

INTERVIEW PAPER: CULTURAL COMPETENCE



Summary of the interview

The aim of this interview is to review and research the influence of the external environment on the functionality of families as contexts of human development. It investigates the interaction of environment and genetics in family processes. The interview highlights linkages and transitions between families and other settings, which influence the development. These include daycare, hospitals, social networks, neighborhoods, and communities. It focuses on trends of environmental events and transitions of life, since these affect interfamilial processes.

1. How did you start in your work?

I started my job by visiting and providing services in the home setting. I sought information on standard behaviors, customs, courtesies, and anticipations from the given families. In the course of visiting and providing services, I observed the environment and sought information from caretakers, parents, and older people on acceptable behaviors, anticipations, and customs, which were unique to families. Based on The Community Leadership Project Curriculum (p. 17), I began an assessment procedure to obtain sufficient knowledge about individual families, understanding their culture, values and beliefs that could not be obtained through reading and research. I focused on their experiences about life, which shape their personalities and their comprehension, interpretation

and appreciation of the world around them.

2. Describe the families that you work for. What are their cultural backgrounds?

Some families I worked for had extended family members and clans comprising several households and relatives. Such families held family-knit support networks. Some other small families' attention was on the immediate family and made use of the external support networks. Most of the parents in these families were involved in their children's well being, growth, and maturity, but still in line with their cultural dimensions. Loden and Rosener (p. 8) explain the role and centrality of the inherent cultural behaviors and characteristics to the present families. Because of culture, some families largely experienced domestic or family violence. However, such issues are at large globally widespread and have to be addressed through recognizable channels. In these families, it was a shunned issue, and little was done to solve it.

3. Do you find their backgrounds similar or different from yours?

Some of the family backgrounds I investigated experienced domestic or family violence. Unlike my background, these families were aware of the violence, yet they assumed it as a culturally permissible practice. Some were not cognizant of what the law says concerning family violence, which is contrary to my background. According to the law, no one should assault another person. According to the National Association for Children of Alcoholics (p. 2), nobody should have sexual contact with another person without their willful knowledge. Further, the law provides that if someone is a victim of domestic violence or in a relationship, he or she

should get concerned about personal safety, and he or she should immediately seek help. Safety is everyone's right.

4. What do you find rewarding in working for culturally diverse families? What example/s can you cite?

Working for culturally diverse families enabled me to establish valuable collaborative relationships through sharing, being flexible and committed to building and sustaining open channels of communication, and understanding. In a book about cultural diversity (Banks, 1997, p. 35), this allows recognition and response through honest self-reflection. It mostly requires me to reflect upon specific cultural values embedded in my understanding of a family's behavior and different factors that contribute to their coexistence. I had to identify if such families recognize and share my values and assumptions, and how their views differ from mine. It rewards much to listen carefully, developing an open mind and reserving judgment.

5. What do you find challenging in working for culturally diverse families? What example/s can you cite? How do you face the challenges? What helped you in responding to these challenges?

In order to get enough information on the needs to address in families, I need to interview the affected victims one-on-one. According to McCoy, Clavin, and Reaven (1997), getting enough feedback information from such victims can be a bit challenging because they could have been traumatized and silently suffering from psychological wounds. For instance, engaging a victimized child in a conversation can be a bit

embarrassing on their side, and, most probably, may leave them weeping and crying. Questions like 'What kind of things do your dad and mom fight about?' or 'What happens when they fight and do they normally hit one another?' may bring memories, which are tormenting to the affected child. In order to counter this, I need to establish whether the victimized child is fully aware of domestic violence. I have to assure the victim that such a conversation is for their safety and will help them to overcome their worries.

Upon assessing the situation and concluding that domestic violence has happened, I carry out a separate interview with the involved adults. Interviewing abused adults always proves to be difficult. As such, I have to be all-round creative. I usually start by requesting them to feel free and tell me about their relationships, the decisions they make as a family and measures they undertake to ensure their children's safety. I then proceed to more difficult questions, like if their partner has ever accused them of unfaithfulness, controlled their money, threatened to kill them, or harassed them sexually. In his article about domestic violence (p. 4), Geri Redden explains that in order to solve such an issue fully, I have to interview the offender to assess how dangerous he/she is. This is geared towards protecting me and lessening the risks for the child and for the victim. It may happen that the offender is so dangerous that I cannot bear to continue. In such a case, I close the interview and consult a supervisor on the way forward. While assessing the offender, I ask them about their relationship, how conflicts are handled in the family and if the offender has ever been angry to the extent of hurting someone. At the end, I am enabled and guided to know the danger posed to both adult victims and children in households where domestic violence is severely rampant.

6. How do you prepare yourself so that you are effective in your work with culturally diverse families? What will you suggest to people who are interested to work with or for culturally diverse families and individuals?

First, I have to understand the factors involved in communicating with such families and particular people. This will give me a good base for communicating with those people that we may not share the same language. From Axner's Community Leadership Project Curriculum (1993), I have to make efforts to communicate in the best way possible, especially where there are language barriers. It is imperative for me to possess knowledge about other cultures and develop a range of skills that will enable me to interact effectively with all members from diverse backgrounds. I will first recognize culture as a human behavior factor, which is a key contributor to the development of relationships based on cultural diversity. This can then enable me to resolve cross-cultural misunderstandings.