What Are We Looking For In Potential Graduate Students Regarding Multicultural Competence?

Below is a slightly modified excerpt (pp. 50-51) from Ponterotto’s (1998) article on diversity education. Based on his and other educators’ experiences, he summarized personal qualities and behaviors that seem to characterize promising students of diversity. According to this thinking, promising counselors-in-process . . .

1. Exercise openness and curiosity with regard to training activities.

2. Demonstrate a willingness to examine their own socialization history—family and community upbringing, schooling, spiritual or religious influences, friendships, and so forth.

3. Exhibit courage to self-disclose their own views, opinions, feelings, and questions in the group and class discussions, in appropriate and respectful ways.

4. Are nondefensive in their interpersonal interactions and can absorb and consider feedback regarding their own attitudes and expectations that may convey unintended sexist, racist, classist, ableist, ageist, homo/bi-phobic, xenophobic, etc., assumptions.

5. Are characterized by high levels of resiliency, psychological hardiness, and cognitive complexity. Involvement in multicultural training over a period of several years can be quite intense, and trainees are likely to feel vulnerable at various points in the training. The ability to effectively process strong affective states and consider alternate philosophies of life in an open-minded fashion is warranted.

   A corollary of these points in #5 is that promising students are committed to having and demonstrating respect for others’ experiences and perspectives. This is especially important during times of interpersonal conflict, which, to some degree, is inevitable during genuine, transformative dialogue. Disagreement is no excuse for disrespect.

6. Display a commitment to development multicultural competence in spite of the many challenges that are involved in the process. This training commitment extends to social justice issues and to a general appreciation for the culturally different.

7. Make active efforts to learn more about multicultural issues through additional course work, conferences and workshops, and independent reading and research. These students also commit to increasing their personal contact across cultures—traveling and establishing more diverse friendships and collegial bases.


Approved by Counseling Psychology faculty at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Summer 2007