Navigating Difference: Development and Implementation of a Successful Cultural Competency Training for Extension and Outreach Professionals

Abstract

As our world becomes more interconnected on international, domestic, and personal levels, our need to be more culturally competent increases (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Recognizing this need, Washington State University Extension sought to increase skills of its personnel by developing a set of cultural competencies and training curriculum. This article describes the process of creating, implementing, and evaluating the training. Examples are offered to show how WSU Extension addressed quality standards for successful implementation of diversity training models as outlined by Bendick et al. (2001), serving as guidelines for other Extension organizations with similar goals.

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Cultural Competency Training in the Extension System: A Critical Need

As our world becomes more interconnected on the international, domestic, and personal levels, our need to be more culturally competent increases (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Historically the Extension system has extended the resources of land-grant universities to all residents of the U.S. and its territories. Over the last century, the diversity of residents in our country has grown (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002), requiring Extension professionals to increase their capacity to work with those who are different than themselves. According to an Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP) report (2002, p. 8), "Extension leadership must prepare its administrators, faculty, and staff to value diversity and accept that change is necessary for the viability of the organization."

In addition to hiring staff who can work effectively with diverse audiences, Extension can provide on-

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going cultural competency training that not only orients Extension staff to the value of diversity but also develops concrete skills to work across differences (Kerrigan, 2007; Schauber & Castania, 2001). Specifically in 4-H Youth Development, 4-H workers are less likely than workers in other youth organizations to "be ethnically diverse, have minorities in their programs, and work with youth from low-income and high-risk backgrounds" (Evans, Sicafuse, & Killian, 2009, Conclusion section, para. 3), suggesting a need for cultural competency training on the job if we are to meet our organizational goals in this crucial programming area. Finally, Hassel (2007) proposed that "Extension professionals who develop intercultural competency can lead the way to a better land-grant university..." (Introduction section, para.3)

Recognizing need for culturally competent professionals in the Extension system, Washington State University (WSU) Extension implemented a process to increase skills of staff, faculty, and administrators. The first step in this process was to develop and adopt cultural competencies.

Development of Cultural Competencies and Training

In 2005 the WSU Extension Cultural Competencies (http://ext.wsu.edu/diversity/) were developed by the Extension Diversity Catalyst Team and approved by the Extension Administrative Team. Both groups agreed that training was needed for Extension personnel focusing on the competencies. The Diversity Catalyst Training Team then conducted a national search for curriculum that would teach to the identified competencies. Three national Extension groups were contacted in the search: Change Agent States for Diversity Consortium, consisting of 14 universities; National 4-H Learning Strategies Team: Equity, Access and Opportunity; and National 4-H Professional Development Contacts. In addition, various universities were contacted by the WSU assistant vice president for Equity and Diversity in search of resources. No curriculum could be identified that taught specifically to the WSUE cultural competencies.

Using cultural competencies as the focus for curriculum development, the training approach, educational methodology, and behavioral outcomes were determined. One goal of the developers was to move the organization from a view of diversity training as anti-discrimination compliance to one of culturally appropriate program development, implementation, and evaluation (Bendick, Egan, & Lofhkelm 2001). With this in mind the developers began by examining three types of diversity training approaches.

Social Justice Model

The primary concerns of a social justice-oriented diversity training are to increase awareness of the unequal distribution of universal human rights (such as liberty, legal citizenship, political standing, and control of one's property) and to motivate participants to promote change that addresses these inequities (Rosenbaum, 1980). The sharing of personal stories of oppression, suffering, and triumph plays an important role in social justice training approaches. A related goal is the development of allies—advocates who are not members of the oppressed group, but who are dedicated to advancing their claims. Social justice training often showcases personal experiences of privilege and oppression in order to create empathy and mutual understanding. The learning focus is on self-awareness, emotional engagement, and personal transformation.

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Intercultural Model

The field of intercultural studies is relatively new. Its parent discipline of anthropology entered the U.S. academy at the turn of the twentieth century. After World War II the State Department's Foreign Service Institute generated powerful collaborations among linguists, anthropologists, and communications specialists (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990). Significant works on culture and communication were first published in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Hart, 2005). Edward T. Hall's *The Silent Language* (1959) is perhaps the most influential. Intercultural communication theory holds that all cultures have predictable and generalizable features that govern human communication and that it is possible to discover the cultural frameworks that shape communication by observing and analyzing human behavior in context (Ting-Toomey, 1999). Intercultural communication theory also considers ways in which intercultural communication can be improved, seeking to diminish cultural misunderstandings that escalate conflict.

Cultural competence is an intercultural studies concept: by increasing understanding of cultural difference and acquiring concrete skills to interact effectively in a variety of cultural paradigms, we can improve social interactions, diminish painful and unfair treatment of others, and advance multiculturalism. Thus, the learning focus of diversity training with an intercultural focus is both cognitive (understanding/analyzing cultural differences in communication) and skill-based (improving and adjusting one's personal communication styles and approaches).

Organizational Development Model

Organizational development emerged as a field of consultancy in business in the 1980s. However, its roots go back to the beginning of the 20th century, when efficiency studies and industrial engineering looked at the elements of human-task interaction, seeking ways to improve outcomes (Senge, 1990). Contemporary organizational development considers questions of prejudice and exclusion as they play out in specific workplaces, with special attention to the way in which unspoken processes and systems prevent organizations from achieving their stated goals. The organizational development paradigm thus focuses on diversity issues as an element of organizational efficiency, examining barriers to participation and systems that uphold or enforce those barriers. The emphasis on "managing" or "leveraging" diversity is characteristic of organizational development models (Cox, 2001). Diversity training with an organizational development focus is both cognitive (understanding organizational processes and systems as barriers to or facilitators of change) and behavioral (crafting action strategies to improve organizational performance).

The developers of the curriculum chose an approach that integrates the three paradigms for diversity training. Content includes material on privilege and oppression (social justice), communication styles and barriers (intercultural communication), organizational culture (organizational development) and experiential activities that enhance self-awareness (social justice) and build intercultural skills (intercultural communication). Using the focus of cultural competencies and the integrated training approach, the intent of the curriculum is to prepare participants to achieve the following behavioral outcomes.

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Engage in culturally diverse settings, initiative, and programs.

- Integrate cultural competencies in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programming.

- Practice strategies for successful intercultural communication in professional settings.

The resulting curriculum, Navigating Difference: Cultural Competency Training for Outreach Professionals, uses key adult education theory to create a safe and welcoming environment for all learners. Learning activities respect and support individual learning styles, and participants' life experiences are viewed as an important source of knowledge. A description of the development of each curriculum module is reviewed below.

Module Development

The five competencies that form the basis of the curriculum modules were adapted from the public health field (Burcham, 2002): cultural awareness, cultural understanding, cultural knowledge, cultural interaction, and cultural sensitivity. Similar competencies of awareness, interaction, and sensitivity were identified for the Extension system by Schauber and Castania as early as 2001 (Schauber & Castania, 2001).

Increased cultural competency begins with the individual becoming aware of the value of cultural self-awareness (Walter & Grant, 2011). To interact effectively with others, resolve conflict, and cope with the current environment of continuous change, the first step is to know oneself. To structure this learning, the first two modules of the curriculum focus on cultural awareness and understanding. The Diversity Wheel (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2003) emphasizes the wide variety of diversity dimensions each person brings into the workplace and how those identities affect interactions with others. The Kluckhohn-Strodtbeck Model of Value Orientations (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961) uses an anthropological approach to understanding how differences in cultural values influence each person's beliefs and behaviors, thus giving us a better understanding of the motives of the "other." The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Hammer & Bennett, 2001) describes the developmental nature of intercultural competence. This theoretical model assists learners in assessing their own level of intercultural capacity as well as that of others.

The remaining three modules focus on methods of gaining cultural knowledge, communicating across cultural difference, and the concepts of privilege and power. Becoming aware of the barriers to intercultural communications (Barna, 1997), the range of communication styles (Condon, 1975; Kim, 1986; Al Batal, & El Bakary, 2002; Ting-Toomey, 1999), the functions of nonverbal communications and cultivating mindfulness (Ting-Toomey, 1999) are key elements in learning the skills necessary to live in a global world. Understanding different cultural conflict styles (Hammer, 2003) and practicing approaches and strategies for dealing with diverse conflict styles brings participants closer to managing intercultural conflicts effectively. In the last module of Navigating Difference, the work of Peggy McIntosh (1988) is used to discuss white privilege and the ramifications of its effects. Strategies and approaches are practiced that assist participants in recognizing the impacts of privilege, inequality and oppression in daily contexts and how to lessen those influences (Johnson, 2006).

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Implementation of the Training

Navigating Difference is currently conducted in two face-to-face formats. The first format is a condensed 3-day workshop with 6 hours of training each day. The second format has the training conducted over several weeks, with one module taught each week.

The target audience is Extension and other outreach professionals. Extension professionals include anyone who works for the land-grant university system in Extension, including faculty (at both the state and county level), administrators, program educators, and support staff. Outreach professionals are defined as any person with an occupation that interacts with the public. This can include, but is not limited to, university and college professors, administrators, and support staff; public and private school teachers, administrators, and staff; county or state employees; and community partners in non-profit organizations, agencies, or non-government organizations (NGOs). The curriculum is also being piloted with older youth and volunteer audiences. To date, 197 people have participated in the full 3-day training conducted by WSU representing eight states and Guam.

Navigating Difference is facilitated by program-certified trainers. To become certified, trainers must complete a three-step process.

Step 1: participate in the full 18-hour Navigating Difference training as a participant.

Step 2: attend a 3-day Train-the-Trainer Retreat (T3 Retreat).

Step 3: co-train with program-certified trainers.

Four T3 Retreats have been conducted, with a total of 51 persons being trained from seven states. Three states (Idaho, Oregon, and Kansas) implement the curriculum in their states.

Program Evaluation

Because it has not been thoroughly documented that "diversity management interventions, including training, yield measurable benefits at the employee, team or organizational level" (Curtis & Dreachslin, 2008), the training team was intentional in developing an evaluation that would document changes in participants' knowledge, attitude, and behavior.

Methods

The evaluation is a mixed methods design, consisting of both survey data and an interview. The survey is a pre-test (delivered before the program begins) with two post-tests (one at the end of the program, and one 6 months later) and is anonymous. Phone interviews are conducted with a random sample of participants approximately 1 year after the program. The goal of the survey is to see whether people have changed specific knowledge and attitudes targeted by the program in the short-term and whether those gains are maintained 6 months after the training. The goal of the interview is to see whether people have implemented any new behaviors in their workplace that they attribute to participation in the program. A secondary goal of the interviews is to ask whether people have specific changes or recommendations about the program based on their experience after

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participating.

Sample

A total of 172 participants who attended nine different trainings over the course of a year and a half completed the pre and post surveys. Participants reported participating in an average of 34 hours of previous training in cultural competencies before attending Navigating Difference, ranging from zero hours to a single respondent who reported 250 hours. The median number of training hours was 25. Of participants who reported their race/ethnicity, 78% were white, and 22% were evenly distributed across other categories (American Indian/Alaska Native, African American, Latino/a, or multiple ethnicities). Seventy-five percent of participants were female.

Outcome Evaluation

Goal 1: Short-Term Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs

The Navigating Difference evaluation has 12 items assessing knowledge and positive attitudes/beliefs about cultural difference (Table 1.) Participants rate how strongly they agree with each item on a Likert-type scale, with 1="Strongly Disagree" and 4 = "Strongly Agree." Pre-tests are administered before training and post-tests immediately after. Comparison of pre-test and post-test scores indicate participants' level of self-assessed change.

The average increase in agreement for 11 of 12 items was statistically significant ($p < .05$, assessed by paired t tests). The statement with nonsignificant change assessed beliefs about whether cultural sensitivity could be learned. On average, people already agreed with this statement at baseline, so there was little room for increase.

We conclude from these data that training was successful in its short-term goals of increasing knowledge and positive attitudes/beliefs about cultural difference. The training was especially effective in helping people develop a framework to think about values across cultures, identify strategies to work with cultural guides, understand and manage barriers to intercultural communication, and recognize different cultural styles of dealing with conflict.

Goal 2: Long-Term Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Beliefs

For a subset of participants (N=45), we also conducted a 6-month follow-up survey (Table 1). All items remained higher (eight significantly higher) at follow-up than at pre-test. We conclude that short-term gains in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs translated to long-term gains and that the training appears to have a long-lasting effect on these training outcomes.

Table 1.
Short- and Long-Term Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Belief on the
Navigating Difference Survey as Assessed by Paired t Tests

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Navigating Difference Survey Items	Competency	Pre	Post	6 mo. Follow-up
I have a framework to help me recognize that cultures may differ from one another in some values and be the same in others	CA	2.9	3.5*	3.3*
I know which of my own personal values are based in my culture	CA	3.0	3.4*	3.2
Cultural sensitivity is something you either have or you don't (R)	CU/CS	3.1	3.2	3.1
I do not understand how culture affects participation in extension programs (R)	CA/CU	3.1	3.4*	3.4*
I know people who can help me understand cultures different from my own ("cultural guides")	CK	2.9	3.3*	3.2*
I can identify strategies to work with cultural guides to better inform my program planning and implementation.	CK	2.5	3.3*	3.1*
I understand the barriers to intercultural communications.	CI	2.7	3.2*	3.0*
I don't have strategies for effective intercultural communications (R)	CI	2.6	3.2*	3.0*
I recognize the different cultural styles of dealing with conflict	CI	2.4	3.3*	2.9*
I understand the concepts of privilege, power, and oppression.	CS	3.0	3.4*	3.2*
I understand how privilege may affect my work with people from cultures different from my own	CS	3.0	3.4*	3.1
Cultural sensitivity can be developed.	CU/CS	3.5	3.6*	3.5

Note: * = statistically significant difference from pretest score ($p<.05$).
Numbers have been rounded. CA: Cultural Awareness; CU: Cultural
Understanding; CK: Cultural Knowledge; CI: Cultural Interaction; CS: Cultural
Sensitivity.

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Goal 3: Application of Training & Changes in Behavior

A total of 13 randomly selected participants have been interviewed so far, 1 year after their participation in the training. Interviews were conducted by telephone by an assistant not familiar with participants.

Interview data showed that participants had changed specific beliefs and practiced new behaviors such as:

- Completing a community map to become aware of gaps in programming;

- Making connections with cultural guides to improve marketing outreach strategies;

- Involving cultural guides in the formation of meeting and training agendas, rather than telling them what was needed from them;

- Being more intentional and taking actions to integrate cultural competency in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs; and

- Increasing the use of strategies for intercultural communication.

Considerations

For Extension organizations considering the creation or adoption of a cultural competency training for educators, Bendick et al. (2001) offered a set of benchmarks related to successful implementation of diversity training models. Brief examples from Navigating Difference are offered to illustrate how WSU Extension addressed these quality standards.

- Training has strong support from administration—The Extension Director created the original Diversity Catalyst Team that endorsed the training approach, and the Extension Administrative Team approved the cultural competencies that served as its foundation. Once the curriculum was developed, regional directors built the first module of training into their annual meetings so all Extension faculty would be introduced to the Navigating Difference model. They continued to financially support participation of educators in the full training.

- Training is tailored to each group—Training activities in Navigating Difference can be adapted to assure relevance to a variety of participants. For instance, case studies have been rewritten so that situations match the audiences and issues that a particular group of outreach professionals (e.g., teachers or social workers) might encounter.

- Training links diversity to organizational goals—Navigating Difference used the diversity definition from the university's strategic plan to create a strong link to the institution's goals. Curriculum developers also were involved in crafting WSU Extension's overall diversity initiative, which ensured a good fit between the training and the organization's strategic direction.

- Trainers are experienced—Diversity training is sensitive and intense work. It requires that trainers

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have basic facilitation skills, know how to deal with group conflict, and are aware of their own biases as well as understand the curriculum content (Marofsky, 2008). Therefore, we recommend that participants in the train the trainer program:

- Be experienced trainers before participating in the trainer process;

- Commit to continuously work to increase their self awareness and cultural competency skills; and

- Co-train with an experienced trainer before conducting training on their own.

- Training engages all levels of employees—Developers of Navigating Difference were intentional in designing and marketing the training as professional development for administrators, department and county-based faculty, and staff in both program and support roles. Our participants have ranged from campus-based department chairs to front office staff in county offices. In training sessions, we ask participants to introduce themselves using only name and location (rather than position) to de-emphasize status differences that might inhibit full engagement of all participants.

- Training is culture general rather than culture specific—The curriculum was designed to be conducted with a broad audience of outreach professionals across Washington State and the country. Since we could not possibly address all cultural groups represented in the United States, the focus became to increase cultural competencies that can be used when interacting with any cultural group.

- Training addresses behavior change—Interviews conducted 1 year after the trainings indicated participants were using new skills to create culturally relevant programs for diverse audiences in communities.

At WSU Extension, cultural competency training is now considered one of four "essential skills" offered in the organization's professional development system (along with program planning/evaluation, facilitation, and communication). Cultural competencies are also infused in the professional behaviors matrix used for faculty performance reviews. For Extension organizations that are serious about sustaining effective outreach to diverse communities, investing in cultural competency training is a foundational imperative. Ongoing support and recognition of educators who display cultural competence is the next step to creating an Extension system that remains viable for decades to come.

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