

# Aspiring to Cultural Competence: The Why, What and How for Lawyers

Prepared by  
Robert S. Wright, MSW, RSW  
Executive Director Child and Youth Strategy &  
Social Worker in Private Practice  
Member NSBS Race Relations Committee

[www.robertswright.ca](http://www.robertswright.ca)  
[www.culturalclinicalconsultants.ca](http://www.culturalclinicalconsultants.ca)

June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010

# Brief Introduction

- Social Work Clinician/Administrator
- Clinical Training at Washington State Penitentiary.
- Executive Director, Child & Youth Strategy
- Registered Social Work Private Practitioner
- Clinical Member of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (ATSA)
- Former Race Relations Coordinator of Dartmouth District School Board
- Co-Author: Prevention and Treatment of Addictions among North Americans of African descent.
- Author: Reflections of African Canadian/American Identity Development from Birth to Later Adolescence: Towards a Framework for Guiding Interventions

# Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

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

(Halifax Muslim Community constructs \$6 million school, mosque and community centre based on Sharia law principles of financing. African Nova Scotian land grants beginning to be complicated by history and community issues).

# Culturally Competent Lawyers: Why?

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

*We conclude that the reasonable persons contemplated by de Grandpre J., and endorsed by Canadian courts is a person who approaches the question of whether there exists a reasonable apprehension of bias with a complex and contextualized understanding of the issue in the case. The reasonable person understands the impossibility of judicial neutrality, but demands judicial impartiality. The reasonable person is cognizant of the racial dynamics in the local community, and, as a member of the Canadian community, is supportive of the principles of equality (R.v.S. (R.D.), [1997] 3 S.C.R. 484-1997-09-26, Supreme Court of Canada – Federal: Reasonable apprehension of bias – dealing with non-white groups – impartiality – evidence – credibility cited by 67 cases).*

# Cultural Competence: Definition

- Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four essential capacities:
  - A. We must understand our cultural differences and similarities
  - B. We must understand the social and cultural reality in which we work
  - C. We must cultivate appropriate attitudes towards cultural difference
  - D. We must be able to generate and interpret a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal responses.

# A) Nichols' Model for Understanding Cultural Difference

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

Different world cultures developed out of differing physical environments.

These world views have differing constructs:

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

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

DEVELOPED BY EDWIN J. NICHOLS, PH.D.

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

# Traditional Ecological Knowledge

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



# Afrocentricity

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

# Differing World Views at a Glance

Questions upon meeting

**European: What do you do?**

Focus on person and objective function

**Aboriginal: Where are you from?**

Focus on spiritual connection with traditional land

**African: Who are your people?**

Focus on relationships between persons

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

North American Diversity is fraught with complicated and tragic history

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

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

## C) Appropriate Attitudes

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

# D) Communicating Across Cultures

Cross cultural communication is a complex study in cultural Hermeneutics:

- Black inmate in GP at WSP
- Aboriginal student in inner city junior high school.

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

- **Elmar Holenstein**

# Cultural Competence: How?

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

# Aspiring to Cultural Competence: The Why, What and How for Lawyers

Prepared by  
Robert S. Wright, MSW, RSW  
Executive Director Child and Youth Strategy &  
Social Worker in Private Practice  
Member NSBS Race Relations Committee

[www.robertswright.ca](http://www.robertswright.ca)  
[www.culturalclinicalconsultants.ca](http://www.culturalclinicalconsultants.ca)

June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010