
Best Practices in Working With Culturally Diverse Children and Families

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OVERVIEW

On the whole ... we are inadequately prepared to deal with cultural diversity.

—Honigmann (1963, p. 1)

Separating oneself from culturally based ethnocentric viewpoints inculcated from birth by way of natural social interaction is not easily accomplished. The very essence of what an individual believes, thinks, and does is a product of unique background and developmental experiences that are most often shaped and determined primarily by culture. Even simply understanding the manner in which all humans are profoundly defined by culture and how it has led directly to the acquisition of almost every precious truth and deeply held conviction requires considerable effort and insight. Matsumoto (1994) notes, “sometimes we cannot separate ourselves from our own cultural backgrounds and biases to understand the behavior of others” (p. 6). With continuing advances in technology (e.g., the Internet), there exist more opportunities to interact with individuals from other cultures. Although this increased exposure allows for learning and understanding about diversity, it also creates fertile ground for cultural misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, with respect to its impact on practice, school psychologists who work with students and families from diverse backgrounds must seek to understand the manner in which culture influences

both their own view of others, and other's view of them.

Competence in being able to provide psychological services to children and families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds is not merely a desirable skill but a necessity. Development of such skill is reinforced strongly by professional organizations including the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA). In addition to providing a wide array of resources related to cultural competency on its website (<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/culturalcompetence/>), NASP promotes the importance of cultural competency in several ways. For example, *School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III* (Ysseldyke et al., 2006) elevates skill in all aspects of cultural competency to one of the four foundational domains upon which the other domains of competency rest. This change reflects a recognition of the fact that cultural competence plays a part in all aspects of psychological service delivery. It is no longer viewed as an add-on to the psychologist's skill repertoire; rather, it is an essential tool that informs all professional activities and an area of skill that must be reinforced through professional preparation and training programs. The resources on the website, which even include a Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Services and Supports to Children and Their Families, among other valuable materials, reflect NASP's commitment to culturally competent practice. In 2002, NASP formally stated in its strategic plan, as adopted by the delegate assembly, that “cultural

competence is evident at the practice and association levels” and is one of the organization’s major values. A similar commitment to cultural competency is held by APA. In 2002’s, *Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists*, APA reinforced its commitment to the training of psychologists in this light and the need for development of such skill by professionals. Clearly, the development of culturally competent psychological service delivery has become central to the mission of both NASP and APA and by default the responsibility of its constituency.

Cultural competence is neither a discrete skill nor a set of learned facts about a culture. Rather, cultural competence is reflected by the ability to recognize when and where cultural issues might be operating in the course of school psychology service delivery. That is, school psychology practice must be guided by activities that are effective for children and families who come from any cultural background and not be constrained for use with specific ones (Ortiz & Ochoa, 2005). Such a definition is aligned with the specification in *Blueprint III*, which identifies cultural competence as a foundational domain applicable to service delivery in a broad sense. It also maintains the focus on what a school psychologist does and not what he or she knows.

If a reasonable set of guidelines for engaging in best practices with culturally diverse children and families is to be suggested, then the first and foremost principle must be this one: that any individual’s own culture greatly affects the way he or she views the world and others, including people from both within and outside the culture. In working with students, families, teachers, and administrators who come from cultural backgrounds and experiences quite different than those that typically comprise the U.S. majority, it is crucial to understand that these differences will affect the very things that school psychologists are often interested in; that is, learning, development, and behavior. It is equally important to recognize that there will be differences that are difficult to comprehend, appreciate, or accept and that such situations do not represent issues of right or wrong, good or bad, rational or irrational, but merely differences between people as a function of their unique cultural experience.

The task of delineating a framework for working with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds hinges upon successful integration of a wide variety of practice-related topics. In order to work effectively with diversity in the schools, school psychologists need to develop full competence, rather than just sensitivity, in

the skills and knowledge bases related to these areas and be able to integrate them in a manner that guides cross-cultural interactions. Similar to the intentions and discussions presented in the previous version of this chapter in *Best Practices IV* (Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002) that were based largely on the preceding version (Flanagan & Halsell Miranda, 1995), this version also seeks to incorporate the increasing body of research in the area of diversity (Franklin, Harris, & Allen-Meares, 2006; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Pedersen, 2004; Trimble, 2003). Much like other topics in school psychology that undergo change as a result of research (e.g., assessment), best practice in working with diverse children and families continues to evolve on the basis of a better understanding of cultural dynamics and understanding that emerges from such research. Indeed, what constitutes best practice in working with diverse children and families has undergone considerable change and remains a difficult skill to acquire and maintain. It is unfortunate, however, that school psychology training programs do not appear to provide sufficient direct supervision or instructional opportunities necessary to promote development of such competency (Geisinger & Carlson, 1998). The lack of culturally competent supervisors and trainers makes it difficult to incorporate such skills or knowledge into training regimens and school psychology curricula beyond the single course requirement needed to maintain accreditation. One training program that has demonstrated consistent success in this regard is San Diego State University, where cultural competency issues and training are infused throughout the curriculum and inform every area of education and practice, albeit such programs are rare. Consequently, the vast majority of school psychologists might be sent into the nation’s increasingly diverse schools largely unprepared for interactions with diverse students, families, teachers, administrators, and fellow school psychologists. Responsibility for ensuring that they are indeed properly trained rests with both school psychology training programs where preservice experiences include the opportunity to interact with diverse children and families, as well as the school psychologist, who must find ways to continue developing competency.

This chapter is intended to address the latter need and provide school psychologists with some of the information they may need or seek as diversity is met in the schools. However, given the importance of cultural competence, and the potential difficulties in its development (e.g., resistance, ignorance of personal biases, cultural misunderstandings), it is recommended that school psychologists not rely solely on guidelines such as

these for engaging in cultural learning. As with virtually all forms of psychological practice, direct mentoring and supervision are invaluable to the learning process.

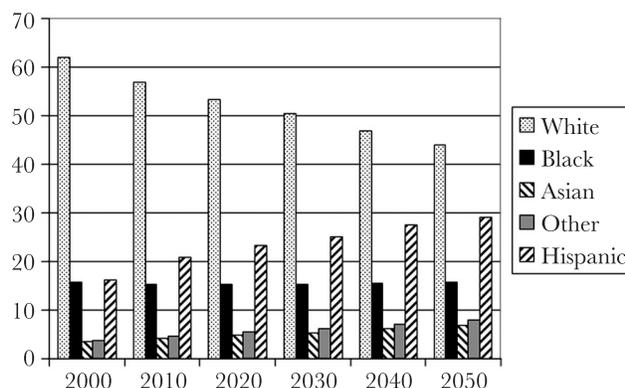
BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

If the diversity of the U.S. population were constant and relatively unchanging, it is likely that competency in working with culturally diverse children and families would remain a distant priority and largely unnecessary for those rare cultural encounters. But this is not the case as the U.S. school-age population continues to change dramatically and is projected to continue this trend well over the next 4 decades (Kindler, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Increasing Diversity

Figure 1 provides a summary of this shift in demographics and highlights the significant changes to follow, particularly for the Hispanic population, which is expected to reach 29.2% (almost double the current total of 16%) of the total school-age population by the year 2050. And although there is hardly a chapter on diversity issues that does not provide an abundance of demographic data to buttress the point, the statistics bear repeating here. By the year 2050, it is estimated that the U.S. population will increase approximately 50% compared to what it was in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). By itself, increased numbers of people are of little surprise. But the degree to which the increase is composed of diverse individuals is quite stunning.

Figure 1. Projected change in U.S. school-age population.



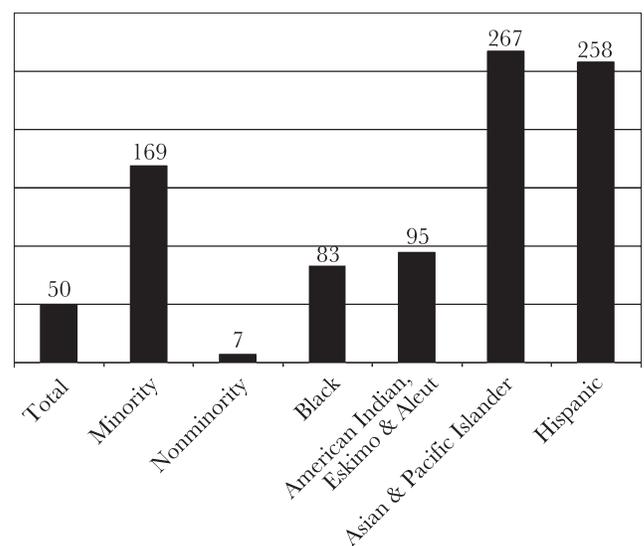
Note. Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

Inspection of the data and the estimates upon which population projections are based indicate that the Asian and Pacific Islander population will increase by more than 267% from 1995 levels. The Hispanic population is projected to increase by 258%, African Americans by 83%, and Native Americans by 95%. By the year 2050, the Hispanic American population is projected to make up almost a quarter of the entire population (24%) and the African American population is projected to comprise about 14% of the entire population. Figure 2 summarizes the growth rates for the major ethnic groups in the United States.

Growth patterns are predicted to be variable, with the greatest increases expected in California, Texas, and Florida, as well as the southern and western portions of the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Trends in the general population tend to reflect trends in the school population, and it is clear that school psychologists in every corner of the country will need to buttress their expertise in this area of practice. Figure 3 provides an illustration of the projected distribution of ethnic minority groups throughout the United States by 2050. Readers may wish to examine state-specific data concerning projected ethnic minority population growth for their school district.

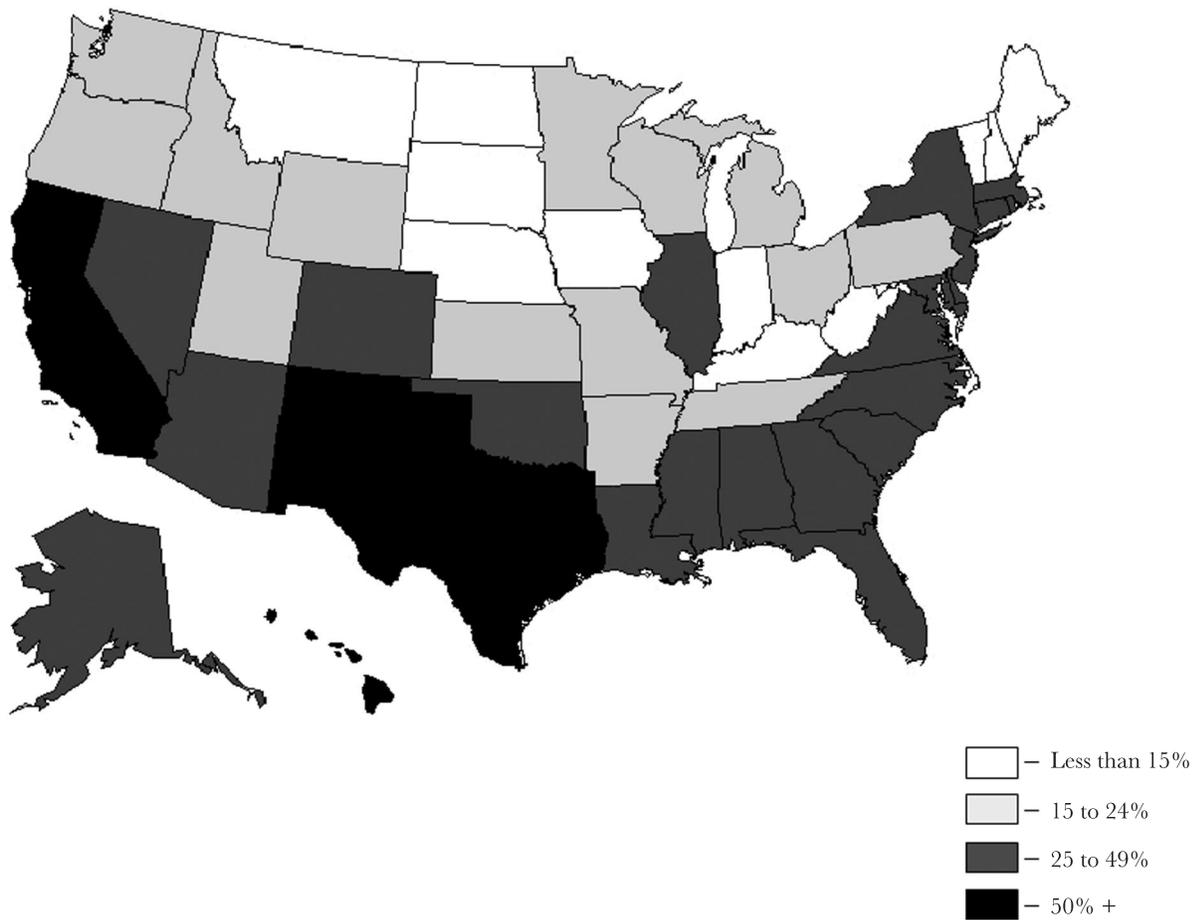
The impact of increasing diversity is not limited to traditional definitions of the term that are based most commonly on “cultural” differences as reflected by the

Figure 2. Projected growth rates for major ethnic groups in the United States, 1995–2050.



Note. Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

Figure 3. Projected distribution of ethnic minorities in the United States by the year 2050.



Note. Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000).

proxy variables of race or ethnicity (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005). For example, the very concept and composition of what constitutes a family are transforming, creating new cultural systems based on dynamics that have little to do with race or ethnicity. The percentage of traditional, nuclear families in the United States has been declining steadily while the percentage of single parent, stepparent, grandparent, adoptive, foster, and same-sex parent families has been increasing (Copeland & White, 1991; Franklin et al., 2006). Moreover, poverty has long been identified as a variable that meets most major definitions of culture and is an important influence in school performance (Hanson & Lynch, 1992). Similarly, people with disabilities represent a group whose experiences are becoming increasingly recognized as falling within the conceptual definitions of diversity and culture. Even diversity based on ethnic and racial

differences has undergone significant changes. As people from different cultures continue to intermarry, the relatively clear delineation of race or ethnicity and the concomitant cultural idiosyncrasies that often accompany them will begin to disappear as they are blended into the mainstream and are subsequently expressed in new and unique ways (Frisby, 1998; Sandoval, 1998a).

The need to be comfortable and competent in working with children and families that come from nontraditional, nonwhite backgrounds will increase in the future. This notion has been reinforced strongly in the vision for future school psychology practice in *Blueprint III* where cultural competence is now a foundational skill and no longer a supplemental skill. School psychologists will need to recognize when their own values and beliefs have an impact on their services to individuals whose backgrounds, experiences, and

circumstances are distinctly different from their own. Failure to appreciate the manner in which one's own culture influences interactions with individuals from a different culture can often lead to conflict, miscommunication, and misunderstanding, having tremendous impact on the nature and effectiveness of service delivery (Ortiz, 2006).

Definitions

The phrase *culturally diverse* differs slightly from the phrase *culturally different*. Although there is much similarity between the two, the connotations of *diversity* are less severe than those of *different*. The term *diversity* almost begs an inclusive, pluralistic perspective whereas *different* seems to set the stage for exclusion. Thus, the phrase *culturally diverse* is preferable and will be used here. However, *diversity* does imply difference, and it is acknowledged that the basis for establishing diversity rests on the premise of some type of difference among individuals or groups. The key, then, is the nature of those differences. Cultural diversity does not represent differences solely or strictly on the basis of racial or ethnic heritage. Although these factors are often associated with cultural differences, they are not in fact the same, as will be discussed. In general, cultural diversity refers to the unique background and experiences that have influenced, to the greatest degree, an individual's development (e.g., physical, emotional, cognitive, social). It is the existence of particular environmental elements and their unique influence on an individual or a group that comprises the essence of culture. School psychology in the United States has traditionally been practiced within the context of U.S. mainstream culture. Therefore, cultural diversity refers to any individual or group whose backgrounds and experiences differ significantly from that reflected by the U.S. mainstream. This definition helps to avoid the error of treating culturally diverse children and families as coming from a unitary, monolithic heritage and keeps the focus squarely on the fact that any two people from any single culture are similar only in that their respective backgrounds differ from that of the mainstream and perhaps from the school psychologist. They may also differ significantly from each other. The following definitions are offered in an attempt to clarify the many dimensions along which cultural differences may exist. "Culture is the sum of all the forms of art, of love and of thought, which, in the course of centuries, have enabled man to be less enslaved" (Andre Malraux as quoted in Seldes, 1960).

Culture

It seems rather curious to have to point out that cultural diversity may exist as a function of cultural differences. What could be more obvious? Nevertheless, much confusion continues to surround the notion of culture probably because of its many connotations in the scientific literature and the popular vernacular. For example, culture may refer to the "characteristic patterns of living, customs, traditions, values, and attitudes that are associated with broad differences in intercontinental habitation or a society's level of technological sophistication" (Frisby, 1992, p. 533), as well as differences in language or religion. Those cultures that produce advances in technology and become industrialized are seen as "modern" whereas those that do not are seen as "primitive." Another definition of culture occurs when the term is included with a modifier that is intended to refer to a circumscribed group of individuals. The uses of phrases such as *deaf culture*, *culture of poverty*, *western culture*, and *culture of the school* are examples of culture defined in this manner (Frisby, 1998). Although the use of modifiers to specify particular groups of people may be valid in a general sense, it is important for school psychologists to understand that not every single individual from even the most circumscribed culture will display any or all of the features commonly associated with it. Individual differences do persist.

Perhaps the most common definition of culture revolves around the values, beliefs, and attitudes that are relatively unique to a given group of individuals and expressed in communal ways (Trimble, 2003). A good example of this definition was put forth by Matsumoto (1994), who described this elusive concept "as the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors, shared by a group of people, communicated from one generation to the next via language or some other means of communication" (p. 4; see also Barnouw, 1985). Within the context of this definition, culture is seen as representing an element of consensus among a group of individuals regarding what is important and what will be maintained by the members and the children of the members of that group in particular. Examples of what may be important to merit transmission from generation to generation would include things such as language (including particular pronunciation patterns, regionalisms, or dialectical variations), religious practices, food preparation and cuisine, clothing and styles of dress, and values regarding interpersonal relationships. In this sense, culture is both a unique and shared experience that has idiosyncratic but predictable effects

on virtually every aspect of development of its constituent members.

In sum, culture must not be viewed as “a rigidly prescribed set of behaviors or characteristics, but rather a framework through which actions are filtered or checked as individuals go about daily life” (Hanson, 1992, p. 3). Individuals of the same cultural background will definitely share certain tendencies, but they will not necessarily behave in exactly the same way. Other factors, including gender, age, socioeconomic status, area of residence, and level of education will also greatly affect behavior, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, etc. (Hanson, 1992). Without question, the degree to which any individual follows the prescribed assemblage of cultural patterns under which they were raised varies considerably (Frisby, 1998; Hanson, 1992). When attempting to engage in best practices, school psychologists will need to remain aware of the subtleties inherent in any definition of culture. Lynch and Hanson (2004) provide several important summary statements that school psychologists need to keep in mind to avoid making generalizations that may be inappropriate or incorrect: (a) Culture is dynamic and ever changing; (b) culture, language, and ethnicity are not the only determinants of groups’ shared beliefs, values, and behaviors; (c) differences within a culture are as great as differences between cultures, and are sometimes greater; (d) discussions about culture are *always* framed in terms of differences in relation to another group; and (e) everyone has a culture.

Race and Ethnicity

Although these terms are often used interchangeably, they are quite distinct and each carries its own separate meaning with respect to culture. Ethnicity is much narrower in scope than race and reflects “a micro-cultural group or collectivity that shares a common history and culture, common values, behaviors, and other characteristics that cause members of the group to have a shared identity” (Banks & Banks, 1993, p. 357; Trimble, 2003). The similarity between this definition of ethnicity and the previous definition of culture is noteworthy. On the whole, there is not much difference, but ethnicity tends to be even more confused with notions of race than culture. Race is simply a biological concept and refers to phenotypically distinct groups without reference to any other distinguishing qualities. For example, Hispanic, African American, and Native American constitute racial groups. But members of any given race may comprise a multitude of different ethnic and cultural groups. Likewise, members of a particular

ethnic or cultural group may comprise a multitude of different races. Consider Puerto Ricans, for example, a well circumscribed ethnic group that is composed of a centuries long tri-racial heritage (native peoples, that is, the Taino and Western European Anglos; the Spanish/French/Portuguese explorers; and African, that is, people taken from their homeland for the purposes of slavery). Clearly, race and ethnicity are not the same thing. Race is much broader in scope than either culture or ethnicity and should not be equated with either. Rather, cultural traits represent the main attributes of an ethnic group whereas biological traits determine race (Banks & Banks, 1993). Racial categories such as Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander imply a uniformity of linguistic and cultural experiences that is not warranted. Mexicans and Cubans both speak Spanish, but not exactly in the same way. Japanese and Chinese are both Asian cultures but there are significant cultural differences and their languages are not mutually intelligible. Understanding that neither race nor ethnicity automatically implies that an individual has had a cultural experience that is similar, let alone identical to any other member of the same racial or ethnic group, prevents the school psychologist from making attributions or generalizations that are unfair and untrue (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Helms & Cook, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). This is particularly important in the assessment arena where interpretation is often based on notions of race or ethnicity without consideration of whether or not cultural experiences do in fact differ significantly from the mainstream (Ortiz & Dynda, 2005; Rhodes et al., 2005). Good decision making in working with culturally diverse children and families requires a solid grasp of the distinctive characteristics of race and ethnicity as limited markers of culture (Constantine & Sue, 2006).

Minority

The term *minority* has fallen out of favor as of late, perhaps in recognition of the fact that some previous minorities are now the majority. In California, for example, Hispanic children slightly outnumber Anglo children (California Department of Education, 1997). To call Hispanics a minority group is not only statistically inaccurate, it could be viewed as pejorative, a sort of semantic way of keeping diverse groups marginalized. As noted previously, the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) estimates that by the year 2050 the distribution of the population according to ethnic group in the United States may be such that no single group will represent a majority.

The term minority has historically carried implications regarding lack of privilege(s) or access to the mainstream, in particular the upper social strata. Members of minority groups have often been viewed as being disadvantaged (due to such factors as limited opportunity for educational or economic advancement) and treated unfavorably by the majority group (Helms & Cook, 1999). This notion continues to be reinforced by legislation. For example, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act again specifically excludes factors such as “environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” from being used as the basis for identifying a child with a specific learning disability (Section 602.30). The idea of economic disadvantage seems appropriate, but there is of course nothing inherently disadvantaged about being culturally diverse. In considering issues of culture, it is perhaps best to avoid most conceptions of it as related to minority group status, except in one way. When minority status has resulted in unfavorable treatment or systematic oppression of members by the majority in power, the effects of being rendered underprivileged in this way may adversely affect the psychological well-being of the group’s family life (Tseng & Hsu, 1991) while simultaneously strengthening family or group bonds. But, again, it is the experience of the oppression that is responsible for the influence on development, and not the fact that an individual or family simply belongs to or identifies with any particular minority group.

Socioeconomic Status

The effects of socioeconomic status (SES) on the development of students and families, particularly within the school realm, have become so well known that it is not uncommon to refer to life under very low SES conditions as the *culture of poverty*. Several researchers have demonstrated that social class has a profound impact on essentially every variable that influences an individual’s physical and psychological growth and development including educational attainment, occupational aspirations, lifestyle, selection of friends, activities, and social roles (Huang & Gibbs, 1992; MacMillian & Reschly, 1998; National Research Council, 2002; Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002). Experience (i.e., being raised) in one socioeconomic stratum versus another tends to delineate the range of opportunities, the kind of choices, and the degree of challenges that are available to individuals and their families. It can even affect the quality of the schools, buildings, and teachers (MacMillian & Reschly, 1998; Oswald et al., 2002) to which the child is being exposed.

Race or ethnicity should no longer be equated directly with social class or culture. Although there might exist a correlation between race and SES, they are not linked by necessity or so easily circumscribed. Nevertheless, the U.S. mainstream continues to hold fast to notions that being White, heterosexual, nondisabled, and middle class reflects high status whereas being anything else reflects lower status (Helms & Cook, 1999). Consequently, impressionable children may learn to devalue themselves and their own culture as they attempt to assimilate into the mainstream, often in vain because of racially based differences in physical features that belie Anglo or Caucasian heritage (Ortiz, 1999, 2006). The desire to fit in is seen commonly in the schools where children often adopt anglicized nicknames and prefer to be called by those names as opposed to their given names (e.g., Johnny instead of Juan). Psychologists should therefore consider SES as an independent, albeit highly interrelated, cultural variable that influences development across a broad spectrum of individual functioning including, but not limited to, self-esteem, personal identity, acculturation, language preference, and academic achievement.

Acculturation

Much like the preceding discussion on culture, ethnicity, and SES, the manner in which acculturation influences all forms of behavior in children and families rests upon issues of differential experiences, not merely differences. According to Salvia and Ysseldyke (1991), “acculturation is a matter of experiential background rather than of gender, skin color, race, or ethnic background” (p. 18). The standard by which acculturation is measured depends greatly on context and purpose. In the United States, where evaluations of student performance or behavior are conducted in the schools, the de facto standard is represented naturally by comparisons with mainstream North American culture that implies English language proficiency and values reflecting predominantly Anglo or Western European views. Thus, whenever the experiences of an individual, family, or group differ markedly from those of individuals who comprise the U.S. mainstream, expectations regarding functioning, performance, or behavior must be examined within the context of level of acculturation (Ortiz & Dynda, 2005; Rhodes et al., 2005).

A number of authors have discussed ways of understanding acculturation in a variety of contexts. In his discussion of acculturation, Padilla (1980) describes a model that emphasizes cultural awareness, ethnic loyalty, and five dimensions of acculturative change

(viz., language familiarity and usage, cultural heritage, ethnic pride and identity, interethnic interaction, and interethnic distance). Hoover and Collier (1985) described different sociocultural explanations for withdrawn, defensive, disorganized, and aggressive behaviors as exhibited by students that can be considered when referring culturally and linguistically different children for special education. Sattler (1998) described factors affecting acculturation (e.g., history of migration experience), ways in which people deal with acculturation (e.g., marginality, assimilation), and suggestions for questions that can be posed during diagnostic interviews to help assess for a client's level of acculturation (e.g., inquiring about the language the client uses to speak with various family members and friends).

Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (1989) outlined five levels of acculturation that describe the manner in which diverse individuals or groups react to the dominant culture. The first level, conformity, is characterized by behavior that devalues cultural differences while at the same time praising the dominant culture. Dissonance, the second level, is defined primarily as a time of intrapsychic conflict where personal views regarding cultural differences shift between degrees of acceptance and rejection. Resistance and immersion form the third level of acculturation and are evident in patterns of general behavior that begin to show appreciation for cultural differences coupled with a certain degree of disdain for the majority culture. Introspection is the fourth level and is best described as a process whereby individuals attempt to explore the basis of their attitudes, in particular those that represent a liking of themselves and their inherent cultural differences. And last, synergetic articulation and awareness comprise the fifth level of acculturation wherein individuals come to appreciate both the cultural differences that exist, as well as particular aspects of the majority culture. Patterns of acculturation tend to be related to familial generations. The level at which an individual may fall on the acculturation spectrum is related to such issues as whether they represent the first among their family to come to the United States (but were not born here), versus their children who were born and raised in the United States (who are often bicultural and bilingual), to their grandchildren who were born and raised comfortably in the U.S. mainstream (and often speak English only; Rhodes et al., 2005).

Acculturation is not, however, a natural or invariant process. Many individuals or groups may deliberately choose to cling tightly to precisely those things that provide them with a sense of identity, even if it retains a

measure of cultural difference. For some, acculturation is viewed as the process of assimilation whereby the native values, beliefs, and customs are gradually lost and replaced by the values, beliefs, and customs of the dominant culture (Ortiz, 1999; Rhodes et al., 2005). Consequently, different members of the same family may be at different points in terms of their level of acculturation. For example, highly impressionable young children may feel no loss in assuming new and culturally different social roles than their middle-aged parents. This difference in acculturation may even create acculturative stress (i.e., tension and disharmony within the family) and disrupt the family hierarchy. It is not uncommon in first-generation families to see the role of parents and children reverse, particularly when the child has acquired better English language proficiency than the parent and begins to act as liaison between the family and mainstream society in certain social contexts (Huang & Gibbs, 1992; Ortiz, 1999, 2005; Tseng & Hsu, 1991).

Knowledge regarding the level of acculturation for a family and the individuals who comprise the family provides an important perspective from which the school psychologist can develop plans for service delivery. Given the varying degrees of acculturation that may be experienced by culturally diverse children, families, and educators and its attendant impact on the attitudes, values, and beliefs held by them, the importance of assessing and evaluating acculturation levels carefully prior to engaging in any service delivery activities should not be overlooked.

Stereotyping

Because there is a finite number of facts and information one can learn about a specific culture, generalizing is an important strategy that psychologists can use to help recognize unique characteristics of each culture. Although evaluating each family as its own entity is important, evaluating how they function within the context of their culture also provides a wealth of information about their functioning. Generalizations allow practitioners to develop a concept of cultural norms and some compass for what may or may not be clinically significant. Simply looking at each as unique may prevent us from acknowledging the influence of the cultural and group history. However, when these generalizations become a rigid set of rules that are applied to every individual from that specific culture, they can develop into prejudicial stereotypes. For example, notions that certain cultural groups are lazy, or do not value education, or do not care about time,

are unfounded biases. These stereotypes seem to provide an exaggerated and inaccurate view of a specific individual and prevent practitioners from taking a closer look at the unique factors that may contribute significantly to the functioning of the individual as a whole. Determining whether one's decisions are being made on the basis of stereotypes is an important part of developing competence in working with diverse families (Ortiz, 2006; Pedersen, 2004).

Multicultural Training and Education

Despite the increasing diversity of the U.S. population, in particular within the schools, training and education toward cross-cultural competency development remains largely inadequate. With few exceptions, as noted previously, training programs that prepare individuals to work with diverse children and their families do not include large numbers of students from differing ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups (Hanson, 1992; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Multiculturalism, cross-cultural competency, and even bilingual assessment tend to enter the graduate school curriculum in the form of a single course, not always taught by individuals with significant professional training or education in these particular issues and not always including supervised experience with diverse children or families. In such cases, it will be the responsibility of school psychologists to engage actively in continuing education efforts even to the point of finding opportunities for mentorship or supervision.

Training and education directed toward development of competency in cultural skills and knowledge too often fall into a format perpetuated by books built upon the notion of "chapter cultures," that is, one chapter on African Americans, one chapter on Native Americans, one chapter on Hispanics, one chapter on Asian Americans, etc. Such instruction is destined for failure because true competency is unlikely to ever develop simply from reading a book (Frisby, 1998; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). In addition, the chapter cultures approach often inhibits a focus on cross-cultural similarities, which can be an important foundation for bridging differences and planning intervention. This is also one of the reasons why this chapter provides examples but does not discuss details regarding specific cultures. The intent is to keep the focus on the process of personal cultural learning that underlies competency in working with children and families from all cultural backgrounds. And, finally, such courses rarely emphasize the importance of understanding one's own culture

first before attempts are made to understand others (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Consequently, as was discussed previously, failure to appreciate the manner in which one's own culture influences interactions with individuals from a different culture can often lead to difficulties in social interaction that negatively affect service delivery (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Prieto, 2005).

The solution to the question of engendering true cultural competence is rather simple, but the implementation is admittedly difficult. Many training programs have already seen the value of recruiting students from diverse backgrounds in order to both provide the school system with a source for psychologists with the desperately needed cultural knowledge bases and the opportunity for students to gain experiences in cross-cultural transactions during their graduate training. Other programs have already worked on expanding university curricula to include an emphasis on multicultural education (Banks, 1993; Hanson, 1992), but the efforts must move beyond notions of single courses and seek earnestly to provide experiences commensurate with the needs and expectations found in the course of actual practice (Geisinger & Carlson, 1998). Graduate training programs also must make a commitment to hiring culturally diverse faculty members who have research and practical experience in working with culturally diverse populations. In the meantime, school psychologists and other service providers are expected to develop cultural competency largely on their own through continuing education efforts, a major reason supporting the need for a chapter such as this. Books, articles, workshops, and other continuing education opportunities on issues related to cultural competence will form the bulk of the education and training school psychologists will likely receive once they have graduated from their programs. But whatever methods are employed to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for effective service delivery, school psychologists must develop and maintain respect for the inherent difference and value of other cultures as well as the notion that differences do not always imply disorders (Hanson, 1992; Lynch & Hanson, 2004).

BEST PRACTICES

Cultural Competence: Knowledge

Cultural competence is based partly on skills and partly on knowledge bases. School culture represents primarily a knowledge base.

School Culture

To understand the school as a culture unto itself, one only needs to ask whether the abbreviations IEP, IDEA, LD, ED, MR, ESL have any meaning to the layperson not employed in schools. Worse yet, these abbreviations may have alternate meanings that could inhibit communication ever further. Schools have rules, expectations, and norms for all sorts of functioning including behavior, language, and attitudes. There is little, if anything, that occurs in the schools that does not reflect the U.S. mainstream culture in one way or another. Samuda, Kong, Cummins, Pascual-Leone, and Lewis (1991) recognized that:

“We took for granted, also, the cultural orientation of the WASP mainstream. The school was, in fact, a reflection of the middle class societal norms and teachers were frequently the purveyors of information couched in terms of a collective mindset that almost totally disregarded any kind of minority sociocultural perspective” (p. vii).

The influence and the impact of the schools as a culture should not be minimized. Apart from the book learning that is taking place, much more is being learned in the school system. The very culture that gave rise to the public school system ensures that it teaches the values mirrored by society. Public school curricula are often based more on political and social agenda than on sound pedagogy. Examples of this include the passage of Proposition 227, known as the Unz Initiative, in California in 1998 (and later in Massachusetts and Arizona) that greatly limited the implementation of primary language programs, or the continued efforts in various states (e.g., Georgia) to introduce creationism as an alternative scientific explanation or direct replacement for evolution as the origin of life on earth.

But perhaps the best example of the politics of public school education can be seen in the impact, both positive and negative, that have surrounded passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The desire to hold schools and districts accountable for the learning and progress of every student is a noble and worthy goal. But when high-stakes tests are used for this purpose, schools and classrooms tend to degenerate into test-preparation centers where critical thinking quickly becomes a lost art.

Such is the politics of public education. What is taught and tested in our schools is not there by mistake or chosen at random. It is chosen precisely and deliberately to espouse a particular point of view, a

particular set of attitudes, beliefs, and ideology that mirrors the values held dearly by the mainstream culture (Spring, 2004).

The problem for the school psychologist is not that the dominant culture dictates the culture of the school. In fact, there have been significant advances in correcting some of the more egregious inequities perpetuated by culturally based ethnocentrism (e.g., the omission of historical and scientific contributions from non-White Americans, portrayals of Native Americans as uncivilized and obstacles to progress, views of slavery purely from political and economic viewpoints without regard to the toll on individual human beings and families). Rather, the problem for school psychologists lies in recognizing school as a culture and understanding the manner in which the system operates to inculcate a particular set of values in each and every student in attendance (Knauss, 2001; Lynch, 2004; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Ortiz, 2006; Trimble, 2003). As diverse children are imbued with these values, the effects can be broad and far reaching with potentially devastating consequences. Consider the following excerpt:

Racism is often characterized, albeit facetiously, as an inherited disease—you get it from your parents. I guess I was lucky; I didn’t get it from mine. Like so many other unsuspecting children, I went out and got it from a more authoritative source, school.... I was infected with a far more insidious strain that taught me to hate my *own* people because they were different than what society said they should be ... speaking Spanish simply wasn’t allowed in school. Bilingual education was but a distant dream, and I was expected to learn English immediately upon entering kindergarten, never mind that my parents could barely speak it.... By second grade, my teacher placed me outside the classroom in a small group where I was teaching other Spanish-speaking children how to read in English. I distinctly remember feeling superior to these children aspiring to be as proficient as I was in English.... It wasn’t that anyone ever said anything to me overtly, and it wasn’t that my parents didn’t value their own culture or language. There just always seemed to be a clear, unspoken norm that English was *better* than Spanish and that being White was *better* than being brown. It wasn’t based simply on being different; it was a question of value. White culture was superior to all other cultures, including mine (Ortiz, 1999, p.10, emphasis in original).

The possible effects of the culture of the school are indeed powerful ones. Best practices dictate that school psychologists fully understand the learning context that exists in each and every school and recognize that the context will differentially affect the learning and development of each and every student. Students whose backgrounds and cultural experiences are not consonant with the values taught in school may respond in ways that run counter to the typical educational expectations. Conversely, the very same children with diverse backgrounds and cultural experiences may respond in ways that are quite consistent with the public school system norms, as expressed in the quote above. In each case, the effects can be considerable (especially with respect to intrafamilial relations or school–family relations) and it will be incumbent upon the school psychologist to carefully assess the forces that have shaped the individual and have served as the underlying influences on their development, notably acculturative patterns, educational programming, and familial attitudes. When diverse children and their families are in need of educationally related services (e.g., counseling, assessment, consultation, behavior modification, instructional intervention), success will hinge in large part on the identification of the dynamics and similarities and differences in culture between the individual or family and the school.

Family Culture

There is probably no greater arena in which the influence of culture operates more directly than within the immediate family. It could even be said that each family represents a unique culture in and of itself (Frisby, 1998; Lynch & Hanson, 2004; McGoldrick et al., 2005). Development of a knowledge base that serves as the foundation for understanding the manner in which family systems work and how they represent cultural entities and transmit culture across generations is crucial to the proper selection and design of educational services by school psychologists (Helms & Cook, 1999; Leigh, 1998; Lynch, 2004; Ysseldyke et al., 2006). It is, however, well beyond the scope of this chapter to examine every aspect of families as cultural systems. Consequently, only a brief cross-cultural perspective of how family systems function will be presented, and the reader is referred to Tseng and Hsu (1991) for a more comprehensive discussion.

Family has been defined as “the basic sociocultural unit ... the nest for the growth of an individual, the resource for social support, and the institution through which culture is transmitted” (Tseng & Hsu, 1991, p. 1).

Although it is not the only method by which culture is passed on to new generations, the family group nevertheless plays a significant role in cultivating the growth, development, and psychological well-being of its children (Lewis, Beavers, Gossett, & Phillips, 1976; Randall-David, 1989). Families, as groups, are likely to come into contact with school psychologists or other service providers when a school-age member of the family has or is suspected of having a disability. Contact may occur informally (e.g., telephone contact, home visit) or more formally through some type of prereferral process meeting or actual referral for special education evaluation. Depending on the background, experiences, and familiarity with the school system, engagements with the family may be welcomed or they may be seen as threatening (Hanson, 1992). For example, families from many Hispanic and Latino backgrounds typically view the school system as entirely capable of handling any and all situations with their children (Ortiz, 1999; Ruiz & Padilla, 1979). They generally seek not to interfere, and when called upon by the school or school staff, even for innocuous or positive reasons, Hispanic families, for example, may suspect that they are actually being summoned because of problems with their child (Ortiz, 1999). If so, they may feel a great deal of embarrassment because the behavior of one member of the family is seen as a reflection of the family as a whole and thus they often arrive at meetings with a strong sense of shame and obsequiousness at having to intrude upon the teacher’s or psychologist’s turf (Dana, 1993). Similarly, the respect for educators within Hispanic families is quite large, and they are unlikely to provide much discussion or feedback, let alone critique, of recommendations offered for intervention services (e.g., special education services). Hispanics tend to value the concept of *respeto*, where deference and status, as indications of respect, are accorded on the basis of such things as age, but also educational attainment (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Thus, school psychologists should be careful not to mistake the strong sense of respect accorded to all educators as a sign of passivity or disinterest in their child’s education. Rather, the respect is so strong that it precludes doing anything that even gives the slightest appearance of disrespect and it carries an almost ironclad sense of trust. The educator is viewed as the professional and to question his or her decisions would be unthinkable (Dana, 1993; Ortiz, 2006).

School psychologists may find themselves in a better position to provide culturally relevant services to families of different cultural backgrounds if they are able to understand the fundamental cultural aspects of family

systems and function such as those just described. The particular aspects of family systems that may be most relevant to school psychologists would include variations related to marriage, residence, kinship, structure, power, and roles (Tseng & Hsu, 1991). McGoldrick et al. (2005) point out, for example, that with respect to family structure, African Americans will likely have at least some regular involvement with extended family members (see also Boyd-Franklin, 1989). For this reason, they emphasize the need for any service provider working with African Americans to take the time to learn about the relationships that children and immediate family members have with extended family members. In similar fashion, Falicov (2005) and Kusnir (2005) suggest that it is important to remember that in addition to nuclear family relationships and focus on interdependence, Latino family relationships generally include certain formalized kinship relations such as that of the *padrino* or godfather. This is important for school psychologists to know because a student's biological parents may not be the only ones who feel they have a stake in and the authority to make decisions about educational or school matters.

In summary, there are many different aspects of the family that need to be considered by the school psychologist from a cultural perspective. An understanding of the economic, political, ecological, social, and historical conditions that play a role in shaping a family's unique cultural patterns will aid in providing an individualized approach to service delivery, where intervention is tailored to the family's needs. Combined with knowledge regarding the school as a culture, a knowledge base regarding family as a culture will enable school psychologists to respond sensitively and effectively to families whose cultural practices differ from that of the mainstream or even their own.

Cultural Competence: Communication

In general, school psychologists who speak the same language(s) as the families they serve may have more effective interpersonal interactions than those who do not. The comfort level felt by parents or children who may not be fluent in English when given the opportunity to express themselves in their native language(s) is a substantial contributor to rapport (Helms & Cook, 1999; Lynch, 2004; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Effective communication is not, however, based solely on verbal or signed interchanges, but very often on nonverbal or gestured expression as well. The need for competence in the former (verbal or signed communication) can often

be attained with the assistance of an interpreter/translator. Competence in the latter (nonverbal communication) will likely require application of a general knowledge base and perhaps even some cultural training from an individual familiar with the culture of the child and/or family to be served (Rhodes et al., 2005).

The amount of information that is communicated explicitly through verbal versus nonverbal means or contextual clues varies considerably from one culture to the next (Lynch & Hanson, 2004; McGoldrick et al., 2005). High-context cultures rely less on verbal communication, and meaning is derived typically through shared experience, history, and implicit messages. This tends to be the case with Asian, Native American, African American, and Latino cultures. For example, posture, eye gaze, and depth of bowing are all important nonverbal signals that have been refined through centuries by the Japanese and which convey meaning in powerful ways. In contrast, low-context cultures rely heavily on verbal communication, and meaning is derived primarily from direct, precise, and logical verbal interchanges. This tends to be used more in Anglo-European American, Swiss, German, and Scandinavian cultures (Lynch, 2004). The proliferation of political talk shows on both television and radio provide examples of the preference of low-context cultures for verbal communication.

Communication norms within the culture of the school appear to be reflective of the low-context modality. Not surprisingly, misunderstandings between school psychologists and families may arise when the normal level of context typically used by each to communicate on an everyday basis differs significantly. Individuals from high-context cultures, for example, Native Americans, may perceive specific verbal directions, detailed examples, and extensive elaboration as insensitive and mechanistic whereas individuals from low-context cultures (e.g., British) may become impatient if a speaker does not get to the point quickly and may not process gestures, environmental clues, or obscure phrases. School psychologists should attempt to observe family communication patterns, as appropriate, or consult with an individual who may be familiar with the culture of the family in order to determine what level of context the family uses to communicate. Ingraham (2000) discusses the use of a cultural broker who can be an intermediary between the school psychologist and family to bridge the cultural gap. This information will enable school psychologists to adjust their style of communication to match that of the families with whom they work, thereby increasing

rapport and the likelihood of success with proposed interventions (Lynch & Hanson, 2004; Ortiz, 2006). See Lynch and Hanson (2004) for specific communication strategies the school psychologist can use to match the communication style of a family from a different communication style.

The use of an interpreter/translator can often assist considerably in managing communication between a school psychologist and a student or family. Interpreters/translators should be trained, however, specifically for the tasks they will be asked to perform (Rhodes et al., 2005). Finding an individual at the last minute and pulling him or her in to interpret at a meeting shows lack of planning and could easily be seen as disrespectful. In addition, the interpreter/translator should be knowledgeable of education-specific terminology and school law. Care should also be taken in matching the student's and the family's particular dialect. The expressions typically used by one cultural or ethnic group (e.g., Colombian) can differ markedly from the expressions used by another cultural or ethnic group (e.g., Nicaraguan) even though each ostensibly speaks the same language (Spanish). The dialectical and regional variations may well create a sense of discomfort, awkwardness, and even conflict because the common usage of certain words and expressions from one ethnic group may be quite offensive to members from different ethnic groups. For example, the concept of "now" is expressed by the word *ahorrita* in Mexico, but it means "later" in Puerto Rico. Conversely, the concept of "later" is expressed by the word *ahorra* in Mexico, but it means "now" in Puerto Rico.

Beyond these considerations, school psychologists must ensure that interpreters/translators are used properly. The interpreter/translator should be seated in a manner that facilitates communication between the school psychologist or other professional and the parent or child. The interpreter/translator should not be used as a representative for the school or as an advocate for the parent and should be trained only to interpret and not offer opinions (often a strong temptation because the parent tends to build rapport with the interpreter). When speaking, school psychologists should make it clear that they are speaking to the parent, not to the interpreter. Although it is awkward at first, the interpreter/translator should remain a background figure at all times, never the center of attention or the focus of the interaction. An interpreter/translator should also be licensed, follow the professional code of ethics, and be compensated appropriately.

As stated previously, verbal communication is not the only method of communication in which school psychologists should seek to develop skills. Nonverbal

communication and miscommunication can have dramatic effects on the nature of the relationship between a school psychologist and members of a family. For example, prolonged eye contact between individuals from Hispanic cultures is considered disrespectful, and any eye contact between a child and an adult is equally disrespectful. Similarly, eye contact between two strangers in some Asian cultures is regarded as shameful (Lynch, 2004; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Other nonverbal behaviors such as specific facial expressions, interpersonal distance (small for Hispanic and Asian cultures, larger for Anglo culture), type of physical contact permitted (e.g., a handshake, hug, slap on the back), and body language (e.g., standing with one's hands on one's hips is considered hostile in some Asian cultures) are influenced greatly by culture and differ as a function of age, gender, religion, and personal preference as well as professional status and economic background. In the absence of concerted effort and sustained study, the average school psychologist is unlikely to learn all the culturally appropriate ways of communicating and behaving. However, with assistance, consultation, and informed readings, it is very possible for school psychologists to acquire enough skill and knowledge related to the more salient patterns of nonverbal communication within a given culture. Particularly important are the behaviors and gestures that show respect (e.g., bowing in Asian cultures, using titles and calling others by surnames only; not using first names in Hispanic cultures; Lynch, 2004) and the often ritualized methods of greeting and dismissal. For example, in the United States, small talk often centers on the topic of weather, but in Puerto Rico it centers on general health concerns and aches and pains.

Mastery of even a few skills related to showing respect or saying hello or goodbye (e.g., bowing, shaking hands, waving) in an appropriate manner can pay large dividends in the success of school psychology service delivery. Behaviors such as these tend to put the family at ease. For example, Hispanics tend to begin any function with polite talk about issues not directly related to the purpose for the meeting. To get right down to business would cause some discomfort for Hispanics as the more common method of attending to matters of import is to first spend some time in small talk about other issues (e.g., the family, health, work), drink some coffee, and allow the conversation to turn naturally from personal things to the issue at hand. Japanese families may expect formal introductions with bowing in lieu of hand shaking, and tea. Engaging in such practices is not difficult, but may feel a little awkward to the school

psychologist or other educator who feels time pressures bearing down on them. Engaging children and families successfully will require patience, effective listening skills, and a willingness to take the time necessary to establish mutual goals. Attempts to show deference, respect, and cordiality to diverse children and parents as well as diverse educators may not always be completely successful, but efforts and attempts to do so will likely be very much appreciated.

Despite the need to learn about some of the particulars of a culture and their manifestation in any given student or family, the most important component of effective communication is represented by the school psychologist's ability to view and appreciate the world from the family's perspective(s). Intervening effectively with students and families will come more from a genuine respect of their native values, beliefs, and attitudes than anything else that might be said or done, especially when their views run counter to beliefs that may be held so dearly. In such cases it must be remembered that school psychologists are not often in positions where they are designing interventions for themselves. Rather, the intervention is for others and they will only be successful in so far as they are culturally relevant to the children and families for whom they are intended.

Cultural Competence: Awareness

Cultural competence is not a discrete skill or set of facts. To view cultural competence in such a light would be a great disservice. As mentioned at the outset, cultural competence represents the integration of a wide variety of knowledge bases and specific competencies that encompass many aspects of work with diverse children and families. Cultural self-awareness represents the first step to developing skill and competency in cross-cultural service delivery (Helms & Cook, 1999; Leigh, 1998; Lynch, 2004; Ortiz, 2006; Pedersen, 2004). This was recognized at the beginning of this chapter where the ability to serve diverse children and families was stated to come from an appreciation of the impact of one's own culture(s) on perceptions of self and others from both within and outside the culture. School psychologists should strive to develop keen insight into how one's own values, beliefs, experiences, attitudes, languages, and customs have been molded by culture. Shweder (1986) put it succinctly: "[T]he best way to get inside yourself is to go outside yourself, and as any good ethnographic knows, if you cannot find yourself in the other, you are not going to find yourself at all" (p. 38).

Based on Guthrie's (1975) research, several important points emerged that described difficulties psychologists may experience when they try to understand a culture other than their own (Lynch & Hanson, 2004): (a) Cultural understanding in one's first culture is typically well established by the fifth year of life; (b) in general, children are able to learn new cultural patterns more easily than adults; (c) although values are determined by one's first culture, they may need to be revised to be effective in a second culture; and (d) not having a deep understanding of one's first culture often yields errors in interpreting the second culture.

The need to recognize school systems as cultural entities and the values that they infuse into the curriculum were discussed previously. The basis of the values being indoctrinated by society into children in the schools, and in children and families outside the school (e.g., through the media), comes from mainstream U.S. culture. Typical North American values are derived primarily from Western European influence and tend to emphasize individualism, independence, autonomy, interpersonal competition, mastery, equality, punctuality, materialism, progress, and a future orientation. Moreover, there are elements of our culture that value interactions that are more informal as opposed to formal, that display a high regard for individual achievement, and that foster pride in direct and assertive interactional communication styles (Helms & Cook, 1999; Leigh, 1998; Ortiz, 2006). School psychologists who understand the extent to which they identify with each of these values will be in a better position to determine how the values that they adhere to most strongly affect their practice (Leigh, 1998; Lynch, 2004). Moreover, they will be more likely to appreciate the influence that mainstream culture is having on the development and functioning of culturally diverse students, families, and colleagues.

Self-awareness involves recognition of differences in one's own world view from that of others and it serves as the first step toward developing competence in working with diverse families (Barrera Corso, & Macpherson, 2003; Lynch, 2004). For example, school psychologists who tend to value independence and autonomy in young children or who believe in promoting the attainment of developmental milestones and correcting slight deviations from the norm, may have considerable difficulty understanding why some Native American and Hispanic American parents seem to have a relaxed attitude toward their children's achievement of self-reliance (Joe & Malach, 2004; Zuniga, 2004). Similarly, school psychologists who tend to value individual

achievement and interpersonal competition may find themselves at odds with families who come from a cultural background that values interpersonal affiliation, cooperation, and reciprocity (e.g., Hispanic American families). And finally, school psychologists who tend to believe that the source of a child's disability lies in physical phenomena rather than spiritual factors will need to work through the dissonance that may result from interactions with parents who are committed to spiritual rather than medical treatments (e.g., some Southeast Asian groups) or some fundamental forms of so-called mainstream religion (e.g., snake holding, immersion in water; Chan, 1986; Harry, 1992).

Clearly, the extent to which a school psychologist's own cultural values differ from those of other cultures as well as the extent to which adhering strictly to those values affects service delivery to diverse children and families is a necessary requirement for engaging in best practices. Honest and genuine cultural self-awareness and appraisal provides the foundation from which the cultural elements of others can be best understood and brought to bear on improving personal and working relationships with diverse students and families.

Data Gathering

School psychologists spend a significant amount of time in activities that are designed specifically to collect information that serves a variety of applied purposes including assessment, evaluation, consultation, and counseling. In all of these components of service delivery, specific information about cultural elements relevant to the purpose for collection helps significantly in being able to understand the values, beliefs, and behaviors operating to define functioning or behavior of any kind. Not only does such knowledge affect the manner in which any collected data might be interpreted, but it also influences the very nature of the data that are sought and collected in the first place and how these data are later defined and used (Hanson, Lynch, & Wayman, 1990). For example, when a school psychologist hypothesizes that poor academic work may be the result of a disability, all interview questions, all observations of behavior and performance, all meaning ascribed to information contained in school records, and all data from testing may be interpreted within the context of providing support, not refutation, of the presumption of dysfunction (Ortiz & Dynda, 2005). Cultural factors that may have significant relevance to and influence over the precise meaning of all of the data are dismissed, ignored, or left uncollected because the presumption steered data gathering efforts in a

particular manner that did not include or place much importance on such factors (Rhodes et al., 2005; Sandoval, 1998b). In order to avoid errors in practice of this nature, school psychologists should adhere to gathering culturally relevant information in line with the following principles:

- *Establish rapport and build trust:* School psychologists should use the increasing knowledge bases regarding displays of respect and appropriate greeting behavior and exiting behavior. Help the family to feel at ease and, respected, and provide the opportunity for the family members to fully participate and contribute to the process of service delivery. Use interpreters/translators as necessary but ensure they are appropriately trained and consult with individuals who are familiar with the culture and languages relevant to the purposes of service delivery.
- *Identify the presenting problem:* School psychologists should listen carefully to the family's perception of any suspected problem and attempt to understand it from the family's perspective. The family may feel there is no problem at all. It is also necessary to determine the family's past efforts to resolve the problem and to elicit the family's present understanding of new intervention strategies and goals. Once these issues have been clarified, the school psychologist will be in a much better position to negotiate intervention strategies.
- *Learn the family system:* The structure of the family system must be assessed and determined to the maximum extent possible. Particularly important to evaluate are the areas related to family composition, family members' roles and responsibilities, family's interactional patterns, family's support system, family's childrearing practices, and the family's beliefs about the student's suspected handicapping condition and its source. Knowledge of the relevant aspects of the structure of the family system provides the basis for interventions that are appropriate and individually tailored to the particular needs and resources of the family.
- *Evaluate one's own cultural biases:* It is virtually impossible to form opinions and impressions that are free from the influence of one's own cultural influence. It will be important to school psychologists to examine how their own cultural experiences influence the conclusions drawn from the collected data. This task will become increasingly more important for those individuals whose culture differs significantly from that of the school psychologists.

- *Determine the influence of previous cultural information:* Appropriate generalizations about a culture can aid practitioners in determining whether an aspect described by the family is or is not a significant issue. However, taken too far, such stereotypes can inhibit school psychologists from looking at unique and idiosyncratic family and individual variables. Failure to distinguish general issues from specific differences will undermine efforts in delivering effective services and inhibit the development of necessary cultural competence.

SUMMARY

Until the affirmations provided by NASP's and APA's organizational commitments to cultural competence, little attention was given to developing cross-cultural competence and understanding the manner in which cultural differences affect school psychology service delivery. Achieving cultural competence is an intentional and challenging process that requires individuals to take risks, lower their defenses, and set aside their own beliefs in an attempt to appreciate another's point of view. It is expected and not uncommon for individuals who have just begun to foster development of cultural competence to have some encounters with diverse students or families that have proven to be uncomfortable or less than successful. The rapidly changing demographics of the U.S. population with respect to diversity leaves many school psychologists faced with the challenge of providing services to culturally diverse children and their families for which they may not be well prepared. The relative lack of substantial and systematic training, education, and supervision toward the development of cultural competence that exists in professional psychology creates a strong need for relevant information and useful strategies applicable to service delivery to diverse children and families.

The information and specific strategies offered here are meant to serve as a readily accessible compendium for school psychologists searching for assistance. Despite the existence of a chapter of this type, it must be recognized that acquiring cultural competency and skills is a lifelong process. Developing cultural competence does not happen overnight and one cannot expect to know everything there is to know about every culture.

However, through an open mind and a willingness to implement new ideas, acquisition of specific strategies that will enable school psychologists to work effectively

and sensitively with culturally different families as well as enable families to feel comfortable about their interactions with service providers. Learning about another culture and developing the skills necessary to communicate effectively with its members is a process that begins with the very first family with whom school psychologists work and with deliberate effort improves steadily over time as cross-cultural interactions and experiences increase.

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Predominantly geared toward social work practice. Nevertheless, both the information and the strategies offered for developing cultural competence are equally applicable to the school psychologist. There are excellent exercises and materials within that make it a very useful tool for advancing one's own competency.

Lynch, E. W., & Hanson, M. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children and their families* (3rd ed.). Baltimore: Brookes.

This updated version continues the same tradition of excellence in providing practitioners with information and guidance on providing culturally competent services to diverse children and families. It remains the number one resource for school psychologists on this topic. Part I introduces issues regarding provision of services to diverse families with a focus on developing intercultural effectiveness. Part II describes the history, values, and beliefs of the major cultural and ethnic groups in the United States. Part III offers suggestions and recommendations for working with diverse families.

McGoldrick, M., Giordano, J., & Garcia-Prieto, N. (2005). *Ethnicity and family therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.

Although geared primarily toward counseling and therapy services, this is a solid reference for culturally relevant information about practices with individuals from more than 40 different ethnic groups. In addition to discussing how various assumptions influence the relationship between the service provider and various ethnic groups, it also examines the patterns of parent-child and multigenerational relationships. Based on this information, a variety of culturally informed applications are recommended.

Pedersen, P. B. (2004). *110 experiences for multicultural learning*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

The purpose of this publication is to demonstrate the relevance of cultural diversity in psychological topics. Provides instructors, students, and professionals with collections of simulations, exercises, and structured role-playing activities to improve cultural understanding, increase cultural sensitivity and awareness, and develop cultural competence. Overall, an excellent resource for engaging in activities to promote one's cultural competence and enhance service delivery.

When beginning to work with families in schools, school psychologists should evaluate the impact of the family system and culture on the student to develop delivery systems accordingly (Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002). Other professionals such as Coleman and Baskin (2003) have suggested that counselors who have developed skills in working with diverse populations were aware of how to adjust their approach to meet the student's needs, the school culture, and the community as a whole. The path to developing multicultural competence is a life long process (Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002). Many traditional family involvement practices are considered ineffective with families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Esler et al., 2002; Ortiz & Flanagan, 2002). Therefore, leaving diverse team unmanaged, and not adapting management practices to their needs may have harmful effects, such as affect job satisfaction and disturb supervisor-subordinate or co-worker relations, which this in turn affects on the achievement of the organisation goals (Lewis 2006). To conclude this essay, there are many typical problems when working with functionally and culturally diverse teams including mismatched needs, confused goals, cluttered objectives, unresolved roles, bad decision making, bad policies and procedures, personality conflicts, bad leadership, blurry vision, insufficient feedback and information, lack of team trust, and unwillingness to change. Another practice that can sometimes thwart efforts to develop collaborative partnerships with culturally diverse families is the use of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to family involvement. In such an approach, school personnel unilaterally designate a prescribed set of behaviors that are offered to families as the way to interact with school personnel. Families whose cultural frameworks and life circumstances are similar to those of school personnel may be more likely to embrace these roles. It may be necessary for families and school personnel to work together in redefining family involvement to establish roles that are feasible and productive for all parties involved. Shea and Bauer (1991) developed a five-phase framework that can be helpful for this purpose: Intake and Assessment.