

Organizational Culture and “Reality”: Terministic Screens

and the NOSM Cultural Division

This paper examines how Kenneth Burke’s notion of terministic screens is useful in examining the cultural reality of an organization. The essay focuses on how the use of specific terms or terministic screens creates the constructed nature of reality. The paper examines the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) and its publications to observe how their particular terminology expresses the cultural reality of the organization. Burke’s distinction between types of terministic screens, those which put together and those which take apart, are examined through the contrasting terms “student” and “learner” which NOSM uses to frame their publications and values in specific ways. The terms learner and student are contrasted with the manner in which NOSM frames community and Aboriginal/Francophone involvement. This relationship between terms is clarified a dealing with inclusive and exclusive terms. These terms are used to evoke a cultural duality at the organization. The final analysis explores how the Northern Ontario School of Medicine’s division between an external and internal manifestation of culture allows the organization to express two different facets of its culture with different aims, while still being based on a singular set of values.