Chapter 4

Designing Culturally– Sensitive Career and Technical Career Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The workplace has become more cross-cultural due to labor costs, outsourcing, and international production. Cultural sensitivity accepts cultural similarities and differences without assigning relative values to them. Culture-sensitive curriculum can optimize organization effectiveness with different populations. In order to design effective culture-sensitive curriculum for CTE, basic information about cultures, curricula, learners, and organizations needs to be understood. The curriculum itself should enhance content meaning through cultural context and provide culture-sensitive learning skills in order to help students learn, and to enable them to address cultural factors when dealing with their potential clientele. Culture-sensitive trainer competencies, resources, instructional strategies, assessment issues, and technological trends are detailed. A focus on healthcare training exemplifies culture-sensitive curriculum that results in more effective service.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Today's world is truly interdependent. Because of telecommunications, faster travel, global manufacturing and trade, and global politics, cultures are coming into contact with one another more than ever before. At the same time, a growing sense of instability and inequity permeates societies. Traditional mores are butting against institutional ties and international citizenship (Merriam, Courtenay, & Cervano, 2006). In many cases, the workplace has become more cross-cultural due to labor costs, outsourcing, and international production. Technical expertise is particularly difficult to find, so the field has become global in nature.

The cost of cultural insensitivity is high. Cultural misunderstandings within and between organizations can lead to lower productivity, poor decisions, low morale, and substandard service. Organizations need ways to address cultural diver-

sity: through recruitment and hiring practices, by removing cultural barriers and inequalities, and by rewarding incentives for diversity (Craig, 1996).

Within these contexts, adult education in general and CTE in specific needs to address these cultural issues, and help pre- and in-service employees and their institutions to become at culturally competent. To that end, culture-sensitive curriculum can foster such a mentality and result in more effective business practices.

4.2 BACKGROUND

In order to design effective culture-sensitive curriculum for CTE, basic information about cultures, curricula, learners, and organizations need to be understood. Adult education is the broader context, and CTE education focuses on the specific applications in the relevant fields.

4.2.1 Culture

Regardless of the scale, when people form together into stable groups with sustained shared value and belief systems and act according to normative expectations, they comprise a culture. UNESCO (2002) defines culture as: "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (p. 1). An individual may belong to several cultures: family, worksite, neighborhood, race, profession, social club, political party, country. Likewise, a group may belong to several cultures; technicians may be members of a site staff, a union, a system, a state organization, a national organization, and an international organization. Some of these cultures may overlap or even contradict, in which case, the individual or group must either live with the disequilibrium or resolve the conflict (i.e., reject one or the other, reject both, or incorporate parts

of each). A culture may also be measured in terms of how cohesive it is in terms of inside and outside pressures; if conflict arises from outside its borders, do members stay within the culture or switch allegiance to the other culture?

Groups and individuals perceive and respond to cultures at various levels, both intellectually and emotionally. Ideally, cultural competency consists of a congruent set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions about one's own culture and others' that enable people to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). Cross et al. (1989) lists the following criteria for cultural competency: (1) cultural self-assessment, (2) cultural knowledge, (3) valuing diversity, (4) management of the dynamics of different, (5) adaptation to cultural contexts. Other terms convey a growing capacity towards such competency:

- Cultural knowledge is intellectual familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, and behaviors (Adams, 1995).
- Cultural awareness implies a sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group, and usually involves opening to personal change (Adams, 1995).
- Cultural sensitivity accepts cultural similarities and differences without assigning relative values to them (National Maternal and Child Health Center on Cultural Competency, 1997).

Several self-assessment instruments are listed by the National Center for Cultural Competence lists (http://www11.georgetown.edu/research/gucchd/nccc/foundations/assessment.html) and the New York State Education Department (http://cstl.syr.edu/assessment/index.html).

4.2.2 Curriculum

As its most basic level, curriculum consists of content and the methods to convey that con-

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