

Inclusive Andragogy: Addressing Microaggressions Through Humanistic Learning

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Abstract

Microaggressions in counselor education programs create hostile learning environments that undermine student success and retention. This presentation examines how humanistic-oriented andragogy can serve as a transformative approach to reducing microaggressions and fostering inclusivity. Through qualitative inquiry, this study explores faculty strategies for addressing microaggressions in graduate-level counseling programs and assesses the impact of humanistic learning principles on student engagement. Findings indicate that faculty integrating cultural responsiveness, individualized support, and student-centered pedagogy contribute to a more equitable classroom experience. Faculty training in identifying and addressing microaggressions plays a vital role in cultivating inclusive learning spaces. When counselor educators integrate humanistic learning approaches, they create environments where students feel supported, fully engaged, and positioned for success. This presentation provides actionable strategies for developing equitable classrooms, prioritizing respect, inclusion, and meaningful student engagement.

Keywords: culturally competent education, microaggression, inclusivity, pedagogy

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Introduction

Humanistic-oriented andragogy effectively accommodates scholars from diverse social locations experiencing microaggressions and advocates their needs in larger societal systems (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Crimmins, 2016). Proponents of humanistic-oriented andragogy believe that the goal of adult education is to assist mentees in achieving their inherent potential (Frick, 1997). Humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning prioritize mentees' unique needs and value the educational relationship (Bloss-Brown & Schoening, 2013). Leading learning theorists endorse Rogers' ideas regarding the whole individual's education and focus on providing experiential and relational learning opportunities in academic milieus (Branson et al., 2015; Dougherty et al., 2020). Humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning endorse personalized course content, so it is internalized by mentees and transformed into applied skills (Gómez-Rey et al., 2018; Humphries & Clark, 2021). Educational researchers believe that humanistic-oriented education reduces inequalities and social divisions because it fosters the development of self-worth and honors individual differences, which lead to inclusive andragogy and academic success (Sanabria et al., 2020; Schreiber & Valle, 2016). Learning becomes productive when all mentees are provided with the opportunity to experience an appreciation of their diversity in a milieu of genuine empathy, which is the emblem of Humanistic Learning Theory (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Frick, 1997).

Despite a heightened focus on social justice and diversity in higher education, students of color report experiencing significant microaggressions in their classrooms perpetuated by their white faculty and peers (Crimmins, 2016). Additionally, students of color emphasize the importance of establishing racially just educational spaces (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016). Humanistic andragogy effectively accommodates scholars from diverse social locations targeted by daily microaggressions and advocates for their needs in larger societal systems (Dougherty et al., 2020). Humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning endorse personalized course content, so it is internalized by mentees and transformed into applied skills (Humphries & Clark, 2021). Honoring mentees' individuality is vital to person-centered facilitators of learning, in addition to creating a conducive learning environment that increases learners' potential for actualization (Bloss-Brown & Schoening, 2013; Frick, 1997). Humanistic-oriented education reduces inequalities and social divisions because it fosters the development of self-worth and honors individual differences, which lead to inclusive andragogy and academic success (Sanabria et al., 2020). Learning becomes productive when all mentees are provided with the opportunity to appreciate their diversity in a milieu of genuine empathy, which is the emblem of Humanistic Learning Theory (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Crimmins, 2016).

Application of Humanistic-Oriented Inclusive Andragogy to Counselor Education

In a humanistic-oriented classroom milieu, the instructor-mentee dyad resembles the counselor-client relationship, where scholars feel understood and their diversity is respected (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016). When delivering instruction, person-centered counselor educators strive to uphold the highest ethical standards of the counseling profession while believing in mentees' endless potential and growth (Bloss-Brown & Schoening, 2013; Frick, 1997). Any intervention in the classroom is grounded in the attitude of valuing the learners' social locations, belief systems, and views while being sensitive to potential microaggressions in the classroom setting (Crimmins, 2016; Dougherty et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is paramount for counselor educators to incorporate social justice and diversity-related issues in all aspects of their teaching delivery (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Sanabria et al., 2020). Person-centered facilitators of learning achieve this by first acknowledging that traditional instruction is based

on an inherent power differential (Branson et al., 2015). Humanistic-oriented facilitators believe in valuing mentees' input because it leads to increased involvement and successful proficiency in content material (Gómez-Rey et al., 2018). Allowing mentees' input to balance the power differential between learners and educators does not mean that lectures and assessments (where the power differential is palpable) should be avoided entirely. Instead, humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning foster collaboration during all aspects of instruction (Schreiber & Valle, 2016). Self-directed learning is a process where mentees take the initiative to determine their personal learning needs and are encouraged to formulate their specific learning goals and objectives (Norrie & Dalby, 2007). Humanistic-oriented facilitators embrace the ideas of the self-directed learning process and feel responsible for creating a microaggression-free supportive environment, providing need-based feedback, accommodating mentees' developmental stages, while fostering autonomy (Dougherty et al., 2020; Humphries & Clark, 2021). Scholars who benefit from the self-directed learning process acquire skills necessary for exercising independent thinking, thus developing attitudes that question and fight institutional inequalities (Crimmins, 2016; Frick, 1997). Self-assessment, mentee-directed inquiry, collaborative, and interactive lectures are staples of humanistic-oriented learning activities (Bloss-Brown & Schoening, 2013). To create balance and attenuate the power differential between mentees and educators, humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning assign some projects that mentees direct in addition to several instructor-directed assignments, which yields heightened engagement and microaggression-free collaboration between peers (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Branson et al., 2015).

Resources for Implementation

Humanistic-oriented instructors recognize that it is unfeasible to address every mentee's learning needs; however, they offer resources that satisfy diverse learning interests and welcome their unique social locations (Bloss-Brown & Schoening, 2013; Dougherty et al., 2020). In a humanistic learning milieu, mentees are empowered to create and implement their unique topic projects, thus reaching their personal learning goals sensitive to their cultural background (Frick, 1997). Research indicates that advocacy-based unique topic projects have increased mentees' sensitivity to diverse social locations and skills concerning cultural, social, political, and environmental issues (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Crimmins, 2016). In addition to unique topic projects connected to diversity, humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning encourage mentees to explore institutional and social-level problems (e.g., addressing racial trauma in higher education contexts) and challenge them to find ways of advocacy for their proposed concerns (Sanabria et al., 2020). When it comes to curating a foundational counseling skills course, present in most clinical mental health programs, research suggests specific methods to organize the course that focus on skill development while sensitively addressing microaggressions during didactic training (Branson et al., 2015; Humphries & Clark, 2021). Foundational counseling courses must be well-structured with carefully curated inclusion-focused content (Gómez-Rey et al., 2018). Person-centered counselor educators communicate developmentally appropriate standards to mentees during the first encounter (Norrie & Dalby, 2007). Two critical practices that facilitators of learning can utilize to improve their gatekeeping practices include clearly communicating the program and course expectations and consistently enforcing them while being sensitive to learners' social locations (Fulton et al., 2016; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2017). Additionally, the use of syllabus contracts is an essential aspect of gatekeeping, which contain clearly defined expectations of racial and cultural sensitivity in the classroom, consequences of not meeting expectations, and operationalizations of procedures or consequences (Forrest et al., 2009). Lastly, providing continuous informal and formal assessments and feedback about mentees' racial and cultural

sensitivity and demonstration of inclusivity in the classroom is essential in facilitating mentees' growth and reducing microaggressions in the classroom and field placement settings (Crimmins, 2016; Dougherty et al., 2020).

Assessment Tools Used in Instructional Strategy to Assess Student Learning

Humanistic learning theorists characterize the process of learning as the whole person's growth, inclusive of interpersonal domains, cognitive, and emotional aspects (Branson et al., 2015; Frick, 1997). Humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning place less emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge and assessment and more on how the mentees integrate skills from their unique social locations (Bloss-Brown & Schoening, 2013; Dougherty et al., 2020). However, facilitators of learning employ measurements that indicate whether learners achieved the desired results (Gómez-Rey et al., 2018). Once the desired results have been operationalized, the methods for qualitative and quantitative assessments are selected (Humphries & Clark, 2021). Assessments may include learner-selected unique topic assignments that allow subjective reflection, quantitative multiple-choice exams that evaluate content knowledge, quizzes, and self-directed presentations (Crimmins, 2016; Norrie & Dalby, 2007). Humanistic-oriented educators believe that growth is dynamic. However, accountability is essential to ensure that mentees are prepared to embark on their respective professional journeys (Forrest et al., 2009). Person-centered educators find ways to evaluate within the standardized context (e.g., CACREP), meeting pre-determined expectations while keeping the learning environment supportive, collaborative, and egalitarian (Fulton et al., 2016; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2017). Person-centered instructors ensure that qualitative and quantitative assessment types accurately measure course content, and they place greater emphasis on the process of learning than the results of the measured outcomes (Schreiber & Valle, 2016). Therefore, humanistic facilitators of learning focus on providing continuous feedback throughout the course, fostering optimal proficiency in the material while instilling an inclusive learning milieu (Bowers & Lemberger, 2016; Dougherty et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Understanding diverse learners is the first step in creating inclusive representation in the course curriculum and reducing the instances of microaggressions. Humanistic educators must acknowledge cultural biases in research and help learners understand why it hinders generalizability. When designing courses, humanistic facilitators of learning are mindful of individuals' representations and lack thereof in assigned textbooks when illustrating foundational counseling concepts. Providing diverse examples is essential to mentees because representation fosters belonging and engagement in the content material. When delivering content material, facilitators of learning are cautious not to make assumptions about mentees and to avoid excluding certain groups from class discussions (Fulton et al., 2016; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2017). Future research should focus on these areas to further enhance the effectiveness of humanistic-oriented inclusive andragogy. Investigating the impact of diverse representation in course materials on students' sense of belonging and engagement and exploring strategies to mitigate cultural biases in educational research could provide valuable insights.

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