

Augustana College

Concepts addressed:

Understanding the Influence of Individual Experiences, Talents, and Prior Learning, as well as Language, Culture, Family, and Community Values on Students' Learning
Multicultural backgrounds; age-appropriate knowledge and behavior; the student culture at school; family backgrounds; linguistic patterns and differences; cognitive patterns and differences; and social and emotional issues.

- **Multicultural backgrounds:** Multicultural backgrounds should be utilized throughout the formal and informal curriculum. Diversity can bring more prior knowledge to the classroom and enhance the learning of all students. Ethnic and cultural diversity should permeate the entire school community both in the classroom, extra-curricular programs, and after school activities.
- **Age-appropriate knowledge and behavior:** Families, communities, and cultures may vary in what they feel is the appropriate age for coming of age, religious responsibilities, and school attendance. It may be difficult for a teacher from one cultural background to understand the values of knowledge and behavior of his/her student from a family that may have opposing views. It is important to listen to and respect the wishes of the diverse family views of age appropriateness.
- **The student culture at school:** The school culture involves both education and socialization. Students bring their diverse backgrounds to school, which can enhance the education if respected and utilized by the teacher. School socialization can also be one of sameness. If multi-cultures are not welcome, but rather encouraged to become like the dominant culture some students will be socially excluded or bullied. This in turn will hinder the education of all students.
- **Family backgrounds:** Within one culture, family values may differ. When serving diverse cultures understanding of the different family backgrounds and values need to be observed. Some multicultural families consist of parents who have not yet learned and/or mastered English. This presents communication needs that if not addressed may create conflicts and misunderstandings between the school and the family. Another area that family backgrounds may need nurturing is if different cultures were at once warring nations. Helping families understand that being American brings peace to that part of their family background may be difficult, yet necessary.
- **Linguistic patterns and differences:** Each language has its own set of rules. Some languages are more closely related than others. English reads from left to right, however, other languages read from right to left. Cultural values show up in languages and if the values are different enough, the ability to grasp the English language may be impaired.
- **Cognitive patterns and differences:** Generally diverse cultures value cognitive styles different from those of the school's culture. This difference in value systems may lead to conflicts and potential student failure. The school's role is to

restructure their instructional programs to meet the learning characteristics of diverse ethnic groups. Also, the school needs to teach all students to function effectively in the mainstream and other diverse cultures .

- **Social and emotional issues:** Students will have a better self-concept if the school validates their culture. Instructional methods and topics should include diverse cultures to include all cultural groups in the United States. If one or two cultures dominate the perspective of the school's instruction, the message the students receive is that those cultures are more important than their own. Social acceptance and harmony is created by an inclusive curriculum.

The key is to build a strong learning community where all cultures are welcome and respected. Once a strong community is built, learning can flourish. The teacher needs to safeguard the individual identity of all his/her students and assist his/her students to view the world through multicultural eyes.