Communicating Across Cultures

Building Connections: Community Leadership Program

Margaret Mead

*If you are going to achieve richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human personalities... in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.*

Texas

- More than 20 million people
- One of the most diverse states in America
- One of the three most populous states
- May soon have no ethnic majority

Human Scrabble

- Each person should have a piece of paper and something to write with.
- The object of the game is to mix and mingle and put your letter together with other letters to create as many words as possible.
Human Scrabble
- Keep track of your points as you make words. Each person who contributes a letter to a word gets a point for each letter in the word.
- For example, if three participants have the letters DOG, they would each get three points for spelling the word DOG!!

Human Scrabble
- If you got lots of points, how did you feel?
- If you got few points, how did you feel?
- How did people respond to those who had the Q and Z?
- How does this activity relate to real life?
- Have you been in situations where this happens?
- Are we including everyone?

What is Culture?
- A way of life
- Shared beliefs, values and norms
- Fundamentally instilled in people from birth
- Integrated, dynamic systems
  Nothing in life is free of culture.

“High-Context” vs. “Low-Context” Cultures
- High – have strong interpersonal bonds and extensive networks with members of their in-group
- Low – compartmentalize their personal relationships; prefer lots of background information
Examples of Context Cultures

- High
  - Japanese
  - Chinese
  - Korean
  - African American

- Low
  - German
  - Scandinavian
  - American
  - English

Nonverbal Communication

- Happens unconsciously
- Is a silent language
- Is culture-specific
- Includes: body movements, how people orient themselves, what people wear, eye contact, touch, voice inflection

- Face – transmits emotional cues (happy, sad, frustrated)
- Hands – show intensity
- Touch – most fundamental part of the human experience—includes hugging, kissing, shaking hands, clasping shoulders.
  - High-context cultures – touch is an intrinsic part of communication
  - Low-context cultures – NOT an intrinsic part of communication

Space

- How much space do people need?
- High-context cultures – prefer to be close when speaking to one another
- Low-context cultures – prefer to keep some distance when speaking to one another

Most often misunderstood type of non-verbal communication across cultures.
Cross-Cultural Competence
Samovar and Porter (1995)

- Know yourself and your own cultural makeup
- Consider the physical and human settings
- Seek to understand diverse message systems
- Develop and display empathy
- Encourage and provide feedback
- Develop communication flexibility
- Avoid stereotyping and prejudice

Cross-Cultural Competence
Samovar and Porter (1995)

- Be aware of consequences
- Seek commonalities
- Recognize the validity of differences
- Communicate respect
- Be nonjudgmental
- Tolerate ambiguity
- Be aware of individual differences

PART 2

“Habitual thinking need not be forever. One of the most significant findings in psychology in the last 20 years is that individuals can choose the way they think.”
- Martin Seligman
Communicating Across Cultures

Williams (2001) says we all look at the world through our own spectacles. Our lenses affect how we view differences in:
- Culture
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Race
- People in general
- Regions in America

How do we develop our lenses?

Legacies + Layers = Lenses

Legacies – powerful historical events that shape our views of the world
Layers – unchangeable life experiences

Which lenses do you see through?

Assimilationist
Incorporate, absorb, fit in, standardize

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

Subcultures should adopt the lifestyles, values, customs and languages of the dominant/majority culture.
Colorblind
Sightless, unseeing, inattentive to appearance

“When I see you, I see a person, and nothing else.”

All men and women are created equal.

Culturalcentrist
Core, heart, focal, central

“My culture is central to my personal and public identity.”

People not of the dominant culture should detach from it to survive, rebuild, and maintain their cultural norms.

Elitist
Privileged, select few, superior, predetermined

“Membership has its privileges.”

Lineage and innate qualities and abilities entitle some members of the culture to be advantaged within society.

Integrationist
Mix, incorporate, combine

“Ebony and Ivory live together on my piano keys … shouldn’t we?”

We can achieve greater equality and understanding through working, living and socializing side by side.
**Meritocratist**
Deserve, worthy of, earned, accomplished

"Cream rises to the top."

Opportunity should be based only on an individual’s initiative, competence and accomplishments.

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**Multiculturalist**
Many, varied, mixed, choices

"The more cultural diversity, the better."

We are enriched by the diversity of cultures in our country. Our future success is based on allowing each of our cultures to contribute to the mosaic.

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**Seclusionist**
Isolate, disconnect, protect, fragment, partition

"Birds of a feather flock together."

It is best for our culture to remain separate from other cultures to preserve our position and control.

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**Transcendent**
Rise above, sacred, inspire

"There’s really only one race—the human race."

Our common divine origin transcends cultural identity.
Victim/Caretaker
Injured, persecuted, abused, exploited

"We shall overcome."

People of different cultures are systematically victimized by the dominant culture and exploited in ways that have crippled their opportunity to be successful.
Summary

- Thinking about the ten lenses is just one exercise you can do to evaluate how you view others.
- There is more information in Mark Williams’ book.

To order a copy of
The Ten Lenses by Mark Williams
ISBN: 1-892123-75-4