

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY PLANNING SESSION, AUGUST 15, 2008

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE) invited senior representatives from colleges across Ontario to participate in a cultural proficiency planning exercise at Seneca College, Markham Campus on Friday, August 15, 2008. As the first step in a four-stage process, the purpose of this collaborative exercise was to enable colleges, in all their complexity and diversity, to effectively expand their capacity to serve the rapidly growing and diverse immigrant population. The exercise was guided by the understanding that colleges are currently at different levels of experience in and familiarity with issues of cultural proficiency. Consequently, each college may select a training model and business-process options that best reflect its unique situation. Representatives from 20 of 24 colleges attended this one-day exercise, which enabled participants to discuss and exchange current best practices and related experiences and encouraged them to work on the following objectives:

- Identify key attributes of a culturally proficient college.
- Map the main elements of a cultural proficiency training program that integrates or takes into account the diverse cultural background of the immigrant population and adequately acknowledges its national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, race, etc. To comply with MCI requirements, this mapping will focus first on front-line service providers and then expand to include-the college community at large.
- Select methodologies that will ensure the ability of colleges to sustain these training programs and eventually integrate them into their respective institutional culture of maintaining excellence and best practices.

A number of ideas and best practices were gathered at the August 15 planning session. From these, a framework for cultural proficiency training will be constructed.

Background

CIITE is a college-system inspired and directed project given to improving the pathways for internationally trained immigrants (ITIs) through the Ontario college system, from pre-entry services through employment transition and into the workforce. The CIITE vision is for internationally trained immigrants to have access to programs and services in the Ontario college system that build on their prior education, training and work experience and expedite their securing employment in their field of expertise or in a related field.

For the academic year 2008-2009, the CIITE Project and the college system were asked by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration to: “develop and deliver cultural proficiency/competency training to a least 400 college staff across Ontario. These training packages must include a sustainability plan to maintain, continue and update the training packages on a regular basis”. The cultural proficiency planning exercise held on August 15th provided the colleges with an opportunity to work together towards this objective and, more specifically, to craft a framework from which exemplary college-specific cultural proficiency training can be delivered. For the

purpose of this exercise, participants were provided with a working definition of 'Cultural Proficiency' as "an approach that helps organizations respond in healthy ways to the cultural diversity of participants. Culturally proficient policies and practices enable organizations to become inclusive in ways clients, employees and the community are served." (Cultural Proficiency Institute). At times alternative terms such as Cultural Intelligence or Cultural Competence are used.

Defining 'Cultural Proficiency'

Participants were asked to discuss the definition of 'cultural proficiency', with particular focus on initial reactions, relevant questions and related experiences. The purpose of the discussion was to seek a better understanding and attempt to come up with a working 'definition'.

Participants were in agreement to view 'culture' as dynamic and complex. The word 'proficiency' implies the existence of a measure or a standard which might not be possible. The starting point entails higher awareness and better understanding of our institution and our culture before moving forward. Accordingly, the first steps in this process would be to identify immediate goals and the stakeholders involved. Colleges need to determine how to create a system with the least number of barriers for its constituents. Since culture constantly evolves, colleges must respond with continued awareness and understanding of the orientation and the relationships between the original institution and its constantly evolving members. One way of representing this notion might be the idea of 'intelligence of cultures' rather than 'cultural intelligence'. Colleges need to observe their internal culture among students and staff *before* looking outwards.

It is important to note that this process may take years to complete because it involves providing better customer service and improving students' ability to effectively navigate the system. Colleges may struggle in their efforts to reach consensus regarding a unified definition, yet they all seem to agree on the urgent need to address the increasing student population diversity. Equally important is not to lose sight of the time needed to address the needs of the 'traditional student' population. Colleges must address the complexity of the diverse and rapidly evolving populations emerging as effective communicators and as exemplars who demonstrate commitment to the ideas of cultural diversity/proficiency in their respective communities. Colleges need to strive to maintain high communications standards and continue to provide leadership in the area of cultural proficiency. Ultimately, colleges must have the courage to admit what they do not know, the institutional intelligence to ask vital questions, and the desire to move forward strategically.

College Profiles

Participants were asked to discuss the profile of their college in the context of student population (diversity, etc.); programs; sense of community/population to be served; extent to which services, programs, curricula and teaching approach seem to correlate to the perceived needs, interests and expectations of students.

Students at each college have different needs. Accordingly, it is important to differentiate between identifying and responding to these needs. For example, colleges need to recognize their immigrant populations, **acknowledge** their needs and determine how best to provide them effective integrated services. To facilitate data collection and render the process transparent and egalitarian Colleges may consider asking **all** their students the **same** questions. For this

process to succeed Colleges may want to adopt a systemic approach encompassing all departments at the college.

Culturally Proficient Institutions

Participants were asked to identify the key attributes of a culturally proficient institution. A number of key concepts were identified and include:

- Seamless integration
- Demonstrated commitment of resources (time/staff/money)
- Policies, documents, curricula, educational frameworks and strategic plans
- Measurement of reflective practice
- Transparent and independent frameworks for addressing concerns and complaints
- Integrated support services for students
- Collaborative adaptable and responsive (internal and external)
- Flexible program delivery serving multiple unique populations
- Measurement of user satisfaction and returns on investment in diversity

Participants agreed that key attributes of a culturally proficient institution were included in the two documents* distributed by email before this session. Nevertheless, they felt that they were focused primarily on business models, rather than on academic ones. Three other attributes should be added to these lists to better apply them to an academic setting. They are:

- The globalization of curriculum – curriculum should reflect the global nature of students and the diverse nature of the student population
- Reflective practice – the ability to meet the needs of all students
- Concepts need to sell themselves internally within the organization

Critically important in creating a culturally proficient institution is the commitment of both senior management and frontline staff in the implementation of cultural proficiency programs. Also necessary is the commitment of sufficient resources in order to ensure that programs are successful. Curriculum needs to include diverse learners, and reflective practice should be encouraged and measured throughout the college. Providing integrated support services for students will assist in establishing transparent frameworks for addressing concerns.

Critical Issues

Participants were asked to consider and provide feedback on how their institutions measure up against the attributes of a culturally proficient institution (highlighted above). As well, they were asked to reflect on the types of critical measures that each institution should take to become more culturally proficient.

Dynamic and complex measurement systems need to be put in place to ensure that colleges are meeting their goals and objectives. The ability to capture a measurement of where, how and why students gain employment after graduation could go a long way towards improving the cultural proficiency of colleges, the services available to students, and the ability to meet employers' demands. Forming partnerships with employers is seen as a critical part of this

* The Conference Board, "Creating a Competency Model for Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners" and DiversiPro, "Attributes of an Inclusive (and Culturally Competent) Organization"

process. Equally important is the need for collaboration in implementing a strategy that effectively encompasses all areas of college life.

All teams within in the college need to work collaboratively on diversity issues to ensure commitment and buy-in from all levels and departments. Ultimately, the measurement approach needs to be client-centered, and every form of documentation needs to reflect the notion of cultural proficiency.

Cultural Proficiency Training Program

Participants were asked to discuss the **key components** of an effective training program that would advance their institution towards its goal of becoming culturally proficient.

Transformational change is an integral part of creating an effective cultural proficiency training program. The opinions, ideas and perceptions of all stakeholders need to be included in the framework. Along with this, it is necessary to create an implementation strategy, without which training will not achieve its intended goals. Furthermore, the implementation framework will ensure sustainability of introduced changes. Colleges should aim to adopt a comprehensive approach to training with the goal of meeting needs of all college communities regardless of their specific and unique demographics. 'Frontline' workers were identified as high priority for receiving training given that they service and have most interaction with clients.

Participants suggested that instead of developing a single training program colleges might consider developing an effective tool to deliver training modules based on specific needs. Colleges could then choose specific modules that best suit their unique needs. Along with this, colleges must have access to the adequate resources to sustain the training and ensure its effectiveness. Colleges need to commit to internal training over an extended period of time, as this type of training will be most efficient as an ongoing process. This modular framework may be more complicated to create at the outset, but will, in the long run, prove to be more effective.

Conclusions

Participants agreed that any sort of cultural proficiency training needs to be collaborative, adaptable and responsive. The approach to such training must be senior management focused, but must also translate down to the frontline users and be driven by all stakeholders in the process. In order to ensure that training is efficient and effective, it may be necessary to redefine the value perception of members of the college system. Within this context, it is important to note that colleges are at different levels on a continuum, and the notion of a very specific training program with set modules will not be effective. Tools need to be developed in order to help colleges determine their needs and create a unique program to service those needs. Self-assessment is necessary, along with the engagement of staff across the college. The measurement of user satisfaction will be a key piece in information this type of training.

It is important to recognize that the creation of a cultural proficiency training program is not just about serving immigrants, but it is about all of the students that are serviced by the college system. Whatever type of training that takes place will be to the benefit of the student body as a whole. This discussion is a starting point. From this, colleges will move forward to turn these ideas into a comprehensive, realistic and effective framework for cultural proficiency training.

Next Steps

The August 15 cultural proficiency planning session was **Step 1** in a series of steps to work towards creating a framework for cultural proficiency training. This collaborative brainstorming session explored the characteristics of a 'culturally proficient' college. The results of this exercise will inform the work defined in the next steps, which are outlined below.

Step 2 – Collaborative Work Group Session:

A collaborative Work Group of college representatives will use the results of the Step One plenary session to fashion a framework/ models that colleges may use (or modify as required) to develop and deliver their own cultural proficiency training. As well, this Work Group will compile standards by which a college may evaluate its standing as 'culturally proficient'.

This session, scheduled for Monday, September 22, will be hosted by Centennial College.

It will be facilitated by Dr. Carl James.

Step 3 – Colleges to Develop their Unique Training Program:

Colleges (listed below) that have committed to the initial phases of the cultural proficiency exercise will undertake:

- i. Development of their own unique cultural-proficiency staff training program (guided by the framework/models recommended in Step Two) starting with front-line staff and radiating to other staff, and the
- ii. Development of protocols for advancing the broader cultural proficiency program and values in various areas of the college (e.g. policy reviews, etc.)

Step 4 - Commencement of Staff Training

Colleges that have committed to the initial phases of the cultural proficiency exercise will commence training staff.

Ontario colleges that initially elected to participate in the CIITE *Cultural Proficiency Exercise*:

Algonquin	George Brown
Boréal (recently added)	Georgian
Cambrian	Humber
Canadore	La Cité
Centennial	Lambton
Conestoga	Mohawk
Confederation	Niagara
Fanshawe	Seneca
Fleming	Sheridan