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Spring 2015

Integrating Sustainability Concepts into a MSW Diversity Course

I chose to intergrate sustainability concepts into the major assignment of the masters-level social work course, Practice Competence in Diverse Communities (MSW 720).

During the previous two iterations of this course that I have taught, students have worked in groups to complete an “In-Service” presentation aimed at increasing the awareness of the background and needs of a particular racial/ ethnic group. The relationship of the racial/ ethnic group to the natural environment had not been included previously; this was the dimension that was added to the exisiting assignment.

My goal was to underscore how cultural history and relationship to the natural environment may impact the worldview and belief systems of people from diverse backgrounds. In social work, we reinforce the need for students to operate from a systems orientation and adopt a person-in-environment perspective. However, too often social work has prized the social environment to the exclusion of the natural world.

Students were divided into four groups for this In-Service assignment: First Nations, African-American, Hmong-American, and Latino. Ability of the four groups to successfully address these concepts varied widely. It was evident during the presentations that some groups (the Hmong-American group, for example) were able to connect the notion of relationship to the natural environment with integral cultural aspects of their assigned racial/ ethnic group. In their presentation, the Hmong-American group discussed the spiritual practices of Hmong people and how the natural world informs those practices. Also highlighted was the strong history of agriculture in the Hmong community, and how that history has shaped the contemporary Hmong community.

I have attached the assignment sheet and highlighted the section that asks students to include attention to the natural environment. Also attached are copies of the slides from two groups: The first, from the Hmong-American group, demonstrates a successful effort at including relationship to the natural environment as an aspect of cultural understanding. The second, from the Latino group, shows the challenges associated with incorporating this content. This group covered cultural values, religion, and dominant views related to mental illness; however, they did not give explicit attention to the relationship of this ethnic group to the natural environment.

In-Service Presentation Proposal

This proposal will not be graded, rather you will receive feedback on it and, if necessary, required to revise it based on the feedback. Five points will be subtracted from your final grade for each aspect of the assignment that is late (i.e., past deadline).

Assigned Racial-Ethnic Group: _____

Group Members: _____

Name of the agency for which your group is providing the In-Service and an email contact for the agency point person:

Briefly identify a challenge in the agency that the In-Service is designed to overcome for your assigned racial-ethnic group:

Grading Criteria (instructor has determined 25% of the content, you must decide how to evaluate the rest, including percentages). Remember to include at least one aspect of the change process as one of your criterion:

1. Brief history of how the group came to be living in Northeastern Wisconsin, including where the group originated from (if applicable) (5%);
2. Discussion of the group's connection to the natural environment (i.e values, spiritual norms, history of agricultural practices, etc.) and any relevant challenges related to this aspect of the group's culture. (5%);
3. Demographic description of the group (focus may be either on: Northeast Wisconsin, a particular city or county in Northeast Wisconsin, or the state broadly), including (5%):
 - a. Percentage of the population relative to other racial-ethnic groups,
 - b. Socioeconomic status of the group relative to other racial-ethnic groups;
4. Slides or handouts distributed before presentation (either emailed 24 hours before or paper copies distributed in class); all sources should be fully referenced according to APA format (5%);
5. Appropriateness of selected readings (5%);
6. _____ (___ %);
7. _____ (___ %);
8. _____ (___ %); etc.

Hmong American group 1 of 3

5/6/2015

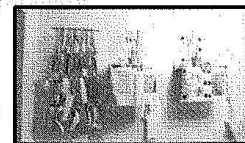
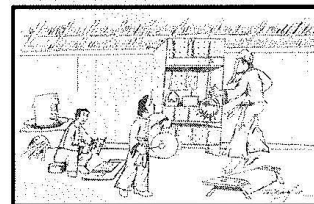
Spirituality

- Contemporary do not follow a single belief system
- Converted to Christianity
- Most maintain traditional spiritual practices
 - Shamanism & Ancestor veneration
 - Spiritual beliefs & health/illness
 - Spiritual dictates physical world
 - Spirits



Hmong Spirits

- Belief in spirits (neeb)
- Altar in home
 - Spirits reside in the sky
 - Shaman can reach these spirits by climbing a ladder to the heavens
- Illness- Hmong believe that illness might be caused by one's soul climbing to the heavens
 - Shaman must go to sky after it to locate and bring it back to the body for a cure

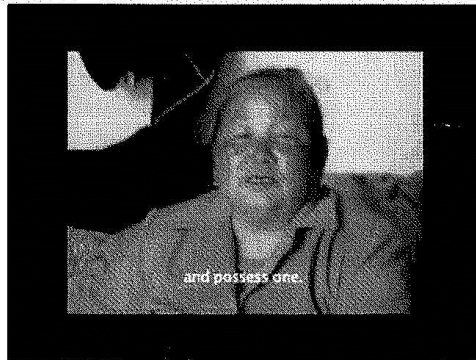
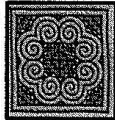
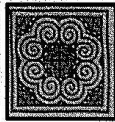


Hmong American group

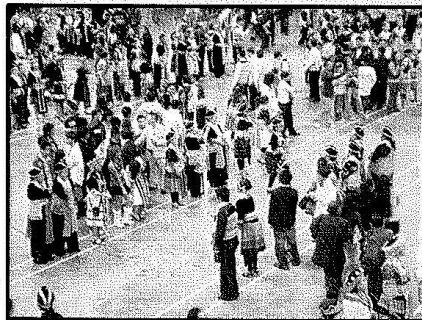
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Culture and Spirituality



Hmong New Year



- Held the first 4 days in 10th lunar month
 - Held in Green Bay early December
 - Created to give thanks to the ancestors & spirits
 - New Beginning
 - Based on religious and cultural beliefs
 - Completion of rice harvest season
 - Cycle of life continues
 - Blessing from Elders

Hmong American group

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Agricultural Practices

- Strong farming roots
 - Hmong were hill tribe from Laos
 - Practiced slash and burn
 - Choose an area, clear brush and burn trees and plant life
 - Ash would be used as fertilizer
 - Plant and harvest fruits, vegetables and corn
- Continue farming in the US
 - They can be seen at various farmer's markets
 - Family Business- Opportunity for grandparents to remain contributing members of the family business



More information: National Hmong American Farmers: <http://www.nhaf.org>

Challenges to Culture



- Modern Healthcare
 - Seen as beneficial but only after traditional practices
 - May encounter resistance to vaccines and long term medications
 - Surgery weakens the body: Puts body at risk of evil spirits
- Marriage
 - Usually done culturally and not legally by US terms

Latino group 1 of 2

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Culture



- Role of a parent for ethnic socialization
 - Development of behavior
 - Ethnic self-identification
 - Ethnic consistency
 - Ethnic knowledge
 - Ethnic preference
- Social and cognitive abilities of a child or adolescent
- Retention of culture exhibited by parents
- Role of mother serves as primary socializing agent

Values

- Support
 - Parental teaching consistent with family priorities
- Obligation
 - Assisting a family member when in need
- Referents
 - Mindful of family during decision making
- Respect
 - Parents should not be interrupted
- Religiosity
 - Strong belief in God

Latino group 2 of 2



Religion

- "About half or more of Mexican-American Catholics say that priests should have the option to marry, and that the priesthood should be open to women" (Donoso, 2014)
- Often associated with Roman Catholic religion
- Mormon and Evangelical Church more predominate
- Integrate religious beliefs into daily family life
- Level of expression depends on affiliation and church
- Approximately 40% attend church at least once a week or more
- Teachings strongly discourage divorce



Mental Illness

- Slow progress for minority children and adolescents
- Mexican American children have a higher prevalence of anxiety disorder when compared to Caucasian children
- Mexican American adolescents have increased psychological distress, higher rates of suicidal ideation, and substance use when reside in the United States when compared to adolescents residing in Mexico
- Minority children and adolescents are often guided to Mental Health Services in educational settings and/or general Human Service providers as opposed to specialized Mental Health providers