



**FIFTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON FAIRNESS & EQUITY
ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

Regional Panel Presentation
**The Realities of Intercultural Communication—
You Can't Know Everything**
Public Child Welfare Training Academy

Summary of Presentation
April 13, 2007

The Public Child Welfare Training Academy (PCWTA) provided a panel presentation that examined the internal process of panel members who consciously engaged in deepening their intercultural communication with each other within the setting of their training academy. The panelists revealed many complex subtleties involved in the art of their communication, particularly when interactions were shaped by different cultural perspectives.

The members of this panel were:

- Liz Quinnett (Program Coordinator, PCWTA)
- Tom Lidot (Curriculum Coordinator, Tribal STAR)
- Laurel Brown (Director, Inland Training Center, PCWTA)
- Amy Okamura (Lecturer, San Diego State University)

Amy Okamura opened the discussion with the metaphor of “shifting gears” to explain how one negotiates different modes of interaction that occur at the individual level. She explained that she often chooses which “gear” of communication to use according to cues received from the environment, comparing the use of different gears to the different “Englishes” that Amy Tan describes in her book *The Opposite of Fate: Memories of a Writing Life*. When shifting gears, a person determines what sorts of vocabulary, pronunciation and nonverbal cues she/he will use while communicating. This usually occurs very quickly and automatically, within seconds or minutes of beginning a conversation. People who identify themselves with a minority or ethnic culture will most likely resonate with this phenomenon, as it is a tactic which members of minority cultures often utilize to “survive” in the world of a different dominant culture.

Liz Quinnett and Tom Lidot recaptured for the audience the heartfelt experience they shared in developing trust, honesty, and skillful communication with each other across the barriers of their respective cultural codes, values, and manners of speech and engagement. They were able to convey the psychological and emotional nuances of their individual experiences as they encountered communication challenges, corrected

misinterpretations, and ultimately reached across cultural divides to grow and strengthen their relationship to one another.

Panel members invited symposium participants to work in small groups at their tables to assess their own ways of communicating and then share key insights with the larger audience.