

Culturally Competent Career Counselling: A Critical Approach to Supporting Minority Canadian High School Students

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Research Problem



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Minority high school students in Canada, including those who are racialized, immigrants, LGBTQ+, and low-income, experience inequity in career counselling and post-graduation planning.

Traditional counselling models rely on universalist approaches that overlook lived experiences, cultural contexts, and social barriers (Chen & Keats, 2016; Shiza et al., 2020).

Research Question

How can culturally competent career counselling models impact post-graduation planning for minority high school students in Canada?

Context

Canadian schools often use Eurocentric and Westernized career models that do not fully reflect the diverse student populations.

Career counsellors lack training in culturally responsive practice or systemic advocacy (Bezanson et al., 2016).

Community Impact

Culturally competent approaches can help minority students access equitable post-secondary and career pathways. This research supports teachers, counsellors, and administrators by working to reduce inequity in Canadian high schools.

Literature Review



Defining Cultural Competence

- Culture is dynamic, contextual, and individually interpreted (Zunker, 2016)
- The *Cultural Accommodation Model* emphasizes individual, group, and universal dimensions (Leong, 2011)
- Requires ongoing reflection, recognition of privilege, and understanding of systemic oppressions (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Balin et al., 2024)
- Canadian research stresses equity, anti-racism, and institutional accountability (Bezanson et al., 2016; Shizha et al., 2020)

The Impact of Career Counselling on Identity

- Self-concept directly influences student career exploration and decision making (Ussinger & Smith, 2010)
- Cultural norms may limit students' ability to make autonomous decisions, as seen in Indonesian contexts where students rely on authority figures (Dahlan et al., 2020)
- LGBTQ+ youth face identity hiding, marginalization, and barriers to career planning due to discrimination (Chen & Keats, 2016; Wada et al., 2019)
- Identity affirmation increases self-efficacy and student agency in post-graduation planning

Intersectionality and Career Counselling

- Intersecting identities shape unique experiences of discrimination and access (Crenshaw, 1989; Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022)
- Bicultural and international students have to navigate fluid and context-dependent identities (Tao et al., 2018; Balin et al., 2024)
- LGBTQ+ ethnic minorities face two to three times the minority stress (Zunker, 2016)
- Gender and race-based stereotyping for students entering and encouraged to enter STEM (Cabell et al., 2021)
- Career counsellors must adapt methods to students' specific and complex identity contexts

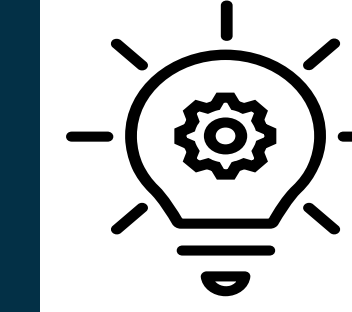
The Myth of Neutrality in Counselling

- Neutrality is a myth that perpetuates inequality (Arthur & Collins, 2014). Universal methods often ignore systemic oppression and cultural realities (Leong, 2011)
- Bias influences career planning and influence in schools (Shizha et al., 2020; Cabell et al., 2021)
- Avoiding perceived neutral information, by engaging in equity-focused interventions that are based around student choice (Piepenburg & Fervers, 2022)

Policy and Systemic Considerations

- Career counselling operates in systems shaped by privilege, funding gaps, and consistent provincial standards Canada wide (Bezanson et al., 2016)
- Counsellors as social justice leaders (Arthur & Collins, 2014; Shizha et al., 2020)
- Policy reform to provide funding for equity outcomes can improve access (Holzer, 2018)
- Locally based cultural counselling frameworks can emphasize adaptability, empowerment, and relevance to students' lived experiences (Hartono, 2020; Owens et al., 2019)
- Mentorship and role modelling support to represent marginalized youth (Jude et al., 2023)

Recommendations and Conclusion



Recommendation 1: Cultural Competence and Advocacy Training

THEN

Recommendation 2: Culturally Competent Career Interest Inventories

Counsellors require training that integrates cultural humility, anti-oppressive practice and advocacy (Freire, 1970).

Decker et al. (2016) proposed:

- Integrating advocacy in counsellor identity formation
- Discussion of privilege and system barriers
- Using experiential and community-based advocacy tasks
- Incorporating empowerment and social change theories while supervising counsellors through a social justice lens

Standardized tools still lack cultural responsiveness. Interventions should reflect diverse norms, multiple identities, and systemic barriers.

Flores et al., (2003) recommended:

- Culturally informed information gathering
- Selecting or adapting culturally valid instruments
- Sensitive administration practices
- Contextual interpretation of results

Barriers and Feasibility

- Limited counsellor training in career development and cultural competence (Bezanson et al., 2016)
- Funding shortages and large caseloads. Institutional resistance to equity-based change.
- Cultural distrust of standardized testing and pressure to conform to familial expectations (Flores et al., 2003)

Conclusion

Culturally competent career counselling is essential for equitable post-graduation planning. Future research should examine Canadian high schools directly, including assessment tools, training models, and long-term student outcomes. Counsellors should act as agents of change to help minority students navigate systemic inequities.

Theoretical Framework



Positionality

As a caucasian, cisgender, able-bodied educator in Canadian Social Studies, Language Arts, and CALM, I acknowledge my positional privilege and commit to cultural humility and reflexivity. My classroom experience demonstrates how Eurocentric norms shape student self-concept and opportunity.

Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970)

- Education as a political act aimed at liberation and critical consciousness
- Counsellors and educators are agents capable of challenging inequity rather than reinforcing the status quo

Feminist Pedagogy

- Education as resistance and self-actualization (hooks, 1994)
- Emphasis on voice, identity affirmations, community and relational care (Green, 1998; Nodding, 2006)

Post Modern & Constructivist Paradigms

- Knowledge is socially constructed, fluid, and context-dependent (Ackermann, 2001)
- Reality is shaped by intersecting identities and lived experiences



"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance..."

-Peggy McIntosh (1988, p.1)

References

