Chapter 6

Listening to Speak and Speaking to Be Heard: Empowering African American Parents Through the Oral Tradition

Timothy J. Brown
West Chester University of Pennsylvania, USA

ABSTRACT

The need for cultural competence is important, especially in our schools where administrators, teachers, students, and parents have to bridge the cultural gap in order to educate, to communicate, and to prepare students for a global society. Nowhere is the need for cultural competence more important than in the school system where individuals from different cultural backgrounds engage on a daily basis. This chapter addresses cultural competence in the education system by focusing on the cultural values and practices that distinguish the communication styles of American mainstream culture with African American culture. More specifically, contrasting the American mainstream and African American communication cultural values. This chapter explores strategies for enhancing the communication between administrators, teachers and African American parents. This chapter explores strategies for enhancing the communication between administrators, teachers and African American parents. This approach provides a deeper cultural understanding of the communication practices and strategies of administrators, teachers and African American parents in order to minimize miscommunication and conflict.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why is there a need for administrators/teachers and African American parents to understand the cultural values that underlie the communicative practices that characterize white American mainstream culture and African American culture?
- What are the major differences between the Western Speech Tradition and the African American Oral Tradition?
- What strategies can be implemented to increase cultural competence of white administrators/teachers and African American parents?

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Every social justice movement that I know of has come out of people sitting in small groups, telling their life stories, and discovering that other people have shared similar experiences. -Gloria Steinem

INTRODUCTION

This national museum helps to tell, a richer and fuller picture of who we are... It reaffirms that all of us are America—that African American history is not somehow separate from our larger American story, it’s not the underside of the American story, it is central to the American story. (Obama, 2016)

When speaking at the dedication ceremony for The National Museum of African American History and Culture, then President Barack Obama reinforced the idea that knowing African American history and culture is not separate from but is American culture. Obama’s remarks were a reminder that knowing more about African American history and culture allows us to better relate to and understand the African American experience. When individuals can understand others, they are developing cultural competence which is a vital skill in our diverse society.

The need for cultural competence is important, especially in our schools where administrators, teachers, students, and parents have to bridge the cultural gap in order to educate, to communicate, and to prepare students for a global society (Tichnor-Wagner, Parkhouse, Glazier, & Cain, 2016). Cultural competence necessitates a mutual respect for other cultural perspectives instead of tacitly valuing one perspective over another (Green, 2013; Vazquez-Montilla, Just, & Triscari, 2014). In American culture, cultural competence reflects the “salad bowl” metaphor—that individuals living in this country regardless of their cultural identity and heritage contribute to American society. Embracing difference makes cultural competence possible. When we don’t, it perpetuates ethnocentrism. As Kochman (1998) argued:

The nonreciprocal nature of the process of cultural assimilation of minorities does not permit the mainstream American culture to learn about minority cultural traditions nor benefit from their official social incorporation. It also suggests an unwanted social arrogance: that mainstream American society has already reached a state of perfection and cannot benefit from being exposed to and learning from other (minority) cultural traditions. (pp. 294-295)

Nowhere is the need for cultural competence more important than in the school system where individuals from different cultural backgrounds engage on a daily basis (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016). Cultural competence is especially needed in understanding how different cultural groups communicate.

Therefore, this chapter will address cultural competence in the education system by taking a communication approach at the macro level to examine the cultural values and practices that distinguish the communication practices of white American mainstream culture with African American culture. More specifically, contrasting white American mainstream and African American communication cultural values will reveal strategies for enhancing the communication between white administrators/teachers and African American parents. This approach will result in a deeper cultural understanding of the communication practices and strategies of white administrators/teachers and African American parents in order to minimize miscommunication and conflict.

Highlighting communication cultural values and practices and how they occur in white administrator/teacher and African American parent interactions will better equip African American parents to