

Final Project – CSP 6035

Leslie Meyer

Bowling Green State University

Pre-conference Workshop Description & Background of Presenter

I attended the pre-conference workshop called “Does Race Matter?” that was part of the Tri-State Diversity Conference held on February 15, 2012 in Cincinnati, Ohio. I contacted the presenter, Dr. Michael Washington, to ask if I could create a workshop evaluation for participants to complete at the conclusion of the workshop and he agreed. Dr. Washington is a professor of history and the past director of the Black Studies Program at Northern Kentucky University. He is recognized nationally for his expertise in a process used to achieve positive outcomes called “The Undoing Racism Approach to Corrective Social Change.”

The purpose of this project was to collaborate with an experienced professional and conference presenter and grow in the area of multicultural competence, while at the same time gaining invaluable experience in the areas of evaluation and assessment.

Evaluation Design & Analysis of Data

Prior to creating the evaluation, I talked via phone with Dr. Washington about his presentation. In addition, I met with my professor for educational research to get his insights on designing a conference evaluation. I designed the evaluation with the input I received from Dr. Washington, my professor, and my own internet research. Attached is a final copy of the evaluation I created (See Appendix A). Prior to distributing the evaluation, I had several people review it and provide feedback. In addition, I timed three people to get an idea of how much time I should ask Dr. Washington to allow for participants to complete the evaluation. At the conclusion of the pre-conference workshop, I collected the evaluations and analyzed the data (See Appendix B). In total, I received thirty completed evaluations. The participant breakdown by gender was 20% males, 73.33% females and 6.67% who did not indicate gender on their evaluation. In terms of race, 33.33% of the participants identified as White, 53.33% identified as

African American, 6.67% identified as Multi-Racial, and 6.67% did not indicate race on their evaluation.

I wanted to share a few interesting findings from the data analysis. A majority of the participants (66.67%) had previously attended a workshop/conference session specifically focused on race or racism. Participants were asked to indicate the level at which their current work exposes them to issues of race on a regular basis and 26.25% of participants indicated that their work does not at all expose them to issues of race on a regular basis. Of the 26.25% who responded in this manner, 20% were White and 6.25% were African American. In addition, participants were asked to indicate the level at which their current work exposes them to issues of racism on a regular basis and 32.5% of participants indicated that their work does not at all expose them to issues of racism on a regular basis. Of the 32.5% who responded in this manner, 20% were White and 12.5% were African American. Over 56% of the African American participants indicated that their work exposes them a lot to issues of race on a regular basis, whereas only 25% of African Americans indicated that their work exposes them a lot to issues of racism on a regular basis. Participants who were exposed to issues of race and racism at work on a regular basis shared through narrative comments that they work with underserved populations or are a minority in their workplace. In addition, several participants indicated that they did not see a distinguishing difference between issues of race and racism at work. This indicated to me that more instruction on the differences between race and racism would be beneficial.

When asked to indicate their previously knowledge about race, 46.67% of the participants had at least some knowledge about race and 33.33% had at least some knowledge about racism. The narrative comments indicated that participants had a hard time distinguishing the differences between race and racism with this question as well. Some of the reasons participants indicated

that they had a great deal of knowledge about race and racism were related to having to deal with it as a minority, having attended previous diversity trainings and conferences, or having taken a college course.

Participants were asked to rate the facilitator and 80% of the respondents indicated that Dr. Washington knew the subject matter a great deal. Only a little over 16% of respondents felt that Dr. Washington somewhat answered questions clearly. Over half of the participants also indicated that Dr. Washington used appropriate examples, presented information that would help them, and related the program content to real-life situations a great deal. A majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop objectives were met, that the subject matter was useful to them both personally and professionally, and that the information presented could be applied to their work.

An open-ended question on the evaluation asked participants to share how they would improve the workshop. Some of the answers included spending a lot less time on participant introductions at the beginning of the workshop, increasing the dialogue among participants, including more structure and framework, providing related literature and handouts to help participants to follow along, having an opportunity to role play, and including more discussion on other races besides Whites and African Americans.

Another open-ended question asked participants to share what they were looking for from the workshop but did not get. Some of the responses included having more information on how to open and engage in dialogues about race and racism with diverse and predominately White audiences, providing participants with concrete skills and strategies and not just knowledge, and having more dialogue among participants.

One series of questions asked participants to indicate to what extent they understood certain topics as a result of attending the workshop. It was interesting to find that over 20% of the participants indicated that they already knew about the importance of networking, the functions of institutional gatekeeping, the idea that accountability is a sacred value and practice, the value of authenticity in terms of building and sustaining positive, productive relationships, and the value of history in enhancing cross-cultural communication. In addition, over 40% of participants indicated that they understand very well the function of institutional gatekeeping and the value of history in enhancing cross-cultural communication as a result of attending the workshop.

Participants were asked an open-ended question about how they think the workshop will help them in their work. Some of the responses revealed that the workshop made folks think about their own biases, assumptions, and stereotypes and how they may influence their work. In addition, participants indicated that the workshop content helped them to consider and be more mindful of their role as an institutional gatekeeper and made them want to take action and not remain silent regarding issues of difference.

The majority of participants (67.67%) indicated that they were thinking differently about race and racism as a result of attending the workshop. In fact, 90% of White participants compared to only 56.25% of African-American participants answered in this manner. Several of the participants indicated that the workshop content helped them to begin to “think outside the box” in regard to issues involving race and racism.

Participants were asked to rate their degree of understanding on a variety of topics both before and after the workshop. Nothing in this section stood out as surprising. All participants

indicated a higher level of understanding on these topics after the workshop than before the workshop.

Lastly, participants were asked to reflect on the workshop and indicate if they plan to do anything different as a result of attending. Everyone who responded to the question answered “yes” and some even shared what specifically they planned to do differently in the space provided. Some of the responses included engaging in more cross-cultural conversations, finding out what underserved populations really need instead of making assumptions, incorporating more about the history and social construction of race in conversations about diversity, communicating with others that race matters, and the importance of becoming more culturally competent.

My Evaluation of the Pre-conference Workshop

I was so excited that Dr. Washington accepted my offer to prepare an evaluation for his pre-conference workshop and it was exciting to finally meet him face-to-face after talking via phone several times leading up to the workshop. Dr. Washington is passionate about helping others grow in their multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. He began the workshop with a short introduction about his background as a professor. Then, he asked each of the thirty plus workshop participants to introduce themselves and share a little bit about their work and what they wanted to get out of the conference. This took almost forty-five minutes, which proved to be a significant chunk of time since the pre-conference workshop session was only four hours. While I thought it was interesting to learn more about who was in the room, as a conference presenter, I think it is critical to consider how best to format introductions when you have only a limited amount of time.

Dr. Washington asked the audience the question, “Does Race Matter?” He talked about how race was socially constructed. He said that while it should not matter, it does indeed matter significantly. He shared with the audience that his objective for the half-day workshop was to facilitate a productive discussion on race and racism so that workshop participants could gain a better understanding of race and racism and be able to implement quality and equitable services.

Before the dialogue began, Dr. Washington used a flip chart to create a contract with all of the conference participants. He said that the purpose of the contract was to establish equitable and accountable relationships among conference participants. Dr. Washington explained that discussions on race and racism often get emotional so it is always best to establish ground rules in a contract. He titled the contract, “Parameters for Positive Dialogue.” The contract included the following: engage in active listening, show respect for each other, be honest in every interaction, say what is on your mind, and participate with a willing spirit. He asked for a show of hands for those who agreed with the contract and he said that anyone who did not agree with the points of the contract should leave. As a presenter, one could design the contract in a more collaborative fashion. For example, Dr. Washington could have asked the participants to help create the parameters of the contract or he could have list parameters that he typically used when facilitating difficult dialogues and ask participants if they agreed with them or had any additional parameters that they would like to add.

Dr. Washington touched on the idea that one must be willing to take risks when participating in difficult discussions about race and racism. He said that folks often stop before they even get started trying to engage in problem solving. He called this “paralysis of analysis.” He said it is common for people to “get stuck” before they even learn about all sides of an issue. He said people are conditioned to stay “inside the box” and accept the status quo. He went on to

explain that the conformity to being normal is important to the socialization process. He talked about how the word “normal” is relative to the context one uses to describe “normal.” He said that normality perpetuates inequality. He talked about the difference between equity and equality. He said that equity is the opportunity for fairness and equality is about portion and is often unfair. He used the example of a family with three children who were given \$100 for support and another family with six children who were also given \$100. This distribution is equal but not equitable because one family has three children and the other family has six children.

Dr. Washington posed the question, “Why are people poor?” and the audience brainstormed ideas, which Dr. Washington recorded on a flip chart. Dr. Washington then presented a scenario where he asked the audience to consider standing in line to check out at the grocery store behind a young woman with four children whose cart was overfilled. This particular woman steps in front of you and you only have a few items. Others come behind you with only a few items too, and begin talking about the woman and her children. The woman’s credit card is denied and the people behind you start commenting on why the woman is poor. He asked the audience to consider what comments these folks might have made regarding why the woman was poor. In comparing the two lists, he talked about the institutional perspective of racism and classism and the personal perspective that includes our own biases, perceptions, and stereotypes. His point was that we have to talk about class if we want to have a meaningful conversation about race. He talked about how classism was constructed because we live in a capitalist society.

Dr. Washington touched on the dangers in treating underrepresented populations we work with as clients instead of a constituency. When we treat underrepresented populations as clients,

he said that we have a tendency to place minorities in the role of victim and assume that poor people cannot communicate what they need. He advocated for treating minorities as a constituency. In this role, one works with minorities to determine their specific needs and underrepresented groups become part of the conversation. When minorities are not included in the conversation it keeps underserved populations dependent on privileged groups. One who is privileged cannot assume that they know what someone from an underrepresented population needs more than that specific person from the underrepresented population knows what they need. Dr. Washington shared that effective outcomes result from a place of honesty where one is willing to listen to and show respect toward others.

Dr. Washington introduced the meaning of an institutional gatekeeper and shared that we all have a role as a gatekeeper. We work to keep certain people in and certain people out. We frequently have the ability to grant or deny access to something or someone. We make decisions on who gets a job, who is admitted into a particular program, etc. A gatekeeper often functions to keep the status quo. We all have the authority to change peoples' lives and provide greater access and it is important for each of us to consider our role as a gatekeeper.

Next, Dr. Washington talked about internalized racial oppression and how people who have been oppressed have bought into stereotypes that others have about them. When folks battle with internalized racial oppression they have a difficult time seeing beyond the categories people place them in. People often stay where they think they belong.

Dr. Washington shared about internalized racial superiority, too. He said that one of the best examples of this is being White and never having to wake up each day and think about being White. Being White in the United States is seen as being "normal" and part of the majority group.

Dr. Washington spent some time talking about the role history has played in the construction of race. He said that race even puts Blacks against other Blacks when race is considered in conjunction with class. The function of race is to maintain a classist society. Race is often used to pit people against each other. Dr. Washington talked about the importance of helping minorities develop a sense of consciousness about who they are and what they are capable of doing. He said that it is critical for folks to have a supportive community willing to forge trusting relationships.

Dr. Washington said that folks struggle with how to begin to have safe conversations about race. He encouraged the audience to take advantage of reactive ways and to use incidents that take place around race as opportunities to dialogue. For example, he said that when one notices a disparity, they should bring it to someone's attention that can help to take action about it. He talked about the importance of having ethical boundaries around these challenging conversations and shared that these conversations should be rooted in reality.

Overall, I thought the workshop was interesting, but Dr. Washington was somewhat unorganized as a presenter and did not seem clear on the points he wanted to convey. Dr. Washington's passion and enthusiasm were evident however, and very contagious. You could tell that he was very knowledgeable on issues of race and racism. In his introduction, he made it seem as though the bulk of the workshop was going to involve engaging in difficult conversations, when in reality we spent most of the time listening to him talk. I think this was a missed opportunity because I would have enjoyed talking with others at my table about some of the topics he covered. It would have been interesting to draw on one another's thoughts and experiences. As I mentioned earlier, much time was also spent developing a contract, but there was little time for participants to actually engage in conversation. In addition, throughout the

workshop, Dr. Washington used a lot of terminology that he often did not clearly introduce or explain. He also provided no outline for the discussion and the discussion periodically got off track.

Recommendations

I learned much from the experience of developing a workshop evaluation, analyzing the data, and attending the pre-conference workshop and I am grateful that I took advantage of the opportunity to design my own project. One of the most important things I learned about developing a conference evaluation is that it is critical to know how you want to analyze the data prior to collecting the data. In hindsight, I wish Dr. Washington and I would have talked about the data analysis piece as we were considering the questions we wanted to include. In doing so, I think we would have been more clear from the onset about how the data could inform us about both Dr. Washington as a facilitator and the learning outcomes of the participants.

Dr. Washington wanted to include a space on the survey for an identification number. The identification number was going to be used to make certain that we received all surveys that were distributed. I pre-numbered the surveys in the lower right corner and several people assisted with distributing the surveys. We had extra copies of the surveys and in the end, the surveys were distributed, but not in a sequential order. In the future, I would consider asking participants to choose a four-digit number to write on their survey.

As a presenter, I also think that providing an outline to keep me structured as a facilitator and to keep the audience focused is a good idea. Perhaps I would use a PowerPoint presentation to highlight key points, but at the very least, I think it would be beneficial to provide an agenda with the information to be covered. After a workshop break, I liked how Dr. Washington did a

brief recap of the previous discussion and then provided a brief overview of what was coming next. It is also important to allow adequate time for questions.

As a presenter, I also learned that one must be mindful of the time so that the workshop ends on a high note. Dr. Washington ran short on time and had to end a conversation about the issues of difficult dialogues before having a chance to close with practical strategies for how to address challenges when talking about race and racism. I think it is important to make certain that you leave the audience in a better place than you found them. This makes me realize, again, the importance of managing one's time wisely and not spending too much time, for example, on introductions.

I also think it would be helpful to incorporate active learning strategies such as group discussions and think-pair-share activities within the lecture to hold participants' attention and engage them in the learning process. Overall, I think folks were disappointed that there was little to know opportunity to share with those sitting next to them and the room was set up with small round tables that would have worked nicely for small group discussion. In addition, highlighting a few books to peak participants' interest in pursuing more knowledge after the conference seemed to be something that folks appreciated.

As a presenter, I feel that using a projector in a large conference room may be more effective than a small flip chart on an easel. Some participants commented that they had trouble reading the notes Dr. Washington wrote on the chart paper. In addition, using a microphone in a large room is another way to keep the audience focused. Dr. Washington frequently went back and forth between using one and I found that somewhat distracting.

When using an evaluation tool, the presenter should use the same terminology during the workshop that he/she uses on the evaluation. Several terms were not introduced at all or were

not discussed in a way that participants were able to recall the term and several participants noted this on their evaluation comments.

Lastly, I appreciated Dr. Washington's genuine passion for his work with issues around race and racism. Based on the comments shared in the evaluations, this also mattered much to conference participants. Even though there were things Dr. Washington could have done to improve his facilitation style, his enthusiasm and passion that seemed to shine through effortlessly throughout the workshop was something that left a positive impact on me.