

Letter from the Guest Editors: Special Issue on Cultural Humility in Education and Practice

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Abstract: This serves as the introduction to the Special Issue on Cultural Humility in Education and Practice for *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*.

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When we approached the *Reflections* Editorial Leadership Team to see if they might be interested in publishing a Special Issue on Cultural Humility in Practice and Education, the team responded with enthusiasm. Although we had high hopes that practitioners and educators would be interested in publishing their experiences with cultural humility, we were overwhelmed with the response we received to the call for articles. And, what was to be one special issue on the topic, quickly became two special issues! It was apparent that our fellow practitioners and educators wanted to discuss and write about their experiences, struggles, and triumphs while striving to live, practice, and teach in a culturally humble fashion.

The model of cultural humility was developed by two physicians—Drs. Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García—in the late 1990s, in the wake of the riots in Los Angeles that developed in response to a not guilty verdict for the police involved in the brutal beating of Rodney King. The events of the time made the two physicians realize that there was a gaping chasm between healthcare providers and the patients they wanted to serve. Tervalon and Murray-García could see that the diversity and cultural training of the time was woefully inadequate in addressing the divide between those who had privilege and those who experienced oppression. In an attempt to bridge that chasm they began to build the cultural humility model.

The model has three basic tenets: lifelong, critical self-reflection; recognizing and mitigating power imbalances in relationships; and institutional accountability (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998). Cultural humility challenges practitioners and educators to be both committed to lifelong learning and to be humble in their inability to become fully knowledgeable. It also challenges us all to look inward and to critically reflect on who we are—our culture, religion, ethnicity; all of our individual intersecting identities and areas of privilege and areas of oppression. Moreover, it asks us to understand how these intersecting identities affect our understanding of self and others and how others may view and understand us. Cultural humility has challenged our graduate social work program as we have implemented a humility model throughout our curriculum. And, it continues to challenge us as we try to practice its tenets, both personally and professionally, as we walk through our lives.

We have come to believe that cultural humility is important to practicing and teaching effectively because as it seeks to understand the diversity of others, it acknowledges that it is impossible for anyone to gain complete and total knowledge of diversity and its intersectionalities; it requires lifelong exploration. Further, as mentioned, unlike previous cultural competency models, it turns the lens towards the practitioners' and educators' understanding of themselves and how who they are affects how they view others. What is more, it requires practitioners to reflect on how the unique individual experiences of their clients influence each client's worldview and values. Finally, it highlights the intersectionality of individual and group identity. It asserts that various ethnic and racial groups may

have a diversity of beliefs, social structures, interactional patterns, and expectations. Each individual has intersecting dimensions of diversity that include socioeconomic class, sexuality, gender identification, dis/ability, and various other identities.

Although it is likely that Tervalon and Murray-García were hopeful that cultural humility would help heal the wounds created by societal racism, sexism, and classism, it seems our current sociopolitical landscape is fraught with the same inequities. And, it is apparent the present climate has increased the divides between all of us and has brought, even encouraged, contempt and violence towards oppressed populations. If there were ever a time to actively seek to mitigate power imbalances and demand institutional accountability, it is the present. Those of us who endeavor to help others and to educate future helpers can utilize our humility to make a difference within ourselves, our clients, our students, our institutions, and our society.

As we read these manuscripts, many themes emerged. A few of those themes include self-exploration of identity and race. What does our individual whiteness, brownness or blackness mean? How has it influenced our walk through the world and what does it mean in the context of our relationships and our work? How can we effectively teach cultural humility in a multitude of contexts from study abroad to online classroom and to a variety of students from adult learners to traditional undergraduate students?

We hope that this issue encourages you to begin or continue your journey living, teaching, and practicing with cultural humility as it has encouraged us to continue that journey. We trust that the articles you read cause you to self-reflect in new ways and provide you with ideas to continue to critically reflect on yourself and your practice. Further, our hope is that the articles you read encourage you to continue to right power imbalances while working toward institutional change. We believe that reading this issue will inspire you and provide you with hope for change.

Such hope is required in order to sustain the desire and will to address the inequalities within our institutions and within the larger society. In short, we trust that at the conclusion of this special issue you, too, will start to see micro and macro connections everywhere. We hope that you enjoy reading this Special Issue of *Reflections* as much as we did bringing it to you. We look forward to hearing from you!

References

Tervalon, M. & Murray-García, J. (1998). Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 9(2), 117-125.

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