

Cultural Styles:
Implications for Teaching African American Students
Donna Y. Ford

Sources: Wade Boykin,
Barbara Shade, Janice Hale, etc.

Models for Other Racial & Ethnic Groups...

B. Shade et al. (2001) **Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms.** Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Questions to Consider...

- *Why does culture matter in teaching and learning?*
- *How can we create learning environments where students feel a sense of membership?*
- *How can we build trusting and nurturing relationships with students who come from culturally different backgrounds?*
- *How can we create learning environments that honor the worth and dignity of marginalized students--students on the fringes?*

Spirituality

- *Belief that a non-material, religious force influences people's everyday lives;*
- *Acceptance of a non-material higher force that pervades all of life's affairs;*
- *Faithful; optimistic;*
- *Resilient.*

Strengths: Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences

Harmony

- The notion that one's fate is interrelated with other elements in the scheme of things so that humankind and nature are harmonically conjoined; harmony--one's functioning is tightly linked to nature's order; sensitive to rhythm.
- Observant/Perceptive: Reads, the environment well; reads non-verbal behaviors well – including inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal.
- Keen sense of justice.

Strengths: Strong appreciation for the visual and performing arts; intuitive

Movement

- An emphasis on the interweaving of movement, rhythm, music, and dance, which are considered central to psychological health;
- A need to move; to be involved, to be active (physical over-excitability);
- Expresses self well non-verbally.

Strengths: psychomotor intelligence; physical over-excitability

Verve

- A propensity for relatively high levels of stimulation;
- Energetic and lively;
- Tactile;
- Kinesthetic.

Strengths: psychomotor intelligence; physical over-excitability

Communalism

- A commitment to social connectedness -- social bonds and responsibilities transcend individual privileges;
- A commitment to the fundamental interdependence of people and to the importance of social bonds and relationships;
- A strong need for affiliation and social acceptance/approval.

Strengths: Interpersonal intelligence; social; extraverted

Oral Tradition

- A preference for oral modes of communication -- speaking and listening are treated as performances;
- Call and response.
- Oral virtuosity--use metaphorically colorful, graphic forms of spoken language (e.g., slang; storytelling, embellishments, jokes, metaphors, etc.);
- Direct, blunt, "tells it like it is."

Strengths: *Verbal/linguistic intelligence; bilingual or multilingual*

Affect

- An emphasis on emotions and feelings; strong emotions;
- Keen sense of justice, right and wrong;
- Sensitivity to emotional cues and a tendency to be emotionally responsive.

Strengths: *Intrapersonal intelligence; emotional over-excitability*

Expressive Individualism

- Seeks and cultivates a distinctive personality;
- A proclivity for spontaneity and genuine personal expression;
- Unique personal expression, personal style;
- Risk taker, independent, impulsive.

Strengths: *Creative, innovative; insightful*

Social Time Perspective: Polychronic

- The event is more important than the time; make the most of enjoyable times;
- The here and now are important (the future is not guaranteed);
- Time is circular, social;
- Time is not a commodity; time is not the master.

Strengths: *Able to (prefers to) do many things at one time; flexible*

Sample Teaching Strategies

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Movement
Harmony
Verve
Expressive
Individualism

- Creative movement (body used to communicate); dance, drama
- Role plays, simulations, theatre
- Field trips
- Physical activity; tactile and kinesthetic activities
- Singing, humming, whistling, chanting
- Creating melodies, songs, etc.
- Background music
- Playing instruments

Sample Teaching Strategies *(cont)*

Oral Tradition
Expressive
Individualism

- Lectures
- Seminars, discussions and dialogues
- Oral presentations & speeches
- Debates
- Word games (e.g., idioms, jokes, riddles, homonyms, anagrams)
- Poetry
- Storytelling, creative writing
- Reading (choral, peer, individual)
- Journal writing

Sample Teaching Strategies *(cont)*

Spirituality
Harmony

- Social, cooperative learning (e.g., clubs)
- Service and community involvement
- Conflict mediation
- Opportunity to help others (e.g., tutoring, mentoring)
- Simulations

Cultural Styles and Testing

Janet Helms

- **Spirituality**
 - May be difficult for student to separate relevant aspects of the test stimuli from factors caused by luck, prayer, faith, or uncontrollable circumstances; therefore, may not apply self.
- **Harmony**
 - Negative test taking conditions may hinder performance (e.g., interactions with examiner, etc.).
- **Affect**
 - Feelings may affect test performance (e.g., may get upset about items, etc.)
- **Social Time Perspective**
 - Student may have difficult time with lengthy tests without breaks.

Cultural Styles and Testing (cont)

- **Expressive Individualism**
 - **Oral Tradition**
 - **Social Time Perspective**
 - **Communalism**
- May choose more creative, funny, unusual responses; may be impulsive and risk taker.
 - Performance may differ (improve) when tested orally, and when student can verbally elaborate on response.
 - Obtaining a good answer may be more important than finishing on time; time may escape the student (mismanage time)
 - Performance may be hindered when competition is encouraged (e.g., Stereotype threat may result, C. Steele)