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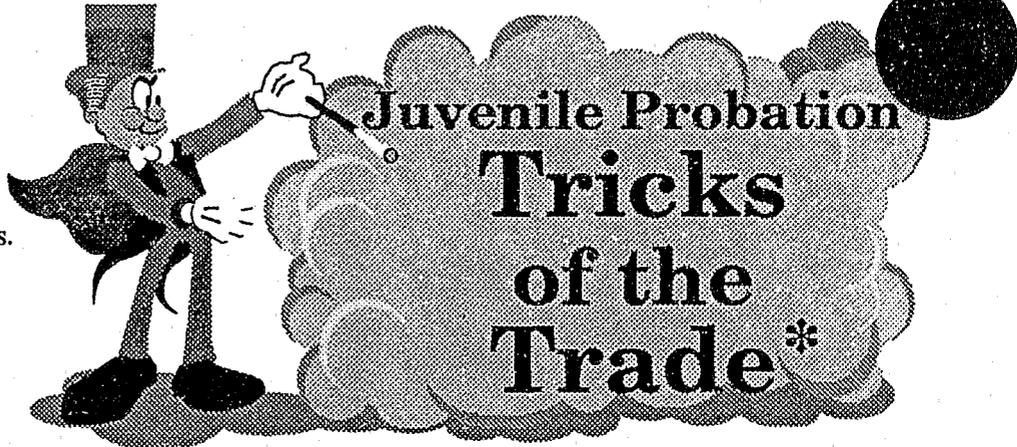
National Center for Juvenile Justice

A product of the Juvenile Probation Officer Initiative's Professional Development Series.

OJJDP

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

137417



January, 1992

Vol. 1, Issue 1

NCJRS Multicultural Awareness: Developing Cultural Understanding in the Juvenile Justice System

JUL 14 1992

ACQUISITIONS

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The purpose of this monograph is to underscore the importance of including a multicultural perspective in the processing of juveniles through the juvenile justice system and to provide some practical approaches and recommendations for achieving an awareness and sensitivity to different cultures. In addition, it is an effort to decrease miscommunication and enhance interaction between practitioners and juveniles thereby reducing the negative impact that cultural diversity may have on decision making.

The need for a multicultural perspective in the juvenile justice system arose in part because of the increasingly disproportionate incarceration rates of minority juveniles nationwide. Research on the matter indicates that the attitudes, perceptions, prejudices and biases of system officials may be related to the problem. Kratcoski and Kratcoski (1990) indeed found this to be true. They indicate that the type of training and personal prejudices and opinions of police officers affected the way a juvenile's case was handled. In addition, the youth's attitude, race, sex, and social class affected case processing. Other practitioners, too, may unwittingly allow negative perceptions to influence how juvenile cases are handled. Because of this, it is important to develop mechanisms that ensure that personal attitudes and perceptions do not adversely influence decision making. This can be accomplished by increasing one's knowledge, empathy and respect for cultural diversity.

The recent movie, "Dances with Wolves," emphasizes the need to learn about different cultures. In the movie, Kevin

Costner portrays a Union soldier on the frontier who is at first frightened by his confrontations with the Indians. By the end of the movie, the culture and language he thought strange had become a part of him. He learned to value and respect the Indian culture - to embrace it as his own. In essence, that is the purpose of multiculturalism: to learn about other cultures, to recognize and understand their differences, and to value and respect them for being different.

In real life we live in a multicultural and multilingual society. We see and interact with Asians, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and people of many other nationalities. As a result, we must create an environment where we can work, serve, educate and communicate with culturally diverse people. We can do this by increasing our knowledge, understanding and respect for other cultures - by noting our differences and learning how to work with one another. This can be done through awareness training, which is an effective method of promoting multicultural understanding.

Culture refers to a set of beliefs, values, arts, mores, habits and customs held by a specific group of people. These groups may include ethnic, racial, religious, professional and social groups. Therefore, not only do Hispanics, African Americans and Asians have distinctive cultures, but youth gangs, senior citizens, divorcees, and juvenile probation officers do also. An expanded definition of culture is given by Porter cited in Nadler et al.—

*In recognition that probation officers have a wealth of untapped knowledge and experience, this series provides a medium for them to share their experience, knowledge and skills with the field. The series seeks to address specific professional development needs of juvenile probation officers by providing practical, useable materials focused on discrete probation skills and techniques. Anyone interested in contributing to this series should contact Doug Thomas, JPOI Coordinator, at the NCJJ, 701 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219 (412) 227-6950. The Center is the research division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. This series was supported by funds provided to the Technical Assistance to the Juvenile Court Project by OJJDP through grant #89-JN-CX-K001. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP.

'(c)ulture involves the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, meanings, beliefs, values, attitudes, religions, concepts of self, the universe, and self-universe relationships, hierarchies of status, role expectations, spatial relations, and time concepts acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving' (1985:89).

In addition, the patterns of our culture influence the way we communicate and interact with others. As a result, we may tend to feel that our own culture is correct and other cultures are not as reflected in this statement by Nadler and his colleagues:

An individual's value system significantly affects that person's perception of a situation...the more an individual fundamentally accepts a basic system of values, the more he is likely to view his own interpretation of an act as the morally correct one and the other fellow's as falling short of grace (1985:89).

This attitude exemplifies the notion of *ethnocentrism*, which is the belief that one's culture is superior to another. Therefore, a critical aspect of awareness training includes that of self discovery. This involves the need to observe the self in relation to other cultures and to critically analyze one's perceptions of others.

Multiculturalism challenged the concept of the *melting pot* in which people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds gave up their traditions and heritage to assimilate into American culture. Today, the *melting pot* is gone. People with different cultural backgrounds no longer decide to shed their identities; instead they take pride in them. That pride is a characteristic of multiculturalism, which says that the ethnic, racial and social identities of American citizens should be valued, studied and respected in their own right. In other words, to be different is okay and worthy of appreciation and respect. That is the difference with the new wave of multiculturalism. People are concerned about cultural differences and are identifying ways to accommodate them.

Multicultural awareness is impacting school curriculums. For example, in Dade County, Florida, students represent 123 different countries. In New York, 1 out of 4 children under age 10 have nonEnglish speaking parents (TIME Magazine, 1991). Multiculturalism is also beginning to affect the future labor market. According to *US News and World Report* and *Work Force 2000*, the increase in the ethnic population will lead to critical changes in labor management. A major change will be in the development of supervisory skills. Managers will need to be skilled in working with culturally diverse people and developing sensitivity to differences in others. This new type of manager is predicted to be one of the top twenty career positions of the future.

Changes adopted by education and labor suggest that the juvenile justice system must also begin to accommodate the needs of the growing ethnic population.

The Multnomah County Juvenile Justice Division in Portland, Oregon is a unique example of a juvenile justice system that has begun this process. The Division developed a systematic plan to incorporate cultural awareness activities into its' entire operation. Efforts to increase awareness of cultural diversity arose in response to a concern for the increasing numbers of minority youth committed to state institutions. It was determined that hiring and retaining a multicultural staff that reflected youths in the system were important ways to address the problem. In addition, the Division required awareness training for all staff members to increase the system's ability to work with a culturally diverse population. These training sessions are provided by a number of qualified professionals.

The intentions of Multnomah County Juvenile Justice Division to increase numbers of minority staff and to increase awareness skills of all staff led to the development of a Five Year Diversity Plan in July 1991. Implementation of these goals are currently underway. The following are the goals of the Five Year Plan.

- Goal 1.** Promote an environment which attracts, retains and fosters a diverse and multi-cultural staff.
- Goal 2.** Facilitate and encourage cross-cultural communication within the Division.
- Goal 3.** Ensure the development and implementation of cross-cultural diversity, knowledge, empathy and respect in policy, planning and service delivery systems within the Division.
- Goal 4.** In partnership with the service provider community and in the community at large, seek and receive knowledge, information and resources from the community to improve our knowledge, empathy and respect of the various community collectives.
- Goal 5.** Provide bold and innovative leadership through advocacy for diversity and cross-cultural knowledge, empathy and respect in the service provider community and in the community at large.

Recognizing Cultural Differences

The goal of multiculturalism is to increase knowledge, awareness, empathy and respect for different cultures. Practitioners need to be culturally aware in order to increase their effectiveness in their jobs and to reduce conflicts, misunderstandings and most importantly, stress. In recognition of the increasingly disproportionate incarceration rates of minority youths, multicultural awareness is also needed to reduce potential bias in decision making.

Practitioners can begin to increase their awareness by learning about the verbal and nonverbal communication styles of different cultures. These differences may influence the way the practitioner responds to a juvenile due to a lack of knowledge about the meaning of the verbal or nonverbal communication in that culture. The verbal communication of a culture may be direct (assertive) or indirect (nonassertive), boisterous or silent (Gudykunst, et al., 1988). For example, in Asian

cultures, there is a tendency to be less assertive in speaking and to be indirect. However, in African American cultures verbal communication appears to be assertive. There is a tendency to talk loudly and use "street talk" when communicating with each other. As a result, practitioners from Hispanic or white cultures should avoid adopting the African American's verbal style in one-to-one communication; it may adversely affect the practitioner's credibility (Cesarz, 1991).

Still another difference can be found in Hispanic cultures, where dialogue may sound more intimidating than it actually is. This may be attributed to the language difference. The fact that English is a second language in this culture suggests that practitioners need to be aware of the tone and inflections used in a culture's language (Cesarz, 1991). Practitioners should be aware that juveniles from African American, Asian or Hispanic cultures who exhibit these verbal styles are simply reflecting the patterns of their culture not reacting to the practitioner personally. Therefore, the perception that the juvenile's loud, boisterous or intimidating communication style is disrespectful, may be simply a matter of cultural differences.

Nonverbal communication also varies among cultures. Some cultural groups convey messages by using more nonverbal behavior than verbal communication. For example in Hispanic cultures *machismo* is a value in males which conveys a strong self-image. It is characterized by stares, silences and an air of "coolness." *Machismo* is valued in Hispanic cultures and explains why men resist taking orders from non-Hispanics and women. If the practitioner is a woman, she should declare her official role in the first meeting with the Hispanic juvenile. This will increase her credibility and reduce future resistance. Because of the value of *machismo* in Hispanic culture, practitioners should beware that one-to-one, direct communication works best when dealing with members of this cultural group (Cesarz, 1991).

In Native American cultures, stares and silences are used to convey different messages. A firm look indicates seriousness and maintaining eye contact is a sign of disrespect (Cesarz, 1991). In Asian cultures, silences are used to emphasize meaning and to show power (Gudykunst et al., 1988). Eye contact is also viewed by Hispanic and African American cultures as a sign of disrespect. In white cultures, direct eye contact conveys trustworthiness, forthrightness and sincerity (Hanna, 1984). If the practitioner is white, lack of eye contact may be viewed as lacking integrity.

There are also differences in the amount of touching within a culture. In Hispanic and African American cultures, handshaking, slapping hands or hugging tends to be used for added expression (Gudykunst et al., 1988). In white cultures, touching or closeness when speaking may be viewed as an invasion of space (Hanna, 1984).

Practitioners should also be aware of what is valued in a culture. In some cultures, religion is highly regarded. For example, in Hispanic, Native American and African American cultures there is a great deal of respect for religion and spirituality. With this in mind, the practitioner may seek assistance from the juvenile's minister, priest or spiritual leader when handling juveniles from these backgrounds (Bailey, 1991).

In addition, practitioners should be aware of the value of family among different cultures. In Hispanic, Asian, and African American cultures family relationships are highly regarded. In Hispanic cultures, *carino*, signifies caring and protection of each other in the family (Bailey, 1991). In Asian cultures, mutual support, cooperation, interdependence, family pride and honor are valued. Problems in Asian cultures are generally handled within the family and outside influences are unwelcome. In African American cultures, the family consists of extended households that are frequently headed by an older woman. A mutual aid system is common in African American cultures - welfare of the family in these extended households is a primary obligation (Selected Cultural Contrasts). Practitioners should consider the value of the family unit and consult with family members, religious leaders or other authority figures when in contact with juveniles from these cultural groups.

The cultural differences presented here are general characteristics that have been observed in some groups. However, practitioners should keep in mind the following basic facts about culture when they encounter juveniles from different cultures.

- Cultures continue to change;
- Cultural differences are related to (and affected by) economic status, education, age, region, and sex;
- Cultures and members of a culture should not be stereotyped (Wright, 1991).

Practical Ways for Increasing Cultural Awareness

An important way to become familiar with the communication styles of different cultures is by using role play exercises. Role plays can increase awareness and tolerance of other cultures. In a role play, the practitioner can be taught to recognize the differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and to respond with attitudes and behaviors that encourage communication and acceptance. This is accomplished by the practitioner playing the role of the juvenile. Roleplays should be done in a controlled setting and directed by a trained professional. One example of a role play places the setting for the exercise as the first encounter between the juvenile and the practitioner (Moriarty, 1991). The practitioner acting as the juvenile should be instructed to be loud, to use street slang and to avoid eye contact with the practitioner. The practitioner should be allowed to respond without any cues. The purpose of this role-play exercise is to allow practitioners to note the non-verbal signals and gestures of the juvenile and the responses of the officer. Practitioners in the group can then discuss the interaction.

Practitioners can also develop sensitivity toward juveniles from other cultures by examining their own feelings and perceptions about cultures and by reading and studying the history and literature of different cultures. In addition, the following steps may be adopted for use when handling juveniles from culturally diverse backgrounds. They were adapted from "State of the Art Nonverbal Behavior in Intercultural Counselling," by Aaron Wolfgang. The first recommendation is to:

Try to avoid dealing with the problems of culturally different juveniles from your desk, i.e. preoccupying yourself with administrative duties, showing little interest, or being superficial.

Showing noninvolvement with your cases is a major obstacle to effective performance. Behaviors practitioners may use that show noninvolvement include: avoiding eye contact, keeping social distance and showing facial expressions that are either neutral or negative. A second measure that practitioners can incorporate into their daily routines which may build a rapport with the juvenile is to:

Try to like the juvenile whose culture is different from your own. Show an interest in the juvenile.

Some examples of showing that you are interested in the juvenile include: smiling, positive head nods, or forward body leans. These behaviors have to be careful not to be overdone or they will be viewed as forced or faked. Finally, practitioners can enhance the interaction with juveniles if they:

Try to understand and see the value of the juvenile's culture, the lifestyle, and the values important to that culture.

This will require some major effort on the part of the practitioner, but the results will be well worth it. Practitioners will need to be flexible, willing to change preconceptions of a culture, willing to accept cultural, ethnic and racial differences, and willing to overcome any belief that their own culture is superior. The behaviors that practitioners can use to show they understand include: expressions of warmth, positive involvement, and confidence.

The practitioner who takes the time to learn about different cultures will be an asset to the profession by helping juveniles recognize the strengths and weaknesses of both cultures, and by helping them develop competency skills to get along in different situations. Being sensitive to cultural differences enables positive relationships between the practitioner and the juvenile.

Cultural Awareness Training

In addition to the efforts of the Multnomah County Juvenile Justice Division to increase cultural awareness, the National Center for Juvenile Justice has developed a cultural awareness training module as part of the *Fundamental Skills Training for Juvenile Probation Officers*, funded by the State Justice Institute. The training module is designed to be used by trainers to sensitize juvenile probation officers to the verbal and nonverbal communication differences that are related to culture. The curriculum, entitled *Appreciating Cultural Diversity* was created by Vicki Wright, Director of Training and Staff Development, Texas Juvenile Probation Commission. Through this effort the communication and job skills of the practitioner will be greatly enhanced. In addition, the possibility that bias will be a factor in juvenile case processing is likely to be reduced.

The training module begins with a general introduction and discussion of culture and race. Also included is a role play exercise which underscores the importance of an individual's perceptions of a culture and how nonverbal

communication is critical to the understanding of a specific culture. The conclusion of the training module focuses on a discussion of the audience's perceptions of the role play as well as the perceptions of those who participated in the exercise. The entire module gives further credence to the need to consider the whole picture when we serve, work and communicate with others who are different from ourselves.

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For information about the cultural awareness training module contact Vicki Wright, Director of Training & Staff Development, Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, P.O. Box 13547, Capitol Station, Austin, TX 78711. (512) 443-2001

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