

**Cultural Competence:**  
**Presented to Staff of Legal Aid Nova Scotia**  
**AGM 2012, October 17**

Prepared by  
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# Who Is Robert Wright?

- A registered SW Private Practitioner
- Former Race Relations Coordinator of the Dartmouth District School Board
- PhD Student in Sociology – Race, Identity, Power
- Former Member Judicial Appointments Advisory Committee N.S.
- Member Racial Equity Committee of NSBS
- Former Executive Director of Cumberland Child Welfare Agency (FCSCC)
- Former Executive Director of the Child and Youth Strategy

# Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

- As Racialized and Aboriginal Canadians gain increasing space in society, lawyers will need skill to represent competently their clients' interests in an increasing diversity of ways:

(Voyvodic's example of representing survivors of residential schools, working with immigrants and refugees and racialized clients in cases of discrimination and harassment)

# Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

- Principles of cultural competence are being recognized legally as foundational knowledge and reasoning that persons bring to the project of Justice seeking.

Consider :

*The reasonable person understands the impossibility of judicial neutrality, but demands judicial impartiality. The reasonable person is cognizant of the racial dynamics in the local community, and, as a member of the Canadian community, is supportive of the principles of equality* (R.v.S. (R.D.), [1997] 3

S.C.R. 484-1997-09-26, Supreme Court of Canada – Federal: Reasonable apprehension of bias – dealing with non-white groups – impartiality – evidence – credibility cited by 67 cases).

# Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

- Cultural Competence has begun to be “read into” Canadian standards of competence for lawyers (Voyvodic)
  1. Lawyers have the responsibility, as members of a self-regulating profession, to recognize the implications of representing members of a diverse community in a manner which protects their dignity;
  2. Lawyer competence incorporates knowledge of equality law, which in turn requires an understanding of the social contexts in which inequality exists;
  3. Lawyers are members of a profession which exists in the public interest to advance the cause of justice;
  4. Lawyer competence incorporates the requirement that skills, attributes and values are performed capably and appropriately.

# Cultural Competence: Definition

- Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four essential capacities:
  - A. We must understand our own cultural positions and how they differ from and are similar to others (critical cultural self-analysis)
  - B. We must understand the social and cultural reality in which we live and work and in which our clients live and work
  - C. We must cultivate appropriate attitudes towards cultural difference
  - D. We must be able to generate and interpret a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal responses (client centred interviewing)

# A) Nichols' Model for Understanding Cultural Difference

Philosophical Perspective on Cultural Difference. Edwin Nichols (cf. work of Jung)

Different world cultures developed out of differing physical environments.

These world views have differing constructs:

- Axiology (values)
- Epistemology (way of knowing)
- Logic (principles of reason)
- Process (practice of reason)

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

DEVELOPED BY EDWIN J. NICHOLS, PH.D.

ETHNIC GROUPS ETHNIC WORLDVIEW	AXIOLOGY	EPISTEMOLOGY			LOGIC	PROCESS
		APPLIED	PEDAGOGY	METHODOLOGY		
<b>EUROPEAN EURO-AMERICAN</b>	<b>Member-Object</b> The highest value lies in the object or the acquisition of the object	<b>One knows through Counting and Measuring</b>	<b>Parts to Whole</b>	<b>Linear and Sequential</b> <i>-Assembly line-</i>	<b>Dichotomous</b> <i>Either/Or</i> <i>-Newtonian theory-</i>	All sets are repeatable and reproducible <i>-Technology-</i>
<b>AFRICAN AFRICAN AMERICAN LATINO/A ARAB</b>	<b>Member-Member</b> The highest value lies in the relationships between persons	<b>One knows through Symbolic Imagery and Rhythm (function)</b> <i>-Gladwell <u>Blink</u>-</i>	<b>Whole Holistic Thinking</b> <i>-The BIG picture-</i>	<b>Critical Path analysis</b> <i>-Cut to the chase-</i>	<b>Diunital</b> <i>Union of opposites</i> <b>Difrasismo</b> <i>-Aztec thought-</i> <b>The In Between</b> <i>Ibn 'Arabi</i> <i>-Quantum theory-</i>	All sets are interrelated through human and spiritual networks <i>-Black church-</i>
<b>ASIAN ASIAN AMERICAN POLYNESIAN</b>	<b>Member-Group</b> The highest value lies in the cohesiveness of the group	<b>One knows through Transcendental Striving</b> <i>-Tree the forest-</i>	<b>Whole and parts are seen simultaneously</b> <i>-To read a Chinese word-</i>	<b>Cyclical and Repetitive</b> <i>-Stroke order in writing a Chinese word-</i>	<b>Nyaya</b> <i>-The objective world is conceived independent of thought and mind-</i> <i>-Chaos theory-</i>	All sets are independently interrelated in the harmony of the universe <i>-Keiretsu-</i>
<b>NATIVE AMERICAN</b>	<b>Member-Great Spirit</b> The highest value lies in oneness with the Great Spirit	<b>One knows through Reflection and Spiritual Receptivity</b> <i>-Purification rites-</i>	<b>Whole is seen in cyclic movement</b> <i>-Seasons-</i> <i>-Medicine Wheel-</i>	<b>Environmentally experiential reflection</b> <i>-Rites of Passage-</i>	<b>Great Mystery</b> <i>-A set of 4 and a set of 3 form the whole-</i> <i>-Super string theory-</i>	All sets are interrelated through the elements, plant, animal, and spiritual networks <i>-White Buffalo-</i>

# Traditional Ecological Knowledge

- Nichol's Model is consistent with a growing understanding and articulation of Aboriginal Traditional Ecological Knowledge: an Ancient and yet ever evolving body of knowledge, practice and belief which concerns itself with the inter relationship of all living things with and within their environment.

# Afrocentricity

There is a growing global and local understanding of the fundamental elements of African thought, culture and philosophy. Somewhat controversial, certainly not standardized, nevertheless its growing legitimacy has been established. Its hallmark is the assertion of a worldview that places all people of African descent at its centre, asserts a common culture, philosophy and history and critiques and perhaps even rewrites global history from this perspective

# **This does not suggest pigeon-holing**

Just because a person is identifiably a member of a particular ethno-cultural, racial or aboriginal group does not mean they will ascribe to a pre-set notion of that groups culture.

The model does give us some understanding of how people can differ in themes related to values, worldview, etc.

## **B) Social, Cultural and Historical Context**

North American Diversity is fraught with complicated and tragic history

- **Enslavement of Africans, Genocide of First Nations, Global strife resulting in trans-global immigration etc.**

A local knowledge of how our racist history is a living legacy is necessary: Africville, Cornwallis.

(Aylward talks of the need for this knowledge to aid in our ability to “spot issues” of race)

## C) Appropriate Attitudes

Cultural competence requires that practitioners actually *value* diversity, not just tolerate it. In a nation that acknowledges multiple founding peoples, that was built up on the foundation of ethnic/immigrant labour and whose future depends on immigration any other attitude should reasonably be seen as unacceptable.

# D) Communicating Across Cultures

Cross cultural communication is a complex study in cultural hermeneutics. In sociology: the context of a person's world view is necessary for the proper understanding and interpretation of behaviour and rhetoric (Voyvodic, pp. 16, 17)

Before meaningless, unnatural, non-human or immature behaviour and corresponding values are attributed to people of another culture, it is better to begin by doubting the adequacy of one's own judgment and knowledge

- **Elmar Holenstein**

# A Couple of Exercises

- Prepared specifically for NS Legal Aid

# Understanding Difference

- Values are one of those areas that Nichols says helps to define and illustrate how we are different:
  - At your table, take a few moments to ask yourself, what are the 2 things that you value most highly (principles, persons, ideas, belongings)
  - Find the persons at the table whose stated values most closely resemble and are most divergent from yours.
  - Talk about what makes you similar and different

# Current Socio-Cultural Issues

- Think about what social issues are occurring in our province/communities today that seem to affect a particular people.
- Consider how that issue is seen differently from people within that community and without

# Valuing & Communicating About Diversity

- I am confident that most of the people in the room would assert that they value diversity:
  - Consider how persons who might differ from you would be able to assess within first meeting you that you value diversity and a “culturally safe” person with whom to deal.
  - When would you be aware that the cultural difference between you and your client is creating a barrier which needs focussed attention to resolve?
  - How and when would you raise the issue?

# Diversity at Work

- Though it is unfair to place on the shoulders of the youngest and newest members of an agency the burden for making practice culturally competent, the culturally diverse staff of an agency can be a significant resource:
  - Consider who the persons are in your staff or in your provincial network that represent a particular diverse community; how would it be appropriate to engage them in the efforts of supporting cultural competence?

# Cultural Competence: How?

- Pre service training/clinical Law programmes
- Conduct organizational assessment of Cultural Competence
- Develop organizational plan to increase Cultural Competence
- Employ and support culturally competent practitioners as agents of change.
- Make available systematic coaching/consulting
- Provide and support continuing education in Cultural Competence

# Cultural Competence: How Not

- Do not place the responsibility for cultural competence solely on the shoulders of “diverse” staff – particularly when these persons are among the most junior persons on staff.
- Do not confuse cultural celebrations for cultural competence training.

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