

Guided Thesis:

A Project Proposal for Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminars

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30 April 2021

Integrative project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Master of Arts in International Community Development

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ESSAY #1: CONTEXTUALIZATION

Introduction

Contextualization reminds us that each community is one of a kind. Each group has its own set of values, aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses that have formulated it to its current state. Through contextualization, we understand a community's unique needs, how to create specific and adaptable processes and interventions that will work, and the goals needed to provide programs that will ensure positive, lasting, social impact.

In this essay, I will discuss the importance of contextualization at Wheaton Academy. I explain how the understanding of context translates into processes and interventions by drawing on research and fieldwork. I will describe how to include creativity and innovation into the contextualization process through seminar content to explore cultural self-awareness. Lastly, I will discuss how these values and practices apply to my future vocational work.

Why Practice Contextualization?

Contextualization demands that international development practitioners begin by building trusting relationships with the communities they seek to serve. It is critical to be acquainted with the community, know its members at a level that cannot be learned through simple observation, statistics, or simply walking onto campus. Developers can gather these characteristics by asking questions and seeking answers. Still, this does not permit an outsider to start moving the furniture. A community developer "believes only insiders have enough knowledge to find solutions, and that most solutions must be homegrown" (Easterly 6). Development practitioners believe that the community possesses what it needs to find solutions and has the freedom to create resolutions that work for them. Community members move their own furniture.

It is vital to discover how a community has become who they are today as a group, organization, or all of the above to understand the context. In *Theories and Practices of Development*, Katie Willis explains the impact of history. She states that both political and economic organization is not introduced into a vacuum. Instead, the nature of previous societies and economies will influence the outcomes of development (85). One piece of learning is a community's history, how their past has affected their present.

In a conversation with Melissa Goss-Jentz, she reiterated that this understanding is critical to working in communities. Goss-Jentz joined the Good Neighbor Team at World Relief Seattle in 2016. The Good Neighbor Team is a program designed to help refugees find a new home and provide support in their first days in their new country. Much of the welcoming and helping is accomplished by Christians that live locally. Goss-Jentz shared that one of the barriers that people of the dominant culture encounter is to relearn the expectations of what care and help should look like. She stated, “the needs and wants are different depending on cultural values, and that’s hard for people to understand sometimes” (Goss-Jentz). In learning more about people and who they are, and what they value, people are able to see each other's humanity more clearly and come to understandings differently. The ability to collaborate and come to new conclusions occurs in a different way than if assumptions had made based on values and culture.

Previous communities have taught that development organizations have often entered communities with a set agenda for how they want to fix an issue or problem. When contextualization is practiced, the community is honored for who they are, not whom a particular group thinks they should be. Communities often have resources that are fundamental to their success and hold solutions they do not realize they possess. By respecting people and working

together to ensure integrity and respect, the work accomplished in a community will provide positive change.

Contextualization Applied in My Project

As someone coming into the Wheaton Academy community, the context of this organization must be learned. According to Hofstede, culture is a collective phenomenon shared with people who live within the same social environment. Hofstede describes manifestations of culture through value systems, rituals, heroes, symbols, and practices (7). It is the "collective programming of the mind" that distinguishes group members from others (Hofstede 6). Wheaton Academy has created its own organizational culture. It is one of a kind.

Wheaton Academy is a community that is influenced by varying levels of culture. It is heavily influenced by mainstream culture, by its location, faculty and staff, and families that choose to send their children to the school. As an educational institution, standards are kept, including laws and regulations instituted by the government of the United States and the State of Illinois in which it presides (U.S. Department of Education).

Wheaton Academy also chooses to be part of Christian culture which permeates their community through their curriculum, chapels, student groups, and admission processes. It has also carefully crafted its own organizational culture around Christian values, creating a safe place for students to be known, to belong, and to find their passions as children of God (wheatonacademy.org). Wheaton Academy clearly articulates what it stands for and conveys these values through their programs and educational practices.

A development practitioner must understand these different expressions and how they fit together at Wheaton Academy. There will be fractions of various cultural pieces that this

organization has chosen to accept or reject, depending on specific targets that they have deemed necessary as a social group.

While this community may appear to be another Christian School in the Midwest, there are many layers to its culture. There is a Board of Directors, Administration, Faculty and staff, supportive parent group, and a large student body, all of which contribute to the whole. They all influence how their values, systems, rituals, and practices play out on a day-to-day, year by year, basis. There is much to discover, information to gather, and values to understand to work with this community.

White American Culture

Studies of White Americans reveal the effects of its dominance within American society. As the mainstream culture, it is appropriate to assume that many within this organization follow the country's standards and norms. According to Hofstede's cultural indices, the United States scores 91 out of 100 on the scale of individualism (Hofstede Insights). This individualistic outlook is essential when working with this culture group. Hofstede states, "in Individualist societies people are only supposed to look after themselves and their direct family. In Collectivist societies people belong to "in groups" that take care of them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede Insights). This difference in value directly affects the degree of interdependence that we expect of people. Within American mainstream culture, there is an expectation that each person takes care of themselves, so collective thinking may not be natural when working in groups.

Looking further at this culture's dominance, we can investigate history. Willis highlights that Eurocentric theorists believed that they had advanced understanding and development methods through industrialization processes (Willis 74). An assumption was made that an

outsider to a community can possess the answer to issues within a community they are not a part of. This assumption is representative of dominant cultural thinking. Additionally, there is a belief that a dominant culture's processes are the best (and only) way to further development. Easterly speaks of this dominance in his book, *The White Man's Burden*. He states, "the White Man's Burden emerged from the West's self-pleasing fantasy that 'we' were the chosen ones to save the Rest" (Easterly 23). He continues that it was a universally held belief that in white European culture, "the West can change complex societies with very different histories and cultures into some image of itself" (Easterly 26). Throughout history, the dominance of the white European culture has changed the world.

Now, the world is changing much faster. Cultural relativism must be understood for community health and growth. Cultural relativism is the understanding that a person's beliefs, values, and practices should be understood based on that person's own culture and not judge against the criteria of another (Roysircar). When cultural relativism is not in practice, people use the standards of their own culture to understand others, which leads to misunderstanding and judgments (Roysircar 662). This is a common concern that should be addressed.

With acceleration and globalization blazing through communities, the dominant culture continues to feel like they must have the answers, that their way is best, and continue to be the norm in society. The dominant culture feels paranoid and unsure of its footing (Singer 358). The correlation can be made that, in some ways, White American culture feels attacked. Lu et al. write of what a culture looks like when it feels threatened. "When a culture is threatened, that which people have in common becomes more clear. Cultural threat sheds light on the collective response that comes from cultural understanding" (Lu Chieh et al. 71). Cultural alerts can feel alarming and even distressing to some.

Throughout my fieldwork, I asked interviewees about this stance of feeling threatened as a dominant culture. I asked Liz Nelson from World Relief Seattle what she sees regarding the effects of the dominant culture on her work with refugees. While speaking over Zoom, she thought for a moment and said, “white people have done damage, and we need to look at ourselves and understand how we have been a part of that” (Nelson). The work of World Relief is directly impacted by the dominance of white culture, for better and for worse. People of this culture group may not recognize the negativity of past generations, which directly affects their present. Jared Knutsen, a coworker of Liz Nelson at World Relief Seattle, resonated with these comments. He added, “volunteers need to know that they do have something to offer here, and this could be really valuable, . . . let's pause and look at what you can learn and what you're gaining from this to equalize them [the refugees] . . . and just put ourselves in the right frame of mind” (Knutsen). Equalizing can be difficult for people of dominant culture.

Julie Grant, Wheaton Academy's International Program Coordinator, concurs. While teaching the onboarding class for Host Parents, she talked to parents about learning more about their American cultural values. The Wheaton Academy Host Family Handbook prompts parents to "keep an open mind and avoid stereotyping or prejudging" (4). The handbook continues with the expectations of host parents and international students. It advises that parents "may not always understand or agree with your student, but you should avoid making value judgments such as 'right and wrong' or 'better and worse' about aspects of his or her culture" (5). Later, in a follow-up conversation, Grant told me that this can be the most challenging part for host parents (Grant). Host parents Nate and Laura Hickox experienced this within their home. When speaking of a minor conflict with their host student, they said, "We needed to dig a lot when it comes to understanding her parents' view and understanding of things, and that's the biggest

challenge we've had" (Hickox). They came to realize that they misunderstood each other because of value differences. It became difficult to navigate while she was living in their home, but discussing their values helped them understand each other.

In Dr. Bayes' *First Steps to Intercultural Competence* class, students learn to be aware of what they are simply observing versus "automatically" interpreting. Interpreting is where individuals get into trouble with misunderstanding others. As cultural people, people of various groups have different, and sometimes very different, interpretations of situations, behaviors, and values from other cultures (Bayes). It takes time to learn to see differently.

While working with Wheaton Academy, the influence of mainstream culture must be acknowledged. As a continuation of the community's journey on their initiative of kingdom community, it is essential to note that if a society's codes are "pre-given", growth is forced (Willis 132). As Wheaton Academy seeks to grow the school internationally, other value systems will need to be acknowledged and recognized.

Nevertheless, within the mainstream culture, this can be difficult for white Americans. In his book *The Art of The Commonplace*, Wendell Berry speaks of the desire to keep things under control, have crowd control, and ensure controlled growth (230). Daniel Hill, in his book *White Awake*, agrees with this theme of control. Due to the power that this culture has, it "is the 'norm' by which all other cultural identities are evaluated" (Hill 31). If Wheaton Academy is to truly become a place in which Kingdom Community principles are taught and lived out, they must understand the cultural lens that most of the community, yet not all, are seeing through. Daniel Hill warns that "with white culture serving as the baselines, we then evaluate everyone else's culture based on the norms we associate with white culture" (Hill 31). Cultural standards can be divisive, even though the divisions are not necessarily intentional.

As a community seeking that students feel like they belong, Vogl's principles of belonging shed light here. Sometimes, there are principles of community that appear unnecessary, or areas that seem unimportant are overlooked (Vogl 32). However, these overlooked areas may be where change is needed. By managing these elements of culture, growth can be fostered. In mature cultures, basic principles are taken for granted, or the community has outgrown what was important in the past (Vogl 103). Good intentions are not always good for everyone, especially in communities that are growing cross-culturally.

While working with a people group of a dominant culture, it will be essential to understand that, on the spectrum of being culturally self-aware, some will recognize this dominance in themselves while others may not. Because their culture is the norm, many will unconsciously understand their ways of control as the standard. With this as a starting point, these standards should be reviewed and acknowledged.

The Christian Worldview

In addition to white American culture, a Christian worldview is present at Wheaton Academy. A worldview describes the philosophy or framework of how people make sense of the world. It affects values, ethics, and point of view, down to seemingly small rituals and inner understandings. There is not a strictly Christian worldview apart from the cultures where people exist. So, the Christian worldview is fundamentally part of this group's motivations and modus operandi by revelation through Biblical text and the body of Christ known as the church. This interpretation of how the world works, of their reality, directly impacts whom they believe they are, how to view others, and how to perceive the world. Their dominant American culture influences all of these parts.

By continuing to gain an understanding of cultural influences, there are correlations between the Christian worldview and white supremacy. Jeannine Hill Fletcher states that "We [evangelical Christians] must contend with the long history of white supremacy at work in the U.S., an ideology that was underwritten by Christian theological supremacy" (57). In his essay *Christian Existence in a World of Limits*, John Cobb follows this line of thinking. He asserts that "unless there are those Christians who have inwardly disengaged themselves from our present structures, we will not be able to offer leadership at a time when there might be readiness for such leadership" (119). People of dominant culture must learn to recognize these structures and be aware of them in their lives.

Wheaton Academy has begun work in this area through its international program and its Kingdom Community initiative. While speaking with Nate Leman, a Teacher in the social studies department, Leman expressed the struggle of the church's history and who white Christians are today. As he teaches his students, there is room for discussion and contemplation. In his work with international students, Leman voiced that there are differences of perspective and opinion, some that are viewed as less acceptable than others within the community. He believes this directly correlates to a lack of cultural awareness (Leman).

The original texts of the Bible communicate decrees of harmony, image-bearers, and loving others as ourselves (Mark 12:31 ESV). The biblical mandate of love to all peoples and treat all equally is within a Christian worldview. Through contextualization, a greater understanding of this faith background is gained. Even within this faith-based group, there are varied views on a spectrum of understanding and interpretation of biblical truths. Wheaton Academy's employees and parent groups are part of many different churches, non-profit

organizations, for-profit organizations, and businesses, giving reasons for the necessity of working with this community collectively.

There is an opportunity to engage this community in their Christian worldview through the process of cultural self-awareness. In their book *Creative Confidence*, authors Tom and David Kelley write about the importance of creativity and innovation. Their findings give hope to the more significant issues that this culture group faces. The Kelley brothers contend that "our creative energy is one of our most precious resources. It can help us to find innovative solutions to some of our most intractable problems" (Kelley and Kelley 6). By understanding context and the issues at hand, creative work can gain a positive, long-lasting impact.

For the creative process, the Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminars will utilize various media, storytelling, music, and art in small groups throughout the modules. Through creativity, working with others from the same cultural group yet with different experiences allows for innovative thinking. By engaging in new learning, collaborative work through these modules provides individuals with opportunities to build relationships, brainstorm, and learn from other organizations and people to move forward in their positive changes as insiders of their organizations.

V. Suthakaran promotes the use of analogies in promoting multicultural competence. She contends that "self-awareness necessitates 'deep cultural self-empathy,' a process that involves a profound understanding of the internal 'gut-level' responses to one's own culture and the cultures of others" (Suthakaran 208). The use of analogies allows for the transferring of knowledge to a new context, allowing individuals to process issues in a way that feels safe rather than "confusing or anxiety-provoking" (Suthakaran 215). This emotional engagement creates a more

substantial impact on attitudes and behavior for further increasing understanding of cultural contexts.

Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminars will provide context for white American Christians to consider the multiple ways to see, interact, and view the contexts they live in and create. The biblical mandates that this community values, within varied interpretations, can be undertaken through the act of participation in this seminar. By courageously applying cultural self-awareness to their faith-based school and organizations, they will cultivate positive community growth.

Applying Contextualization in My Future Work

Community developers have a beautiful task. Through contextualization, they guide a community to see themselves through a different lens. Collectively, a community is empowered through its strengths and weaknesses to figure out how to be an improved version of itself.

Each community, made up of individuals, is collectively are intricately connected. It is important that as I teach the processes of developing cultural self-awareness, each person is on their journey while collectively contributing to the greater whole. It is important to realize that growing in cultural self-awareness can be an uncomfortable process. There are parts of this development that are encouraging and inspiring. On the flip side, people often see things about themselves in the early stages of learning that they do not particularly like. People may disconnect as they interact with a story or deny reality in some way if it does not feel positive. Everyone will not agree with the process, content, or teaching that I bring to these seminars.

I need to commit to being honest with myself about whatever might come up when working with communities learning cultural self-awareness. As I teach these processes with individuals, grace and truth must be given and spoken. There is much to learn, and that learning

needs to begin with me and must continue. A mantle of learning is necessary as a community developer. As a channel of God's peace, I can provide an avenue to learn more about how people are created and seek to be the best version of themselves.

Conclusion

Communities that need solutions often already have the answer. However, sometimes they do not have a complete road map on how to get there or know how to resolve the roadblocks standing in the way. A connection is how community is built. Authentically connecting with others can be fueled by understanding and vulnerability. According to the needs of its people, a community should change over time while keeping a solid foundation (Vogl 13). Thankfully there are building blocks and questions to ask to create stability for communities so people can feel like they belong.

Wheaton Academy must continue to grow, take care of how they grow, and labor for the good of all. There is hard work to be done as it seeks to grow its Kingdom Community initiative. Cultural self-awareness can create positive situations in which the threats of others can be seen as opportunities for growth, and control will feel inappropriate. Rather than simply acknowledging areas that Wheaton Academy is in its collective cultural awareness, a better way of engaging opportunities for new growth will be to carefully grow this community through a clearer, self-reflective White American Christian lens. The goal is to help them recognize the cultural lens through which they see and interpret others to see themselves and others more clearly. Contextualization will aid Wheaton Academy to see itself on the inside for what it is and empower it to grow from there.

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ESSAY #2: QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Introduction

A community can be understood and the impact of the work within it measured by gathering qualitative information. Research is fundamental to encountering data that will inform community action. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods are valuable to community development. Quantitative research is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. It is beneficial in finding patterns, averages, making predictions, and generalizing results to broader populations (Merriam and Tisdell 20). Qualitative research is a different way to access data. In their book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Merriam and Tisdell state that the purpose of qualitative research is “to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (24). It is a way in which both methodically and personally facts are viewed through various lenses.

This essay focuses on using qualitative research methods and highlighting their strengths and values. These approaches will demonstrate their benefit for Wheaton Academy, which ultimately led to a tailored proposal. Evaluating impact through outcome markers is included, should the community choose to use the proposal. Lastly, the intent of using these methods as a practitioner in the future is articulated.

Why Qualitative Research Methods?

Research should inform work and actions. Primarily, research is motivated by an intellectual interest in an event or phenomena and has as its goal the extension of knowledge. When applied, research is assumed to improve the quality of practice. The process of qualitative research seeks a similar goal. It strives to create an opportunity for understanding contexts of need. Because each community is unique, each context will require a creative and innovative

plan to address its challenges. Meeting community needs solely through quantitative means may overlook the needs based on context and community perspective.

Through a qualitative approach to inquiry, the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Rather than testing established theories, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam & Tisdell 17). Researchers record and capture information, communication, and observations within the environment to portray their data and findings more clearly. For example, an international school in Oakland learned that they should provide holistic services to their students. Many of their students were new immigrants or refugees. Through inquiry, they learned that intentional practices of reciprocity were fundamental to students staying in school. This information was a collection of stories, a recording of people's lives within a community. In an article written about this school, Bajaj and Suresh report that "we first detail the school's family and community engagement strategies, . . . last, we focus on how responsive teachers and staff members adjust curricula and practices to adapt to the realities of students' lives" (92). This first-hand way of seeing individuals with socio-emotional, cultural, and reciprocal needs allows for questions to be asked in a different order rather than following a standardized process. A vital piece of these stories was describing students' cultural practices.

Merriam and Tisdell concur with the importance of this information. They state that "the researcher also depicts his or her understanding of the cultural meaning of the phenomenon" (30). The result of qualitative research is a richly descriptive report in which words and pictures (rather than numerical data) tell the story of a community. World Relief Seattle seeks to build community through relationship also. Simple connections such as working in the community garden, having tea with a refugee at their new place, or talking a walk together provides time to

build relationship, providing a learning experience and a wealth of information that a book cannot teach (Stoppler, Cosgrove). People learn about others and themselves through connection.

The process of gathering facts and information through fieldwork can be simple in the moment but a complex progression to articulate. Through an inductive process, research is conducted carefully through gathering data, asking useful questions, and writing robust fieldnotes. In the book *Fieldworking*, Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater explain that by using details like cultural artifacts, photographs, observations, and conversations, the process of discovery will increase insight and understanding (124). Thus, the researcher responds and adapts to the data as it is collected. The understanding of social needs is formed, piece by piece, by the community, via the data collected by the researcher.

Strengths and Values

Qualitative research helps practitioners perceive and engage human needs with teachability and interest. Merriam and Tisdell clarify that throughout the process, the researcher goes from "general interest, curiosity, or doubt about a situation, to a specific statement of the research problem" (77). It provides a path in knowing what questions to ask and how to turn the knowledge gained into practical solutions to social challenges.

Through contextualization, collaboration, and copowerment, qualitative research offers the promise of making a difference in people's lives. This way of thinking demonstrates a philosophy of service that directly impacts a researcher's thinking and effectiveness. Development practitioners focus on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those studied. This thorough process can use varying methods to discover information from a holistic perspective. Methods such as interviewing, observation, and participation are

ethnographic, allowing for descriptions of people and cultures with their customs, habits, and differences to be articulated. These practices explore questions and gather perspectives that are brought together through personal contact and insight (Holmes 8). By coding data, we arrive at conclusions and understandings that are multi-faceted and not represented by charts or graphs.

While gaining information through an individual may seem like a risky way to conduct research, allowing the researcher to become part of the process allows for the honest understanding needed to learn the underlying social challenges. The interaction of context sensitivity and human interaction is where the value lies. Through interaction, participation, and interviews, specific questions can be guided and even redirected by the researcher in real-time. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater explain that for researchers, "it is our job to reveal our informant's perspectives and experiences rather than our own... our questions must allow us to learn something new, something that our informant knows, and we don't. We must learn how to ask" (221). Thus, the distinctive value of qualitative research lies in the encounter with the community context. The contextual data discovery occurs through revising methods as new information emerges.

While interviewing World Relief employees, the research process sought clarification regarding why their perspectives were the same in some subjects and different in others (Cosgrove, Stoppler). Using open-ended questions such as "tell me more about . . ." permitted conversational collaboration. It revealed more about the teller as well as their perspective and their story within the greater organization.

At Wheaton Academy, there was a similar situation. Each person interviewed had a different opinion, attitude, and perspective when asked the same questions. It allowed the researcher, who became both listener and observer, to document all incoming data, even that

which seemed insignificant at the time. By going back and relistening to interviews, reading field notes, and asking follow-up questions about the data collected, new ideas or correlations became clear. For example, after attending the Wheaton Academy host parent training meeting, following up with experienced host parents was valuable to clarify specifics of the program. Host parents were able to tell stories and give details that were not part of the host parent training. Both sets of parents that were interviewed provided information on how trust was built with their host student and the process of learning that led to closer relationships in their home. This ability to go back and gather more information served the community by increasing understanding and deepening the collaboration articulated in the fieldwork study.

Finally, through qualitative inquiry and carefully documented information, the discovery of meeting the needs within a community are met in a copowering way. Through data, a community can learn, understand its strengths and weaknesses, and realize how it can meet the needs of its members.

Qualitative Inquiry in My Project

The qualitative research began by investigating how to teach cultural self-awareness to people of the dominant culture. I immersed myself in this dominant cultural group through deep observation, data collecting, and understanding its mainstream setting. I sought to know how cultural encoding is learned, if specific settings are more advantageous to the learning process, and how critical self-reflection is when understanding culture.

The research began by collecting information from a variety of systems that teach cultural intelligence. Four cultural intelligence models were chosen and studied. The models were the IDI (Intercultural Development Index), EPIC (Essential Practice for Intercultural Competence), Increasing Intercultural Competence (CultureCrux), and The Transformative

Intercultural Educator Framework (True North Training). These models were compared and contrasted to acquire the areas of needed growth to gain cultural intelligence. All models revealed the necessity to grow in cultural self-awareness before further learning could increase.

With this insight, I continued by setting up interviews with professionals that have taught cultural intelligence classes. I continued to collect data, write detailed notes, and asked questions about areas taught differently. The IDI model reveals learning within one's context, for example, the workplace. However, the EPIC model uses case studies to explain and reveal cultural differences and discusses the various perspectives determined in a specific setting. Culture Crux uses a combination of daily life and case studies, while True North Training is specifically modeled to be used in educational settings. All four models use self-reflection questions to end class sessions.

By learning about how other organizations have taught cultural awareness, the research revealed how I might apply this information to the specific group of Wheaton Academy. Also vital to this research was to learn the lens of a Christian context as this an essential piece of Wheaton Academy's culture. In the beginning stages, this cultural understanding did not appear uniform. Curiosity and assorted interactions with people compelled me to study this further to learn if there was a foundation from which to work.

Much research has been conducted on the professional development of teachers. Inquiries include the importance of learning cultural intelligence and the many ways to go about learning these processes (Goh 402). While it is true that globalization is affecting the classroom, the skillfulness of cultural self-awareness is not simply book knowledge. It requires reflection and personal skills (Goh 405). The process of cultural self-awareness sought by individuals will ultimately affect the Wheaton Academy community collectively.

Qualitative research searches for unquantifiable elements with an open mind. The information and data need to be observed in context and voices heard within the community. The answers to specific questions need to be encountered for this issue, for this time, and this place from those living it. The data needs to come from insiders sharing what a practitioner needed to know about their culture, values, and history.

The following paragraphs articulate the various qualitative methods of ethnographic study, fieldwork, and action research used. Ultimately, the seminar content was created with findings from the research data for the Wheaton Academy community.

Ethnographic study

After exploring cultural intelligence training, the research continued with organizations that have provided education, conferences, or seminars to their employees, specifically focusing on people within the dominant culture. By observing their worksites, the processes of listening and conducting interviews with managers, program directors, and interns followed. To this group of people, I asked the following questions:

1. How do white Christian Americans learn to be culturally aware individuals?
2. What are the best practices to begin (and continue) this learning?
3. What information or principles are effective in teaching people to be culturally self-aware?
4. What barriers do people of the dominant culture encounter?
5. What are the characteristics of a culturally aware person?

The variety of interviews proved insightful to the diverse perspectives within mainstream culture and white Christian Americans. The challenge was to listen without offering an opinion. Instead, choosing only to collect data and allow follow-up questions to provide more insight into

stories and personal reflections proved valuable. The questions above were followed up on, depending on what the interviewee described. Clarification was requested if the information countered what someone else in their organization had given.

Fieldwork

Through this process of speaking with people at various organizations, valuable knowledge was attainable. When asked the first question, how do white Christian Americans learn to be culturally aware individuals, different answers were received. Brenda Vishanoff, Executive Director of WA Global, believes that relationship is vital to learning cultural awareness (Vishanoff). A different answer was recorded while interviewing Gerard and Karena Cruz. Karena Cruz, a host parent to two international students, spoke of an acceptance of self and other cultures as critical to cultural awareness (Cruz). Another person, Brian Hogan, Dean of Chapel and Spiritual Formation, believes that being aware of bias and privilege is paramount to being a culturally aware Christian (Hogan).

Each person interviewed held a unique perspective. Markedly, they were willing to share personal stories when they understood the greater objective of the project. It is the goal of the project to provide opportunities to learn cultural self-awareness through innovative ways. Those interviewed believe that this community can grow and find solutions to their social challenges.

Action Research

After initial interviews at Wheaton Academy, selected action research methods prompted further questions. Action research looks for answers within a community of people seeking positive change, which Wheaton Academy is working towards with its Kingdom Community initiative. In his book *Action Research*, Stringer states that this method provides "the means to devise sustainable improvements in practice that enhance the lives and well-being of all

participants" (5). Systematically, a specific issue or problem allows a community to develop collaborative exploration that develops an understanding of issues. Throughout the process, human development becomes key, and the responsibility of the researcher is to work on a grassroots level, primarily focusing on the people (Stringer 21). In an educational setting, action research can be a valuable tool for positive change.

Action research requires all participants to engage in communication that "facilitates the development of harmonious relationships and the effective attainment of group or organizational objectives" (Stringer 26). Challenging issues are able to be addressed and improvement is possible when using this method.

A study titled, *The Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Cultural Intelligence: A Study of International School Leaders*, examined the cultural intelligence of school leaders and how it impacts transformational leadership (Keung and Rockinson-Szapkiw). The study conducted special attention and investigation of what cultural intelligence is and how it manifests itself in the community. According to the research, cultural intelligence is founded on "individual capabilities as opposed to trait-like individual differences" (846). By targeting specific areas for individual and organizational growth, positive change is attainable if these specific areas of learning are valued and embraced. As Wheaton Academy looks to expand where its students are coming from globally, the school's leadership will need to grow in this area to meet the needs of its student body and their families.

As a community that asks questions and looks to be collaborative, using a seminar format could be an effective way for Wheaton Academy to make small changes over time. It would allow them to sort out systematic changes necessary for community health as a whole through individual training. By bringing together people to learn, Wheaton Academy can work towards

positive change in their community. All members have something to contribute and something to learn.

Program Evaluation and Project Evaluation

Qualitative inquiry approaches allow development practitioners to be creative and innovative on a community's behalf. Using the perspectives, experiences, knowledge, and history of Wheaton Academy rather than using a one size fits all 'Christian school approach', allows for a unique learning opportunity to foster community growth. These methods allow for effective and sustainable approaches, as opposed to a list of standard recommendations.

Through truth-filled and compelling research, copowerment can strengthen the community and develop in healthy ways.

Research communicates time and time again that there are many ways to do good work in a community. This realization allows for resourceful, productive solutions to contexts in need and the social issues they face. To ensure that positive growth continues, the use of both project and program evaluation will ensure that change is monitored, measured, and evaluated while risks are mitigated.

Program evaluation allows for a system of processes to be calculated and assessed. Funnell and Rogers discuss in their book *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective Use of Theories of Change and Logic Models* that an evaluation without program theory reveals only how it works; however, without the guidance to translate how it worked (9). Monitoring alone does not show if a program is successful. As Wheaton Academy continues its growth organizationally, it will be valuable for its leadership to have a theory of change. A measured assumption for how the school will develop, highlight progress, and evaluate its programs will ensure positive development.

Karsh and Fox argue that “too many people wait to think about evaluation until the report is due, which is a surefire method for creating serious headaches for everyone involved in the program” (240). By ensuring a theory of change is guiding a program, its monitoring and evaluation are essential aspects of project management. *The Project Management Development Professionals Guide* (PMD Pro) states that “monitoring and evaluation are the cornerstones of any project” (PMD Pro 118). They are distinct steps in program evaluation and project management that complement one another. If Wheaton Academy chooses to use the proposed Cultural Awareness Development Seminar, evaluation tools will help ensure its effectiveness from beginning to end.

Wheaton Academy will gauge if changes are necessary to promote further growth by using evaluation tools through quantitative methods. An example would be employing surveys and utilizing evaluations after seminars or kingdom community events. Evaluation numbers will be collected through these data points. There will be detailed data and comments that will allow further progress to be curated through qualitative methods. Not only will data record who attended these events, but also why they came and the quality of their time. These are data points that numbers cannot communicate. Evaluation tools will give Wheaton Academy the ability to monitor and assess the achievement of its community goals.

Conclusion

Bringing about organizational cultural awareness within a mainstream Christian school is no small task. Joyaux writes of engaged communities that are genuinely committed to their organization. As a community moves forward, they will need to continue in their "commitment to the process," "ongoing conversation," and managing the change process through "participatory

decision-making" (Joyaux 50). Through its organizational development, the Wheaton Academy community will be more engaged, understand members, and better connect with each other.

The priority of Wheaton Academy encouraging individuals to grow in cultural self-awareness as a private Christian school is significant. This development will continue to grow the organization, and surrounding community as relationships build and diversity is celebrated on a level this community has yet to see. It is anticipated that both employees and families attending the school will see growth in the community through positive social change.

The hope is that this project proposal will be a catalyst in this community, providing the opportunity to affect personal change in community members and continue to "motivate people to become more conscious, evolved, effective, and integrated" (Joyaux 19). As Wheaton Academy continues to grow in its mission, international program, and Kingdom Community initiative, positive changes are possible.

Using qualitative methods in a world of globalization and acceleration is vital in a constantly changing world. Continuing the use of a growth mindset is essential to learning for oneself and serving the community. Together, the process of positive change is accomplished. Individually, people may not have the answers, but by growing together and using the collective skills and talents, solutions for social change can be achieved.

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ESSAY #3: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT VALUES

Introduction

Collaboration among people is how the world changes, for better or worse. To improve understanding, we need to embody that trust is valuable, respect celebrates another, humility benefits relationship, and love comes from the heart. Each of these values will cost something unexpected. This final essay will focus on international community development (ICD) values. This set of values allows people to join collectively and work towards a common goal. There is a responsibility within each person to co-create solutions that emerge out of differences and diversity.

This essay will begin by sharing my transformation process and how my view of social justice has been influenced and ultimately changed by these international community development values. It will describe my understanding of copowerment and how it will guide my future work. Lastly, I will share a personal theology and philosophy of service and how they will influence my future vocational choices.

Personal Transformation

I came into the ICD program seeking hope. My heart had been softened by trauma while working cross-culturally, and I wanted to see how the hurt would be redeemed. I wanted to learn how to create an authentic community in a globalizing world yet did not understand what that would entail. I felt like I needed more tools in my toolbox, skills that would help me work with globally-minded people. My desire has always been to understand how to enable people to work together. Now, I can confidently say that I have more tools in my toolbox. Some tools feel more natural than others. Many tools have to do with understanding the inner work of transformation

and how this process changes our world one person at a time. I have learned so much yet still have immeasurably more to discover and understand.

Throughout the program, my perspective changed. I changed. I understood that vocation and occupation were different, but I thought they were both matters to be attained. Instead, I learned that they are both gifts. I also believed that I understood internal and external messaging. In Molinsky's book *Global Dexterity*, he refers to people living and working cross-culturally as having an external performance and having internal feedback. He states, "a second type of feedback is equally important for people learning to integrate challenging new behaviors into their personal repertoires: internal feedback about how it feels, from a psychological perspective" (115). While I agree on a surface level with Molinsky, I believe Parker Palmer articulates this process more clearly. Parker Palmer in his book *Let Your Life Speak* writes that "we live in and through a complex interaction of spirit and matter, of the powers inside of us and the stuff 'out there' in the world" (77). My understanding of this has changed over time. The internal and external are intertwined, in every way, in every area of life. If I am honest, I did not want to acknowledge how much they were connected, especially in my messier places. Now that I am aware of the connectedness, I am beginning to learn how to navigate them, especially those that seem less connected than they should be.

My integrative project taught me that to increase cultural awareness in people of the dominant culture in the United States, it is necessary to foster individual self-awareness through the learned processes of self-reflection. I had no idea when choosing this topic that COVID-19 would increase awareness of the systemic inconsistencies within the United States and how important community and relationships are on a plethora of levels. I did not know that the murder of Black Americans during the summer of 2020 would allow for an increase in

understanding and an opportunity to ask deep questions about mainstream culture and, ultimately, how individuals can work together towards positive change.

As a community development practitioner, grasping how dominant culture works, and does not work, increases my ability to provide leadership in intercultural communities. I desire for people to understand how interactions with others can build up or break down communities and how the skill of reflection can be developed, grown, and applied. I aspire to provide avenues for a community to grow from within, which ultimately should dictate their external behavior. Creating a space that could articulate this process step by step and learned by individuals has been challenging. This research and writing process provided a foundation for me to learn of my inner and outer messages, teaching me about myself and my interactions with the world. I have become more empathetic to humankind, loving differently now knowing what I know, and comprehending that I have much more to learn.

This complex world should challenge our thinking. Choosing to care about how people are connected or disconnected has changed my actions. I firmly believe that creating curated spaces can help us understand each other. Collectively, we can find answers to ensure that all people are valued and loved. In his book *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, John Paul Lederach expresses that conflict can be viewed as an opportunity. He writes that "conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships" (Lederach 22). Rather than seeing areas that need resolving, we can choose to see the opportunity to transform a situation into something better.

So then, the questions become less about resolving immediate problems. Instead, we have the guiding question of "how do we end something not desired and build something we do desire?" (Lederach 30). By understanding context and choosing empathy for humankind, I can choose to visualize transformation and work to that end.

Social Justice

It is troublesome to recognize that a standard way of life in the United States, complete with green parks and picnic baskets, could starkly contrast with lives full of unthinkable pain and poverty. What is worse is that this division is created so that I can eat blueberries and sandwiches while wearing a sweatshirt and jeans with disregard to how I came to own them. A sense of entitlement tells me that I am owed these things. What is tough to swallow is something that seems innocent, like eating blueberries, has turned into a moral choice.

David Naguib Pellow writes about people in industrialized nations in his book *Resisting Global Toxics*. I believed the assumption that "material conditions will improve for the world's poor through economic globalization" (Pellow 42). I did not think to look past my initial understandings of how the power of transnational corporations devastates whatever happens to be in their way to gain greater wealth and power. I did not understand how the systems I live in daily contribute to another's poverty and desolation of the earth.

Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, in her book *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*, states that "most of us do not experience directly the damaging effects of our actions on people and climates across the globe" (96). Moe-Lobeda challenges thought processes and encourages a deeper understanding of structural evil. She states that "While structural evil may be beyond the power of individuals to counter, it is composed of power arrangements and other factors that are humanly constructed and therefore may be dismantled by

other human decisions and collective actions" (Moe-Lobeda 3). In seeing systemic evil for what it is, alternatives that are just and loving are constructable.

Throughout this graduate school season, I have been cutting holes in the walls of my mental constructs. While learning to clean up cluttered thinking, gaining a greater perspective of what social justice can look like is attainable. In her book *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of Our Daily Choices*, Julie Clawson defines justice as "the practical outworking of loving God and others" (21). According to Clawson, "to live righteously is to live justly; they are one and the same" (22). An aspect of acting justly is to stop being complicit in injustice. In the process of consumption, the hidden costs must be considered and who or what is paying the price. To take it one step further, the question must be asked, "are we willing to make the changes needed in our habits to help change the system?" (Clawson 133). Alternative decisions must be made if change, both individual and systemic, is to happen. Ethical decisions allow for living justly.

The upholding of justice should be a Christian's struggle. Northwest's ICD program has taught its students to look at a community as it is, neither upgrading nor degrading it. Students gain vision to serve as an influence for social justice by sharing what is learned and collaborating with others to create new, attainable, ethical solutions to divisive habits and structures.

Within a Christian framework, how individuals reflect and choose to live is critical to what Moe-Lobeda refers to as "neighbor-love" (177). Often, people know that a response to unjust systems is lacking but fail to act or change due to feeling caught or stuck within systems and frameworks. Within this context, the vision of 'what could be' begins. In this framework, Christians can grieve, repent, and choose to respect and love all that is holy and good. ICD values align with Moe-Lobeda that "while individual actions will not alone dismantle systems of

evil, those systems will only be dismantled if individuals do act” (98). Through seeking social justice and collaboration, transformation can become a reality.

Continuing actions toward justice, however small they may seem, are vital to necessary social change. Buying minimal clothing, reusable items, choosing to bike or walk when possible are simple ways to move society forward. They all have both social and environmental implications. Personally, I would love to say that I will never set up practices that would intentionally hurt people or place them within a hierarchy. However, here I sit, working on my MacBook, in a heated house, wearing a sweater and jeans, drinking coffee. In examining my life and making simple changes, I can choose to be part of positive change.

As human beings, daily justice understands that our motivation is greater than ourselves. The goal of justice for all people and that for the Earth is worth fighting for. Fundamentally, learning must begin with an understanding of what God commands: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8 ESV). The Bible is persistent in the call of God's people to return to him, to the balance that He has created, and relentless reminders of the neighbor-love that must be within us as His followers. The human race can live in harmony with each other if we so choose.

Copowerment

Copowerment dissolves hierarchical thinking and exchanges it for a co-created, non-linear, outcome-focused path to sustainable social change. Leadership has never worked well in isolation. Further, pretending that community developers are superhumans does no one any favors, individually or collectively. Most leadership serves within a unit. Yet, many organizations or communities have one or a few individuals in higher positions that make

decisions. They dictate what work needs accomplishing, and their followers or employees must deliver results.

Petra Kuenkel, in her book, *The Art of Leading Collectively*, uses guiding principles to articulate what it looks like to lead collectively. She writes that one can “know that you have entered the field of collective leadership when- despite opinionated differences- people are prepared to join a collective learning journey toward a greater goal” (32). Copowerment then allows us to “grow in our own potential of self-efficacy and increase the empowerment of others” (Kuenkel 61). Everyone will contribute to the journey in different ways.

Trust is a key element of copowerment. First, individuals must trust themselves to assess their strengths and weaknesses honestly. In this process of mindfulness, “we become aware of our own fears, our need for self-protection, or our desire for recognition” (Kuenkel 102). After identifying a weakness, we must trust someone else to fill that role instead of compensating for that weakness ourselves. In her book *Roadmap to Reconciliation 2.0*, Brenda Salter McNeil relays that often denying our weaknesses puts communities in a holding pattern (56). In these situations, there is untapped potential, both within the community and as individuals. Kuenkel states, “The moment the mind finally becomes quiet, it sets free other competencies- compassion, gratitude, humility- as if these elements were waiting to be unleashed” (102). Building trust through conversation, discussion, and joint implementation is attainable by engaging with each other. The result can be authentic engagement and an ability to move forward together because all were part of the process and invested in the outcome. When we practice copowerment, we find freedom.

Through many stories and facts, the strengths and weaknesses of Wheaton Academy were addressed in the project proposal. Throughout the fieldwork process, stories of shared

experiences, a lack of copowerment, and an inability to share other experiences and backgrounds were gathered. This created barrier meant more obstacles to serving the needs of everyone. The needs of the people were changing, but the way they were reaching was not. Kuenkel advises that "Management needs to strike a balance between binding rules and permission to create variations" (109). Through this collective intelligence, different viewpoints must be allowed, and space given to dialogue. If dialogue can happen, the best ideas for that time and place will rise to the top. Together, change can be sought and implemented. This process of copowerment is not easy or simple, but it is the best way to create positive social change through community development.

Effective community development can and should involve managing and changing elements of culture. Sometimes there are principles of community that appear unnecessary or areas that seem unimportant. Community members can work together for positive change so compassion, gratitude, and humility can be fostered. This is where copowerment is powerful.

In a study conducted by Feize and Gonzalez, there was a greater interest in "teaching multiculturalism (inclusion) than critical multiculturalism (evaluating whiteness)" (Feize and Gonzalez 485). Cultural awareness gives a sense of openness, humbleness, and of a willingness to learn. Further, "'cultural awareness' and 'cultural humility'...have different characteristics such as constant self-reflection, considering the role of power, and questioning institutional reliability" (Feize and Gonzalez 480). As Wheaton Academy, it is vital for this community to meet together and dialogue. It will be valuable for this group to learn cultural self-awareness if it wishes to make positive strides in its kingdom community initiative.

As a social change-maker, I need to grow in a deep understanding of who I am, whom I am working with, including the structures, culture, and influential values. Through

copowerment, sacrifices made help us to meet in the middle, build relationships authentically, and the choices moving forward will honor everyone. I wholeheartedly agree with Kuenkel that “the capacity to initiating, leading, facilitating, and sustaining the construction of meaningful futures is within all of us” (32). Human values can change and align with human behavior. Growth can happen if community members choose to value and believe in each other and commit to working together.

Theology and Philosophy of Service

Acting out one's morals is a tangible way that love demonstrates for our neighbors. Loving is a personal act that plays out collectively. Moe-Lobeda states, "privilege and oppression do not simply coexist side by side. Rather, the suffering and unearned disadvantage of subordinate groups are the foundation of the dominant group" (122). Even as I work to understand my neighbors, I find myself bumping up against the learned assumption to see poverty as malady. Indeed, there is a negative ripple effect that has distressed the globe. There are many areas that I have sought to unlearn this understanding, but there seems to be more that I am surprised by, new pockets that this thinking has affected. Love needs to start with an awareness of self.

In understanding the gift of love that comes from God, I continually find myself asking how do we, as broken vessels that have received this love, love our neighbor in turn? Being broken vessels does not grant permission to find the exit door. A moral agency needs to have hands and feet, head and heart. Love means the worn path is not assumed to be the right path. Love means that unpopular or less convenient ways of life may be the correct way. Love means that I seek the Creator to make decisions about daily decisions. Love means that I am connected, awake, and aware of my place in creation.

Putting love into practice should be simple. Moe-Lobeda states that "The indwelling love of God as an actual presence abiding within us, being lived into the world by us, implies a boundless power to love" (Moe-Lobeda 70). Neighbor love, as action, has more to do with making sure we are asking questions and correcting behaviors with humility, rather than being defensive and holding on to power and comfortable practices. Practicing love can profoundly affect the impact on policies, procedures, and decision making because it seeks to look at the whole picture rather than only what we can see. Sometimes people get stuck talking in circles and are unable to get to the heart of a problem or issue. If diversity is an asset, then we are invited to do as Kuenkel suggests. We can "develop our competency to inspire and empower (ourselves and) others, stay open-minded, observe trends or developments, and acquire new knowledge" (Kuenkel 61). My thinking has now turned to, what do we need to do to love and reconcile within community? What questions should we be asking, and what copowering answers can we seek, doing the best possible work along the way?

Humility is positively associated with cultural competence as well as commitments to social justice. In a study by Bell titled *Relationship Spirituality, Humility, and commitments to Social Justice and Intercultural Competence*, humility "involves low concern for status and realistic self-awareness" (218). But humility on its own does not appear to be enough. The recommendation is "to facilitate the development and growth of faith maturity and reduce defensive theology...to enhance their service to others" (219). Self-awareness benefits the individual, but also those surrounding that person, including the collective community.

Looking to the future, I am beginning to understand vocation as a gift and the importance of the inner journey allowing me to lead from within confidently. This is different from feeling balanced or being well. Palmer states that "authentic leaders in every setting – from families to

national-states – aim at liberating the heart, their own and others' so that its powers can liberate the world" (76). As my integrative project allows people to work toward the reflection of self, there is the potential for much learning. The catalyst for learning may be available, but personal work will create the change. As Palmer states, "if we who are privileged find ourselves confined, it is only because we have conspired in our own imprisonment" (77). Reflection on the shadow of fear will uncover our need for control, eliminating chaos, and seeking rigidity. To gain cultural awareness, a reflection of self may provide growth in the humility of spirit and a desire for a reciprocal relationship.

Our world is complex, and people need to work together contextually in the best interest of all people, no matter their status, skin color, culture, or geographical location. Our world needs to hear that people are capable of working side by side. We, as humankind, can live in harmony with each other, if we so choose.

We are better humans when we build relationships with people that are different from us. Through others, we learn much about the world, our communities, and even ourselves. God created us as relational people, and our differences can bring out the best in us. We do not all think the same, act the same, or feel the same. When we learn another's story, we are discovering a part of our Creator's story. We are a pleasing tapestry when woven together. Collectively, we are beautiful and capable of beautiful things.

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PROJECT PROPOSAL

A Project Proposal

Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminars

Wheaton Academy

900 Prince Crossing Rd.

West Chicago, IL 60185

Marlina Kers-Visker

30 April 2021

Introduction

Wheaton Academy, located in West Chicago, Illinois, and established in 1853, has long been a leader in the Christian school sector. It continues to be an institution that grows, adapts, and successfully provides community learning and engagement. As Wheaton Academy seeks to develop its Kingdom Community initiative, this programming ought to also be carefully designed and navigated.

In 2021, many Christians express that harmony and reconciliation are important. However, the process of what that means for people individually and collectively is unclear. Cultural self-awareness can provide a framework for white American Christians to consider the multiple ways to see, interact, and view the contexts they live in and create. Harmony and reconciliation are important. The "how and why" people achieve them are equally so.

This paper is a proposal to Wheaton Academy for Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminars. The intended goal is to help people recognize the cultural lens through which they see themselves and interpret others. These seminars will inform and coach Wheaton Academy's teachers and staff to fully utilize the kingdom community perspective to cultivate growth and positively extend the Wheaton Academy community. After establishing this development training, community members and parents can participate in similar learning workshops through the kingdom community parent group.

The natural progression of these Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminars will include advancing the Kingdom Community student group. This organized, student-driven, teacher-guided directive will provide ongoing learning opportunities to all grade levels, thereby assuring development to the whole community.

Overview

An American high school had a Feast Day during their cultural celebration week known to the community as I-Fest. While eating the tasty morsels, a student told her teacher that the food was delicious, and she wished that she had culture. “What do you mean?” he asked. “Well, I don’t have culture, like, this food and bright dresses and stuff,” she replied. He asked her to imagine how her life might be different if she had grown up in a different country. He asked her to think about what would be different there compared to what she was used to at home in the United States. When she began to list differences and similarities, she realized that what she was listing were pieces of herself formed by culture. This basic understanding was enlightening to her. Up until that point, she saw another’s culture, but not her own.

Many members of a dominant culture are unaware of how culture affects their daily lives. Because of this dominance, there often is not a reason to learn about one’s own culture due to the simple fact that most people around them are of the same culture. The dominant culture group of the United States is that of white, middle-class, Protestant people of northern European descent (United States Census Bureau). This culture group, over centuries, has developed customs and standards for its society. Some would argue that this worldview, defined as eurocentrism, creates a biased view that favors Western civilization over non-Western civilizations (Willis 18). To be clear, standards are true of any culture, including values that are understood and adhered to. In writing about mainstream values, Fujioka and Neuendorf submit that “values are fundamental to human existence...and their acquisition is a central objective to socialization” (Fujioka and Neuendorf 353). Shared norms and principles are imbedded into societies.

The reality is that many members of the mainstream cultural group in the United States have yet to understand how culture has shaped them individually and collectively. To be

effective community members, people of this culture group need to learn about cultural structures and gain insight into how cultural encoding has influenced and continues to influence them. The ethos of this group has created both societal entrances and barriers to other people groups. By gaining insight into cultural structures, discernment and perception expand. This knowledge affects who we are as individuals and why, including how these central tendencies affect people around us.

The process of learning this data is known as cultural self-awareness. Lu and Wan, throughout their research, relay that cultural awareness points to a consciousness of how culture has influenced people. They state that “cultural self-awareness is an individual’s metacognitive understanding of culture’s influence on the self” (Lu and Wan, 823). So, cultural self-awareness is set apart from cultural competence or simply knowledge about culture. Further, they iterate that “cultural self-awareness focuses on how individuals make sense of the relationship between the culture and the self (how culture has shaped me)” (Lu and Wan 824). This information does not indicate that one culture is superior to another. Rather, through a process of learning about the driving factors of American culture, an understanding is gained to comprehend ourselves relative to the world around us.

Within this mainstream culture, Wheaton Academy began in 1853. This educational institution has existed amidst central cultural tendencies within American society and within social controls that have ensured values and norms. The founding fathers of Wheaton Academy believed in education in which God is central, and these culturally Christian values are still held 150 years later. Today, Wheaton Academy continues to adapt and evolve within American society. In writing about globalization, Bryant Myers reminds us of what is essential amid uncertainty. He states, "we need to know who we are... where we are...what we must do...and

what time it is (how our past, present, and future fit into this picture)” (Myers 55). The context in which we live adapts and shifts, affecting our very lives.

Within the United States, various sectors have endeavored to meet a variance in cultural understanding through direction and instruction. Numerous institutions are concerned with the lack of cultural awareness of people of the dominant culture, a gap in understanding compared to those with cultural understanding and knowledge (Jay & Levy). By offering cultural intelligence instruction for personnel and training individuals within organizations and businesses about cultural norms and values, an increase in cultural awareness has proven successful in reaching their clients more effectively (Agner, Roysircar). Many universities have also provided instruction, discussion-based learning, and travel abroad opportunities to learn about culture. In a study conducted by Celeste Gaia, students compare their own culture to other cultures. She states that students "were able to explore their own sense of self and consider what factors shaped their own identity" (Gaia 27). Self-reflection is a central piece of the cultural awareness process.

Within the Wheaton Academy community, a large group of people appears to be culturally unacquainted. This phenomenon is not unique to this school community. In a culture that sets a high priority on living by the biblical command to love their neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39 ESV), many individuals are unaware that they do so through a cultural lens. This lens, which includes a Christian worldview, is different from other cultural lenses. Because of blind spots to see differences of perspective, people are also unaware of their biases programmed by their culture (Bayes). Loving their neighbor should look different, depending on their context.

Wheaton Academy has done excellent work as a community and organization. The school's leadership continues to work diligently to ensure that the community is a Christian,

healthy, vibrant organization in which students can learn and thrive and in which professionals can develop and adapt. Their initiative of Kingdom Community bears the marks of culture and faith under one Lord, one God, and one Creator (wheatonacademy.org). Nevertheless, amid this learning, there is a vital area of growth that has yet to be addressed.

As people, in order to understand who we are as individuals and communities, it is essential that we understand how we are programmed by culture. We must learn not only about others, but we must also learn about ourselves. Lu and Wan, in an enlightening article addressing culture's influence on the self, state that often these processes of learning allow us to live more authentically, creating both a stronger sense of belonging and connection to culture, as well as learning to respond to experiences (835). In a training curriculum, Jennifer Anderson Juarez reasons that these processes are not explicitly addressing race; rather, patterns of unintentional and intentional bias (Juarez 98). Further, in a study by Gargi Roysircar on cultural self-awareness assessment, the study found that individuals can "discover their biases when they reflect on their cultural and race-based thoughts and feelings, both positive and negative" (660). By being educated about cultural systems, social norms, behaviors, and cultural software, individuals then can begin to address thought and behavioral processes. When addressing cultural self-awareness, why we are who we are and why we do what we do is also addressed.

In order to see a cultural perspective differently, a growth mindset must be cultivated. A growth mindset shows a continual desire for learning about the world, others, and ourselves. Kelley and Kelley, in their book *Creative Confidence* maintain that "individuals with a growth mindset believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable); that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished" (31). On the other hand, Kelley and Kelley also assert that "people with a fixed mindset will prefer to stay behind in their comfort zone, afraid that the

limits of their capabilities will be revealed to others" (31). Wheaton Academy has an extraordinary opportunity to educate its adults, their Living Curriculum Teachers, staff, and willing parents. As people of a dominant culture in a globalized world, providing a learning opportunity to inform and teach individuals will help them explore undiscovered areas of self within a cultural context.

The journey of cultural awareness begins with individuals as people and continues with recognition of oneself through cultural self-reflection. By seeing oneself, by looking in the mirror, and understanding programmed thoughts, feelings, understandings, behaviors, and predispositions, we can create new paths of learning. The skill of cultural self-reflection can be developed and applied. To grow in cultural self-reflection is enlightening, thought-provoking, motivating, and directly correlated to a desire to live in harmony with and appreciation for, others. By gaining access to a deeper part of self, we can discern and recognize what a Kingdom Community member looks like. Through cultural self-awareness, we can learn what it means to be a culturally programmed image-bearer of God.

This proposal offers seminars that focus on developing greater cultural self-awareness. To increase cultural awareness in people of the dominant culture in the Wheaton Academy community, it is necessary to foster individual cultural self-awareness through a process of learning and cultural self-reflection. We are not able to see other cultures openly until we see our own clearly.

Qualitative Fieldwork

This project proposal required a foundation of literature review as well as a study of qualified fieldwork sites. Through speaking with professionals within the fields of education,

cultural intelligence training, the Christian church, and non-profit organizations, an opportunity to connect these fieldwork sites through qualitative research was provided.

First, an expansion of understanding of the current positions of people of the dominant culture in the United States was needed. CultureCrux provided expertise and skills to measure cultural awareness, and the processes followed to develop these skills (Bayes). With this research in hand, work continued with the staff at World Relief Seattle. Observation of individual staff on their cultural awareness journeys was made and interviews conducted. I also was able to see firsthand the growth that cultural awareness cultivates within the communities they serve (McClish, Stopper). Lastly, the Wheaton Academy community was observed. I attended a host family onboarding for their International Student Program and interviewed host parents and staff of international students to gain insight into how Wheaton Academy works to develop their international community (Grant, Vishanoff). In the initial stages, I learned more about the school's Kingdom Community initiative by interviewing Wheaton Academy faculty and staff (Leman, Hogan). More of this data is shared in detail in the joined essays, including importance of this research as Wheaton Academy continues to grow and progress.

Throughout this fieldwork, I sought answers through specific cultural questions, including personal growth, barriers, community understanding, and adaptability. Data to seek opinion, insight, and possible solutions for cultural barriers for communities with people of the dominant culture was compiled. These locations, including online courses, intercultural assessments, training sessions, program reviews, and numerous interviews, are included in this qualitative research. All of these are credited to support my recommendations and heavily influenced the proposed seminar content.

Seminar Content

In each training module, the goal of individual learning is to encourage cultural self-study. The goal of the group is to gain insight and understanding of the role of cultural programming at Wheaton Academy. In the commencing groups, it is crucial that the participants are of the dominant culture. Frankly, it is too lofty of a goal to assume that cross-cultural understanding will be learned in the same space as cultural self-awareness in the beginning stages of cultural learning. Indeed, learning will be more significant within a non-judgmental space and the ability to discuss culture with like-minded people. Each segment of the Seminar will provide education and practical coaching. This training will encourage understanding oneself within the greater context of the dominant culture and within the Wheaton Academy community.

Culture, Dominant Culture, and American Culture

Within a closed group of people from the Wheaton Academy community, participants will gain knowledge about what culture is. Further, the opportunity will be given to ascertain the significance of being a member of the dominant culture group within a society. Through cultural indices, individuals will have the ability to compare their culture with others to see similarities and differences (Hofstede). They will learn and discuss facts about American culture, including the use of vernacular language, media, and cultural relics to apply this realization (Roysircar). To further increase understanding, participants will be encouraged through interaction and discussion to “speculate on the impressions people in other cultures may have... and the consequences these impressions may have on intercultural interactions” (Hochel 4). This discussion-based module will pave the way for the next session on cultural self-awareness.

Cultural Self-Awareness

Self-awareness can divide into two parts: personal self-awareness and cultural self-awareness. While personal self-awareness is to know the influence of personality and personal experience, learning cultural self-awareness is different. Cultural self-awareness is a consciousness and understanding of one's own thought processes due to culture's influence (Lu, et al. 823). Insights into the informational coding of culture grant individuals a way to view their context differently. Cultural self-awareness development allows individuals to see programmed values, norms, and behaviors as a lens.

This module provides an opportunity to consider how culture has shaped and programmed the participants into the people they are today. By allowing cultural self-awareness to be applied, it can increase one's abilities to recognize how interactions with others can build up or break down relationships and communities. This personal development can be enlightening and life changing.

Cultural Self-Reflection

The next section of the Seminar begins a process to understand and realize the impact of one's cultural identity. We do this through self-reflection. In a study of charter schoolteachers, Heather-Lee Baron's research concludes that "reflective practice is essential for a professional because it allows for continuous learning that informs everyday decisions and actions" (126). Participants will have space to begin processing how to move forward with this new information about themselves through modules of community-building activities, playing out vignettes, dialogue, and cultural self-reflection. There can be positive and negative reactions to being enlightened about how culture has influenced one's thoughts and behaviors. Baron reasons that the practice of self-reflection allows participants to "look outside of oneself to

reflect critically and analytically...have a clearer understanding of one's behaviors and reasoning" (Baron 117). Angela Webster-Smith's research and process of creating a pyramid of self-reflection takes the process one step further. She concludes that when used authentically, cultural self-reflection "should provoke a profound rebirth to the point of no longer remaining the same" (10). Within this module of cultural self-reflection, creative space will allow individuals to learn this practice effectively and authentically.

Cultural self-reflection provides an opportunity for openness, humbleness, and a willingness to learn. When applied to living in community at Wheaton Academy, this change in perspective and new-found ability to change or adapt provides an opportunity to foster growth within the community. As Joy Agner's research on cultural humility training can attest to, participants of such seminars are able to ponder "changing their perspective from one of 'knowing' to one of 'learning'" (Agner 5). This self-efficacy will reflect humility yet confidence in solidifying or modifying community norms to meet the needs of the Wheaton Academy community.

Christianity as a Lens

The intentional process of learning culture, cultural awareness, and cultural self-reflection will guide the group to exploring Christian culture and questions of the heart. On a heart level, how does the dominant culture align with Christian culture? Are there perspectives or opinions that appear to disagree? By seeing Christianity as a lens within the dominant culture, we see areas of beauty and areas of needed growth.

With the understanding that multiculturalism is essential to the North American church, "it is a given...that all cultures, including the dominant Western culture, are prepared to submit their values to the examination, sifting and transformation of Scripture" (Sheffield 58). Wheaton

Academy appears to agree with this belief as they have a vibrant international program and seek to pursue a community built on their understanding of the kingdom in the Bible in Revelation chapter 7 (Vishanoff). However, as part of American culture, history tells us that White Christianity has been “produced and maintained by othering both people who were not Christian and those who were non-White Christians” (Hill Fletcher 59). Today, many White American Christians prefer to see othering as a piece of history rather than an issue that is still present.

Throughout this module, individuals will be encouraged to contemplate and act in response to multiculturalism. By choosing to place people, no matter their cultural identity, under the lordship of Christ, Christians are capable of being reconciled and united as "members of a kingdom community" (Sheffield 59). To be noted here is that although there are substantial racial reconciliation topics that could be part of the discussion, the curriculum will stay focused on cultural differences due to time constraints. A recommendation of having continuing conversations following the Seminar and continued learning will be encouraged.

Individuals collectively create community. Certainly, individual character builds within a community. Wheaton Academy understands what Thomas Friedman unveils in his book *Thank You for Being Late*: "most of the time character is not an individual accomplishment. It emerges through joined hearts and souls, and in groups" (351). Character and self-efficacy is built individually within community.

As the Wheaton Academy community grows in character and cultural self-awareness, collectively, it will, through a Christian lens, enable the adults of this community to follow its mission in a new way, donning a mantle of learning as image-bearers of God.

Options*2-day Seminar*

The Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminar 2-Day option will provide the community participants an overview of culture, cultural self-awareness, cultural self-reflection, and a further understanding of a Christian cultural lens. The advantage of a 2-day seminar lies in the extra time that the participants will have to dive deeply into the content and have time to process with like-minded people. This seminar option could also bring in people other than faculty and staff, possibly parents and members of this community that desire to learn together in a closed group. By offering a designated amount of time to learn, both physical and mental space can be offered with ample time to discuss further development of Wheaton Academy moving forward.

1-day Seminar

The Cultural Self-Awareness Development Seminar 1-Day option will provide the community participants an overview of culture, cultural self-awareness, and cultural self-reflection. Unlike the 2-day option, there will not be enough time to truly unpack a Christian cultural lens, though it will be touched on. This option will begin with an introductory video with a follow-up exercise before the development day seminar begins. Due to time constraints, the Seminar may feel like a bombardment of heavy information with limited time to process. However, follow-up meetings for further discussion and reflection will be strongly supported and encouraged.

Conclusion

For some members of the Wheaton Academy community, this Seminar will be an introduction to culture and cultural self-awareness. For others, it will serve as a continuation of cultural learning. There is a sense of never being finished when communicating the complexities

of cultural awareness; there is no beginning, middle, or end to the process. As people, we are continually developing, as is the culture that we live in. Wisely, Parker Palmer writes, “The world isn’t something we have to adjust to. It’s something we adjust” (33). As Christians, cultural self-awareness and the ability to self-reflect culturally create the capacity to impact Wheaton Academy and its surrounding community significantly.

Daily, Christians look to Scripture, choosing to know its teachings and walk with God. If Wheaton Academy community members, in humility, choose to grasp this learning and comprehend how to practice cultural self-awareness, cultural self-reflection will guide them on their way to looking even more like Jesus.

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