

Benchmark Cultural Immersion Project Paper

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

As a counselor, learning and engaging in different cultures benefits not only the client but also the counselor. It allows counselors' to be cognitive of how their own background may influence the way they counsel, and it helps them better to serve the needs of the client. As a new counselor learning about different cultures is necessary. This paper will discuss the culture of disabled adults. Disabilities is often viewed as a separate population. However, after studying and learning about this specific population, disabilities is a very diverse culture with different needs.

Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values

Individuals with disabilities have always been labeled and have endured isolation and separation (Ayelet & Roni, 2020). According to the CDC (2020), one out of four Americans has a disability and may have a hard time with everyday activity living, vision, hearing, and/ or motion. In reference to intellectual disabilities, areas that are affected are reasoning, problem solving, cognitive abilities, and adaptive functioning. In the United States, 19% of the population are individuals with a disability and is also the largest and most stigmatized group (Bogart, Rosa, and Slepian, 2018). Over the years there have been many changes within our society regarding the treatment of those who have disabilities. Social attitudes prior to the twentieth century viewed individuals who had a disability as abnormal, deficient, and sick (Butner, 2022). In the past, society treated these individuals with pity. The attitude and assumption were individuals with disabilities were incapable of contributing and participating in society as well as recipients of welfare (Butner, 2022). Attitudes and beliefs about disabilities are not viewed the same with individuals, families, and communities. Often depending on the disability holds the level of stigma. Individuals with a physical disability are viewed less critical than those individuals with intellectual and sensory disabilities (Rohwerder, 2018). Majority of the time a person with a disability is informally evaluated by what that individual can contribute to society (Pappas, 2020). However, the disability alone does not transform a person's beliefs and/ or values. Family, friends, society, and their culture helps to form their beliefs, values, and behavior (Pappas, 2020).

Customs, Practices, and Beliefs

Our culture influences are way of living. In different cultures, one will see different perspectives on disabilities based on their type of disability, religion, beliefs, ethnicity,

socioeconomic position, and gender. Laws, politics, geographic boundaries, current services for disabled individuals, and more add to the complication of culture and identity in disabilities (MISUA, 2018). Every country has individuals who are impacted by a disability. How they function and participate in society is greatly influenced by cultural beliefs and values. Adults who have a disability live based on their capabilities. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2021, 19.1 percent of adults with a disability were employed and 19 percent of college students who were undergraduates reported having a disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021).

Spirituality and Religion

Research shows that depending on an individual's culture, traditions, and values; spirituality and religion can play a critical part in the healing process after the flow of life is disrupted by a disability or a disease (Aydogdu, 2019). A study was done, and the participants viewed spirituality and religion as giving them hope, self-esteem, and a purpose (Mugere, Omona, State, & Shakespeare, 2019). It also gave them a way to deal with certain stigmas about disabilities. In other cultures, some believe that an individual with a disability was a punishment from God (Rohwerder, 2018).

Historical Events and Figures

In the 1900's various changes in legislation and society took place which had a great impact on the way people treated individuals with disabilities. During the Great Depression in the 1930's a group was organized called the League of the Physically Handicapped and they fought for employment of those who had a disability. Another group called We Are Not Alone was created in the 1940's and their purpose was to help psychiatric patients transition back into the community from hospitals.

In 1963, President John Kennedy passed the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act which helped to create facilities to provide care for individuals with disabilities. In the mid 1960's, Medicaid and Medicare were formed so individuals with a developmentally disability could receive medical and long-term care within their communities. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed to prevent discrimination based in your religion, color, race, national or sex origin. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson developed a mental retardation presidential committee. In 1968, the Fair Housing Act was established to prevent housing discrimination. In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act was passed to prevent discrimination on disabilities in federal funded programs. In 1975 the Education for all Handicapped Children Act was established. In 1986, the Air Carrier Access Act was created to prevent discrimination in the travel corporation. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was sanctioned to make sure individuals with disabilities have rights of full involvement of the American life. In the late 1800's state and local agencies-built facilities to house and care for individuals who had developmental disabilities. According to Ayelet and Roni (2020), majority of the facilities were built on the town's outskirts and societal attitudes endorsed this type of segregation, however segregation further stigmatized those with disabilities.

Historical and Current Oppression

Disabilities' perceptions and treatments have experienced changes since the 1900's. Individuals with disabilities have demanded change and equal rights. Dating back to the 1800's, activism has been prevalent in different disability groups. Various people, groups, laws, and experiences have molded this growth and movement in changes of disabilities. The greatest achievement of disabilities is the Americans Disability Act which today still fights for equal

rights. In the month of July, Disability Pride is celebrated to recognize all the work that has been done to help individuals with disabilities. One of the most pivotal changes for individuals with disabilities was in 1999 with the Olmstead Supreme Court Decision which gave individuals the right to have access to services in the community and support from state funds. This court decision would also allow individuals to be able to stay in their homes instead of being institutionalized (Olmstead, 2022). In previous years individuals with disabilities that live in the United States were not allowed to be in public and children who had a disability were taught at home and exiled from activities in the community (Olmstead, 2022). Even with laws put in place to protect individuals with disabilities, they still struggle with obstacles every day. Some of the struggles and barriers that individuals with disabilities must face daily are lack of handicap accessibility, availability of adaptive and assistive technology, resource limitation, and negative opinions from people (CDC, 2020). These obstacles make it hard for those with disabilities to take part and function in daily living activities and to be independent.

Events

I had the privilege to volunteer at the Adult Basic Life-Skills Education Program also known as ABLE at Randolph Community College. This program is for disabled adult that are seventeen years of age and older. The program is geared to help disable adults to achieve a higher independence level and build their academic skills by concentrating on skills in education, social, life, and vocational in a learning setting. I was able to attend two events. The first event was on March 30, 2022. I was able to volunteer at the student's plant sale. The students of the ABLE program prepared plants to be sold to the public and the money was used to help with

their prom cost. The students were excited about the plant project. They worked hard and took pride in their work. The second event that I was able to attend was the ABLE prom on April 23, 2022 and the theme was “Red Carpet”. This was such a beautiful and heartfelt experience. The students were dressed in beautiful dresses and nice suits/ tuxedos. The students had so much fun being treated like celebrities. Both events were such a joy to watch and participate in. These experiences helped me to look at disabilities at a whole new level. The students from this program showed me what confidence is all about. They are not letting their disabilities limit them or held them back. Many of these students enjoy coming to school to learn and a few have part jobs, paid and volunteer work. As I worked with these students with various disabilities, I was reminded how God shows up in the small things teaching us big things. What I learned from these students, no matter what situation that you are in, you can do anything through Christ that strengthens you.

Participating in these events impacted me emotionally in a positive way. I saw these students work hard, work together, work consistently, and work proudly despite their disabilities. I loved the relationship between the teachers and the students. I also loved how the public embraced the students and supported them through the different projects. Throughout these events I was eager to jump right in and help where needed. I enjoyed talking to the different students and getting to know them. Many would tell me what they were working on and was eager to show the work they had completed. I enjoyed being a part of helping set up the prom and watching the students smile from ear to ear. I enjoyed watching them dance on the dance floor and having a dance off with the teachers and parents. I enjoyed seeing the students treated like the kings and queens they are. I enjoy watching the students filled with so much life and not having a care in the world. What I learned from the ABLE students was you must play the hand you were dealt.

Life is not always going to be fair and how you make the best of your life depends on you. I love to see individuals conquer what tries to hold them back. The ABLE students truly showed what determination, courage, and strength are all about. One of the teachers that I talked to stated, even though I am their teacher, I have learned so much from these students. It gives individuals with disabilities a chance to shine and to bring awareness to the community of disabilities. I think I had such an overwhelming action because the students showed that you are stronger than you can imagine, good deeds will always win, helping others reciprocates kindness, all have something to contribute, and your condition does not define your ability.

Three things that I learned about adults who have a disability through participating in the ABLE program that I did not cover in research is the importance of communication, recognizing independent levels, and disabilities can happen to all of us. When interacting with the ABLE students, I learned that different ways of communication was very important. It is important to allow those with disabilities to be able to express themselves and to figure out what makes sense to them in the way they view the world. It is important to talk with individuals the same way you talk to an individual without a disability. These individuals are adults and should be treated as such. When a person has a disability, it is critical to take measures, to ensure when communicating, that effective strategies in communication are used. Another teaching moment for me was learning the different levels of independent with each student. As a mother and counselor, sometimes it is in our nature to help without considering what someone wants help with. Often when we think of someone that has a disability, we think they are always depending on us to help. ABLE students showed me that they are more independent than we think, and we need to respect their independence. Individuals with a disability want to be treated normal and it is our job to make sure we are doing just that. Last, disabilities do not have any

creed or color. It does not matter what race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, or gender you belong to; disabilities can knock at anyone's door. Disabilities effects all walks of life and I saw that with the ABLE students. What I was most impressed about the students, they all worked together as if they did not see any differences among themselves. Knowing the importance of communication, recognizing independent levels, and disabilities can happen to all of us helps you to understand that you have to let individuals be their own person and treat them they way you would want to be treated if you have a disability. It is important to learn about disabilities because even if you are not affected directly you still can help and advocate for others.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Solution Focused Brief Therapy are counseling theories that can be helpful when helping individuals that have a disability. Cognitive Behavior Therapy teaches skills that helps individuals cope when challenges arise with negative behavior patterns and dysfunctional thoughts. According to the National Institute for Health Care Excellence, Cognitive Behavior Therapy is recommended to treat certain mental health issues in individuals with mild intellectual disabilities (Henderson-Laidlaw & Hall, 2020). It is also recommended before using Cognitive Behavior Therapy, an individual's cognitive aptitude, skills in communication, ability to recognize emotions, and the ability to comprehend the Cognitive Behavior Therapy model should be assessed (Henderson-Laidlaw & Hall, 2020). There were several case studies done on individuals with intellectual disabilities using Cognitive Behavior Therapy. These studies provided evidence that treating behavior issues and depression with this group resulted in substantial clinical improvements. Solution Focused Brief Therapy looks at a person's present moment and future situations and values rather than experiences in the past. The main principle of Solution Focused Brief Therapy is to reach goals by making solutions rather than

studying the problem (Carrick & Randle-Phillips, 2017). Solution Focused Brief Therapy has been an effective intervention for a scope of mental health issues (Carrick & Randle-Phillips, 2017). Studies done by Carrick and Rande-Phillips (2017) showed that clients with intellectual disabilities both mild and moderate had a range of problems addressed effectively with Solution Focused Brief Therapy. With both Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Solution Focus Brief Therapy they both focus on changing a particular behavior, achieving achievable goals, and finding quick solutions. These two therapy techniques have been effective in helping those with disabilities. There is evidence base information to show both Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Solution Focused Brief Therapy are essential to helping those with disabilities. As a counselor that may provide services to adults that have disability, theses are two counseling techniques can be used.

Conclusion

The Cultural Immersion Project gave a glimpse on how it is important to learn and engage with cultures that you are not familiar with. This experience working with adults that have various disabilities gave a new perspective on how you can help others by simply getting to know them personally. By getting to know another culture, you learn more about yourself. The culture that I learned about will help me as a new counselor to see things through their world. which will make me a better and effective counselor. Sometimes you have the read the book instead of viewing the cover.

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