



The Impact of Culture

Continuing Study Outline

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Goal

This continuing study outline will expand the participant's understanding of the significant influence that culture has on all areas of child development and develop increased sensitivity to cultural influences.

Preparation

In preparation for this continuing study activity please review the following:

Maschinot, B. (2008). *The changing face of the United States: The influence of culture on child development*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE. Available at:

http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/Culture_book.pdf?docID=6921

Objectives

The participant will:

- A. Describe the implications of limiting cultural understanding to awareness of behaviors and customs associated with various cultures.
- B. Define culture and describe why members of a group may have difficulty describing their cultural practices and beliefs.
- C. Describe the notion of cultural scripts and highlight two distinct features.
- D. Describe the major differences between individualistic and interdependent cultures.
- E. Describe two ways parents from individualistic cultures may interact with their children and two ways parents from interdependent cultures may interact with their children.
- F. Describe three components of communicative competence that are evaluated differently amongst the various cultures.
- G. Identify two resources for increasing cultural sensitivity.

Overview

It is most probably safe to say that all mental health professionals have at their core a desire to help the families they serve. Interestingly, no matter how strong this desire is, or how effective the interventions may seem, families may judge our success by our ability to "see" their uniqueness and design interventions with this in mind. Whether this uniqueness is thought of as the more obvious categories such as ethnicity or the more subtle variations of individuals, families or child

	<p>temperament it is important all the same. Although cultural sensitivity is often spoken of as an absolute, it may be better understood as a range of levels of awareness and understanding.</p> <p>In the most recent census, the United States Census Bureau reported that 35 % or the 106 million people identified were people of color. As the United States becomes more diverse, it becomes increasingly imperative that we develop and maintain respect and understanding for the differences that this creates. Families that seek help are first and foremost looking to be understood and supported. The relationship develops between families and practitioners as this occurs; conversely, the relationship fails miserably when understanding falls short. Our ability to support families must take into account their values, beliefs and customs in a way that does not merely categorize families but takes steps toward a true understanding. Cultural understanding is never fully achieved but a process that is built on twin pillars: awareness of the magnitude of what we do not know and openness to learning through partnering with those that do. This outline will support participants' efforts to broaden their awareness in this area and identify resources to continue learning.</p>
<p>Expanded Objectives</p>	<p>A: As we think about the variations in culture, it is critical to understand that no one would appreciate or feel understood, if they were reduced to a check off list of traits. It may be true that many cultures have groups of traits that tend to be particular to that culture but this is not the important concept to grasp. It is even more relevant to understand what is driving those observable behaviors and "traits". The intentions of these actions are what one needs to understand.</p> <p>B: As noted in the article by Maschinot, "ZERO TO THREE proposes the following definition modified from Christenson, Emde, and Fleming (2004) and Emde (2006): <i>Culture is a shared system of meaning, which includes values, beliefs, and assumptions expressed in daily interactions of individuals within a group through a definite pattern of language, behavior, customs, attitudes, and practices.</i>" Cultural awareness is akin to implicit memory in which we do not necessarily have conscious awareness of previous experiences that influence what we are currently doing. Values and beliefs are so engrained in who people are that they may not have words to describe it when asked directly. The words may come in the descriptions of routines and activities but awareness that this is the "sharing of culture" may not be present.</p> <p>C: Cultural scripts can be thought of as the "default mode" that one goes to in interpreting others, interacting with others and coordinating our actions. Cultural scripts often operate outside of our conscious awareness. Although they may be strong motivators for behavior they also are not necessarily rigid and incapable of change. Many factors influence how a person's behavior manifests past experiences, beliefs and values including new experiences, new relationships and how they evaluate their past experiences. Lastly, most of us are not aligned with only one cultural influence but a variety of cultural influences.</p>

	<p>D: Individualistic cultures value the individual characteristics that promote success and achievement, and foster assertiveness in individuals. This culture, which is the predominant culture of the United States, puts the value of the individual above the value of the group. Interdependent cultures, such as Asian and Latin American cultures, promote the role of the individual as part of a bigger group. An individual is successful if they promote the group and fit in well with the group.</p> <p>E: Caregivers of children from individualistic cultures promote independence and assertiveness. As cited in the article by Maschinot, researchers Schulze, Harwood and Schoelmerich (2001) describe European American mothers as “expecting their children to initiate and master feeding, sleeping through the night, and toilet training at an earlier age than Puerto Rican mothers”. Caregivers from individualistic cultures praise children for making choices and being assertive.</p> <p>Caregivers of children from interdependent cultures are primarily concerned with their children’s ability to socialize and fit in well with the group. When observing their children in social interactions they tend to be more instructive in cooperation tasks and communication with others. A sense of strong connection to family and responsibility for one’s family is valued. Caregivers are less focused on achieving independence in feeding, sleeping and eating tasks.</p> <p>F: When considering competence in communication abilities there are several areas to consider that are thought of differently by members of different cultures. Anderson (1996) identifies differences in who is thought to be the child’s “main communication partner”, the types of topics that are appropriate, the value of communication in general, and how the caregiver believes teaching language should occur.</p> <p>G: Zero to Three suggests the following resources:</p> <p>Barriera, I., Corso, R., & McPherson, D. (2003). <i>Skilled dialogue: Strategies for responding to cultural diversity in early childhood</i>. Baltimore: Brookes.</p> <p>Greenfield, P.M., & Cocking, R. (1994). <i>Cross-cultural roots of minority child development</i>. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.</p>
<p>Discussion Points</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask participants to share ways they have found helpful in considering their own cultural influences. Examples might include family stories, previous training opportunities, or readings. (As noted in Maschinot (2008), it is difficult at times to develop this understanding and even more challenging to share it with others). 2. Invite participants to share experiences in talking with and learning from families from different backgrounds. It is helpful to hear times when participants have been successful and times when they have struggled. Information about talking with families about cultural differences and about adapting interventions to appreciate these differences will be useful for the

	<p>group.</p> <p>3. IAITMH welcomes your feedback about this and all of our training materials. Please send any comments to info@iaitmh.org.</p>
<p>References and Recommended Readings</p>	<p>Lewis, M. (2000). The cultural context of infant mental health: The developmental niche of infant-caregiver relationships. In C. Zeanah (Ed.), <i>Handbook of infant mental health, 2nd Ed.</i>, pp. 91-108. New York: Guilford.</p> <p>Randolph, S. & Koblinsky, S. (2001). The sociocultural context of Infant Mental Health in African American families, <i>Zero to Three</i>, 22(1), 29-38.</p> <p>United States Census Bureau. (May, 2001). <i>Profiles of general demographic characteristics: 2000 Census of population and housing</i>. Retrieved February 1, 2009 from http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/ZTT22-1_aug_sep_01.pdf?docID=7293http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/dp1/2kh00.pdf</p> <p>Walker, J. (2002). Assessing and addressing cultural competence in systems of care. <i>Focal Point</i>, 16(2), 3. Retrieved May 12, 2009 from http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/phpPubsScript.php?documentID=213&choice=download</p>