



Inside this edition

CULTURAL

COMPETENCE



Resource Article

The study of culture, family and parenting has evolved over the past century from rather interesting beginnings to a more encompassing and complex awareness. In their chapter, Culture and Parenting, Harkness and Super provide an overview of how we have come to understand the culture of parenting today.

Anthropologists were perhaps the first academics to study groups of people. They used ethnography or detailed written descriptions of observed groups. Anthropologists studied people from far-away lands, making notes about family and societal customs, relationships, gender roles, parenting, and work habits. For example, from 1906 – 1908, researchers doing field work in the Andaman Islands recorded the islanders' parenting practices. While the documentation was detailed and interesting, it is the interpretation of those observations that began the notion of culture.

In the 20th century, anthropologists began using psychological frameworks to gain understanding of how culture develops. A number of theories were

drawn upon (e.g., Freudian, learning, cognitive, etc.) to provide a structure for organizing childhood experience related to customs, behaviors, and belief systems. More recently, information about culture and parenting has combined a number of different disciplines and theoretical approaches, such as cultural practices as contexts for development, cultural construction of the child, role of culture a child's formation, expression, and developmental consequences, issues in minority child development, cross cultural studies of culture and parenting, cultural images of childhood, and work on ethnic and minority families.

There continues to be a multiplicity of avenues yet to be explored that could expand our understanding of culture. Harkness and Super observed that while research on parenting young children has amassed, there is less information about how the parenting role evolves as the child grows into adulthood. Another topical issue gaining interest is the role of socioeconomic status (SES) on parenting. . This can be observed in

Resource Article	1
What do the data say?	3
Consultation Corner	4
On the WWW Continuing Education	6

Resource Article (continued)

the United States where families from different SES often have different values, educational expectations and goals for their children. Studies conducted by Schoelmerich and Schulze (2000) and Harwood, Schoelmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schulze, and Wilson (1996), found differences in socialization goals held by Puerto Rican mothers and Anglo (i.e., American of European descent) mothers. The mothers were asked generally about their long term goals for their children. They found Anglo mothers talked more about goals relating to self-maximization (i.e., development of one's talents, self confidence, and independence) whereas Puerto Rican mothers spoke more of proper demeanor (i.e., including respectfulness and the appropriate performance of role obligations). When looking at SES within each group, the blue collar Anglo mothers spoke more about the American Dream, which had been out of their reach but hopefully was within reach for their child. These mothers used the term, self-maximization less often. The blue collar Puerto Rican mothers emphasized proper demeanor whereas the middle-SES mothers spoke of proper demeanor in addition to goals, such as self-maximization. The authors suggest that SES is a means for transmitting broad level cultural constructs.

Another theme that emerged in the evolution of culture is that of the Individualistic-Collective construct. This can also be understood as independence and interdependence. Even within the Western industrialized world we can see how different cultures view this construct. Harkness, Super, and van Tijen (2000) found that Dutch parents' descriptions of their children differed from American descriptions of their children with regard to individualistic views. Dutch parents' descriptions included sociable, enterprising and strong willed. The American parents used terms like smart, self-confident and leaders. The groups were similar in their the way they described their children as

dependent or independent, but the way each group described dependent was different. The Dutch parents considered dependent behavior typical for normal young children, but the American parents considered dependent behavior clingy, worrisome, or suggestive of some problem.

The authors highlight four issues at the heart of investigating parenting and culture: (1) our knowledge about differing people and cultures has grown exponentially and continues to expand; (2) the search for causal explanations of parenting behavior continues and has resulted in the combination of cross discipline efforts (cultural anthropology, developmental psychology, and now including a more global perspective); (3) the interest in learning how culture transmits from generation to generation continues; and (4) there a shift in studying culture from a broader perspective to understanding the influence of culture on development of specific behaviors such as play, performance on cognitive tests, or social orientation to the caregiver.

As an early interventionist how do you learn about a family's culture? Are there strategies you have found helpful? One helpful tool is the Routines-Based Interview (RBI), which invites families to share what a typical day is like for them. During the RBI you learn about the priorities they have for their child and their entire family. You learn what wake up, dressing, meal times, hang out times, outing, and so on are like for the family and you come away with a better understanding of their cultural values and beliefs. This will be valuable as you continue to support the family through early intervention.

Harkness, S. & Super C. M. (2002). Culture and Parenting. In Bornstein, M. H. (Ed.), *Handbook of Parenting (Vol. 2) Biology and Ecology of Parenting* (pp. 253-279). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.



What do the data say?

What are some common characteristics of different cultural groups?

Continuing our review of cultural variations this month we look a bit closer at the African American cultural sub-group. As you read on remember that it is critically important to respect and understand families individually and be ever cautious of stereotyping.

While African Americans have had to endure numerous challenges, prejudices being most significant, many of the earlier foundational values remain. African Americans value family, community, communication, music, religion, and making it (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). The family serves as a basis of support providing strength and reassurance for family members to gain success. Subsequently, the success gained by individual family members is shared with other family members in need, and ultimately shared with the greater community (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). African Americans also respect and obey their elders (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). This respect is demonstrated as adults may be referred to as Sir or Ma'am.

African Americans regard children as the future and provide them protection and guidance while teaching them to be responsible and disciplined (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). Teaching self-respect is linked to learning how to respect others and discipline is provided accordingly. Good food is highly regarded and young children are transitioned from baby food to table food around 12 months of age (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). African Americans regard play as an important part of child development for social as well as physical benefits. Consequently, play opportunities are often created for young children.

Among African Americans, adults are responsible for overseeing the children. Accordingly, other adults may act on behalf of the child's parent if needed (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). This type of shared discipline likely increases children's regard for all adults, not just their parents.

Regarding children with disabilities, African Americans will typically do whatever is possible to assist their child (Lynch & Hanson, 1994). African Americans continue their life as normal as possible, which mirrors the intent of early intervention services to help families help their children while maintaining a sense of family normalcy.

A challenge faced by a comparatively high percentage of African Americans is poverty. While poverty is evident in every culture 22.1% of African Americans lived in poverty in 2000 and 33% of African American children experienced poverty living (Dalaker, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002a). Compounding this poverty rate is the high number of households being maintained by women without husbands. Less than 50% of African American families were maintained by married couples (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002a). Early intervention providers working within any culture must also be aware of further sub-cultures such as poverty.

Lynch, E. W. & Hanson, M. J. (1994).
Developing cross-cultural competence.
 Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.



Consultation Corner

From November through March 2014 we are excited to have Christina Kasprzak and Betsy Ayankoya as our consultation corner experts addressing the topic “Cultural Competence.”

What are important cultural differences I should be aware of as I support families from diverse cultural backgrounds?

‘Culture’ refers to a group of individuals held together by common knowledge, experience, attitudes, values, traditions and beliefs. Our culture influences how we see the world and how we behave. In order to effectively support young children and families, from cultural backgrounds different than our own, it is critical for us to seek to understand the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the families we serve and explore how their beliefs and values are the same and/or different from our own.

Examine your own experiences, traditions and values. Understanding our own cultural beliefs and values is a good place to start. Examine your own personal experiences and identity those that shape how you view the world. What was your own childhood like? Who raised you and who do you consider your family? Examine your core values and beliefs and how they impact the way you interact with others. To what extent is your perspective influenced by religious beliefs or faith versus reason or scientific research? What communication styles are you more comfortable with – using prolonged eye contact when talking or limited eye contact? When you have a conversation, do you prefer that people are direct and to the point? What are some of your experiences and expectations related to

child rearing? Is it important to you that young children learn to become independent at an early age?

Learn about the experiences, traditions and values of the families you support. Now consider the experiences and identities of families with whom you work. How are they like or different than your own? It is impossible to know without asking. Every communication we have with a family, starting with our earliest contact, is an opportunity to ask questions and to listen and learn about their experiences, traditions, and values. Perhaps one of the key cultural viewpoints to explore relates to how they view disability and how they perceive early intervention. What were the circumstances surrounding the diagnosis of their child’s disability? What are their beliefs about the nature and causes of disability? What are their ideas about early intervention and professional support for their family and child? For example, in some cultures disability is viewed through a religious lens and may be considered punishment for a parent’s sins or blamed on evil spirits. Some religious people, especially those from areas where medical resources are limited, will seek out spiritual leaders to pray or perform rituals that may help them find out the cause of and/or the solutions to disabilities.

Equally important are how one views family. The definition of family varies widely from single parent households to grandparents raising grandchildren to extended family members living together under one roof. Who are the key family members involved in the child’s life? What are the roles of the various family

Consultation Corner (continued)

members with regard to care-giving and decision-making? For example, the African American experience differs from Black people from Africa, the Caribbean or Latin America. Many African Americans come from a long line of extended families, including those whose grandparents were primary caregivers. The concept of “fictive kin” is one that is common amongst African Americans, and is common amongst many cultural groups. Fictive kin refers to individuals who are unrelated by either birth or marriage, who have established emotionally significant relationships that take on the characteristics of a family relationship. In many societies, these relationships are as important, and in some cases more important, than comparable relationships. Extended family and “fictive kin” may play a central role in key decisions impacting the family.

While we may not know what each family brings to the relationship, we do know that there are some things that all families want. All families want to be treated with respect and all families want to be able to see their children grow into successful adults. However, families from different cultures may define respect and success differently.

Avoid stereotypes. In our quest to explore cultural and linguistic backgrounds, we must be acutely aware of stereotypes and how they can impact our interactions with others. When we ascribe certain characteristics to groups of people, we don’t allow ourselves to consider the diversity within the group. Stereotypes generalize groups of people in ways that lead to discrimination against individuals who belong to that group. In addition, many negative stereotypes result in stigmatizations that impose limitations on those individuals. Even so called ‘positive’ stereotypes can lead to idealizing, having unrealistic

expectations or romanticizing and ultimately limit opportunities to develop relationships and make it difficult to work effectively with others.

Not all generalizations, however, are stereotypes. Working effectively with families requires professionals to be knowledgeable about the diverse backgrounds and historical experiences of the cultural groups. If culture refers to “ways of being and interacting in the world,” understanding culture means that we consider all the aspects of living that influence our perspectives. The physical manifestation of race has little to do with how one views the world. However, the shared experiences based on one’s history and racial background contributes greatly to those perspectives.

For contemplation:

- *As an early interventionist, do I listen to family stories and perspectives and ask questions to better understand their cultural experiences, values and beliefs?*
- *What is the cultural and linguistic heritage of the child and family?*
- *What does the family believe about the origin of their child’s delay or disability?*
- *What are some of the family’s key experiences, values, beliefs and traditions that shape their perspective and influence their actions?*
- *How are my own beliefs and values different from those of the family?*
- *Who are the important people in this child’s life that they consider family and therefore will be helping make decisions?*



On the WWW

<http://veipd.org/earlyintervention/would-you-like-a-cup-of-tea/>

The link above is to a blog titled Early Intervention Strategies for Success. This particular link brings you to one blog that provides an example of how culture can play a role in early intervention home visits.

The situation of being offered something to drink or eat on a home visit is one many early interventionists have experienced. This

blog provides a nice discussion about how family culture can guide a visit. Furthermore, the way we present in the home can be influenced by a family's culture. You are encouraged you to read the short blog and consider how you'd respond in a similar situation. Engage your colleagues in the discussion as well.

In addition to this blog, the Early Intervention Strategies for Success Blog includes a wealth of other topics for reflection and discussion.



Continuing Education for KIT Readers

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on *Cultural Competence*, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (November 2013 through March 2014) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

KIT readers will receive the exam in April 2014. There is no need to register for the CEUs. Rather, if you are interested complete the exam online at www.edis.army.mil

Upon successful completion of the exam, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

KIT Newsletters
are available
online at
www.edis.army.mil

*Thank you for your continued interest in the KIT.
Please share your KIT questions/ideas via email to
EDISCSPD@amedd.army.mil*

