Communicating Across Cultures

Objectives
- Make participants aware of changes in Texas demographics
- Describe effective strategies of communication among differing cultures
- Build knowledge of different American cultures
- Help participants understand their own personal perceptions of culture
- Explore effective ways of working with people of different cultures

Advance preparation
- Review the material provided (about 2 hours)

Materials needed
- Computer and projector
- CD with PowerPoint presentation
- Letters cut out for Human Scrabble (Attachment 1)
- Pens or pencils

Time needed
- 1 hour

Background
Part 1. Texas is the third most populous state in the U.S., with well over 20 million people. The state's population has increased dramatically over the past two decades and the Texas State Data Center and Office of the State Demographer predict continued growth.

Texas is also one of the most diverse states in the country, with all ethnicities represented. Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic group statewide. In the near future, it is predicted that Texas will not have a majority ethnicity. This diversity means that Texans have many different cultures, values and norms. As leaders, we must evaluate our communities and determine effective ways to communicate with all the people who live here.

What does this mean? It means that we must look at ourselves and see how well we communicate with others. To do this, we must first understand other cultures and how to communicate most effectively 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 who share:
- Social institutions
- Attitudes
- Beliefs
- Motivations
- Value systems

Culture includes commonly accepted ways of thinking. Leaders must be fully aware of the value systems of different cultures so they will know how to develop and implement educational and other types of programs for these audiences.

The first step in understanding different cultures is evaluating our own perceptions of culture. Williams (2001) identified ten “lenses” individuals...
look through when evaluating culture. The purpose of this lesson is to talk about how these lenses shape the way we view others. Exploring our own personal views will help us be more productive educators and leaders.

Part 1  
**Interest Approach — Human Scrabble (15 minutes)**

**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 including everyone and making them feel a part of the group.

**Group size**
Any size group (works best with groups of 20 to 40).

**Materials needed**
Cut out the letters on Attachment 1 and give one to each participant.

**Instructions**
1. The object of the game is for individuals to mix and mingle and put their letters together with the letters of as many other individuals as possible to create words.
2. As words are made, each participant keeps track of his or her own points. Each person gets a point for each letter in the word. 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 most? What was that person’s letter? Who got the least and what was his or her 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 who 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 trying to fit in with a group of people who are not like them. Everyone wants to be accepted in a group, like those with popular letters such as the vowels.
4. It is important that, as a leader, you work to make sure everyone you come in contact with feels important and is allowed to contribute to the group.

**Lesson (20 minutes)**
1. Set the stage by reading the Margaret Mead quote (slide 2).
2. Discuss the population trends in Texas and point out that this state will not have a majority (more than 50 percent) 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 (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.” They are different, but neither is good or bad (slides 8-9).

- **High-context** – have strong interpersonal bonds and extensive networks with members of the group
- **Low-context** – compartmentalize their personal relationships and prefer lots of background information

6. These two cultural contexts have different types of nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, hand movements, touching and space (slides 10-12).

7. According to Samover and Porter (1995), there are eleven cross-cultural competencies (slides 13-14). These are 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, and communication involves so much more than words. It 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 group into small groups of no more than 10.

2. Ask the small groups to identify and discuss the different cultures in your county and list them on the board. Allow a spokesperson from each group to discuss the list with all participants.

**Lesson**

(20 minutes)

1. Discuss how our “lenses” are developed (slides 15-18). Describe the differences between legacies and layers and give an example of each. This is also a good time to get ask the audience for examples of legacies and layers. Ask your participants what legacies have affected their lives. A way to ask this is to say, “Name an event that made such an impression on you 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, one’s place of birth, gender and ethnicity are things that cannot be changed.

2. As you go through the slides, talk about these ten lenses. Evaluate the advantages and shadows of each.

- Assimilationist (slide 20)
- Colorblind (slide 21)
- Culturalcentrist (slide 22)
- Elitist (slide 23)
- Integrationist (slide 24)
- Meritocratist (slide 25)
- Multiculturalist (slide 26)
- Seclusionist (slide 27)
- Transcendent (slide 28)
- Victim/Caretaker (slide 29)
3. (slide 30) This is a picture of Chinatown in San Francisco. Ask the audience which of the ten lenses best reflects Chinatown. There will be many responses. Most would probably say seclusionist.

4. (slide 31) These are pictures of Colonias in South Texas. These are communities with very few 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?”

5. (slide 32) In contrast to the previous pictures, this picture of Dallas reminds us of the huge differences between urban and rural communities in Texas.

6. (slide 33) The ten lenses are just one way we can look at ourselves. You can learn more about it by reading Mark Williams’ book.

**Application (5 minutes)**

1. Discuss the fact that this topic could seem confrontational to some, but this is not the goal of the exercise. This exercise is designed to help people understand how they view other cultures and to encourage openness to other cultures.

2. To be an effective leader, it is important to understand yourself so that you can get the most out of yourself and others.

**References**


