

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL HUMILITY: EXPANDING OUR VIEW

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ABSTRACT

The way in which we teach cultural competence is evolving. There are emerging definitions, new perspectives, and social justice experiences that affect how we react and respond to cultural competency ideologies – ideologies that can polarize or produce change. This chapter will examine the idea of cultural humility and explain why adding it to the diversity, equity, and inclusion lexicon can help engage various discourse communities and deepen one’s understanding of various cultural identities. The authors will briefly review key research findings that examine why college students are often resistant to discourse about culture, race, and bias. Finally, the chapter will use the model of influence framework as a conceptual approach to teach and foster cultural humility in higher education settings.

Keywords: Cultural humility; cultural competence; model of influence; College student success; education equity; Inclusive practices

INTRODUCTION

Creating the Context

Cultural humility is a concept that gained prominence in the nursing field first and then gained traction in psychotherapy literature. Research from various medical disciplines has consistently shown that when treatments created and adapted with

Cultural Competence in Higher Education
Innovations in Higher Education Teaching and Learning, Volume 28, 53–63
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ISSN: 2055-3641/doi:[10.1108/S2055-36412020000028007](https://doi.org/10.1108/S2055-36412020000028007)

cultural considerations in mind, patient outcomes are better (Owen et al., 2015). In many ways, the idea of cultural humility speaks to the need to take the time to understand the humanity of the person with whom you are interacting. The concept has recently become a prominent theory in counseling and other mental health professions – professions that arguably place a high value on the importance of multicultural competence and relationships.

While cultural humility recently perceived as a gold standard for multicultural clinical research, the concept has recently been considered across various disciplines in education, and for educators, especially those in racially diverse school settings. There is often a false narrative projected about culturalism in education – a notion that educators are naturally culturally responsive, or should be more culturally responsive because they work with diverse populations of students. In some instances, that is unfortunately quite the opposite. Educators, like all humans, are bound by their bias that is based on their values, beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences.

Furthermore, when those cultural identities and ideologies about groups of people are challenged, they may retreat to identity-protective cognition – the tendency of people to devalue or disqualify other ideas, perspectives, and beliefs that are competing with their cultural beliefs about. Often times the person who is experiencing identity-protective cognition feels there is some type of assault on their cultural identities. Therefore, they will hold steadfast to those beliefs because it is comfortable and known. Visceral examples might be the ways in which White nationalists attempt to protect their identity, even to the point of engaging in violence acts and hateful rhetoric. Their beliefs scaled into narrow prism of the like-minded ideologies. Another example might be a college professor who attempts to engage students in an uncomfortable topic about abortion rights. This might lead to students retreating to their known and comfortable values and systems of thinking without allowing for other ideas and thoughts to enter the discussion.

This can cause one to resist viewpoints and perspectives that are in conflict with what a person currently values as the truth. This is abundantly true in college classrooms where the mere human condition and merging of students from all backgrounds can create conditions for cultural and ideological clashes.

Later on in this chapter, the authors will define cultural humility and will build a case for expanding one's thinking beyond cultural competence and proficiency to embrace cultural humility. The authors will engage the reader in an exploration of the resistance of college students to engage in difficult conversations and discourse about cultural issues. The chapter will end with an introduction to the model of influence (MOI) and how this framework is used effectively to enhance the teaching of cultural humility and any value-added disposition.

Reimagining Multiculturalism

So, why would we change what we have been doing, especially when what we are doing might seem comfortable? The authors of this chapter are not advocating disavowing cultural competence or multiculturalism. However, the authors advocate for new ideas and thoughts to be considered and added to the idea of what

multicultural competence means, and to do so by integrating cultural humility into daily practices and conversations. The world is ever diversifying which brings with it challenges that have not been faced and intersections of cultural views that have not experienced before.

Educators at all levels have to ask themselves the following questions:

- (1) Are we effectively preparing students to live and learn in an ever-changing and diverse world?
- (2) How are we helping students understand themselves and others beyond their labels and identities? How do we help them see the humanity that lives in all people?
- (3) How have we created spaces and conditions for these students to challenge and learn from each other in graceful and respectful ways, especially when the new thoughts might feel like an assault on their known ecosystem and values?
- (4) How have we defined this new, diverse, and multicultural salad of a world in which cultures are blending, ideologies are sometimes segregated, people are evolving, and humanity is demands to be respected and valued?

Multicultural education began in the United States in the 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement, and since then, there has been growing interest in research in multicultural education (Ozturgut, 2011). However, over the years, it is becoming difficult to define multicultural competence when one cannot even define the word multicultural (Ozturgut, 2011). Most scholars agree that there is room for further discussion when it comes to defining the term multicultural, which in turn affects one's ability to teach multicultural education.

How one defines, values, and respects the idea of multiculturalism blurs as we accept the fact that many of our individual cultural identities intersect and overlap with other people's cultures and identities. The current stance in multiculturalism respects the differences between groups. However, it is the individual differences of members of the same group, which make creating a singular definition a murky process. One reason why it is difficult for some to move beyond this resistance to accept and value the intersection of lives might be identity-protective cognition. Furthermore, it may also make it difficult to define what multiculturalism means through the lens of cultural humility.

Multiculturalism is in need of constant reformation. We cannot accept a single definition to define and explain such a fluid construct. Our society is ever changing; therefore, our "best practices" in multicultural education need to adjust to meet the needs of the members within. Pon (2009) stated that, "Cultural competency resembles new racism both by otherizing non-whites and by deploying modernist and absolutist views of culture while not using racialist language" (p. 59).

One study assessed the perceptions of multicultural education of students in a teacher preparation program. They found that most of the students appeared to lack initiative to pursue further learning about multiculturalism or participate in self-reflection, and only participated in these activities as a matter of

compliance (Grant, 1981). There is room for all to learn from one another, and there must be a willingness to leave one's comfort zones and accept that there is always room for improvement.

This is why the authors believe that embracing the ways in which individuals understand each other is critical to not only fostering good citizenship among students but also providing them a platform to build global, local, and national discourse and communities to be true influencers of change. But, how? The next section offers considerations that do not discard the idea of multiculturalism or competence, but offers a different way to think about how we see, experience, and make an intentional investment humanity through one's humility.

Expanding Our Context

While the authors do not suggest abandoning ideas like competency and proficiency, they encourage individuals to engage in cultural humility. For example, it might be that one will eventually achieve proficiency in an element of a culture during a specific time, but to assert that one is competent in something that is constantly changing, evolving, and integrating, is naive. The authors suggest that engaging in cultural humility affords one the opportunity to cycle through Kegan's developmental process, as suggested by Puchner and Markowitz (2016), with the goal of achieving proficiency or competency in certain aspects, while constantly adding to one's understanding.

Cultural humility and awareness could be an avenue that allows teachers to move through the developmental levels; however, this happens along a continuum not necessarily in a linear fashion (Goode, 2004). The *Cultural Competence Continuum* as presented by the National Center for Cultural Competence highlights six steps along this continuum: (1) cultural destructiveness, (2) cultural incapacity, (3) cultural blindness, (4) cultural pre-competence, (5) cultural competency, and (6) cultural proficiency (Goode, 2004). For the purposes of this chapter, the authors will highlight competency and proficiency; however, it is apparent that awareness of one's own assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes is the first step to positively learning and interacting with one another.

Competence is a demonstration of acceptance and respect of cultural differences (Goode, 2004). This stage involves implementing culturally appropriate and evidence-based practices, developing strategies that incorporate community involvement, and engaging in trainings to increase an individual's levels of cultural competence (Goode, 2004). Cultural proficiency is when an individual or an organization holds culture and diversity in high esteem and it is a foundation of the individual or the system (Goode, 2004). This stage involves continuing to add to a knowledge base and conducting research to further develop approaches, adopting an organizational philosophy and practices that support culture (Goode, 2004). The assumption with competency and proficiency is that there is an end goal. However, there is no final destination in the journey toward cultural humility. By engaging in cultural humility there is always room for continual growth, even when an individual or organization arrives at the competency or the proficiency stage in a specific area.

Competency and proficiency have a finality that humility does not. Culture, by nature, is never final. Therefore, the continuous desire to engage in learning about oneself and others will only serve to deepen the relationship, understanding, and respect for others. This process of cultural humility at its core involves continual self-evaluation, critique, and self-discovery. Cultural humility could be a catalyst for movement along the competence continuum. It is essential to create a culture of learning in the classroom where viewpoints, even polarizing viewpoints, are heard and the humanity of the individual is respected.

By engaging in cultural humility, each person in the learning space can grow, affirm, and share their thoughts and ideas. They can create new knowledge and ideals. They can engage in an authentic understanding of others from dissimilar cultural identities, and they can embrace the fluidity of culture and challenge viewpoints that dishonors humanity. The next few sections will define cultural humility in the larger context, provide a brief discussion to the resistance of cultural issues, explore the concept of bias boundaries, and provide a framework for teaching and integrating the concept of cultural humility in the classroom.

Defining Cultural Humility

Cultural humility is described as a lifelong process of discovery that includes three general elements – sensitivity, responsiveness, and awareness. Cultural humility is a process of challenging individuals to engage in self-evaluation, reflection, and critique (Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt, & Ousman, 2016; Juarez et al., 2006). It is characterized by understanding self and others, to gain a better sense of how to collaborate, interact, and behave in a genuine way with each other. The idea is that one should strive to always engage in cultural humility across the lifespan because each new experience affirms or challenges one's thinking. Therefore, a person is never fully culturally competent because culture is always evolving and changing.

Cultural humility is beyond the scope of multicultural competence. It is highlighted by a sense of openness, curiosity, and a genuine desire to understand how other people do life. Therefore, the concept of cultural humility is different from the stance taken by multicultural competence or proficiency. With cultural humility, no one assumes competence. Rather, individuals work together to gain an understanding of who the other person is and how they see themselves (Owen et al., 2015).

Culture, alone, is complex because there is no single definition of culture. A person's culture can be any aspect that is salient to them as an individual. Cultural, therefore, is important for relationships where there is a power differential such as in a client–therapist relationship or a student–teacher relationship. When a person is culturally humble, they are less likely to miss opportunities to learn about a person's culture and values. They are more likely to take advantage of the meaningful relationship, which creates connection and relatedness. Therefore, the teacher who is working to develop meaningful alliances between him- or herself and his or her students, increases opportunities to impact the educational outcomes and make greater investments in the humanity represented in

their classrooms. It also creates space for the teachers and the students to examine and explore their biases about each other and the respective groups with which they, the student and teacher, identify.

A bond, goals, and tasks that are collaborative to support greater understanding about the aspects that are salient to the person's culture characterize these strong alliances (Hook, Davis, Owen, & DeBlaere, 2017). Having conversations about culture and differences that are evident can go a long way toward improving those alliances and relationships. According to Goode (2004, at the National Center for Cultural Competence, awareness and knowledge are developmental processes that are constantly evolving throughout both individual and organizational life spans. Needs and the level of support will be different for every individual, which is why it is important to understand their perspective on various cultural issues, even if the topic or rhetoric is vastly different from your own. Examine the following scenario, for example:

A group of twenty White, female teacher education candidates who share similar conservative-Christian, middle-class, rural values, are suddenly thrust into a student teaching experience with predominantly African-American students, (mostly male), from middle class families, whose values are based in Islamic and Black Liberation theology.

In this scenario, while both groups share the same social class, even that may look dramatically different depending on a multitude of circumstances and situations. Additionally, neither the teacher candidates, nor the students, are prepared for the cultural and discussion style conflicts that will surely arise. Each person involved in this scenario, if provided the space to genuinely engage in cultural humility, could learn about each other's individual thinking, beliefs, values, and experiences that can potentially strip away the power differentials and the betrayal of authenticity – the representation of who you want to be, not who you are.

Otherwise, this scenario could be an example of the perfect storm to grow deeper dissension among groups of people who will occupy the same physical space for months. It is through earnest cultural humility that one can truly begin to attempt the heavy lift of racial and cultural inequity and tension. The teacher, as the instructional leader in the classroom, is also the agent of social change for his or her students in many ways. And that teacher must lead their students through uncomfortable situations and difficult conversations that will challenge their deeply rooted schemas of thinking and behaving, and their cultural identities and ideologies.

Bias Boundaries

Another layer to consider when elevating cultural humility into various discourse communities is recognizing the authenticity and organic way in which cultural humility affords one the opportunity to build relationships beyond the bias boundaries that can cause one to hold only see others through a narrow scope. The boundaries, and for the purposes of this chapter, we submit bias boundaries, are essential to understanding the traditional ways in which we shape our identities and acknowledge the identities of others. Bias boundaries refer to the values, beliefs, and ecosystems one engages in to understand others and ourselves.

The concept of identity boundaries is rooted in much of Erikson's work on psychosocial aspects of group norms and protective cognition (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Gil, 2013).

As one experiences new people, places, and ideologies, boundaries expand to integrate new thoughts into one's current scheme of thinking or may lead one to reject new ideas. In higher education settings, these set boundaries have the propensity to expand quickly, which then, may create cognitive dissonance. It might even cause reluctance to engage in discourse, especially when the information is related to racial diversity and inclusion.

For college students, all of this new information can cause friction between their various other ecosystems and exploit the relationships they have with individuals within those same ecosystems. Therefore, engaging in cultural humility is essential to honor and respect ideals and ideologies that will challenge the current scheme of thinking, acting, and behaving toward others. It is not necessarily going to change one's thoughts and behaviors, but the authors assert, it will allow the opportunity for deeper understanding, civility, compassion, and advocacy for others.

The Resistance to Cultural Issues

Customs, artifacts, music, institutions, accomplishments, beliefs, values, social constructs, patterns of thinking, and experiences characterize culture. Culture is shared ideals, practices, and systems. It is generational training, and yes, it is how groups of people who share similar legacies and racial and ethnic lineage engage in life together. One of the most important questions of our time is, "Why is racism and prejudice still in existence, and how can we address it?" The simple answer is humans want to protect their cultural identities. It can sometimes be a daunting task to accept a new constructs – constructs that challenge the ideologies about groups of people and self. Perhaps, that is not so simple an answer.

Puchner and Markowitz (2016) explored this problem by using a developmental model to explain why preservice teachers, and by extension all teachers, struggle to understand racism and how it is manifested through their practices. They used Kegan's Model of Meaning Making to help explain this phenomenon. In Level one, there is no distinction between self, perceptions, and impulses. This level is observed in children ages 0–6. The child *is* his or her perceptions and his or her impulses. There is no separation of self and feelings or objects. Level two leads to differentiation of self from impulses, perceptions, objects, to the recognition that all individuals have enduring characteristics. Level three leads to more abstract thinking and reflection of one's own beliefs and values. Finally, in level four, people enter a phase where they are able to write their own lives and figure out what to do when their values conflict. This level, level four, is the desired level.

Puchner and Markowitz (2016) surmised that teachers in the United States might not understand race because they are not developmentally ready to understand the underlying concepts at the higher level. Pucher and Markowitz theorized that some teachers, especially White teachers, might never reach a level

beyond level two, where they can firmly grasp the topic of race. A theory as to why may be rooted in understanding how the world operates from a scope of whiteness, where the power differential reveres whiteness as superior.

This can exist in consciousness, but more often than not, exists as unconscious thought. Many adults, especially those of the majority culture, are not capable of separating who they are from their external influences, and therefore, they cannot understand the thinking and behaviors predicated on race, because they themselves have no personal experience where their lives have been negatively affected by racism or racial bias.

When you layer this idea or this concept into a higher education setting, it makes sense to say that understanding can only be attained when the appropriate developmental level, level four, is reached – where an individual will write their own history and manage conflicting cultural understandings. The realities a person has experienced are aligned with what they are being taught. This then allows for a type of autocorrecting of their understanding based on new information and experiences.

Unfortunately, when a faculty member resists engaging in cultural humility to gain greater insight for genuine alliances and relationships; that problem persists and the cavern of ineptitude deepens. If there is not a deeper understanding and/or learned experience, it will be difficult to fully recognize racism as discussed in the previous example. More broadly, if one resists engaging in cultural humility, they miss grand opportunities to experience life in new and different ways that may add to the richness of their own life.

A Framework for Teaching

The MOI was introduced in the book, *Civility, Compassion, and Courage in Schools Today: Implementing Strategies for the K-12 Classroom*. The authors developed the model, based on Krathwohl's affective hierarchy, created in 1964, as a framework for developing and teaching social and emotional competencies to K-12 students. The MOI is represented in a hierarchical framework that moves one's thinking, behavior, and action from an awareness level to action. The framework can be applied to support the understanding of dispositions and values in any educational context. In this instance, the college student becomes increasingly invested in learning about themselves and others to have richer, deeper, more meaningful, and authentic interactions. Therefore, the framework can help guide and expand one's perspective from cultural competency and proficiency to cultural humility.

Level One: Developing an Awareness of Cultural Humility

The first level of the MOI is to develop a consciousness or awareness of the concept you are attempting to teach (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015). This means that one must move toward defining, explaining, and offering examples and models of cultural humility, for example. As with any new concept or idea, one must take the time to build prior knowledge to scaffold students' learning. This brings more meaning to the concept and provides opportunities for rich conversations to emerge.

Additionally, at this level, both the teacher and his or her students are engaged in teaching and learning from each other. While the defining of a term might seem simple, cultural humility is a term – a concept that has layers and requires one to discuss the origin of the terms culture and humble. It requires an in-depth study of its meaning and an explanation of why it is important to a lifelong exploration of self and others. This is the foundational level of the model and is essential to moving through the framework effectively.

Level Two: Acknowledge Beliefs and Values

As with any hierarchical framework, each level of the MOI reflects a deepening of the knowledge and application of the information presented from the previous level. The second level of the MOI suggests that both parties, student and teacher, should engage in the acknowledgement of the values and belief systems which guide one's current behavior, thinking, and action (Kohler-Evans & Barnes, 2015). This level, in the context of cultural humility, requires a consideration of one's bias boundaries, stereotype threat, and cultural identities.

Bias boundaries define how our values and beliefs drive the how and when one will interact effectively and genuinely. These boundaries are not static and should be challenged by genuine efforts to exercise and engage in cultural humility. As one learns who people are individually, one expands the boundaries that bind thinking to current experiences. Often times, these boundaries inform how people genuinely engage in understanding the humanity that exists within an individual. Bias boundaries can also influence what a person thinks and how that person appreciates the lived experiences of others.

Aronson and Steele introduced stereotype threat in the mid-1990s. They purported that individuals of certain racial groups would conform to the stereotypes associated with their race, especially as it relates to cognitive aptitude. However, the concept of stereotype threat can be used to affirm or understand the beliefs and perspectives of self and others, which is central to cultural humility. When one is exposed to, or engages in, stereotype threat they are essentially applying a stigma to achievement and success, or how one understands a person's progress toward success.

In the college classroom, people from similar and dissimilar backgrounds and histories are forced to convene in the same space for a length of time. They may have projects, discussions that require interaction and engagement. The bias boundaries along with the stereotypes students have can influence their ability and willingness to step out of their comfort zone and create new spaces for thoughts and ideas to flourish. If they engage in cultural humility, however, they can work to authentically alleviate the threat, fear, misperceptions, and false narratives about groups of people. For example, an instructor has worked with his or her students to define and explain what cultural humility is and how it will be used in the course. Once those students have that foundation, they are set to begin exploring the values and beliefs they have about themselves, their affinity groups, and cultural groups.

They also have the opportunity to learn and hear from others. It is that balance of understanding others first, and then, self that makes this second

level so meaningful. The key is creating a safe place where everyone can express himself or herself, even if their ideas are outside of the mainstream, controversial, political, conservative, liberal, or in any way unique, etc.

Level Three: Benefit of Cultural Humility to Self and Others

The third level of the MOI requires one to discuss and internalize the benefit of the value-added competencies to self and others. For example, why is it important to experience and give respect, kindness, or compassion? In this instance, the poignant questions might be what are the benefits of engaging in cultural humility for self and others? What will all parties gain by engaging in understanding self and others? How will it support and enhance the interactions, behaviors, and relationships?

The answer, of course, is embedded within the definition of cultural humility – a lifelong process of self-discovery and learning about one’s own culture and learning about the various identities and experiences of others. This can be either a difficult level to achieve or an easy level to achieve, depending on how the dialogue evolves through each level, and frankly, the restorative practices one may need to implement to engage in difficult conversations.

A significant component of this level is recognizing that the benefit is multi-dimensional. It understands the intersectionality of one’s personality with their values and beliefs, and the ways in which these new understandings shape behavior and action toward others. It also acknowledges the need to make meaning of this newfound knowledge or new experience to serve others in need and share a new scheme of thinking and understanding. It is this progression through the MOI that leads to the next level – engagement and action. It can also be difficult to achieve based on one’s emotional maturity and development, as was discussed earlier in the chapter regarding Kegan’s third and fourth levels; to engage in reflective and abstract thinking, and shape new actions and meaning for life based on new information.

Level Four: Active Engagement and Influence

First, cultural humility is defined and explained – awareness. Second, the way in which one may value beliefs and perspectives is shared – affirmation. Third, a realization of the benefit to self and others – acknowledgement, that the person should take *action and embrace* his or her influence to become a *change enterprise*. A change enterprise is a person or group of people engaged in an intentional and purposeful action to shift thinking, behavior, and action toward a greater good. Action is the pinnacle of the framework.

The overall idea is once you have the information, you must do something with it. The information becomes useful only when you take action. This might mean that multiple engagements will have to occur in order for the action to become sustainable. For example, it could be sharing of thoughts and ideas in various discourse communities. It might also be engaging in thought-provoking, inquiry-based problem-solving. It could be that the information is used to create

cognitive dissonance. It could also mean that the instructor and student would desire to influence the hearts and minds of others in their various communities.

When the teacher is engaging students in the principle effort of cultural humility, they are essentially fostering strong bonds and high-engagement relationships – relationships that involve both compassion and insistence. These high-engagement relationships can then be used to build bridges that carry hatred, discontent, fear, misperceptions, and misconceptions about the other to a distant place. That same relationship can foster caring, compassionate, genuine, and respectful interactions. The practice of cultural humility fades the otherizing notion, discussed earlier, and forces one to show genuine care for others and an authentic exploration of self to better understand others.

In closing, cultural humility is an infinite recycling of awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness to new experiences and thinking – experiences and thinking that might disrupt or affirm one's current understanding. Through cultural humility, bias boundaries collapse and false narratives fail to speak to one's individuality. As one opens his or her mind and lives to learning about others, the destructiveness that often creates systems of oppression, the actions and behaviors that illustrate discrimination and the thinking and attitudes that feed micro- and macro-aggressions, are shattered. From those shattered pieces of division and cultural blindness, rich opportunities to demonstrate authentic inclusionary and equity practices emerge – practices that can affirm and respect all cultural identities.

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