MODELS FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT: Cultural competency is to be an all-encompassing theme throughout a university, teaching and learning institutes. Strategies are necessary for transmitting this concept and its associated behavior through students, and graduates to the wider community. Cultural competence enhances capacity in all spheres. Several models show cultural developmental stages by different names leading to professional behavior, and policies that effect change in policies and service delivery. Cultural incompetence may be described as deconstructiveness, incapacity, blindness, pre-competence, denial, defense, minimum stages of sensitivity, safety, acceptance, adaption and integration. Cultural competence is much more than just awareness of cultural differences, but the capacity to improve outcomes by integrating culture into the delivery of services.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Competence, Cultural Elements, Operational Model and Pedagogical Model.


INTRODUCTION: Cultural competency is necessary for organizations, while pursuing of excellence and the continual building of expertise because it helps organization accomplish its objectives by knowing more about something than other organizations. The mind-set prevalent in a culturally competent organization is one, where products and services are viewed as things that can always be improved upon. In a culturally competent scenario, today's achievements are tomorrow's baseline with higher goals to strive for. Plus there is a sense of urgency coupled with intensity created with the individuals. People in culturally competent atmosphere love a challenge. Difficult, complex problems represent a chance for them to test themselves. People in culturally competent environment are "Voluminous information gatherers" and make decisions based on logic and facts, all the while working under the pressure to make decisive calls quickly. Cultural competency seeker is never satisfied, and they are quite often hard taskmasters and they can be exacting in their expectations of others. Leaders in this culture have a single purpose and want to organize in ways that allow them to reach their goals. The implementation of an organizational structure does not translate into people being assigned to functional groups or tasks for the long term. However, instead, people are assigned based on specific, time bound issues or temporary projects with their performance closely measured and analyzed. High achievers love this because without being measured they can’t prove to themselves that they are achieving. Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in the context of human resources, non-profit organizations, and government agencies whose employees work with persons from different cultural/ethnic backgrounds.

Cultural competence comprises four components: a). Awareness of one’s own cultural worldview, b). Attitude towards cultural differences, c). Knowledge of different cultural practices worldwide and d) Cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Background of Cultural Competence: To understand cultural competence, it is important to grasp the full meaning of the word ‘Culture’ first. According to 1 culture represents “The values, norms, and traditions that affect how, individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world” (p.197), Taylor (1996) defined culture as, “An integrated pattern of human behavior including thought, communication, ways of interacting, roles and relationships, and expected behaviors, beliefs, values, practices and customs.” 2 qualified culture as, “The bear of human wisdom that includes a wealth of human behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, values and experiences of immense worth. It also carries things that are offensive to a person’s dignity and wellbeing and certainly to others whose cultural framework is different”.

Cultural competence may also be associated with diversity, and from an organizational communication perspective, a diverse culture. Diversity must be prevalent and the intersections of power evolved to include concepts focusing on organizational culture and the intersections of power, structure, and communication all of which may contribute to diversity initiative or potentially impede them. Diversity initiatives are typically part of a more human resources management approach which seeks not only employee inputs but also values it, differences are recognized as a uniting component rather than a separating one. Since diversity is an ambiguous term grounded in context, it does not necessarily mean the same thing to all the people all the time. Diversity encourages the process of including the perspectives of under-represented, non-dominant groups in organizations to ensure they have a voice (Orbe & Spellers, 2005).

Developing cultural competence requires examining biases and prejudices, developing cross-cultural skills, searching for role models, and spending as much time as possible with other people, who share a passion for cultural competence.
The term multicultural competence surfaced in a mental health publication by psychologist Paul Pedersen (1988) at least a decade, before the term cultural competence became popular. Most of the definitions of cultural competence shared among diverse professionals come from the healthcare industry. Their perspective is useful in the broader context of diversity work.

**DEFINITION:** A set of congruent behavior, attitudes and policies that come together as a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Operationally defined, cultural competence is, the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services: thereby producing better outcomes.

The word culture is used because it implies integrated pattern of human behavior that include thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of racial ethnic, religious or social groups. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function in a particular way: the capacity to function within a context of culturally integrated patterns of human behavior defined by a group. Being competent in cross-cultural functioning means, learning new patterns of behavior and effectively applying them in the appropriate settings. Cultural competence is not static and our level of cultural competence changes in response to new situations, experiences and relationships. Three elements of cultural competence are:

a) **Attitude.**
b) **Knowledge.**
c) **Skills.**

**ATTITUDE:** Paul Pedersen’s multicultural competence model emphasized three components: Awareness, Knowledge and Skills. Attitude is a component that emphasizes the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs in general, and training that has participants carefully examined their own beliefs and values about cultural differences.

**KNOWLEDGE:** Social science research indicates that, our values and beliefs about equality may be inconsistent with our behavior and ironically we may be unaware of it, regardless of whether our attitude towards cultural differences matches our behavior. We can all benefit by improving our cross-cultural effectiveness.

One common goal of diverse professionals is to create inclusive systems that allow members to work at maximum productivity level.

**SKILLS:** The skills component focuses on practicing cultural competence to perfection. Communication is the fundamental tool by which people interact in organizations. This includes gestures and other non-verbal communication that tend to vary from culture to culture.

The set of four components of our cultural competence definition- awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills - represents the key features of each of the popular definitions. The utility of the definition goes beyond the simple integration of previous definition.

However, it is the diagnostic and intervention development benefits that make the approach most appealing. Five essential elements that contribute to a system’s ability to become more culturally competent are:

- Value diversity.
- Have the capacity for cultural self-assessment.
- Be conscious of the ‘Dynamics’ inherent when cultures interact.
- Institutionalize cultural knowledge and.
- Develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures.

**Understanding Value Diversity through FAST/CAICS Programs:** Valuing diversity means accepting and respecting differences. Diversity between and within cultures must be recognized. E.g. Families and Schools Together (FAST), an eight-week programme which primarily focuses on family empowerment through parent/professional partnerships, organizes weekly dinners with families participating in the programme. Each week, a different family hosts dinner. Participating families often represent a variety of cultural backgrounds. During these dinners, FAST staff facilitates informal activities for families. These activities are effective because families and staff are able to respect each other’s differences.

Community Approaches to Improving Success (CAICS), a project based in the Englewood, New Jersey school system, hosts weekend get-always for teachers, primary caretakers, and children in the programme. The retreats are designed to begin a process of moving away from blaming others for children’s behavior. Participants, including children, are expected to move towards self-accountability. Participants have an opportunity to develop an appreciation for other people’s cultural perceptions and the reality of differences. The programme stresses the importance of understanding that ‘Different does not necessarily mean ‘wrong’ in cross-cultural interactions.

**Cultural Self-Assessment:** Through the cultural self-assessment process, school or programme, staff is better able to see, how their actions affect people from other cultures. The most important actions to be conscious of are, usually taken for granted. Mis-communications can be avoided through cultural self-assessment and understanding the dynamics of difference. If a person is aware of his or her own cultural behavior, he/she can learn to modify them when appropriate. Individuals and institutions such as schools, have also to assess culture as well.

**Consciousness of the Dynamics of Cultural Interactions:** There are many factors that can affect cross-cultural interactions. Biases based on historical cultural experiences can explain some current attitudes. For e.g. Social workers are often perceived as the people who remove children and separate families. To overcome this bias, many staff members are trained as social workers, who are redefining the social worker role as part of New Pathways. New Pathways focus on improving family functioning, using an adaptation of the ten-week fast programme to ensure the family’s role as the primary support mechanism for children.

To avoid confirming negative associations regarding social worker, staff has changed its interaction with families. Meetings are held in the family’s home rather than in offices. Instead of wearing formal attire, staff dresses in a manner are perceived by the clients as respectful but unimposing.
Rather than completely following their own cultural rules, staff greets and refers to family members according to culturally appropriate titles. Staff also follows the appropriate rules for body language, social distance and eye contact as defined by the family.

**Institutionalization of cultural knowledge:** The knowledge developed regarding culture and cultural dynamics, must be integrated into every facet of a school, programme, or agency.
- Staff must be trained, and effectively utilize the knowledge gained.
- Administrators should develop policies that are responsive to cultural diversity.
- Programme materials should reflect positive images of all people, and be valid for use with each group.

Fully integrated cultural knowledge may affect global changes in human service delivery. A programme demonstrating institutionalized cultural knowledge is world of difference. Staff participates in professional development activities conducted by Dr. Wade Nobles, a recognized expert in cross-cultural training.

Classrooms are prepared with reading corners consisting of culturally relevant subject matter such as African children’s stories, and lessons about influential African-Americans. Such culturally inclusive practices produces better outcomes for creating a bridge between school, home, and community, and serves as an example of how this programme has integrated cultural knowledge in its service delivery system.

**Adapt to Diversity:** Working with cultural groups that stress veneration of ancestors and invoking a sense for duty in children by illustrating the actions and values of their ancestors provides an example. A child’s cultural background provides traditional values that can be used to create new interventions.

**Indigenous Cultural Competency:** There is still no single definition of cultural competence or pedagogical model. However, cultural competency aims to achieve equality, so it is important for all students and staff to have all these components:
- Knowledge and understanding of indigenous cultures, histories and contemporary realities and awareness of indigenous protocols (Cultural awareness).
- Critical reflection on one’s own culture and professional paradigms in order to understand its cultural limitations.
- Proficiency to engage and work effectively in indigenous context congruent to the expectations of indigenous people.
- Effecting positive change in one’s profession.

One useful pedagogical model as a matrix/tool for curriculum development of units and courses for cultural competence training can be- Generic understanding of culture (Knowledge, Awareness)
- Understanding indigenous cultures and histories (Knowledge, Awareness):
  - Reflexivity of values and attitudes:
  - Critically examining the profession:
  - Cross-cultural skills:

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- Specific Professional skills.
  - The learner generally develops from cultural incompetence to knowledge to awareness to sensitivity to competence and finally to cultural proficiency.

**Operational models for developing indigenous cultural competency.**

Four operational models have described different aspects in different courses and contexts. Finally a matrix provided may be a useful tool to map these stages of learning through a course.

This model has been criticized for its failure to effect change in behavior and therefore service delivery. It may be because ‘cultural awareness programs add sessions that do not have assessments and measurable outcomes, and participants do not have to display the achievement of any competencies”.

**Cultural Awareness** involves developing knowledge and understanding of cultural difference and of the social, economic and political context in which people exist.

**Cultural Sensitivity** is where cultural differences are ‘legitimated ‘through a process of self-exploration that enables an individual to reflect on how their culture, worldviews and actions impact upon others.

**Cultural Safety** is an environment which is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, or who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity and truly listening.

‘Cultural Competence’ transcends notions of cultural awareness and safety to include critical reflexivity of self and profession, capacity building of skills and decolonization of organizational paradigms, policies and procedures. Cultural competence is much more than awareness of cultural differences, focusing on the capacity to improve outcomes by integrating culture into the delivery of services.

Professional cultural competence has measurable human capabilities involving knowledge, skills, and values, which are assembled in work performance demonstrated by:

- Knowledge of other cultures:
- Personal qualities of openness, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity and a sense of humour:
- Behavioral skills, such as communication competencies, culturally appropriate role behavior and ability to relate well to others:
- Self-awareness, especially of one’s own values and beliefs:
- Technical skills, including ability to complete tasks in new cultural settings:

**Individually and organizations are said to be at the stage of:**

**Being culturally destructive:** when they hold beliefs or engage in policies and practices that perpetuate and reinforce historical notions of western, racial and cultural superiority:

**Cultural incapacity** is when they have developed sufficient knowledge, insight and skills to operate in less culturally destructive ways but continue to reinforce culturally-biased policies and practices and covertly foster notions of western superiority through paternalism.


**Cultural blindness is** when they are actively seeking to be non-biased in their policy and practice but in so doing implicitly or explicitly encourage assimilation by failing to adequately recognize and address the needs of the cultural minority:

**Cultural pre-competence is** having recognition of the need for culturally competent policies, procedures and professional development, yet this recognition does not extend beyond tokenism or discussions on strategies:

**Cultural competencies is** when they have developed the knowledge, reflexivity and skills necessary to be genuinely accepting and respecting of cultural differences and actively implementing policies and procedures that support these beliefs and commitment

**Cultural proficiency is when** they have inclusive policies and procedures in place and have a fully integrated workforce, being pro-active in seeking to refine their approach and practice through research, cross-cultural engagement and ongoing professional development and act upon a set of values and guiding principles that support cultural competence and cultural proficiency in every aspect of their personal, professional, and organizational functioning.

When people first recognize that culture and social structure do influence individual’s beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavior, they may move to the second stage. During the defense stage, they begin to acknowledge the existence of other cultures; however, at this stage their worldview of structure delimits their understanding so that, they see their own culture as the ideal and other cultures as inferior. Individuals tend to think about their own culture as the ideal and other cultures as inferior. Individuals tend to think about other cultures hierarchically. Typically, western, industrialized cultures are ranked highest by westerners with other cultures failing in status as they differ from this norm.

The third stage, minimization, is similar to cultural blindness, in which cultural differences are recognized as inconsequential. The remaining three stages are described as ethno-relative. In the fourth stage, individuals accept differences without judging or minimizing them. People who achieve the fifth stage, adaptation, are able to alter their own behavior to accommodate the behavior of those who differ from themselves. In the final stage, integration; individuals celebrate and incorporate cultural differences into their way of being.

### A Pedagogical Model for building cultural competence:

There is currently no commonly agreed upon pedagogical framework to guide appropriate course and programme development in this field across the sector.

However, if the aim is building cultural competence for students, so that they become skilled to function effectively in inter-cultural contexts and develop a culturally competent system, then the following matrix may be a useful tool for curriculum development of units and courses that may achieve this aim. A pedagogical matrix can be used for curriculum development, showing foundational knowledge, understandings, skills and attributes to programme specific content and strategies required for culturally competent engagement and professional practice.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The development of inter-cultural competence is mostly based on the individual’s experience, while he or she is communicating with different cultures. When interacting with people from other cultures, the individual experiences certain obstacles that are caused by differences in cultural understanding between two people from different cultures. Cultural competence means, improving cross-cultural capabilities by adapting services to the culture context of families and children. Cultural competence programs help others initiate similar activities. While many resources are available to guide that process, developing cultural competence continue to challenge our creativity. However, the dire situation faced by our children today, and therefore by our nation tomorrow, demands that we embrace this challenge.

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An operational model suggests that cultural safety is achieved in three stages

A six stage sequential development of cultural competence and proficiency of individuals and organization through personal and professional development, commitment and systemic organizational change

Another 6-stage model for cross-cultural competency is a sequential development of knowledge and cognitive processing on a continuum from denial to integration

A developmental model for Indigenous Cultural Proficiency in a University course or unit