

Spiritual Duck Race Teaching Module

Gerri Miller, Ph.D.

Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling

Edwin Duncan Hall

Appalachian State University

Boone, NC 28608

millerga@appstate.edu

(828) 262-6048

Abstract

This module is designed to assist students in understanding the integration of a spiritual component into counseling. Often students approach this area with unknown biases and a lack of awareness of potential countertransference issues. Their projections of spirituality frequently come from both personal and professional biases, and they often have unknown defense structures around these biases. This experiential exercise is meant to circumvent these biases by helping students examine an individual's story for its healing spiritual resource components. These spiritual resource components may include community, family, nature, religion, etc.—components the storyteller uses to describe how they live with and heal from their suffering. The stories used can be of famous people drawn from books such as *The Harder They Fall* or of people who are not famous (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous). The stories draw students in so they see the person and discover that person's spiritual recovery resource (family, community, God, etc.) and then apply this information to the duck who represents the storyteller. This process invites a confrontation of each student's spiritual biases in a gentle, humorous fashion and they are encouraged to look at forms of spirituality broader than religion that can contribute to a person's resilience.

In preparation for the rubber duck race, the class is divided into groups; each group chooses a story, a duck, and completes an application form based on the story they choose (see attachment) and that is given to the instructor a week prior to the race. Copies of each application are made for the entire class and are given out on the day of the race. A representative from each group summarizes the application in five minutes or less, prior to the race, highlighting a metaphor for the spiritual component that has assisted the storyteller in his/her recovery and healing process. The metaphor they choose to represent this spiritual component is also used to

assist their duck in winning the race. For example, a storyteller who survived sexual abuse may have turned to their community of other survivors for support. This support community may be metaphorically represented: Individuals in the group can stand in strategic positions alongside the body of water used in the race and toss the duck from one person to another along the race path, thereby representing a community of individuals uplifting and supporting the duck in his/her recovery process from sexual abuse.

As seen on the teaching instructions' attachment, individuals in the group are assigned different group race roles and two race day roles (the starter squirt gun role and the symbol holder marking the end of the race with a balloon, etc.). The instructor is in the water catching ducks with a net as they cross the finish line. Group members do not need to get into the water if they can figure out a way to stay out of it, e.g. using motorized boats to carry the ducks, standing alongside the body of water and throwing the duck to one another. The instructor announces the place of each duck (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) as the duck crosses the finish line. In spite of their race placement, everyone wins the same small door prize (e.g. inexpensive bookmarks, etc.) because all the ducks (storytellers) are seen as winners. However, students draw their door prize in the order their group placed in the race (first place winners draw first). In the class session(s) following the race, discussion focuses on the objectives outlined at the end of this abstract. Students discuss: 1) their ducks' stories in a broader discussion of spirituality, 2) discovered spiritual biases, and 3) the uses of spiritual resources in counseling to strengthen a client's resilience.

This experiential exercise can be used in various CACREP core classes where spirituality in general or specific issues (such as addiction, eating disorders, sexual abuse) are discussed. Some courses include: Social and Cultural Diversity [2a of the 2009 CACREP Standards],

Human Growth and Development (crisis component) [3a, c, f, g of the 2009 CACREP Standards], Helping Relationships [5d, e, g of the 2009 CACREP Standards], Group Work [6a of the 2009 CACREP Standards], and Assessment [7f of the 2009 CACREP Standards].

The objectives are:

1. to broaden the student's perspective on spirituality;
2. to reduce the student's potential countertransference of spiritual biases; and
3. to assist the student in viewing the spiritual dimension as a core part of all of us and as a potential resource that counselors can tap into in order to encourage resilience in clients.