Everything You Need to Know to Begin the Journey Toward Multicultural Competence

A Review of

Becoming Culturally Oriented: Practical Advice for Psychologists and Educators

by Nadya A. Fouad and Patricia Arredondo

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Reviewed by

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There are certain names in the field of psychology that are well known regardless of what subfield you subscribe to. The mere mention of these names evokes feelings of admiration, awe, and curiosity as to what is the latest piece of wisdom flowing from their pens. Nadya A. Fouad and Patricia Arredondo are two such names, and we are all lucky to have at our fingertips a coauthored practical manual written by these incredible psychologists! Becoming Culturally Oriented: Practical Advice for Psychologists and Educators is a handy addition to anyone’s collection, whether they practice, teach, research, or consult with organizations. It is useful for novice and seasoned professionals alike, either describing important aspects of the “Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003) for the first time, or reminding all of us the integral components to multicultural competence. In short, this readable book is a must for every psychologist!

The premise of the book is that it goes through each of the six guidelines in detail, explicating the foundational literature that contributed to it. The reader is actually able to receive the information firsthand from two of the members of the writing committee that ultimately produced the Guidelines (APA, 2003). Each chapter focuses on one guideline, giving detailed information about it. Although some may consider it an extensive literature review, this would miss the useful suggestions, checklists, and case examples that flow through the text. The authors are unable to go into extensive detail about the variety of topics contained therein, although they do provide enough data to help us meander along the path toward multicultural competence.

The book begins with an introductory chapter, in which the authors share the reason for producing this text:

Our purpose in writing this book was to help psychologists gain a better understanding of the practical implications of the Guidelines in their work. In other words, we hope to help psychologists (a) know how to develop a better awareness of themselves and others and (b) learn what exactly the critical elements of a culturally centered educational program are and practical ways to become more culturally oriented as practitioners, researchers, and change agents. (p. 4)

They give some demographic data for both the United States and the field of psychology, making the point very clear that all mental health professionals are ethically obligated to become “culturally oriented.” The reader is also given background information as to how the Guidelines were formed, which is a very interesting history.

Chapter 2 begins with the first guideline, which states, “Professionals are encouraged to recognize that, as cultural beings, they may hold attitudes and beliefs that can detrimentally influence their perceptions of and interactions with
individuals who are ethnically and racially different from themselves” (APA, 2003, p. 382). The authors provide competency statements associated with this guideline, which are helpful as standards by which to judge oneself. They also define various concepts associated with this guideline, such as dimensions of personal identity (Arredondo & Glauner, 1992), identity development models for both Whites and people of color, and White privilege. What is particularly helpful is the discussion of defense mechanisms associated with each of the stages of both models and the self-evaluation provided at the end of the chapter. Although these theories are often considered controversial in nature, Fouad and Arredondo do a very good job of presenting the material in a way that is easily digested.

Chapter 3 focuses on the second guideline, which states, “Psychologists are encouraged to recognize the importance of multicultural sensitivity/responsiveness, knowledge of, and understanding about ethnically and racially different individuals” (APA, 2003, p. 385). The chapter deals with issues such as interacting with difference, and the variety of effects this may have, such as ethnocentric thinking, bias, and misunderstandings based on communications. It is a very powerful chapter, particularly in its discussion of phenomena that are typically beyond one's conscious awareness, such as aversive racism and invisibility.

The fifth guideline is the focus of Chapter 4, and it states, “Psychologists are encouraged to apply culturally appropriate skills in clinical and other applied psychological practices” (APA, 2003, p. 390). This chapter discusses psychologists in practice and makes it very clear that clients are not to be judged prematurely but rather offered the opportunity to be multicultural, multifaceted beings who are not easily categorized. Three case vignettes are provided with detailed discussion of the relevant issues to consider with each. Interventions and assessment are also discussed, with a handy list of questions to ask before using it with clients (Exhibit 4.2, p. 63).

Chapter 5 focuses on Guideline 3, which states, “As educators, psychologists are encouraged to employ the constructs of multiculturalism and diversity in psychological education” (APA, 2003, p. 386). As may be surmised, the chapter deals with teaching and infusing multiculturalism throughout all courses. The authors provide critical elements of a multicultural infused psychology curriculum (Exhibit 5.1, p. 68) and a step-by-step guide to achieve this goal. Other topics covered are recruiting diverse faculty, how to design a multicultural inclusive course, and providing a safe environment in the classroom. I found this chapter particularly helpful because of the practical suggestions that were given, especially because bringing issues of multiculturalism into the classroom is often met with great resistance.

Guideline 4 is the foundation for Chapter 6. It states, “Culturally sensitive psychological researchers are encouraged to recognize the importance of conducting culture-centered and ethical psychological research among persons from ethnic, linguistic, and racial minority backgrounds” (APA, 2003, p. 388). A very informative overview is provided with regard to how race and ethnicity have not historically been included in psychological research. This easily leads to a discussion of assumptions in research design, particularly because "researchers' worldviews shape the questions they ask and the research they conduct” (p. 86). Assessment is again discussed, given that many measures "are culturally biased, at worst, and limited, at best” (p. 89). It is a great chapter with which all researchers should familiarize themselves in order to prevent harm with diverse populations.

Chapter 7 focuses on the last guideline, which states, "Professionals are encouraged to use organizational change processes to support culturally informed organizational (policy) development and practices” (APA, 2003, p. 392). Organizational change is discussed throughout the chapter, which is an important facet of multicultural competence that is often left out of texts. This is supplemented in Appendix B, “The Empowerment Workshops' Workforce Diversity Audit: An Organizational Self-Assessment” (pp. 133–142). This chapter is very practical and informative, with an outline and full explanation of various steps involved in engaging in multicultural organizational development. I especially enjoyed the discussion of “enablers” and “barriers” to implementing a multiculturally sensitive agenda (p. 117), as it is important to consider what may aid or stand in the way of such change.

The final chapter brings closure to the many topics discussed throughout the book. The authors state,

We have argued explicitly in this book that the psychology profession needs to change. We have talked about changes needed in the way that we psychologists see ourselves and others and in the way we do our work as change agents, teachers, researchers, and practitioners. But more change is needed to transform the profession into a truly culture-centered field. We need to develop a deeper knowledge and awareness of the role of race and
ethnicity in human behavior and of how we can provide leadership for effective culture-centered practices. (p. 124)

The final exhibit of the book (Exhibit 8.2, p. 128) provides a variety of questions one may ask as he or she attempts to put the guidelines to work. This is further explored in Appendix A, “Checklist for Culturally Competent Practice” (pp. 131–132).

There is an extraordinarily large amount of material covered in this little book. The information is presented in very clear, easily understandable language. Each chapter begins with a quote by well-known authors that are inspiring and relevant to the discussion. There are also competency statements for each chapter and guideline, which allows the reader to give himself or herself goals to achieve. Each chapter ends with a summary, which is a helpful recapitulation of the information, particularly in teaching settings. It is possible for each chapter to stand on its own or to be included with the rest. This makes the book particularly useful for studying each guideline in detail before moving on to the next or providing a handy reference to whichever guideline is specifically applicable.

Overall, this text provides the reader with a wealth of information regarding how to be a multiculturally competent psychologist. Although this is neither a simple nor linear process, we all benefit from the wise leadership of the two well-known, well-respected authors. They end the book with a quote that aptly describes an approach they model well throughout the book:

Social justice advocates remind us of the obligation and responsibility all people have to one another. As professional psychologists, we believe this responsibility is even greater. In closing, we borrow from the words of civil rights leader Cesar Chavez, whose example is worthy of our emulation: “Justice advocates remind us of the obligation and responsibility all people have to one another.” As professional psychologists, we believe this responsibility is even greater. “We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community… . Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.” (p. 129)

References