

Report on cultural diversity essay

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Running head: REPORT ON WALT KOWALSKI Report on Walt Kowalski Team B
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October 12, 2009 According to Kiosk (2006), “ Culture is an important guiding force in individuals’ life and it shapes not only their perceptions, but their relationships with people and the world around them. Culture, in some ways, defines and organizes reality for people” (Kiosk, 2006). “ An individual’s lifestyle, guiding beliefs and basic assumptions about life are also affected by culture” (Kiosk, 2006). Cultural diversity covers the entire range of the human experiences. The film Gran Torino is an excellent film that portrays the differences in culture. This film specifically shows differences in culture amongst Americans and Hmong’s, an Asian ethnic group.

This is a report about the film Gran Torino. This report will explore the cultural diversity and cultural issues displayed in the film, as well as the benefits and drawbacks as portrayed by the character Walt Kowalski. This report will also provide culturally competent strategies that could improve the cultural issues. Background of Walt Kowalski The film “ Gran Torino” is primarily about a man by the name of Walt Kowalski and his relationship with his neighbor Thao. Walt is a retired American Ford automobile assembly line worker and a Korean War veteran. The film begins at his wife’s funeral. From this the viewer is able to see Walt’s relationship with his family, which is not a good one.

Walt views his relatives as rude, spoiled and self-regarding. Walt seems to be very angry and unapproachable. His language would lead one to believe he is quite prejudice. As the film continues, the viewer learns that Walt lives in a
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community that not only has different ethnic groups residing in it, but also resides in a community with gang violence. Despite Walt's rough exterior and prejudice demeanor, this film shows the development of a relationship between Thao. Thao is Walt's Asian or Hmong teenage neighbor. The two were off to a bumpy start. This is because Thao, under pressure from his gang member cousin, tried to steal his 1972 Gran Torino.

The 1972 Gran Torino is Walt's prize possession and he has kept it in mint condition. Despite the rough start, Thao and Walt become friends. Walt helps Thao in the area of manhood, helps him obtain a job and even gives him the 1972 Gran Torino by the end of the film. By the end of the film, Walt refers to Thao as his friend; a friend who was willing to give his life to protect.

Cultural Issues and Diversity Different cultures have different patterns of behavior based on what they consider to be normal may not be to other cultures. Cultural issues occur when there is a breakdown of communication or understanding between cultures. Overcoming cultural issues requires cultural competence. One needs to be aware that certain actions can be taken to overcome these cultural issues and they have to start with the individual. Understanding that stereotyping is wrong and that it can be damaging to people is a good start.

Stereotyping groups of people often leads to negative images of certain groups or people. This type of behavior is eliminated by becoming aware of cultural differences. Language barriers also cause problems between different cultures. Sometimes the same words can have different meanings to different people. When confused, asking for clarification is a good way to

overcome these barriers. For Walt, he has some prejudice towards his Asian neighbors that probably stems from his experience in the Korean War as well as his experience while working in the American car company. Walt is set in his ways and also exhibits prejudice towards others. He tends to get in altercations with others whom he does not agree with.

For example he argues with a young white man who is dressed as and tries to act like some of the Black American's in the neighborhood. Something that Walt can keep in mind while trying to become more culturally competent is to get to know people on an individual basis before he decides he does not like them based on looks alone. Walt has to realize that he does not have to like everybody but he does need to be respectful of people as an individual and this will help him understand that his way is not the only way.

Culturally Competent StrategiesThe cultural composition of America is rapidly changing. Researchers estimate that by the year 2050 more than half of the nation's population is comprised of people from different ethnic and cultural minority groups (Guzman, Hill-Menson, & Greve, 2007).

The trend of greater cultural and ethnic diversity in America has resulted in a change in the cultural dynamics and complexities in many communities and neighborhoods across the country. Neighborhoods once segregated by race and ethnicity, such as Walt Kowalski's, have become more diverse in both race and ethnicity. Despite an increase in the cultural makeup of many neighborhoods, racism, bias, and prejudice still exist in many (Guzman et. al. , 2007).

For this reason, many people like Walt Kowalski need to gain the necessary skills to develop cultural competence, allowing them to interact positively with people from other cultural backgrounds. One way to develop cultural competence for a man like Walt Kowalski is to assist him in gaining a better understanding of himself and the Asian culture of his neighbors. To help Walt better understand the root of his prejudice outlook, the writers propose to have Walter participate in a self-assessment exercise, and this allows him to understand that his views are based on stereotyping, biases, and prejudice. The self-assessment is used as a tool to work with Walt and allow him to understand how his own cultural beliefs and how they have influenced his opinion of others. For example, Walt is a veteran of the Korean War and a retired middle class Ford factory worker, it is important to show him how these two aspects of his life have influenced his views of Asian immigrants. Pointing out to Walt that his war experience and work in the American car factory, not his Asian neighbors, may be the root of his prejudice views will be the first step to cultural competence. The next step in helping Walt build culturally competent strategies is to help him gain knowledge about the Asian culture of his neighbors through exposure and interaction with his neighbors.

The writers would ask Walt to attend and participate in a traditional cultural event of his Asian neighbors. Attending this event will help Walt gain knowledge and an understanding of the Asian culture and the people within the culture. Additionally it would create an opportunity for Walt and his Asian neighbors to interact and learn more about each other. For example, when Walt attended a dinner at his neighbor's house, he learned that people of the

Hmong culture were in alliance with American soldiers during the Vietnam War. Through exposure, it is the writer's expectation that Walt will realize that many of his beliefs about Asian immigrants are based on stereotypes and not facts. Benefits and Drawbacks as Portrayed by the Character Walt had benefits as well as drawbacks in his life. His benefits were that deep down he was a good person but is blamed for wanting a perfect life. He was a dedicated man to his wife but did not get along so well with his two sons' as he admitted later on in his life.

He had more drawbacks than he did benefits because he used profanity in every sentence that he said, he spoke his mind, he criticized, discriminated and was also offensive to others; in short, he was not at all culturally competent. He does deserve credit for trying to learn about his neighbors which later resulted in him understanding their culture. Like many other immigrants, his neighbors came to the United States to live a better life after war. Walt needed to understand that his neighbors would have rather stayed in their homeland than live somewhere completely different for them as the United States, his neighbors had no option. The U.

S. is an abundant country made up of many different people from different parts of the world who have their own customs and culture and Walt is one of the many people who have trouble understanding that being discriminative is not the answer to their problem. It is not realistic to believe that people like Walt Kowalski will become culturally competent overnight. Additionally, it is impossible for people from different cultures to exist together without forming biases about each other. Becoming culturally

competent is a lifelong endeavor; however, taking the first steps to learn about cultural beliefs and the beliefs of others is the first step to becoming culturally competent. Conclusion Culture influences the shape and the framework within which people view the world and operate in their everyday approaches to life” (Kiosk, 2006).

For Walt Kowalski, it is evident his time spent in the Korean War gave him a negative outlook on the Asian community. Walt’s career in the Ford factory increased his preference for America and its way of life. The development of cultural competence strategies, for example self assessments and gaining knowledge will assist in improving Walt’s cultural competency.

These strategies will enhance his interaction with people and improve relationships. References Guzman, M. R.

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