

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States

**CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING  
FOR POLICE IN THE UNITED STATES**

**A look at Effective Methodologies**

by

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**RUNNING HEAD: Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States**

## Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States

### Abstract:

This article explores the history of race relations and cultural awareness training in the United States and the importance of emphasizing cognitive and learning styles of police in an attempt to ensure the course content is effective. Research indicates that the vast majority of police are objective, thinking types based on the results of two cognitive function instruments, the Law Enforcement Type Sorter and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, both based on the personality type theories of C.G. Jung. The article emphasizes the importance of effective training content and design methodology based on the favored cognitive learning styles of police as well as class structure, appropriate selection of instructors, and to ensure the most effective programs possible in this ever challenging facet of community policing. It concludes with a brief synopsis of the content of Race Relations Based programs, deemed as less effective than Cultural Awareness Models of training.

### Keywords:

Cultural Awareness  
Cultural Awareness Training  
Law Enforcement Type Sorter®  
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®  
Police Personality  
Police Cognitive Styles  
Race Relations Training

The challenge for law enforcement and cultural awareness, more unique than in any other profession because of the power held by police, creates a special need for understanding a pluralistic, multicultural society. The very success of the many facets of community based policing is dependent on this understanding (Hendricks and Byers, 2000). The concern for understanding the importance of culture and the role that police play is not new. In fact negative attitudes by police officers regarding race and culture was noted by police researchers in the early 1900's (Simon, 1929, Jordan, 1972, Walker, 1980, Suthen, 1987). Cultural awareness training and attempts to educate police officers to be more sensitive to different ethnic groups, races, and lifestyles, began to proliferate in the mid 1960's and early 1970's during and after the strong emphasis on civil rights, particularly for those rights long denied African-American citizens. The usual setting for this training was a panel presentation by trainer(s), the vast majority being racial or ethnic minorities. The courses were typically marked by a strident and emotional challenge to participants which could, and often did, result in deep anger and resentment on the part of the participants (Work, 1989). This interest in cultural awareness and sensitivity training intensified after the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles in the early 1990's.

Because of the nature of power law enforcement officers possess, it becomes critical they understand the changing community and the racial and ethnic challenges that abound. However, many new officers' perceptions of police work are often influenced by the myriad of police shows on television and motion pictures with a strong enforcement theme which tends to glorify action-oriented policing and "an us against them" mentality (Hennessy, 1998). In this media environment, little importance to interpersonal communication and cultural awareness is emphasized. Coupled with this action-oriented view of policing, police training academies struggle with countless important and critical performance objectives competing with each other for the limited time officers train to become minimally competent. Subjects oriented to maintaining officer safety, firearms, arrest tactics, and other tactical issues usually win out over "softer" subjects such as cultural awareness and communication issues.

It has been more than ten years since the police incident involving Rodney King in Los Angeles, which stimulated a renewed interest in cultural awareness training. Even though the King incident involved issues much more complex than racial issues, the demand and interest in cultural diversity training has grown exponentially.

### **A Brief History of Cultural Diversity Training for Police in the U.S.**

#### **(The 1960s - 1970s)**

The concern and need for cultural awareness and race relations training was not new for

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States  
police. In the late 1800s, the public often perceived the police as corrupt,

inefficient, and insensitive to issues involving race and culture. Early writing reflected the attitudes of some Irish police officers in New York that the immigrant population was composed of “the mentally and morally unfit of Europe” (Jordan, 1972). Special training in race relations was unthinkable, especially in an era where police received little or no training at all. Cultural diversity training for police really began during the 1960s as a response to actions of police during the Civil Rights Movement in the South and the continuing importance of understanding minority rights throughout the United States. The training was initially structured to “sensitize” the police to minority concerns. Of course at that time, few if any, police were members of minorities and often lack of understanding prevailed. Police agencies didn’t even begin to hire women as police officers in significant numbers until the early 1980s.

#### **(1970s - 1980s)**

During this era, most courses were still designed by training course designers in private industry or academia. They were usually taught under a “crisis” mode and taught almost exclusively by minority trainers. A problem would arise involving real or perceived injustices towards members of minority community by police. Trainers would gear up to begin the sensitivity process again. Rarely did a police agency take a proactive stance towards racial sensitivity training. They really didn’t know how to. Most courses were still not relevant to the job of policing, and rarely valued or understood by the police officers being trained.

#### **(1990s - Present)**

After the Rodney King incident, again, departments geared up for more training to sensitize police; however, an interesting change began to take place. Those experienced in police training started to look at the courses being taught from a police training perspective. They began to challenge course methodology that had been previously accepted as being effective. Those involved in law enforcement training began to adjust the “politically correct” content and methodology to reflect issues related to the very complex and challenging job of policing. Research on the effectiveness of curriculum and design began.

#### **Learning styles of police**

Programs that are designed for the general public or for private industry don’t seem to work very well with police audiences. This is due, in part, to the nature of the police work

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States involved. It also involves the nature of police and the police culture. Extensive research has been conducted into the police culture and the myriad of factors that influence the

culture. One important area of research deals with understanding the cognitive styles of the police officers to design programs that are more effective with that audience. The design of the multicultural curriculum begins with an analysis of the nature and learning styles of the law enforcement profession being impacted. It is based on predominant cognitive functions as theorized by Carl Jung (1974). Jung believed people differ and act according to basic psychological functions. He described functions as a form of psychic activity that remains the same in principle under varying conditions (Jung, 1974, pp.436-467). Jung understood two functions of Sensing and Intuition as perceiving functions. The Sensing type prefers perception directly observed and interpreted through the five senses. The Intuitive type prefers to go beyond the basic information and look for meanings and potentials. The decision making dichotomy reflects two different ways of judging. The Thinking type prefers to decide through impersonal or logical analysis in contrast to Feeling types who prefer to consider affiliation, warmth, and a connection to individuals, not things (Thompson and Borrello, 1986). An individual's preference in using these functions can be measured by The Myers Briggs Type Indicator® and the Law Enforcement Type Sorter® both indicating that approximately 85% of police are "T's", or Objective, Thinking Types. Approximately 300 studies of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator are cited by Buros (1965, 1978) and over 1,500 studies are included in the latest edition of the Myers-Briggs Manual (Myers and McCaulley, 1985). Its indices of reliability and validity have been extensively investigated and have been judged acceptable (Murray, 1990). The Law Enforcement Type Sorter has been normed against the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator with positive results and is presently being tested for reliability and validity independently.

Research into cognitive styles of law enforcement officers, according to Jungian typology, began in the mid 1970's with Wayne B. Hanewitz from Michigan State University (1978). His research indicated that the majority of police officers preferred to perceive information realistically and concretely as Sensors (S) and make decisions using the impersonal and objective analysis of the Thinking (T) function. Subsequent research by Henson, 1984, Cacioppe and Mock, 1985, Lynch, 1988, and Hennessy, 1991, reflected the same conclusion that a minimum of 65% of any given population of students from a law enforcement group are ST's. Recent (1997) research yet to be published by Hennessy reflects individuals with ST preferences being at least 70% in the law enforcement profession.

Police officers have often been described as concrete, decisive, direct, cold, condescending, matter-of-fact, impersonal, pragmatic, and logical. They are not likely to be convinced by anything but reasoning based on solid facts. They are seldom wrong with the facts as they see them, are sequential and enjoy working under an established, structured plan (Hennessy,

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States 1998). In analyzing learning styles, ST's focus on the realities of a situation. They are fact and detail-oriented with a great capacity for seeing the world as it

really is. Sensors usually like concrete things they can see, touch, and handle with practical experience (Wilkins, 1996). Sensors learn best when given a clear, objective rationale and like giving and receiving critical analysis (Myers, 1980).

In any general police audience, the remaining 15% of police are "F's", or Feeling Types and prefer to use subjective logic when making decision. Feeling Types are usually more conversational, people-oriented officers who prefer to communicate and deal with people in more considerate, tactful, sociable, caring and diplomatic terms.<sup>2</sup>

Both types are very successful anywhere in general police activities, however, the Objective, Thinking Types typically choose areas dealing with their strengths such as S.W.A.T., Motors, Internal Affairs, Homicide, Planning and Research, and Drug Enforcement. Feeling Types may be found more in Media or Community Relations, School Resource, D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T. Knowing this, the challenge is to design a curriculum that appeals to the vast majority, the Pragmatic, Thinking Types. To have the most impact, cultural awareness courses must be logically structured, reality based, and relevant to the job of policing. The officers must know why understanding the changing demographics of their cities is important to their professionalism and the image of the department. The Feeling Types will automatically attach to people issues to the discussions. One of the challenges in constructing courses for police, however, is that most designers of training curriculum in private industry happen to be Intuitive Feelers, just the opposite cognitive style as that of police. That is why it's important to understand when designing courses for police, that the favored cognitive learning style of police be a prime consideration in the process.

The term "cultural awareness" is used indicating the class is structured to give the attendees tools and insights (an awareness) on how to do their jobs better. The author prefers not to use the terms "Cultural Diversity."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The course authors choose not to use the term "cultural diversity" due to a perceived negative connotation to the term and its use in past law enforcement training. This rationale is based on the history of many cultural diversity courses that proliferated in the mid 1960s' to early 1970s'. Many courses were structured in such a way to afford various minority representatives an opportunity to address rookie trainees or veteran in-service officers. The usual setting was in the form of a panel. These courses often became one way monologues or confrontational dialogues between both minority representatives and attendees in an attempt to induce learning, understanding, and a change of attitude. This was not necessarily the fault of the presenter(s) or attendees themselves, but the construct and methodology of the courses. Such a presentation panel on a subject as value laden as race relations in law enforcement often invoked anger and resentment. Without an opportunity to explore and discuss issues of differences in an adult learning environment including an intellectual exchange of thoughts and ideas, the goals of the courses were often not achieved. The authors felt the term "cultural awareness" was more appropriate and positive in that the course rationale and objective was that of "being aware of other cultural communication patterns will

**Selection of trainers and facilitators;**

We believe that the most effective cultural awareness trainers are members of their own departments. When outside consultants are used, especially those with no law enforcement background, the “buy-in” from the officers can be tenuous at best. The consultants leave and the officers have no continuous reminders for “buy-in” . Once they have their obligatory diversity training, they go back to business as usual. That’s not to say that outside consultants are not beneficial. They can help if they are members of or well versed and experienced in the law enforcement culture and understand the challenges of policing as a profession. Outside training consultants with law enforcement experience and understanding can best fit the role of training the trainers. When we professionally train members of our own departments to teach these critical issues, the importance to the department is emphasized and apparent, both in the delivery of the courses and in officers seeing those involved in the teaching in daily situations. Having departmental instructors tends to continually reinforce the community values for which the department stands.

In selecting trainers, if the department consists of primarily White, male officers, then White male instructors should be involved. We also believe that team teaching should be the norm, preferably with one identifiable minority and/or female officer and one Anglo officer. Team teaching with both Anglo and minority instructors will often serve to refocus participants’ attention on the critical issues of multicultural policing rather than personal agendas.

Instructors should be credible, respected officers who have experience working the street. Instructors should be asked to teach rather soliciting volunteers. One should not assume that all members of visible minorities can, want to, or are even capable of teaching classes in cultural awareness and racial sensitivity. An often-made mistake is to immediately turn to identifiable minority officers as instructors. In doing this, we may be setting them up to fail. The majority of officers are still Anglo and male and when they see a minority instructor who is going to teach a cultural awareness class, they may be very sensitized to hidden agendas even when there may not be any. Officers may use the situation as an opportunity to make a personal statement, placing the presenter on the defensive and attempting to defend the actions of others of his or her race or culture. Instructors must be credible and committed and respected members of the department.

They should be trained in basic principles of teaching and facilitating discussions as well

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help them perform better in their profession.

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States as having street experience and credibility. Teaching cultural awareness can be referred to as “emotion negative” training (Work, 1989) and, as such, is often more demanding on the instructor than any other type of training. The need for competence

in facilitation methodology is perhaps even stronger in these courses than others. Instructors should have basic knowledge of presentation techniques, audience participation techniques, discussion techniques and simulation techniques. The best instructors are identified by others, not necessarily those who volunteer to teach the critical subject. The instructors should be department members either sworn or civilian, who have the respect and credibility of others. These individuals are the ones who will have the most impact as instructors. They should be asked to become involved.

The most challenging part of designing and teaching cultural awareness programs is for the trainers to be able to step outside themselves and their own values, prejudices, wants, and needs. It takes personal insight and emotional intelligence to be able to successfully get the message across without blaming or scolding the attendees. Too often trainers approach these issues with personal agendas, (often not realizing it) wanting an opportunity to aggressively insist on change or force adherence to the trainer's value systems. A trainer must be able to objectively look at the audience and meet their needs, not their personal needs. Trainers should take on the role of a resource guides and facilitator, not assuming that of a subject matter expert.

### **Teaching Techniques - Group Structure and Classroom Structure**

As instructors we are serving as facilitators more than teachers. Our goal is to help officers to pragmatically think about the changes in their community and how they will affect their jobs and the law enforcement profession. The 2000 U.S. census figures reveal there have been some profound changes in the demographics of the country. The continued influx of immigrants fundamentally changes the way we do business and with these changes, we stress attendees re-examine their stereotypes and understand why they may occur. The material presented should be contextually relevant. If training is being provided to officers serving in a patrol function, then activities and instruction should be directed toward the functions of a patrol officer. This allows the audience to make instant connections between his/her work and the material being presented.

The most effective number of students in a class appears to be 30 to 35 attendees. Classrooms should be arranged to enable group discussions. Auditorium or “seats forward” classes set the instructor(s) up as “experts” and great targets for various barbs and rhetorical questions that disrupt. Tables in the room should be set up to accommodate four or five attendees per table. Less than four attendees at each table and more than five allow some participants to drop out of discussions. Group process will happen when

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States people are involved in their own training. The many years of experience and intellect at each table becomes a strong learning tool if facilitated correctly. Officers have a lot of insightful observations and ideas when it involves their jobs. The responsibility to learn the most that they can about changing community

situations becomes theirs. Allowing folks to speak up and discuss issues that affect them and their jobs on the street is critical to these issues. Instructors would do well to trust in the intellect of the groups. They will rise to the occasion with good, solid, discussions and possible solutions.

### **Curriculum Content and Structure**

Recently, law enforcement educators and researchers began to divide sensitivity training for the police into two distinct types: Race-Relations training or sensitivity training and Cultural Awareness models of training. Research has shown that Race Relations models have focused primarily on increasing people's awareness of their own racism and understanding of the structural dynamics of racism, while Cultural Awareness models or intercultural training has tended to emphasize cross cultural understanding and self-awareness (Ungerleider et al, 1995)

#### **Race Relations Models**

Some race-relations model based training courses have several characteristics unique to this style of training:

- Typically having racial and/or ethnic minority trainers.
- Stressing the need to sensitize White, males to minority issues.
- Focusing on past problems and guilt.
- Focusing on "White or dominant privilege"
- Including exercises that can be somewhat demeaning to participants as well as having little real life value.
- Denying that cultural or racial characteristics can be defined.
- Holding up the U.S. value system as flawed.
- Divorcing course content from real lives and activities of police officers on the street.

Race-Relations based courses seem to be less effective than Cultural Awareness models.

#### **Cultural Awareness Models**

Programs deemed to be more effective were those that stressed the changing

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States demographics of our communities and the changes involving the policing profession. Typically, the courses are job related in content and emphasize the placing of the context of the job in the curriculum. Typically, characteristics of these programs are:

- Emphasis on Cultural Awareness rather than “Diversity”.
- Inclusive intercultural approaches, bringing many cultures (including the Euroamerican cultures) to the issues.
- The content of the curriculum and the exercises used were work related with much discussion of current, relevant issues on policing a diverse community.
- Emphasis on the benefits of understanding minority issues and practical skills.
- On-going programs which reflected the values of the department.
- Allowing time for changes to take effect rather than expecting “one-time miracles”.

The content of cultural awareness courses involves demographics and psychographics: how the world is changing and what those changes mean to the profession. Issues involving the aging population, particularly for those sun belt communities facing a large influx of retirees, are discussed. Additionally, content involves dealing with personal value systems and how humans deal with change is part of the curriculum. Also included are discussions on historical perspectives and how people may react to previous experiences with police. It is important to remember that the Civil Rights movements in the 1960s were only a short forty years past and many people, particularly African Americans, still remember the actions by police during the demonstrations in the South. A part of the cultural awareness curriculum involves communication in a cultural context and cultural applications with police. Group discussions, role-plays, pencil tests, videos, lecture, overheads, and PowerPoint presentations are used as media. Multimedia resources are used as those students preferring Sensing learn better through practical experiences while Intuitives learn better through abstract lecture methods (Lawrence, 1982; Myers, 1980). The lecture method is used throughout as it serves to pass on volumes of information and facts, but it is made more effective by using a multitude of media (Wilkins, 1996).

It is also important to understand the power that police represent in their community and how people of other cultures may view that power. The system of justice in the United States is based on English Common Law with individual rights and responsibilities being critical to its success. The vast majority of immigrants are coming from countries whose justice systems do not resemble ours at all. Unlike the U.S., in many countries, society as a whole or the government is the beneficiary of the law, not the individuals in that society. Understanding the context of communication and the role that it plays in human interaction as well as value systems of different cultures will enable law officers to be more effective

Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States and more efficient when dealing with the public.

We want to help officers put their jobs back into an understandable perspective. When we work in a disadvantaged part of town on third shift with the same one or two percent of the population of any culture or race that cause society and our communities the most problems, it is relatively easy to be negatively affected.

## **Conclusion**

Communication is a critical part of policing. Research in the United States has shown that 93 percent of police work is one-on-one communication and the ability to communicate with all of the citizens in our communities is critical to successful policing. The more effective courses are those that include discussions of various cultures within communities and how they can best be served. The changing diversity of our communities will challenge us all towards more effective policing. The discussion and implementation of these and other well thought out and pragmatic approaches to teaching will enable trainers to more effectively approach cultural awareness and cultural communications training in the law enforcement profession.

## **Appendices:**

The Law Enforcement Type Sorter® is published by Leadership Inc., of Scottsdale, 7418 E. Helm Drive, Scottsdale, Arizona, U.S. 85260. [sorter@leadershipinc.com](mailto:sorter@leadershipinc.com).

The Myers Briggs Type Instrument® is published by Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 3803 E. Bayshore Road, Palo Alto, California U.S. 94303 [www.cpp-db.com](http://www.cpp-db.com).

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Cultural Awareness Training for Police in the United States

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