

Native American Awareness for Educators and School Psychologists

This site will help us understand how culture can influence various aspects of a Native American child's life and make his or her educational experiences more relevant, meaningful, and beneficial. It will also talk about recommendations for educators and school psychologists on how culture can be considered when attempting to understand and work with Native American children from educational settings.

Culture

Culture is defined as the varied patterns of living, traditions, and attitudes possessed by individuals. These patterns of living, traditions, and attitudes are developed out of the person's specific place of origin, and subsequent cast, yet are influenced by transmitted messages from parents and/or the community (Mosley-Howard, 1995).

Note: It can not be overemphasized that, when dealing with students from varying cultural groups, educators must deal with students as individuals and must not assume that each child exemplifies those cognitive traits which have been, at times arbitrarily, assigned to a specific cultural group.

Reference

Mosley-Howard, G.S. (1995). Best Practices in Considering the Role of Culture. In A. Thomas and J. Grimes (Ed.), Best Practices in School Psychology (pp. 337-345). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.

Native American Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors, Together with Educational Considerations

It is the parental and/or the community group message that often contains values and attitudes different from those of educators and school psychologists. The following values, behaviors, and educational considerations are taken from the American Indian: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, Handbook for Educators, 1991:

Values	Attitudes and Behaviors	Educational Considerations
1. Cooperation	Cooperation is highly valued. The value placed on cooperation is strongly rooted to the past, when cooperation was necessary for the survival of family and group Agreement and cooperation among Tribal members are all important.	This value is often at odds with the competitive spirit emphasized in the dominant society. If a Native American student does not answer a question in class, some Native American children may also state that they too do not know the answer, even though they might.
2. Group Harmony	Emphasis is placed on the group and the importance in maintaining harmony within the group.	The Native American child may not forge ahead as an individual person and may prefer to work with and for the group.
3. Modesty	Even when one does well and achieves something, one must remain modest.	Native American children may not speak of their accomplishments. Therefore, non-Indians are generally unaware of special achievements.
4. Autonomy	Value is placed on respect for an individual's dignity and personal autonomy. People are not meant to be controlled, including children.	Native Americans may resent non-Indian attempts to help and give advice, particularly, in personal matters.

5. Placidity	Placidity is valued, as is the ability to remain quiet and still. Native Americans observe in silence while inwardly determining what is expected of them.	This conflict in values results in Native American people being incorrectly viewed as shy, slow, or backward.
6. Patience	To have the patience and ability to wait quietly is a good quality among Native Americans.	Educators may press Native American students or parents to make rapid responses and immediate decisions and may become impatient with their slowness and deliberateness of discussion.
7. Generosity	Generosity and sharing are greatly valued. Most Native Americans freely exchange property and food. The respected person is not one with large savings but rather one who gives generously.	Some educators fail to recognize and utilize the Native American students' desire to share and thus maintain good personal relationships with peers.
8. Indifference to Ownership	Acquiring material goods merely for the sake of ownership or status is not as important as being a good person. The person who tried to accumulate goods was often viewed with suspicion or fear.	Non-Indians frequently have difficulty understanding and accepting the Native American's lack of interest in acquiring material goods. If the student's family has an unsteady or nonexistent income, educators may incorrectly feel that economic counseling is in order.
9. Indifference to Saving	Traditionally, have not sought to acquire savings accounts, life insurance policies, and the like. In Native American society, where sharing was a way of life, emphasis on saving for one's own benefit was unlikely to be found.	This value may be at odds with dominant culture, which teaches one to forgo present use of time and money for greater satisfactions to come.
10. Indifference to Work Ethic	Since material accumulation was not important, one worked to meet immediate, concrete needs.	The practice of assigning homework or in-class work just for the sake of work runs contrary to Native American values. It is important that Native Americans understand the value behind any work assigned, whether in school or on the job.
11. Moderation in Speech	Talking for the sake of talking is discouraged. In social interactions Native Americans emphasize the feeling or emotional component rather than the verbal. Ideas are conveyed through behavior rather than speech. Native Americans often speak slowly, quietly, and deliberately. The power of words is understood; therefore, one speaks carefully, choosing words judiciously.	It may cause non-Indians to view Native Americans as shy, withdrawn, or disinterested. Native Americans tend to retreat when someone asks too many questions or presses for conversation. Because many Native Americans do not engage in small talk, non-Indians often consider Native Americans to be unsociable.
12. Careful Listening	Because Native Americans have developed good listening skills, they have simultaneously developed a keen sense of perception that quickly detects insincerity. The listening skills are emphasized since	This value may be at variance with teaching methods that emphasize speaking over listening and place importance on expressing one's own opinion.

	traditions were passed down orally.	
13. Careful Observation	Most Native Americans have sharp observational skills and note fine details. Likewise, nonverbal messages and signals, such as facial expressions, gestures, or different tones of voice, are easily perceived.	Native Americans keen observational skills are rarely utilized or encouraged.
14. Permissive Child Rearing	Native American child-rearing is self-explanatory rather than restricted. The child is usually with relatives in all situations. The Native American child learns to be seen and not heard when adults are present.	In-school conflicts may arise since most educators are taught to value the outgoing child. While a Native American child may be showing respect by responding only when called upon, the teacher may interpret this behavior as backward, indifferent, or even sullen.
15. View of Time as Relative	Time is flexible and geared to the activity at hand. The attitude is rooted in the past, when only the sun, moon, and seasons were used to mark the passage of time. Many Native American languages contain no word for time as well as no words to denote a future tense.	Non-Indians may mistakenly interpret Native Americans' different attitude toward time as irresponsible.
16. Orientation to the Present	There is a tendency toward an immediate rather than a postponed gratification of desires. This value is closely tied to the philosophy that one should be more interested in being than in becoming.	Frustration often results when Native American students are pressured to forgo present needs for future vague rewards.
17. Pragmatism	Most Native Americans are pragmatic. Native Americans tend to speak in terms of the concrete rather than the abstract or theoretical.	Native Americans students often learn more rapidly if there is greater emphasis on concrete examples, with discussion of the abstract following.
18. Veneration of Age	Native American people value age. They believe that wisdom comes with age and experience. Tribal elders are treated with great respect.	Conflict may result when Native Americans are influenced by non-Indian attitudes toward youthfulness. A generation gap may result, causing a loss to Native American people of the wisdom and knowledge of the elders, who are speakers of native languages and the carriers of the culture.
19. Respect for Nature	Native Americans fashioned their way of life by living in harmony with nature. As a result, even today most Native Americans do not believe in the progress at the expense of all else.	Because of the respect for all of nature, the practice of using animals in science experiments is met with revulsion by many Native Americans.
20. Spirituality	Native Americans hold to a contemplative rather than a utilitarian philosophy. Religious aspects are introduced in to all areas of one's life. Much emphasis is placed on the mystical aspects of life.	Frustration may result when spirituality is avoided in most school discussions. This practice ignores an aspect of life considered essential and natural to Native Americans.

	Religion is an integral part of each day; it is a way of life.	
21. Discipline	Native Americans believe that demeaning personal criticism and harsh discipline only damage a child's self-image and are thus to be avoided. Noncorporal means of discipline is preferred which include, frowning, ignoring, ridiculing, shaming, or scolding the individual or withholding praise. Sibling and peer pressure are also important means to control behavior. In general, Native Americans still use withdrawal as a form of disapproval.	Since Native Americans are sometimes disciplined by ridicule, they may fear making a mistake in class if they are not prepared adequately. Additional communication problems may arise when educators directly criticize a Native American student or parent, an act that is viewed by traditional Native American standards as rude and disrespectful.
22. Importance of the Family	The importance of and value placed on the Native American extended family cannot be underestimated. This large network of relatives provides much support and a strong sense of security. Since traditional Native American homes were small, family members became accustomed to being in close proximity to one another.	Educators and social service personnel often fail to understand the validity of various Native American relatives who function exactly as natural parents do and may consider the natural parent to be lax in their duties. This behavior should not be considered abnormal or indicative of problems.
23. Importance of Cultural Pluralism	Native Americans resist assimilation and, instead, emphasize the importance of cultural pluralism. Native American people desire to retain as much of their cultural heritage as possible. Native Americans tend to stay among Native Americans and go into non-Indian areas only when necessary.	Confusion and misunderstanding often result when Native Americans go through the motions of assimilating outwardly when they have not really accepted non-Indian values.
24. Avoidance of Eye Contact	Most Native American people avoid prolonged direct eye contact as a sign of respect. It is also a simple matter of being courteous to keep one's eyes cast downward.	Frequently the erroneously non-Indians presume that Native Americans are disrespectful, are behaving in suspicious manner, or are hiding something when they fail to look a person in the eye, when they are actually looking down out of respect.
25. Holistic Approach to Health	Native Americans believe in holistic approach to health (i.e.,the whole individual must be treated, not merely one physical segment of the body).	Many Native Americans still prefer being attended by a medicine person rather than by or in addition to a non-Indian physician. The use of chemical prescriptions may be avoided.
26. Importance of Bilingualism	It is important to Native Americans to retain their native languages. Many cultural elements are contained within the context of a native language. Certain words and concepts are not easily translatable into English.	The Native American student and parent may need a longer time to formulate a response, since they may be thinking in their native language or dialect and must translate into English before verbalizing. Because the general population prefers that everyone speak standard everyone speak standard English, the importance of native languages

		go unrecognized.
27. Caution	Native Americans use caution in personal encounters and are usually not open with others. Information about one's family is not freely shared, and personal and family problems are generally kept to oneself. Some of the personal caution stems from a hesitancy about how they will be accepted by others.	Non-Indians may see Native Americans as aloof and reserved, Native Americans may see non-Indians as superficial and hence untrustworthy.

Reference

The American Indian: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, A Handbook for Educators, California Department of Education, Sacramento, 1991.

Recommendations for School Psychologists

Mosley-Howard (1995) recommend several steps school psychologists can take and programs they can implement to better understand cultural factors and to enhance practice. They are as follows:

1. School Psychologists need to be informed about various perspectives on cultural differences and similarities.
2. School Psychologists should examine critically their own ideologies about cultural diversity, revisit biased notions that may have been acquired during their upbringing, and tease out their own beliefs about culture that stem from training-program ideologies. Cultural diversity workshops that foster awareness, knowledge, and practice can also be beneficial.
3. School Psychologists could try to become familiar with the cultural experiences of the children with whom they work and the person-by-environment variables influencing the child's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. This requires a full examination of socioeconomic influence, gender, the family system, level of acculturation, traditions and customs, and the connections with ethnic communities or continents of origin of the families and children with whom they work.
4. When prescribing interventions, school psychologists could use the family and community support systems inherent in the child's environment.
5. School Psychologists could identify how the systems of the larger society positively or adversely impact the child and should serve as advocates in ameliorating adverse conditions, whether this is the school, family, or the criminal justice system.
6. School Psychologists can become familiar with (a) assessment tools that address the multifaceted components of "intelligence" or "cognitive capability" and (b) various intervention issues. These are especially valid pursuits because research indicates that slightly more than half of the school psychologist's time is still used for assessment and a significant number of minority children are in special education or considered educationally at risk.
7. School Psychologists could use qualitative as well as quantitative assessment tools with diverse groups of learners.

8. School Psychologists should become acquainted with the use of a multidisciplinary team approach where children are examined from a cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, and behavioral perspective with an array of techniques including observations, interviews, and paper-pencil instruments. This provides a more holistic view of events and characteristics surrounding the child in question.

Reference

Mosley-Howard, G.S. (1995). Best Practices in Considering the Role of Culture. In A. Thomas and J. Grimes (Ed.), Best Practices in School Psychology (pp. 337-345). Washington, DC: National Association of School Psychologists.

Selected Cognitive Assessment Measures

When examining test materials, school psychologists and special educators should examine them for stereotyped portrayals, linguistic patterns which conflict with local norms, and a lack of portrayal of persons of color items. Hoover, Chalmers, and Bornfield (1993) proposed a list of questions that may prove useful to practitioners working with Native American Children:

1. Is the item free of offensive sexual, cultural, racial, and/or ethnic content?
2. Is the item free of sexual, cultural, racial, and/or stereotyping?
3. Is the item free from language that could be offensive to a segment of the examinee population?
4. Is the item free from descriptions that could be offensive to a segment of the examinee population?
5. Will activities or situations described in the item be familiar to all examinees?
6. Will the words in the item have a common meaning to all examinees?
7. Is the item free from difficult vocabulary and/or sentence structure?
8. Will the item format be familiar to all examinees?
9. Are persons of color adequately represented in test materials?

Facundo, Nuttall, & Walton (1994) selected tests recommended from research and from publishers' literature that give some evidence of validity, reliability, and have versions in appropriate norming data that is relevant to students from different cultures. None of the tests can be regarded as totally "culture-free," but some have a lower culture load than others. They are as follows:

1. Differential Ability Scales—5th Edition.1990. Grades 7 to 12. Measures verbal, nonverbal, spatial, and academic abilities. Normed on 3,475 students matching U.S. population for race/ethnicity in 1988.Items biased for Black and Hispanic students were eliminated during construction.
2. Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC).1983. Age span: 2.6 to 12.6.Assesses problem solving skills using simultaneous and sequential processing and academic verbal skills. Nonverbal scale nationally normed. White and Black socioeconomic norms given.
3. Leiter International Performance Scale.1948. Age span: 2.0 to 18.0.Measures reasoning skills. Has a high correlation with the SB-LM. Low culture content, nonverbal. Directions are pantomimed and respondent makes choices.
4. Matrix Analogies Test.1985. Age Span: 5.0 to 17.0.Measures nonverbal reasoning by analogies, pattern completion, serial reasoning, and spatial visualizations. Large norming group representing U.S. population.
5. Test of Non-Verbal Intelligence-2.1990. Age span: 5.0 to 85.11.Language-free measures of intelligence with sets of figures in which one more is missing. Instructions may be pantomimed.

6. DAP-A Quantitative Scoring System.1987. Age span: 5.0 to 17.0.An estimate of nonverbal intelligence in human figure drawing with standardization on representative sample of U.S. population.
7. Human Figure Drawing Test.1986. Age span: 5.0 to 10.0.Estimates nonverbal conceptual ability with a norming sample representative of the U.S. population.

Reference

Facundo, A., Nuttall, E. V., & Walton, J. (1994). Culturally Sensitive Assessment In Schools. In P. Pedersen & J.C. Carey (Ed.), Multicultural Counseling In Schools (pp. 207-223). Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon A Division of Paramount Publishing.

Hoover, J.H., Chalmers, L., & Bornfield, G. (1993). Assessment of Native American Students Under PL 101-476: An Instructional Module for Special Education Courses. Project Eric, 1-24.

Cognitive Differences

In schools everywhere, there is a strong tendency to emphasize verbal over visual symbolic thinking and to approach situations analytically rather than holistically. It follows that students whose cognitive tendencies do not match those school expectations are more likely to be less academically successful (Tharp, 1989).There is considerable evidence that Native American children suffer such a mismatch, since by-and-large they tend to think in holistic rather than analytical terms (Tharp, 1989).Informal learning in many Native American cultures is acquired in a holistic context.

Most reported studies have recommended caution in the use of instruments with the Native American populations. Studies done by McShane (1980) have generally demonstrated an 8 to 19 point difference between the Verbal and Performance subtests of the WISC-R, with the Performance scores typically falling at or above the national mean. Connelly (1983), McShane and Plas (1982), and Teeter, More and Petersen (1982) found that Native Americans exhibit their greatest strengths in the Spatial Category, which is comprised of the Picture Completion, Block Design, and Object Assembly subtests. The intellectual abilities of Native Americans referred samples on the WISC-R have also shown subtest recategorization patterns of Spatial > Sequential > Conceptual > Acquired Knowledge. According to Kaufman (1979), Performance > Verbal differences may suggest a better developed right-hemisphere processing of Native Americans.

Reference

Kaufman, A.S. (1979). *Intelligence Testing with the WISC-R*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

McShane, D. (1980). A review of scores of American Indian children on the Wechsler Intelligence Scales. White Cloud Journal, 1, 3-9.

McShane, D., & Plas, J.M. (1982). Wechsler scale performance patterns of American Indian children. Psychology in the Schools, 19, 8-17.

Teeter, A., Moore, C.L., & Petersen, J.D. (1982). WISC-R verbal and performance abilities of Native American students referred for school learning problems. Psychology in the Schools, 19, 39-44.

Tharp, R.G. (1989). Psychocultural variables and constants: Effects on teaching and learning in schools. American Psychologist, 44, 349-359.

Recommendations for Educators

Issues of multicultural competence are important to the professional development of educators. The recognition of this need implies acceptance by educators of the need to bring educational experiences

into harmony with the cultural experiences of students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Locke and Parker, 1994). Locke (1989) aimed at providing educators with a list of ways to improve multicultural competence:

1. Be open and honest in relationships with culturally different students. Leave yourself open to culturally different attitudes and encourage culturally different students to be open and honest with you about issues related to their cultures. Talk positively with students about their physical characteristics and cultural heritage. Make it clear that a person's identity is never an acceptable reason for rejecting him or her.
2. Learn as much as possible about your own culture. One can appreciate another culture much more if there is first an appreciation of one's own culture. Understanding, honesty, and improve the knowledge of yourself and this will lead to positive reactions to others.
3. Seek genuinely respect and appreciate culturally different attitudes and behaviors. Demonstrate that you both recognize and value different cultures. Provide opportunities for students to interact with other students who are racially or culturally different from themselves. Help students learn the difference between feelings of superiority and feelings of self-esteem and pride in one's heritage.
4. Take advantage of all available opportunities to participate in activities of cultural groups in the communities of cultural groups. Invite persons from the various communities to your classroom or school throughout the school year. Work to understand and analyze the development of students' social, home, and community relationships. Try to obtain direct involvement with members of racial and cultural groups and/or with organizations working to improve human relationships, including intergroup relations.
5. Keep in mind that culturally different students are both unique individuals and members of their culture group as well. Strive to keep a reasonable balance between your views of students as unique beings and cultural group members.
6. Eliminate all your behaviors that suggest prejudice, racism, or discrimination against culturally different populations and work toward elimination of such behaviors from your students and colleagues. Teach your students how to recognize stereotypes and how to challenge biases. Involve students in taking relevant action on issues important in their lives.
7. Encourage teachers and administrators to institutionalize practices in each school that acknowledge the contributions of various racial and ethnic groups. Strive to work together toward agreed upon solutions and interactions with respect for differences.
8. Hold high expectations of all students and encourage all who work with culturally diverse students to do likewise. Initiate activities to build self-identity and teach the value of differences among people.
9. Ask questions about the culturally diverse. Learn as much as you can about the various cultural groups and share what you learn with your classes and your colleagues. Recognize that the cultural heritage of the student is as much a part of what makes up that student as his or her physical characteristics.
10. Develop culturally specific programs to foster the psychological development of culturally different children. Be sensitive to classroom grouping procedures that result in racially or ethnically identifiable group.

Also, change in content begins as educators ensure that curriculum materials are reflective of and relevant to various groups in the culture. American School Counselor Association, ASCA (1989) aimed at providing educators with a list of ways to improve multicultural content:

1. Develop attitudes, skills, and techniques so that knowledge of human relations, including racial and ethnic relations, can be translated into learning experiences for students.
2. Conduct surveys of present curricula materials being used to ensure accurate representation of racial and ethnic groups.
3. Identify and use supplemental materials that provide additional information on varying racial and ethnic groups. Include curriculum materials and information on all cultural groups present in the classroom, the school, or the school district.
4. Select subject matter content and materials that foster cultural pluralism. Use diverse individual and community characteristics and resources to supplemental text material so that students can see a connection between the subjects they are studying and their lives.
5. Evaluate ways in which topics related to racism, prejudice, and discrimination can be reflected in instructional materials.
6. Increase personal knowledge of other group customs, values, language, contributions to society, social structure, and other factors of racial and ethnic identity.
7. Collect materials that portray culturally diverse groups in positive ways and request that these materials be added to school libraries.

Reference

American School Counselor Association. (1989). American School Counselor Association position statement: Cross/multi-cultural counseling. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 23, 322-323.

Locke, D.C. (1989). Fostering the self-esteem of African-American children. Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 23, 254-259.

Locke, D.C., & Parker, L.D. (1994). Improving the Multicultural Competence of Educators. In P. Pedersen & J.C. Carey (Ed.), Multicultural Counseling In Schools (pp. 39-58). Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon A Division of Paramount Publishing.