

Culturally competent practice

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Purpose

This activity is designed to sensitize students to cultural differences by understanding more about their own cultural inheritance. The student learns that cultural competence is not an absolute quality and that 'culture' is not something which is limited to certain groups, classes or races.

Method

This activity is most effective if it can be done by a small group of students and practice teachers from diverse backgrounds. In this way, influences which individuals may well take for granted are put in perspective. It is a good exercise for pairs of practice teachers and students to do together early in the placement.

Give *You are what you eat* to the students and practice teachers with no prior preparation, other than a brief explanation of the purpose of the activity. Participants can work in pairs, threes or fours, but no larger.

Get feedback from everybody. Help the group to move out from the focus on meals towards broader considerations of the impact of culture as an active force in their lives. Encourage people to share any new understandings they have gained about themselves and other people. (Allow 45 - 60 minutes).

Variations

The experience of meals is universal and feels relevant to all individuals; a colloquium on food at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, in 1991 concluded that 'feeding and eating is really one with the human heart.'

In addition, experiences of music provide another opportunity to expose cultural influences. Early experiences of medicine (what was considered to be healthy or unhealthy, what were the family's pet cures?) are also enlightening.

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YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT Activity

To prepare for this activity, put these meals in order for a typical day and add any meals which are not named:

(for example, some South Walesians eat *tea-tea*, a meal of cold, sweet foods taken in the late afternoon)

* DINNER * BRUNCH * TEA * BREAKFAST * LUNCH * ELEVENSES * SUPPER *

- as a child, which of these meals did you eat?
- what image does the word to describe each meal bring to mind?
- we only need to eat two meals a day, so why so many possible meals?
- were there any periods of fast in your family?
- what was the main meal of the day in your family; who was present?
- on weekdays, was your main meal of the day at school or at home?
- was there any special day of the week with different meal patterns?

Smells

what are your earliest memories of food smells?
what, if any, smells greeted you as you came home from school?
are there any smells which have special memories for you?

Tastes

what was your favourite-tasting food; was it associated with a family meal?
did your family encourage you to try unfamiliar foods and tastes?
if you didn't like the taste of something on your plate, what happened?

Touch

did you have to wash your hands before coming to the table?
what foods could you eat by hand at the main family meal?
were you ever hit for misbehaviour at the table? if so, what had you done?

Sounds

did your family make any blessing before eating?
were family meals times for conversation or silence?
if conversational, were these happy, argumentative or a mix?

Sights

who prepared the meal, set the table and served the food?
how was the table set - did you have a tablecloth, napkins, etc?
would you often or seldom see guests eating with you at the family table?

How have the habits of your childhood meals influenced your adult meals? If you share meal-times with a partner, what similarities and differences did you notice in your meal-time behaviours? Have other cultures influenced the way you take the main meal of the day now, or is it very similar to your childhood experience?