



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
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Immigrants arrive in the United States to avail economic and educational benefits, for themselves and their children. In recent years, immigrants entering the United States are mostly "people of color" arriving from developing countries in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. In fact, Census projections show that in the year 2010, one-third of the total U.S. population will consist of minority families.

For immigrant minority parents with children, optimism about coming to America has resulted in them relying and high expectations about American public schools, daycare and preschool programs. However, schools and early care facilities have not been able to fully accommodate their diverse cultural backgrounds thus causing a dilemma, not just for the parents but for teachers and care providers as well.

Approaches towards enhancing culturally responsive teaching and learning practices within educational communities have been few and far between. Many minority and immigrant parents find themselves wondering whether their physical characteristics, language differences, dress and food habits will be valued by the mainstream white American teachers, care providers, and community members.

Unfamiliarity with early education programs and the American school system makes them become more dependent on the teachers and care providers. How can they seek assurances that their culture and diverse ways of thinking and living will be valued and acknowledged by teachers and care providers? How can they become part of the larger society and yet stay apart to maintain their distinct identities?

Similarly, on the other end of the spectrum, not being exposed to different cultures puts many teachers and early care providers in a vulnerable position. How can they transform their learning environments and meet the needs of parents and children? How can they develop culturally appropriate curricula and teaching strategies?

It is apparent from these questions that culture plays a powerful role in each of their lives and the environments they work in. Neither minority homes nor majority schools are culture-free environments. Hence, a good understanding of one's own and other people's culture is warranted.

Culture is comparable to an iceberg; unfortunately, a big of chunk of it is buried deep inside and not fully exposed, causing much stress and misunderstanding. Culture is part of one's identity, forming the basis to the question---Who am I?

Census projections indicate that by the year 2028, one half of our school-aged children will be minorities. Based on this, it is evident that those involved in the teaching-learning process must recognize that people have different ways of "knowing". Immigrant and minority families have their own "funds of knowledge". As an immigrant and minority woman, I can vouch for that. Let us not forget, whether we are teachers, parents or caregivers, anchoring our discussions within the realm of our daily lives and divergent cultural experiences is fundamental to our survival. Acknowledging and honoring cultural differences will not only help us become more proactive, but also create pathways to become more productive as well, a cultural trait we can pass on to the next generation of Americans.

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