

Creating Cultural Connections – Concepts and Definitions¹

Culture

The creation of learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors in a community of interacting people. Each of us constructs a multicultural identity from the many cultural influences that impact us, including nationality, ethnicity, race, age, gender, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, and organizational affiliation.

Intercultural Competence

The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts.

Mindset: analytical frameworks for understanding culture *Skillset*: interpersonal and group skills for bridging differences *Heartset*: motivation and curiosity to explore cultural variables

Cultural Humility

Respect for the validity of other peoples' cultures; requires us to recognize that diverse worldviews are equally legitimate.

Cultural Self-Awareness

The recognition of the attributes and patterns of your own culture and how those shape your values, beliefs, and interpretations of others.

Stereotype

Hardening of the categories"; a process of developing rigid ways of thinking about individuals from other cultures, as if those individuals represent some statistical "norm" of their culture group.

Generalization

A lightly held hypothesis based on research about patterns of behavior in the other culture; a hypothesis that we never act on until we have confirmed that it is appropriate for the individual we have met.

Marginalization

The exclusion or separation of individuals and groups of people from access to power, opportunities, and resources afforded to others.

Privilege

Unearned benefits received because of membership in a dominant group.

Culture of Power

What is accepted as the norm. Who is in authority, how is space designed, what is considered acceptable, who has credibility, whose experiences are valued, whose voices are heard, and who is making decisions. (From Kivel, P. (2002). Uprooting Racism. New Society Publishers.)

Cultural Capital

Specialized or insider knowledge not available equitably to all.

¹ From Reitenauer, V.L., et al. (2005). Creating cultural connections: Navigating difference, investigating power, unpacking privilege. In Cress, C.M., et al. (Eds.). Learning through serving: A student guidebook for service-learning across the disciplines. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Guiding Questions

The educational narratives that we read described the experiences of a number of individuals from different race, class, and gender backgrounds. As a group, select one of the narratives and respond to the following questions:

1. What are the dimensions of this person's *culture* that seem most significant to him/her? Given your own *cultural self-awareness*, how do those compare and contrast to your own?
2. What *stereotypes* might you hold about this person; identify how a *generalization* of this person would be different than a stereotype?
3. What are the ways in which this person expresses or infers how they have felt *marginalized*?
4. Compare this person's life experiences with your own using the concept of *privilege* as defined above. How do you think the person in the narrative would talk about *privilege*?
5. Compare and contrast the person's *cultural capital* with your own. What do you think the person in the narrative would have to say about *cultural capital* in his/her own life experiences?
6. Think about your person's experiences with school. How does the *culture of power* in their school experience compare and contrast with the cultural background your person brings to the school?
7. How might your own identity challenge you to recognize the validity of this person's culture (*cultural humility*)? Why?
8. What do you have to learn from this person? How could working with this person develop your own *intercultural competence – mindset, skillset, heartset*?

Narratives from which to choose:

- (a) Working class college women - Gwendolyn, Patricia, and Kathleen
- (b) Female author of "Listening to the Voices of AA Males, Bessie Gage
- (c) African American man, Harold
- (d) African American man, Ray
- (e) White, Appalachian middle school boy, Billy Charles Barnett