



Multiculturalism In The Daycare Setting

Broadly speaking, there are two approaches to cultural adaptation for fitting in to a new land; assimilation and accommodation. These concepts are drawn from a Piagetian view of cognitive development. Accordingly, assimilation has the individual resolve a cognitive dilemma by seeking a way to make sense of new information within existing points of view or schemata. Accommodation has the individual resolve a cognitive dilemma by seeking to make changes to existing points of view to thus resolve disharmony. They change their schemata.

For example, we need to live in a new land. By virtue of assimilation, I will learn the rules of the new land and find ways to work within my existing cultural framework. I may bring special food to work in order to meet dietary needs and I may use flexible scheduling to address attending to special holidays. However, by virtue of accommodation, I may change my behaviours and dietary preferences to more adopt the host culture. Both assimilation and accommodation resolve the need for cultural adaptation, but the underlying processes and values are remarkably different.

In view of those differences, there are those who may believe that one is better than the other thus creating a conflict over the manner to which one makes cultural adaptations. The difference in these values may be seen not only between childcare workers and parents; but between worker and children; between parents; and parents and their children.

The challenge in the daycare setting is meeting these diverse needs for cultural adaptation as well as maintaining one's cultural identity and customs. As such some parents may wish for a setting that does not challenge their cultural norms but provides care in a way that is consistent with their existing cultural values. On the other hand some parents may see the daycare as the opportunity for their child to adapt and adopt the new culture and as such, may seek to maximize exposure to the new culture and limit influence of their natural culture. These parents may want the daycare setting to offer their children

something not available in the home whereas the parents know they can still provide their cultural influence within the home. Of course there are also some parents who may seek a balance between maintaining one's cultural identity yet incorporate elements of the new culture.

The challenge for daycare service providers is both appreciating the different value propositions of parents and children with regard to cultural adaptation and maintenance and then delivering service in a way that respects parental preference. To do so though, you need to answer the question, can you be culture neutral? The answer is likely a resounding, no. Neutrality itself may be offensive to some as it may negate by omission, the cultural values of some people.

Thus the tool for managing cultural differences in the daycare setting is not neutrality, but dialogue; open and frank discussion with respect to cultural adaptation and maintenance. The challenge in facilitating such a dialogue is being aware of one's own biases and being accepting of opinions and values that challenge one's own. The dialogue is to facilitate learning not only of cultural differences, but the disposition to adaptation. The dialogue will by necessity be ongoing and always anew as older children leave the setting and younger children enter. The purpose of the dialogue is for the service provider to be transparent with regard to their disposition to the delivery of service and where acceptable, also adapt to the changing needs of the people served. Where a conflict exists between service provider and parent with regard to adaptive preferences, transparency will be vital so that both sides enter into a service contract knowing what may or may not be achieved.

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