

Meeting the Psychoeducational Needs of Ethnic Minority Students: A Discussion of the Necessity of Multicultural Competence

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ABSTRACT: In addition to a critique of the primary components of Frisby's article, the value of multicultural competence and training school psychologists is defended. Although acknowledging some weaknesses concerning the value of multicultural competence, these problems should not overshadow the continuous efforts of the researchers who address the challenges, such as conceptualization of multiculturalism in school psychology and identifying critical competencies; responsive training in school psychology; and evidence-based practices in critical areas such as assessment, consultation, and systems-level interventions with culturally diverse students and their schools and communities. Therefore, we argue that what our field needs is to improve multicultural research, teaching, and practice rather than abandon multiculturalism.

Both the lead article (Frisby, 2015) and the book *Meeting the Psychoeducational Needs of Minority Students: Evidence-Based Guidelines for School Psychologists and Other School Personnel* (Frisby, 2013) provoked our thoughts on the necessity of multicultural competency in meeting the psychoeducational needs of all children, especially the vulnerable. A prominent theme of both revolves around the need to challenge the current practice of multiculturalism in organizations and training programs as well as the usefulness of the preservice training of cultural competence for personnel in poor urban schools.

As members of the school psychology community, we agree that discussion and debate are signs of a healthy and dynamic profession. As bilinguals involved with culturally and linguistically diverse populations, we are interested in joining this discussion and sharing our thoughts. Our discussion focuses on the necessity of multicultural competence in serving minority students, the need of critical thinking from a sociohistorical perspective in the consumption of research literature, and review of outcome data. We hope such discussion will broaden our perspectives on cultural competence among school psychologists.

What interested us the most is Frisby's systematic analysis of the problems of current practice of multiculturalism in our field. Some outstanding problems listed are superficial multiculturalism practice and training that is not connected to reality in urban schools; sociopolitical multiculturalism

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that enforces conformity; lack of scientific attitude toward multiculturalism such as not examining the assumptions of multicultural school psychology or the usefulness of cultural competence training; and lack of empirical support to cultural competence training from well-designed outcome studies. Based on his observations and analyses, Frisby believes that the ideas of multiculturalism and developing cultural competence have nothing to do with actual practices that result in positive outcomes for ethnic minority students in poor urban schools. It should be noted that the outcomes discussed by Frisby are primarily educational achievement. Outcomes of psychological well-being of ethnic minority children are not addressed although the focus of the article is “helping” children.

Based on our experiences and awareness of the current literature, we agree that many of the problems discussed by Frisby exist and deserve attention from our field. We believe that this suggests the importance of self-awareness of both the meanings (beliefs and values), practices of our own culture, and gaining more knowledge about the meanings and practices of different cultures in order for school psychologists to help the multicultural activities in schools to go beyond the superficial level. However, the problems in the current multiculturalism practice, training, and research should not overshadow the contributions of multicultural policy, research, teaching, and practice to the improvement of the life of ethnic minorities in the United States. Nor should these problems overshadow the continuous efforts of the researchers who address the challenges, such as conceptualization of multiculturalism in school psychology and identifying critical competencies; responsive training in school psychology; and evidence-based practices in critical areas such as assessment, consultation, and systems-level interventions with culturally diverse students and their schools and communities. Therefore, we argue that what our field needs is to improve multicultural research, teaching, and practice rather than abandon multiculturalism. We do not want to throw out the baby with the bathwater.

MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE: A NECESSITY

Based on our own observations in schools and research, we believe multicultural competence of school personnel is necessary. Multiculturalism is rooted in a consensus of research and theories in cultural anthropology and in cultural and cross-cultural psychology. For instance, in their article about alternative cultural pathways of child development, Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, and Maynard (2000) conducted a comprehensive review of cultural and developmental research studies and illustrated how universal developmental tasks and cultural learning lead to two well-known cultural orientations, independence and interdependence in individuals, which they named cultural pathways. Greenfield and colleagues integrated three different approaches of theories in cultural psychology: the ecocultural (e.g., Whiting & Whiting, 1960; Whiting and Edwards, 1988), sociohistorical (e.g., Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1990; Vygostsky, 1962), and value approaches (e.g., Goodnow, 1988; Greenfield & Bruner, 1966; Harkness & Super, 1996) to discuss how each cultural pathway “results from a value orientation that generates the construction of socializing practices in particular situations” (Greenfield et al., 2000, p. 466) as an adaptation to the different environmental conditions and constrains. The important message from studies like this is that there is abundant empirical research and sound theories in fields outside of school psychology that serve as the foundation for multiculturalism within school psychology. School psychologists should caution themselves that although they are helping professionals who apply skills more often, they should not neglect the foundational psychological theories and research in other disciplines. In fact, researchers have called for integrating theories and research in related fields into school psychology practice and training (Lopez & Bursztyn, 2013; Pianta, 2009).

Multicultural competence is henceforth important to helping professionals such as school psychologists and counselors who work in schools with an increasing population of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In this discussion, multicultural competence includes cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. First, awareness of their own worldviews, values, biases, and cultural norms about human behavior and awareness of the differences between theirs and their students’ worldviews, cultural values and norms, and ecological systems are necessary for these school psychologists and counselors to

understand and evaluate behaviors of culturally diverse students. Without such awareness, children from different cultures are often misunderstood. In a recent study, Chinese-American and immigrant students reported that frequent intercultural misunderstandings at school and home were a major source of stress (Li & Li, in press). Some behaviors that reflect Chinese cultural values and norms were misinterpreted at school. For instance, being quiet in class was interpreted as lack of participation, and looking down when criticized by authorities was viewed negatively despite the fact that the student was brought up to show respect to adults by looking down quietly. Similarly, some behaviors that reflect Western cultural values and norms were misinterpreted at home. For instance, calling older siblings by their first names was viewed as disrespectful. In another recent study of school report cards of students from four ethnic backgrounds, Ni and Li (2013) found cultural differences in teachers' narrative evaluations of students in nonacademic areas. Overall, African American students from low-income families had poorer narrative evaluations than Caucasian students from middle-class families. Significantly more African American students received negative comments on the areas of social development and classroom behaviors than Caucasian students even after controlling other influential variables (gender, family income, and academic achievement). The study calls for awareness of implicit cultural values and norms and their potential impact on evaluations of nonacademic areas of racially and culturally different students. Such awareness should extend beyond the individual level to the school system level, including the school culture and established norms. Multicultural awareness thus is an essential component in supporting the educational, developmental, and psychological well-being of ethnic minority students.

Acquiring multicultural knowledge is also essential for serving ethnic minority children. Such knowledge includes the sociohistorical development of the ethnic groups in the United States and theories and research that help advance understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Frisby seems to downplay the value of learning multicultural theories, but these theories help us understand ethnic minorities from different cultural and socioeconomic environments. For instance, theories on racial-cultural identity development (e.g., Sue & Sue, 2013), multiracial identity development (e.g., Roots, 1996), acculturation stress (e.g., Berry, 1997), and feminist ecological theory of human nature (e.g., Ballou, Matsumoto, & Wagner, 2002) have direct implications for understanding, assessment, and counseling of racial and cultural minorities. Research on life experiences of various cultures and immigration (e.g., McCubbin & Marsella, 2009); cultural research on cognition (e.g., Abrantes & Hanenberg, 2011); cognitive assessment and tests (e.g., Verney, Granholm, Marshall, Malcarne, & Saccuzzo, 2005; Mindt et al., 2008); and social, emotional, and behavioral assessment and tools (e.g., Butcher, Cheung, & Kim, 2003; Ni, Li, & Zhao, 2014; Suzuki & Ponterotto, 2008) all help the understanding of ethnic minority students and inform school professionals' efforts for culturally appropriate services for them. They also help us gain insight of how to match our teaching style to different students' cognitive and learning style.

Furthermore, knowledge of the process of second language acquisition and its implications for student learning in the classroom (Cummins, 1984) can help educators better understand their English language learning (ELL) students. If educational policy makers knew that it typically takes 5–7 years to develop cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP; Cummins, 1984), that it may take 7–10 years to develop CALP if a child has no prior schooling or has no support in native language development (Collier, 1995), and that there is a strong relationship between language proficiency and academic test scores, then they might not require the ELL students to take the high school exit examinations, which unintentionally discriminate against ELL students (Li et al., 2014). If teachers know the implications of ELL for students learning in the classroom, then they will be less likely to mistake the needs of ELL as a basis for a learning disability (Li & Wang, 2014).

In addition to multicultural awareness and knowledge, multicultural skills are also essential for serving ethnic minority children. In terms of multicultural skills, we agree with Frisby that our field needs clear and specific guidelines about how to adapt and develop cultural skills as well as research that provides evidence for the efficacy of the skills taught in the training programs. That said, we also want to attend to the progress in specifying multicultural skills. One of the milestones in this area is that Rogers and Lopez (2002) identified a list of 45 critical multicultural competency skills organized into 10 areas based on the input from a national sample of school psychology practitioners, faculty, and supervisors and

administrators who were considered cultural experts. The study resulted in a clearly laid out list of multicultural skills that could be used to guide multicultural training and professional development. There are also efforts on conceptualizing multiculturalism and translating it into evidence-based practice in different areas of school psychological services. For example, Ingraham (2000) proposed a comprehensive framework for multicultural school consultation that advanced articulation of cultural issues that affect school consultation with ethnic minority students and teachers. This framework was well illustrated in a qualitative study about the process of graduate students' consultation with experienced teacher consultees in a multicultural context (Ingraham, 2003).

Another advance in the area of multicultural skills is exemplified by the efforts for the nondiscriminatory assessment (e.g., Ortiz, 2012), which is “a wide range of approaches that collectively seek to uncover as fairly as possible relevant information and data upon which decisions regarding functioning and performance can be equitably based” (p. 1). This method describes cultural competence as fundamental in the assessment process (Ortiz, 2012, p. 4), which includes assessing the educational environment, language proficiency, opportunity for learning, educationally relevant cultural and linguistic factors, and various other practices (p. 9). Research on the efficacy of methods of nondiscriminatory assessment is emerging. Meanwhile, multicultural issues in evidence-based interventions are raised (e.g., Ingraham & Oka, 2006). In consideration of both the aforementioned progress and the problems Frisby pointed out, we think our field should strive for well-designed efficacy studies to inform the training of multicultural skills. We also need more researchers to dedicate to theoretical and critical thinking pertaining to multicultural competence in school psychology.

MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE: A NEED FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

Although emphasizing the necessity of having evidence and empirical research to support multicultural policies, training, and practice, Frisby has neglected evidence from research outside of school psychology. For instance, Frisby perceives *cultural competence* and *social justice* as invented terms that suit the sociopolitical agenda. However, many of the multicultural issues have been evidenced by empirical studies in child development, education, sociology, political science, and various branches of psychology (e.g., Bull, Fruehling, & Chattergy, 1992; Eveleth & Tanner, 1990; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Kurasaki, Okazaki, & Sue, 2002; Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003). Thus, the field of school psychology might have blocked the window to the greater world of science and research by disconnecting from other disciplines. Compared to the aforementioned disciplines that attend to both empirical evidence and theories, the school psychology field seems to be narrowing its scope by focusing only on applicable practices and skills called *empirically based practice*. Training programs consequently have catered to teach professional skills only, which leads students to believe that school psychologists do not need to know theories and research. The disconnection between skills and theories is pointed out by Pianta (2009), which provided a detailed discussion about the need for the school psychology field to connect skills to theories in developmental psychology, social psychology, and allied fields of study. The field of school psychology could benefit from learning about theories developed by other relevant disciplines, such as counseling, cultural and cross-cultural psychology, developmental psychology, educational psychology, education, sociology, and political science regarding why multicultural competence is needed in the contemporary society. It might be this disconnection that contributed to the impression that multiculturalism is only a sociopolitical ideology without research support. It is true that research has not led to solutions to all multicultural issues.

APPRECIATION OF RESEARCH: A NEED FOR A SOCIOHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Frisby listed the implicit doctrines of sociopolitical ideologies versus objective empiricism. We think the specifics of this discussion are helpful to readers, but it must be noted that a

critical examination of the research literature itself is missing. For a critical examination of research literature from a sociohistorical perspective, our first question for the author would be: Is there really objective empiricism independent of cultural, class, and historical context?

Objectivity is relative instead of absolute in research. One perspective explained by Johnston and Pennypacker (2009) is to view researchers as individuals whose decisions when conducting an investigation are the products of their previous experiences and the environment, just as people's behavior is determined by their histories of interaction with different stimuli. Johnston and Pennypacker (2009) stated that much of research is based on rule-governed behavior based on scientific methodology, which "tends to lead to behavior that is too strongly influenced by theory, the research literature, or factors other than the data from the experiment" (p. 14). Although individuals such as behavior analysts directly use data to shape their experiments and interpretations, not all research has reached this standard (Johnston & Pennypacker, 2009).

A more critical view of research reveals the following: (a) Researchers come from certain historical, cultural, socioeconomic status, gender, age, and religious/worldview, and educational training backgrounds. Thus, the research questions and interpretation of the results are influenced by the researchers' sociocultural context. (b) Researchers are trained in certain theoretical framework and methodology, which allow us to see certain phenomena but not others. For instance, for a child's bed wetting, a behaviorist and psychoanalyst may see different symptoms and problems. (c) In psychological or educational research that involves human subjects, the participants are also from certain sociocultural contexts. Thus, the results and the conclusion of the research study are influenced by multiple layers of different sociocultural contexts, which suggest the relativity nature of objectivity.

Our next question is: Is there a need for gaining a multicultural perspective in the consumption of research in education and psychology? Our answer is yes, because a number of research studies conducted from a Eurocentric perspective produced racially or culturally biased conclusions in the history of psychology. Sue and Sue (2013) provide an eye-opening review of how "the scientific literature of the past...[led to] an implicit association of minorities and pathology" (p. 98), citing work from Thomas and Sillen (1972) about the various incorrect findings in historical research literature about how the brains of African Americans were inferior, how freedom was unnatural for African Americans and led them to anxiety, and many other outrageous "facts." Many psychology textbooks now cite the seminal review by Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) that most research is conducted by and based on WEIRD (westernized, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) populations. Thus, many traditional psychological principles and findings might not apply to individuals outside of that description, which renders any interventions based off such principles ineffective. Frisby criticizes this perspective by reviewing how simply assuming differences between ethnic minority and WEIRD populations and pursuing different strategies for multicultural students does not often match data gathered in schools. However, although Frisby rightly prompts readers to follow the data, a multicultural perspective is still necessary for practitioners to appreciate the data because data, such as office disciplinary referrals, may connote values (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Martens, 1993). It also calls for practitioners to consume research literature critically and for researchers to gain awareness of their own biases and the decisions (i.e., how to interpret data, which data to highlight) that result from those biases when conducting research. For instance, recent research about African American youth behavior shows that adopting a cultural-asset framework reveals that behavior traditionally considered to be a risk factor may in fact help the youth be successful in his or her given environments (Gaylord-Harden, Burrow, & Cunningham, 2012). Consequently, Sue and Sue (2013) further highlight the need for adjusting traditional assessment methods in order to better discover the strengths of an individual's culture and gain perspective on the purpose and context of that individual's behavior.

DISCUSSION OF “FOLLOWING THE OUTCOME DATA”

One of Frisby’s concerns is that multiculturalism is not connected to the outcomes of ethnic minority students in poor urban schools. His solution is to follow the outcome data that show what leads to students’ success in school. His solution does not include multicultural competence. We think Frisby has a legitimate concern and it is important to follow outcome data. However, we are missing the discussion of how to view the outcome data critically from the book. Before using the data to guide future practice, we would like to know: Has the outcome study that generated the data been reviewed critically? Have all the components of the intervention and data collection been examined? Have the data been analyzed critically? Have the data been desegregated (e.g., when the data of school performance of the poor and new immigrant ELL students are lumped together with the middle-class and fluent bilinguals as “native language other than English,” the needs of the poor and new immigrant ELL students are likely to be diluted)? From what perspectives are the data presented? Henrich and colleagues (2010) pointed out that most research is conducted by and based on WEIRD populations. Delpit (1988) acknowledges that many standards and expectations in education come from the “culture of power,” or the predominantly Caucasian, westernized, and wealthy individuals who sit in administration and leadership positions in education. However, while it is correct to acknowledge that existing standards may not match the personal strengths of students, not helping students master existing standards in order to achieve success (and enact change) in existing society only cripples the students until societal change occurs. This suggests that, when translating multicultural guidelines to practice, practitioners should take into account multiple layers of potential in adhering to multicultural perspectives that would allow for the pursuit of culturally appropriate services for individual ethnic minority students, school system changes, and even societal changes. One of the examples of the systems-level changes is participatory action research in which communities of inquiry and action evolve and address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This approach has been applied by school psychologists in cross-cultural settings and been evidenced to be successful (Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Jayasena, 2000).

CONCLUSION

Frisby has brought up critical issues regarding current practice of multiculturalism. We agree with him that our field should address the issues such as superficial multiculturalism, lack of scientific attitude and critical thinking, and disconnection between training and practice in poor urban schools. We also agree with him that we need well-designed efficacy studies of the multicultural skills taught in graduate school or practiced in the field. We concur with him that we should attend to outcome data regarding what works in urban schools, but we caution that the data should be reviewed critically from multicultural perspectives. Frisby questioned the usefulness of multicultural training of school personnel. We believe multicultural training is necessary. What our field needs is to improve research, teaching, and practice regarding multicultural competency for the psychoeducational well-being of *all* students.

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Intercultural aspect needs to be the content of communicative competence, the basic guideline for the formation of communicative linguistic competence. It should be remembered that «not all linguistic units, both lexical and grammatical level, have a cultural component values» [22, p. 87]. Therefore when determining the content of training, the foreign language shouldn't be limited to only a culturological orientation of speech subjects and communication situations. 6) the ability to act as a full-fledged representatives of the native culture; 7) the ability to self-learning to function independently in a multicultural world, using socio-cultural strategy. Such level of proficiency in a foreign language, likely, can be considered ideal. Key words: ethnic minority college students, multicultural interaction, ethnic identity, Xinjiang-born Mongolian, narration, case study. People in different places and different times always ask the same question: who am I? This may profoundly distinguish human beings from other creatures. Identity is closely related to this question as it is an extension of self-affirmation. Generally speaking, the concept of identity concerns people's comprehension about basic questions of life, such as who they are and the meaning of their existence, because comprehension about these questions is related to their self-identity. Students bring to school, not only differing racial and ethnic heritages, but also a wide range approaches to learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to recognize the impact that cultural differences may have on their students' education. This is because teachers who have ethnocentric and racist attitudes toward their students often fail to meet the academic and societal needs of the students they teach. Multicultural education affirms the multiple identities that students bring to their learning. There is a need to improve the level of English acquisition in Malaysian students as those people who are fluent in English have better career opportunities (Yahaya et. al., 2011). Ethnic minorities tend to be at a disadvantage in most situations, most often because they are stigmatized as different from the norm. Such a minority will inevitably seek ways to assure the equal protection of the laws, as American blacks have done in the civil rights struggles of the 20th century. Recent Demographic Trends. In line with its more multicultural population and in consequence of a decades-long, perhaps reactive trend of older ethnic groups and African Americans to emphasize their overseas origins through "ethnic pride," the United States in the 1960s and thereafter gradually deemphasized its traditional stress on acculturation and assimilation of ethnic minorities and took up the idea of multiculturalism. School students were not provided with multi-ethnic textbooks until the 1990s. In reality, the multi-ethnicity in population was suppressed under Japanese colonial education from 1895 to 1945 and KMT partisan education from 1945 to 1970. According to Fong & Hsuei (1996), students lost their ethnic awareness and ethnic determination under the oppression of Japanese. In the period of the KMT, according to Lin (1987), school curricula and instruction were dominated by a political agenda that promoted a national spirit. This task of this study is to understand teachers' conception of multicultural competence on curriculum philosophy in terms of ethnicity. The definition of ethnicity in my study is not a primordial one but a social constructed one.