

Cultural Influences on Young Children's Social Skills and Behaviors

Adapted from "Working with Children from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds" By M.Diane Klein & Deborah Chen Chapter 4

Social Skills & Behavior

- ▶ Adults in early childhood settings must be aware of how their own behaviors and their expectations for children's behavior may not match children's early experiences.
- ▶ There are a number of ways in which cultural values and practices influence young children's social development. These include adult-child interactions, peer interactions, play behaviors, and gender roles.

Adult-Child interactions-

- ▶ While children from middle class mainstream families may be very comfortable initiating and sustaining conversations with non-family adults, many children may be uncomfortable and unfamiliar with this type of communication.
- ▶ Yet other children may engage in a teasing or combative style of interaction. Making direct eye contact and use of silence are other important variables.

Adult-Child Interactions-

- ▶ Teachers need to be aware of these differences so they do not misinterpret the ways in which children relate to them, especially when children are new to the classroom or group care setting.
- ▶ Differences in how children relate to non-family adults can affect how children interact with teachers and staff
- ▶ Middle-class children may be quite comfortable interacting with adults

Adult-Child Interactions-

Some African American children enjoy playful verbal interactions with adults

Many children from traditional Asian families respond in formal ways to specific cues.

Some children may be most comfortable when there are very clear rules for what is expected.

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Adult-Child Interactions-

- ▶ Some children may be most comfortable in groups, and may not be comfortable in one-to-one interactions with adults.
- ▶ In many Asian and Native American families, silence may be a sign of respect
- ▶ “Backchanneling” may not be common in some cultures

- ▶ Backchanneling is providing feedback to the speaker to indicate that the listener is being attentive and following what the speaker is saying. Examples include “uh huh” and “okay”
- ▶ Altruism or Altruistic behavior is - Regard for others, both natural and moral; devotion to the interests of others; brotherly kindness; opposed to egoism or selfishness..

- ▶ Peer Social Interactions- Typical social interactions among mainstream children are more competitive and individualistic than cooperative or altruistic. Children’s self-esteem is influenced by the extent to which they achieve their culture's preferred social interaction style.
- ▶ Children’s Play styles vary across cultures.

- ▶ Altruism is an important theme in many Mexican-American homes (McClintock et al., 1983) Children are taught to behave properly and to consider the effects of their behavior on others (Saracho & Hancock, 1983). The child who learns these social roles and responsibilities successfully is referred to as being “bien educada” (well educated) (Zuniga, 1998, P230 : Saracho & Hancock, 1983)

Peer Social Interactions

- ▶ Competitive Versus Cooperative Styles of Interaction
- ▶ • individualistic
- ▶ • competitive
- ▶ • cooperative

- ▶ •preference for groups rather than one-to-one

Peer Social Interactions

Play Styles

- Physical self testing
- Games
- Symbolic play
- Object Play

and the last two include Stimulus Intensity and Gender Differences.

- ▶ Development of Ethnic Identity, Bias and Prejudice

- ▶ Cognitive bases
- ▶ Prejudice
- ▶ Ethnic Identity
- ▶ Effects of prejudice

- ▶ Development of Ethnic Identity, Bias and Prejudice

- ▶ Children often believe skin color can be washed off (Derman-Sparks, 1989) or they hope to have different physical features when they grow up. Children need help in sorting this out.
- ▶ Ramsey(1987) discusses several cognitive processes involved in the development of children's thinking about ethnicity. The first is the process of categorization The next cognitive process is the search for coherence, Children attempt to fit new information and experiences into their existing belief systems.

- ▶ Development of Ethnic Identity, Bias and Prejudice

- ▶ What is clear is that the development of children's prejudice results from the interaction between the natural processes of cognitive development related to the formation of categories and search for rules and regularities in the world, as well as the child's absorption of negative attitudes toward certain categories or groups of people present in the child's social environment
- ▶ The prevention of prejudice in children requires active intervention on the part of significant adults in children's lives.

- ▶ Development of Ethnic Identity, Bias and Prejudice

- ▶ One key to dealing with the development of prejudice in young children is to understand that children's awareness of differences, and their generalizations about characteristics of groups, are normal cognitive processes whereas the development of negative attitudes toward these differences is not.

- ▶ Development of Ethnic Identity, Bias and Prejudice

- ▶ A separate, but not unrelated process, is the development of ethnic or racial identity, the child's inclusion of ideas and attitudes toward his or her own ethnic or racial group into a private sense of self.

- ▶ Sutton-Smith and Roberts (1981)
- ▶ Play is broadly categorized into 3 types :
 - ▶ 1. Play that centers around physical self-testing such as jumping, throwing objects, developing strength, and manipulating small objects.
 - ▶ 2. Play that imitates games and activities specifically modeled by older siblings or adults.
 - ▶ 3. Symbolic play activities such as those characteristic of western cultures.