Cross-Cultural Dynamics

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**Assignment #3 – Essay**

1. Write a 5-page essay based on one (1) of the three (3) items below:

a. Write a paper highlighting a cross-cultural experience that involved a project or

work-related activity to which you could have applied Community Development

principles. Discuss principles you violated and principles you used. Give a

synopsis of, now being aware of the principles, you could have proceeded for a

positive outcome.

b. Develop a project plan related to your work that will focus on a cross-cultural

strategy and enumerate practical applications of the Community Development

principles.

c. Choose a factual event in a cross-cultural setting from books, media, or personal

knowledge that was development-focused and critique it through the grid of the

10 principles.

2. Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of eleven scholarly research sources (two books and the

remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

Developing a successful culturally heterogenous multi-family subsidized housing model

Using the DMV or District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia region as a model, a majority of residents in one affordable housing complex are usually comprised of one predominant ethnicity. This paper attempts to provide a conceptual model of an intercultural and cross-cultural demography in subsidized or affordable housing which provides specific benefits that a heterogenous demography would not. Although there is a dearth of literature on cultural diversity in subsidized housing, this proposed model will be based on various cross-cultural and intercultural constructs that may catalyze this type of housing.

Subsidized housing as an economic construct solves housing insecurities and contributes to food security for low-income families. Ozer & Jacoby (2022) offer a definition of subsidized housing that is “A term used to refer to a diversity of public and private sector housing that is 1) financially supported by a subsidy, 2) rented or sold below market rates, and 3) allocated based on social welfare and political criteria. It also tends to be built at scale using standardized designs” (p. 2).

Creating and sustaining diversity in subsidized or affordable housing developments can have varied meanings. Community diversity can be in the context of age, income, household composition, or ethnicity (Levin, Santiago & Arthurson, 2022). This paper will focus on ethnic and cultural diversity reviewing both cross-cultural and intercultural constructs. A focus will also be placed on the benefits of an intercultural housing model such as social capital, social bonding, an intersection of economic, racial, and ethnic socialization, and finally representation of the Kingdom of God. In the context of mixed-income communities or social mixing, Levin, Santiago & Arthurson (2022) have highlighted various negative effects of social mixing such as the possible disruption of kinship networks as well as class power. This may or may not apply to a housing development where there is intercultural socialization but income on average in these communities is the same.

Current intercultural literature has pointed out that traditional interculturalists propagated an essentialist model of interculturalism and pedagogy that did not appreciate the distinctness of one particular culture but instead fused cultures (Ferri, 2022; Dasli & Simpson, 2022). Essentially, this ideology celebrates or recognizes one part of a culture or ethnicity that fits in with Western society at the same time promoting an unstainable ego of knowledge regarding the other. A cross-cultural or intercultural subsidized housing model would face the challenges of the current cultural competency construct. In a building, where everyone is expected to get along and meld into one culture, the uniqueness and distinctness of each culture would have to be harnessed.

This is the challenge of housing developers, property managers, and surprisingly architects. Ozer & Jacoby (2022) illuminate the need for the function and design of subsidized housing to cater to cultural habits, traditions, and lifestyles. Many previously built senior citizen complexes, for instance, include chapels that would be open to any religious practice. Mesquita (2022) suggests moving from cultural competence to humility. Following Mesquita’s necessity for humility in the context of managing a subsidized housing complex, managers, staff, and residents work and live in a state of not knowing everything about each other and must have a willingness to get to know each other.

The model for this proposed inter-cultural subsidized housing model would be progressive. Designing, advertising, and post-planning the complex would move from initially a multi-cultural community towards attracting applicants from various cultures and ethnicities in the same income bracket. It is important to note that advertising a multicultural community must follow the guidelines of fair housing laws so that each unit is first come first serve and the criteria to live in the building is not based on race or ethnicity but income, credit, and criminal history.

This multi-cultural community would then become cross-cultural where amenities and apartment layouts have been designed to meet the needs of different cultures with different-sized families. The cross-cultural element proceeds interculturalism since in cross-cultural communities, differences and similarities are apparent and events, activities, or social services are designed to accommodate all cultures present. The post-planning after residents have moved in would then go into an intercultural phase where the various cultures not only live in the same space and co-exist but there is an exchange of ideas and facilitation of activities and dialogue that highlight the uniqueness of each culture. Each culture intermingles with the other cultures.

Of course, there are many challenges for families from various cultures living in the same space. Aririguzoh (2022) poignantly states “Naturally, there have been miscommunications and misunderstandings because people judge others based on their cultural values” (p. 2). On a positive note, Aririguzoh (2022) follows in that no matter our ethnicity, we want to communicate and understand as well as be appreciated and be respected by others and that we express our identity through communication.

A major barrier in a cross-cultural setting is language. This can be overcome by nonprofits sponsoring language lessons and residents leading classes themselves. Of course, it may be expected that only basic words and words that express activities of necessity would be learned but because of the effort shown, respect and cohesion amongst residents can be developed. Language is the most obvious but not the only barrier to communication. In relating the dynamics of cross-cultural communication, Aririguzoh (2022) emphasizes how values as well as ideals, and biases interplay in communication. She asserts that each culture articulates a particular value and that the prioritization of one value by one culture leads to difficulties in cross-cultural communication with another culture that does not hold that same value.

Aririguzoh (2022) cites five significant values of Hofstede (1980) that influence cross-cultural communication to include: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity roles, and long-time orientations. The development of cross-cultural communication because of the emphasis on different values can also be a blessing, Aririguzoh (2022).

In a building where the demographics comprise various ages, genders, mixed family composition, and ethnicities, the preservation of culture cannot be overlooked. Mei, Canham, & Battersby (2023) inform that the idea of cultural safety, a subcategory of cultural competence, originated in the field of nursing and the medical field in general, to improve the safety of unrepresented individuals. Mei, Canham, & Battersby (2023) describe cultural safety as “an environment where individuals feel respected, valued, and safe from cultural harm or discrimination” (p. 14).

Continuing with an interdisciplinary approach, using the research of Rich & Bruenig (2022) is appropriate. Rich & Bruenig's (2022) application of cultural safety in the discipline of sports and leisure is appropriate in the context of cross-cultural subsidized housing. They characterize cultural safety as  “recognizing intersectionality and the diversity of identities and social structures” (p. 366). While implementing Housing First Initiatives, Mei, Canham, & Battersby (2023) in their efforts to increase cultural safety as well as humility, developed a Culturally-Responsive Planning guide that can serve as a resource to housing providers, and social service providers. See Mei, Canham, & Battersby (2023) for the complete resource tool.

Many fields and disciplines have incorporated cultural competency and cultural sensitivity into the training of staff and leaders. Property management should be no different. A property manager not only manages physical assets but also manages maintenance staff, vendors, and contractors as well as manages the resident dynamics and is enmeshed in the lives of the residents who live in the building. Mei, Canham, & Battersby (2023) offer advice on how those who work in a cross-cultural setting can become culturally responsive. They suggest first understanding and tailoring to the needs of the individual values, beliefs, and meanings shaped by various sociocultural environments. Mesquita (2022) extends the concept of “meaning” in advising that all groups which may include cohorts, different socioeconomic groups, different religions or cultures, and even different family cultures may provide emotions with their meaning.

This effort would be especially significant in a cross-cultural low-income senior citizens' apartment building. Seniors are at an age where they have amassed years of cultural traditions and set value systems. If religious, these seniors are usually set in their belief system. Older adults also bring years of positive and negative life experiences as well as years of trauma. Next, Mei, Canham, & Battersby (2023) suggest considering and honoring cultural and linguistic differences. This step facilitates earning and maintaining trust coinciding with an effort to address biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and assumptions. Housing agencies and property managers exist to provide a service to those housed, not just four walls. Honoring the differences of each resident shows that you are inclusive, open to diversity, and culturally competent.

The degree of trust between resident and manager defines the level of proxemics in the relationship. If a property manager is of a different ethnicity and shows no interest in other cultures, residents are more prone to not trust leadership. The relationship will be transactional only with no professional intimacy taking place. This will result in less transparency about issues that may be occurring in the building community. Residents will feel burdensome or be hesitant to report deficiencies and even reticent to report discord amongst themselves or crimes they have witnessed either in the building or the surrounding area. When residents trust management and staff, they often desire to get closer to the staff, closing the physical and emotional distance between them. They are usually excited to share aspects of their culture. For instance, residents may want to introduce art that is representative of their homeland, they may have suggestions for unique cultural activities, and they may have a desire to share stories of their heritage and family traditions. This enhances not only the residents’ living experience but also the workplace for the staff.

Emotions are another component of cultural dynamics. Mesquita (2022) asserts “Emotions are the currency of many of these intercultural encounters, yet we do not all use the same currency” (p. X). Mesquita (2022) warns facilitators and actors in cross-cultural environments to be careful of cultural assumptions. Tensions and emotions can grow high between a property manager/resident in what can be viewed as a top/bottom dynamic. This is where the aforementioned humility approach comes into play. Managers and residents may disagree, or frustration may set in because of misunderstandings. Because a manager may think he or she is in charge, a state of “emotional imperialism” (Mesquita, 2022) may set in. Mesquita (2022) offers a counter approach by building “on emotions for a shared understanding of humanity” (p. 21). In this moment of tension and hopefully an insertion of humility, instead of emotional imperialism, both parties would do well with what Mesquita (2022) suggests by explaining our emotions in lieu of the fact they are neither “natural nor universal” (p. 21).

Markle, G. (2019) introduces the Grid-group cultural theory which can facilitate the development of this cross-cultural and intercultural housing model. The theory comprises four dimensions, which are often applied in an organizational, corporate body context. Because of the theory’s assessment and nuance, along with its capability for broader cultural variations (Jeroen & Heidi, 2021), it is appropriately applied in this context as well. The four dimensions are fatalism, hierarchy, individualism, and egalitarianism. Because an apartment complex is a community, and even represents a micro-society, its residents or citizens, especially in a multicultural building, will exemplify each of these four dimensions because of life experiences, family culture, and socializations that have occurred at home, work, and in society in general.

Each resident’s socio-cultural background will determine if the resident thrives more or desires a more egalitarian community in which the power balance between residents is equal (no one culture or resident receives more favor than the other); whether they are individualistic will also be revealed, where there is no resident spokesperson and even competition may ensue, vying for attention from the management. One set of residents may prefer a more hierarchal community where there are rules and regulations and each resident or cultural group has its place or finally a group of residents may be complacent in the fatalist category. The residents in the fatalist category are not active participants in the overall culture of the community, feel they have no control, submit to community and cultural rules, and are just surviving life in the complex. Markle (2019) describes the grid’s cultural representation as “each culture has its own orientation to nature and specific conceptualization of needs and resources by which its members justify their set of behavioral strategies” (p. 116).

Design implementations and architectural considerations would have to be intentional for an intercultural subsidized housing model and would need to be at the forefront of policy. Design planning is based on the needs and habits of the residents who are intended to live in the building. As Ozer & Jacoby (2022) emphasize “Design controls are shaped by knowledge of, or assumptions on, household com-positions, daily routines, user needs, and wider social and cultural expectations that determine what housing is deemed adequate” (p. 4). Ozer & Jacoby (2022) also assert that subsidized housing outcomes are considerate of both socio-cultural housing expectations and political and economic context. In tandem with architectural design, asset management is another key component in cross-cultural, intercultural subsidized housing. Sharam (2023) emphasized asset management’s responsibility is to not only respond to financial and environmental needs but social and cultural needs.

A cross-cultural residential development with intercultural practices has many benefits. Not only social cohesion but also social capital where resources and opportunities are gained through relationships. Tolerance, respect, and honor will eventually shift from one’s residential dwelling to one’s outside activities and social settings such as church and the grocery store. Healing can take place as a result of cross and interculturalism. Once an understanding of other cultures has taken place, once relationships have been created, once an internal assessment of one’s pride has been eradicated and a certain level of competency has developed, biases are broken down, stereotypes are no longer utilized, and friendships emerge based on character.

The eventual goal is community development as well as Kingdom representation. This requires a shift from multiculturalism to cross-culturalism and finally interculturalism. This transition relies on literature that states a multicultural community, although diverse cultures may co-exist, is a divided community. In their research, Pier-Luc, Sealy & Tariq (2023), identify tensions in the literature between multiculturalism and interculturalism. They found that much of the literature accuses multiculturalism of encouraging separation, avoiding conflict, submitting to essentialism, and flirting with cultural relativism. Pier-Luc, Sealy & Tariq (2023) attempt to intersect the multicultural, intercultural, and cosmopolitan ideals and insert that in Britain, interculturalism is seen as community cohesion with a focus on inter-group contact and mixing to reduce prejudice and enhance cohesion. Property managers and other stakeholders who work in cross-cultural vocations should, as Mesquita (2022) demands, communicate with the expectation of finding differences not only similarities.

The manager will know that a true community has developed when social conflicts are minimal, residents willingly share resources and give to each other what the other needs, cohesion has formulated, each culture enjoys the other and participates in their cultural traditions, and each culture is involved in resident level decision making. This intersectionality is a representation of God’s kingdom. The church has a call. Christian scholar-practitioners have a call. Christians inside of their vocation have a call. Our goals, our vision, our prayer, and our works of service should be guided by Scripture. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” ( King James, 1769/2023, John 17:20-21 )

An ultimate cross-cultural transition to interculturality fulfillment is revealed in Revelations, chapter seven. “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (King James 1769/2023, Revelations 7: 9 ). A cross-cultural subsidized housing community that is transformed into an intercultural housing model represent God’s creation, love and intention for humanity.

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