



My Practice/My Theory

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“There is nothing so practical as a good theory” Kurt Lewin



ABOUT THEORY

The first definition of theory that is found in the Random House College Dictionary is “a coherent group of general propositions used as principles of explanation for a class of phenomena”. The second definition is “a proposed explanation whose status is still conjectural, in contrast to well-established propositions that are regarded as reporting matters of actual fact”. The theory that I put forth falls within the second definition.

During my graduate studies at Temple University in 1960, the theory began to take form. It was like a quilt being woven from threads of thoughts from the minds of John Dewey (“Experience and Education”), Kurt Lewin (group dynamics; T-Group, human relations), Abraham Maslow (humanistic psychology), Margaret Mead (anthropology) and, in the 90’s, Angeles Arrien (cultural anthropology) and Bell Hooks (feminist theory). Connected to and learning from those philosophers, social psychologists, educators, applied behavioral scientists, my theory evolved.

More than thirty-five years of working in, and learning from, diverse cultures on six of the seven continents have resulted in a theory informed by rich learning experiences. In this year (fifty years later) and with this writing, I name my theory. I call it: “The Saunders-Craig 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness ©. It is a cognitive theory in that it deals with the acquisition of knowledge and is humanistic in nature. It relies on the individual to learn from self-motivation and is in tune with experiential learning as espoused by John Dewey (unity of theory and practice) and Kurt Lewin (the

theory and practice of social and personal change).

In brief, the theory states:

A Universal: One can connect with another culture by first knowing the self and then tasting the foods, listening to the stories, singing the songs, swaying/dancing to the music, being in silence and sensing the spirituality of the surrounding space.

The component parts of the 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness © are:

- Social Skills Self
- Sustenance
- Stories
- Songs
- Swaying/Dancing
- Silence
- Spirituality

ABOUT MEANING/DEFINITIONS

Social Skills Self: a proficiency in managing one’s relationships and building networks; an ability to find common ground and build rapport; self-knowledge



Sustenance: the foods of the culture that provide nourishment and enjoyment

Stories/Storytelling: sharing, connecting and passing on the history, traditions and beliefs of the culture

Songs: powerful, melodious, creative sounds of voice; singing, humming, chanting

Swaying/Dancing: body/mind/spirit in rhythmic unity

Silence: solitude/quietude; listening to others for learning; listening to self for guidance and wisdom

Spirituality/Spiritualism: weaving cultural wisdom into the quilt of contemporary times

This theory and these definitions are the underpinnings of my international practice. In each of the countries where I have worked (using my social skills self to connect with individuals of different cultures), I continue to re-discover its value in helping to develop human relationships for getting “the work” done. The process begins with crossing the border and entering into a cultural space, with the purpose to advance cross-cultural connectedness and develop intercultural relationships.

Within the field of Applied Behavioral Science, I know that behaviors are the most visible aspects of culture and that they arise from the values of a culture and that values arise from the core beliefs of a culture and that core beliefs are played out in the behaviors that we see, observe and experience in our human interactions as expressed in a Haiku:

Interwoven Threads
Create Quilt of Core Beliefs,
Values, Behaviors.

Whenever I take my diverse self (African, Cherokee, Seminole and English ancestral lineage; African-American; female; heterosexual; senior age; middle class; humanist; healthy; divorced; parent; grandparent; I/E NTP personality style) into cultures that are different from and similar to aspects of my own, I enter authentically and openly because of the 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness © that I have adopted for the work that I do with others and my learned “use of self as an agent of change” (Seashore, 2004, p55).

Over the years, I have entered several international cultures in six of the seven continents: Australia, Asia, Africa, Europe, North America and South America, to include among them the countries of Australia, India, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, England, France, Kuwait, Spain; Canada, Bermuda, Trinidad, Brazil, and Argentina.

Out of all the international countries where I have worked longest, the one whose borders I have crossed and entered the most and have had the longest experience in, and developed the deepest relationship with, is Bermuda (1984-2010).

BERMUDA

I crossed the border and entered the British colony of Bermuda for the first time twenty-six years ago (June, 1984) to provide system-wide consulting and training to the Bermuda Government. Each year thereafter, my work with many organizations in Bermuda was through connections with multicultural individuals and various organizations working on issues of diversity, race relations and social justice – resulting finally in the establishment of the Diversity Institute of Bermuda in 1998.

The application of the theory of culture has helped to sustain the relationships to do “the work” in the area of diversity on this “cultural island” whose ancestors came mainly from Europe, West Indies and Africa to this British colony more than 400 years ago (1609).

Today, this British colony has a diverse population of approximately 68,000, composed of people who are Black (55%); White (34%); Bi-racial (7%); Others/ Unspecified (4%) – residing on 20.75 square miles (3300 permanent residents per square mile). It is the third most densely populated place on earth – only exceeded by Monaco (15,921 per square mile) and Singapore, with 6,891 persons per square mile. According to the World Bank, Bermuda has the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also one of the highest costs of living. With a Gross National Income (GNI) of more than US\$99,500 per capita, in 2009, the World Bank rated it #1 in the world.

Other selected statistics about the culture of Bermuda (excerpted from the Website *Bermuda-Online*) include:

- 33% of the workforce are non-Bermudian; 16% White Bermudians. Black Bermudians earn less than White and tend to have less formal education. (Non-Bermudians working here are referred to as “expats”; must have a Work Permit and are not permitted to receive Bermuda citizenship, and so they must leave the Island after 6-9 years. There is no ‘immigrant’ population. Non-Bermudians are typically at the very top or bottom of the salary levels (highly educated in the international business sector or in labour-intensive employment (kitchens, cleaning, landscaping).
- Age structure: 0-14 years: 18%; 15-64: 68%; 65 years and over: 15% . There are more females in each age group.
- Life expectancy at birth: Total population: 81 years (with females living 6 years longer than males).

These facts characterize a culture of diversity, differences and social injustice. In terms of human interactions and relationships, this culture represented to me a microcosmic challenge and unique opportunity to put into practice the 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness ©.



THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Social Skills Self: By using dialogue and conversation (“democracy begins with conversation” stated John Dewey) to build networks, relationships and rapport, I found common ground to connect to their personal “philosophically-based world view” (as put forth by Edwin Nichols) about diversity, culture and change. I heard:

“Diversity is what makes interpersonal relationships and interactions exciting and colourful. However, persons who are closed to diverse cultures, races, etc. can make those same situations difficult and frustrating, but challenging nevertheless.”

“It is of great personal value to an individual to appreciate and learn from the differences that others bring to a group. The more open you are to others, the better prepared you are for the world’s current situations”.

“There are 3 planes to dealing with the issue:
1) Learning – developing a desire to want to learn more and start the journey; 2) Exploration – talking a lot – coming to understand others’ perspectives; 3) After years of #2, beginning to solve problems together because you admit they exist and want to solve them. Diversity is a journey.”

Sustenance: By sitting around the table and tasting the traditional dishes of cassava pie; Sunday breakfast of cod fish, avocado, banana, hard boiled egg, boiled potato – all covered with a tangy sauce of chopped tomatoes, green peppers and onions; Bermuda fish chowder laced with sherry peppers and black rum, I experienced a sense of inclusion and felt connected.

Stories/Storytelling: By reading about and listening to the stories of slavery, emancipation, non-violent demonstrations, classism, cricket, segregated education, Black/White/Portuguese/ Non-Bermudian relations, racism, I connected to my own experiences of social injustice.

Songs and Swaying/Dancing: By appreciating the lively dancing and singing of the colorful Gombays in the African tradition and the bagpipe European sounds of the regiment, I understood the accepted coexistence of the different cultures.

Silence: By listening, I learned what was important to them and where the internal energy resided and the external energy expressed for doing the work.

Spirituality/Spiritualism: By attending their denominational and interdenominational religious/spiritual gatherings, I centered and focused.

In applying the theory in other countries/cultures, I found that it worked in terms of connecting and doing “the work” with the people. Whether I entered and stayed for two weeks, months or was in and out over a period of seven years (as was the case

in South Africa with other NTL colleagues: (Craig, 1988. pp6-7; through the Africare organization and the United Nations)), I easily engaged the people of different cultures and connected with them around the dimensions of diversity (age, race/ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, class, ableness, spirituality/religion).

APPLICATION BY OTHERS

From colleagues who shared their recent experience in applying the 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness®, I learned that their preferred ways of connecting with a culture were through Social Skills Self (managing relationships, building networks, finding common ground and building rapport interpersonally/interculturally) and through Stories (listening to and learning from persons different from them). They also shared the least effective ways for them to connect with other cultures: Swaying/dancing, Silence (being in silence with the other) and Spirituality - due mainly to the short time spent in the culture.

A Canadian consultant-associate described her experience of its use:

“... The more fully I experience a cultural system (using all the 7 Ss), the more in touch I become with my own self. AND AT THE SAME TIME, the more I become in touch with my real self, the easier it is to connect to a new culture.” (Virginia LeVan, February, 2010)

Her statement is remindful of one made by Edward Hall in The Silent Language:

“Years of study have convinced me that the real job is not only to understand foreign culture but to understand our own.” p. 29.

Statements from others:

“Argentine Craig’s 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness® provided a perfect container in which to process our introduction and immersion into the culture... As we entered the ... culture, we had the opportunity to exercise many of the seven S’s in Craig’s theory ... Our first opportunity to engage with ... was during dinner (sustenance). We were able to interact and socialize (social skills) with members...who were enthusiastic about sharing their culture, history and knowledge with us. In a relaxed setting we learned from stories, jovial anecdotes, and conversational interchange. We also learned a significant amount about the geographical, political and cultural nature of the island from the native’s point of view

(Hansa Jacob-Martin. March 2010)

“Connecting with people is important preparation for crossing the border and completing global OD



work in an effective manner. The Craig 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness © through social interaction, experiencing the culture and reflecting also provides an excellent framework for accomplishing this goal.”

(Mary Cobb, March 2010)

Over the years, in addition to forming, defining and refining my 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness ©, I have been developing intercultural competence. This process has progressed in levels (as described by a 1994 Task Force of the School for International Training and The World Learning organization):

Levels:

- 1 = “educational traveler” (having summers abroad, short term exchange programs)
- 2 = “sojourner” (immersed in another culture or multicultural setting)
- 3 = “professional” (working in another culture or multicultural setting)
- 4 = “intercultural/multicultural specialist” (involved in training, consulting, advising)

This year, as I prepare to participate in NTL’s “The Festival of Learning” in Singapore October 1-10, I anticipate that the 7 S Theory of Cultural Connectedness © will once again be useful in this “opportunity to explore and engage in a variety of ways, in a variety of learning experiences” (NTL’s 2010 Program Guide). I look forward to enabling and facilitating a meaningful connection and deeper understanding in that cultural space of Singapore.

BIOGRAPHY

Over the past forty-five years, Dr. Craig, Diversity and Organization Development Consultant, has worked as university professor, management consultant, Peace Corps trainer and human relations/diversity facilitator/consultant. She has been on the faculty of, and associated with, numerous universities and learning centers (including American University, The Fielding Graduate University, Harvard University, Morgan State University, NTL, University of the West Indies/Trinidad, Vermont College of Norwich University).

Ms. Craig has advised governmental departments of the United States, Kuwait and Bermuda in human resources, graduate education and management training issues of racism, sexism and ageism. During an eight year period, Argentine served as Consultant/Facilitator in Human Relations/Diversity work in South Africa with the NTL Institute, Africare and the United Nations. In 2000, she was honored with the title of Faculty Emeritus of Human and Organization Development from the Fielding Graduate University.



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