Submission for Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development
Entry: Cultural Differences

Contact Info for Submission:

Anthony Jackson
Graduate Student
University of Texas at San Antonio
College of Education and Human Development
Educational Leadership
Email: AnthonyJackson1962@yahoo.com

Norma S. Guerra
University of Texas at San Antonio
College of Education and Human Development
Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Adult and Higher Education
Email: Norma.guerra@utsa.edu
Authors and affiliation

Anthony Jackson
Graduate Student
University of Texas at San Antonio
College of Education and Human Development
Educational Leadership

Norma S. Guerra
University of Texas at San Antonio
College of Education and Human Development
Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Adult and Higher Education

Cultural Difference

Synonyms

Lifestyle mores, ethnic tradition, specific folkways, eccentricities of a ethnic or racial group

Definition

Cultural difference involves the integrated and maintained system of socially acquired values, beliefs, and rules of conduct which impact the range of accepted behaviors distinguishable from one societal group to another.

Description

Cultural differences contribute to persons' relationship with their external environment. The result of these groupings can be characterized in identifiable behavioral, and personality differences. Addressed as social competencies, they may include differences in levels of self-disclosure, assertiveness, willingness to cooperate, maintain positions of individual or shared interpersonal style. For example, the culture that dictates that individuals dominate their environment in contract with the culture that promotes living in harmony. Worldviews may as well reflect cultural differences. While one culture values the contributions of their forefathers in response to current societal needs another invests in their youth to seek solutions to the same societal demands.

Relevance to Childhood Development

Cultural competence develops as the child understands and functions comfortably within an immediate grouping (society). By the age of five, children are aware of their cultural and ethnic background as well as the differences between themselves and others. Further, they are able to demonstrate these skills in speech and behavior. Examples include: established appropriate social relationships with family, friends,
learned use of categorical and symbol systems, and developed abilities to organize and regulate their own behavior in situations that are either unfamiliar or familiar.

Cultural differences can also be found in individual classrooms, so it is important to consider the child’s heritage and any developmental or maturational differences as separate and apart from culture. The valuing of cultural differences can be introduced in the classroom through group activities, for example, inviting the children to share their own cultural heritage. This type of activity encourages the children to value the unique qualities associated their cultural tradition, promotes cultural pride and facilitates a greater self-understanding.

Relevance to Parent-Teacher Relationships

Invite teachers and parents from different cultural groups into the home to help the child become comfortable with persons that are different. Encourage parent teacher communications to help the early childhood professionals better understand parent’s perceptions and expectations of their child in relationship to the school program and differences in culture. Be mindful of stereotypical remarks about cultural differences and the social injustices than are often associated with cultural differences.

In sum, cultural differences reflect distinct integrated societal systems.

References