

CULTURE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

FIELD EXPERIENCE

HANDBOOK

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"Neighborhood Walk "

Take a walk around the neighborhood with someone, such as a student, from your placement site. Ask the student to show you around, and to tell you about things that you see during your walk. Make sure this is OK with your site supervisor, first.

Then, create a way of portraying the neighborhood, such as:

- Create a photo essay of the neighborhood, and have your student guide help with captions. If you photograph people, ask their permission first!
- Draw sketches of the neighborhood.
- Ask students in your placement site to draw sketches of the neighborhood, and to write about the sketches they drew.
- Write a poem that depicts the neighborhood as descriptively as you can. You can also ask students you are working with to try doing this. If they/you don't know how to get started, start by brainstorming words that come to mind when you think of the neighborhood, such as its sounds, smells, colors, its "feel." Then create phrases from the words. Then try ordering the phrases in an interesting way, adding more descriptive phrases as they come.

“Mapping the Community”

Communities do not usually have definite boundaries that everyone agrees upon. Geographically as well as socially, even though there may be high agreement as to where and who constitutes the community, there are also usually differences in how people define the community, its characteristics, and its boundaries.

Interview at least 5 people who you believe are members of the community being served by the center or agency where you are working, and try get a sense of common as well as diverse perspectives about who and where the community is. It will be helpful if you bring a city map along.

1. Tell me about the community this center or agency serves.

Who are the people in the community? How would you describe them?

2. Show me on a map (if one is available) where the community is, exactly. Where do most of people live? (Some communities are geographically scattered, others are geographically fairly distinct. Don't assume things are one way or the other, get people to describe it for you.)

3. What makes this community a distinct community? What do the people have in common, what kinds of things hold them together?

4. What are the most important places or events where people in the community come together?

5. What are the most important things you would like people who aren't members of this community to know about the community?

“Getting to Know the Agency”

Find out what this agency or community center does. Many students find this a very helpful exercise to do at the beginning of the semester. Here are some suggestions for doing this.

Interview the director and if possible at least 2 staff people. You might also interview someone on the board of directors, if this is feasible. Ask them question such as:

- What are the goals or purposes of this agency or center?
- What kinds of services does it provide? To whom? What programs does it run?
- What is the history of this agency or center? How did it get started here?
- What are the main accomplishments of this agency or center?
- Where does its funding come from?
- Does it sponsor any special community events? Would you recommend one for me to attend?

Gather some print information about the agency or center. Some have handbooks, brochures, newsletters, or scrapbooks.

" Why do People Come Here?"

This is an interview to do with adults in a social service agency. Study the questions carefully before doing this activity, and modify them as needed. They are "generic" questions that could fit a variety of adults coming to a variety of social service agencies, but may not quite fit your situation.

1. Explain who you are, and that you are doing this as a college class assignment for learning more about social service agencies. Make sure the people you interview are aware that this interview is not being required by the agency itself, and that they may decline to participate without losing anything.
2. How did you decide to come to this agency?
 - What problem(s) or need(s) is this agency addressing?
 - How did you hear about it?
 - Were there any special considerations you had to think about before actually coming?
3. Do you know people with similar needs who are not being served by an agency such as this?
 - If they are not being served, why not, do you think?
4. What is the best thing you have gotten out of coming here so far?
5. If I were going to work permanently some day in an agency like this, is there anything I should know or be learning that would help the agency serve clients better?
6. How well do you think the general public understands and supports what this agency is trying to do?
 - How well do they know its purpose?
 - How concerned are people about the need it is addressing?
 - How willing are taxpayers to support it?
 - How understanding are people of the reasons why clients come here?

"Issues of Concern to a Community"

Find out who local residents of the community see as their leaders and/or spokespeople. Be sure you get the residents' perspectives, rather than outsiders' perspectives; often "insiders" will name very different people as their leaders than will "outsiders." Find out what churches and organizations people in the neighborhood affiliate with. In addition to churches, there may be formal organizations (such as NAACP) as well as informal organizations (such as a group of parents that meets periodically). Also find out what media (newsletters, newspapers) serve the neighborhood. Ask about items such as church bulletins, Black or Hispanic newspapers, and community center newsletters. In addition, find out what other media (such as radio stations, magazines) people in the neighborhood "tune in" to. Below are interview questions that you can use to guide this part of your investigation.

1. Who do members of your community see as their leaders?
2. What churches do community members attend?
3. Are there any particular organizations community members belong to?
4. Are there any community centers or organizations (such as the NAACP) that serve the community?
5. Are there any particular newspapers or newsletters that people in the community like to read? Magazines?
6. What radio stations do community members prefer to listen to? What TV stations do community members tend to watch?

This investigation will provide you with a "map" of sources of further information about the community. Although ordinary community residents will be able to tell you a lot about the community, leaders and newsmen serving the neighborhood often have access to a wider range of information than many other residents.

Now, interview 2-3 community leaders, and/or listen to or read media that represents the community, to find out the main issues or concerns currently facing the community. Some questions that can help your investigation include:

1. What problems or issues are currently facing the community?
2. What are the main improvements community members would like to see?
3. What kinds of additional resources could the community best use, and for what?

4. What resources does the community currently have for addressing these issues, and what is the community currently trying to do about them?
5. What are the community's greatest strengths?
6. How can my future profession best contribute to the community?

“Life Histories”

This activity is most appropriate to do with people with whom you already have acquaintance. It involves learning about personal life experiences of people. Do the activity with at least two individuals. Be sure you do not pry into people’s private lives; let them tell you what they wish to disclose. You may prompt people through broad questions, and you can ask for clarification of things you do not understand, but don’t prod people to talk about areas of their lives they seem to prefer not to tell you about. Begin to asking the individual if he or she would mind sharing some personal history with you; be open to sharing some of your own personal history in return, if the individual is interested.

Below are two different ways to approach this.

1. Ask the individual to tell you her or his own personal life history. A reasonable way to start is to say that you are interested in finding out what led people to live in this community, or to hold a particular kind of job. Then you can invite the person to “Tell me something of your own personal history, or of your family’s history.”

2. Give the individual, and yourself, an index card or sheet of paper. Ask the person to put his or her full name in the center. Fill in the four corners with: 1. a date of personal significance, 2. a person of personal significance, 3. an object of personal significance, and 4. a place of personal significance.

When you have both finished, ask the individual to tell you about his or her name, and what is in each of the four corners. You reciprocate by doing the same.

While doing this activity, try to identify both things you have in common, as well as areas of your lives that are different. Be sure to listen carefully, and not to assume similarities or differences prematurely.

"Special Days"

Many communities commemorate events that outsiders are not aware of. Interview about five people from the community (preferably the same ethnic community) to find out:

-- Holidays that are celebrated in the community: you might go through each month and ask people to describe each holiday that is celebrated in the community, especially if you don't know much about it. Even holidays that everyone is familiar with, such as Christmas, may have special community celebrations that you don't know much about.

-- Dinners and awards that churches or other community organizations put on, such as banquets honoring high school graduates.

Find out as much as you can about what will be happening over the next year, what kinds of things happen at each event or celebration, what the purpose of each is, and whether it would be appropriate for you to attend. Try to construct a year-long calendar of events that are important to the community. For example, you would probably be quite welcome to attend a pow-wow, or a Kwanzaa theater production.

"The Arts"

Find out as much as you can about theater, music, or other artistic groups in the local community. Some sources for finding out this information include the city newspaper, local community newspapers, and asking local adults.

Start to fill a box with newspaper clippings, announcements, and programs for events. Over the semester, try to attend as many as you can, and have them as varied as possible. For example, you might attend a bilingual theater production at the Teatro Campesino, a concert that features a classical Mexican guitarist, a Mexican dance, and an art exhibit that features work of local Latino artists.

Also, ask around to find out whether there are any magazines or other materials that relate to art of the group you are learning about. For example, the magazine Visions features African American art at the national level, and includes information about events in various local parts of the nation.

If you are preparing to be a teacher, look for ways to connect these artistic productions with your curriculum. You may need students' help in thinking about possible connections.

“Community History”

Find out about the history of the community where your placement site is located. To do this, interview at least two adults, preferably older adults. Two are suggested because different people usually provide somewhat different “spins” on a community’s history. In your interview, you might ask questions such as:

- How long have you lived in this community? What kinds of changes have you seen over your lifetime here?
- When was the community first established? Who established it?
- Why have people come here to live? What has drawn people?
- What has been the main economic base of the community? How has that changed over time?
- What would you say are one or two of the most significant events that this community has experienced? Tell me about those.
- Where might I learn more about the history of the community?

"Interpersonal Communication Style"

This activity is appropriate when observing two or more members of the same socio-cultural cultural group interacting with each other.

Watch people talking naturally, and if you can do so unobtrusively, write descriptions of their behavior as they talk. Look for things such as:

- What distance do they maintain between each other?
- What kinds of gestures are used?
- In what contexts do people touch each other? How do they touch, and where? (some cultural groups touch a lot, others very little.)
- What do they do to indicate they are listening?
- How does a person "get the floor" when she/he wants to speak? (e.g., does the person simply start talking? wait for an opening? use a hand gesture?)
- What level of loudness or softness of speech do people maintain?

Also, if possible, watch an adult giving directions to, or reprimanding, a child who is a member of the adult's same socio-cultural group. What does the adult say? What nonverbal behavior does the adult use? How does the child respond?

Watch people on more than one occasion, in order to discern communication patterns that are commonly used.

"Listening Exercise"

Before you do this, check with people you are working with to see if it would be appropriate. In some contexts it's fine, in some it isn't.

Identify an informal location, where people (either children or adults) are interacting. This could be a school lunchroom, a playground, a community center, a restaurant, a bar, etc. (Make sure you focus on members of a racial or cultural group different from yourself.)

Listen to what people are talking about. You can add some questions for clarification, if appropriate, but the purpose is to find what interests, concerns, and perspectives people share among themselves. If possible, listen on several occasions to find out which topics occur repeatedly, so you can get a sense of what people are generally interested in (as opposed to one-time or minor topics of conversation).

Use some judgment about whether you are eavesdropping on private conversations or not. If you sense that the people concerned would not want you to listen in, don't.

After listening for about a half-hour or more (listen long enough to really hear something discussed), make a list of the topics that were discussed, and the list of what was said. Do this on more than one occasion. What main topics surface frequently?

"Adult Jobs and Areas of Expertise"

Find out what kinds of jobs adults in the community have, and through talking with a few of them, try to develop an inventory of knowledge areas people have related to their work. Ask questions such as, "I don't know much about what a person actually does in that job, can you tell me how a day goes?"

Also, find out about some additional things adults know a lot about. For example, someone may be good at fixing cars, or cooking, or growing things, or taking care of sick people. You can ask questions such as, "What kinds of things are some of the women (or men) on your block especially good at doing?"

Do not probe into illegal activities. Children sometimes volunteer information they shouldn't; older children and adults sometimes simply look uncomfortable if they suspect you are investigating illegal activities. You can direct conversations with examples, such as, "What about cooking? Are some people in the neighborhood really good cooks?" Or, "What about fixing things? If your bike broke, would you take it to anyone in the neighborhood?"

Based on these interviews, develop a description of areas of expertise and knowledge that people in the community have.

"Name Calling"

These are interview questions about experiences with prejudice. They work best with older students. Plan to interview about five students. Think through how you expect the students to answer them in deciding whether or not to do this activity. Also, some people consider these questions sensitive, so definitely clear them first with your supervisor.

1. Tell me about a time in which some students were making fun of another student.
 - What did the teacher(s) or supervisor(s) do about it?
 - How did students react to what the teacher(s) or supervisor(s) did or did not do?
 - Might the situation have been handled better, do you think? If so, how?
 - Did the teacher(s) or supervisor(s) do anything to teach kids not to make fun of others like the one getting picked on, in the future? If so, what?

2. Can you think of times when girls/boys (opposite sex of the interviewee) have picked on other kids or the basis of sex, or stereotyped your sex unfairly?
 - Tell me about it; what did they do or say?
 - What if anything did the teacher(s) or supervisor(s) do about it?
 - How effective was what they did?
 - Would you have liked to have seen them do something different?

3. Have you been aware of other kids being prejudiced against other racial or ethnic groups?
 - How did you know they were?
 - What did the teacher(s) or supervisor(s) do about it?
 - How effective was what they did?
 - Would you have liked to have seen them do something different?

4. Can you think of times when kids with disabilities have been picked on or called names?
 - Tell me what happened?
 - What did the teacher(s) or supervisor(s) do about it?

5. Tell me about the most effective thing you have seen an adult do to help kids who are different get along better and appreciate each other more.
 - How do you know it worked?
 - Why do you think it worked? (in other words, what made it work?)