

## In My Opinion...

### The Challenge of Worldviews

By Dr. Valerie Batts, VISIONS Executive Director

In this issue, we explore one of the most difficult topics in the field of “inclusion” for many US citizens—worldview differences. U.S. mainstream culture is one manifestation of modern Western society. As noted in the pieces included here, this way of being is presented to most of us as if it were the *only* way to be, or if not the only, the best. One of VISIONS’ key messages to organizations and groups that want to make sustainable change over time is that incorporating a multicultural lens will also entail uncovering and changing underlying values and unwritten assumptions. These cultural elements determine what is considered “right, beautiful, and true.” They impact institutional and interpersonal practices and must also change when they work against stated inclusion goals. Such change takes a long-term commitment—like healing from an injury, growing a plant, learning a new language—it takes time, caring, vigilance, and on-going attention.

Worldview can be expressed in a number of ways. In these articles, we consider how language, time, race, and historical context have impacted our consultants’ worldview. Personally, I am reconnecting at this point in my life with how worldview informs our relationships as human beings to nature, as I spend more time in the outdoors.

Consider the following from a Hawaiian elder, Nana Veary: *“It was a Hawaii where birds, clouds, and stones spoke as clearly as people, because the silent language of nature was profoundly understood.”* In such a world, of course, time, language, ethnicity, regional and other differences become another kind of mosaic for enhancing life, rather than becoming problems to be solved (or alternatively, to be ignored).

We are far from such a vision. Pragmatically, recognizing cultural differences can inform our work as multiculturalists. On a recent trip to China, I thought about how the Chinese Revolution of 1948 created institutional change when new governmental policy declared men and women legally equal. I began to wonder in what ways the Chinese government and other institutions need to continue to address cultural, interpersonal, and personal implications for current gender relationships. I found myself thinking about parallels to the U.S. Civil Rights movement. (I say this with much humility; China is so old and we have so much to learn in the U.S. as individuals and as a country.) The laws passed in 1875 and 1964 in the U.S. banned discrimination, but did not teach us how to behave differently as individuals, or to recognize, appreciate, and effectively utilize cultural differences in our institutional life. Listening to the challenges of Chinese women executives related to work/life balance brings up many new questions. What has become of the

“cultural revolution” with respect to equal gender rights and treatment is asked by many I spoke with as they consider current challenges. It is not an easy question.

I am exploring similarities and differences in how I and these women view the world, as we as consultants also support them in exploring similarities and differences in how they and their “company” view the world, as well. Such stretching builds humility and determination to continue to define, frankly, the indefinable. In the words of James Luther Adams, cultural level analysis invites us to consider how to create “nets to catch the wind.” Such cultural work helps sustain the practice of being the change we want to see in the world.