Tutorial Engagement Task

Which of the following are accurate descriptions of the distinction between race and culture? Select all that apply.

A. Culture is a set of common understandings, beliefs and practices, that is *learned*, whereas race refers to *inherited* physical characteristics common in a group. Inherited characteristics include facial features and skin, eye and hair colour.
B. Culture is socially constructed, whereas race is not.
C. The idea that specific, identifiable races exist has been discredited by modern genetic research, whereas cultural differences are a subject of ongoing research.
D. Both race and culture are difficult to define.

Group discussion material

Excerpt from Passer, Michael W., and Ronald E. Smith (2018). *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, McGraw-Hill Australia. pp.770-771

The role of psychologists with Indigenous Australians: 'But it's all too much!'

For many students and practising psychologists, their consideration of and involvement with Indigenous Australians often include descriptions of vulnerability. This is sometimes expressed as not wishing to do the 'wrong thing', or being seen as contributing to the ongoing disadvantage of Indigenous Australian people. Students and practitioners also report various feelings in response to their awareness being raised in relation to the history of Indigenous Australians. Incredulity and sadness are commonly reported as are descriptions of anger or disbelief at not having been told. Guilt and shame also feature in students' accounts of their encountering information concerning Aboriginal people. Students or practitioners may feel overwhelmed or paralysed by depression (Williams, 2000), leading to avoidance or inaction and an inability to negotiate positive action in the midst of this uncertainty. Such crises may be indicative of a degree of culture shock as an awareness of a different cultural reality emerges. Navigation of this enhanced awareness is important as it precedes what may well be a useful incorporation of information that promotes engagement, or, it could pre-empt one's departure from an arena experienced as overwhelming.

In practice, it may be a more realistic and less urgent expectation to view one's transition to enhanced cultural competence as gradual and incremental. Patience, where possible, is advised, although this may not be a luxury available to those required to 'hit the ground running', or provide a service following a major natural disaster. New graduates and even seasoned professionals report feeling like they have been 'thrown in at the deep end' when it comes to working cross-culturally (Garvey, 2015), and the struggle to 'sink or swim' can be quite distressing— experiences acknowledged in the messages of both Bullen and Prandl from earlier in the chapter.

These critical scenarios notwithstanding, preparation for, and the ongoing engagement with, cultural competence development is something that can be planned for, much like other professional development activities we are required to complete in order to maintain registration within the profession. Other opportunities can present themselves as part of the 'everyday', and accumulate toward our development. For example, running contrary to what may be seen as the monumental task of engaging in cross-cultural and Indigenous contexts comes a suggestion by Garvey (2010b) that valuable contributions to meaningful engagement can be made in the minutes and moments of our interactions with Indigenous people. A greeting or a question showing genuine interest in how a client or colleague is doing can do much to establish and reinforce the basis for a good working relationship. Adoption of this incremental perspective may also mitigate the likelihood of feeling overwhelmed by having to instigate grander initiatives.

This principle is supported by Vicary and Bishop (2005), who argue that non-Indigenous counsellors can work more effectively with Aboriginal clients once certain preconditions have been met. This means that much of what can be done to enhance the likely effectiveness of psychological involvement with Aboriginal clients needs to be done prior to actual contact, or as a precursor to therapy. Vicary and Bishop (2005) propose a model that promotes a collaborative approach with an emphasis on teamwork. For the practitioner, the establishment of good working relationships with immediate team members (perhaps within the same organisation) and cultural consultants or advisors (within or external to the organisation) is something that can be worked on and nurtured prior to, during and following any actual intervention.

Put another way, much of the work involved in working well with Indigenous Australian people occurs both within and external to therapeutic contact. It is the networking and maintenance of relationships and resources that helps us to become known as a potential resource for others, alerts us to the presence of human and other resources that can assist us in our roles, and ideally paves the way for smoother psychological interactions when they are required.

One of the features of Vicary and Bishop's framework is its emphasis on collaboration and the establishment of what they describe as an 'egalitarian co-therapeutic relationship between the non-Aboriginal practitioner and Aboriginal counsellor' (p.16). The psychologist in this context may not be the 'expert' on particular matters and needs to work in a consistent partnership. In fact, depending on the assessment of client needs, the psychologist may not be required at all or, at best, may be on the periphery of intervention. This may take some getting used to, especially if the therapist is used to working in ways that sees them as central to the process of intervention. According to Vicary and Bishop, the psychologist's role is not necessarily central in relation to the nature of the problem, to the needs of the client and the measures regarded as having the best chance of effectiveness.

Psychologists who find themselves in isolated situations can still seek support and guidance. This may require a little creativity or more investigation on the part of the practitioner, but such effort can be beneficial for those just starting out or negotiating what may be the transitional shock of working cross-culturally with Indigenous Australians. The effort would also be regarded as a necessary indicator of one's alignment with the more advanced levels of cultural competence development.

One option could include identifying colleagues within your workplace who have expressed a similar interest in reflecting on their work with Indigenous Australians. They may offer to be a mentor in a formal sense, or be willing to have conversations of a more informal nature concerning issues that arise for you in the course of your work. They may also be able to direct you to further resources, or introduce and 'vouch' for you to others as part of developing your own networks. For other suggestions on resources, you might contact your local or state psychology association. The AIPA and APS websites may also provide some useful guidance and opportunities for networking, training and information.