

HRD 643 Final Project

Prepared for

Dr. Mark Hicks

Multicultural Adult Development: Summer Institute

University of Southern Maine - Gorham

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Submitted by

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Dr. Hicks,

Not being a journaler, I thought writing journal blurbs would be the biggest hurdle I faced in completing the assigned tasks for the HRD 643 Final Project. However, the most difficult part of this assignment has been writing this transmittal to tell you what I learned from completing each of the four “movements.”

I considered blathering on about how my daily experiences have been transformed by exposing parts of myself I did not know existed, excising them, and replacing them with “appropriate” behaviors for a multi-cultural entity. However, one of the canons I have adopted for guidance on my life’s path is integrity at all costs. A critical tenet of that canon is honesty. It is as vital for me to be honest as it is to breathe.

You are probably wondering what that personal revelation has to do with completing the assignments for HRD 643. It is this: The primary lesson I learned from my experiences in the class is that I have always been multi-cultural. It is how I was raised. I can not imagine living “white” as you described it and as several of my classmates acknowledged. In the introduction to the Final Project for this course, you wrote, “In order to experience the multicultural world we live in, we need to learn how to ‘see’ the world differently.” If, by “differently” you mean without ratifying ethnic, racial, social, economic, or other differences, I got there as a toddler and have never wavered.

You also wrote, “Our social world has always been multicultural, yet one would never know it by looking at the dominating institutions and ideas that shape how we see ourselves and others.” To what “dominating institutions” do you refer? Affirmative Action has been around for 40 years, and its effects are widespread. In fact, many people my age and younger think Affirmative Action initiatives are a waste of time today. Isn’t it true that one of American society’s “dominating institutions” – the post-Civil Rights Act public school system – is responsible for making my generation more multicultural? Most writers who describe late-born GenX and all of GenY persons remark on the inherent disdain these generational groups have for cultural segregation. My generation, the Baby Boomers, raised these children to be diverse. Schools, not our parents or other social institutions, created this sense of equality in Baby Boomers, and we passed it along.

You also wrote in the introduction, “Educators must not only have an intellectual understanding of a multi-cultural framework, they must be able to *live multiculturally* themselves.” One of my proudest life moments occurred when an adult student in a course funded by Welfare-to-Work initiatives said, “Miss Billie, you are only white on the outside.” Other students have made similar remarks over the years, and I am excited by consistent validation that I am a successfully multi-cultural educator.

Your introductory remarks continued,

“This adult development course places the student right in the center of multicultural theory by asking participants to name their standpoint and consider – and practice – how to negotiate multiple voices and multiple realities in the same space. Multicultural theory, in that sense, is both a *process* and a *goal*.”

Most of the words I wrote during our in-class journaling exercises were indignant responses. By the end of the week, I was actually angry. I did not need to “unlearn being white,” and your suggestion that I did was inflammatory. I was offended that you characterized all Caucasian people using generic descriptors. I was especially infuriated by the *Example [sic] of White Privilege in My Life (partial)* handout. Not only do I find this document racist and ridiculous in several places, I can not identify with any of the statements it contains.

I grew up lower middle-class, intelligent, female, not Baptist or Methodist, a pacifist, with a Boston-born daddy in the rural south. I have always been surrounded by disabled individuals. I know what it is like to be marginalized. I spent two years in Connecticut, listening to my co-workers make fun of my language patterns. I had to learn homogenized diction in order to be an effective trainer from Manhattan to Maine. I can assure you from my own experiences it is not just people of color who go through the stages in the *Patterns for Persons from Culturally Marginalized Groups Coming into Racial/Ethnic Consciousness* handout.

I was fortunate to grow up in a community where blacks were revered educators, pastors of “white” churches, popular doctors, highly regarded tradesmen, and owners of thriving businesses. Skin color was never a consideration when you wanted the best. This was decades before Rosa Parks sat in the front of the bus. That is how our parents grew up, and it is how their parents grew up. Maybe we were a social anomaly in the pre-Civil Rights South, but that did not matter. Humanity did. Today, my community has embraced a tremendous number of refugee immigrants. The two-century spirit of inclusiveness continues.

You wrote in the introduction to this assignment: “Moving from a mono-cultural orientation toward a multi-cultural framework takes a serious, sustained effort...” I disagree. I believe once an individual becomes truly amalgamated, multi-culturalism is just a matter of being. There is no work involved. The handout *General Patterns of Identity Formation for Persons Socialized into a White Identity* is completely foreign to me. I realize there are people to whom it applies, and I feel sorry for them. What a chore it must be to consciously go through those phases.

The Final Project introduction also contained the following statements:

“You have lived multicultural developmental theory this week. You began with a self-study of your personal challenges to developing a more inclusive, multicultural orientation. You re-visited the cultural patterns and

systems that have and continue to shape your life. You contemplated what needs to be un-learned in order to take in new perspectives. And, you've taken some first-steps toward re-learning new ways of being that support a multicultural consciousness. "

If you are speaking on a global-social level, I can agree with portions of this paragraph. However, if you are speaking directly to me, this paragraph represents an unjustified assumption on your part. As we learned in the readings and discussions about crucial conversations, it can be unproductive to the point of volatility to engage in dialogue with others when you have preformed ideas. Is it appropriate for anyone to assume "unlearning" must take place before someone can adopt new ideas and behaviors? This is the "break 'em down and rebuild 'em" mindset of elite military groups and other organizations that require all their members to be, essentially, Stepford wife-style automatons.

I was also disturbed when you "put on the every black person hat." How can you identify with my friends from Trinidad or Liberia? How can you understand my best friend's son, who has a Jamaican father? What do you have in common with the parolees, poverty-stricken seniors, or mothers whose children are the fourth or fifth consecutive generations living in subsidized housing? You understand what it means to be Mark Hicks. You may find a small cohort of others whose lives mirror yours, and you could conceivably represent them. I think suggesting you can portray an amalgamated persona of "every black person" is as wrong as it would be for me to attempt to represent every Caucasian southerner.

I am very happy to be a citizen of the multi-cultural universe. I am not ashamed to be white. In fact, I like to think of white in its scientific context: the blending of all colors. My personal spiritual symbol has always been a rainbow, and that's exactly how I perceive my Self.

I am tired of living in a climate of fear and distrust forty years after we made such tremendous strides to eradicate it in this country. Pre-Civil Rights racial issues in America were not that big a deal when considered in the context of today's global strife driven by ethnic and religious differences. As the global socio-political divide widens and formerly Third World countries become economic powerhouses, we are going to see distrust and aggression increase exponentially.

Just as the old adage says it takes less effort to smile than frown, I believe it takes a tremendous amount of effort to be aware of differences in people. I would love to live long enough to see Dr. King's metaphorical check tendered on a worldwide scale, so we can enjoy universally "the riches of freedom and the security of justice."



Movement One

Assignment: Before you leave on the last day of the summer session, you should have a first-thought about a project, practice, program, unit, etc. from your workplace that would be improved if one of the multicultural competencies were in place (see list on the purple sheet). For the purpose of this course, you will need to pick something that you can accomplish in the next few months. Jot down your question, and set it aside. Let your project marinate in the flow of your life for a short period of time. As you watch and consider, it's likely that you will get a deeper understanding of the issues that are informing your project.

Response: During the class meetings, I chose a project that involved American Mensa and discussed it with you. After careful consideration, I realized that was an impractical project in the scope of HRD 643. Therefore, I took advantage of an opportunity to facilitate an informal training during a staff meeting for a local Department of Children's Services branch. I identified the components as follows:

Audience: Staff of the DCS branch office.

Training Gap: Individual staff members, especially newly hired college-graduates who are Caucasians with little or no exposure to different cultures, have difficulty working with clients whose lifestyles are not "normal" according to notions held by the staff members. They make judgements about how to manage a particular case based on a lack of understanding the family's cultural norms. For example, a child may be one of a dozen Hispanic individuals sharing a home together. The itinerant Hispanic community in East Tennessee considers such living arrangements standard, yet some DCS case managers are initially rebuffed.

Competency from Hicks' List: "Participants can listen and behave without imposing personal values and assumptions on others."

Movement Two

Assignment: Kick-start your Curiosity! Chose ONE (or do something of your own creation in the spirit of the following). I chose

Do The Opposite Exercise. Plainly stated, do something that you typically don't do. . . . After you have completed the above exercise, document your "product" (digital still or video camera-mini disk or VHS).

Activity: I participated in the food preparation and table-setting for St. James' Episcopal Church Women's (ECW) "Evening with the Stars" annual banquet. Following is a description of the event:

An Evening with the Stars of Saint James' was begun five years ago with the desire of the St. James' ECW to lift up and celebrate the many ministries performed by parish women. Awards were established to recognize the gracious women of St. James' who continue to shine as they Feed God's Sheep.

This year, Stars "Celebrates God's Grace" in honoring seven women who sometimes go unnoticed but their angelic blessings mean so much to the recipients. These ladies are shining examples of loving, serving and feeding God's sheep. We are deeply thankful for each one of them and for all of the women of St. James'. This is YOUR night!!!

Each year, nominations are received from ECW members and from the community. Members of the Awards Committee vote on the nominations. Awards are a secret until the banquet, at which the parish men escort the women to their seats, serve meals, and bus the tables.

Usually, I merely attend. This year, however, I was able to help with actually creating the meal. Two other women and I worked as a team to prepare the food. Food preparation may not be artistic to some people, but – as far as I am concerned – food is as much a medium for expression as paint or clay. I also had the opportunity to collaborate on creating the evening's published menu, which meant I got to brainstorm words that fit food and simultaneously evoked angelic imagery. While I can not share the heavenly delights as proof, I have included a copy of the menu to show my wordsmithing (Figure 1) and a copy of the program to describe the event (Figure 2).

Journal Assignment: Write a journal entry where you describe what you learned. What were you trying to accomplish? What were you reminded of? What confounded, delighted, challenged or provoked you? How did you do? Be sure to include something about how this particular exercise/movement influenced your thinking about your "big project."

Journal Activity: Why is it this church represents such an emotional tug-of-war for me? I feel a sense of comfort and peace in the building, and I truly enjoy communing with many of the people. Others, however, are walking testimonies to everything I find abhorrent in human behavior. My personal spirituality extends far beyond the limits of the Episcopal Church or even Protestant denominations. I can not abide the limitations of organized religion. Yet, I marvel at the depths of faith in most of the women who have been elected the Stars of St. James' Church over the years.

Part of my purpose in choosing this activity to fulfill Movement Two of the assignment was the creative opportunity it fostered. However, as I thought more about it, I realized the activity had close ties to the presentation I will develop for the Department of Children's Services (DCS) for Movement Four.

Figure 1: "Evening with the Stars" Menu



At St. James', we have an accrual of faiths, ethnicities, national origins, political affiliations, sexual identities, physical abilities, and socio-economic levels. There are people in the church who stratify everyone, yet St. James' as an entity is incredibly inclusive. If you believe in the mission of the parish – to feed and tend God's sheep – you are embraced, whether or not you are "card-carrying" member of this congregation or even the Episcopal Church. No one tries to tell you how to live your life.

That is the message many of the staff at DCS need to hear, and it is a philosophy they apparently need to manifest more clearly in their work with clients.

Figure 2: "Evening with the Stars" Program

 <p><i>"Celebrating God's Grace"</i></p> <p><i>An Evening with the</i></p> <p><i>Stars of St. James'</i></p> <p><i>September 28, 2007</i></p> <p><i>St. James' Episcopal Church</i></p> <p><i>1101 North Broadway</i></p> <p><i>Knoxville, TN 37918</i></p> 	 <p><i>"Celebrating God's Grace"</i></p> <p><i>Musical Interlude</i> <i>Anne Jackson at the Harp</i></p> <p><i>Welcome</i> <i>Lisa Hysinger, ECW President</i></p> <p><i>Introductions</i> <i>Marilyn Canady</i></p> <p><i>Blessing</i> <i>The Rev. Larry Beach</i></p> <p><i>"Amazing Grace"</i> <i>Performed by: David Houser & Anne Jackson</i></p> <p><i>A Heavenly Repast</i> <i>served by Angels from our Men's Group</i></p> <p><i>Guest Speaker</i> <i>Marla Delong</i></p> <p><i>2007 Stars Awards</i></p> 
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Movement Three

Assignment: Conduct a conversation with someone who you suspect will not support the changes that will come about because of your project. You want to speak with this person *because* they have a different opinion than the one(s) you hold. In that way, you will be crossing a cultural gap. Think carefully about the kind of questions you want to ask, and *how* (tone, body language, actual words, etc.) you'll ask them. Before the actual conversation, jot down the answers you suspect your person will give. After you're done, compare your assumed responses with what was actually said.

Activity: Conversation with DCS team leadership to approach them about staff members' request for a presentation. Obvious issues are (a) taking time from already overtaxed employees; (b) taking time allotted for required training; (c) identifying specific behavioral

examples that should be mitigated; and, (d) encouraging buy-in from staff, team leaders, and managers.

Journal: I anticipated only having a conversation with one individual, but it worked out that I was able to meet with four employees who represented three levels of DCS hierarchy: a Team Coordinator, who manages six teams (44 staff), coordinates day-to-day operations, and schedules staff meetings and training; a Team Leader who directly reports to the Team Coordinator; and two case managers whom the Team Leader supervises.

My expectation was the training presentation would be a hard-sell, strictly based on direct and indirect economical considerations of staff time. It is easy to shove off a non-emergency problem when one is faced with budget constraints. Surprisingly, the Team Coordinator was very supportive of the need for providing multi-cultural awareness training to her staff. She is very attuned to the cultural challenges faced daily by case managers in the field. Everyone present for the conversation acknowledged a particular problem with new-hire case managers, but the Team Coordinator observed similar cultural dissonances existed even among some seasoned case managers. She even spoke of making the training mandatory for all staff who are not responding to emergency calls or in court.

The younger case managers are members of a generation that, while inherently diverse, is used to bluntly stating an opinion with parents or other responsible adults around to absorb any fallout. Obviously, it will be a challenge to explore behavioral modification that is a by-product of an entire generation's socialization. The older case managers' behavior represents a different concern. They know better, but they are so regularly overworked and faced with so much of the worst in human behavior that they sometimes just snap. For them, a meeting about multi-cultural awareness issues could be viewed as a significant affront. They know how to do their jobs, and they do the very best they can with the time, resources, and intra-agency support available. For these case managers, an occasional lapse in judgement or behavior is not a personal inadequacy but a symptom of the system's failure to support them while they are out in the trenches working with the clients.

Movement Four

Do your project! As with the other phases, write a journal entry that captures your experience with the project. Include a description of:

- Your role in the organization

I have no role in the organization. Because I have facilitated diversity training for business students at the community college level, I was asked by a DCS Case Manager

to approach the need for multi-cultural awareness training with departmental management in hopes training could be arranged.

- The context of the organization

An agency of the State of Tennessee, the Department of Children's Services is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanence, and well-being of children. "Permanence" in this context means residence in a permanent home as opposed to foster care or transitional housing. The agency achieves its goals through community resource utilization, cultural responsiveness, and providing services to all Tennesseans from birth to age 18. DCS is also responsible for administering Tennessee's juvenile justice system.



- The multicultural competency you sought to improve

"Participants can listen and behave without imposing personal values and assumptions on others."

- What happened

A focused dialogue took place during a DCS branch staff meeting. Fortunately, this group has a relationship that allows it to be frank in discussing topics that can cause a dialogue to deteriorate. The meeting facilitator described behaviors that represented insensitivity. These behaviors had either been observed by co-workers or supervisors, or they have been reported by clients, service agencies, or members of the public.

Case Managers shared similar experiences from their interactions with clients and discussed both positive and negative outcomes. All those present agreed that cultural responsiveness is a critical element of the Department's mission. They were genuinely pleased the Department added cultural responsiveness to its published core values in 2006.

Everyone agreed to be more aware of their individual responses to cultural differences and be proactive in assisting co-workers who might be struggling with specific situations.

- How the preliminary exercises informed your "big project"

The creative exercise gave me an opportunity to evaluate my own issues with self-righteous people, especially those who are more likely than not to be totally insensitive to others' feelings or needs except for public displays of generalized support.

The conversation exercise gave me the opportunity to discuss more specific needs of the DCS branch when I realized the Team Coordinator was not at all offended

by my approaching the subject of inadequacies among her staff and was quite open to the prospect of office-wide training.

- What did you learn overall

Actually, I was surprised to learn the DCS staff were able to talk openly and – at times – bluntly about interpersonal issues. It's highly unusual for an organization as diverse as DCS to have that level of communication. It was refreshing to be among people who understand the importance of cultural awareness and are willing to acknowledge their own deficiencies. More so, it was encouraging to see the employees not only make personal promises to modify their behavior but to also support each other without any sense of self-righteousness.

I was pleased to see you referred to Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning theories in the class. I have incorporated them into my own educational style since I first read them. The handout you provided in our class was surprisingly applicable to the DCS office, and that was refreshing to me both as a person and an educator.

Final Product

- ✓ Submit – portfolio style – a copy of your journal entries for Phases 2, 3 & 4.
- ✓ On top of your entries, attach a 3-5 page cover letter that summarizes what you learned, the status of your own developmental trajectory (i.e., what are you now capable of doing using a multicultural lens), and, finally, lingering questions or puzzlements that remain active for you.