
Enhancing multicultural counselling competencies and services

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Abstract: An increasingly diverse USA society challenges mental health professionals to provide culturally sensitive counselling to clients whose backgrounds are different from those of the service providers. Based on reviews of the current multicultural counselling competency standard, the purpose of this article is twofold: (a) to propose a strengthened standard - Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies and (b) to infuse Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory into cross-cultural counselling services. The recommended counsellor competencies and the contextually based services aim to empower practitioners who serve various types of cross-cultural clients. Particularly, Chinese international students in the USA higher education are used as sample clientele because they account for the largest group among the rapidly growing number of international students. International students have greater vulnerability and counselling needs than domestic students and cultural groups. The article also provides a case example to illustrate the application of the recommended practices and implications for future research.

Keywords: Bronfenbrenner; Chinese international students; contextually based practice; cross-cultural; diverse; ecological systems theory; Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies; multicultural counselling competence; services and standards.

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1 Introduction

Currently, about 975,000 international students are pursuing higher education in the United States of America (USA), a 73% increase in the total number of international students compared to the year 2006 (Institute of International Education, 2016a, 2016b). In particular, Chinese international students/scholars have increased from about 17% in the 1990s to 33% in 2015 (Institute of International Education, 2016a; Liu, 2016; Ministry of Education, the Republic of China, 2016). Chinese international students constitute the largest foreign student group in the US higher education (Institute of International Education, 2016a). The authors use them as sample clientele to propose two initiatives:

- a An enhanced multicultural counselling competency standard for American counsellors.

- b Ecologically/contextually based counselling services for counsellors to better serve clients whose cultural backgrounds are different from those of the counsellors.

1.1 Concerns of international students in the USA

Studies have shown that before arriving on campus, most international students anticipate positive experiences studying in the USA; however, shortly after arrival, many start to experience culture shock and difficulties. Culture shock is especially exacerbated in those students who come from the non-Western world, such as Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America (McClure, 2007; Shen and Herr, 2004). The feelings of loneliness, social isolation or social loss quickly diminish the pre-sojourn expectations and excitement (Bertram et al., 2014; McClure, 2007; Sherry et al., 2010). In addition to sharing academic challenges with domestic students, international students are required to negotiate the American system; to use English - oftentimes their non-native language - for advanced academic learning, socialisation and daily living; to build new networks; and to constantly adapt themselves to cultural differences (Sherry et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015). The students often experience homesickness, anxiety, depression and feelings of inferiority, which may even affect the students' perceptions of other people (McClure, 2007; Wu et al., 2015; Yamazaki et al., 1997). The unremitting tension and frustration may even lead to suicidal ideation or serious mental illness (Mori, 2000).

1.2 Gaps between international students and counselling services

Despite the USA's standing as the leading host to foreign students in the world (Institute of International Education, 2016c), campus services have been developed mainly for domestic students (Shen and Herr, 2004; Wu et al., 2015; Yan and Berliner, 2011). On one hand, studies show campus services, including mental health services, have not met the needs of foreign students, such as the Chinese (Shen and Herr, 2004; Wu et al., 2015; Yan and Berliner, 2011). On the other hand, similar to Asian Americans and certain domestic cultural groups (Ting and Hwang, 2009), many international students with psychological concerns are sceptical about the usefulness of these services (Xie, 2008; Zhang and Dixon, 2003). Others have never thought about seeking counselling, or they tend to postpone seeking professional help until other resources (e.g. family, friends) are exhausted or the issues have become severe (Sue and Sue, 2013; Wang and Kim, 2010; Xie, 2008; Zhang and Dixon, 2003). In a study with Asian international students, Frey and Roysircar (2006) found the students' behaviour in seeking professional assistance was highly associated with their acculturation.

1.3 Meeting the counselling needs via strengthening counsellors' multicultural cultural competence

Recognising the gaps among the needs of the clientele, deficiencies in services provided and client motivation or acculturation, some scholars have advocated strategies for mental health professionals to better serve culturally different clients. One strategy is to have linguistic and ethnically matched counsellors ready to serve cultural groups (Shen, in press; Shen and Lowinger, 2007; Sue and Zane, 1987; Wang and Kim, 2010). Although the background match may grant the counsellor more *ascribed credibility*

(Shen, 2016; Sue and Zane, 1987), it is not available in many geographic locations of the country (Wang and Kim, 2010). According to the American Psychological Association (Wang and Kim, 2010), 87.5% of psychologists are Caucasian/European Americans and only 1.7% are Asian/Pacific Islanders. This finding parallels the results of other national and local surveys with counsellors (Chao, 2012; Holcomb-McCoy, 2005; Holcomb-McCoy et al., 2008; Shen, in press). Meanwhile, according to the Associated Press (2012), as soon as 2019, Caucasian/European American youth will no longer be the ethnic majority youth in the country. As such, counselling service providers are facing a daunting task in answering the needs of the rapidly diversifying clientele, including Chinese international students (Zhang and Dixon, 2003). While the ascribed credibility is less likely to be achieved nationwide in the near future, counsellors can strengthen their *achieved credibility* (Shen, 2016; Sue and Zane, 1987) by enhancing their multicultural counselling competencies (Wang and Kim, 2010). The terms *counsellor*, *mental health professional*, *psychologist*, *practitioner* and *therapist* are used interchangeably below. The terms *counselling* and *psychotherapy* are also applied interchangeably in this article.

1.4 Definition of multicultural counselling competence

The authors define ‘multicultural counselling competence’ as the ability of mental health professionals to serve counselling clients whose cultural backgrounds are different from those of the service providers via a proper understanding of, respect for and response to the clients’ values, attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms. Based on this definition, we attempt to propose a new standard to strengthen the quality and usefulness of cross-cultural counselling.

1.5 Purpose of the article

This article is twofold:

- a To expand the counselling standard.
- b To enrich counselling services.

First, this article focuses on one way to enhance the cross-cultural competencies of American counsellors, especially Caucasian/European American counsellors whose cultural origins are different from clients of other backgrounds. The authors expand the model of Sue et al. (1992) by proposing additional competency domains to enrich the existing multicultural counselling competency standards. Second, for the campus counselling services, the authors incorporate Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1992), Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) ecological systems theory, which emphasises environmental and cultural influences on individuals’ development. Traditionally, much less attention has been paid to the effect of cultural or contextual factors on the counselling process or on professionals’ competence (Coleman, 2004). Compared with domestic students and cultural groups, international students are at higher risk for psychological problems (McClure, 2007; Wu et al., 2015) and have greater vulnerability and demands for cultural adjustments. Furthermore, Chinese students account for the largest group of international students in the USA. Therefore, to illustrate how the proposed concepts discussed herein can be applied to a cultural group, the authors will use Chinese international students as examples in this article. As a note, multicultural

issues have been addressed recently in the discipline of *services and standards* (Essounga-Njan et al., 2013; Essounga-Njan, 2015). Along the same line, this article intends to take the field of services and standards to a new dimension, strengthening practices in the counselling profession.

The following sections will address these specific areas: the identification of the baseline service standard of multicultural counselling competencies; the enhancement of the standard, including original domains (i.e. awareness, knowledge, skills) and the addition of two domains (i.e. comfort, challenge); the operational procedure of the enhanced standard (Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies); the infusion of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory into multicultural counselling services; an explanation of the Chinese values influencing Chinese foreign students and scholars and finally, the operationalisation of the model - a case example demonstrating the application of the enhanced competency standard and suggested service model with a Chinese international student studying at an American university.

2 Identification of the baseline standard of multicultural counselling competency

In 1992, the *Journal of Counseling and Development* and the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* jointly published the article *Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards: A Call to the Profession* by Sue et al. (1992). The tripod model of *Competencies and Standards*, which evolved from the original work of Sue et al. (1982) and later were operationalised by Arredondo et al. (1996), emphasises three domains (knowledge, awareness and skills) of counsellors when working with clients from diversified multicultural backgrounds. A multiculturally competent mental health professional who abides by the Sue et al. (1992) model should possess the following domains of competencies:

- a Awareness of the worldviews of the counsellor and client and how both of them are the products of cultural conditioning.
- b Knowledge of counsellors' own and clients' worldviews, cultural groups and the socio-political influences on clients.
- c Skills essential to work with culturally different clients.

Based on this model (Sue et al., 1992) and other documents in this area (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1982), the APA approved the *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* in 2002 (APA, 2016). Similarly, the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2003) also endorsed the multicultural counselling competencies based on the same model (Sue et al., 1992) and other statements (Arredondo and D'Andrea, 1995) in 2003. These actions were intended to facilitate philosophical changes to integrate inclusiveness, altruism, justice and the like into the foundation of counselling services (Sue et al., 1992). On one hand, several professionals opposed the competencies (Patterson, 2004; Vontress and Jackson, 2004). In addition, Weinrach and Thomas (2004) argued that the APA had developed "discretionary guidelines, not mandatory standards", and ACA 'endorse[d] rather than adopt[ed]' (p. 84) the multicultural counselling competencies. On the other hand, Arredondo and Toporek (2004) and Coleman (2004) were in line with Constantine et al.

(2002) who claimed that the model had achieved its mainstay status of the discipline. Scholars debated the appropriateness of the identified multicultural counselling competencies, whether there should be standards, and the adequacy of the operationalised procedure (Arredondo and Toporek, 2004; Coleman, 2004; Patterson, 2004; Weinrach and Thomas, 2002, 2004). Despite the debate, Worthington et al. (2007) found that the model has been widely accepted in the field, after reviewing 75 articles published between 1986 and 2005. The growing literature provides further evidence that the concept of multicultural counselling competency has gradually achieved standing in the field (Chao, 2012; Hill et al., 2013; Quin, 2013; Shallcross, 2013; Shen and Lowinger, 2007; Worthington et al., 2007). To this end, the authors of this article are treating the tripod model concept as the core *standard* for counsellors' multicultural counselling competence.

3 Enhancement of the standard

In their earlier work, Sue et al. (1982) challenged the psychological counselling profession to develop competencies that are more sophisticated for professionals, so they can work more effectively with culturally diverse clientele. Sue et al. (1992) described 31 specific competencies under the three major domains. Arredondo et al. (1996) further elaborated the concepts into 119 explanatory statements. Despite the expansion, Arredondo and Toporek (2004) reminded counselling professionals to treat the standard as a living document and continually refine it in accordance with evolving socio-cultural and political issues that affect clients.

3.1 Expanded competency models based on client-related perspectives

To help counsellors enhance their competencies, scholars have tried to expand the standard by including more client-related perspectives over the past few decades (Constantine et al., 2002). For instance, Sadowsky et al. (1994) suggested a four-factor model consisting of the following domains:

- a Multicultural counselling skills
- b Awareness
- c Knowledge
- d Relationship

Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999) also suggested a five-factor model:

- a Multicultural knowledge
- b Multicultural awareness
- c Multicultural terminology (i.e. counsellors' ability to define terms, such as discrimination)
- d Racial identity (i.e. counsellors' knowledge of racial identity development theories germane to clients)
- e Multicultural skills

Constantine and Ladany (2001) further proposed two competency domains to add to Sue et al.'s (1992) three-domain model:

- a Counsellors' understanding of clients' unique variables (e.g. personality traits, personal values, cultural group memberships)
- b Counsellors' establishment of an effective working alliance with clients

Regardless of the efforts of these scholars, none of them deliberately developed their ideas into concrete guidelines for real-world practice.

3.2 Unaddressed issues in previous models

In addition to the lack of concrete guidelines for real practice, all of the aforementioned models, including the original tripod model, ask practitioners to create client-comfort services ultimately; however, these models fail to ask practitioners two introspective yet fundamental questions. First, how comfortable are the counsellors when placing themselves into the interpersonal dynamics with a client whose cultural background, worldviews, customs, reasoning processes and life experiences are very different from or even opposite to those of the counsellor? To provide successful services, counsellors have been urged to be genuine and congruent in the counselling process (Ivey et al., 2013). It may not be a problem to apply these skills when counsellors are serving clients of similar cultural backgrounds. However, it may not be the case when the two parties are very different, not only externally, but internally. While the goal is to help clients feel comfortable, it should be equally important to reach a balance between client-comfort and counsellor-comfort.

Second, how courageous are counsellors in challenging themselves to explore the unfamiliar? During cross-cultural contact, differences exist between the two parties most of the time, if not all the time. An intrinsic, on-going motion is necessary for counsellors to engage themselves in the unfamiliar. Dr. Mark Pope, a former president of ACA, once said 'multiculturally competent' is an inappropriate term to describe counsellors "because 'competent' implies that they are complete, finished" (Shallcross, 2013, para. 26). After attaining the three domains (i.e. awareness, knowledge and skills), many counsellor trainees believe they are competent. They regard themselves as already accomplishing the 'requirement'. In other words, no existing domains have highlighted any on-going momentum adhering to the standard of multicultural counselling competence.

3.3 The needs for new competencies highlighting on-going momentum and intrinsic integration

An effective counsellor must be able to reach a proper balance around the cross-cultural dissonance. This process relies on counsellors' internal integration. Sue et al.'s (1992) model has not provided a conduit for counsellors to integrate the dissonance internally. In fact, the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development primarily proposed the multicultural counselling competencies with the hope of establishing a universal standard for multicultural training curriculum and counsellor practice (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992). Indeed, the perspective of this original standard was tilted

towards the trainers' expectations for counsellor trainees. While trainers may require trainees to attain the three domains, there are additional areas, such as counsellors' self-comfort and willingness to engage in the unfamiliar, which are more intrinsically motivated and cannot be taught by trainers. These areas allow counsellors opportunities to process integration within themselves. When the intrinsic integration is missing in the tripod model, counsellors' overall multicultural competency is lacking a humanistic feature, thus appearing to be mechanical. Recently, Shen (in press) tackled the issue using comfort and challenge levels as alternatives to measure school counsellors' multicultural counselling competence in working with Asian American students. Again, the aspects of comfort and challenge have not been developed into practice aiming to enhance counsellors' multicultural counselling competence.

3.4 Proposal of Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies

To strengthen the production of counsellors with more internal and humanistic integration, the authors propose an enhanced standard for multicultural counselling competence. This conceptualisation retains the tripod model of Sue et al. (1992) but incorporates the recommendations of Shen (in press). This broadened construct, Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies, consists of five dimensions:

- a Awareness
- b Knowledge
- c Skills
- d Comfort
- e Challenge

The following sections will detail the two additional domains. After that, the authors will concisely address operational guidelines for each of the five domains.

3.5 Definition of comfort domain - a new competency

The proposed comfort domain refers to the interpersonal processes associated with comfort and trust between the counsellor and client. Counsellors who are truly peaceful and free from the feelings of unease, awkwardness, constraint and anxiety, regardless of any cultural differences between the counsellors and their clients, can be considered as demonstrating a proper level of comfort domain. Counselors are likely to develop an undesirable dynamic if they are not comfortable (or cannot build trust) with clients who hold different worldviews, cultural norms or values; if they cannot manage this cross-cultural dissonance within; if they ignore consciously (or unconsciously) the unbalanced feelings within or if they cannot cope with clients' language or communication difficulties. For instance, countertransference is one type of an undesirable dynamic. Countertransference is a situation that may occur when a counsellor develops certain emotions towards the client (Hayes et al., 2011; Shen, in press). It could sabotage counselling relationships and outcomes (Shen, in press; Sadowsky et al., 1994). Rather

than simply tolerating, counsellors who are comfortable in the dynamics of cross-cultural counselling are genuinely receptive to the culturally different client. Counsellors who merely tolerate the client may eventually withdraw themselves or lose their intrinsic motivation.

3.6 Definition of challenge domain - a new competency

The challenge domain reflects counsellors' initiative to challenge themselves when preparing to serve cross-cultural clients (Constantine and Ladany, 2001). For instance, a counsellor whose religion does not support homosexuality or who has no prior exposure to the homosexuals might not feel comfortable with them. However, this counsellor is now willing to take action in obtaining more knowledge about the group, anticipating working with a client in this group, attending their social gathering, befriending them and eventually providing actual counselling to this population. Now, this counsellor can be considered as demonstrating a proper level of challenge domain. If a counsellor does not have the strength and commitment to take some risks to challenge him or herself, the authors would have serious doubt about whether this counsellor has the strength and commitment to be effective in serving as an agent for social change. A competent cross-cultural counsellor should also be a social change agent to assist the culturally different client in combating societal injustice (Constantine and Ladany, 2001; Shallcross, 2013).

How can a counsellor convince international students that he or she can help them if the counsellor does not have the willingness, courage and wisdom to challenge the unknown, in much the same way that the students place themselves into their American adventure? These students are much less likely to knock at the doors of counsellors who shelter themselves in a space of cultural self-contentment and familiarity. Although there is no guarantee, when a counsellor works with clients who are from the same culture, speak the same language, wear the same costume, hold similar worldviews and abide by the same cultural norms, the ascribed credibility often affords counsellors a better opportunity to succeed. However, working with clients who are different in these dimensions and often have difficulties in expressing themselves well in English, counsellors who are not willing to open themselves and challenge themselves to continually integrate their own novel experiences into the cross-cultural encounter risk losing the clients sooner than expected (Zhang and Dixon, 2003). By including the challenge competency domain, the counsellors may infuse more promise into their cross-cultural practice.

3.7 Addressing the subjectivity of competency domains

Particularly for these newly proposed domains, one may argue that both of them could be very subjective because the significance of each term may depend on the particular context. To counterbalance this issue and to obtain a more objective view, the authors strongly recommend that for those who want to scientifically assess the counsellor's competence in these domains, the client in the dyad should also have the opportunity to voice his or her feelings about the services received. According to the survey with university counselling centres' clients in cross-cultural dyads, Fuertes et al. (2006) found positive relationships between clients' satisfaction with counselling and their perceptions

of counsellor/therapist multicultural competence. Despite the models applied, most ways of assessing counsellor multicultural competency still stay exclusively with the subjective self-reports of mental health professionals/trainees (Shallcross, 2013). Incorporating both voices may provide a more comprehensive picture about the cross-cultural competence of the service provider. By doing so, what originally seems to be the downside of these domains is compensated and becomes more objective.

3.8 Comparison between the old and new competency domains

To provide an overlook of the original standard and the enhanced standard, Table 1 shows the differences between the original and new domains. As presented in the table, the three original domains (awareness, knowledge and skills) feature the abilities cultivated by counsellor trainers; the newly added domains (comfort and challenge) feature the abilities intrinsically integrated by counsellor trainees. The strengthened standard - Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies - comprises the five domains. Clearly, the newly proposed standard more comprehensively addresses the ability of counsellors.

Table 1 Comparison between the original multicultural counselling competency standard and the enhanced standard

Domain	Major concept	Feature			
		Nature of ability		Model of standard	
		Trainer deliberately- cultivated ability	Trainee/ counsellor intrinsically- integrated ability	Original standard - Sue et al. (1992)	Strengthened standard - Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies
Awareness	• Awareness of counsellors' own and clients' worldviews and how both of them are the products of cultural conditioning	✓		✓	✓
Knowledge	• Knowledge of counsellors' own and clients' worldviews, cultural groups and the socio-political influences on clients	✓		✓	✓
Skills	• Skills essential to work with culturally different clients	✓		✓	✓

Table 1 Comparison between the original multicultural counselling competency standard and the enhanced standard (continued)

Domain	Major concept	Feature			
		Nature of ability		Model of standard	
		Trainer deliberately- cultivated ability	Trainee/ counsellor intrinsically- integrated ability	Original standard - Sue et al. (1992)	Strengthened standard - Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies
Comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfort of counsellors in the interpersonal processes despite cultural differences between the counsellors and clients 		✓		✓
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative of counsellors to challenge themselves when preparing to serve cross-cultural clients 		✓		✓

Note: A check indicates a match between a domain and a feature.

4 Operational procedure of the enhanced standard

To provide a convenient guide for counsellors, the following sections elaborate the operational procedure of each competency domain and use Chinese international students in American higher education as examples.

4.1 Awareness

College counsellors should first examine their personal characteristics (e.g. demographics, worldviews) to increase the counsellor’s awareness about how each feature may play a role, as a strength or weakness, during the counselling encounters with a Chinese client (Shen, 2015). In particular, counsellors should raise their awareness of personal bias, prejudice and discrimination which may have been inherited from the counsellors’ ancestors (Sue et al., 1992). Parallel to the self-analysis process, the counsellor should also be aware of how each of the aforementioned features may affect the client as a cultural being. The counsellor should further examine how the features of both parties may affect the counselling dynamics and how much of a background match may exist between the two parties, thus granting the counsellor ascribed credibility.

4.2 Knowledge

The counsellors should have proper knowledge about their personal features, which involve counsellors' demographics (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity/race, marriage status, sexual identity, languages, religion, social economic status, immigration status or citizenship, occupation, disability status, life roles and geographic location), developmental stage of racial/cultural identity, motives, values, assumptions, biases, preconceived notions, racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and disability phobia (Shen, 2015). The counsellor should also have a proper understanding of the aforementioned features in the clients.

4.2.1 Understanding Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory

Relevant to understanding individuals' cultural backgrounds, Hofstede's (2001, 2010; Diaz et al., 2016) Cultural Dimensions Theory, derived from his studies across 76 countries and regions concerning how cultures influence work-related values, elucidates six cultural dimensions:

- a *Power distance* (meaning the extension of people's accepting or expecting power to be distributed differently)
- b *Individualism/collectivism* (referring to whether or not people think with the mentality of 'I' or 'We')
- c *Masculinity/femininity* (meaning the extension of enterprising)
- d *Uncertainty avoidance* (meaning the extension of accepting ambiguity)
- e *Long-term/short-term orientation* (meaning the extension of focusing on long-term vs. short-term goals)
- f *Indulgence/restraint* (meaning the extension of controlling desires)

China, for instance, ranks very high on power distance in Hofstede's study; this result means in Chinese culture, there is a large power distance between subordinates and superiors. This finding may help counsellors understand why Chinese students often hold parents, teachers and authority figures in high regard. These dimensions are deeply seated in a country's culture. Counsellors should study resources like Hofstede's before initiating a cross-cultural counselling relationship, particularly with international students.

4.2.2 Reducing counselling barriers via enhancing background knowledge

The counsellor may not have full background knowledge that may have to be learned from the client during the ensuing counselling (Sperry, 2010). However, counsellors who possess more background information prior to providing the service will be able to enter the client's frame of reference with fewer barriers, to build rapport more smoothly and to detect cross-cultural issues more efficiently, thus more likely preparing the counsellor to provide seamless service. For instance, when working with the Chinese international students, counsellors should have proper knowledge about the following areas:

- a The Chinese culture
- b The subgroup to which a particular Chinese client belongs (e.g. Hakka, Native Taiwanese)
- c The geographic location of the client's family of origin in the homeland (e.g. Mainland China, Hong Kong or Taiwan)
- d The neighbouring countries of the client's homeland
- e The socio-political influences of the homeland on the client (e.g. one-child policy [Wikipedia, 2016] in Mainland China)

More details about the cultural norms/values that universally influence Chinese clients will appear in later sections.

4.3 Skills

The counsellors should be proficient in applying techniques that can sensitively meet the needs of the culturally different clients. Counsellors with adequate skills can identify issues efficiently and process them with the client effectively (Constantine and Ladany, 2001). In a study with Asian American college students, Kim et al. (2002) found the clients perceived counsellors who provided immediate directions for problem solving as more competent in forming a working alliance than those who focused more on insight exploration. Similar to Asian Americans, many Chinese (and people of other cultural groups as well) view the counsellor/therapist as a teacher figure and often expect a more directive counselling approach (Sue and Sue, 2013). Although individual differences may exist, and no single approach would fit all, counsellors who are not sensitive to this culture-bound feature or not able to address it properly may lose Chinese clients before long. Meanwhile, counsellors should also be able to adjust their strategies accordingly, should this culture-bound expectation not be applicable to a Chinese client who needs to explore more insights before making a decision (Arredondo et al., 1996). In fact, most practitioners have recognised the importance of culturally sensitive treatments, but very few report that they actually applied treatments that are culturally sensitive (Hansen et al., 2006). Therefore, practitioners should really 'practice what they preach'.

4.4 Comfort

Counsellors should increase their exposure to culturally different populations and to cultural activities (Arredondo et al., 1996), thus increasing counsellors' comfort level with the people. The increased exposure may help counsellors become more relaxed and used to the existence of these different cultural beings, along with how they view the world and handle things. A practical way for counsellors to become more comfortable with culturally different clients, such as Chinese international students, is to make genuine friends with the individuals of their group, including their family (Shallcross, 2013). By doing so, according to Dr. Richard Henriksen Jr., counsellors' "fears are removed and doors are open to new adventures and opportunities to learn" (Shallcross, 2013, para. 120). Simply befriending a few people in a cultural group does not guarantee the counsellor multicultural competence. Instead, counsellors should continually push themselves to learn more about the individuals, broaden personal life experience and

avoid generalising the limited personal experience and knowledge to the entire population or stereotyping the group (Shallcross, 2013).

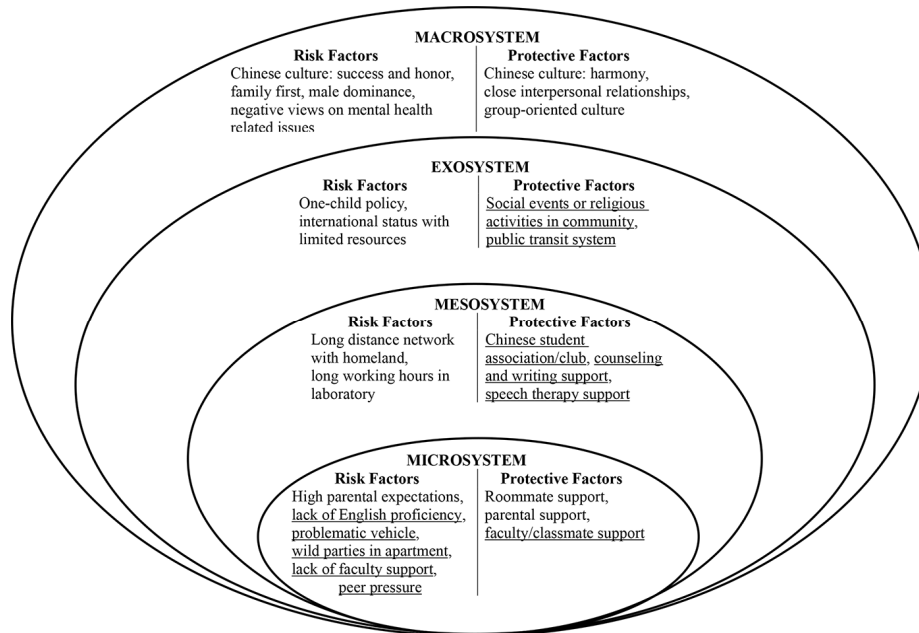
4.5 Challenge

Counsellors should internally examine how cross-culturally ‘inexperienced’ they are, honestly identify areas that are outside counsellors’ comfort zones, and intentionally challenge themselves to take action to make up these deficiencies. One frailty of human nature is the pursuit of social desirability. All counsellors like to be viewed as competent service providers. Identifying one’s weaknesses may be a tough task for some counsellors because they may lack knowledge about their blind spots or feel uncomfortable in breaking through personal façades. The ego of the counsellors might also be too fragile to embrace personal vulnerability. However, in order to work effectively with cross-cultural clients, counsellors have been urged to constantly attend to diversified cultural activities and expand personal experiences (Arredondo et al., 1996; Shallcross, 2013). Instead of brushing over this task, counsellors should realistically put it on the table and actually work on it. Regardless of a counsellor’s religious or spiritual views, one important practice is for the counsellor to cultivate “a moment in time imbued with sacred qualities” (Goldstein, 2007, p.1002). What feels frightening to one counsellor may not be the case for another counsellor. However, a cultural encounter that creates the feeling of ‘out of place’ in a counsellor might be a beneficial eye-opener, promote the counsellor to a state of transcendence and create a new connection between the counsellor and the new adventure. Counsellors should treat this practice as a continual pursuit of enhancing their multicultural counselling competence.

5 Infusion of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory into multicultural counselling service

The standard of multicultural counselling competence (Sue et al., 1992) values contextual factors (Coleman, 2004); this feature coincides with the concept of Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1986, 1992; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) ecological systems theory. Traditionally, counselling practitioners focused primarily on intrapsychic factors; contextual factors were missing. The multicultural counselling competency standard is based on the postulation that individuals are influenced by socio-cultural, political, historical and environmental events (Arredondo et al., 1996). The standard (Sue et al., 1992) expects counsellors to integrate contextual factors into the counselling process (Coleman, 2004). Bronfenbrenner’s theory emphasises that individuals develop largely via the interaction with their environment. The complex interactions of an individual with various systems influence his or her behaviour. These systems range from intimate to broad context (Figure 1). Ecological systems theory allows practitioners to examine clients’ issues and develop possible strategies from a contextual perspective. Therefore, the authors urge counsellors to take advantage of this theory when helping the culturally different clients, such as Chinese international students.

Figure 1 Ecological systems with risk factors and protective factors associated with the counselling client Mei



Note: Underlined areas indicate reduced risk factors and increased protective factors across the course of counselling.

5.1 Ecological systems theory

When helping Chinese international students, counsellors should focus on four of the major systems discussed by Bronfenbrenner:

- Microsystem:* This system refers to an individual's everyday environment, including home/family, school, neighbourhood, workplace, in which he or she has direct or immediate contact with the people or settings. For example, the neighbours of the international Chinese students in the same apartment complex may affect them.
- Mesosystem:* This system refers to the linkages between different microsystems. For example, the events at the students' apartment could affect their school performance.
- Exosystem:* This system refers to the linkages between a microsystem and outside systems. For example, the transit systems in the community can affect the students' daily living.
- Macrosystem:* This system refers to the overarching cultural blueprint, including societal norms, values and ideologies, laws, as well as economic and political systems. This system is commonly understood as a *culture* (Coleman, 2004) or the atmosphere of a society.

5.2 Incorporating the perspectives of risk and protective factors into ecological systems theory

While applying this theory in the counselling process, Wilmshurst (2015) suggests practitioners not only add the perspective of risk factors and that of protective factors, but also identify these factors in each system of a client. These factors are the negative or positive influences on the client's development from various dimensions. Counsellors may help the culturally different client take advantage of the protective factors and eliminate risk factors in these systems/contexts. This practice matches with the goals of the standard (Sue et al., 1992) aiming at ensuring that practitioners possess the ability to determine where in the interaction, between the individual and various systems, would be the best place to intervene, so the culturally different clients may better cope with the interactive effects (Coleman, 2004).

5.3 Importance of being culturally responsive and sensitive to specific contexts

An important goal of the multicultural counselling competency standard (Sue et al., 1992) is to make sure practitioners understand the contextual effects (e.g. disturbing emotions) of the macrosystem (e.g. values of the cultural group, discrimination and oppression imposed by other cultural groups) on clients (Coleman, 2004). According to Coleman (2004) and Weinrach and Thomas (2002), incorporating multicultural factors into the counselling process could be an extremely complex task. Therefore, counsellors must be culturally responsive and sensitive to specific contexts although some features of the helping process may be shared across cultures (Constantine and Ladany, 2001). By infusing the ecological systems theory, counsellors can holistically and systematically address the cross-cultural clients' counselling needs.

6 Values and worldviews influencing Chinese international students

To provide practitioners with background knowledge, this section selectively describes Chinese views related to help-seeking, cultural norms, family influence and socio-political issues that may affect or even impinge on the students' life (Sue et al., 1992; Zhang and Dixon, 2003).

6.1 Chinese views about mental health and help-seeking

The concept of mind-body-spirit interconnection is featured strongly in Chinese heritage. Instead of associating psychological distress with mental or emotional aspects, Chinese clients may present the concern through somatic symptoms (Tseng, 2001; Zhang et al., 1998). Chinese herbalists or doctors practicing Chinese medicine may be preferred over mental health professionals (Kung, 2004; Sue, 1994; Uba, 1994). It is common to find that some Chinese clients actually deny or are not aware of their needs for mental health services (Kung, 2004).

A well-known Chinese aphorism is, 'Don't wash your dirty linen in public'. Chinese people tend to address personal issues within their family and keep things private; otherwise, it would be considered immoral and may leave a stigma on the family (Shen et al., in press). Chinese culture values both self-control and resolving one's

problems internally over seeking external help because the society may view emotional distress as a personality weakness, a lack of will, and the result of malingering bad thoughts (Kung, 2004).

Because counsellors or psychotherapists are the products of the Western world, many Chinese people are not familiar with the idea of seeking mental health assistance through these professionals (Shen and Herr, 2003; Shen et al., in press). However, over the past few decades, the mental health sector in the major Chinese societies (i.e. Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan), has gradually embraced Western psychotherapy (Hou and Zhang, 2007; Shen et al., in press). Compared with people in Mainland China, those in Taiwan are more acculturated and receptive to this Western counselling practice (Shen et al., in press). Regardless of the influence of Western practice, like other international students, many Chinese international students tend to cope with stress via passive strategies, such as avoidance, withdrawal or consciously suppressing the problem (Zhai, 2002). Others seek support from their family, friends or fellow Chinese students - especially those with similar sojourner experience (Xie, 2008).

6.2 Differences between core Chinese cultural norms and Western norms

In addition to the help-seeking and mental health perspectives that are different from those of the American mainstream, many core Chinese cultural norms are different from American mainstream values (Zhou et al., 2009). For example, the moral *filial piety* requires youth to be obligated to parents via deference, respect and care. It is very important to bring honour to the family and avoid losing face (Zhou et al., 2009). Parents hold high aspirations for children's academic and career achievements. Chinese people value harmony, closeness in interpersonal relationships and group-oriented culture (collectivism). Traditionally, Chinese culture is patriarchal. However, in modern Chinese societies, many efforts have been made to promote gender equity for women to a certain degree (Wikipedia, 2016b, 2016c).

6.3 Socio-political issues in Chinese societies

Due to the historical-political situation after World War II, some clients from Taiwan may not appreciate a counsellor who cannot differentiate between Mainland China and Taiwan (i.e. Communist vs. democratically governed), and who thus refers to 'China' as their geographic origin. In Mainland China, the one-child policy from 1978 to 2015 restricted each family to have only one child (Wikipedia, 2016a). No other area in Asia has had this policy. In addition, counsellors who mix up Thailand (a country in the Indochinese Peninsula) and Taiwan (an island off the coast of Mainland China) may unintentionally portray themselves as lacking common knowledge about the background of clients from Taiwan or Thailand. Counsellors with correct knowledge about the clients' neighbouring countries may be more appreciated.

7 Operationalising the model: an example

Similar to the approach that is undertaken by other publications proposing innovative practices for practitioners in the disciplines of counselling (Shen and Sink, 2002; Swank and Shin, 2015) and healthcare (Wang et al., 2016), this article provides an example

below to demonstrate how the competency standard and services can be improved. This section explains three concerns:

- a How a Caucasian/European college counsellor operated the enhanced multicultural counselling competency standard.
- b The assessment of whether the counsellor's actions may increase the likelihood of meeting the domains in the enhanced standard.
- c How the counsellor incorporated the ecological systems theory into the cross-cultural counselling practice with an international student.

7.1 Implementing the Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies

Kathy, a Caucasian/European American, was a counsellor working in the student counselling centre of an American public university. Although the centre serves all students enrolled in the university, most of the clients were domestic students. Once in a while, she did encounter clients who were international. She noticed that, regardless of undergraduate or graduate status, international students would drop out of the counselling service after one or two sessions although the clients' concerns had not been alleviated. During her years working there, two international students had committed suicide on campus. Kathy also noticed that the university's international student population had increased 28% in the past 5 years. She was concerned and wanted to better serve them.

7.1.1 Self-examining the five domains

First, Kathy self-assessed her level of multicultural counselling competence in each of the five domains: awareness, knowledge, skills, comfort and challenge. She had taken a multicultural counselling course in her graduate training. She now realised the course provided her with a good starting point, but it was not enough for her to perform cross-culturally proficient counselling in the real world. Although she seemed to have a general awareness of how the different cultural backgrounds between her and a client could affect the counselling relationship, process and outcomes, she recognised that her knowledge about the students from diverse countries was insufficient. According to Pedersen (2008), "if awareness is lacking, then wrong assumptions are likely, and if knowledge is lacking, the proper understanding is at risk" (p.9). Without proper understanding, the adequate selection of strategies - the skills - is also endangered (Constantine and Ladany, 2001). When asking herself if she really felt comfortable with those students, she found she was not. Furthermore, she seldom had social interactions with individuals of different cultural backgrounds.

7.1.2 Challenging herself to reach for the unfamiliar

After the thorough self-examination, Kathy decided to challenge herself by auditing university courses outside counselling area, such as Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, African Studies, South American Studies and International Relations. She also attended workshops that provided information related to counselling cultural groups. These courses and workshops provided her with good knowledge about the people, cultures and socio-political issues in different countries. These learning activities also increased her awareness about cultural differences and different perspectives between the

USA and other countries. She searched for local ethnic groups and international student associations on campus; went to their restaurants to taste the food and converse with the culturally different people and students; learned how to greet them in their languages and participated in their activities and cultural events. In the beginning, she felt out of place but through the increased exposure, she gradually made some friends and started to feel comfortable with other cultural beings. She started to invite international students to her house for Thanksgiving Dinner, Christmas Eve Dinner, and July 4th barbecue (BBQ) parties. She watched movies showcasing the life and worldviews of people whose cultural backgrounds were different from hers (Shen, 2015). She really pushed herself out of her original comfort zone and tried to rebalance herself due to the cross-cultural dissonance. By intentionally attending to the five domains of multicultural counselling competence discussed earlier, she felt much better prepared to provide counselling services to the international students.

7.1.3 Setting up inviting climate to reach out to the students

Being sensitive to the fact that many international students are often not active in seeking counselling help or are afraid of being stigmatised even if their mental health might be at high risk, Kathy took the initiative in collaborating with the International Student/Scholar Office (ISO) to reach out to and advocate for the potential clients. She placed flyers and posters in the students' native languages in ISO to introduce counselling services to the students. With a separate entrance to cautiously protect the students' confidentiality, she was able to secure an office in the ISO to offer counselling services to the students/scholars a few times a week. Diversified cultural pictures and crafts appeared as décor in this office, which cultivated a culturally responsive setting (Shen et al., in press). The setup also helped international student clients feel that the counsellor was trustworthy and possessed expertise (Zhang and Dixon, 2001).

7.2 Assessment - validating the activities/practices against the standard

Table 2 was applied to assess Kathy's practices against the five competency domains of the new standard. In the table, a check indicates an activity allowed the counsellor to attend to a competency domain. From the perspective of content validity, this procedure validated whether each action taken by the counsellor had facilitated the likelihood of meeting the standard - the Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies. The assessment results demonstrated in Table 2 show that not all activities listed were able to strengthen all of the old competencies (awareness, knowledge, skills). However, these activities were likely to help the counsellor attend to both of the new competencies (comfort and challenge). Activities that did not grant the counsellor the best opportunity to achieve certain domains could still provide the counsellor with good balance to achieve other domains. Activities such as these should not be overlooked because each domain played a different role. Together, when a counsellor was able to implement all of the activities on the list, the counsellor tends to enhance the overall multicultural counselling competence.

Table 2 Assessment of counsellor's action in relation to the five domains of the Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies

<i>Counsellor activities</i>	<i>Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies</i>				
	<i>Awareness</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Comfort</i>	<i>Challenge</i>
1 Auditing university courses outside counselling area (e.g. Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, African Studies, South American Studies, International Relations)	✓	✓		✓	✓
2 Attending workshops which provide information related to counselling cultural groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3 Participating in the activities and cultural events of local ethnic groups and international student associations on campus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4 Dining in ethnic groups' restaurants	✓	✓		✓	✓
5 Conversing and interacting with culturally different people and students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6 Learning how to greet culturally different people in their languages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7 Making friends with culturally different people and students	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8 Inviting international students to counsellor's house for Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas Eve dinner, and July 4th barbecue (BBQ) parties	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9 Watching movies showcasing the life and worldviews of people whose cultural backgrounds were different from that of counsellor	✓	✓		✓	✓

Table 2 Assessment of counsellor's action in relation to the five domains of the Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies (continued)

<i>Counsellor activities</i>	<i>Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies</i>				
	<i>Awareness</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Skills</i>	<i>Comfort</i>	<i>Challenge</i>
10 Collaborating with the International Student/Scholar Office (ISO) to reach out to and advocate for the potential clients	✓	✓		✓	✓
11 Placing flyers and posters in the students' native languages in ISO to introduce counselling services to the students				✓	✓
12 Having a counselling office in ISO with separate entrance to cautiously protect the students' confidentiality			✓	✓	✓
13 Decorating the office with diversified cultural pictures and crafts to cultivate a culturally responsive setting			✓	✓	✓

Note: A check indicates an activity allowed the counsellor to attend to a competency domain.

7.3 *Infusing ecological systems theory into cross-cultural counselling service*

Mei, an international Chinese undergraduate student in science, scheduled an appointment to see Kathy in the student counselling centre. Mei had been in the USA for 3 months. She studied very hard and spent most of her time in the laboratory. She lived off campus. Although she knew a few students in the Chinese Student Association, she had hardly made any friends. In her apartment complex, there were always wild parties over the weekends. Although her roommate and neighbours invited her, she did not feel comfortable joining. She felt lonely, homesick and depressed. Her English was not proficient, and she felt challenged in class. The language deficiency created tremendous barriers and really frustrated her. Although experiencing difficulties in her learning, she kept things to herself and did not disclose the problem to her professors or classmates. She inherited a former graduate's used car, which was quite problematic and created additional stress on her. She took Chinese herbs she brought from Mainland China to help her relax. However, she gradually stopped attending classes and simply stayed in her apartment. She lost her appetite and started to lose weight. Her roommate, a domestic student, really worried about Mei. Finally, the roommate convinced Mei and took her to the counselling centre on campus.

7.3.1 *Assessing and understanding client concerns via ecological systems theory and cultural dimensions theory*

After Kathy greeted Mei with Mandarin Chinese, the official language in the major Chinese societies, Kathy explored Mei's understanding regarding receiving counselling service, explained how a counsellor could help her, and informed her of the option of receiving counselling service at the ISO. Mei decided to see Kathy at the ISO because Mei felt less threatened to receive services associated with the ISO. On a scale (of 1 to 10) assessing her stress level, Mei indicated a nine point; in another assessment of depression, she indicated a six point. Mei was diagnosed with mild depression. Based on additional information gathered from Mei and having Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory in mind, Kathy was able to enter Mei's frame of reference quickly. Kathy applied Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and identified certain risk factors that could result in Mei's depression and stress; meanwhile, there were some protective factors that could help her improve or prevent her from aggravation. Kathy grouped these factors in different systems associated with Mei's life (Figure 1):

- a *Microsystem*: Mei's risk factors included high expectations from parents, which added more pressure on her; lack of English proficiency in a non-native language environment; a problematic vehicle; wild parties in her apartment complex; peer pressure and lack of faculty support. Meanwhile, she was protected by her roommate support and had supportive parents. Mei's honouring her parents' high expectations, a demonstration of filial piety, could be understood via the high-power distance dimension in Chinese culture (Hofstede, 2001, 2010; Diaz et al., 2016).
- b *Mesosystem*: The risk factors included a long distance network of family and close friends in her homeland, which resulted in lonely feelings on a new campus. Another risk factor involved professors and science students' mutual agreement on laboratory access, which resulted in long working hours. The protective factors were a Chinese student association/club on campus and counselling support. The tolerance of long working hours could relate to the restraint (vs. indulgence) dimension in Chinese culture (Hofstede, 2001, 2010; Diaz et al., 2016).
- c *Exosystem*: The risk factors included the one-child family policy of Mainland China, which led to no experience in sibling relationships, and international status, which confined her accessibility to many resources in comparison to domestic students in particular. Mei was from a one-child family, which could result in some deficiencies in her personality and relationship-building skills with others. Her protective factors were social events or religious activities in the community.
- d *Macrosystem*: The risk factors included some Chinese cultural norms which highly stressed career and academic success, bringing honour to the family, 'family first,' and negative views on mental health related concerns. The family first as a cultural norm could result in some pressure in Mei because she was not able to be herself in many ways, such as her choice of academic field and career. The male dominance was a societal factor that might create hardship for her life because she had to work extra hard to gain recognition for her achievements. Regardless of the risk factors, there were still some protective factors valued in the Chinese cultural norms, such as promoting harmony, close interpersonal relationships and a group-oriented culture. The success and honour emphases could be related to the masculinity - enterprising

(vs. femininity) dimension in Chinese culture; the family first and group-oriented norms could be understood via the collectivism (vs. individualism) dimension (Hofstede, 2001, 2010; Diaz et al., 2016).

7.3.2 Implementing contextual-based strategies across the counselling process

Kathy worked with Mei to reduce the risk factors and increase the protective factors in each system. After obtaining Mei's permission, Kathy contacted Mei's advisor and professors in science to identify possible classmates to assist with Mei's class notes and assignments. Kathy also contacted the Communication Department to explore the possibility of matching Mei with a volunteer student in the language therapy program to meet with Mei on a weekly basis to assist with her oral expression in English. In this manner, Kathy served as a social change agent for Mei. Kathy further suggested that Mei take advantage of the university's Writing Centre. Mei was able to receive tutorial services to improve her English writing. For her living conditions and transportation concerns, Kathy helped her move to an on-campus student residence hall, where she was able to cook her own food, and where wild parties were restricted. This new living condition allowed her to meet some international students, including Chinese students, as well as American students. The public transit system was convenient for the students living in the residence hall and took care of Mei's transportation concern. Kathy worked with Mei on her social skills and encouraged her to be involved in more student activities. In time, Mei participated in activities organised by the International Chinese Student Club and made more friends. Many of the increased protective factors were not in Mei's macrosystem but were found in her microsystem, mesosystem or exosystem.

Mei's situation was improved gradually. She was able to secure desirable grades and envision her graduation with confidence. Kathy continually provided Mei with counselling support until the end of the academic year. Prior to Kathy's termination with Mei, the assessments of her stress and depression levels both resulted in a two to three point (on a 10-point scale), which was deemed as a bearable level for international students.

8 Conclusion

This article not only proposes a strengthened standard - the Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies (including awareness, knowledge, skills, comfort and challenge) - but also incorporates Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory into the cross-cultural counselling process. The original competency domains (awareness, knowledge and skills) are trainer deliberately-cultivated abilities. The addition of two new domains (comfort and challenge), which are trainee intrinsically-integrated abilities, inspires on-going momentum in mental health providers. This addition may facilitate the expansion of service providers' cross-cultural counselling competencies. Contextual aspects were missing in traditional counselling process but have been expected by the multicultural counselling competency standard. The intersection of the ecological systems theory and the Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies, hence, may allow practitioners to systematically address environmental/cultural factors, thus maximising the effectiveness of cross-cultural counselling. Together, the enhanced

multicultural counselling competency standard and contextual-based service model construct a culturally sensitive ecology in the cross-cultural counselling process.

8.1 Implications for practice

Despite the use of Chinese international students in American higher education as sample clientele herein, “multicultural counseling competency is required across all counseling specialties” (ACA, 2014, p.8) serving diverse clients. Therefore, the authors recommend the proposed practices for mental health practitioners who work with various cross-cultural clients with diverse features or cultural backgrounds, including age, gender, ethnicity/race, marriage status, sexual identity, languages, religion, social economic status, immigration status or citizenship, occupation, disability status, life roles, and geographic location. While practitioners may not have much control in gaining ascribed credibility, they can still strive for achieved credibility through the proposed practice. Practitioners should also bear in mind that the revised standard and campus service model suggested do not attempt to take precedence over practitioners’ professional judgment because counselling situations could be more complicated in certain cases.

8.2 Recommendations for research

It is worth noting that although based on theoretical underpinnings, the authors developed the proposed practices and recommend them for the considerations of mental health training programs and professionals, research is needed to better determine the effectiveness of these practices. Researchers may examine the following topics:

- a Whether counsellors possessing the original three competency domains only, or the additional two competency domains, or not exhibiting any of these competencies make any difference in relation to clients’ perceptions about the counsellors’ competence (Weinrach and Thomas, 2002).
- b Which group of counsellors with these three conditions produce most effective counselling outcomes (Weinrach and Thomas, 2002).
- c Whether or not counsellors applying the suggested service model produce more effective counselling outcomes (Smith et al., 2006).
- d Whether or not counsellors possessing the enhanced competencies and simultaneously applying the suggested service model, including the applications of ecological system theory along with other services, produce most effective outcomes (Smith et al., 2006).

8.3 Recommendations for profession

To ensure the implementation of the multicultural counselling competence standard, the ACA has been the monitoring body to oversee the practice. According to the *2014 ACA Code of Ethics* (ACA, 2014, p.8), counsellors should “gain knowledge, personal awareness, . . . , and skills pertinent to being a culturally competent counselor in working with a diverse client population”. Awareness, knowledge and skills have already been listed. The association may also want to embrace additional domains, such as comfort

and challenge. The quality of cross-cultural counselling services cannot be enhanced and sustained unless the profession, as well as the professionals, can acknowledge and endorse effective competency domains.

In conclusion, it is hoped that with Enhanced Multicultural Counselling Competencies and a contextual-based intervention approach, mental health practitioners can provide the fast diversifying clientele with much more effective services. The recommended standard and practices should be treated as living documents/protocols and continual refinement should take place in accordance with evolving research and clinical results. Essentially, the improvement of cross-cultural counselling services with Chinese students, other international students, and with any other cultural groups must rely on mental health professionals' continual growth to develop more competencies, scholars' future research on culturally responsive applications of more creative models and counselling associations' unflinching endorsement.

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