

Enhancing Conversations Through Cultural Intuitiveness¹²

"There's so much more to health than health care.... Public health is community development,"
Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and chief executive officer of the Robert Wood Johnson
Foundation³

The Cultural Intuitiveness™ (CI) process provides a means to apply the research that supports the value of attending to cultural perspectives as an impact on our perceptions of ourselves and others which in turn impacts our health. In fact a recent graduate of the Cultural Intuitiveness Institute told our evaluator, "I'm more confident and believe more in myself and what I'm saying."⁴ Is that not the essence of good health?

"This has helped me interact better at home and draw clear boundaries between work and home." This process guides individuals to more effectively and responsibly negotiate differences within their relationships--both personal and professional--and work better together. In other words, CI provides a value-based approach, plus strategies and tools to engage with others by stabilizing these relationships, while decreasing the potential for marginalization within them, thus increasing the possibility of connectedness with each other. "Practicing CI has helped me be more comfortable with who I am and more accepting of others. So I'm not having as many negative biases against others – just accepting people where they're at and that's okay." This is the richness an individual who has sharpened their CI brings to and receives from their relationships.

According to CSII, which developed the Cultural Intuitiveness™ process based on theories concerning the importance of attending to issues of culture in our social and professional relationships: *To be culturally intuitive is to appreciate how your experience, attitude and behavior can minimize offense to others by being truthful and transparent to whom you are in a manner that invites trust, allowing others to hear you and for you to accept what you hear from others.* The practice of Cultural Intuitiveness begins with the assumption that all of us will offend someone at some point, because we each see, experience and react to the world around us differently. The key is to work to minimize the offense. We can do that by being truthful and transparent about whom we are and what we want so that our behaviors invite trust from others. Once we develop that trust with others, our perspectives can be better heard and our words and deeds appreciated and we, in turn, will be better able to appreciate and accept—while not requiring that we understand or agree with--what we hear from others. The CI process requires the adoption and embedding of 5 key values. These values are connectors, contemplation, communication, context and continuation.

¹ Cultural Intuitiveness is the process developed in 2007 through the work of Intuitive Synergy and the Strategic Collaboration Group. More can be found on Facebook at *Cultural Intuitiveness* or online at *communitysystemsonline.com*

² Written by D. G. Mawn, with Carol E. Hays. *NALBOH Newsbrief*. National Association of Local Boards of Health, 1st Qtr, 2013.

³ Reported by Dave Peters, November 1, 2012, for *Minnesota Public Radio* from a gathering of a hundred or so people from Minnesota public health and community development organizations brought together by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis and Wilder Research.

⁴ Responses are from participants of a 1.5 day CI seminar and 1.5 hour monthly follow up for 5 months. Identifying information excluded to protect confidentiality. These reflections were provided through a two points in time evaluation process.

To *Value Connector* is to value outward listening and inward hearing; realizing that the information you take in and reuse is the basis for your thoughts, attitudes, and actions. To be inclusive is hard work and takes time, especially to listen to perspectives that diverge from our own. One CI participant reflected on practicing this value: “I thought I was a really tolerant person, but now I’m finding I *want to hear* other people’s stories.”

To *Value Contemplation* is to value slowing down - which most individuals find very hard to prioritize - in order to move forward. The days are so busy meeting the needs of others that there seems to be little time to set aside to sort through the information they received from others and how they feel about it, think about it, as well as what they want to and need to do about it. Participant reflections on practicing this value include: “I thought this was about me helping others and have learned that it’s really about me helping myself.”

To *Value Communication* is to value the process of speaking, hearing and listening in a manner that creates a safe space for all to be able to reveal and recognize their similarities and differences, living in their truths. As we become more open and hope-filled, we are better positioned to manage the dynamics of differences and move forward productively together. Respect for others is the foundation for this healthy deliberation. Reflecting on this value, a participant concluded: “It often seems there was a lot at stake in terms of win/loss in conversation; now I see it as joint progress.”

To *Value Context* is to value discovering points about the community; realizing your impact and potential impact within the community you live and the community you serve. Assessing the four key conditions of each community context that you live: economic, political, social and communication will increase the ability to assure that your plans are met, and, in turn, perhaps even be strengthened and supported by the context in which you live and work. A respondent reflected on increasing attention to context: “Different situations call for different skills.” While another noted: “It’s made me a better manager.”

To *Value Continuation* is to value your long held interpretations, realizing that you need to allow them to evolve. The process that CI embraces and encourages is one of considered thought, of engagement with others who also have ideas and opinions that are based on varying sources, not in a disordered free for all, but in a manner and process that allows for each person to feel heard and engaged in the decision making process. This approach provides strategic flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing environments with energy, commitment and hope while supporting continued movement forward. Upon integrating the practice of all 5 CI values, a participant concluded: “I feel more hopeful ... and more connected than I’ve ever felt before.” Another concluded: “I didn’t realize how much impact it would have on all aspects of my life.”

By adopting, encouraging and actively practicing Cultural Intuitiveness™, you will deepen your access to the diversity of knowledge, experience and ideas around you, while enriching your attitudes and behaviors. You and those you connect with will be on a stronger footing to respond and adapt to the cultural conditions of the community as it changes, and thereby increasing your health and that of your community.