

Communicating Across Cultures

Objectives:

- ✓ To build knowledge on changes in demographics in Texas
- ✓ To describe effective strategies of communication among differing cultures
- ✓ To build knowledge on differing American cultures
- ✓ To understand one's own personal perceptions on culture
- ✓ To determine effective ways to work with people of differing cultures

Advance Preparation:

- ✓ Review the provided material (typically two hours of preparation time)

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Projection device
- ✓ The Power Point Presentation
- ✓ Letters Cut-out for Human Scrabble (Attachment 1)
- ✓ Writing Instruments

Time Needed:

- ✓ 1 hour

BACKGROUND

Part 1. The only states that have a higher population than Texas are California and New York. Texas' population is well over 20 million people. This population total is only going up. The state's population has more than doubled between 1940 and 1980 while increasing almost 20% from 1980 to 1990. According to the Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer (2004), the population estimated projections range from 26,085,101 to 45,388,036 depending on what scenario is used to estimate.

In addition to the large population totals, Texas is also one of the most diverse states in the country. All types of ethnicities are present throughout the state. Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group statewide. In the near future, it is predicted that Texas will not have a majority ethnicity. In addition to diversity in ethnicity, this state will have differences in cultures, values, and norms. Thus, as leaders, we must evaluate our communities and determine effective ways to communicate with the people in these communities.

What does this mean? It means that as leaders, we must look at ourselves and see how we can communicate with others. In order to do this, we must first understand the prevalent cultures and how to most effectively communicate with all types of people.

Part 2. Boone, Safrit, and Jones (2002) point out that culture is an important part of the educator's cognitive map. Culture is defined as the behavior or lifestyle of a definable grouping of people. Boone et. al. (2002) continues by saying a culture includes members who share:

- Social Institutions
- Attitudes
- Beliefs

- Motivations
- Value Systems

Spicer (1952) and Bertrand (1967) note that this definition reveals that culture includes commonly accepted ways of thinking. It is imperative that the educator be fully aware of the value systems in place in different cultures. Understanding cultures will help the educator know how to develop and implement educational programs for these audiences.

The first step an educator or volunteer must do to understand different cultures is to evaluate their own perceptions of culture. Williams (2001) identified ten lenses individuals look through when evaluating culture. The purpose of this activity is to review the ten lenses outlined by Williams (2001) and talk about how these lenses shape how we view others. Moreover, this lesson will talk about how understanding your own personal views will allow you to be more productive as an educator with all types of lessons.

PART 1. Interest Approach (15 minutes)

Human Scrabble

Purpose / Goals:

This activity is used to illustrate how some people are left out of participation, through no choice of their own. The goal of “Human Scrabble” is to teach participants the importance of inclusion and making everyone feel a part of the group.

Group Size:

Any size group (works best with groups of 20-40)

Supplies:

The attached sheet has the letters on it. Simply cut out the letters and pass out one to each participant.

Instructions:

1. The object of the game is for individuals to mix and mingle and put their letter together with as many other individuals as possible to create words.
2. As words are made, each participant keeps track of their own points. For each letter in the word they create with other individuals, each person that contributes gets that number of points. For example, if three participants have the letters “**D**”, “**O**”, and “**G**”, they would each get *three* points for spelling the word **DOG**.
3. Allow only 2 minutes for the activity.
4. At the end of the 2 minutes, have participants add up their points.

Discussion Points:

1. Ask participants how many points they got? Who got the highest? What was their letter? Lowest and their letter? “**Q**” and “**Z**” generally get the least because it is difficult to create words with these letters.
2. How did those who got lots of points feel when they saw the letter they were to use? How about those that got very few points?
3. Tie the discussion into the fact that sometimes people get left out of groups because they appear to be different than others. They may feel uncomfortable

- tying to fit in with a group of people not like them. Everyone wants to be accepted in a group like those with popular letters like the vowels.
4. It is important that as a leader, you work to make sure everyone you come in contact with feels important and has a contribution to make to the group.

LESSON (20 minutes)

1. Set the stage by reading the Margaret Mead quote on slide 2.
2. Discuss the population trends in Texas and point out that this state will not have a majority (over 50%) ethnicity in the very near future (slide 3). Because of this, it is important to understand how different people from different backgrounds bring all types of values and norms to communities. These things help to establish community culture.
3. Do the human scrabble exercise (slides 4-6).
4. Define culture – this should be a review from previous lessons, but it helps to set the stage (slide 7).
5. Edward Hall is a famous anthropologist who has devoted his life to the relationship between culture and communications. He classifies cultures into two distinct groups. These groups are “high-context” and “low-context”. It is important to discuss the differences in these two contexts and to explain that neither is good or bad (slides 8-9).
 - High Context** - have strong interpersonal bonds and extensive networks with members of their in-group.
 - Low Context** - compartmentalize their personal relationships; they prefer lots of background information
6. A spin off of these two contexts is “nonverbal communication.” Slides 10-12 focus on facial expressions, hand, touching, and space. These nonverbal communication examples are also compared to the low and high context cultures.
7. The last two slides (13-14) focus on eleven cross cultural competencies according to Samover and Porter (1995). These are just points that a leader should think about when dealing with different types of people and cultures.

Application

Leadership is so much more than just knowing your personal style, managing people, and motivating people to reach an intended goal. Leadership is about challenging people to get the most out of them. Your success is based on your ability to communicate. We often think of communication as just basic verbal communication. Hopefully, this lesson has helped you to determine that it is so much more. It is your nonverbal communication. This includes how you approach people, how you dress, how you listen, and how you react to others. Remember, you are always being evaluated as a leader. Make sure you are displaying appropriate communication tactics.

PART 2. Interest Approach (30 minutes)

1. Split the individuals in the room into small groups (no bigger than 10).
2. Ask the small groups to identify and discuss the different cultures in your county. List them on the board. Allow a spokesperson from each group to discuss the list to all participants.

Lesson (20 minutes)

1. Starting with slide seventeen, discuss Williams (2001) thoughts on the ten lenses we look through when working with others.
2. Slide 15 is one of the most important slides in this section. It discusses how our lenses are developed because of lenses and layers. Describe the differences and provide example of each. This is also a good time to get feedback from the audience on lenses and layers. Ask your participants what *legacies* impacted their lives. A way to ask this is to say, "What is something that happened in the past that you still remember exactly where you were when it happened? Examples include: World War II, Pearl Harbor, 9/11, JFK Assassination. These are all major events that shaped our lives. *Layers* are unchangeable life experiences. For instance, where one was born, their gender, their ethnicity. These are items that cannot be changed.
3. Then, simply proceed through the slides and talk about these ten lenses. Evaluate the advantages and shadows of each.
4. Slide 20 – Assimilationist
5. Slide 21 – Colorblind
6. Slide 22 – Culturalcentrist
7. Slide 23 – Elitist
8. Slide 24 – Integrationist
9. Slide 25 – Meritocratist
10. Slide 26 – Multiculturalist
11. Slide 27 – Seclusionist
12. Slide 28 – Transcendent
13. Slide 29 – Victim / Caretaker
14. Slide 30 – Slide 30 is of Chinatown in San Francisco. Ask the audience which of the ten lenses best reflects Chinatown. There will be many responses. Most would probably be seclusionist.
15. Slide 31 – Slide 31 has two pictures of Colonias in South Texas. These are communities with very little resources. Texas Cooperative Extension is trying to work with these underserved audiences, but has struggled. A question to the group may be, "how can we more effectively communicate with these groups?"
16. Slide 32 – Slide 32 is picture of Dallas to just highlight the urban vs. rural communities in Texas.
17. Slide 33 – The summary slide reviews that the 10 Lenses are just one way we can look at ourselves and that Williams' work is highly recognized. To learn more about it, contact information is provided.

Application (5 minutes)

1. Discuss with the group that this could be confrontational to some. This is not the goal of the exercise. This exercise is designed to allow each individual to look in one's self to determine how they view other cultures and encourage openness to all types of culture.
2. In order to be effective in community education and leadership, it is important to understand yourself so that you can get the most out of yourself and others.
3. Slides 20-32 reveal some pictures of different places that certainly force one to think about the culture represented. These are just discussion points to think about as you wrap-up with the group.

References

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