course design that help to increase a student’s multicultural competence.

Procedures
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured, face-to-face, audiotaped interview. Your participation will take up approximately a total of one (1) hour of your time. The interview will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience, preferably one that allows for privacy, comfort, and minimal interruptions.

Potential Risks or Discomforts
While there are no foreseeable risks associated with this study due to the minimal level of risk associated with participation, there is a possibility you may experience some mild discomfort. This discomfort could be physical, psychological, or emotional, as you will be asked about your perceptions with regard to a specific experience and memory. If you experience discomfort at any time, you have the right to cease participation in the interview temporarily or permanently.

Potential Benefits of the Research
There are no costs to participate in this study. You will gain insight into your experience as a counseling student, your multicultural competence and your effectiveness as a counselor. Your shared narrative will help to fill a gap in the literature regarding effective
curriculum planning for counseling students. The research will also benefit society by increasing effective training for counselors who may encounter diverse populations.

**Confidentiality and Data Storage**
Your interview will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be used in the study. All participants will be assigned a pseudonym and all findings will be summarized and categorized into themes when reporting the results of the study. The audiotapes and data will be digitized and stored in a secured file and can be assessed by only the investigator for at least three years after completion of study.

**Participation and Withdrawal**
Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. You will not be penalized if you choose to terminate participation.

**Questions about the Research**
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact the student investigator Mercianna R. Oliver at mercianna.renee.oliver@live.mercer.edu or the faculty advisor Dr. Suneetha B. Manyam at manyam_sb@mercer.edu.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

☐ I consent to being audiotaped  ☐ I do not consent to being audiotaped

___________________________________________  ______________________________________
Signature of Research Participant                  Date

___________________________________________  ______________________________________
Participant Name (Please Print)                    Date

___________________________________________  ______________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent              Date

Rev.08/19/2010
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Penfield College
Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision Program
Interview Guide

Participant: ______________________________________

Referred By: ______________________________________

Immersion Course Location: __________________________ Semester: ______________

Demographics

Sex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Age Range:

|       | 20-25 | 26-35 | 36-49 | 50+ |

Race/Ethnicity:

Asian/Pacific Islander Black/African American
Hispanic/Latino American Indian/ Native American
Biracial/Multiracial White/ Caucasian
Middle Eastern Other________

Professional Level:

Counselor in Training LPC
LAPC Unlicensed Counselor

Years of Experience in the Field:

Internship Only 5-10 Years
0-3 Years 10-15 Years
3-5 years 15+ Years

Educational Level:

Master’s Student PhD Student
Master’s Degree Doctorate Degree

Number of Multicultural Courses Taken: _____

Number of Previous Immersion Experiences: ______

Professional Setting:

Correctional Facility
Outpatient MH/SA Agency
Inpatient MH/SA Facility
Private Practice
University Counseling Center
Other_________________
Prompts

Q1: How would you rate your overall MCC on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being none at all, and 10 being Superior?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q2: Would you attribute some development of your MCC to your experience in the immersion course?

Yes No

Q3: Please elaborate on why you gave that answer.

Q4: How would you rate the course’s focus in terms of helping to develop your skills, knowledge, and awareness in terms of MCC?

Skills

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Knowledge

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Awareness

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q5: What specific incidents during the immersion course itself were most influential to the development of your multicultural development? Why do you feel those were so impactful/helpful? Please elaborate with specific examples and thoughts/feelings about the incident. (Who, What, Where, When, How?)

CI #1:
Q6: What specific incidents during the immersion course itself may have hindered the development of your multicultural development? Why do you feel those were so impactful? Please elaborate with specific examples and thoughts/feelings about the incident. (Who, What, Where, When, How?)

Q7: If you could change or add more to the course that would have directly aided in your MCC development, what would it be? Please elaborate with specific examples and thoughts/feelings about the incident. (Who, What, Where, When, How?)
WL #2:

WL #3:

Q8: Is there anything else you were like to add? Do you have any questions or concerns for clarification?
APPENDIX E

FIGURE E
## Figure E Case Summaries of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Professional Level</th>
<th>Years in Field</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Professional Setting</th>
<th># of Courses</th>
<th># of Internships</th>
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<td>26-28</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>LPC</td>
<td>5-10 Years</td>
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<td>African-American</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
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<td>Multiple</td>
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<td>African-American</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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