

## **Cultural Considerations**

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The integrity of the Indian families should be respected with the inclusion of relevant cultural aspects. Many researchers have expressed concern about the appropriateness of service delivery and treatment to culturally different populations and have advocated culture specific techniques for ethnic minority groups (Dinges, Yazzie & Tollefson, 1974; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; Sue & Zane, 1987; Trimble & Hayes, 1982). The blending of specific cultural aspects with an effective technology provides a sound empirical foundation with a culturally sensitive approach.

The use of skills training for parenting competence has application especially with American Indians. The teaching of Indian children within the family circle was by example and explanation. Children and youth were provided lengthy explanations of the reasons for family and tribal guidelines and for preferred behaviors. Children were encouraged to see and follow the examples set by others. Positive self-concept was taught by letting a child practice and succeed at a task appropriate for that age level (Primeaux, 1977). Children were taught customs by observing the examples of others and also by participating in the practices themselves (Nichols, 1930). A young person gained from the learning of activities and tasks from other family members (Ryan, 1980).

### **Cultural Components**

A training program that is culturally-appropriate for American Indians would include specific traditional parenting techniques that would emphasize language, examples, and/or procedures that are consistent with Indian values. Values, beliefs, and attitudes are defining expressions of culture. According to Sue (1981), culture consists of all those things that people have learned to do, believe, value, and enjoy in their history. Culturally specific concepts contain the attributes that American Indian families have used for generations and continue to value though they may have become fragmented as a result of the inequities families have experienced.

The Indians of today, and of the past, present a picture of broad diversity of culture. It is inaccurate to state that all American Indian tribes value or practice to the same degree all traditional concepts or tribal beliefs. It is important not to assume that all Indian tribes have similar traditions. In fact, most tribes wish to maintain their uniqueness and their tribal integrity. However, respect can be given to unique tribal traditions while recognizing the overall values that seem to be held by tribal groups collectively. Tribal differences diminish when contrasted with the majority population so that these differences between tribes seem less significant when one considers the differences between values held by American Indians generally and those of Anglo-Americans. Several writers (Bryde, 1972; Richardson, 1981; Trimble, 1976; Zintz, 1963) have identified some attributes that are considered to characterize Indian people and have listed those polar traits that correspond for the Anglo-



American majority culture. Briefly summarized below are the values perspectives that are commonly cited.

### **Basic Value Differences**

1. Children are accorded the same degree of respect as an adult. Children are considered important units of the family and are central to the family. They are considered more important than material possessions. Children are not generally accustomed to the structure imposed by non-Indian adults, especially as found in school settings. Talking loudly and reprimanding children is considered ill-mannered.
2. Important is placed on harmony with the environment. Man is not accepted as the center of the universe but rather a part of it. One accepts the natural world and does not try to change it. Nature, in the Indian view of the world, is indivisible and a person is only a part of a much larger creation. The non-Indian attempts to control the physical world, to assert mastery over it. Indian people seek to be compatible with the surrounding environment both socially and physically.
3. Generosity and sharing has more value than personal acquisition or material achievement. Individuals are judged by their relative contribution to the group. Generosity and sharing are important attributes; Native American values place priority on giving rather than receiving. The one who gives the most, commands the most respect. The "give away" has an important part in the social and religious activities of Indian people. By contrast, the non-Indian is judged by personal achievement and by acquiring many possessions.
4. Group competition is encouraged if it is a cooperative venture, that is, team sports, as contrasted to individual competition which is not highly valued. Competition is unacceptable if it causes hurt or brings shame to another individual. The Native American learns to work with others by being cooperative and getting along. Within Indian groups there is conformity, not competition. Competition is learned early in the non-Indian environment where most believe that competition is essential. Progress results from competition and "progress" is considered necessary. In the Indian world, politeness is considered essential, while confrontation is a violation of cultural norms.
5. The orientation toward a present time frame versus the orientation toward a future time frame is another contrast. Native Americans live more in the present and are concerned about the now rather than anticipating unknown future possibilities. Traditionally, Indian tribes had to regard the future out of necessity for survival, for preparations were essential to survive the winter months and the non-harvest times, but there was an appreciation for being in the present. The non-Indian, however, lives for tomorrow, constantly looking to and planning for the future. The non-Indian life is governed almost entirely by time. Those who are prompt are respected, and those who are not are usually



rejected and reprimanded. There still exists for Indian people, the appreciation of living for today, while today exists.

6. In tribal custom there is a respect for the elders who have lived a long time and are highly regarded for their wisdom and knowledge. Indians respect a person who has knowledge of the people and the natural world. The non-Indian society places a greater importance on youth, an emphasis seen daily on television and in politics, for example.
7. There is value placed on the traditional lifestyle and teachings. Children are taught the ancient legends and cultural traditions. They are taught their history, who they are and where they come from. They are taught what is expected of them and how they are part of the family, clan, and tribe. Advancement, technology, and learning new methods to maintain a modern society are appreciated more by the non-Indian.

### **Family Structure**

The strength of American Indian families can be appreciated by their persistent struggle to maintain a similitude of the former cultural structure while being confronted by opposing social, political, and economic events reshaping their lifestyles (Lewis, 1984).

Traditionally the time for child rearing was not when one had children but when one had grandchildren (Attneave, 1982). The older generation occupied a position closer to the grandchild than did the parent, making the bond between grandparent and grandchildren very strong. The basis for part of this pattern was economics. Attneave (1982) noted that hunting and gathering, even in rural agricultural villages, were traditionally the most prevalent means of sustaining life. The energies and strengths of young adults were crucially needed for the support of the clan as a whole. Physically, the young adult could be more active in the pursuit, dressing, and hauling of game, in addition to defending the interest of the tribe.

The American Indian family defined itself not so much as an individual unit but as an extension of the clan unit into tribes (Morey & Gillian, 1974). The clan system supported the formal organization and sustained the social order which governed the conduct of its members. An understanding of the clan system is basic for an understanding of its role in the rearing of children. The extended family network was a structure of relationships by group members toward other group members. The kinship structure was basically a tight-knit community in which everyone depended on everyone else for survival and support. Each relative or member was delegated formally or informally to guide, counsel, or teach the children that belongs within the clan. All cousins were treated as siblings; all aunts and uncles shared parental functions. Indeed, in almost every Indian language and tradition, these roles are blurred as far as the genetic lines are concerned (Attneave, 1982). The same kinship terms are used for brother/cousin, mother/aunt, and father/uncle. Great aunts and uncles were considered grandparents and functioned in that role (Attneave, 1982; Morey & Gillian, 1982; Primeaux, 1977). Teaching children correct behavior was the



responsibility of each adult person. Survival skills were taught so children could be competent to overcome obstacles they would encounter in their normal development. The child was reinforced by the family, community, and tribe since each contributed to the child's welfare and the child was the traditions passing forward.

### **Traditional Teachings**

Traditional teachings were based on behaviors that proved to be successful in maintaining the integrity of the tribe and the individual. Harmony, respect, and generosity were considered the core of traditional teachings (Nichols, 1930). Traditional teachings were based on cultural values that gave essence to the Indian nations (Richardson, 1981). Cooperation, service, and concern for the group permeated all aspects of tribal life since it was necessary that all contribute to the livelihood of the group. Sharing and generosity were measures of personal worth. The values were rooted in survival of the tribe. Members needed to depend on each other for support, for protection, for direction, and for spiritual guidance. Geography and climate determined the degree to which the Indian community adapted to harsh surroundings or lived comfortably. Indian people sought a balance with nature and accepted the circumstances in whatever area they lived. They respected the elements and the trials they had to endure to survive. To show their appreciation of the gifts from the earth, they would try to use the natural resources in a beneficial and reasonable manner that would enhance the whole tribe. Tribal people would usually place offerings in exchange for the use of food or shelter from the earth. Respect for the earth, sharing of whatever one had, and seeking harmony with each other and the surroundings formed the foundations of the teachings. Traditions were built on these values held by the tribe and were taught to children as beliefs, attitudes, and rituals.

### **Traditional Talking Circle**

The Traditional Talking Circle was a way of bringing native people together in a quiet, respectful manner for the purpose of teaching, listening, learning, and sharing (Archambault-Stephens, 1982). The Talking Circle was a circle of respect, a Sacred Hoop. Archambault-Stephens (1982) uses Black Elk's teachings as a way to describe the completeness of the circle. According to Black Elk, everything an Indian person did was in a circle because the Power of the World always worked in circles, and everything tried to be round. In other days the Indian people were a strong nation because they saw that the Sacred Hoop was unbroken. The knowledge of the world came from the outer religion that was based on the Sacred Hoop. The four quarters of the hoop nourished the flowering tree which was the living center of the hoop. Everything that is of the world is represented in some form of the circle. The sky is round, the earth is round, the wind, in its might power, also circles the earth. The birds and animals build their nests and dens with curves and roundness. The sun and moon both form circles with their substance from day to day, and from month to month. Things always come back again in the circle. The nation's hoop forms a circle.



The circle encompasses respect, love, understanding, communication, sharing, acceptance, and strength. This establishes an arena for discussion with rules and respect to govern behavior. When approached in the proper way, the circle can be a very powerful means of touching or bringing some degree of healing to the mind, the heart, the body, or the spirit (Archambault-Stephens, 1982).

### **Principle of Proper Living**

The teachings of Indian people were based on spiritual beliefs given orally for generations. The Principles of Proper Living taught discipline, honesty, integrity, bravery, beauty, health, respect, kindness, devotion, willingness, action, vision, hope, faith, and knowledge (Stone, 1980). The Principles were taught because man was not only creation but existed with all other forms of creation. The buffalo, the bear, the eagle, the trees, the rivers, the very stones were believed to be intimately related in the structure of the world. Everything was thought to be vested with its own power through the work of the Creator. The Principles were for man's welfare to exist and to co-exist with self and with others. The world was part of man because it relates to the survival of mankind and for mankind's welfare. There was no separation of man from nature or the natural order of things. There was no separation of the physical from the spirit without suffering consequences. All undertaking would be done with fasting and prayer. To be strong and in good health meant not only the physical self but spiritual self also. Therefore to stay well, it was necessary to touch the Spirit in the circle, by song, dance, and prayer. Spirituality has played and continues to play an important role in the life of American Indians (Bryde, 1971). Spiritual preparation includes applying the Principles of Proper Living.

### **Storytelling**

Creation stories are the history and tradition of the tribes; they tell how the world began and in what manner. They explain how the world, people, animals, and plants are related. Through creation stories, people can understand the natural order of life and in what direction they came and in what direction they are going. They give reason to the overall scheme of things. Parents are accountable for teaching their children that actions today are significant and important and attention should be given to their actions. Elders believe that how children are reared and what is said to them influences their behavior and parents need to pass on the knowledge. It is their duty and right (Ketcheshawno, 1983). It is therefore important to understand the creation of things because it provides the framework within which wise decisions can be made.

Storytelling was the form of transmittal for how things were and why things happened. There were winter stories and summer stories, stories for days that the rains fell, and stories for early mornings. Creation stories were retold and retold many times in the growing years. This was not only to re-create the beginning of the tribe but the stories would have different significance as children matured through the developmental stages. Storytelling gathered families together to share recreation time and to improve listening and oratory skills. Stories provided the answers to when, where, how, and how come.



### **Medicine Wheel**

The Medicine Wheel was also part of the Sacred Hoop. From its teachings come the directions for guidance and understanding. The Medicine Wheel is divided into four parts to represent the four parts of man; the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The Medicine Wheel gives mankind an understanding of good medicine and bad medicine. The teachings of the Four Directions also come from the Medicine Wheel. Wisdom, knowledge, and learning come from using the Sacred Directions for guidance and understanding (White Crow, 1986). The Four Directions are for understanding; they are messengers.

The North direction is colored in white. The buffalo and deer come from the North. They represent food, clothing, and shelter. But if the direction of the North is misused, it is said to care only about itself; it is cold-hearted. The color of the East direction is gold. The eagle is part of the East direction, and the East direction marks the beginnings, the creation, and the light. If the medicine of the East becomes bad, a person misses opportunities. They are unable to use the opportunities that are about them. The South is marked with the color of green. The directions are sacred and so are the colors that correspond to the directions. From the South, come love, trust, and innocence. The mouse and rat are small and tiny, yet bring the qualities of love, trust and innocence. People do not always recognize the value of these gifts. The animal that has been called Brother by the Indian comes from the direction of the West and is the Bear. Black is the color that causes individuals to be introspective and to seek from within. This person is caring and loving. At times when the medicine is bad, the person may be taken advantage of.

The next two directions are upward to Father Sky and beneath to Mother Earth. Father Sky has the rights to the sunlight, the wind, and the rain. The change in the seasons, the change in temperature, and the change as the earth moves come from the direction of the sky. The Earth connection is necessary for life to continue. The Earth is the teacher and instructor for living. Together the two directions bring fertility and reproduction to the environment.

The last direction, called the Seventh Direction, is the medicine of self. When the medicine is good, then everything is in harmony with self. This is what is strived for. When people know who they are and the direction they are to follow they are self-assured. The Sacred Directions help to establish identity and self-confidence.

### **To Honor Children**

To honor children is to touch a child, for they are the heart of the Indian people. "Of all the teachings Indian people receive this one is the most important. Nothing belongs to you of what there is, of what you take, you must share...touch a child – they are my people," are the words of Chief Dan George (LeBrasseur & Freark, 1982 pg. 6). Children were the center of the circle for the Indian community. The experience of community was a tangible one in which respect for children emerged as the people praised, advised, guided, and cared



for all the children. Children were encouraged to be in touch with their world. Whenever a child accomplished even a small task, he or she was given recognition for the effort. Celebrations surrounded different rites of passage. Name giving, ear-piercing, certain birthdays, first dance, first hunt, first art object – all were cause to celebrate the accomplishments of the child. Friends, relatives, family, the whole kinship system engaged in acknowledging the efforts of their children either formally or informally. For example, when the first beadwork article was completed, an aunt would give away some of her possessions to honor the work done by the niece. At the end of a successful hunt, the father or uncle would know the skills mastered by the youth. Encouragement was the essential ingredient for continued success by the next generation of Indian people. All the kinship system focused their efforts toward this end. Praise was an important part of the learning process. Plenty Coup expresses the significance of praise; “Our teachers...were grandfathers, fathers or uncles. All were quick to praise excellence without speaking a word that might break the spirit of a boy who might be less capable than the others. The boy who failed at any lesson got only more lessons, more care, until he was as far as he could go” (Marashio, 1982, pg. 6).

### **Vision Quest**

It was not uncommon in American Indian society that children were brought early to gain knowledge about the world and their place in it. Children as early as seven, eight, or nine had visions which shaped the direction of their lives, and some received the power or prophecy (Marashio, 1982). Traditional Indian people believed that each individual has a vision and a special purpose in being on this Mother Earth. Learning through visions became a powerful method of knowing the direction of one’s life. A person seeking the vision usually went through fasting and the sweat lodge and, once purified, went off alone into the wilderness to seek a vision. There was power in vision and much to be learned. Ceremonies were also used to gain knowledge and truth. A clear understanding of reality was necessary to develop a perception of the world that governed survival. The quest for knowledge, understanding, and wisdom answered the kinds of questions that provided the basis for one choosing or feeling confident in a sense of direction and meaning in life (Ortiz, 1945).

### **Conclusion**

The teachings of Indian families have existed for generations and have survived over 200 years of federal policies. The strengths of the American Indian family are interwoven within the community network, within the spiritual quality of seeking peace and balance, and with the personal relationships among family members (Lewis, 1980). Traditional teachings may be seen as valuable resources today. There are many aspects of Indian culture that can be involved in the rearing of children. Trainers will, hopefully, be respectful of the teachings and of the families that they will work with, thereby maintaining the integrity of the Indian family.

