



Becoming Culturally Aware in the Classroom

What is Cultural Competency?

- A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables them to work effectively in cross cultural situations
- The acknowledgment and incorporation at all levels of the importance of culture and the assessment and relation to cultural competency
- The expansion of cultural knowledge
- The adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs
- The word **culture** is used because it implies the integrated patterns of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups
- The word **competence** is used because it implies having the capacity to function in a particular way: to function within the context of culturally integrated patterns of human behavior defined by a group
- Being competent in cross-cultural functioning means learning new patterns of behavior and effectively applying them in the appropriate settings

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Some Key Elements of Culture

- Values and beliefs
- Communication patterns (language/dialect)
- Social relationships
- Diet and food preparation
- Dress and other body decorations
- Religion and religious practices
- Family (structure)
- Traditions and customs
- View of time
- Recreation and leisure

Ethnic & Cultural Stumbling Blocks

- Language
- Class related values
- Non-verbal communication (eye contact & body language)
- Stereotypes/assumptions/labeling/preconceived notions
- Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, Albinism
- Lack of experience with others from different groups
- Fear, anxiety, "no time," need for acceptance or "fitting in"
- Family upbringing
- Youth/family conflicts (youth acculturate faster than parents/family members)

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Awareness of **Your** Own Assumptions, Values and Biases

As a teacher you will have to learn to get over your own cultural assumptions and biases for the benefit of your students. Having a culturally tolerant classroom starts with you. By reviewing the following points you will be able to assess your own prejudices and its implication on your teaching.

- Beliefs and attitudes
- Self awareness
- Sensitivity
- Comfort
- Knowledge
- Multiple life experiences
- Educational methodologies
- Understanding of how racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination and stereotyping affect our work
- Acknowledge your areas for growth
- Personal and professional development

Strategies for becoming culturally competent

- Affirm your culturally competent philosophies, belief systems, thoughts, language and actions
- Always be consistent
- Do not accept what others may imply
- Become an agent of change
- Build sensitivity, tolerance, and acceptance
- Read, study, get on-line, get the facts
- Speak with people who are culturally different
- Visit museums, churches, or other culturally unique sites
- Share the knowledge of what you learned and how you have changed