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I Can See Clearly Now

Kenneth A. Tucker

Southeast Community College

**This session presents new and diverse perspectives on student leadership.
Leadership is not a set of personal attributes.**

Morale

The I Can See Clearly Now Multicultural Leadership Retreat was carefully constructed to engender change on a deeply personal level in multicultural awareness and, more significantly, to learn how that awareness translates into leadership responsibility. Leadership as understood at this retreat is not embodied in a person or persons but is regarded as a process. It is the process of one person acting in a leadership role to help another person become empowered. Burns (1978) refers to this type of leadership as transformational leadership which "occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns quotation in Boatman, *A New Student Leadership Paradigm: Diverse Perspectives on Developing Leadership*, 1996, monograph in press, p. 20). In her paper, "A New Student Leadership Paradigm: Diverse Perspectives on Developing Leadership," Boatman (1996) also writes, "... This perspective suggests that leadership is not a set of personal attributes or an assigned or emergent position, but rather an activity, a state of mind, a process that creates an organization or community's culture or vision." Therefore, based upon this understanding of leadership, students during this retreat were encouraged to view themselves as participants in the process of change, each having a responsibility to challenge racism, discrimination, and the existing societal structure wherein a dominant culture prevails.

Strategy: EDIT Technique

The retreat identifies contributions of the various groups in society; however, the focus is more on how to learn rather than on learning specific information. Learning in this instance is not regurgitation of information, nor is it information gathering. Instead, during the retreat learning is viewed as a process in which new understanding is manifested in changed behavior. To accomplish this, the EDIT technique as expounded by Kolb in his book, *Experimental Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, was employed.

EDIT is an acrostic for Experience, Describe, Interpret, and Transfer. In this approach, students experience the learning event, then describe what happened as the experience occurred. They infer what the experience meant by answering the essential question, "what did I learn from the experience?" Finally, they transfer what was learned from the experience to other contexts.

During the retreat, students experienced the learning event through the brown eye-blue eye exercise conducted by Jane Elliott. In this exercise, participants were labeled inferior or superior based on eye color. Elliott declared brown-eyed people to be better and more

intelligent, and granted privileges that were denied to the blue-eyed group. Students in the blue-eyed group learned how it feels to belong to a condemned group that could never win. For three hours, the students experienced/practiced discrimination, verbal abuse, and victimization.

Following this session, students described what happened while the experience occurred. In small groups, students individually and collectively wrote down their feelings during the exercise under the heading "My Thoughts About This." One student wrote; "Scared of myself, the way I was so able to hate others so readily." Another wrote, "Some people got really pissed off and some even left, I wish I had that luxury."

During the retreat, students were allowed to infer what the experience (Elliott's presentation and subsequent sessions) meant by answering the essential question, "What did I learn from the experience?" Along these lines, students shared their thoughts by writing on four posters with the headings, "things I am learning about me" and "things I am learning about culture." Under the heading "things I am learning about me:" "There are many things I need to change." "I'm not quite sure I'll not mismanage power!!" "I've learned I like the shoe to be on the other foot for once."

Finally, students were encouraged to transfer what was learned from the experience to other contexts, making theory-to-practice applications. Students wrote down their thoughts under the heading, "What should/can I do about this?" Responses in this case included: "Stop [racist] remarks when they are said. Bring it to people's attention as they do it." "Bring our ideas [about multicultural issues] to our schools and our communities." "Minorities need to change their attitude 'minorities vs. minorities'." "Be careful of our own use of stereotypes and let people know about correct prototypes." "Define people as individuals, not groups."

Conclusion

In Nebraska's schools, a person walking down the school hall would meet 88 White faces before meeting one person of color. Little wonder that it's nearly impossible for White students to understand what it is like to be a minority, or for persons of color to understand what it is like to be significant in the school culture. However, in the safe, controlled retreat environment, both White students and students of color benefit from and experience the power of inclusiveness.

PRESENTER

Kenneth A. Tucker is a Recruitment and Retention Specialist (Multicultural Students) at Southeast Community College in Lincoln, Neb. A native of Nassau, Bahamas, Tucker earned a B.S. in organization communication and an M.A. in education from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Tucker has more than 20 years' experience as a minister, counselor, public speaker, and broadcaster. He was a founding member of Operation Hope, a crack cocaine rehabilitation program in the Bahamas, and was producer and host for a radio call-in program about drug addiction, *A Time For Hope*.

Tucker has produced and hosted several religious programs which were broadcast

internationally. In recent years, Tucker has been a speech instructor, Coordinator of Multicultural/International Students Admissions, and Coordinator of Special Projects for the Office of the Vice Chancellor for University Relations at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Tucker has presented at the Speech Communication Association 1994 conference, Washington D.c., the National Association of Multicultural Education Region 7 annual conference, 1996, Kansas City, Mo., and the Minority Student Today 1996 conference, San Antonio, Texas.