

ABSTRACT: 2013 ELAM Institutional Action Project Poster Symposium

Project Title: Conversation Du La Coeur, Dialogues for Transformative Change

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Background, Challenge or Opportunity:

Ethics consultations and mentoring relationships across the health sciences center have highlighted a critical lack of meaningful discussions about weighty issues which permeate this and other institutions. Race, culture, ethnicity, gender etc. are often couched under the rubric “Diversity/Inclusion,” a well-intentioned maneuver, but it often fails to speak to the root cause of the ailment. Why? Because we care and may fear the impact of how others frame their story. As health professionals/educators we ask for “the history/herstory” but what part of it are we prepared to hear and discuss? The capacity to truly engage in honest discussions about sensitive issues such as race is a necessity in health care. Some years ago, a publication included an article describing black and white women, referring to themselves as “The Zebra Group,” who came together specifically to engage in dialogues about race. The article referenced the dialogues as painful but productive.

Communication through dialogue is a valuable tool and can be used effectively when addressing complex, sensitive issues. Eighteen months ago, I brought together a group of women, diverse in age, ethnicity, discipline etc. to begin an ongoing series of monthly discussions focused on race and related issues. The conversations have been insightful, hard, heartwarming and beneficial, to paraphrase the collective voice of the group. This concept is not new, race related dialogues are occurring in several places:

- Boston, MA – City-Wide Dialogues on Boston’s Racial and Ethnic Diversity
- Boston University, YWCA Community Dialogues
- Milton, MA, Dialogue on Race, Class and Culture
- Charlottesville, WV, Dialogue on Race in the High Schools
- Evanston, IL, “My Evanston, My Neighbors: Constructive Dialogues on Race, Understanding and Our Hopes for Evanston”
- A Dialogue on Race with President Clinton – 1998

Purpose/Objectives: To create an environment that is authentic and practical, in support of the core values of the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center. “...To fully embrace the tenets of professionalism; to demonstrate integrity, accountability and decisiveness in our commitment to excellence, to support collaborative practices and personal growth, and to honor and respect our diversity in people, thinking and cultural heritage”

Methods/Approach: Host monthly meetings with members of Health Sciences Center senior leadership to facilitate a dialogue that acknowledges our differences, similarities and commonalities and to speak honestly about all of it. Respect for confidentiality and privacy is a key feature of the process. Our first meeting, held March 3, 2012 was an introduction to the process/ground rules and learning about each other. In advance of our next meeting the following question has been posed, “As an individual, what do you celebrate about yourself and your cultural identity (whatever that means)?” Answers to the question are expected to generate thinking and a discussion about personal and shared values.

Outcomes and Evaluation: This is the beginning of a one year project

Conversation du la Coeur: Dialogues for Transformative Change

Anne R. Simpson, MD

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Introduction

“Conversation du la Coeur: Dialogues for transformative Change,” is an authentic and practical response to the core mission of the UNM HSC:

“...To fully embrace the tenets of professionalism; to demonstrate integrity, accountability and decisiveness in our commitment to excellence, to support collaborative practices and personal growth, and to honor and respect our diversity in people, thinking and cultural heritage.”

Why do we need meaningful discussions about weighty issues?

- The capacity to truly engage in honest discussions about sensitive issues is a necessity for health care professionals
- Race, culture, ethnicity, gender etc. are often filed under the rubric “Diversity/Inclusion;” it is well-intentioned but fails to capture some meaningful issues
- To help us understand our lack of comfort with the pain an honest discussion may evoke



Dialogues on race are not new, they are happening in Boston, MA, Milton, MA, Charlottesville, WV and Evanston, IL. President Clinton had one in 1998. Here are responses from some participants in those discussions.

Post dialogue Survey reports showed:

- 84% - experience increased their understanding of other’s attitudes and beliefs
- 59% - comfort and ability to discuss race/ethnic issues increased
- 97% - would recommend race program to others

- 83% - very likely they would participate in other race-related community activities in their neighborhood

Why Participate – Personal Responses

“To transform the divisions between us into links that enriches us”

“To be part of an honest discussion about challenging and relevant issues”

“To build connections with community”

“To gain insight into your own racial and ethnic identity”

“To join a growing movement to build a more tolerant, diverse society”

