

## Problems of Cross-Cultural Youth Care Demographics of Child Care

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### Abstract

Lack of cultural understanding may cause cross cultural misunderstanding. It is much easier to generalize negative characteristics of another's behavior when we have lack of knowledge about other culture. We often assume that representatives of other cultures share our perceptions and have the same understanding of messages that we have. This very often causes uneven, appreciation of the intelligence of American mainstream and minority youths in the educational system by the youth care workers.

**Keywords:** abstractive, associative, behavior, mainstream, minority, unintelligent

### Introduction

Teachers must recognize that positive teacher-student relationships are beneficial for student achievement and special education referrals (Long-Mitchell, 2011; Adams, 2007; Decker, Donna and Christenson, 2007).

The development of positive teacher-student relationships may differ for different ethno/cultural groups (Ebb and Neuharth-pritchess, 2011)

Teachers must recognize their own positionality in terms of race, ethnicity, gender. As the majority of teachers of African American children are of European descent, these teachers must acknowledge how race affects their own identity in order to avoid the pitfalls of teaching from positions of power and privilege (Lockhart, 2002).

According demographers the number of white youths in the United States institutions for troubled youths will solidly decrease while the number of minority youths will certainly increase; simultaneously the demographic trends show that these institutions will be filled with a disproportionate number of black, Hispanic and other nonmainstream residents. Meanwhile, white child care workers will probably remain prevailing (Rensberger and Hilts, 1986).

According B. Rensberger the birthrate in the United States has declined steadily since the first census in 1790. The overall national birthrate is about 15.5 per 1.000, although for whites it is 14.6 and for blacks 20.9. The black population is increasing at a faster rate than the white population. If not for immigration there is a prediction, that the low level of reproduction would cause the diminishing of the United States population before the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that over a quarter of the increase in population for the past years has been the result of immigration with majority com-

ing from Hispanic and Asian nations. Their birthrates are much higher, but median ages lower than the national average of white Americans.

According S. Rich (Rich, 1986) young men are responsible for most crime, and because of the sharp drop in birthrates, the number of young men is declining, although minority birthrates are not declining as speedily. If the majority of crimes continue to be committed by the youth, the programs coping with these troublesome juveniles will be directed towards the population segment that is increasingly disproportionately nonwhite.

The juvenile justice system is an important source for recruiting children of color into child welfare. Minority youth, especially African Americans and Hispanics, continue to be overrepresented in juvenile institutions. Many studies show that racially disparate treatment occurs at various stages of juvenile processing. For example, African American youth are more likely than white youth with the same offenses: to be referred to juvenile court to be detained prior to trial in secure facilities, to be formally charged in juvenile court, to be waived for disposition in adult courts, and to be committed to a juvenile or adult correctional institution (Youth Law Center, 2000).

According sociologists it is not a case of birthrates that justifies the forthcoming demographic changes in institutions dealing with troubled youths. Black youths are often gathered in urban areas, come from low-income and single-parent families, and daily face social and physical hardship. The pressures on their families are much greater than those on white Americans, pressures of inflation, unemployment. They are more likely to come from unemployed families, twice as like-

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ly to lie below the poverty level, and almost three times as likely as white youths to be unemployed.

There is another significant group of minorities – Hispanics, whose families are predominantly centered in urban areas with even higher rates of unemployment and poverty than blacks. Their educational achievements are lower and they are loaded with different language and cultural differences that considerably increases their distance from the mainstream of America.

Half a century ago most immigrants were rather well educated and came from the middle or upper class of their own countries, especially if they came from non-European nations. The majority were professionals escaping political oppression. At present, they are undereducated, lower class fleeing economic oppression. They tend to gather in urban areas rife with poverty and crime. Despite their traditional extended families, immigrant youths are exposed to great socioeconomic difficulties that tend to pull apart the structure of the family. They are often entrapped between cultures negligible both the traditional culture of their parents and that of their host country mates.

It is not a surprise that minority youth may have more behavioral problems than mainstream youths.

Even without the demographic changes, it would be expected that they would be unevenly poor, unemployed. Living in urban areas and would belong to families engulfed in socioeconomic stress. Despite their rising numbers and percentage in the population, these youths evidently will more probably have problems coping with modern society. According law enforcement agencies, in the near future they may fill courts, schools, and institutions that deal with maladjusted young people.

### **What is Conventionally Accepted Behavior?**

Excluding psychosis and physiological disorders, normality is normally culturally defined as being like others in the dominant society. As it is extremely difficult to measure and discern values, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions, normality is observed through behavior. In the U.S. those not behaving according to the norm of white, middle-class, mainstream Americans often are regarded as behaving pathologically or abnormally. While true pathological behavior is socially and psychologically detrimental.

The assumption of homogeneity was mostly referred to at earlier stages of the development of the nation. Homogeneity is the belief that Americans are all the same. It is the opinion that most Americans are like most other Americans, that means most Americans are white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants, and that all of the other peoples form a small minority of the population. Of all the many different nationalities and ethnic groups which have gone into the making of America, some have quickly assimilated; they have mostly lost or intentionally given up many of those specific mark-

ers which would make them much different from their neighbors. This process of assimilation, or Americanization-becoming part of the “melting pot” – has characterized the immigrants experience in American history at least for most Europeans (Stevenson, 1998, p. 14).

Homogeneity is a belief in the “melting pot” myth; a belief that even though the United States is the land of immigrants, those immigrants have integrated into the rest of America and have become like everyone else. It is the belief that everyone is and wants to be like the majority. Similarity is the belief that other people are like you. It is the expectation that other people have the same life goals and career aspirations; the same activities and that they should behave in similar ways to you. We are surprised and often angry or disappointed – when they do not act as we expect.

Most people unconsciously place negative value judgments on that which is culturally different. A foreign visitor might tell co-nationals that “Chinese eat bad, uneatable food,” when he really means that Chinese eat different food than people in his country. This disposition to appreciate culturally different behavior negatively is most probably to occur when people are unaware of the concept of culture.

It becomes unthinkable to depict culturally different behavior impartially, as we consider it through the eyes of our own cultural experiences.

This makes us not only to select out that which our culture has considered significant and discard proof that might challenge or disarrange our simple outlook, but also adds an estimative dimension where our behavior becomes normal, and other dissimilar behavior becomes abnormal. So we cannot describe the behavior of others objectively, consequently we don't understand it.

Very often that which is culturally different is ignored. It is denied, and other people and the artifacts of their culture are regarded as inconspicuous or negligible.

Culturally different children in the U.S. often are not considered as different. Their culture is ignored or denied and the children feel within a low standard. Very often their behavior is viewed as abnormal when in reality it may be only culturally different.

W. Raspberry (Raspberry, 1986) considers the following scenario taking place in the U.S. to illustrate this; Gloria, a six-year-old, inner-city black child has been having difficulty in school.

Her teacher, a white, middle-class woman tells Gloria to ask her mother to come to school to see her after class. Gloria responds, “No ma'am, she be sick”. The teacher thought of this response: Gloria is not very bright, she speaks bad language. Then the teacher suggests that Gloria ask her mother to come to school next week, after class. Gloria again responds, only more emphatically, “No, ma'am. She be sick”.

The teacher thinks not only is Gloria speaking bad English, she is probably lying. How does Gloria know that her mother will be sick next week?

The thing is all of the teacher's presumptions are

wrong. Gloria is neither dumb nor is she lying. She uses the tense of the verb “to be” to mean an ongoing process. Her mother is chronically ill. This tense no longer exists in standard American English, but it is found in most non-Western languages, and even Shakespearean English. Ironically Gloria is brighter than her teacher because she is properly using a verb tense that her teacher doesn’t know. The verb “to be” is the most common verb in so-called Black English, as a result of cultural emphasis placed on who you are – family background, age, relationships with others and so on. To survive in a Standard English world, she must use Standard English in the classroom; black dialect is necessary to communicate with her peers in the community. It offers a sense of belongings and in group membership so paramount for the development of self-esteem. For Gloria it is quite pertinent to speak Black English with her friends in the community (W. Raspberry, 1986).

According to W. Raspberry (Ibid, 1986) the teacher is engaging in a subtle form of unconscious racism. Had Gloria grown up in Scotland and spoken a Scottish dialect with her peers on the playground, she might be perceived as very intelligent, especially if she then spoke the King’s English in her classroom. Gloria has mastered one language – Black English. Her problem is learning another language – Standard English and knowing when it is appropriate to use one or another<sup>1</sup>.

Gloria’s teacher views her as deficient in language skills, while she communicates quite well with her friends. Instead of considering her speech as a bilingual problem, the teacher is subconsciously considering Gloria as not normally developed. This abjures Gloria the right to be different, it considers her culture as an inferior version of mainstream America and the impediment of cross-cultural understanding and the lack of interaction rests on her shoulders, not the teachers (Ibid, 1986).

Although the teacher may never express her presumption, Gloria is more likely than a white child to receive the negative nonverbal messages. Some researchers maintain the idea, that non mainstream children frequently receive nonverbal negative signals (Mehrabian, 1968). If we approach these people as if they are unintelligent, we may induce self-fulfilling prediction. Especially children are more inclined to believe they are not very bright, that in turn reduces their performance far below their competence.

As a participant of the American Studies Curriculum Design Program, I had a chance to compare white American schoolchildren’s activity in Philadelphia and Indian schoolchildren’s participation at the lessons in Santo Domingo Tribe school of New Mexico State.

When asked a question, white American schoolchildren enthusiastically compete with each other to get the teacher’s attention by tumultuously waving their arms in the air.

These children not only want to have the opportunity

to be first to give correct answer, they love it when the child on the other side of the classroom gives the wrong answer.

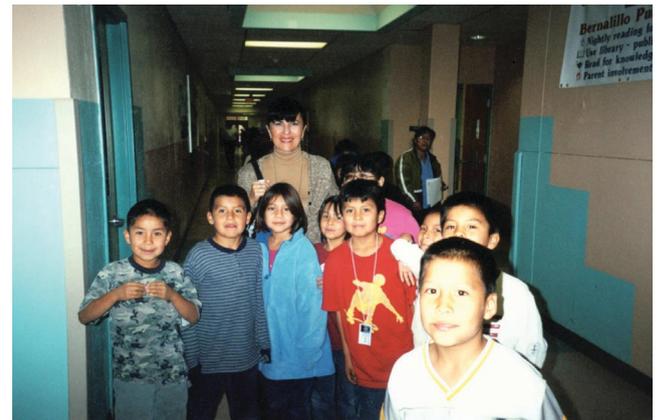
It is a matter of each individual student to be in competition with the entire class, and there is only one winner.



*Schoolchildren of Philadelphia Secondary School*

As for American Indian children, they seldom wave their arms, which may hint to the teacher that not being involved, they don’t know the right answer. Compared to the Anglo children, the American Indian children may appear slow in teacher’s viewpoint.

Among Native Americans, learning does not involve a skill immediately followed by displaying of the skill before others. In their group oriented culture, one does not publicly compete against peers. Social harmony and collaboration are much more important values than individual cooperation.



*Santo Domingo Tribe School, New Mexico*

I made the same observation on the students of the George Washington University as a Fulbright scholar and the students of New Mexico University after delivering a lecture on Georgia, its cultural heritage. The George Washington university white American students showered me with the following questions:

1. Why do you have strong interest in multiculturalism and how that interest connects the study of the

<sup>1</sup> Brilliant example is Dr. Martin Luther King, who would often give the same speech to a black audience in Black English and to a white audience in Standard English.

United States to the circumstances of Georgia?

2. Give information about the "Velvet Revolution" in Georgia
3. What is the current state of diplomatic and cultural relations between Georgia and the U.S.?
4. How does the history of relations between your country and the U.S.A. shape current attitudes?
5. What do students in the schools in your country learn about the U.S.A.?
6. Do you think college students in your country know more about the U.S.A. than American students know about your country?
7. In what ways are American cultural (art, music, literature, T.V., movies, etc.) influences felt in your country?
8. Do citizens of your country distinguish between American people and their government?

While Indian students requested just to show them the film about Georgia, asking no questions at all. The learning method and ways of displaying knowledge are different for American Indian youth, yet often the teacher ascribes non-participation and lack of intelligence to their behavior. Within their culture, their behavior is expected, accepted and quite normal. Within their culture waving one's arm for getting attention, attempting to show publicly a newly learned skill, and competing with classmates, would be completely inappropriate.

For them a friend, a member of the group, a person who appreciates social harmony and collaboration is more valuable than what one does as an individual.

## Clashing Learning Styles

What ones learns and how one learns is culturally decided. Nevertheless majority of people expect everyone to learn the same things in the same ways as they do. Every culture gives its members specific recipes how to solve problems and think in similar ways. However, most people suppose everyone thinks the same way. In the opposite case these people are often viewed as unintelligent, uneducated, immature. But noteworthy is, that not only normal behavior is normally culturally defined, but so too are the ways through which we learn and think.

Abstractive, inductive and analytical thinking and problem solving are characteristic to mainstream Americans. Learning normally is done individually, with concentration on precision, selection of applicable data to solve a problem. The majority of intelligence, aptitude, and achievement tests measure this kind of learning.

There is an accepted view that American Indians, black Americans, and even many white females think associatively, deductively and relationally. Their learning style involves others; the focal point is generalization, qualification, and collecting all data for solving a problem. The mainstream skill concentrates on universalistic meanings and things, while the relational style features approximation, contextual meaning, and

people (Cohen, 1969).

When these culturally different children are enrolled in schools, they are faced with a cross-cultural confrontation of learning styles.

As these children begin to be considered immature, their self-esteem and confidence weaken; they may unconsciously begin to doubt their own intellectual abilities.

Dissimilarities in thought patterns and learning skills are crucial in cross-cultural education; this is an unconscious revelation of cross-cultural conflict. Basic attention of care workers is given to behavior, what a youth does, not how he/she thinks or learns and his/her internal culture is hidden and ignored. The conflict of cultures often creates the "inadequate" behavior of the nonmainstream youth. When two cultural icebergs collide, enormous impact comes off below the water level of awareness where the internal culture is.

## Conclusion

We think bicultural approach would lessen the feeling among minority youths, (especially at the secondary schools level) that they are inferior, unintelligent and academically incapable. Of course it is useful for them to learn to think and communicate in a mainstream fashion, and not remain encapsulated in their communities. But the teachers should be very careful with minority children while evaluating them as verbally and intellectually underdeveloped. These children are simply different from mainstream.

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