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## Building Inclusive Communities Through Intercultural Communication: A User-Friendly Handbook for Those Who Care About Self and Others

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## Building Inclusive Communities Through Intercultural Communication: A User-Friendly Handbook for Those Who Care About Self and Others

### Abstract

The article reviews Ann C. Schauber's, *Working with Differences in Communities: A handbook for those who care about creating inclusive communities*. The user-friendly book is designed so that anyone can open it to any section and learn. Schauber's book will instruct and move readers interested in creating inclusive communities through effective intercultural communication. The focus is on what the individual can do to make communities more inclusive, rather than on what others need to do. The book is perfect for people who care--or have been forced to understand--our multicultural society.

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### Introduction

Six months ago I was offered and accepted an opportunity to serve as one of five reviewers for an exciting new handbook written by Ann C. Schauber, Diversity Leader for Oregon State University Extension Service. As I felt then and feel now, Schauber's handbook, *Working with Differences in Communities*, will instruct and educate not only readers interested in understanding the impact of effective intercultural communication, but those interested in creating inclusive communities. This book was obviously conceived and written with the highest regard for human interaction as we are experiencing it in today's multicultural society.

Who can benefit from it? Anyone who is searching frantically for a roadmap to improve their understanding of this very rocky cultural terrain. Thus, it would serve as a perfect tool for Extension professionals who would like to diversify their thinking relative to programmatic efforts for current and future audiences. *Working with Differences in Communities* is perfect for people who care--or have been forced to understand--our changing society.

It is at once both sophisticated and accessible. The book is extremely user-friendly and creatively intersperses text with life-like illustrations and insightful quotes that make the it interesting and quite readable. It is substantial enough to please voracious readers and casual enough to attract the relaxed reader. Schauber offers a cogent summary of what we have or have not learned about effective intercultural communication, an agenda for future inquiry, and a guide to action.

Schauber points out in her preface that the handbook was written in the belief that by working on our own personal intercultural development, we can create more inclusive communities. She notes that the fundamental message in her writing is that "I" am the only one who must learn and adapt (not "them"). Thus, the focus of the book is on what the individual can do to make communities inclusive, rather than on what others need to do.

### Working with Differences

This unique, one-of-a-kind, handbook is divided into five thematic, stand-alone sections:

- Section One (About Difference),

- Section Two (The Inquiring Mind Set),
- Section Three (The Open Heart),
- Section Four (The Evolving Skill Set), and
- Section Five (Continuing the Learning).

The book is designed so that anyone can open it to any section and begin to learn. Schauber takes her readers on a remarkable journey through the landscapes of our culture. It moves us to see ourselves first as a cultural self and second as collaborators working toward building inclusive communities. Preceding each of five sections, Schauber provides an inviting introduction in which she defines culture and provides a brief synopsis of the chapters appearing in that section. Her goal in writing this handbook is to provide the reader with an overall portrait of how meanings of messages vary with different cultures.

Schauber sets the stage in Section One (Chapter One) by providing a rationale to demonstrate to the reader that working with differences is as important today as it has ever been. As part of her rationale, she describes a process of learning to work with cultural differences by developing an inquiring mind set, an open heart set, and evolving skill set. While the process of learning to work with differences is only briefly mentioned in the first section, Schauber does a nice job of elaborating on the process in the next three sections of her book.

However, Schauber could have presented a clearer rationale and provided some statistics to build a stronger case for working with differences. In order to show a systemic significance of working in a diverse society, it is important to make the case by showing the impact as it relates to business, education, and nation-building.

Section Two (Chapters 2 through 7) elaborates on the inquiring mind set and addresses a variety of ways to think about difference. This section presents complex material; however, Schauber does an excellent job of formatting for an easy read. Schauber helps the reader to understand that culture is something everybody has and that any approach to working with others has to start with individuals having a deeper understanding of their cultural self. This section also introduces the reader to an intercultural communication model that is particularly important for understanding and working through the complexities of communication.

Another salient point is the discussion of power. Power is one of the least-discussed aspects of creating an inclusive community/organization in which difference is genuinely valued. The power issue is often ignored because we are so uncomfortable with it, and we fool ourselves into believing that, if we just act as if the playing field is level, everything will be just fine. Based on her experience, Schauber categorizes the issue of power into three dimensions: personal, influential, and decision-making. She provides a lucid discourse on power dynamics and how it affects every aspect of our lives and interactions.

In Section Three (Chapter 8), Schauber describes the open heart set and focuses on commitment, caring, and emotions. She feels that the heart set is key to working with differences. A prescription is provided for the reader to follow in order to embrace a commitment and willingness to work with people who are different from them. The heart set helps individuals to explore their feelings about developing and practicing the mind and skill set.

Section Four (Chapters 9 through 11) insightfully integrates the mind set and heart set into the skill set. In the first two chapters of this section, Schauber introduces the skills necessary for effective communication within, between, and across cultures.

However, the author feels that the most important and powerful part of the book is Chapter 11, "Listening to the Other Voices." Twelve individuals from different cultural backgrounds share their stories of discrimination. Shared experiences from the voices of others creates a new template for thinking about diversity as the reader is guided through the reconstruction of personal truths. Schauber believes that this chapter provides readers with an opportunity to apply new knowledge and to practice newly learned skills. Readers also increase their awareness of differences and begin to realize that their experience of reality is only one of many.

Last, but not least, Section Five (Chapters 12 and 13) explores different ways for individuals to continue to expand their learning experience. Schauber brings closure to her writing by engaging her reader in a visionary journey during which newly acquired knowledge and skills can be applied to create the ideal inclusive community of the future.

## **Conclusion**

This is certainly a handbook that could and should be used by everyone within Extension. Schauber has produced a book that anyone, scholar or layperson, who has a passion to work in communities and who loves and understands the work he or she does will find immensely useful. *Working with Differences in Communities* could be used at conferences, for paid staff and volunteer training, and at teen meetings.

All of us need to familiarize ourselves with the most contemporary approaches to intercultural communication, if for no other reason than to remain in dialogue with our peers and current in the field. This collection of insights allows us to initiate such dialogue.

Some of the approaches discussed in its pages, such as discovering one's cultural self, understanding the power dynamic, and developing and applying one's intercultural skill set, are crucial to learn. They go to the heart of the issue as to what we do with present and prospective clientele--who we exclude, who we demonize, and how our choices shape our culture and transmogrify others. We should all be involved in addressing these issues now, given the unpredictable state of our world.

## Reference

Schauber, A. C. (2002). *Working with differences in communities: A handbook for those who care about creating inclusive communities*. Corvallis OR: Oregon State University Extension Service. (Order by e-mailing [puborders@orst.edu](mailto:puborders@orst.edu).)

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