

Attitude or skills? Cultural competence development within an Aotearoa New Zealand bicultural framework

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Cultural competence is one of the most widely used approaches to cross-cultural practice among health and social care professions, including social work. Following the professional code of ethics, social workers must be competent in working with people across cultures. As a result, social work education has sought to teach students to prepare them to become culturally competent. The popular cultural competence model which includes the three components of awareness, knowledge, and skills is often used to measure students' capability to work in cross-cultural situations. The model has an underlying premise that competency can be achieved through education and training. However, there is insufficient evidence that the three components (or each component in isolation) will improve students' and practitioners' competence.

METHODS: This article reports on a qualitative study. Qualitative research offers versatile methods of exploring the three components through gathering information about research participants' educational learning experiences and analysing their application of its into practice.

FINDINGS: This study found that cultural competence is about enhancing the capability of practitioners to negotiate with differences in practice. Aotearoa New Zealand content on biculturalism in social work education has played a pivotal role in valuing cultural differences to foster. Cultural safety calls forth recognition of others and being more other-oriented, encompassing cultural humility. A receptive attitude toward difference is a by-product of cross-cultural skills for practice.

IMPLICATIONS: The study result strengthens support for the integration of cultural safety and cultural humility in teaching and learning cultural competence in social work education.

KEYWORDS: Biculturalism; cultural competence; cultural safety; cultural humility

Cultural competence is generally understood as an effective cross-cultural practice approach (Yan & Wong, 2005). The concept has been increasingly prominent in countries with culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse populations. Correspondingly, Aotearoa New Zealand has experienced rapidly growing diversity. First and foremost, the country recognises the

indigenous people of Māori as a Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa and respects the people and culture. As it increasingly requiring practitioners to work in cross-cultural situations, social work is concerned with cultural differences, which may cause cultural barriers in practice (Yan & Wong, 2005). Developing a practitioner's cultural competence supposedly overcomes the

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barriers to working with clients across cultures.

Cultural competence is an essential part of learning for social work students to prepare for them for meeting cross-cultural challenges in their future practice. Social work educators often use a compositional model (awareness, knowledge and skill components) to set a standard to train students, evaluate their ability to work cross-culturally, and to develop skills to enhance performance in cross-cultural situations (Yan & Wong, 2005). There are various cultural competence models and frameworks which, presumably, guide in the development of cultural competence. In contemporary social work, Lum (2011)'s process stage framework can be pertinent as it defines four stages: (1) cultural awareness: to develop an awareness of ethnicity and racism and its impact on professional attitudes; perception, and behaviour; (2) knowledge acquisition: to gain a body of information that organises material about a topic such as systems, psychosocial theory and also theories about ethnicity, culture, minorities and social class into sets of facts that explain phenomena; (3) skill development: the integration of cultural awareness and knowledge acquisition when applying them in a helping situation; and (4) inductive learning: to continue developing skills and insights relating to multicultural social work. Social workers continuously require new learning to maintain their competence (Lum, 2011).

However, the previous studies on cultural competence have consistently reported theoretically and practically inadequate evidence for its effectiveness (Denso, 2018; Fisher-Borne et al., 2014; Kwong, 2009; Harrison & Turner, 2011). Over the past 40 years, a number of researchers have sought to determine the concept and find better techniques and approaches to cross-cultural practice. The primary critique of cultural competence is absent in a standard definition that shares a unified meaning. Various similar concepts and terminologies (Kwong,

2009) lead to multiple understandings and interpretations expressed by different authors (Denso, 2018). Moreover, the operationalisation of cultural competence, such as actual behaviour in practice, is less examined (Jani et al., 2016). Hence, cultural competence has been theoretically constructed, underlying assumptions of what it is, how it works in practice, and most of all, what is, and how to be a culturally competent social worker. As a result, social work education faces challenges teaching cultural competence, and social work students may struggle to perform their proficiency in cross-cultural practice (Jani et al., 2016).

A weakness with this argument is given little attention, to the degree of training effectiveness of cultural competence applying knowledge and skills taught to students in the classroom and practicum placement in actual practice. The learning efficacy would suggest further education, training, and practice. This research has sought to understand cultural competence from an inductive approach for the first author's PhD thesis. The central question asked how social work students' learning of the main three components—awareness, knowledge and skills—aided their developing cultural competence. This study analysed the three components within Aotearoa New Zealand social work education, which encompasses Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi.

In Aotearoa New Zealand biculturalism—the trajectory of relations between with indigenous people of Māori and Pākehā and also between Tangata Whenua and Tauwiwi (non-Māori/Pākehā)—a Treaty between Māori tribes and the Crown is incorporated in the codes of ethics and conduct which apply in social work practice (ANZSW, 2019; SWRB, 2016a). In Aotearoa New Zealand, teaching biculturalism in social work education has become fundamental to cultural competence development (Beddoe, 2018; Eketone & Walker, 2015; Fraser & Briggs, 2016). This

article attempts to show that the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi underpin the active promotion of cultural safety, valuing cultural differences and considering the other's culture that influences cultural humility: recognising others and being more other-oriented. The attitudinal development toward cultural differences has significantly resulted in competence to work with differences in practice.

Problem with acquisition of cultural competence

Many cultural competence models, which are often a basis of awareness, knowledge skills components organising education and training, have an underlying, embedded assumption that cultural competence can be obtained by increasing student or practitioner awareness and acquiring knowledge (Kumas-Tan et al., 2007). The Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training set by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) particularly mention awareness and knowledge. Social work students are expected to increase self-awareness about their personal, cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and biases that may influence relationships with diverse backgrounds of individuals and groups. Knowledge of class, gender, and ethnic/race-related issues is not only about individuals and groups, but also an in-depth understanding of the environment and cultural context (IFSW, 2021). Thus, the ability of learners is often focused on assessing awareness and knowledge components. The outcome presumably brings skills for cross-cultural practice. However, the current assessment may be an inadequate measure for an individual's skills (Jani et al., 2016). The main criticisms are discussed below.

Mastering another culture

One major drawback of this approach is that cultural competence has been constructed as knowledge-based *learned*

capacity (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010). A fundamental element of learning within professional education programmes often focuses on gaining cultural knowledge. Cultural competence is a modernist heritage associated with the cultural literacy model rooted in anthropology and ethnography, which defines culture as a static and monolithic construct (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). The method of knowledge acquisition relies on the systematic gathering of cultural information that culture can be captured without influencing the observer's cultural expectations and biases (Williams, 2006). Knowledge of cultures is often defined as descriptions of particular cultural groups of history (oppression), norms, traditional characteristics, gestures, communication styles, behaviours, and attitudes (Nadan, 2014). This approach may imply that practitioners can simply learn about a culture of a specific group by gathering information about that group.

Culture is, therefore, approached as knowable from the essentialist perspective in training and teaching. In analysing a typology of assumptions underlying training culture Carter and Qureshi (1995) identified one of the five different perspectives of culture, called the *traditional* approach, to be apposite to a teaching mechanism of cultural competence. In this approach, culture is viewed as a function of socialisation and the social environment and members of the culture have a shared background and an identity related to a worldview. Thus, an individual's development of cultural identity is primarily a function of how the individual interprets their world due to the possibilities and limitations contained within their culture (Carter & Qureshi, 1995). This approach to training aims to expose the learner to another culture by their being in a cultural environment and interacting with people of that culture even though that exposure may be very limited: "the idea is that one person or family is representative of the entire group" (Carter & Qureshi, 1995, p. 249). The experience of

interacting with specific individuals and families of an ethnic and cultural group can be translated as knowledge of the culture. The traditional approach has been seemingly the norm in teaching and learning cultural competence. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this may be expressed by requiring specific experiences, such as attending a Noho mārae. As international fieldwork has become popular in social work programmes in the past 2 decades, augmenting local practice experience with a purpose is to develop social work students' cultural competence through immersion in another culture (Dunlap & Mapp, 2017; Thampi, 2017). The training approach may underpin an assumption that the best learning opportunity happens when the learner experiences another culture.

Consequently, cultural competence is premised on the belief that one can master another culture: one must be knowledgeable about clients' cultures to be culturally competent. Several authors have reported analyses of the relationship between knowledge and competence. Cultural competence often indicates that learning and understanding specific cultural groups is a good strategy for competence (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). Knowledge of a cultural group is thought to be thoroughly applied to work with clients from that culture (Johnson & Munch, 2009). "Basically, the more we 'learn about' others, the better skilled we are to meet their needs" (Ben-Ari & Strier, 2010, p. 2158). These authors are sceptical in the ways of measuring cultural competence. In fact, another study found that knowledge about cultures does not necessarily reflect on a practitioner's ability to engage with diversity and difference (Jami et al., 2016).

Unequal power relations in practice

Another problem with this approach is that the awareness component, which refers to a practitioner's self-awareness is used ineffectively in practice. Cultural competence models/frameworks

significantly emphasise increasing some levels of self-awareness of practitioners (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014; Yan & Wong, 2005). In reference to the IFSW/IASSW's (2021) educational standards, students are encouraged to examine their cultural background and identity and their perception of other cultures before working with people from different cultures. Self-awareness encompassing cultural competence focuses on assessing the dynamic of cultural differences between the self and clients that begins with cultural self-awareness of the practitioner and the cultural 'other' awareness of the person being worked with (Lum, 2011). A primary goal of cultural competence is to analyse and assess exploitative power and privilege derived from a practitioner's cultural background and social context (Denso, 2018). Thus, the practitioner's awareness of cultural background and identity different from clients (cultural difference) can be the centre of attention. On the other hand, self-awareness can also challenge the inherent power imbalance by analysing the power differences in a client-practitioner relationship (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014), such as critically analysing and questioning to the practitioner's self-positioning in the relationship. However, the education and training fail to emphasise such use of self-awareness (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). Consequently, cultural competence is often criticised, lacking in examination of power differences (Denso, 2018).

Furthermore, cultural competence might have been moulded within understanding the self and others/clients which leads to forming a hierarchical relationship between the two. The social work profession has moved away from the approaches of 'social worker expert' as understanding and solving a client's problem (Johnson & Munch, 2009). Cultural competence implies mastery of a particular ability or area of expertise (Lum, 2007), such as being well equipped with knowledge of clients' cultural groups. Thus, cultural competence

may engender a power imbalance in the relationship, negating the original purpose for thinking and beginning to deal with (power) differences in practice.

How does cultural competence work in practice?

In view of all that has been outlined so far, there is no strong link between the awareness and knowledge components and the ability or skills of a practitioner in working effectively with clients from various cultural backgrounds. There is no substantial evidence that each component in isolation will improve the practitioner's competence. Firstly, knowledge of culture may reduce practitioners' anxiety by knowing about a cultural group of clients. However, such *knowing* of broad descriptions of that cultural group (Fisher-Borne et al., 2014) alone is an insufficient skill for practice. This argument can be supported by Melendres's (2020) recent study. Melendre reported that novice professionals tend to feel inadequate, as they are not only expected to be competent with knowledge of their clients' background but also to be competent about providing the best services based on the client's uniqueness. Secondly, focusing solely on examining and exploring the practitioner's background and identity is not enough evidence to suggest competence in working effectively in cross-cultural practice.

Furthermore, the 'skills' of a practitioner have not been paid much attention. The skill component often refers to cross-cultural skills, such as: cross-cultural communication and relationship protocols, and problem understanding of culturally diverse clients in Lum's (2011) framework. These skills can be perhaps interpreted as specific strategies or techniques of cultural groups which, presumably, can be transformed from cultural knowledge and experience. Particularly, knowledge suggested in cultural competence is often assumed to apply culturally specific

intervention practices (Azzopardi & McNeill, 2016). Apparently developing practice techniques is accompanied by building knowledge about specific ethnic or cultural groups, contributing to the skill component (Abrams & Moio, 2009). As professional knowledge and skills are always required in practice (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Kwong, 2009; Nadan, 2014; Yan & Wong, 2005), social work students would expect to be taught knowledge and skills directly related to cross-cultural practice. However, a question may be raised, does cultural competence signify skill or rather, as Harrison and Turner (2011) claim, competence does not refer to knowledge and skill, which are interchangeably used with the term *competency*; competence means capability and potentiality. The current understanding of competence(y) may move away from the original intention and meaning. Thus, this article discusses cultural competence based on how awareness and knowledge taught to research participants in Aotearoa New Zealand social work programmes are demonstrated in practice.

The study

In a study conducted for the first author's PhD thesis, the three main components of cultural competence were investigated: awareness, knowledge, and the skills taught research participants in their social work programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how these components they learned were transferred to practice (Ide, 2021). The data were gathered via individual interviews with 10 social work students who had completed at least one placement in their social work degree and 18 practitioners who had worked a minimum of two years in various fields of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. An in-depth, semi-structured interview method was selected to explore their educational learning, field education and professional experiences. Data from students and practitioners were analysed

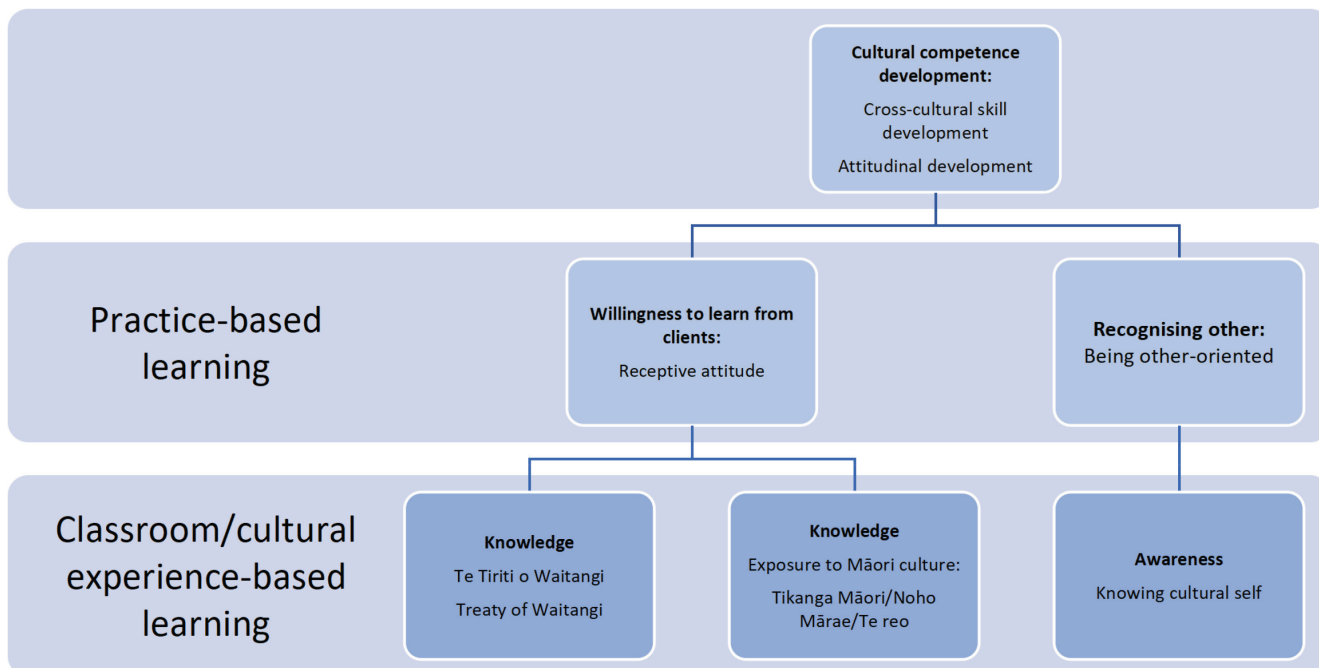
separately. The practitioner participants were asked about their educational experiences and early professional practice experience. The study received ethical approval from the University of Auckland Ethics Committee on 4 June 2015.

Findings: Leaning outcomes of cultural competence within a bicultural framework

The study set out to assess the importance of learning outcomes of cultural competence. Aotearoa New Zealand social work education is compatible with the IFSW/IASSW educational standards of learning objectives. This research found that a shared focus between knowledge and awareness components is indicated in the participants’ illustrations of educational (classroom/practice-based) learning experiences (see Figure 1). The participants applied their classroom-based learning to practice-based learning, which aided their potential cultural competence. A key element of acknowledging cultural differences from knowledge and awareness

components becomes a core of cross-cultural practice. The current social work does not define ‘difference’ based on a solo meaning of race and ethnicity but also age, gender, socioeconomic status and sexuality in human behaviour (Jani et al., 2016). Surprisingly, the research findings indicate that *culture* is often specified as ethnic and racial minority groups. Cultural competence means working with Māori people, particularly, perceived by students and mature-aged Māori practitioners. Although the current ANZASW code of ethics and the SWRB’s core competency standards are aligned with the international standards; these do not particularly require social workers to demonstrate their knowledge and skills for working with Māori clients (ANZSW, 2019; Eketone & Walker, 2015; SWRB, 2016b). The bicultural principle in New Zealand social work education significantly fosters cultural safety which then influences cultural humility and has thus been a crucial part of cultural competence toward skill development. The findings of the study are discussed below with reference to the literature.

Figure 1: Cultural Competence Development Within a Bicultural Framework



Classroom-based learning

Promoting cultural safety beyond knowledge

Aotearoa New Zealand social work programmes encompass learning exclusively about Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi, which has significantly impacted participants' learning. One participant mentioned: "... you get the other side of the story as well and, you know, it [learning the Treaty] is a respect thing and it is being inclusive..." Māori lecturers and educators who were involved in teaching the Treaty and other Māori papers were also a considerable influence on the participants exploring Māori people's worldviews. Through listening to those lectures and educators' lived experiences in the social work profession and being a Māori person in Aotearoa New Zealand society, another participant said: "I think what real value was that the lecturers were all Māori So that was really educational and the Māori lecturers they worked in 70s, 80s and 90s." Some participants reflected on how Māori people interpreted the historical experience such as colonisation and oppression and their personal issues may be derived from decades of inequality and mistreatment in the society.

Furthermore, exposure to Māori culture played a pivotal role in educational learning. Attending a Noho mārae (staying at mārae: meeting house) was a noteworthy experience for many participants. One said: "That's demonstrated how to engage [with Māori people]." Participants have learned about how to behave themselves in Māori cultural environments through observing the cultural protocols. They found comfort in the familiarity of Māori culture through cultural immersion experience. Other participant said, "I'm not struggling with working with Māori and I'm not uncomfortable with cultural differences." Her familiarity/comfort demonstrated her confidence in a placement: "I did mihi introducing myself [in an introduction meeting at a placement

organisation] Only I did it [among other placement students]. I could feel Māori staff were quite happy [with her nice gesture]" Moreover, a Māori participant saw her study cohorts changing to positive attitudes toward Māori culture by attending Noho mārae each of the 3-year social work programme. She analysed the reasons: "...only because they are uncomfortable leaving their comfort zone, sharing the space [the cultural/personal environment]." These findings corroborate the ideas of Carter and Qureshi (1995), who define the traditional approach to multicultural training; they suggest that cultural exposure is a way for the learner to develop comfort with cultural differences. Cultural exposure has seemingly had a significant effect on increasing comfort and improving their confidence in being with Māori people in the cultural environment.

On the other hand, Jani et al. (2016) argued that confidence has been found to have an inverse relationship with the ability to work with the difference. A previous study has indicated that cultural competence often implies being confident professionals who are comfortable with others; however, the professionals' confidence and comfort may not be a measure of cultural competence (Kumas-Tan et al., 2007). Kumas-Tan et al.'s (2007) study found that students who receive cultural content in their courses may feel less confident, and also, a student who has cultural immersion experiences in their programmes noted that as they experience another culture, the less they know about them in the other study. A potential reason is that higher confidence and comfort levels may indicate lower insight or awareness (Kumas-Tan et al., 2007).

One unanticipated finding of this study was that formal education fosters cultural safety, affecting participants' consideration of other cultures and sensitivity to the other's feelings and experiences in environments. This was illustrated in the earlier example, where some participants sought to understand how Māori people may perceive Aotearoa

New Zealand history and consider their social experiences in learning about the Treaty. A few participants take into account the other's view affected by culture and other factors which can be different from theirs. Therefore, they question their own views. One said: "We tend to think we are the same as others, which is problematic." Other participants also mentioned "wearing ... cultural glasses" or "turning on our cultural channel" to see/make judgements on the others. That can suggest their attitudinal development toward differences.

A possible explanation for this result is that cultural safety derived from the Aotearoa New Zealand nursing and midwifery through the 1970s to 1980s (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2011) might have recognised and been promoted earlier in education and training for health professionals in the country. Cultural safety is about health care recipients' feeling comfortable and it concerns their safety in receiving health care (Vernon & Papps, 2015). The concept aims to improve patients' health care experiences by integrating with Māori health and the Treaty of Waitangi in health settings (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2011). The approach to practice may require the practitioner's compassion and respect towards people from different cultures, while cultural competence focuses more on improving the ability of practitioners to provide adequate social and health care to the people.

Bring "self" awareness from exploration of the self

In social work, awareness often refers to the practitioner's cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, and their own emotional and cognitive processing of cross-cultural encounters (Nadan, 2014). The current research findings also locate those attributes in growing awareness among participants during the social work programmes. In this study, the different types of awareness are categorised: (1)

cultural identity: defining self-identify; (2) cultural self-awareness: recognising cultural differences and similarities between the self and others; and (3) critical self-awareness: tracing and analysing emotions and thoughts (including assumptions and biases) where they are originated from. In classroom-based learning, cultural identity and cultural self-awareness strengthen participants' self-awareness. Cultural identity explored the cultural/personal backgrounds of participants: race/ethnicity, country of origin, gender, language and religion and how their identity(ies) has/have formed whom they are through reflecting on life experience. A young participant explained her classwork:

... we had a presentation about "who am I". To be honest ... I didn't know why such a topic of "who am I" [is required for social work]. Other students said ten minutes presentation was too short, but I had just seven minutes. After that, I still keep thinking about who I am.

For me, my childhood experience, my living context, my culture, my parents, and [her cultural] traditional food, these shape who I am....

For those who were young and/or immigrant participants, this self-exploration process was an early opportunity to discover the self.

Cultural self-awareness was intended to assess the dynamic of cultural differences between the self and others. The process frequently occurred in a culturally diverse classroom where the participants discussed, shared their opinions, and faced value conflicts with their study cohorts. Recognising similarities and differences in traits and values between one's own and other groups made one more aware of the self. Lum (2007) mentioned that learners develop cultural awareness through negative and positive experiences through contact with individuals, families, and groups from

different cultures and races/ethnicities. An example of this: a migrant participant who had experienced a confrontation with local New Zealand students in a class:

... we talked about sex workers in class, I know this is legal in New Zealand but back in my country this isn't legal ... I am an Asian [implying the moral coming from her cultural value], and having a sister, if she is a sex worker, it is not acceptable. It's not a better social worker or not. It comes to differences, it's clashed ... I was kind of angry because at the end of the discussion, how it flew was "[local students' implied] it's New Zealand we have to accept as it is, if you can't accept it then you can't be [a] social worker".

This participant generally sees herself integrating well into Aotearoa New Zealand society. However, this experience of cultural discomfort reminds her of her own significant differences from her local student colleagues. Both cultural identity and cultural self-awareness focus more on knowing the (cultural) self, whereas critical self-awareness involves recognising others through understanding self, which occurred more in practice-based learning discussed later.

Practice-based learning

The applications of awareness and knowledge in a practice setting began in field education but were often processed during earlier careers where participants made sense of their learning. When facing their learning limitations in actual situations, those students and early professional participants felt the inadequacy of their knowledge and skills for practice, which is seemingly something to do with their "engagement/engaging" and/or "relationship/connection" with clients frequently mentioned in interviews. In practice-based learning, having direct experiences working with people from various cultures gradually

influences their attitudes toward cultural differences.

Willingness to learn "from" clients

Learning 'about' the Treaty of Waitangi and about Māori culture is cast as a foundation for the cross-cultural practice commenced in classroom-based learning. The research findings showed that participants avail themselves of the learning 'about' culture approach (knowledge acquisition) in practice. A typical example of this was searching for a greeting in the language of a client and the interaction protocols of the culture the client comes from before initial meetings. Several participants describe it as "cultural manners", which are the way they demonstrate their respect and acknowledgment of clients (and their cultures) in practice.

Student participants tended to assume that cultural knowledge assisted in building a working relationship with Māori people and anyone from any cultural background. Participants who are/were in their early professions were often urged to learn more 'about' other cultures apart from Māori and Pasifika cultures. However, the learning 'about' approach often has limitations for use, as several experienced practitioner participants mentioned. Simply learning about all existing cultures is impossible. These experienced practitioner participants cautioned that learning 'about' a cultural group by gathering information from books or the internet might engender generalisations about a cultural group of clients. Several participants observed that, while there may be similarities between people within a culture, all clients from that cultural group do not always think, express themselves, or behave in the same way. This finding is in agreement with Kumas-Tan et al. (2007), who argued that acquiring cultural knowledge minimises differences among community members. Also, Fisher-Borne et al. (2014) claimed that knowledge may create a stereotype of various group

identities. Participants acknowledged that appropriateness or manner can vary by culture and individuals. Therefore, the individuality of each client cannot be ignored.

It is interesting to note, in analysing the findings, that many practitioner participants actively sought help in using their professional and personal networks for advice when they recognise a lack of understanding of clients' cultures. This is contrary to an international study where it was reported that social workers tended toward a passive attitude to filling information gaps about clients' cultures. They had an expectation to be offered the information via educational seminars and workshops, and to be educated by supervisors (BØ, 2015). In this Aotearoa New Zealand study, some non-Māori student participants who were presented opportunities to work with Māori social workers actively observed their interactive behaviours with Māori clients and asked questions about Māori culture in their placements. Moreover, some practitioner participants openly ask for clients' preferences and needs, which can be culturally specific. One participant spends time talking to her clients about their culture if there is a need to discuss it, by asking, "How does it work for you in New Zealand and what might work for you?" Another participant showed her open and positive attitude toward clients when asking:

I think I've got brave as well as being about more open about you know "this is me, this is who I am, tell me about you, what's important to you?" and perhaps acknowledging explicit about [her intention]. I suppose I'm reasonably a young Pākehā girl, [saying or implying to clients] "I'm not the same as you I may need your help." I've found [for] most ... clients that work[s] quite well. Usually, we have a giggle, you know, we are kind of lightening [the mood between them].

Other participants encouraged their clients to share and teach their ways of living as these participants value trying to "do things in the client's ways". One participant said: "I want to know my clients, I let them lead us. I don't want to go there and make the family feel uncomfortable with me." Another participant demonstrated this stance in their example:

My example of an Islamic family. I looked up Google and different cultures within the Islamic religion. Not all Muslim people are the same. I've gotten a little bit of an overview. So when I went to the room [in their house], I let the mother guide me. She looked toward where I can sit, which is on the ground. So sweet, I sat on the ground. And then she brings a tea pot, some really funky tea. You know it's yuck but I drank it. It's just out of respect. Just watching and mirroring what they were doing.

These findings are critical because the participants are positively inclined to learn 'from' clients to understand their cultures. Another participant has learned 'from' her clients about living in a new culture/society through respectful dialogue with them. She explained:

... when I was working with older adults I saw a lot of different cultures... I guess a lot of people we saw the parents of children who had migrated to New Zealand. They were often older and had a sort of own community and they had ways of doing own things [ways of lifestyle] that turned sort of upside down when they came here...

The participant had come to understand, through conversations with them, that migrant clients' issues are sometimes related to their hardship experiences in adapting to a new culture. The narrative approach does not assume that the practitioner can know (learn 'about') another culture they do not belong to (Williams, 2006). The participants

did not always expect themselves to know clients' cultures. They had developed a receptive attitude toward the unknown.

Becoming other-oriented

The primary outcome of awareness developed from classroom-based learning was the importance of knowing the self through processing cultural identity and cultural self-awareness. The last type of awareness, critical self-awareness, was exercised more in field education and professional practice. Participants traced their emotions and thoughts in a particular situation significantly when they negatively experienced interactions with people. They began to examine why they acted, felt, and thought the way they did in the situation and analysed underlying assumptions, beliefs, and biases through reflection. An example of this was provided when a young student participant received some negative comments from a mature-aged client, expressing her low confidence about her in her placement setting. The incident had a major impact on her during the placement. Afterwards, she reflected on this and understood that this client may have felt subordinated by talking to a person who is younger. Moreover, the participant recognised her anxiety about being judged herself due to her young appearance and lack of confidence as she tried to act like and *be* a professional (trying to fit into her professional image). After reflection, the participant realised: "Even if you look professional, that's another assumption [this also judges a person]" .

In education, awareness can be excessively concerned with the self as cultural/personal. In field education, student participants become conscious of the self as a professional. Many students and early professional participants are likely determined to play a professional role by managing to control cultural/personal self in practice: taking a non-judgmental stance and not 'taking a side' about cultural differences even if they have to suppress their feelings and opinions. The

finding is consistent with a previous study by Yan and Wong (2005), which explicated the theoretical understanding of how self-awareness works in practice; the self-aware practitioner assumes to be conscious use of oneself through full use of *professional self*. They can maintain cultural neutrality by being not totally a part of, or not totally apart, from their own culture (Yan & Wong, 2005). The findings of this research suggest that self-awareness is often used to overcome cultural differences by taking a professional self/culturally neutral position. However, the full use of the professional self was not always effective for developing a practice relationship. A couple of participants described it as "just working" and "not engaging." Participants often felt lacking connection with clients.

Many participants kept self-awareness in mind as understanding the self before understanding others. On the other hand, few participants questioned how their awareness of the self relates to understanding people from other cultures or working effectively with them. This finding may support the idea of Bø (2015), who suggests that practitioners need to look into the self and be more aware of how their cultural predispositions determine how they understand their clients' problems. Some participants come to know more about the self; they realise that our views of the self and others are relational: when knowing another individual, our view of the person is relational. We tend to see a person filtered through our perspectives, including biases and assumptions. A participant explained that her 'normality' was often defined based on her cultural value as her culture has strongly affected her thinking about how life and people should be. She said: "I come from the culture [clearly defining] 'this is good', 'this is bad', 'this is normal', 'this is abnormal' and [her preconception] was my big dilemma working with different cultures". As a result, she used to belittle some clients' needs who are much better provided for than in her country of origin.

... listening to [service users] people's problems, their disappointments [about the social services]. That was huge cultural difference for me. Sometime listening to them, personally, it's not really a problem.

But because it is a problem to them, calling you and requiring you to listen to them and to support them what they want ... Because they come from a [New Zealand] different culture and have grown up in a different society and system. The citizens have been given the rights which I've never had in my home country. That was my own cultural difference I was learning.

Her awareness of thoughts was that she judged the clients by seeing their life situations from her previous position.

When recognising others through understanding the self, the participants take an other-oriented stance by thinking and understanding how clients might think and view their situations and issues. The participants also considered how much their perspectives and preconceptions may affect their thinking and understanding of others. These findings show that cultivating self-awareness can be a landmark of attitudinal changes toward cultural differences among these participants who have gradually grown cultural humility by engaging in self-question/critique and accepting their assumptions and biases.

Discussion

Integration of the self and other in practice

Previous studies have noted that cultural competence has been often criticised due to neglecting consideration of relationships with clients in the context of power relations (Denso, 2018; Fisher-Borne et al., 2014). Yan and Wong (2005) critiqued the one-way process of the client-social worker relationship within many cultural-

competence-related models underlying the concept of the social worker as an expert who is equipped with knowledge and skills to help them while the client becomes more passive and always seeking help. The construction of the self and the others deemed in practice can influence power in the relationship.

However, the findings of this study do not strongly support the previous research. The experienced practitioner participants often endeavoured to overcome differences by integrating the self and others in a client-social worker relationship. Participants realised that addressing and recognising cultural differences, including power differences, is essential; sharing similarities and finding things in common to strengthen their relationships with their clients was equally important. These participants viewed social work practice as a two-way process. One said: "I think sharing a little bit of self helps the process. People want to know if you are genuine...." Another also mentioned that: "I think that it's like any place people get to know you and you come with good intentions, and people are just getting to suss you out I suppose." Showing the personal aspects of participants themselves to clients, to a reasonable degree, is vital in their practice.

The concept of the use of self in practice is acknowledged; however, it is not clearly defined in social work. Dewane (2006) defined several types: use of personality, use of belief system; use of relational dynamics; and use of self-disclosure were particularly demonstrated by practitioner participants. The use of an open personality appears to assist in enhancing a relationship. Participants described an open attitude to their clients by showing their good intentions and interest in clients as a person, including asking questions. That leads to being open to each other. The participants also shared their life experiences by revealing their personal information when it was deemed appropriate for relationship building. They often come from a similar background to

their clients, such as being a single parent, experiencing family/partner domestic violence, and sharing common cultural and religious beliefs; these connections seem to make it easier to develop relationships. Those participants saw this use-of-self as being more authentic in a relationship with a client within a professional boundary. Integrating self and clients in practice, which requires negotiating differences, is a means to facilitate a practitioner's ability to work effectively with people across cultures in this research. As has been demonstrated in this paper, Aotearoa New Zealand bicultural education in social work has exerted a positive influence on valuing cultural differences that stimulate the participants' development of a receptive attitude toward differences, which can transform their cross-cultural skills.

Conclusion

This study was designed to determine the effect of cultural competence: awareness, knowledge, and skills components applied in practice. The awareness and knowledge components are start-ups for building cultural competence. The findings have shown that participants acquire knowledge using an approach to learning 'about' cultural groups by gathering information about a set of traditions, customs, characteristics, communication styles, and behaviour patterns of that cultural group. Self-awareness, in which one understands one's own cultural background and identity, including acknowledging emotions, thoughts, assumptions, and biases, was often used to maintain the professional self/cultural neutral position. However, these do not directly indicate the participants' competence to work with people from different cultures.

One of the significant findings from this study is that Aotearoa New Zealand biculturalism in social work education has played a significant role in fostering cultural safety: valuing cultural differences and considering others' cultures among

participants. This has predisposed their receptive attitude toward differences leading to change in their behaviours—being willing to learn 'from' clients and becoming more other-oriented by recognising others in practice (cultural humility). The current study found that cultural competence is particularly demonstrated in engagement with clients in negotiating differences between the two parties to bring them into more equal participation in practice.

In recent years, cultural humility has been favoured over cultural competence and the training leads to improving client-practitioner relationships by examining the practitioner's attitudes and beliefs, while cultural competence has been criticised as tokenistic, and an inadequate skill for cross-cultural practice. In this study, cultural humility, shown in the attitudes of a practitioner, can contribute to cultural competence (potential ability). Both are interdependent elements of cross-cultural skills development.

This research result may help us understand that being a culturally competent social worker does not mean always being proficient—to know how to do practice in every cross-cultural situation—but social workers need to figure out ways of working with clients in practice. However, this was a small study, and these findings cannot be extrapolated to all students' and practitioners' development. In addition, social workers who volunteered to participate were more likely to have a strong interest in, and hold concerns about, current cross-cultural social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. These social workers seemed to hold open and positive attitudes toward cultural differences that significantly supported their impetus to develop cultural competence.

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