Culturally Competent ABA

by Saundra Bishop, BCBA on 04/14/16

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by Mawule Sevon

A great place to start a conversation about cultural competence is to define culture.

**Culture is established by the shared values, beliefs and customs that are developed through common experiences.** It grows into a system of rules that are the core of communities. With this definition of culture we gain an understanding of the importance of culture in the individuals we work with, and how it shapes our interaction with others. By understanding culture at its core level (also referred to as deep culture) a therapist can evolve their practices to improve the learning experiences of all clients and their families.

Research suggests that people can be successful in their academic endeavors when they are provided access to quality programs, services, and support that integrates their deep culture. Furthermore, individuals who are given the opportunity to explore their culture during the learning process and who are given varied experiences, feel acknowledged and valued.

Cultural competency leads professionals to effectively work and serve clients in cross-cultural settings. **At BASICS, our goal is to give clients tools that will allow them to get their needs met.** While teaching these skills we focus on understanding the culture of the environment of the client for two main reasons:

1. The first is to include to culture of the learner in the learning process.
2. Second, it is to help the learner to be an active participate in their community.

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Addressing Cultural Barriers in Applied Behavior Analysis

Culture is defined as the way of life of a particular society or group of people, including patterns of thoughts, beliefs, behavior, customs, traditions, rituals, dress, language and arts, music and literature (Webster’s New Encyclopaedia, 1992). From a behavioral perspective, culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns. Considering this definition, Applied Behavior Analysis in itself has its own culture. Behavior analysts have their own beliefs, customs, thoughts, practices and even their own language sometimes called “behavior talk”, which in itself makes behavior analysis unique as a stand alone practice.

In the past decade, health professionals have made an increasing effort to understand the role of culture in counselling practice; however minimal research has been conducted specifically on the role of culture in practicing behavior analysis. The research on individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders in developing nations, such as Jamaica, is even fewer.

Behavior analytic principles and interventions originated in the United States and are therefore best applied to Westernized cultures. However, applying behavior analysis with a Western perspective is not applicable to families in developing countries. Therefore, it is important that behavior analysts find a way to create ABA programs that are culturally sensitive and relevant to meet the needs of other cultures. It is imperative that practitioners in the field address these issues as autism diagnoses are growing at an alarming rate. The Center for Disease and Control and Prevention (CDC) states that about 1 in 88 children have been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). With this rapid rate of increase, the health and support services available in developing countries are having a tremendously hard time keeping up. Jamaica suffers from a lack of resources, funding and professionals who are properly trained. The few professionals who actually are trained and skilled in their areas of expertise are overwhelmed with their caseloads and cannot afford to lower their prices.

So this poses the question, how do behavior analysts worldwide meet the pressing needs of developing countries that are struggling to support their population? How can behavior analysts become culturally sensitive towards clients who have different beliefs and attitudes than them outside of the United States? Also, are there any reasonable, effective and affordable solutions to these issues? The answers to these questions are convoluted and complex; however it is imperative that answers are found as there are several obstacles not only in the diagnosis and treatment of ASD in developing countries, but independent practitioners and behavior analysts must make frequent decisions that affect many lives. The core ethical principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis serve as a guide that practitioners use as they work to promote effective interventions across a broad spectrum of cultural practices. However, these core scientific principles cannot stand alone to be a sufficient guide when making decisions.
about multicultural cases as these can have potentially conflicting outcomes.

References

Radical Behaviorism
B. F. Skinner's treatment of values begins with an observation about verbal behavior. Skinner (1971) tells us that “What a given group calls [italics added] ‘good’ is a fact: It is what members of the group find reinforcing” (p. 122). Moreover, he suggests that the “reinforcers that appear in the contingencies [of a culture] are its ‘values’ ” (p. 121). Thus, “any list of values is a list of reinforcers” (1956, p. 35). The items on a list of values can be classified under three headings: personal good, owing to our biological susceptibility and genetic endowment; the good of others, derived from social reinforcement for positive social behavior; and the good of the culture, and the measures the culture uses to induce its members to work for its survival.
He recognizes this position as cultural relativism and spells out its implications that “Each culture has its own set of goods, and what is good in one culture may not be good in another” (p. 122).
One can see that B. F. Skinner's pragmatic approach to understanding truth (what works) and values (reinforcers) dismisses traditional notions that they can be understood as universally valid and arising from the power of a higher authority in the metaphysical sense, or as a private (rational) matter. According to Rorty (1999), “for pragmatists … there is no distinction of kind between what is useful and what is right and [therefore] no distinction between facts and values” (p. 73). Although Rorty was referring to the philosophy of John Dewey in this passage, his comments apply equally well to radical behaviorism. For Skinner, value-laden terms, such as good, function as tacts for reinforcers. Given that reinforcers are always functionally defined, it follows that values too may be understood functionally rather than as matters of metaphysics.
Before reading this article, please take a moment to read this caution statement: It is important, when speaking about any group of people, to keep certain cautions and principles in mind. Please read carefully the numbered items found next.

**Cautions to Observe when Considering Cultural Influences on Learning Style, Behavioral Patterns, and Value Orientations.** Discussing “cultural differences” and the influences of one’s heritage on learning style preferences, behavior patterns, and deeply-held values is fraught with hazards. At any moment, we are just a few syllables away from inflicting verbal self-injury and perhaps unintentionally alienating ourselves from those with whom we wish to connect. In order to prevent stereotyping and overgeneralizing (or on the other extreme, denying that cultural differences exist which fails to recognize and honor the characteristics that give a group their sense of peoplehood) we need to remember that:

1. All behaviors are found in all cultural groups.
2. Some behaviors are demonstrated more so in some cultures than in others, but the first point still applies.
3. Individuals within a particular culture display the traditional traits and cultural markers of that group to varying degrees… from “not at all” to “exclusively and intensely”. These variations can be due to ethnic group differences with the larger culture, socio-economic status, degree of acculturation to the mainstream society, gender, religion, and myriad other factors.
4. If a student displays a behavior that is common and accepted within his/her cultural group, it should be viewed as “a difference” from the ways of the mainstream society that are promoted in the schools; **NOT** as a “deficiency” or “disorder”.

The Culturally Sensitive Disciplinarian

Abstract
Given the increasing cultural diversity of the school age population, teachers must become more aware of cultural differences in behavior. This article addresses some of these differences and recommends behavior management modifications.

Since their inception, our schools have changed from predominantly white institutions to multicultural environments. While the 25 largest school systems have a student population comprised mostly of minority students (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, 1988), non-urban areas are also seeing such developments (Alston, 1991). By the year 2000, one third (Grossman, 1990) to one half (Wilson, 1988) of America's school students will be from a minority group.

At present, 92% of the teaching force is from the white majority culture. This figure will increase to 95% by the turn of the century (Henry, 1990). The contrast in cultural background between teachers and students applies to an even greater extent in special education where minority youth are over-represented in various programs for the disabled, including those for pupils with emotional or behavioral disorders (Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Viadero, 1992). Much of this phenomenon may be attributable to the mismatch between the expectations present in the students' home and those of the school environment (Almanza & Moseley, 1980; Grossman, 1990).

Behavioral patterns and actions considered to be abnormal vary by culture (Light & Martin, 1985; Toth, 1990). When educators and their charges come from different backgrounds, it can be expected that each will often display behaviors different from those in the other's culture. Given that most individuals truly understand only their culture and find it difficult to appreciate behavior culturally different from their own (Garcia, 1978; Grossman 1990; McIntyre, 1992a), there is a strong chance that teachers will misinterpret their pupils' culturally based behavior as requiring a referral...
for special education or at least disciplinary action (Foster, 1986, Grossman, 1990; Hanna 1988). Indeed, children who display culturally diverse behaviors, especially recent immigrants (Sugai, 1988), are particularly susceptible to diagnosis for behavior disorders (Hanna 1988; Sugai & Maheady, 1988).

**Cultural Differences in Behavior** A lack of appreciation and tolerance for cultural differences is often found among educators. These teachers expect their students to adopt majority culture behaviors overnight, denying the validity of centuries of cultural practice. "The teacher's expectation is that the student should be compliant, docile, and responsive to authority. The student is expected to conform to a standard of behavior that the teacher is familiar with, the compliant child standard that was indicative of the teacher's upbringing." (Dent, 1976, p. 178) These teachers are at risk for reacting to culturally determined behavior in ways that are insensitive, inappropriate, counterproductive or offensive to students and their culture.

As an example of culturally disrespectful intervention, consider that in the majority American culture, a child is expected to look at the authority figure when being disciplined. Lowered eyes are associated with deceit or inattention (Armstrong, 1991; Grossman, 1990). To gain eye contact, the instructor may lift the student's chin and say "Look at me when I'm talking to you." The educator may not realize that in many Asian, black and Hispanic homes, children are taught to lower their eyes when being disciplined as a sign of respect and submission (Armstrong, 1991; Grossman, 1990; Nine-Curt, 1976). Canter's Assertive Discipline (1976) and other behavior management systems that recommend gaining eye contact while disciplining, unknowingly fail to respect the behavior promoted in the student's home environment. Additionally, the teacher probably fails to realize that direct eye contact by these students during disciplinary situations typically indicates defiance rather than respect (Grossman, 1990; Hanna, 1988). The educator may also not realize that many culturally diverse children smile during disciplinary situations, not to express defiance, but rather due to anxiety, appeasement attempts or confusion as to why the instructor is confronting them (Henkin & Nguyen, 1981; Nine-Curt, 1976).

Minority students are often penalized by teaching methods which contrast with their culturally based preferred style of learning (Blackorby & Edgar, 1990). Consider, for example, the individualistic and competitive environment of the typical classroom which works against the more cooperative learning style common among Hispanics, blacks and Native Americans (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1991; Focal Point, 1988;
Grossman, 1990). While displaying their culture's helpfulness, brotherhood or generosity, students may assist their peers or allow them to copy their answers, not considering this to be "cheating" (Grossman, 1984). If criticized for doing this in front of their peers or made to compete against their will, these pupils may rebel against such treatment, or withdraw from further attempts to succeed in school or relate to their teachers (Grossman, 1990). Majority culture educators may then use their own culturally based disciplinary behavior; removing affection (Grossman, 1984). However, this reaction is less commonly found in the students' culture and may not gain the desired results (Grossman, 1984).

Other traditional methods of promoting positive classroom behavior such as checks, gold stars, sweets, and prizes may also be less effective with Hispanic and other learners. The reason, explains Grossman (1984, pp. 37 & 40) is that "Hispanics tend to be more interested in and dependent on the approval of others than Anglos who are more likely to be receptive to more impersonal and materialistic forms of recognition." Instead, teachers should use praise, hugs, pats on the back and other personal contact. They should also stress that Hispanic students' families will be proud of them and share the honor of their accomplishments. This particular strategy might also be useful in motivating Arab and Asian students who wish to bring pride to their families (Nydel, 1987; Wei, 1980).

While touch is often recommended as a reinforcement procedure, especially for cultural groups that use a great deal of bodily contact, it may be contra-indicated for some Asian students. Those whose heritage was influenced by Confusionism view the body as being more sacred as one approaches the area of the head where the soul is believed to reside (Kaczor, 1988). Given this wide body spacing and the lack of touch between Asian individuals (Yao, 1980), teachers should avoid certain actions that are used to motivate and reinforce Hispanic, Arab and Black students (e.g., hair mussing, placing hands on the shoulder, back slapping).

While the majority culture places great emphasis on promptness and working diligently on task (Althen, 1988), most other groups have a more flexible view of time (Nine-Curt, 1976; Sung, 1987). As a result, minority students may be late to school or might not complete classroom work as quickly as their majority culture peers. They may be viewed as being "off task" and tersely told to "get to work". When rushed, or told to stop working before completion of that assignment in order to begin the next task with their peers, the students may resist, appearing to misbehave (Grossman, 1984).
Other groups may also be negatively affected by the demands of the traditional school setting. A teacher's expectations for quiet, non-active student behavior would be in opposition to the more active and emotionally outspoken contributory styles of Arab students (Nydel, 1987). This can result in the students' behavior being viewed as inappropriate. A similar learning style is frequently evident among African-American pupils who show attention and cognitive involvement with vocal responses, exuberance, and physical movement (Gay, 1975; Ogbu, 1984). Teachers oftentimes consider these students to be inattentive, restless, disruptive, or hostile (Gay, 1975), and evidencing "an attitude" (Gilmore, 1985). They may impose disciplinary procedures rather then incorporating spontaneity, performance and audience reaction into their lessons.

Another common misunderstanding involves a teacher who explains a task to an Asian student and then asks if the directions are understood. Although the student says "Yes", upon later review, the teacher finds that the instructions were not comprehended. He or she is perplexed by the apparent dishonesty of the student, unaware that the pupil may have been attempting to "save face" (Woo, 1985). Among the Asian cultures there is a commonly held belief that one should avoid conflict or public embarrassment which would shame not only the individuals involved, but by extension, their families (Wei, 1977; Henkin & Nguyen, 1981; Leung 1988). The student in the testing situation may have been trying to prevent the dishonor or humiliation of admitting that he or she was incapable of understanding the directions (Woo, 1985), or perhaps the pupil was trying to avoid humiliating the teacher for not having done a good job of explaining the task (Wei, 1977). These students may also fail to volunteer answers during class discussions for fear of giving an incorrect response (Henkin & Nguyen, 1981; Woo, 1985).

The same applies to the "pow-wow" (Hobbs, 1966), in which a student's report on whether he or she has achieved pre-selected goals is followed by peer commentary as to whether they agree. This could be quite uncomfortable for Asian students as they might publicly "lose face" if goals have not been attained. Therefore, teachers should not assume that the less direct and more subdued behavior common in the Asian cultures is indicative of "sneakiness" or non-compliance. While penalizing the student for this behavior is inappropriate, any shame and embarrassment is compounded when public reprimands such as those in the warning system recommended in Assertive Discipline (Canter & Canter, 1976), are used (Jones, 1991). Listing the student's name, followed by checkmarks
indicating recurring misbehavior, may cause Asian students (and many Arab students whose families also place great emphasis on family honor) to "lose face". A private rather than public critique of behavior is the intervention of choice.

Contrary to the facesaving behavior promoted by certain cultures, other groups provide an upbringing which may increase the likelihood of teacher-student conflict. For example, in the Hispanic culture which tends to be male dominant (Arredondo, 1991; Devore & Schlesinger, 1987), adolescent boys may resist complying with commands from female educators (Grossman, 1984). With these students, cooperation is best gained through non-authoritative methods which request rather than demand compliance (Grossman, 1984).

Defiance may also be demonstrated to a great extent by low income urban black youth whose parents often teach them to fight to avoid being victimized in their tough neighborhoods (Hanna, 1988; McIntyre, 1991; McIntyre, 1992b). Growing up in these areas is more likely to produce traits that impede success in school (e.g. a more physical style of action, a greater approval of the use of violence, less disguised aggression, lack of subtlety in verbiage, and ridiculing of others) (Hanna, 1988; McIntyre, 1991; McIntyre, 1992b). These behaviors and the previously mentioned learning style differences may explain why black youth receive one-third of the corporal punishments (Quality Education for Minorities, 1990), are twice as likely as whites to be suspended (Gibbs, 1988), and are suspended for longer periods than whites (Gibbs, 1988).

Few teachers realize that African-American, Mexican-American, Native Hawaiian and Native American youth are often under great pressure from their peers not to achieve in school (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990; Hanna, 1988; Ogbu, 1990). Individual success in schooling or professions is viewed as inappropriate if the group does not also advance (Fordham, 1988; Ogbu, 1990). For many students, merely attending school is viewed as evidence of rejection of their culture (Fordham, 1988; Hanna, 1988). For others, misbehavior is a strategy of resistance to being pressured to think and act "white" in the schools (Fordham, 1988; Gibson, 1988; Ogbu, 1988; Ogbu, 1990; Quality Education for Minorities, 1990). Because of the peer pressure, those who strive for academic excellence may feel the need to camouflage their academic efforts (Fordham, 1988).

This rejection of schooling may result in disciplinary action or referral for behavior disorders services. Teachers can best assist and support these students by using private disciplinary action (and even allowing usually
compliant students to misbehave at times), modifying instruction to better match their culturally determined learning styles, allowing them to downplay accomplishments, and avoiding public recognition unless approved by them (McIntyre, 1992b). Teachers can expect that these students might not respond well to public praise and rewards for actions which may be perceived as "acting white". Even devoid of racial influences, defiant and aggressive behavior occurs more often in the lower socio-economic stratum (Strom, 1965; McIntyre, 1992b). As a result of harsh and inconsistent home discipline (Horton & Hunt, 1968; Hanna, 1988), low income urban pupils may have developed an escape and avoidance reaction style to discipline, or come to view physical punishment as a sign of caring (Rosenfeld, 1971; Silverstein and Krate, 1975). They may be confused by the subtle and supportive behavior management practices of middle class teachers (Hanna, 1988; Harrison-Ross and Wyden, 1973).

While some educators support corporal punishment in the belief that these students are best disciplined by a style to which they are accustomed (Bauer, Dubanoski, Yamauchi & Honbo, 1990), most middle class oriented educators believe in permissiveness and an appeal to reason. The first group's methods are ineffective because schools cannot offer aversive consequences as severe as those at home. The second group fails to realize that lower class youth have a different frame of reference regarding discipline that involves physicalness and toughness (Foster, 1986; McIntyre, 1992b). These youth "test" teachers to see if they can "make" them behave (Foster, 1986) and come to view whites and middle class minorities as passive and weak if they cannot do so (Hanna, 1988). Implementing a structured behavior management approach in which predetermined penalties are consistently administered for violations of clearly stated rules gives one "clout" and influence. However, this should still be blended with reinforcement for appropriate behavior in order to promote a positive classroom climate.

The emphasis on positiveness also applies to working with Native American students. The imposition of authority in a demanding or demeaning manner typically results in passive resistance and withdrawal on the part of these pupils (Hurlburt, Gade & McLaughlin, 1990; Kleinfeld, 1972). An appeal to their good nature and the use of appropriate reinforcement is more productive than coercive or confrontational strategies (Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 1991).

The same principle applies for Arab-American students. As in the Hispanic and Native American cultures, frank criticism may be perceived as
a personal insult (Nine-Curt, 1976). Best practice includes indirect criticism, mixed with encouragement and praise regarding any positive points or expectations that were met (Nydel, 1987).

**Recommendations**

It is imperative that educators practice respect for culturally different behavior. Instead of viewing behavior as "right" or "wrong", it is best judged by how well it is suited to the demands of the educational environment (although schools must also assess how well they are meeting the needs of their culturally diverse populations). To better serve their charges, educational personnel need to develop an awareness of how cultural background affects the way one behaves, and conversely, how one perceives and judges the behaviors of those not like oneself.

As Light and Martin (1985, p. 43) point out, "An understanding of cultural expectations and roles can contribute to the development of child management techniques specifically designed to eliminate value differences between a child's family, the school system, and the larger society." By working with, rather than against a culture, any student resentment about having to behave differently in school can be managed (Grossman, 1990). One recommendation regarding discipline which pertains to all groups is to be positive rather than negative or confrontational. A skilled culturally sensitive behavior manager entices rather than coerces students into "proper" behavior (Bauer, Dubanoski, Yamauchi & Honbo, 1990).

For students from the black, Hispanic, Native American and Arab cultures which place greater emphasis on socializing and bodily contact than the white and Asian cultures (Kleinfeld, 1972; Nine-Curt, 1977; Nydel, 1987), teachers can increase their effectiveness by displaying more "warmth" (Kleinfeld, 1972). This involves reinforcing students via the use of touch, hugs, smiles and closer body spacing. When discipline is necessary, because of their desire to socialize with peers, "time out" may be especially effective with these pupils (Hanna, 1988).

In order for our schools to become more culturally sensitive in their disciplinary practice, changes will need to be implemented at each educational stratum (McIntyre, 1992a). Teacher training institutions must assume the large share of the burden of imparting cultural information. At this level, it can be assured that future teachers will study this information and be guided in it's use in practicum settings. Generally, however, university programs in education are not presenting this information (Garcia, 1978; Yates, 1988). Before teacher trainers can impart information regarding cultural characteristics, instructional modifications and culturally
sensitive behavior management practices, they must first educate themselves in this area.

Schools can promote cultural understanding in a number of ways ranging from conducting inservice sessions with national level consultants or local civic leaders of particular cultures, to hiring individuals from minority groups who are able to communicate information across cultures (Armstrong, 1991). Additionally, schools might provide services to culturally diverse students to assist them in becoming "cultural chameleons" capable of displaying "school behavior" if their culturally based actions interfere with educational achievement or interaction with others. This is not an easy decision for educators and the community at large who must wrestle with the issue of whether to promote and/or teach majority culture behaviors to the student population. Caught in the horns of a cultural dilemma, they must decide whether to chance making one culture look preferable to another, or hazard impairing student's future employability by failing to expose them to the expectations of the typical workplace.

If it is deemed necessary to teach "white" behavior, this can be accomplished via specially designed lessons perhaps utilizing activities from published social skills curricula. Students would then role play common situations. Career education lessons that focus on the benefits of being able to display "office behavior" might also be planned.

 Paramount at the classroom level, however, is the creation of an atmosphere of cultural tolerance and acceptance. Students of all ethnic cultures need to feel valued, respected, and psychologically and physically safe. This is accomplished by proactively adapting one's classroom management style to their culturally based characteristics (Grossman, 1990).

Finally, it is imperative that professional organizations concerned with cultural diversity and behavior disorders focus more on culturally based differences in behavior and culturally sensitive behavior management practices in their publications and conference planning.

**Conclusions** Teachers oftentimes create much of the "misbehavior" about which they complain. Via modification of traditional behavior management procedures one can create a productive classroom environment that values the culture of one's students (Jones, 1991). When educators are knowledgeable of and able to critically examine differences in culturally based behavior, they can be more confident that all students are being treated fairly and respectfully.
Culturally Diverse Childrearing Practices: Abusive or Just Different?


Abstract: This document describes childrearing practices that are sometimes found among certain cultural/religious groups. It does not offer judgement on those practices, only information. Teachers are urged to protect the health, welfare, and safety of their students.

North America's public schools are becoming increasingly culturally diverse. This means that teachers will often instruct students from cultures other than their own. Indeed, at the turn of the century, 95% of the teaching force will be of European-American background (Henry, 1990), while one-third (Grossman, 1990) to one-half (Wilson, 1988) of the school-age population will be from a non-Caucasian minority group. Already, America's 25 largest school systems have a minority majority (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, 1988) and non-urban areas are also experiencing cultural shifts (Alston, 1991).

We educators, like nearly all individuals, tend to be "ethnocentric". We truly understand only our own personal culture or background. Because of our unfamiliarity with other groups, we are likely to view the culturally based behavior of other groups as being inferior to our own. This outlook also applies in situations where teachers observe the childrearing practices of culturally diverse families.

Upon finding what appears to be evidence of physical or emotional harm to their students, educators face difficult decisions about what constitutes correct action (McIntyre, 1990). These decisions are made even more complex when one considers cultural differences in child treatment. While abuse and neglect of children has been documented in most cultures since the dawn of civilization (Haase & Kempe, 1990), caretaking practices which are accepted and appropriate in one ethnic group are often viewed by those from other groups as being "wrong" or abusive.

For culturally different families in America, disciplinary practices which
are accepted within their original homeland or ethnic group, may appear to
individuals from the majority culture to be odd, backward or cruel. These
misunderstandings occur because while parents the world over are
expected to provide sustinance, supervision, discipline and mental
stimulation, they vary in the ways they meet their obligations. Differences in
social, cultural, religious and moral values result in variations in what is
viewed to be "proper" childrearing.

Cultural Differences in Discipline The lack of knowledge that most
educators possess regarding both child abuse (McIntyre, 1987) and
culturally different childrearing (Garcia, 1978; McIntyre, 1992) creates fertile
ground for misjudging the appropriateness of parental practices. Teachers
who adhere to the disciplinary practices of the majority culture may find
themselves viewing culturally different practices as being abusive. This
would mean that use of culturally diverse childrearing practices places
parents at greater risk for being reported to agencies in charge of handling
abuse and neglect reports. A few of these practices and the reporting
dilemmas they cause for concerned educators are addressed below.

- A novice teacher in a poor urban school district is distressed when upon
seeking advise from colleagues regarding discipline, is told by them to use
physical punishment. This coincides with the advise of the students in his
class who tell him to "Hit `em upside the head". In fact, physical punishment
is more accepted in the low socio-economic classes (Gollnick & Chinn,
1990; Horton & Hunt, 1968; Persky, 1974; Spinetta & Rigler, 1972; Hanna,
1988), and educators who teach these students are more likely to approve
of corporal punishment (McDowell & Friedman, 1979; Bauer, Dubanoski,
Yamauchi & Honbo, 1990), perhaps believing that one must "use what they
know".

- A teacher phones a student's parents to inquire as to how that pupil
came to have welts on his body. She is given a religious defense based on
the biblical book of proverbs that promotes the use "the rod". Indeed,
Fundamentalists, Evangelists, and Baptists respond more punitively in
disciplinary situations than people who are affiliated with other major
religious orientations (Hyman, 1988).

- A teacher is concerned when told by his student that she is made to
kneel on uncooked rice when she misbehaves. Upon bringing this to the
attention of the administration, he is told that this is a common disciplinary
procedure among low-income Hispanic families from the Caribbean islands.

- A Vietnamese-American pupil asks her teacher if he knows why a newly
arrived Vietnamese student has a pierced ear. The teacher responds that he is not aware of the reason and would like to know more. According to the pupil, it is not uncommon for traditional Vietnamese families to tie a misbehaving child's ear to a doorknob as punishment.

-In the faculty lounge, a teacher hears that a student of her's has been locked out of his house. An Asian-American colleague mentions that this is a common disciplinary practice among Southeast Asian families. It is meant to shame "Americanized" children who have not met traditional familial expectations and obligations (Bempechat & Omori, 1990).

-A newly certified teacher accepts a position at a school near an Indian reservation. She is appalled by the apparent lack of guidance provided by a number of the parents of her Native American students. Like many teachers from the mainstream culture (Swisher, 1990), she believes that the parents are neglectful and letting their children "run wild". She is unaware that among many tribes, non-interference, except in times of danger, is the guardians' policy (Devore & Schlesinger, 1987; National Geographic Television: The New Indians, 1990). Additionally, many clans and tribes assign a great deal of the childraising responsibility to relatives, especially the grandparents (Devore & Schlesinger, 1987).

-A teacher wrestles with the issue of whether to report a poor student's parents who are, in her mind, neglectful. She is aware that in low income areas, early independence with limited guidance or training is the norm (Horton & Hunt, 1968; Miller, 1959), as is the use of inconsistent and harsh physical punishment whereby children are taught to obey rather than reason (Farrington, 1986; Hanna 1988; Stack, 1974). However, these practices violate her beliefs regarding proper childrearing.

-A teacher is told by the parents of a poor, urban black youth to "whup" (paddle) him if he misbehaves in class. The use of controlling and punitive child treatment is more likely to occur in the low income black culture (Hanna, 1988; Stack, 1974) and may even be viewed by the child as a sign of caring and affection (Rosenfeld, 1971; Silverstein & Krate, 1975). The middle-class oriented behavior management techniques that avoid the expected swift physical punishment may actually cause anxiety for the youth (Hanna, 1988; Harrison-Ross & Wyden, 1973).

-A student's parents promise to improve the school attendance of their adolescent child. The next day he arrives at school beaten about the head and upper torso. Cuts, bruises and swelling are evident. The parents become angry when confronted by the instructor. In their minds, they accomplished the task asked of them. The teacher was unaware that due
to the physicalness of low income disciplinary practices, parents might possibly abuse their children in response to requests for their assistance in dealing with non-compliant school behavior (Hanna, 1988).

Almost all cultures promote appropriate child behavior via the use of negative reinforcement (i.e. the threat of punishment for misbehavior). The American middle-class culture is one of the few that uses positive reinforcement procedures while limiting punishment (Grossman, 1984). When deemed necessary, a mild spanking may be administered, although a more frequent practice is to isolate the misbehaving child, withdrawing love and affection for a period of time (Grossman, 1984; Miller, 1959). These majority culture parents perceive their methods as being more humane than those that incorporate physical punishment. However, other cultural/ethnic groups often view the dominant culture style as being more cruel. While some culturally diverse guardians may use quickly administered physical punishment, they would never hint at an emotional separation from their progeny that might create feelings of rejection in the child.

**Folk Medicine Practices** The ways in which various cultures treat family members who have fallen ill can also bring about reports of abuse. Time honored folk medicine practices, viewed as irrational, ineffective, and insupportable by western medical standards, are strongly believed by many members of culturally different groups. For example:

- A teacher calls a Hispanic student to her side upon seeing his reddened and crusty eyemargins. Upon inquiry, the student tells how his mother places petroleum jelly on her children's eye areas when they have difficulty sleeping. This practice is believed to promote slumber. The teacher, explaining and criticizing this practice to colleagues in the school lounge, is informed by a Latino peer that this is a common home remedy in some Hispanic cultures.

- A teacher is concerned about a ring-shaped burn on the body of one of his students. In response to his report of suspected abuse, the caseworker in charge calls back to inform the instructor that this resulted from a folk medicine healing practice known as "cupping". This practice is common in some East Asian (Wei, 1983) and Eastern European countries. Cupping involves lowering a ceramic cup, turned upside down with a candle underneath, down to the skin of the afflicted area of the body. A suctioning effect results which is believed to draw out aggravating substances. A variation of this
practice involves igniting alcohol-soaked cotton which surrounds a piece of broken glass in a cup. The cup is then turned over onto the skin, perhaps leaving a burn and/or a puncture wound.

- An Asian-American teacher, aware of the limited knowledge base among her non-Asian colleagues regarding Oriental folk medicine treatments, presents a short informational session at a staff meeting. She describes how pinching, scraping, or "coining" (i.e. rubbing a coin into an afflicted area) can leave marks and skin abrasions that might be mistaken for evidence of abuse.

- A student reports to her teacher that her brother is extremely ill, being nauseous with wrenching pain and extreme tenderness in the lower right abdomen. She also says that her Christian Scientist parents are praying for a cure rather than taking him to the hospital, even though they suspect an appendicitis. Although they are aware that they are required by state law to report this practice when they engage in it, they are failing to make this disclosure.

- A preschool teacher in a low income black community notices that one of her pupils is ill and has a severe rash. Upon inquiry, she discovers that the student's family has already attempted to treat him with folk remedies often found in these homes (Stack, 1974). Lye or detergent was added to the youth's bath water to treat his rash. For his stomach pains, he drank "persnickety", a pungent brew made from tobacco and added to the child's milk.

- A novice teacher, newly assigned to a school in a low income Hispanic area, is perplexed by the odd smell emanating from a lethargic student. He is told by his team leader to read a book on Santeria. Santeria, a blend of Catholicism, African spirit worship and folk medicine practices, is common in these communities (Canino, Velez & Stoltberg, 1987; Gonzalez-Wippler, 1989). Depending on the individual's country of origin, it might also be known as Lucumi, Macumba, Candomble or Shango. For ill children, animal sacrifices, or the wearing of certain colors, beads or potions may be prescribed by a priest known as a "Centro" or "Santero" (Canino, Velez & Stoltberg, 1989; Gonzalez-Wippler, 1989).

**Taking Appropriate Action** The discovery of non-standard disciplinary or folk medicine practices places the educator in a difficult position. With the present-day emphasis on cultural tolerance, educators should respect practices and values different from their own. **However, the teacher's**
sense of personal and professional responsibility in protecting one's charges from abuse must remain intact. Considering that all fifty states require educators to report even suspected abuse or neglect, the teacher may feel obligated to file a report for fear of losing one's teaching license should he or she fail to notify the proper authorities.

Determining whether a culturally diverse childrearing practice is maladaptive is not an easy task for those outside of that particular culture. The proper plan of action is often unclear. How then should a concerned, empathetic instructor respond? A number of suggestions are offered below.

All teachers of culturally diverse students should undertake study to gain information about child abuse, and increase their knowledge of the cultural practices and traits commonly found in their pupils' homes. This allows us to make more accurate assessments of the available evidence, and prevents misunderstandings. A number of informational sources are available. In addition to texts and articles on these topics, colleagues or community leaders from the various cultural groups can be contacted for more information. Enrollment in college courses is another option, although one must be cautious and selective. Teacher training programs, in general, have failed to include information on child abuse (McIntyre, 1987) or cultural differences (Garcia, 1978; McIntyre, 1992).

If concerned about one's observations, but unsure of whether the evidence is indicative of abuse, the educator (or school social worker) should undertake an investigation. This involves speaking with the pupil and/or parents about disciplinary/folk medicine practices, and ascertaining whether the guardians understand appropriate childrearing in accordance with their culture's expectations. The degree to which physical and emotional nurturance, clothing, shelter, safety, security, and health care are provided, even if it is in a manner different from what is accepted by one's own culture, should also be assessed. Having a colleague or community leader from the parent's culture present can be of valuable assistance in making judgements. If disciplinary or folk medicine practices appear to be overly punitive or hurtful, the educational professional should respectfully explain the law regarding abuse to the parents and inform them of the courses of action available to and expected of educators in these situations.

With regard to discipline, teachers should remember that a certain practice that would cause emotional scars to children of their own culture, might not be viewed by children from another culture as being excessive, demeaning or traumatic. If the disciplinary practice is common in their
ethnic group and is viewed by parent and child as reflective of concern and caring, than it may not be abusive. The teacher should therefore attempt to determine whether the pupil has a healthy self concept and feels valued by his family.

If the decision is made to not file a report of abuse, observations and perceptions should still be documented in a personal notebook. If suspicious happenings continue, but evidence is still not convincing enough to support the filing a report, they should also be documented. However, if concerns appear to have ANY validity, the educator should submit a report of abuse. Remembering that educators must report even suspected abuse, "better safe than sorry" is sage advice in these situations.

**Conclusions:** Due to the changing demographics in our schools, educators are likely to be instructing students raised in ways different from their own upbringing. When teaching culturally diverse students, instructors should undertake the task of acquiring a cultural knowledge base. They should also keep an open mind and engage in a self-examination of their own beliefs regarding discipline, childrearing practices, and abuse. All this helps one to fulfill one's professional responsibilities in a culturally sensitive manner.

**References & Resources**

