Strengths Based Approaches to Supporting Cross Cultural Education for Students with Mental Health Diagnoses

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Learning Goals

* Learn theory behind implementation of strengths based wellness planning

* Discuss implementation issues related to strengths based cross cultural education

* Practice Wellness Planning
Benefits of Cross Cultural Education for Students with MH Issues?

* Intercultural growth: same as other students
* Perspective on life, family, problems
* More independent self care
* Gaining cultural perspective on wellness
  * Pace of life and Time
  * Family meals
  * Process over product
Deficit Perspective

- Medical model that seeks to isolate the smallest component of the problem
- Can be quite dehumanizing
- Looking for problems generates more problems
- Expecting people to be sick is sickening
- The location of a diagnosis can be problematic
Strengths Perspective

* Radical perspective that requires us to view the whole person and put their capacities in the foreground.
* The client is the expert on their experience. The helper is the expert on the process of helping.
* Recognizes and critiques the deficit perspective and recognizes that our systems often work to undermine people’s strengths.
All students have strengths: We should be on the lookout for skills and capacities that students have and not undermine them.

When students seem helpless or hopeless, a strengths focus can be instrumental in helping them move past difficulties.

When students are struggling, there is tremendous opportunity for growth.
Each student can gain from cross cultural experiences, and we can’t predict who will gain most. Assessment should be geared towards degree of growth not achieving a standardized goal.

Working “with” students who are struggling (as opposed to working “on” students) will help them to feel more motivated, in control and more invested in the outcome.

Every environment (family; host family; host culture) is full of resources. Sometimes we have to look hard to find them.
Programmatic implications of a strengths based approach

Susquehanna University Global Opportunities (GO) Program
A change in focus

- From ‘academic’ study abroad...
  - to cross-cultural experience
- From experience away from campus...
  - to reflection on campus after the experience
- From completing a program...
  - to working toward learning goals
- From a privilege...
  - to a required expectation
Universal Design vs. Universal Access

* Universal Design: Program designed so that any student can successfully participate

* Universal Access: All students have access to the same or similar experience – and meet the same learning goals

* Work to eliminate obstacles for student access to meaningful cross cultural experience

* Maintain clear policies as a means to address expectations and limit liability

* Recognize the limits of reasonable accommodations

Dunlap Manning 2014
Screening – are we looking for ways to include students or exclude students?

Relationship building with students

Coordinating with campus resources

Coordinating with on-site resources

Focus on student’s learning goals
GO
Your Own Way

* A ‘self-designed’ cross-cultural experience
* Cross-cultural experience does not have to bear credit
* Accommodates students with special needs or circumstances
* Shifts emphasis from what the student cannot do...
  * to what the student can do
* Keeps emphasis on the cross-cultural learning goals
* Puts students in charge of their own learning
Preparing Faculty Leaders

- Skills self-assessment
- Self care
- Model behaviors

Risk Management

- Student health forms
- Insurance

Training/Simulations

- Teaching a strengths approach
- Focus on student strengths

On campus support during travel
Wellness Planning
Finds out what the person’s experience is
Communicates strengths to the person seeking help
Enhances awareness of strengths
Uncovers new strengths (they may be hard to see)

How? Skillfully applied questions lead to greater awareness of strengths

Strengths Assessment

Dunlap Manning 2014
**Strength Based Questions**

- How did you deal with this before?
- Who is on your team?
- What do you think is going to happen?
- How do you stay well?
- What are your goals?
- What should you be worried about?
- What would your hero/parent/mentor advise?
Wellness Planning

- Current treatment
  - What has worked in the past?
  - What will you keep doing?
  - What will you take a break from?
Wellness Planning: Resources

- Internal
  - Physical
  - Emotional
  - Cognitive
  - Techniques for self care

- Environmental
  - Culture
  - Family
  - Friends
  - Care professionals
Wellness Planning

* Planning
  * Warning signs?
  * What to do for maintenance?
  * What to do in an emergency?
  * What to do in a catastrophe?
Group Work
Report Back

Discussion

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