



TANDEM PROJECT: DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN POLICE TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS USING CULTURAL/ETHNIC MENTORS (*)



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Abstract: The Tandem Project was an experimental applied pedagogical approach designed to meet the needs of diverse community policing and training in Montreal, Quebec, for police technology students in their first year. It allows the students to develop cultural awareness, cultural competency and cultural intelligence. This approach was developed to expose students in their first year to a random selection of ethnic/cultural mentors who represent 13 to 20 minority groups of the 120 groups in Montreal. The students, when meeting with the mentors, learn basic cultural etiquette, proper intervention techniques and how to engage community members concerning a number of issues. They also learn how the community perceives the police and main barriers between the police and the community. The results are twofold; the students learn who their future clients are and what their needs are. They also learn culture-specific interaction and communication techniques as well as culture-specific de-escalating approaches. Additionally, the mentor and their community learn to overcome negative stereotypes of police and develop a level of trust. As one church parishioner from a minority community said, 'it was nice to have the police students come to our church, it shows they care.'

INTRODUCTION

As the populations in the OECD countries continue to age and national birth rates decrease there has been a political prioritising to increase immigration for population replacement. The necessity to increase immigration is required to augment taxes and fill jobs that are not being filled by the local national population. An example of population complexity occurs

in Quebec (a province of Canada) which has a population of approximately 8.5 million, with a median age of 42. Presently there are a higher percentage of those 65 and older than those 15 years old and younger. Consequently Quebec needs a yearly immigration of between 50 000 to 53 000 people for growth and replacement. The targeted populations for immigration to Quebec tend to be former Francophone colonies such as Algeria, Morocco, Mali, and Haiti to name a few. The majority of these countries also maintain Islamic beliefs.

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As with Quebec, and other modern countries, immigrants tend to be attracted to larger urban economic centres where they start their new lives within pre-existing communities or historically based enclaves. Currently the main economic urban centre of Quebec is Montreal which has a population of 3.8 million and contains 120 different cultural groups. Of these groups some have fully integrated into the Quebec culture, especially by the third generation. However the vast majority of those who immigrate still maintain specific aspects of their culture of origin. One underlying broad community issue seems to be a trust in police.

The form and volume of immigration increases the role of policing from just enforcing the law, to serving, protecting and mediating various issues. This means that police training needs to prepare police students to be aware of cultural differences and de-escalating techniques while learning to gain the trust and confidence of the various ethnic/cultural groups. Policing has become very complex with numerous layers that the police have to navigate.

BACKGROUND OF THE POLICE STUDENTS

The students in the John Abbott police programme are part of one of two streams. There is the 2-year stream consisting of students who have previous college or university education or who may be switching careers from, for example, being a paramedic to being a police officer. This particular group will go through the police technology programme in 2 years. They only need to take police technology courses to acquire the diploma in police technology. The other group is the 3-year stream. They tend to have just graduated from high school, or come through a qualifying year or 'pathways' programme. When the 3 years are completed they will have a college diploma. During the 3 years, these students will take numerous other courses, such as humanities, English, history and psychology. Once the students have completed their training at John Abbott College (or other Quebec police colleges) they do a further 10 weeks' training at the Quebec Provincial Police Training Centre at Nicolet, Quebec. After this process they are then ranked and hired by either the provincial or local police sectors.

The students in the John Abbott police programme are mainly (73 %) males, with 27 % being female, the vast majority are Caucasian, with 80 % coming from a French Quebec background. In terms of exposure, 65 % of the students were not brought up in diversity, essentially they were reared in homogenous areas. The average age of the respondents was 21 with a range from 18 years old to 39 years old. From this group of students, 36 % were 19 years old and 12 % were 23 years old. Academically, police technology students tend to have a higher than normal GPA, usually in the 80 % or higher ranges to get accepted.

Generally, they have little exposure to other cultures; even those few who are visible minorities in the programme can have limited exposure to other cultural/ethnic groups and are more aware of the issues of the majority. Beyond limited exposure there is the impact of the media, family and peers which can have negative influences on the perceptions that the students have internalised and maintain.

CONTEXT OF THE DIVERSE COMMUNITY COURSE

Presently the police technology students take a course in diverse community at John Abbott College usually in their first year, which exposes them to various cultural issues ranging from domestic violence issues, issues of 'saving face', the complexity of 'honour' and awareness of body language. Although academic lectures are used, the information is combined with direct live interaction scenario-based teaching approaches to help the students navigate the 'grey' areas of trans-cultural interaction and de-escalating various situations. Finally, the course uses the Tandem Project as a key component which allows for the development of cultural awareness, cultural competency and cultural intelligence.

COMPLEXITY OF POLICING

When cities have diverse communities the complexity of community policing and serving the population becomes multifaceted. Direct lecturing in courses and scenarios, although serving as a base of knowledge, are limited in that there are no components of direct interaction with



the ethnic/cultural communities. This highlights the key question of how do you start to expose police students to cultural diversity without direct interaction? In order to overcome this barrier the Tandem Project was developed.

TANDEM PROJECT

This particular project requires the volunteering of cultural/ethnic mentors from various Montreal groups. For the first year of the Tandem Project we had cultural ethnic mentors from Shia and Sunni Muslims (both Arabic and black), El Salvadorian, Venezuelan, Jewish orthodox, Jewish semi-orthodox, black English Caribbean, black Haitian, Indian and South-East Asian communities to name a few. Each of the ethnic/cultural mentors was located through a 'snow ball' or networking approach. The mentors were chosen based on their desire to represent their community and be open to listening to the issues that the students have. Once the mentors were chosen, they were given a flexible outline of what was needed to be discussed and how to encourage the students to be fully engaged.

TANDEM PROJECT DISCUSSION PROCESSES

The discussion process was based on developing a rapport between the students and the mentors over a 6- to 8-hour time frame (three to four meetings of 2 hours each). This particular process allowed for both parties to openly get 'to know' each other. The second stage (second meeting) was used for the students to understand how police are being perceived by the community and the history of the community with the police. This second meeting also covered the different forms of intervention a police officer could encounter and how best to manage various situations from domestic violence, teen gang issues, and school bullying to highlight a few. The third meeting has the mentors and students finalising their discussion of issues. They also use this time to discuss preventative community approaches. The mentors also use this time to see what the students have learned. For example, one mentor asks the students at the end a simple question. What is the most important thing you can do toward someone from my community? All the

students, but one, figured it out, 'show respect'. The answer was very simple.

The final part of the third meeting is for the mentor and the students to develop an approach and intervention for a specific written scenario. This allows all parties to collaborate and develop a unifying approach to a cultural issue specific to that group. They work together to figure out how to do the best intervention possible.

Once the students have completed the first phase of the Tandem Project, they are then re-grouped into new groups. For example, students from the Jewish mentor, the black Haitian, the Sunni Muslim and those with the Indian mentor were placed into a new community policing group. For this final stage they have to identify the community needs, community overlaps and common community issues (think Venn diagram). They then develop a unique community policing approach which considers the needs of all of the communities. They also have to attempt to anticipate potential problems within this community and develop measures to ensure peace.

RESULTS

The Tandem Project placed 133 police technology students with cultural/ethnic mentors from a number of Montreal's cultural communities. All three participants, the mentors, the students and the community developed a more positive perspective about each other. The overall interaction allowed the students to learn how to interact with other cultures. For example, the students learned how to make a proper intervention for domestic violence calls, and how to properly split the couple for interviews. The students also learned how to initiate and maintain cross-cultural- and cross-gender-based discussions and interventions. The students became more aware of cross-cultural approaches to show respect, from a simple act of apologising for having boots on during an in-home intervention to showing proper respect in greeting their clients, especially the elders.

The host mentors and their community also showed positive attitudes and perceptions with a broad consensus that the students being exposed at the beginning of their training should be able to withstand contamination from senior



officers. The communities also have hope that a relationship will have begun which will grow over time. As one police student who was invited to participate in the black congregation Sunday service found that after the service a teenager from the black community told him, 'I never thought I would see a white, French police officer in my church, so let's talk about why you are here.' The two talked for the next hour and realised that they were not that different. The beginnings of such a dialogue, the realisation that we are all the same, we all want peace in life, a good job, and to enjoy life is the essence of the Tandem Project, to lower barriers, change stereotypes of all parties and overcome discrimination from both sides. Hopefully, in the future, the students will remember their interactions and they will determine, in part, their future interactions.

The final part of the course and the Tandem Project is to have the students develop their own cross-cultural scenario with the proper or correct resolution. From the last 2 years I have seen considerable insight and increased

awareness of the complexity of cross-cultural issues. The students, in general, have evolved from cultural awareness to cultural competency to cultural intelligence. The increased depth of awareness of community issues and barriers has been significant in that the students more fully understand their clients and their role as police officers.

The final note and evolvement of the Tandem Project to be implemented in the autumn of 2014, with consulting from various mentors, is the development of a scenario system which will be based on reverse 'empathy training'. The scenarios will reverse the traditional roles of the students and those from the ethnic community. Essentially it will be the individuals from the ethnic communities playing the role of police while the police students will be the minority in specific situations. This process will allow the police students to experience what others experience from the police.