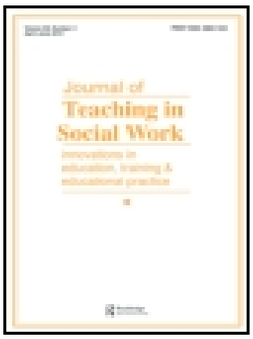

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Journal of Teaching in Social Work

ISSN: 0884-1233 (Print) 1540-7349 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wtsw20

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**To cite this article:** Hermeet K. Kohli , Ruth Huber & Anna C. Faul (2010) Historical and Theoretical Development of Culturally Competent Social Work Practice, Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 30:3, 252-271, DOI: 10.1080/08841233.2010.499091

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2010.499091

*Journal of Teaching in Social Work,* 30:252–271, 2010

ISSN: 0884-1233 print/1540-7349 online
DOI: 10.1080/08841233.2010.499091

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# Historical and Theoretical Development of Culturally Competent Social Work Practice

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*This article provides a detailed review of the historical and theoretical context in which culturally competent practice has evolved in the social work profession and enables educators and practitioners to see holistic connections between the past and present. Historical review of the inclusion of diversity content is followed by definitions of culture, cultural competence, and culturally competent practice. We then provide a synthesis of different frameworks currently being used for understanding the development of cultural competence in psychology and social work, and conclude with discussion and implications for social work education and practice.*

*KEYWORDS cultural competence, diversity education, historical context, theoretical framework*

Diversity education has been the focus of attention for the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and the National Association for Social Workers (NASW). It is now required of all accredited social work institutions to have diversity content (i.e., age, sex, gender, ethnicity, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and political affiliation) in their curricula (CSWE, 2008). There are several historical benchmarks and theoretical frameworks that guide the development of diversity education in the United States. Review of historical and theoretical context in which diversity education has evolved in the social work profession will enable educators and practitioners to see holistic connections between the past and present.

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In this article we review historical and theoretical concepts related to culturally competent practice for its lessons about how present and future education of social workers should be accomplished. We started with a literature search of cultural competence-related material from the following internet databases: (a) social work abstracts, (b) PsycFirst, (c) PsycInfo, (d) sociological abstracts, (e) ERIC, (f) dissertation abstracts, (g) social science index, and (h) EBESCO Academic. Extensive literature review was conducted to identify the underlying meaning in different theoretical perspectives as related to cultural competence and contributions of various theorists were synthesized using theoretical synthesis methodology. This article provides (a) historical review on inclusion of diversity content, (b) definitions of culture and cultural competence, (c) synthesis of different frameworks currently being used for understanding cultural competence in psychology and social work, and (d) discussion and implications for social work education and practice.

## INCLUSION OF DIVERSITY CONTENT IN CSWE-ACCREDITED SOCIAL WORK CURRICULA

Through curriculum policy statements, CSWE has required all programs to include content on diversity in their curricula. This has led to the development of different views for operationally defining these policy statements. We will first discuss the meaning of diversity, followed by its history in social work profession.

### Diversity

The word *diversity* is generally understood as being unlike in nature or qualities, and the main thrust is on differences. It refers to those human differences that account for the uniqueness of individual and group life. Diversity includes all of us, as each individual is unique and one-of-a-kind (Lum, 2000). The meaning of diversity, however, has been unclear in the academy, which has led to flawed notions, stereotyping, and discrimination.

Discussion about diversity comes into focus when problems arise within different groups. Those who are in power hold the ability to define what constitutes good or bad (Ridlen & Dane, 1992). Therefore, people from the dominant group exercise their power to assign positive and negative values to these differences for their own good (Ridlen & Dane, 1992). Those who have more resources and power have been exploiting others for their own benefit. This process of "othering" limits the overall development of people who do not conform to the norms of WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) Eurocentric worldviews (Van Dijk, 1997). This process has been continuing since antiquity as the central values of the dominant group have not been challenged enough to liberate people from old habits (Minnich, 1991).

Before attempting to elaborate on the need for producing culturally competent practitioners, it is important to understand how diversity content came to be integrated into the curriculum. We now discuss the historical evolution of the diversity education in the social work profession.

## Historical Context

Historically, emphasizing diversity content in social work curricula was not an important issue (Schmitz, Stakeman, & Sisneros, 2001). Practice with ethnic minorities was of marginal interest for social work professionals, and their practices tended to focus on individual interventions, with little involvement in social change and social justice activities (Aponte, 1995). These issues were also neglected in the social work academia. A meta-analysis of the three major social work journals (*Social Casework, Social Service Review,* and *Social Work*), from 1970 to 1997, revealed that issues related to human diversity were discussed in only 8% of the articles (Lum, 2000).

Social work academicians and professionals have been stressing the need to include multicultural issues in the curriculum since the 1960s (Van Soest, 1995). From the mid-1970s, CSWE has been promoting the inclusion of some content on minority groups (i.e., racial, ethnic, and women; Van Soest, 1995). Only since 1992 has CSWE mandated that all social work programs include diversity content in their required courses in order to be accredited (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997).

## Paradigm Shifts in Inclusion of Diversity Content

We will draw from Chau (1990), Grant and Sleeter (2010), and other authors to sketch the history of the inclusion of diversity content in social work education. Table 1 briefly chronicles this evolution of different paradigms for teaching human diversity courses in social work education, and shows how the present emphasis on respecting, affirming, and valuing diversity has emerged from the changing sociocultural contexts (Chau, 1990).

In the 1950s, assimilation was emphasized. European settlers had believed that the indigenous knowledge of the Native Americans was not capable of understanding and comprehending the world. A melting pot approach was initiated where efforts were made to assimilate or integrate all "others" within the Western notion of correct living (Marger, 2003). Rather than emphasizing the respect for differences, social work educators focused on the cultural deficit model or mainstreaming "others" into the dominant ideological perspectives.

The ethnic-minority perspective emerged in the 1960s and 1970s from economic, cultural, and political upheavals. Minorities articulated their needs and decried prior exploitation, and efforts were made to integrate the content on ethnic minorities and women into the social work curriculum to

**TABLE 1** History of CSWE's Emphasis on Human Diversity

| Decade | Theoretical perspective | Emphasis on diversity |
|---|---|---|
| 1950s | Melting pot | Emphasis was on the treatment of clients' problems (Chau, 1990). |
| 1960s | Awareness of cultural contexts | Treatment included consideration of clients' sociocultural contexts (F. D. Harper & McFadden, 2003). |
| 1970s | Minority perspective | With political and economic turmoil, and the influence of the Civil Rights movement, voting rights, and work programs for the poor, emphasis was placed on minority perspectives. Thus, curricula included information on people of color and women (Gould, 1995; Montiel & Wong, 1983). |
| 1980s | Cultural pluralism | Content on other vulnerable and oppressed groups became important and was also included in curricula, and importance was placed on identity development (K. V. Harper & Lantz, 1996; Torres & Jones, 1997). |
| 1990s Forward | Respect for differences | Diversity issues encompass not only ethnic and racial issues, but also variables such as age, sex, gender, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and political affiliation. It is now mandated that content on human diversity be included as one of the nine core areas of study in CSWE-accredited schools of social work (CSWE, 2008). |
| Early 2000s | Ethnocultural framework | Social constructionist views incorporated to teach social work students. |

meet the challenges of the time. Several authors criticized the minority perspective and emphasized that it resulted in a unidimensional view that was somewhat paternalistic: it limited students rather than fostering respect and sensitivity (Gould, 1995; Montiel & Wong, 1983). This model neither helped the plight of minorities nor enhanced social work students' understanding of their problems (K. V. Harper & Lantz, 1996).

Cultural pluralism was the major theory behind the framework of the 1980s and 1990s as more emphasis was placed on respecting human differences. Attention to individual differences was not limited to race, ethnicity, and gender (Torres & Jones, 1997), but broadened to include sexual orientation and other cognitive and physical differences. Then there emerged a view that cultural pluralism and multiculturalism are vague constructs that do nothing to help the poor, oppressed, and deprived sections of society (Atherton & Bolland, 1997). Respect was equated with tolerance, and tolerance was seen as a privileged term: tolerance of some people above others implied that some people were more valued than others (Husband, 1995). The dominant ideologies were not challenged enough to allow equal articulation of other ways of thinking and understanding (Minnich, 1991). Gould (1995) alleged that syllabi were simply accommodated to enable White students to receive some basic understanding about various diversity issues.

This history led to the development of an ethnocultural framework in the early 2000s, in which a social constructionist framework is used to teach social workers to become morally active practitioners. This framework recommends that an either/or approach should not be used when teaching students about sensitive issues; rather, a reflexive-dialectic stance (or a combination of appropriate approaches) should be employed (Billups, 1992). This approach appreciates that no one is born culture-less or identity-less; therefore, a humanistic approach that values and encourages the narratives of all students should be fostered. While sensitizing social work students to diversity issues, it seems imperative to initiate a dialogue on culture because people do not thrive in isolation and culture shapes how people experience their worlds. The focus of the next section is on culturally competent practice.

## CULTURALLY COMPETENT PRACTICE

Culture plays a substantial role in influencing worldviews of both professionals and clients. This basic tenet is a vital component of how services are delivered and received. If social workers have positive self-identities, they are better able to value and respect their clients' identities (Pinderhughes, 1989). In this section we define culture, competence, and cultural competence, and delineate the steps involved in acquiring cultural competence.

### Culture

Different scholars have used culture to signify different things and its meaning has changed over time. Although sometimes limited to social class and race, it implies a way of life in which the people of different cultural groups absorb and assign specific meaning to their actions over time (Marger, 2003).

#### History

In 1871, E. B. Taylor defined culture as the sum of life experiences, but did not explicitly clarify what that whole constituted (Mitchell, 1999). In that era, culture referred to the beliefs, customs, traditions, habits, values, and ideologies of a group of people that are passed from one generation to another (Webster, 2002). These definitions, however, did not recognize the effect of cultural markers such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and political affiliation on interactions between human beings (Mitchell, 1999). Arbona (1998), on the other hand, purported that culture does not constitute beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors, but rather broad categories that provide social structures in which beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors are developed.

Phinney (1996) maintained that individuals differ not only in terms of cultural values and norms, but also in their ethnic identities; therefore, culture only refers to the norms and values that characterize the ethnic group. We should learn to respect differences and remember that all people (whether from the dominant or minority groups) have their own cultures, identities, and interests. Culture has many dimensions that encompass the behavioral patterns, intergenerational passages, and particular life experiences of people (Lum, 2000). Different approaches to culture in the mental health field have been identified as (a) ethnic identity, (b) language, (c) material signs and symbols, (d) events and celebrations, (e) shared values, and (f) the multicultural approach that encompasses them all (Guarnaccia & Rodriguez, 1996).

## Competence

Competence implies "capability, sufficiency, and adequacy" (Lum, 2000, p. 6). It refers to ways of living acquired by various groups to survive in their environments and includes their abilities to function successfully (Aponte, 1995). Applied to the competency of social workers, they, too, need to acquire ways to practice that honor all kinds of clients. We now define cultural competence.

## Cultural Competence

Cultural competence can be defined as the ability of professionals to function successfully with people from different cultural backgrounds including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical or mental ability, age, and national origin (CSWE, 2008). A set of similar attitudes, actions, and procedures are compiled by professionals to enable them to work efficiently in multicultural environments (Cross, 1988). Cultural competence engages the development of abilities and skills to respect differences and effectively interact with individuals from different backgrounds. This involves awareness of one's own biases or prejudices and is rooted in respect, validation, and openness toward differences among people. Cultural competence begins with an awareness of one's own cultural beliefs and practices, and the recognition that others believe in different truths/realities than one's own. It also implies that there is more than one way of doing the same thing in a right manner.

### Culturally competent practice

The need for providing culturally appropriate services is driven by the demographic realities of the United States. It is generally believed that in order to be culturally competent, professionals must simply possess the core abilities of warmth, empathy, and genuineness. These are developed through

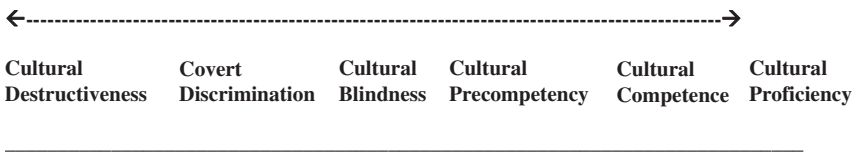


**FIGURE 1** Six stages of attaining cultural proficiency.

*Note.* Adapted from Cross (1988).

compassion and respect for people who are culturally different, and enable professionals to develop culturally proficient behaviors.

### Steps involved in acquiring competence

Cross (1988) suggested that the developmental process of acquiring cultural competence can be attained in six different stages (Figure 1). The continuum of the incapacity or competence of the professionals working with diverse groups ranges from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency. The former involves overt discrimination of certain people based on their differences such as age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, race, and political affiliation. The next position on a continuum of cultural incapacity or competence reflects covert forms of discrimination. Cultural blindness is after that and results when professionals assume that they are unbiased, but believe that dominant ideologies and ways of living are universally applicable (Cross, 1988).

Cultural precompetence signifies movement along the continuum, when professionals might attempt to serve minority groups, but lack relevant knowledge about various possibilities and procedures. Cultural competence is characterized by acceptance and respect for differences, self-assessment of professionals, consideration of the dynamics of difference, expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, and a variety of adaptations to the helping models to provide sensitive and appropriate services. Culturally proficient professionals add to their knowledge base through research and experimentation. They establish positive helping relationships with their clients and enable them to help themselves (Cross, 1988). We now review various theoretical frameworks that have emerged for developing culturally competent practitioners in psychology and social work.

## FRAMEWORKS FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN STUDENTS

In this section synthesis of the literature on theoretical frameworks to develop culturally competent professionals is provided.

## Psychology Theories

Despite the focus on the social work profession, it nevertheless seems relevant to list the basic psychological models because counseling and educational psychologists first initiated the concept of cultural competence. The literature on developing cultural competence is synthesized in Table 2. There are three major categories of the models in the psychology literature: (a) the three-dimensional models for multicultural counseling, (b) worldview approaches, and (c) process-oriented models for understanding cultural competence.

### Major contributions

The models developed in the counseling profession to understand cultural competence are dynamic in nature. They emphasize the effects of the interaction of human beings with their unique environments. The development of *Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards* by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) and its adoption by the American Psychological Association were landmark events in the development of a culturally competent practice model. Sue, Ivey, and Pedersen's (1996) multicultural counseling and therapy theory is the central psychological theory that explains the development of cultural competence and is based on a postmodern approach.

Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis's (1992) rationale for the need for cultural competence standards was based on the diversification of the United States, the monocultural nature of education, and sociopolitical reality. These scholars outlined their model as a 3 × 3 matrix of 9 competencies with 31 skill areas in 3 dimensions of cross-cultural competencies: (a) counselors' awareness of their own cultural values and biases; (b) their awareness of the client's worldview, and (c) initiation of culturally appropriate intervention. These dimensions are interlinked with three major components: (a) attitudes and beliefs, (b) knowledge, and (c) skills (Sue et al., 1998). The major contributions from counseling literature toward the development of a cultural competence framework for this study are summarized in Figure 2.

In essence, cultural competence of professionals is affected by the processes that shape their cultural identities which are, in turn, influenced by their own worldviews and the worldviews of their clients. The differences between the clients and the workers in any helping relationship cannot be ignored, but need to be brought to the forefront to develop trust and acceptance in the professional relationship. In order to reach that level of cultural competence, workers need to be aware of their own attitudes and beliefs, and develop knowledge and skills to effectively work with clients from diverse backgrounds.

**TABLE 2** Approaches to Develop Cultural Competence in the Counseling Profession

| Approach | Proponents | Major contributions |
|---|---|---|
| Three-dimensional approaches | Theory of multicultural counseling and therapy (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996) | Conceptualized as a 3 × 3 matrix with 3 dimensions of cross-cultural competencies:<br>1. Counselors' awareness of their own cultural values and biases.<br>2. Counselors' awareness of the client's worldview.<br>3. Initiation of culturally appropriate intervention.<br>These dimensions are interlinked with three major components:<br>(a) Knowledge<br>(b) Beliefs and attitudes<br>(c) Skills |
| | Three-dimensional model for counseling racial/ethnic minority clients (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993) | Counselors adopt different roles based on three client dimensions: (a) locus of problem, (b) acculturation level, and (c) goals of helping.<br>Emphasis is on healing the client. |
| | Integrative model (Leong, 1996) | Emphasis on multidimensionality when understanding human personality is stressed. It is important to cover all levels—micro, macro, and mezzo—during treatment. |
| Worldview approaches | Existential worldview theory (Ibrahim, 1991) | The emphasis is on defining worldview and how understanding and knowledge of client worldviews lead to more effective, ethical, sensitive, and client-specific counseling interventions.<br>Based on the grounded theory that identifies universal elements of culture and culture-specific variables; uses a cognitive, affective, and skills approach. |
| | Transcultural perspective (McFadden, 1996) | The generic nature of multicultural counseling does not hinder, but supports, the inherent differences within people.<br>Cultural ideas between different cultures should be blended together and integrated for effective communication. |
| | Stress-resistant delivery model (Smith, 1985) | Importance is on understanding stress factors in clients' lives.<br>Distinguish stress from prejudice and discrimination.<br>Respect the differences in worldviews. |
| | Model of change process (Trevino, 1996) | Worldview is seen to have two levels: (a) general/abstract and (b) specific counselor-client congruence in general worldviews is desired. |

(*Continued*)

**TABLE 2** (*Continued*)

| Approach | Proponents | Major contributions |
|---|---|---|
| Process-oriented models | Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986) | Different cultures create and maintain worldviews using different processes. |
| | Perceptual schema model for cultural sensitivity (Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeier, & Zenk, 1994) | Use of schema theory to enhance cultural sensitivity. |
| | Racial identity development model (Helms, 1995) | Focus is on how people develop racial and ethnic identity. |
| | Multicultural assessment procedure model (Ridley, Li, & Hill, 1998) | Encourages and directs practitioners to take a scientific stance in counseling process when assessing clients' issues.<br>Counselors help clients to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy expression of values and beliefs while affirming clients' worldview. |
| | Banks's model of development of ethnicity (Banks, 2002) | Six stages for development of ethnicity:<br>1. Ethnic psychological captivity<br>2. Ethnic encapsulation<br>3. Ethnic identity clarification<br>4. Biethnicity<br>5. Multiethnicity and reflective nationalism<br>6. Global competence |

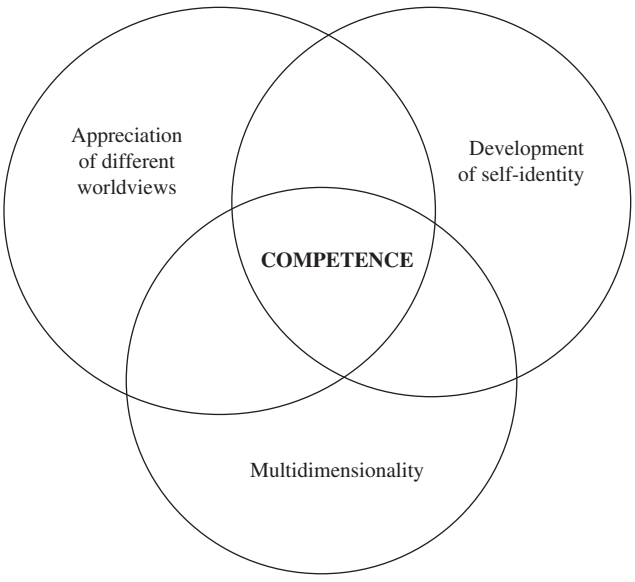


**FIGURE 2** Psychological frameworks for understanding cultural competence.

### Critique

There is continuous apprehension in the counseling and educational psychology literature regarding the nature of culturally competent practice (Arbona, 1998; Fischer, Jome, & Atkinson, 1998). Emic (culturally specific) and etic (universal) are two approaches to counseling the culturally different. Three-dimensional models for multicultural counseling and the process-oriented models for cultural competence are based on emic approaches. The worldview theories, on the other hand, are etic or universal in nature. The multicultural movement began with the aim to provide culturally sensitive services, whereas earlier, emphasis was placed on making clients fit into the service categories (F. D. Harper & McFadden, 2003). The focus shifted with the increased awareness about diversity issues and understanding that no particular ways of adaptation/intervention were much better than others. Rather, the social-political-economic-cultural situations in which people are embedded define or color their perceptions of reality.

## Social Work Theories

We now delineate various theoretical frameworks that have been used for the development of cultural competence in social work (Table 3). Whereas there were 3 basic kinds of theories from psychology explaining the development of culturally competent practice, approximately 10 different frameworks were identified in the social work literature.

### Major contributions

Anderson and Carter (2003) depicted a cultural framework in which they highlighted three major perspectives of human diversity: (a) ethnocultural diversity, (b) oppression, and (c) vulnerable life situations (Figure 3). This classification matches perfectly with the development of cultural competence in the social work literature.

Two central frameworks that foster development of culturally competent professionals have been the strengths and the empowerment approaches, with a vision that all human beings receive social justice. In order to provide justice to all, we need to (a) fight oppression, (b) value and recognize worldview differences among people, and (c) enable people in vulnerable life situations to maximize their potential, even in times of adversity, by providing support and resources for them (Anderson & Carter, 2003). All of the other frameworks can be seen as different manifestations of these core ideas.

**TABLE 3** Approaches to Develop Cultural Competence in the Social Work Profession

| Approach | Proponents | Major contributions |
|---|---|---|
| Social constructionist approach | George & Tsang (1999) | Emphasis is on social construction of diversity and difference. Intersectionality of oppressions is discussed with respect to multiple identities and the nonhierarchical nature of oppression. |
| | Lee & Greene (1999) | It is not possible to be experts on all diversity-related issues due to considerable intergroup diversity. This framework is based on the premise that people actively create and recreate their realities. Differences in views should be accepted and cultural sensitivity toward different worldviews is the key point. |
| Humanistic approaches | Cross-cultural approach (Goldstein, 1987) | A model of cognitive humanism that emphasizes not fixating on either/or approaches, but focusing on the ethical and humanistic dimensions when counseling clients from diverse backgrounds. |
| | Existential cross-cultural approach (K. V. Harper & Lantz, 1996) | Enlightened view of human diversity that is grounded in cross-cultural social work practice. Emphasis is on accepting and respecting human differences and similarities. |
| | Culturally transferable core (Taylor, 1999) | Social work shares some fundamental responsibilities, tasks, and principles, and thus has elements that can constitute a culturally transferable core internationally. |
| | Human-centric approach (Webster, 2002) | Instead of making people realize that they belong to specific groups, effort should be made for people to see their innate similarities and celebrate their differences. |
| Strengths approach | Saleebey (2006) | Based on Saleebey's ideas, an effort is made to mobilize the creative will of individuals as it produces the strength necessary for growth. It enables the clients to use resources and become empowered. The focus is on the strengths of clients rather than problems. Belief that positive perception of self-worth in the clinician is created through:<br>1. Recognition<br>2. Connection<br>3. Analysis<br>4. Knowledge and skills<br>5. Reflection and collaboration |

(*Continued*)

**TABLE 3** (*Continued*)

| Approach | Proponents | Major contributions |
|---|---|---|
| Empowerment approach | Guadalupe (1999) | Based on the ideas of Freire (2000) and Giroux (1992). Basic premises are:<br>1. Promotion of well-being<br>2. Multiple dimensions of life<br>3. Consciousness raising<br>4. Many ways of doing things<br>5. Trust |
| Ethnic-sensitivity approach | Devore & Schlesinger (1999) | One's individual and collective history has an impact on understanding psychosocial problems. Social workers try to simultaneously focus their attention on the individual and systemic concerns as they emerge. Seven layers of understanding are proposed to understand problems from a holistic perspective. |
| Person-in-environment/ ecological approach | Haynes & Singh (1992); Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler (1996) | Problems faced by clients are assessed in relation to their historical, environmental, cultural, familial, and individual levels. Interactions of individuals with their environments occur at all of these levels and any disruption results in stress. The emphasis is on educating social work students toward differences in the different ethnic/social groups.<br>The ecological approach looks at the individual, familial, community, national, and global issues when finding solutions to problems.<br>These theories are based on the values of justice, independence and freedom, and the importance of community life, client self-determination, and social change. |
| People of color approach | Lum (2000) | This is a process stage approach based on generalist practice. Four areas of competence:<br>1. Personal and professional awareness of ethnicity by practitioners<br>2. Knowledge of culturally diverse practice<br>3. Skill development in work with culturally diverse clients<br>4. Inductive learning |
| Cognitive sophistication approach | Latting (1990) | This perspective involves identification of "isms," acknowledgment of own biases, and development of critical thinking skills when examining one's own and others' biases. The "isms" are social arrangements that create problems. Both intergroup contact and development of critical thinking skills have potential to uncover biases of students. Functions of bias: |

(*Continued*)

**TABLE 3** (*Continued*)

| Approach | Proponents | Major contributions |
|---|---|---|
| | | 1. Socialization<br>2. Psychological<br>3. Cognitive social psychological<br>4. Politico-economic |
| Coverdale approach | Plionis & Lewis (1995) | Borrowed from management consulting, it promotes individual, interpersonal, and intragroup tolerance toward inherent differences within people. |
| Integrated cognitive and affective learning approach | Torres & Jones (1997) | It encourages students to address the significance of their racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage and emphasizes the effects of this education and enrichment on developing ethnic-sensitive social workers. The focus is on the awareness and knowledge skill components of developing cultural competence.<br>There are challenges in using this approach as it could include instructing a homogeneous group, the constraints of a single course, and a lack of systematic evaluation of the impact of a single course on students' personal lives and professional growth. |

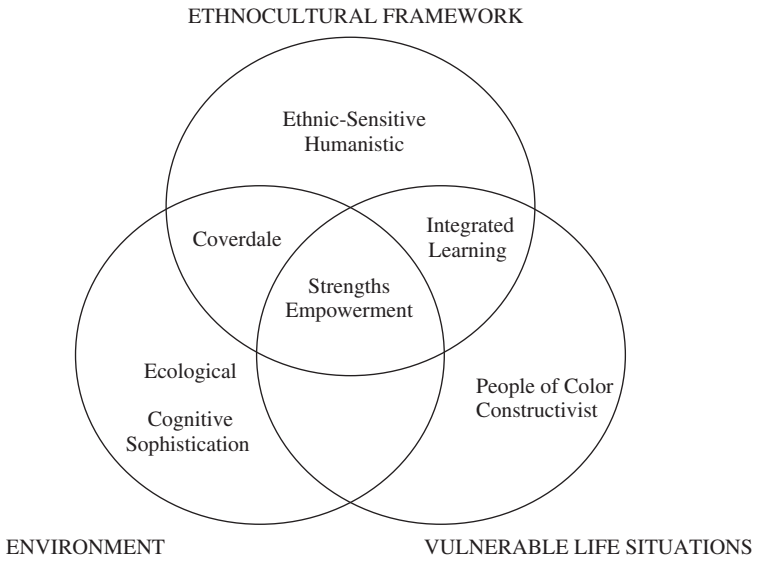


**FIGURE 3** Social work frameworks for understanding cultural competence.
*Source.* Adapted from Anderson & Carter (2003).

### Critique

We agree with Greene (1994) that literature on cultural content is diffuse and there is no consensus on a theoretical framework in the social work profession. Several models have been adapted to effectively integrate human diversity content into the social work curriculum. However, only Lum (2000) has detailed a process stage approach for developing culturally competent practitioners. His framework is also based on the Sue et al. (1996) framework.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

In the previous section, an effort was made to concisely summarize the various theoretical frameworks that have been developed to understand the development of cultural competence in the human service professions. The major contributions from psychology and social work frameworks were incorporated to understand the development of cultural competence. We now summarize the key highlights from these theories that enable us to better understand the development of cultural competence.

Four basic assumptions can be derived from the synthesis for all the frameworks: (a) reality is socially constructed, (b) diverse worldviews need to be appreciated, (c) multiple realities affect individual personalities, and (d) diversity education has a positive impact on the journey to cultural competency. One major theme that was highlighted in all the models was social constructionism. Based on the knowledge that reality is socially constructed, it becomes apparent that reality is different for everyone and is shaped by their social, cultural, political, and historical context. The concept of cultural worldviews holds that different cultures are not comparable, but are appropriate in their own historic circumstances (Ibrahim, 1991). This view benefits clients if their own worldviews are respected and valued during treatment and the Eurocentric value system and models are not imposed on them. This view is mirrored in the values of acceptance and respect espoused in our Code of Ethics.

When observing through a constructionist lens, reality is seen as a social construction and the individual is seen as intricately meshed with the society. With the development of an understanding that multiple truths and narratives exist, it is accepted that there could never be a single way of knowing or doing anything as every individual is unique and distinct (Gergen, 1991). We should appreciate the strengths of individuals that help them to survive in the worst of situations and use their strengths to empower them. In addition, as professionals our identities influence our perceptions of the world as well as our understanding of its complexities. Therefore, focusing

on the sociocultural realities of both workers and clients is integral to culturally acceptable service delivery, and all these aspects should be the focus of attention in diversity education.

Historically, not much attention was given to providing culturally sensitive services, and emphases were placed on fitting clients into available service categories (F. D. Harper & McFadden, 2003). The focus has now shifted with the increased awareness about diversity issues and understanding that no particular race or culture's way of seeing and interpreting events is superior to others. Rather, the social-political-economic-cultural situations in which people are embedded define/color their perceptions of reality. Various "isms" (i.e., racism, sexism, and homophobia) are still a reality in today's society. Social work students at times have limited awareness of manifestations of such discriminations and many at times do not act on them professionally in field settings (Garcia & Van Soest, 2000). This leads to potential harm—both for students and for the clients whom they will later serve.

Different teaching techniques have been recommended by social work professionals to produce culturally competent practitioners. Weaver (1998) advocated the experiential component and Edwards (1997) supported the educational or knowledge component to be integral in the development of culturally competent practitioners. Swank, Asada, and Lott (2001) studied the acceptance of multicultural education in a university in the Appalachian region of Kentucky and reported that students' acceptance of diversity issues increased substantially through exposure and interaction with culturally different people.

Another area involved with teaching diversity content is regarding tensions that arise from critical examination of politically volatile areas when discussing sensitive diversity issues. Problems encountered when teaching about human diversity include students' (a) increased stress, (b) sense of vulnerability, (c) increased dependency, (d) anger, (e) guilt, and (f) frustration when confronted with the unfamiliar. Despite the development of numerous frameworks for teaching human diversity content, instructors report that students are challenged and threatened when exposed to worldviews that are in contrast to their own, and distress, confusion, anger, and resentment builds, leading to stress and anxiety in the classroom (Organista, Chun, & Marin, 2000).

Van Soest (1995) and Garcia and Van Soest (1997, 2000) advocated for instructors to create an environment that supports students through the challenges that they face. Hyde and Ruth (2002) observed that the general climate of classes, including individual student characteristics and group dynamics, had a major role in the creation of a tense classroom. Instructors need to be sensitive to critical classroom incidents related to oppression and diversity and use their professional and personal skills to turn those tense moments into teachable moments. In addition, continual efforts must be made to develop diversity curricula that do not perpetuate stereotypes.

We advocate that in order to produce culturally competent social workers, two-fold efforts are required. First, social work students need to be educated to become self-aware and have an appreciation of their own value systems. Miller and Garran (2007) also contend that we need to first look at and confront racism inside ourselves before looking outside. On the second level, they need to be immersed in cultural experiences where they observe the uniqueness of every individual. The major emphasis of social work educators should be on creating democratic and inclusive classrooms that will foster empowerment and participation for all students, irrespective of their age, sex, race, class, ethnic background, religion, and sexual preferences (Blake, 1994).

The first step toward understanding human diversity is to make students aware of their own cultural heritages and recognize the various forms of oppression that they might have come across during their lifetimes. Students from both dominant and minority groups need to reflect on their past experiences so they can unlearn the various biases that they might have developed. They should also be able to reflect on the various biases inherent in the social structure in which they function as professionals. Students need to develop practice skills that will enable them to work competently with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. After self-reflection, the next most important step is to provide them with opportunities where they can interact with culturally diverse groups in safe and trusting environments. In conclusion, it is recommended that diversity education should foster self-awareness of own values and beliefs in the students and provide them with opportunities for cultural immersion to help them gain skills to work effectively with clients from diverse scenarios.

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