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Culturally Responsive Care and Education

There is almost nothing that a person can do while interacting with children under three, while caring for a child under three, that is not cultural. Everything that one does is cultural.

Lily Wong Fillmore

Differences between children and teachers or parents and teachers often cause problems. Teachers must realize that these differences may be a result of culture. Culture influences how families raise children and how a child behaves, communicates, and learns. These behavior patterns and child-rearing practices reflect a specific culture's history, values, beliefs, and current situation. In order to provide good care and education for young children, teachers must make their work **culturally responsive**—the program must represent and support the home cultures of the families whose children attend.

This chapter will help you work successfully with children from diverse cultures by identifying ways in which culture and family patterns mold the children you serve. This chapter will provide you with some basic information about families and practical ideas for providing culturally responsive child care. As you read through this material, look inward and gain insight into your own culture. Reflect on your own family experiences. Think about how your orientation toward family may affect your work with children and families.



See glossary.

What Is Culture?

You may not be convinced that culture has a large influence on children in your classroom, much less your own teaching style. Let's begin by defining culture. Culture is things, customs, beliefs, and values. Culture can be thought of in terms of the concrete items and objects we see, hold, and use. Items such as clothing, artwork, food, and dance are tangible symbols of a person's culture. Culture is also experienced in how people live out their lives as well as what they believe and what values they hold dear. Family roles, childrearing patterns, communications styles, and holiday traditions are ways in which culture influences how we as individuals live our daily lives. People's goals in life and their beliefs about human nature and humanity are invisible but ever present aspects of culture. The chart on the next page suggests some of the aspects of life that are part of an individual's cultural experience:

Culture is a powerful force that shapes our lives. Culture is who we are on the inside. It is the set of values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people. Culture gives us roots. Cultural traditions give our lives meaning, stability, and security. Culture is dynamic and alive, and it changes slowly over time. Culture is transmitted through families from one generation to the next. That which is cultural, seems natural and normal.

Some people refer to culture as an iceberg. The cultural artifacts and behaviors make up the tip of the iceberg, or the 10 percent that is visible above the waterline. Cultural beliefs, which can often be learned by an outsider to the culture, are directly beneath the surface. Cultural values are deep and difficult to uncover and represent—such as the foundation of the iceberg, or the 90 percent that lies underneath the water.

Some individuals have recently embraced America as a country made up of many cultures, languages, and religions. This is often imagined as a tossed salad or a mosaic in which each part retains its own character, while adding to the whole. It is important to recognize, however, that the government's policy toward culture has been assimilation. The process of assimilation, represented by the familiar image of the "melting pot," involves stripping away one's own culture in order to create a new American culture. The melting pot is an image from steel-making, when ore is melted to burn off the impurities. The idea behind the melting pot is that if America as a nation is to be as strong as steel, culture must be removed in order to create a single unified American society, with no trace of the

Culture List

Things (cultural artifacts)	Customs or Traditions (how people live)	Values and Beliefs (deep invisible reasons behind the customs)
Clothing	Celebrations	Spirituality
Jewelry	Holidays	Role of people in the world
Food	Ceremonies	Role of children
Cooking and eating utensils	Communication style	Role of the environment
Music and instruments	Ages and stages of development	in people's lives
Dance	Family roles	Meaning of life
Language	Rites of passage	
Folk tales	Meal patterns	
Toys and games		
Coins		

Adapted from an activity in *Alerta: A Multicultural, Bilingual Approach to Teaching Young Children* by Leslie R. Williams and Yvonne De Gaetano, Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley, 1985.

original cultures. Because of white dominance in creating the systems of American society, the new “American” culture envisioned was also largely white and European. Do you see how assimilation (the melting pot) treats individual cultures as impurities to be burned away instead of as valuable and beautiful parts of a multicolored whole?

In defining what culture is, we can also look at what it is not. In reality, there is no agreed-upon American culture. Culture is not the same as citizenship. Many Americans, particularly European Americans, confuse culture with citizenship. Citizenship is what government you pledge allegiance to. Citizenship activities include things such as abiding by the laws, voting, contributing to the well-being of the community, demonstrating patriotism, and paying taxes. Look at the chart above showing the activities that reflect culture. Do you see how those are different from citizenship activities? Culture should not be seen as a threat to nationalism, patriotism, and cohesion. Likewise, promoting cultural identity does not promote separatism or result in the erosion of national unity.

Early Childhood Education Reflects a European American World View

Many European American ancestors gave up their cultural identity for white privilege. Most European Americans are unaware of their cultural traditions. Many European immigrants, like my grandfather, changed the spelling of their names so that they would sound more “American.” The other side of my family has been in the United States for many generations. We are a mix of many European ethnicities. The result of this common pattern is that many European Americans don’t experience culture as a core part of their identity, or pick and choose which parts of their culture to accept. Often they can’t speak their ancestral languages and are monolingual. This doesn’t mean that European Americans don’t have culture. It does reflect two important facts: (1) the common elements of European American culture (such as values and communication style) dominate in the United States, and are often invisible to European Americans; and (2) the unique parts of different European cultures (such as languages and holiday rituals) have often been lost to individual European Americans through assimilation. These two somewhat contradictory facts—European American culture is omnipresent; European American culture is lost—make the concept of culture confusing. Uncovering European American cultural patterns, especially as they relate to child development and early childhood education may make more clear the concept of “culture” and the influence of European American culture on early childhood programs.

The field of early childhood care and education has been greatly influenced by European American culture. So understanding some of the common characteristics of European American culture can help teachers work more effectively with both European American children and children from other cultures. The chart on the next page shows some key traits of European American culture.

Culture Influences Childrearing Patterns

Culture influences childrearing and, as a result, people from different cultural backgrounds have differing ideas about what constitutes quality child care. According to Darla Miller (1989), the author of *First Steps Toward Cultural*

Characteristics of European American Culture

<i>Communication</i>	Greetings are brief, informal, and casual. People say, “Hi!” and call each other by first names. Communication is frank, candid, and explicit. “Say what you mean and mean what you say.” Individuals communicate at arm’s length from one another and look each other in the eye.
<i>Time</i>	Clock conscious. “Time is money.” People are usually punctual and concerned with being on time. Five minutes late is late and fifteen minutes late is cause for concern.
<i>Future-oriented</i>	Emphasis on future rather than present. Tend to minimize the past. “The sun will come out tomorrow. Tomorrow will be a brighter day.” This is evident in life insurance policies, retirement plans, and wills.
<i>Youth-oriented</i>	What’s good for the child is good for the family. Elderly are seen as a burden or liability. Families use nursing homes to care for the elderly.
<i>Family</i>	Family is nuclear and mobile. Contracts and legal agreements define family relationships.
<i>Eating habits</i>	Eating is a necessity. Individuals may eat while doing other activities such as driving, working, or watching television. When families eat together, food is often served “family style.” All family members sit down together. Food is placed in serving bowls and platters, which are passed from one member to the next, and people serve themselves.
<i>Work</i>	Strong work ethic. “Work and then play.” Individuals are task-oriented, productive, and efficient. Individuals talk of working on relationships and working on their parenting skills. Prefer rewards based on individual achievement.
<i>Thinking style</i>	Logical sequential thinking. Knowledge is fixed and static. Value rational and objective thinking that can be proven scientifically or mathematically. Subjective or intuitive knowledge is not highly respected.
<i>Learning style</i>	People learn through exploration, problem solving, and interaction with objects. Value creative problem solving, seek creative solutions, continuous improvement, and progress.
<i>Individualism</i>	People are unique individuals, distinct from their family or culture. Individuals control their lives. Value personal freedom, personal choice, and autonomy.
<i>Egalitarianism</i>	There is a stated value of treating women and men the same. Children are given equal status with adults. Challenging authority is acceptable behavior.
<i>Self-responsibility/ self-sufficiency</i>	People are responsible for their own behavior and managing their own lives. Individuals should provide for their own basic needs and not rely on others. Needing help from others is viewed as being a burden or being weak.
<i>Materialism</i>	High value placed on things such as clothing, furniture, toys, and other consumer goods. Owning goods contributes to an individual’s sense of self and status in the community.

Difference: Socialization in Infant/Toddler Day Care: “Methods of caring for and educating young children routinely expected by high-income families may shock and repel low-income families—and vice versa. Routines considered desirable by one group may be seen as inane by another. Guidance strategies believed in some cultural settings to be essential to healthy growth may be considered inhumane and destructive in others. What some consider to be essential experiences for effective early learning, others consider utter nonsense. Social workers, early childhood educators, and child care professionals have often felt the tension among these opposing views and have sometimes been snagged unknowingly by their own culturally biased assumptions.”

In reality, culture influences how a parent responds to all elements of child-rearing, such as the following:

- Parent’s age-related expectations of their children
- Interest in and concern over children acquiring skills by a certain age
- Attachment and separation
- Children’s role and responsibility in the family
- Gender roles
- Diet and mealtime routines
- Sleep patterns and bedtime routines
- Medical care
- Discipline methods
- Children’s play
- Children’s learning styles
- Family’s expectations of teachers and schools
- Selection and use of supplemental child care

As a teacher you have your own culturally based beliefs about how each of these childrearing issues should be handled in your classroom, as well as by parents at home. Sometimes we view our own style of childrearing as the normal or right way. Remember, each culture successfully raises new generations of children according to their own values and beliefs. We must be willing to look at the life experiences of the children and families in our care without placing judgment.

Early childhood programs institute policies and procedures that define a specific style of child care and education. A program can never be multicultural if its staff expects one style of child care to complement the endless variety of child-rearing patterns. Conflicts arise when programs rigidly follow one style. Parents and teachers may disagree about what’s best for a child. You have probably

observed or at least sensed these types of conflicts. For example, have you ever been frustrated by or found yourself wondering about the following:

- A child who refuses to play by himself and interrupts other children who are playing quietly and independently
- A child who has difficulty choosing an activity and prefers to cling to you, her teacher
- A child who asks for your help or attention by verbally teasing you
- A child who resists looking you in the eye when you are reprimanding him
- A child who has a high energy level and turns every activity into a large-motor experience
- A child who goes limp and becomes silent when you directly confront her behavior
- A baby who prefers to be held and gently rocked, and who cries loudly whenever you put him on the floor to play
- A three-year-old who drinks from a bottle and can't go to sleep without a pacifier in her mouth
- A child who comes to school every day in “party” clothes and his parents warn him to stay away from paint and other messy activities
- A parent who is very angry because her daughter comes home with a dirty face and sand in her hair
- A child who enjoys lively play with one or two playmates, but is silent and hangs back in group activities

A teacher may think she clashes with a child because of “personality” issues, when in fact it is a difference in culture.

On the following pages is a diverse list of culturally based family patterns, childrearing practices, and values—all of which may influence your classroom. Use this list to help you identify sources of conflict, recognize the child's experience, and understand the parent's perspective. The right-hand column offers suggestions for alternative caregiving and teaching practices and attitudes. Use this list to develop and institute culturally relevant care and education.

Culture and the Classroom

Cultural Pattern

FAMILY SYSTEM

Highly mobile, nuclear

Clan network in which family unit lives in the same neighborhood or community

Extended family that lives together and shares resources

POWER STRUCTURE

Democratic family with members sharing in decision making

One family member has the power and authority to make decisions

WORK/EMPLOYMENT

Career-oriented; job is very rewarding; parent brings work home and has few other interests

Boring, monotonous job, or a job that requires little initiative or autonomy; personal fulfillment comes from recreation

Child's Experience

Child has little contact with extended family; friends take the place of extended family.

Child is used to a high level of activity within the home, with people coming and going (dropping by). Child may regularly eat or sleep in more than one household.

Child is involved in all activities and is used to a high level of cooperation and responsibility. Separating children can be seen as breaking up the family.

Child is allowed/encouraged to negotiate, compromise.

Child is expected to obey, follow commands, and respect adult authority.

Parents want child to have similar opportunities to be creative and develop own interests; child relates to learning through play.

Parents don't expect child to enjoy learning; model attitude of work now and play later; and may expect child to sit through long lessons.

Caregiving and Teaching Strategy

Sponsor family events to help families build support systems, encourage child's friendship that continue away from school.

Child may become bored if there is little activity. Provide opportunities to move freely around room. Thrives on free choice play. Provide activities that encourage cooperation and sharing.

Child may try to watch out for younger brothers and sisters. Consider mixed age groups that allow siblings to stay together or allow child to "visit" sibling during the day. Provide activities that build cooperation and sharing. Understand that family may not need or attend family-oriented center events.

Offer real choices to child; use problem-solving techniques.

Child may resist making activity choices and may be uncomfortable looking adults in the eye or calling them by name. Don't insist on eye contact; be aware child may need your help in making choices. If a concern exists, try to connect with the powerful family member.

Provide meaningful choices and opportunities for creativity and self-expression.

Guide child in free play if he tends to become wild. Encourage and demonstrate short, quiet breaks from long lessons.

Culture and the Classroom, *continued*

Cultural Pattern	Child's Experience	Caregiving and Teaching Strategy
ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILD CARE		
Child care is a public place and the teacher should be respected	Child comes to school in dress clothes, is told to obey the teacher, and may not call teachers by their first names.	Provide smocks that actually cover and protect clothing; respect child's need to speak to you formally; consider adding a title (Ms., Mrs., Mr.) if you use your first name.
Child care is for the child, part of a modern extended family network	The child may come in worn, casual play clothes; the child and parent call teachers by their first names.	Don't be offended or judge the child based on her clothes; consider allowing the child to call you by your first name.
CHILD DEVELOPMENT		
Infancy equals the first twelve months of life	Child is breast-fed for the first six to twelve months; discipline begins with saying "no" and slapping the child's hand, and letting child cry after six months of age.	You may feel that the child's parent is pushing the child. Use active listening techniques and simple commands toward the end of the first year.
Infancy equals the first two years	Child is breast-fed for the first two to four years or is allowed to have a bottle for the first five years; toilet training is gradual; discipline begins at the end of this period; parent may not be concerned about developmental milestones.	Recognize that this child may have a difficult adjustment to child care due to grieving the perceived loss of mother. Find ways to hold and carry this child; do not force him to play alone for long periods.
Infancy equals the first five years of life	Child is breast-fed for the first two years; may spend all of waking hours with mother and may sleep with mother; few demands on child at this time; toilet training is gradual; child is not pushed to learn self-help skills.	Accept what may look like delayed separation anxiety, which may peak during preschool years and catch you off guard. Allow child to have transitional objects such as stuffed animals or blankets; push developmental information on parent only if you have a strong concern about delays.

Culture and the Classroom, *continued*

Cultural Pattern

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

Parents experience discrimination, lack of opportunities, violence, and police hostility

Parents experience privilege and many opportunities, and live in a safe environment

VALUES

Strong, close-knit family

Interpersonal relationships

Independence

Interdependence

Child's Experience

Child's demands are ignored or ridiculed as child is prepared to survive in a hostile environment, taught to tolerate unfairness, and conditioned not to expect too much.

Child is given what she wants and is taught to expect that her needs will be met and that the world is a safe place.

Child taught that the family comes before the individual; members are expected to sacrifice personal desire for the family.

Infant is usually in the company of others and is held most of the time, or passed from one person to the next; and child is people-oriented.

Infant only held for feeding, comforting, and moving from place to place; child sleeps alone for long periods of time; and child has own space and toys at home.

Child is raised to understand that being a member of a family involves relying on others to get his or her needs met; give and take relationships with siblings, parents, and extended family members. Child is fed when he or she is capable of feeding herself and carried when he or she is capable of walking.

Caregiving and Teaching Strategy

Delay your response to a child; respect parent's need to keep child safe; and use firm discipline.

Consider granting parent's request for individual treatment of child.

Recognize child may be expected to miss school in order to take care of a family member.

Find ways to hold and carry infant; provide lots of touching and caressing; play "people" games such as peek-a-boo; understand that child may be more interested in playmates than in manipulating toys and objects; use eye contact to guide child's behavior.

Recognize parent's fear that too much holding and cuddling will "spoil" the baby; allow infant to play on the floor and children to move independently around room; bring own toys from home and minimize sharing.

Create situations where the child relies on you for assistance. Store toys in view but out of reach so that the child asks you to get them down, serve children their meals rather than having children serve themselves, pair up and encourage older children to help younger ones tie shoes or button coats.

Culture and the Classroom, *continued*

Cultural Pattern	Child's Experience	Caregiving and Teaching Strategy
VALUES, CONT.		
Present-time orientation	Child's lifestyle is very process-oriented with little emphasis on routines and eating or sleeping by the clock.	Offer flexibility in arrival and departure; avoid threats and bribes to get child to eat or nap.
Personal cleanliness	Infant may be spoon-fed, child's face is washed often, clothes are kept clean, and toilet training may begin after the first year.	Keep the child's face clean; avoid getting sand in the child's hair; put the child in clean clothes before going home from child care.
Honor, dignity, and pride	By their behavior and achievement, child upholds family honor; child is disciplined for rude behavior and poor manners.	Share child's achievements with parent; help child to learn manners; be sensitive to parent's need to maintain pride and dignity when confronting parent about child's negative behavior.
"Humanism"—emphasis on individual dignity, worth, and self-realization	Each child is accepted as an individual; child is not pushed to reach developmental milestones or learn self-help skills early; parent may trust individual teacher more than the program.	Avoid motivating child through competition; understand that the child may be more interested in friends or helping the teacher than in completing tasks; avoid misreading parent's acceptance of child's abilities as lack of interest.
"Personalism"—emphasis on, and orientation toward, close interpersonal relationships and friendships rather than outer achievements	The child is encouraged to be friendly, hospitable, charming, congenial, agreeable, open, and outgoing.	Encourage the child to be loyal and generous to classmates; don't be surprised if the child tries to be your "helper"; find ways for the child to help others in the classroom.
Modesty	Child taught to keep a low profile in public and discouraged from drawing attention to herself; it is not acceptable for child to ask for what she wants; there may be little public display of affection.	Respond to child's cries promptly; don't allow this child to become an invisible member of your class; this child may not ask much of you and easily can go unnoticed; avoid forcing the child to talk during group time.
Self-expression	Child taught to express personality through verbal communication; child is praised for speaking and listening well.	Look for child to enjoy group time and creative expression, and engage the adults in verbal interplay; try teaching through drama, stories, and song.

Culture and the Classroom, *continued*

Cultural Pattern

Child's Experience

Caregiving and Teaching Strategy

VALUES, CONT.

Strong oral tradition

Culture passed down through storytelling, poetry, and song; adults guide child's behavior by telling a story with a moral.

Recognize teachable moments for telling a story to motivate or challenge the child's behavior; also, use lullabies and songs.

Expressing feelings is permitted

Child is allowed to cry, scream, and have temper tantrums; affection is often expressed among family members.

Accept child's crying while comforting the child; stay with child when he is having a temper tantrum.

Feelings should be hidden

Crying and screaming are discouraged, as are displays of affection.

Pick up infant as soon as she cries; try ignoring outbursts, or remove child from group to express feelings.

CHILD DISCIPLINE

Clear, direct discipline

Child learns to respect authority, to do what he is told, and to come the first time he is called.

Child may ignore or not take positive discipline techniques seriously. Try using firm statements and commands, humor, gentle harassment, and animated gestures.

Motivate child toward inherent goodness

Child is given freedom to explore consequences; adults talk in quiet voices and warn child of possible embarrassment as a result of misbehavior.

Child may go limp or show other signs of passive resistance if you discipline him too strongly. Use natural consequences, ask rather than command, and talk softly.

Motivate child toward good behavior from inherent chaos or self-interest

Child is disciplined by scolding, threats, and promises.

Try modeling desired behavior using "if-then" statements: "If you put the toys away, then you can go outside"; praise good manners and polite behavior.

Harmony within family or with other people

Child is scolded, shamed, and humiliated for fighting or having temper tantrums.

Show disapproval through facial expression and body language; try talking to the child in a low, hushed voice; praise cooperation.

LEARNING STYLE

Formal—learning takes place in a structured environment with clear, distinct roles

The child has been taught rules of appropriate social behavior such as addressing adults by a title, dressing appropriately when going out in public, and showing respect to adults and others.

Dress professionally; have children use a title when addressing you; provide a set daily schedule, a quiet learning environment, and less mobility; and make large group time more like a ceremony.

Culture and the Classroom, *continued*

Cultural Pattern

LEARNING STYLE, CONT.

Novelty—learning is oriented toward the present, flexibility, creativity, and change

Group orientation—learning is seen as a collaborative process in which everyone’s input is necessary and valued

Visual—learning takes place primarily through sight; vision is used to take in information and feedback

Kinesthetic—learning takes place primarily through the child’s active physical engagement with materials, and in motion

Relational—learning takes place through dialogue and interaction with others

Independent—learning is easiest when working alone

Child’s Experience

The child is encouraged to try anything once and is used to doing things on the spur of the moment; home may be a very dynamic, lively environment.

The child may be used to being in close physical proximity to others and doing things with siblings or as a family; sharing information may not be seen as “cheating,” but as logical and helpful.

The child likes to “see” the pictures in a book, have adults look at him or her when they are interacting, and notice visual details in an environment.

The child may need to move (jiggle, wiggle, fidget) to pay attention and process information and may need to demonstrate concepts with her body or gesture with her hands in order to convey information.

The child is sensitive to the emotional experience associated with learning and needs harmony in the classroom in order to learn.

The child enjoys playing alone for extended periods of time and making his own “projects.”

Caregiving and Teaching Strategy

Use a variety of teaching methods; be creative and flexible; follow the child’s lead and go with the unexpected; and avoid repetition.

Create a warm, friendly classroom based on respect and cooperation; praise the group rather than individuals; and avoid individual reinforcements such as praise and sticker charts.

Demonstrate and model; use posters and illustrations to show children what to do.

Make sure there is always space in the classroom where children can be active; give children sensory balls or worry stones to manipulate during large group or story times. If a child is having difficulty explaining herself in words, ask if she can show you with her body or demonstrate with her hands.

Pay attention to the emotional climate of the classroom; invite free communication, emotional expression, and simultaneous talk rather than alternating talk.

Provide free choice time; allow children to work alone; praise self-motivation and completion of projects; invite the child to observe you, practice while you watch, and then continue to repeat the activity privately.

Culturally Inappropriate Programs

“Remember what happened to E.T. when he got too far from home? He lost his power over the world. And so it is with our children when their school settings are so different from home that they represent an alien culture to them. They too lose their power. But unlike E.T., our children cannot simply go home, for their homes are embedded in that alien culture” (Brunson-Phillips 1988). Cultural mismatches lead to academic failure. Research has linked academic failure of minority children to differences between the home and school. Often, classrooms are designed to meet the needs of European American children. As a result, the classroom fails to validate the home culture or life experience of children who are not European American. Many current efforts are designed to improve school achievement through positive interaction between the home and school. Research suggests that learning style is related to the primary caregiver’s child-rearing practices.

Culturally inappropriate programs

- Fail to promote children’s cognitive and social growth
- Disrespect children’s life experience and turn children off from learning
- Make children feel rejected and cause children to reject school
- Cause children to feel unappreciated and misunderstood
- Weaken children’s connection to their family and home culture and cause children to lose their sense of identity
- Increase the likelihood children will reject their home culture and rebel from their family

Cultural behaviors can be similar to one another, different but complementary, or different and contradictory. Dichotomous (all or nothing) thinking is not very helpful when thinking about culturally related behavior. I find it much more useful to think about a continuum of behaviors.

What Is Culturally Relevant Education?

“Work to consciously establish a program approach which both assists children to function in their own cultural community and builds their competence in the

culture of the larger society” (Brunson-Phillips 1988). Culturally responsive care honors and meets the needs of today’s changing families. In a culturally responsive program, children maintain their personal power and sense of identity. The child’s family is supported and enhanced. Children don’t experience daily conflict or confusion. The purpose of child care is to foster children’s healthy identity development as a member of a family and a cultural community. Culturally responsive programs share three important components:

- Curriculum is based on children’s daily lives
- Activities incorporate children’s home language
- Activities encourage children to learn about their family and home culture

How can you help children feel at home in your classroom? Culturally competent teachers and caregivers demonstrate the following qualities:

- Deep sense of respect
- Awareness of own culture
- Ability to maintain cultural integrity
- Knowledge of other cultural practices
- Understanding of the history of cultures in the United States
- Ability to get accurate information about the families and cultures
- Ability to avoid assumptions
- Belief that other perspectives are equally valid
- Skills needed to critique existing knowledge base and practices
- Ability to take another perspective
- Open, willing, and able to adapt and try new behaviors
- Good problem-solving skills
- Ability to tolerate ambiguity, conflict, and change

What makes cross-cultural work difficult? We learn the rules and expectations for behavior within our home culture by age five. We tend to think that our own culture’s patterns are the norm. We may not have a lot of cross-cultural experiences. It is hard for adults to learn new cultural patterns. Our values are cultural and may conflict with those of other cultures. Our own culturally based perspective makes it difficult to accurately interpret other cultures.

You can get to know yourself as a cultural being by answering these questions:

What is your cultural identity?

Where did your family originate?

When did your family immigrate to the United States? Why did they come here?

Where did your family first settle in the United States?

What are some of the values, beliefs, and behaviors associated with your cultural heritage?

What are some traditional foods that are served in your family?

What are some words of wisdom that your elders passed on to you?

What are the childrearing patterns in your family?

When do you say “no” to a child?

How are children disciplined in your family?

When does a baby become a child?

What are some childrearing practices that shock or appall you?

Who would you ask or where would you go for parenting advice?

How does your culture influence your caregiving style?

How does your culture influence your teaching style?

What do you need in order to become culturally competent?

What Do You Need to Work Effectively with Other Cultures?

Sometimes teachers think they need to know everything about a culture before they can work effectively with children and families from that culture. Some teachers feel they need to have all the power and be the expert in the parent-teacher relationship. Sometimes we get trapped into acting on our own assumptions. We may lack communication skills, or we may not be used to reflecting on our practices, or it may be hard for us to step back and take other perspectives.

A number of steps can be taken to help teachers work effectively with children from cultures other than their own. Here are some suggestions:

- Become culturally competent (see pp. 107–108).
- Get to know families and identify their strengths.
- Build partnerships with parents.
- Interact with children in culturally congruent ways.
- Provide culturally consistent care.
- Work to reduce cultural conflicts between home and school.
- Differentiate problem behavior from a culturally different pattern of behavior.
- Incorporate children's home language into the classroom.
- Help children develop strong cultural identities.
- Invite families to share their culture with the school.
- Recognize the contributions of children's home culture.
- Strengthen families by connecting them to the neighborhood and community.
- Participate in community cultural events.

Our teaching and caregiving practices must go beyond our own cultural orientations. We must be fully aware that cultural differences between children and teachers or parents and teachers often cause problems for children. Some of these problems, such as feelings of alienation and isolation, can be extremely hurtful and result in very negative consequences for the child. Culturally responsive care evolves from teachers realizing that differences may be a result of culture—in other words, how families raise children and how a child behaves and learns. You can work successfully with children from diverse cultures by identifying the behavior patterns and childrearing practices that reflect a specific culture's history, values, beliefs, and current situation.

All too often, children who speak a language other than English do not receive developmentally appropriate language instruction and, as a result, are less likely to succeed in school. In the next chapter, we'll look at how children acquire a second language and classroom strategies you can use to support second language learners.

Questions to Ponder

1. Try to uncover your own culturally-based values, beliefs, and behaviors. Ask yourself these questions:
 - What were some words of wisdom, sayings, or advice that your parents or grandparents passed on to you?
 - What are some childrearing practices of others that shock, appall, or frighten you?
 - To whom or where would you go for advice about children or parenting?
2. How can you develop the sensitivity and perspective that will enable you to provide culturally responsive care and education that honors and meets the needs of today's changing families?
3. In your experience, how have cultural differences created challenges in the classroom? How did you resolve or manage those differences? Would you do it differently now?
4. Use the form on the following pages to help you think about diversifying your caregiving routines and practices.

What if?

(From *Developing Roots & Wings*, 1992, Redleaf Press)

This activity allows you to think about diversifying caregiving routines and procedures. Read through the list and do the following:

- Circle those practices that would be the easiest to change.
- Put a star next to those practices that you could never do.
- Underline those practices that would be possible, but difficult to change.

1. What would happen if we considered different family systems in the design of an early childhood program?

- What if we created mixed-age groups?
- What if we allowed siblings to stay together during the day?
- What if we allowed a child to visit his baby sister?

2. What would happen if we respected the power structure of various families?

- What if we allowed children to participate in making the classroom rules?
- What if we invited a child's mother and grandmother to the parent/teacher conference?

3. What would happen if we respected how parent's work and social status influences their parenting?

- What if we allowed children to move around more or to be more physically active during free choice play?
- What if we included some product-oriented activities in the curriculum?
- What if we granted a given parent's request that their child not go outside today?

4. What would happen if we considered parents' attitudes toward teachers?

- What if the children were to call me by my first name?
- What if the children were to use a title of respect to identify me?

What if? *continued*

5. What would happen if we recognized that child development theories and developmentally appropriate practices are culturally based?
 - What if we held a baby instead of putting her on the floor?
 - What if we allowed babies to fall asleep in the middle of the hubbub of other children, instead of in a separate “crib room”?
 - What if we let them sleep where they were, instead of in a crib or on a mat?
 - What if we allowed parents to decide when their child is ready to be toilet trained?
 - What if we allowed toddlers to have bottles, pacifiers, or blankets?
6. What would happen if we incorporated values from different cultures into our program?
 - What if we played touching and “people” games with babies instead of encouraging them to play with toys and objects?
 - What if we allowed children to bring toys from home?
 - What if we didn’t make children share?
 - What if we didn’t make all children be here by 9:00 A.M.?
 - What if we washed children’s faces, combed their hair, and tucked in their shirts toward the end of the day?
7. What would happen if we modeled different styles of communication?
 - What if we casually told stories throughout the day to make a point or teach a concept?
 - What if we allowed children to show their anger?
8. What if we recognized that parents’ discipline methods are part of their culture?
 - What if we tried humor and gentle harassment with some children?
 - What if we lowered our voice and talked very softly when disciplining some children?
 - What if we used if/then statements with some children?

What if? *continued*

Add your own what-ifs.

[illegible]

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