

# MULTICULTURAL ISSUES & SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

Bob Schmidt, M.S., LPC  
[www.SerenityPresentations.com](http://www.SerenityPresentations.com)

## About Cultures:

- Culture refers to any group of people who identify or associate with one another on the basis of some common purpose, need or similarity of background.
- All counseling is cross-cultural
- Cross counseling places an emphasis on human diversity in all its many forms.
  - Schools have a distinct culture
  - Communities have a distinct culture
  - Age is a culture
  - Culture is multi-dimensional

## A culturally aware counselor needs to:

- Understand his/her own culture and how it affects his/her attitudes and behaviors.
- Be open to learning as much as he/she can about other cultures.
- Be willing to step out of his/her culturally comfort zone.
- Ask when he/she does not know or understand.
- Listen, observe and ask before he/she draws a conclusion.
- Become aware of how he/she may be perceived by a client.
- Can never know everything about different cultures, but is not afraid to work with someone who you they have little knowledge or understanding about.

## In the School Setting:

- Children are often referred to the counselor because of a symptom or behavior.
- Children often don't know what their problem is. They may be referred because they are not performing academically, they may appear depressed, they may have social problems, or they may be targeted by other children.
- The counselor has to consider ALL FACTORS in the child's culture: (Family, religion, customs, rituals, peer groups, past history and level of cultural identity)

## Counseling students with handicaps (Physical and intellectual) in the schools

1. First, see them as a person
2. Establish a rapport
3. Be aware of and sensitive to the words that may shut the person down
4. Empathy, but never pity
5. Then you can talk about everything

## Awareness of Privilege:

- It is generally unearned (you're born with it)
- People with privilege usually are unaware of their privilege.
- It gives the individual distinct social and economic advantages.
- In the U.S. privilege is white, male, straight, able bodied, Christian and economically comfortable)

What privileges do you possess in society? What power does it give you? How does it make you feel? How may it affect the clients you work with?

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR**

- Social justice in counseling embodies professional conduct that opposes all forms of discrimination and oppression.
- Social justice counseling practices seek to challenge inherent inequalities in social systems that negatively impact human development.
- Whenever a student is victimized because of a difference (religion, race, size, shape, appearance, etc.) it is a social justice issue.
- Many instances of bullying are social justice issues.
- As counselors, we must be opposed to all forms of discrimination and oppression.

## **PROGRAMS AND CLASSES THAT DEVELOP CULTURAL AWARENESS IN THE SCHOOLS**

### **Using Music to create a culture of understanding and appreciation.**

(School counselors can use this in groups or Developmental Classes)

- Have students bring in examples music from their culture
- Share the music of your culture (consider your age also)
- Cultural influences on contemporary music
- It's common not to "like" something that is different from what you are accustomed to.
- Anthropologist Margaret Mead: "People fear what they do not understand." Therefore if we begin to understand, we begin to dissolve the fear.

### **Programs in the schools that develop cultural awareness and sense of social justice:**

- Working at soup kitchens
- Bringing clothing to homeless shelters
- Fund raising for poor and underprivileged
- Mentoring
- Tutoring

### **Classes in the school that can develop cultural awareness and appreciation if done right.** (The school counselor can work with the teachers or volunteer to teach a lesson in the class)

- Vocal and instrumental classes
- Art Class
- Social Studies and Language Arts (English) Classes

Is there an experience in your life or a special talent that you can share with students in the school that will help them develop an understanding or appreciation for diversity and other cultures? Personal stories can be an excellent teaching tool.

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