

Contrasting Views of Childrearing: The Impact on Schooling

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During a seminar on acculturation of young children, the participants were given a pink sheet of paper with a large circle drawn in the middle of it. They were instructed to write their own name inside the circle and then to draw smaller circles to indicate groups to which they belonged. Examples were family, church, neighborhood, sports, social, advocacy, ethnic, hobbies, political, career, etc. They could add as many small circles as they wished.

When finished, they were to connect the larger circle with their name to the smaller circles using this criteria:

- . An **unbroken line** indicates that you have a very connection to the people in that group.
- . A **broken or dash line** indicates that you have a lesser connection to the people in that group.
- . A **wavy line** indicates that there might be some degree of uncertainty concerning the real value of that group your life.

The participants then were asked to look at each of the small circles that had a strong, unbroken line to the larger one. They were instructed to respond mentally to the following questions:

- a.) How did I become a member of this group?
- b.) In what ways has this group influenced my life the most?
- c.) What makes my allegiance to this group different than to other groups in my life?
- d.) What are my advantages in being part of this group?
- e.) How do I act when I'm with people from this group?
- f.) If I had to imagine my life without this group, what would change for me?

The seminar participants identified a very wide variety of groups. They commented openly on their reflections about those groups with whom their connection was strong. At the end of the discussion, it was clearly evident that on the pink sheet the group which had the most *strong, unbroken lines*, which *re-occurred most frequently*, which had *the most influence*, which had *the most power to affect change*, and to which there was the *strongest feeling of allegiance* was “**Family**”.

FAMILY

FAMILIA

PAMILYA

FAMIGLIA

JAMII

FAMILLE

FAMILIE

In any language, in every society, in every age, on every continent, children have had the same basic needs. What are they? Love, belonging, physical and emotional safety, daily provisions, and a sense of worth are among the things that are common to all. For the most part, in the early years these needs are met through the members of the family. Culture molds families and families mold the next generation of children. The *socialization* of the young is the duty of those who have come before. Parents, grandparents, or older siblings, aunts, uncles, and even the neighbor all help in the process of socialization. This word implies that the youngest member of a cultural group is being taught the traditions, values, attitudes, and patterns of behavioral interaction that will make him or her be a well-liked, acceptable part of the whole. Socialization is not an individual thing at all. It centers around how one person is perceived by others.

Yet there are differences in how families meet those needs while raising their children. Subsequently there are differences in how children behave, how they communicate, and how they learn. Differences between cultures can lead to

different perspectives on what is considered to be *acceptable behavior*. Everyone easily can recall at least one time when they have seen a child do something which they thought was atrocious while the parents seemed not to be appalled by it at all. Who decides what is right or wrong?



Childrearing encompasses a multitude of complex phenomena due to differences in ethnic background, socio-economic status, gender, religion, cognitive and physical ability, family makeup, expectations, philosophy, generation, lifestyle, geographic region, number of children in the home, educational level of parents, beliefs and values, and various other factors that can affect interpretations of the best way to raise children.



It is an agreed-upon fact that children must be taught proper group behaviors, but what is deemed proper or acceptable varies from group to group. Within the context of schooling, difficulties arise when teachers and administrators use their own cultural values or styles as the standard or the norm by which communities are valued or not. If an *assumption of normative equivalence* is made using themselves as the model, it can cause feelings of alienation and isolation within students from groups that are diverse from their own.

The teachers have the task of valuing the home life of their students and the upbringing from their parents or caregivers, while at the same time crafting an environment within the four walls of their classroom that is consonant with the larger goals of the educational system. An example would be teaching a child to speak formal English, while by no means negating or putting down the non-standard linguistic patterns spoken at home. Another example is teaching a child to work independently when appropriate, while by no means negating or putting down the “always be willing to help someone else” mode of cooperative interaction taught at home.

It must be remembered that each culture has raised children successfully for generations. A problem exists when an educator misinterprets or negatively judges the behavioral patterns that another group permits or embraces. People usually learn the rules and expectations for behavior within their own culture before the age of eight years old, and from then on they may tend to consider their cultural patterns as the norm. Since everyone grows up with a culturally-biased perspective, it may be difficult to make an accurate interpretation or assessment of other cultures. The culture of a group is fully understood by those within it. All too often, however, it can be misunderstood by those outside of it.



In the arena of education, research has suggested that teachers observing behavior in children may analyze it differently when viewing through their own normative lens. Children of color and those from lower social class environments are referred for special education services more often than their white, middle-class counterparts, but such referrals are disproportionately under the heading of emotional or behavioral categorizations rather than the more clearly-evident physical or cognitive ones. This phenomenon has raised concerns and questions regarding the possibility that subjective perceptions on the part of teachers are that certain culturally-based interactive styles are inherently wrong.

Teachers and administrators can work successfully with families by identifying and understanding the behavior patterns and childrearing practices that are reflective of a specific culture so that they do not automatically assume that such behaviors are wrong. Likewise, those in the parenting role must become aware that every behavior that is right in the home may not be socially-accepted within the school or classroom environment. It is incumbent upon them to teach their children to respect the context of an educational setting.

Below are some ways in which the school can build culturally-responsive bridges of understanding:

- . Be aware that “culture” does not mean *race*. Always remember that even you are a product of culture.
- . Recognize that socialization of the young is inherent within the structure of the family.

- . Avoid using your own cultural styles as the norm or standard for others.
- . Believe that all cultures have valid ways of raising their children.
- . Let a respect for other people become your general approach to life.
- . Learn a great deal of information about the cultures in your school.
- . Research and understand the powerful influence that culture has upon everyone.
- . Be certain that your classroom curricular content, materials, and activities reflect all types of diversity in a positive manner.
- . Be willing and open to interacting with students in a culturally-relevant manner.
- . Invite families to share their culture with the school through materials and activities.
- . Participate in cultural events that the community holds outside of school.
- . Compile a list of resources to facilitate family involvement in the school by providing transportation, translators, child care or other needs.
- . Build partnerships with the parents / guardians / families who are in your school. Know and utilize their strengths, thereby valuing and validating them.

When all is said and done, an understanding of differences in family patterns of child-rearing and cultural socialization can increase harmony between the home and school.

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