



The Impact of Culture

When discussing the impact of culture on children's development of competencies in social and emotional learning and approaches to play and learning, culture can be defined as "a shared system of meaning, which includes values, beliefs,

and assumptions expressed in daily interactions of individuals within a group through a definite pattern of language, behavior, customs, attitudes, and practices" (Mashinot, 2008).

Anthropological research highlights differences among cultural groups with perspectives ranging from individualistic to interdependent. The goal in cultures labeled "individualistic" is individual fulfillment where children are encouraged to make choices and to strive assertively to achieve them. The goal in "interdependent" cultures is the well-being of the group, and personal assertiveness can be frowned on to the degree that it upsets group harmony (Mashinot, 2008).

Both perspectives contribute to a healthy society and can be incorporated into early childhood programs.

Cultural beliefs, perspectives, and values may be handed down from generation to generation, internalized by families and children, and exhibited in behaviors or attitudes that may be perceived as "good/not good." Educators can help children to understand, accept, and embrace a variety of perspectives and values without judgment, therefore, adults also need to be aware of their own cultural perspective and how it influences their interactions and teaching.

Understanding cultural perspectives is necessary to build and maintain interpersonal relationships at all levels.

All the elements of the environment, play, culture, and connections with families contribute to the adult's ability to support competencies in academic areas, social and emotional learning, and approaches to play and learning.

Children's competencies in the domains of social and emotional learning, and approaches to play and learning are critical to their success as learners. Equally important are the learning opportunities that we adults provide to young children to help them build the foundations of these skills and competencies.

