FACILITATING SPIRITUAL COMPETENCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATES

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FACILITATING SPIRITUAL COMPETENCE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATES

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Introduction

Learning Objectives

By the end of this presentation, you will be able to:

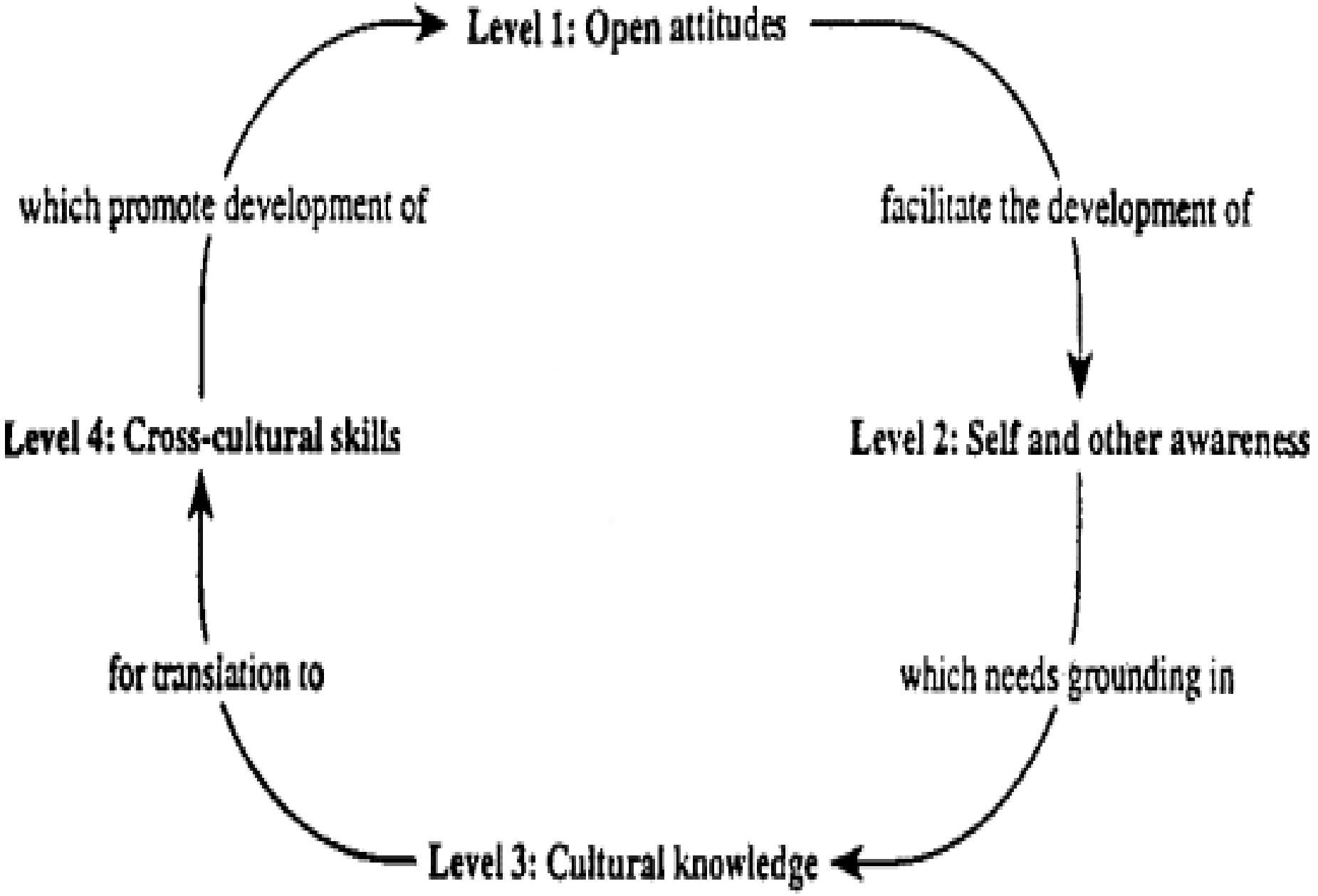
1. define spiritual sensitivity and spiritual competence;
2. identify instructional methods designed to facilitate spiritual competence;
3. recognize student expression of spiritual sensitivity; and
4. explain how student expression of spiritual sensitivity relates to spiritual competence.

Cultural competence in social work practice is the social worker's ability to understand people of all cultures and to use that understanding to respond respectfully and effectively.

Cultural competence develops over time, like moving from cultural awareness to cultural sensitivity, and requires the ability to evaluate one's level of cultural competence (NASW, 2015).

	Cultural incompetence	Cultural knowledge	Cultural awareness	Cultural sensitivity	Cultural competence	Cultural proficiency
Professionally specific skills						
Generic skills						
Critically examining the profession						
Individual values and attitudes						
Understanding Indigenous cultures and histories						
Generic understanding of culture						

(Adapted from Nolan and McConnochie, 2008)


Level 1: Open attitudes
facilitate the development of
Level 2: Self and other awareness
which needs grounding in
Level 3: Cultural knowledge
for translation to
Level 4: Cross-cultural skills
which promote development of

NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work

- Standard 1. Ethics and Values
- Standard 2. Self-Awareness
- Standard 3. Cross-Cultural Knowledge
- Standard 4. Cross-Cultural Skills
- Standard 5. Service Delivery
- Standard 6. Empowerment and Advocacy
- Standard 7. Diverse Workforce
- Standard 8. Professional Education
- Standard 9. Language Diversity
- Standard 10. Cross-Cultural Leadership

Standard 2. Self-Awareness

- Demonstrate an appreciation of their own cultural identities and those of others
- Demonstrate cultural humility
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the dynamics of power and privilege in all areas of social work

Accordingly, culturally competent social workers shall…

1. examine and describe their cultural identities, to increase awareness of assumptions, values, beliefs, stereotypes, and biases, and to recognize how these affect services, and influence relationships and interactions with clients.
2. identify how their own knowledge, fears, and "isms" (such as racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, homophobia, cissexism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, and classism) influence their attitudes, beliefs, and feelings
3. develop and apply strategies to inform and change their detrimental attitudes, beliefs, and feelings

Accordingly, culturally competent social workers shall…

5. demonstrate an awareness of personal or professional limitations that may warrant the referral of a client or organization to another resource that can better meet the client's needs, along with the skills to make such referrals effectively
6. demonstrate comfort with self- and other-awareness about different cultural customs and views of the world
7. use relationships with supervisors, mentors, and colleagues to enrich self-awareness and self-reflection
8. practice cultural humility to balance the dynamics of power and privilege inherent in the social work position and the practitioner's multifaceted cultural identity (pp. 23-24)

Cultural competence
an awareness of the role of spirituality and/or religion in the lives and worldview of individuals, groups, and communities.

Spiritual Sensitivity

- Spiritual sensitivity is the ability to recognize and respect what informs a client's life meaning, accurately evaluate one's level of spiritual competence, and provide care that is experienced as being spiritually supportive (Callahan, 2012; 2013, 2015, 2016, forthcoming; Callahan, Benner, & Helton, 2016).
  - Spiritual sensitivity is an intrinsic and extrinsic process that is communicated through practice.
  - Spiritual competence is a means to evaluate what is spiritually sensitive relative to practice standards.

Spiritual Competence

- Hodge & Bushfield (2006) and Hodge (2011) characterized spiritual competence as:

  (1) awareness of personal worldview and related assumptions,

  (2) empathic understanding of the client's spiritual worldview, and

  (3) evidence-based interventions based on client preference, clinical expertise, relevant research, and cultural competency.

Spiritual Competence

- Spiritual competence falls on a continuum.

- Developing spiritual competence is a process.
  - Set of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that can be developed over time but requires intentionality.

(Hodge & Bushfield, 2006)

Initial Question

- How can social work educators build spiritual competence ?

Building Spiritual Competence

- Educators across disciplines have worked to help students to understand themselves and others spiritually (Briggs & Rayle, 2005; Barker & Floersch, 2010; Johnston, Mamier, Bahjri, Anton, & Petersen; 2008; Bethel, 2004).
- Likewise, there is extensive support for the importance of self-awareness in being spiritually sensitive (Mitchell, Bennett & Mandrin-Ledet, 2006; Briggs & Rayle, 2005; Barker & Floersch, 2010; Wasner, Longaker, Fegg & Borasio, 2005; Ingersoll, 1997; Singletary, 2005).

Building Spiritual Competence

- A variety of methods have been used to help promote student *spiritual* self-awareness:
  - Meditation (Wasner, Longaker, Fegg & Borasio, 2005)
  - Praxis (Singletary, 2005)
  - Talk with others outside faith tradition (Svare, Jay, Bruce & Owens-Kane, 2003
  - Share own spiritual beliefs, traditions and practices (Svare, Jay, Bruce & Owens-Kane, 2003)
  - Complete religious/spiritual genogram (Svare, Jay, Bruce & Owens-Kane, 2003)
  - Write a spiritual autobiography (Ingersoll, 1997)

Knowledge Gaps

- Research on social work and spirituality courses have generally focused on examining course objectives (Bethel, 2004; Seyfried, 2007: Northcut, 2004), assignments (Cashwell & Young, 2004; Briggs & Rayle, 2005), and course evaluation (Pate & Hall, 2005; Fukuyama & Sevig, 1997; Seyfried, 2007).

Knowledge Gaps

- However, research is needed to clarify how social work education may facilitate spiritual competence (Hodge & Derezotes, 2008; Schafer, Handal, Brawer, & Ubinger, 2011; Raskinsku, Kalad, Yoon, & Curlin, 2011; Ai, Moultin, Picciano, Nagda, & Thurman, 2004).

Study Purpose

- This study will explore whether student spiritual self-reflection facilitates the experience of spiritual sensitivity.
  - The experience of spiritual sensitivity is expected to be indicated by the awareness of meaningful coursework.
- The focus of this study is to learn how spiritual sensitivity manifests and relates to spiritual competence to evaluate course effectiveness.

Rationale

- This study explored the process of building spiritual competence through an asynchronous, online undergraduate social work course.
  - Assumption 1: Online instruction requires self-reflection for course participation.

Rationale

- Instructional methods that required self-reflection were evaluated to assess a student's experience of spiritual sensitivity.
  - Assumption 2: The ability to recognize the experience of "meaningful course work" suggests a degree of spiritual sensitivity.
  - Assumption 3: The product of meaningful course work is a reflection of spiritual sensitivity, and thus necessary for the building of spiritual competence.

Spirituality

- Spirituality is defined as having a meaningful, life enhancing connection with oneself, others, and/or beyond (Canda & Furman, 1999, 2010).

Meaningful Course Work

- Meaningful course work is considered course work that has significance, value, or purpose. This includes a belief that participation in the completion of meaningful course work made a difference in one's life or was used to make a difference in someone else's life.

Spiritual Self-Reflection

- Spiritual self-reflection refers to the process of discerning how one's personal worldview and client's worldview informs professional practice. This process is considered necessary to inform spiritually sensitive practice relative to level of spiritual competence.

Research Questions

- Research Question 1: What assignment(s) is "most meaningful"?
  - Does level of meaning vary based on assignments that require more self-reflection?
- Research Question 2: How does spiritual sensitivity manifest?
  - Based on the most meaningful assignment, what do students report they learned?
  - How do student responses inform the concept of spiritual sensitivity?

Research Questions

- Research Question 3: How does spiritual sensitivity inform spiritual competence?
  - Does spiritual sensitivity enhance or detract from spiritual competence?

Methodology

- This study was conducted in two stages.
- In the first stage, a survey was used to capture which course assignment students considered the "most meaningful" for further analysis.
- In the second stage, the "most meaningful" assignment was analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Methodology

- Before starting this study, the chair of the IRB committee was consulted to determine if IRB approval was needed.
- It was determined that this research was exempt from IRB review under Category 1, which includes research conducted in an established educational setting that involves normal educational practices.

Sample

- Students who took *Spirituality and Health Care* in Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 were solicited to participate in this study.
  - In Fall 2011, 13 students were solicited to participate with 6 responding for a response rate of 46 percent.
  - In Spring 2012, 24 students were solicited to participate with 10 responding for a response rate of 42 percent.

Survey

In order to identify the most meaningful assignment, students were asked to completed a Likert Scale survey with the following introduction:

> This survey is meant to evaluate what you experienced as "meaningful course work" in the *Spirituality and Health Care* course. "Meaningful course work" is considered course work that had significance, value or purpose. This includes a belief that your participation in this course work made a difference in your and/or someone else's life.

Survey

Respondents were asked to rate course activities from 0 (NA) to 7 (most meaningful).

(1) Least Meaningful

(2)

(3)

(4) Neutral

(5)

(6)

(7) Most Meaningful

(0) Not Applicable

Survey

Please indicate if any of the following course activities were meaningful to you:

- Discussion Board for Week 1 (Introduction)
- Discussion Board for Weeks 2-3 (Importance of Beliefs)
- Discussion Board for Weeks 4-7 (Crisis of Faith)
- Discussion Board for Weeks 8-11 (Making Other Life Meaningful)
- Discussion Board for Weeks 12-15 (Plan to Communicate Spiritual Awareness)

Survey

Reflection Paper I (Religious/Spiritual Diversity)
Reflection Paper II (Spiritual Assessment)
Reflection Paper III (Implications for Growth)
Reviewing PowerPoint Slides
Reading Book (“Spirituality in Patient Care”)
Reading Recommended Journal Articles
Completing Workbook (“What Do I Say?”)
Reviewing DVD (What Do I Say?”)
Overall Course

Survey

Please describe any thing else you found meaningful in the course.

Please describe any ideas you have for improving this course.

Data Analysis

- Survey data (N = 16) was tabulated per item. The total per item within and across each data set was compared to determine perceived meaning.
- The most meaningful assignment was analyzed (n = 37) based on the six-phase thematic analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).
- Both authors independently reviewed all open-ended responses and then the second author integrated the codes and themes from the data.

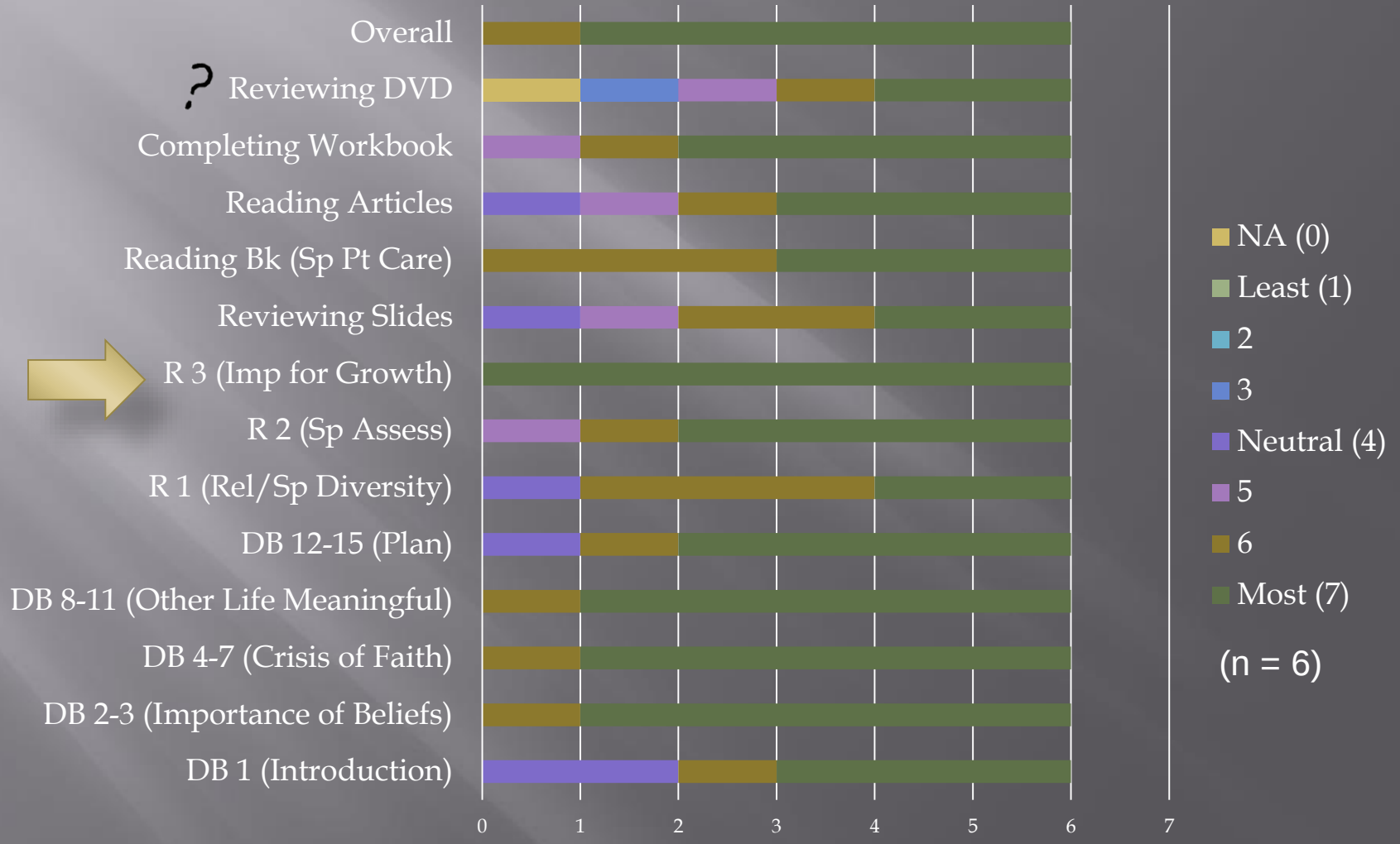
Six-Phase Thematic Analysis Process (Braun & Clark, 2006)

- Phase 1: familiarizing yourself with your data
- Phase 2: generating initial codes
- Phase 3: searching for themes
- Phase 4: reviewing themes
- Phase 5: defining and naming themes
- Phase 6: producing the report

Results – Phase 1

- Research Question 1: What assignment(s) is "most meaningful"?
  - Does level of meaning vary based on assignments that require more self-reflection?

RQ1: What assignment(s) is "most meaningful"?



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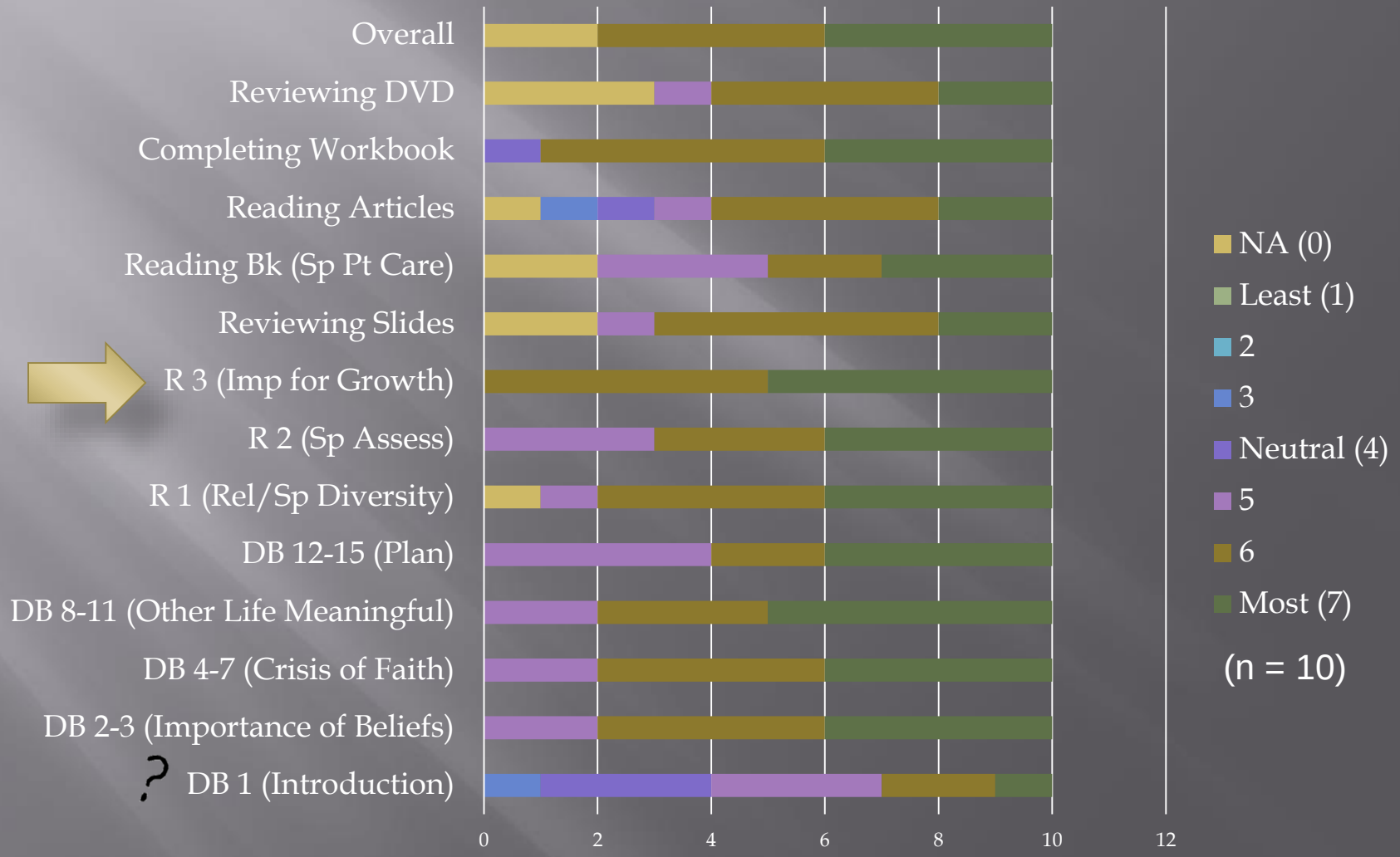

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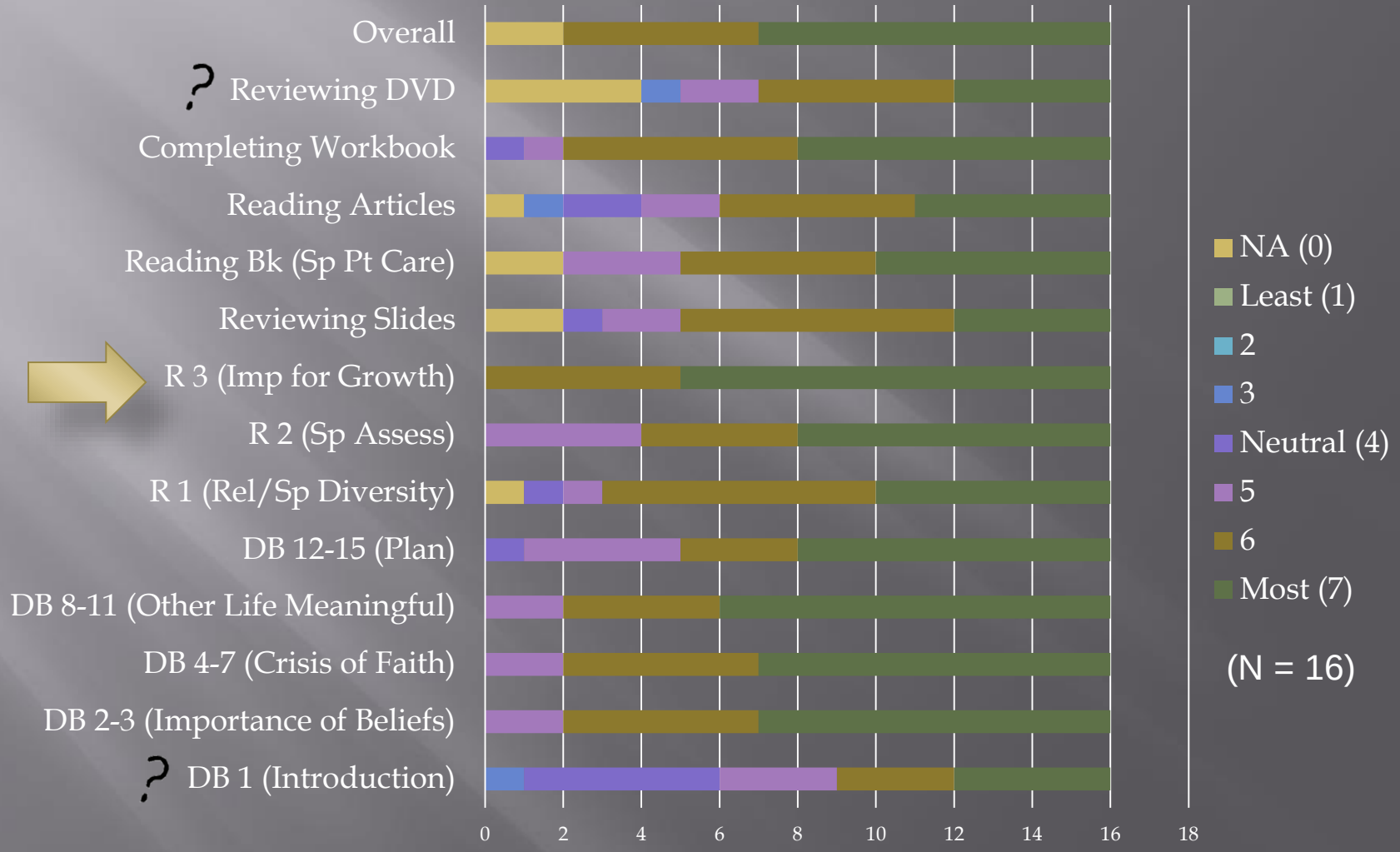

RQ1: What assignment(s) is "most meaningful"?

Students selected the capstone reflection paper as the "most meaningful" assignment. The paper description is:

- The purpose of this assignment is to help you develop a conceptual framework for spiritually sensitive and competent practice. Please address the following:
  - Introduction (purpose of paper with review of topics)
  - Discuss two new insights gained through this course.
  - How can you provide care that communicates spiritual sensitivity?
  - How can you determine your level of spiritual competence?
  - How will you continue your personal and professional development in this area?
  - Summary (review of material covered and new insights)

Results – Phase 2

- Research Question 2: How does spiritual sensitivity manifest?
  - Based on the most meaningful assignment, what do students report they learned?
  - How do student responses inform the concept of spiritual sensitivity?
- Research Question 3: How does spiritual sensitivity inform spiritual competence?
  - Does spiritual sensitivity enhance or detract from spiritual competence?

RQ2: How does spiritual sensitivity manifest?

- Spiritual sensitivity was identified as being important for spiritual competence.
- Spiritual sensitivity was linked with personal growth.
- Spiritual awareness and spiritual well-being were believed to have the potential to influence and be influenced by clients.
- Personal growth is needed to internalize particular qualities (such as understanding, compassion and acceptance of different spiritual and religious views) to be spiritually sensitive.

RQ2: How does spiritual sensitivity manifest?

- Self-efficacy appeared to be important.
- Spiritual and religious assets and issues were identified as being challenging to assess, primarily due to fear of risking offense.
- Students gained confidence by being more spiritually sensitive.
  - For example, students often linked spiritual sensitivity to self-awareness; the more aware students were of their own thoughts and feelings related to spirituality and religion, the more confidence in their ability to address such issues.
- Students desire education, observation, mentoring, and supervision to further development.

RQ 3: How does spiritual sensitivity inform spiritual competence?

- Students recognized a need to respect spiritual diversity.
- Students said this class helped them better understand the potential for spirituality and religion to be experienced differently.
- Quality, holistic, and client-centered care was believed to require sensitivity to spiritual diversity.
- Students recognized the need to overcome discomfort with spiritual diversity in order to help clients address spiritual concerns and reduce spiritual distress.

Discussion

- This course appeared to help students reflect on their own spirituality and consider how they might respond to the spirituality of others.
  - For example, spirituality was recognized as an intrinsic, rather than an overlooked, dimension of diversity which suggested a new spiritual sensitivity and level of spiritual competence.

Discussion

- Students acknowledged their need to overcome barriers to address spirituality as a standard component of client care which further suggested course effectiveness.
  - For example, students expressed difficulty in assessing spirituality and discomfort with spiritual diversity, which suggested they recognized the importance of having spiritual competence.

Discussion

- These results further suggested that social work educators and supervisors have the responsibility and ability to help students develop spiritual competence by facilitating spiritual self-reflection.

Limitations

- The current study assumes that the experience of meaningful course work is an accurate indicator of spiritual sensitivity.
- It is unknown if increased spiritual sensitivity actually influenced practice beyond respondent report of application and/or plans.
- Nothing is known about the risk of gaining a false sense of spiritual competence or access to spiritually sensitive supervision for support.

Directions for Research

- Is self-awareness necessary to inform spiritual sensitivity or spiritual competence?
- How does course modality influence the building of spiritual competence?
- Does an increase in spiritual competence in an online course translate to direct practice?

Directions for Research

- Is an increase in spiritual competence in an online course sustained over time?
- What are the consequences for an inaccurate estimation of spiritual competence?
- Are there spiritually competent supervision available to help inform intervention?

Conclusion

- Students demonstrated the emergence of spiritual sensitivity through an assignment that facilitated spiritual self-reflection.
- Students recognized the importance of spiritual competence, with evidence to suggest that they had difficulty in assessing spirituality and discomfort with spiritual diversity.
- Educators can create opportunities for students to develop spiritual sensitivity and evaluate spiritual competence for practice.

Thank you!

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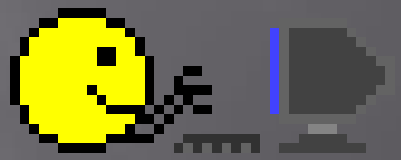

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