

## Cultural Diversity

*Outcome: In this segment we will examine how cultural differences can give rise to misunderstandings and misconceptions that influence teaching and learning.*

Now that we have explored mainstream American culture, it will be useful to examine some of the cultural characteristics represented by other students and families in our diverse community. Again, we will use proverbs as a vehicle for exploring the values and beliefs beneath the words and actions.

As the next set of proverbs are displayed, record what you see as the core values within each one on your capture sheet.

**"Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet."** African Proverb

**"It is not enough to know how to ride – you must also know how to fall."**  
Mexican Proverb

**"Venture all; see what fate brings."** Vietnamese Proverb

**"If someone sweats for you, you change his shirt."** Haitian Proverb

**"A successful person should help others realize their good ideas."**  
Chinese Proverb

**"A single stick may smoke, but it will not burn."** Ethiopian Proverb

**"A boat does not go forward if each one is rowing his own way."**  
Swahili Proverb

**"A dog that barks all the time gets little attention."** Argentinean Proverb

**"The closed mouth swallows no flies."** Spanish Proverb

**"Having a good discussion is like having riches."** Kenyan Proverb

**"How beautiful it is to do nothing, and then rest afterwards."**  
Spanish Proverb

**Life is so short we must move very slowly."** Thai Proverb

Compare the list of mainstream American cultural characteristics with the ones you identified for the proverbs from other cultures.

Consider the following:

- Was it easier to identify the characteristics in the mainstream proverbs or the proverbs from other countries?
- What similarities and differences did you detect between mainstream characteristics and values and the characteristics and values from other cultures?

Let's review the proverbs from the other cultures again to identify the core values expressed in them.

**"Only a fool tests the depth of the water with both feet."** African Proverb  
This proverb communicates a value on reflection before action. The value is not on quick action as it is in mainstream culture.

**"It is not enough to know how to ride – you must also know how to fall."** Mexican Proverb  
Implicit in this proverb is the notion that mistakes will happen and that an individual must prepare for them.

**"Venture all; see what fate brings."** Vietnamese Proverb  
This proverb suggests that an individual does not have full control of an outcome, but rather that fate or destiny may interfere.

**"If someone sweats for you, you change his shirt."** Haitian Proverb

**"A successful person should help others realize their good ideas."** Chinese Proverb

**"A single stick may smoke, but it will not burn."** Ethiopian Proverb

**"A boat does not go forward if each one is rowing his own way."** Swahili Proverb

All four of these proverbs express a value on the wants, needs, and characteristics of the group over the individual.

This orientation or way of looking at culture is referred to as “collectivist”.

**“A dog that barks all the time gets little attention.”** Argentinean Proverb

**“The closed mouth swallows no flies.”** Spanish Proverb

How are these two proverbs different from mainstream culture?  
Mainstream culture embraces self-expression and the communication of individual needs and wants. These proverbs reflect quite the opposite.

**“How beautiful it is to do nothing, and then rest afterwards.”**

Spanish Proverb

**Life is so short we must move very slowly.”** Thailand Proverb

These proverbs express a value of time from a perspective that is different from that of mainstream American culture. Here time is the tool of the people; people are the given, and time is the variable. In mainstream culture, time is the given and people are the variable. We will focus more on the concept of time in a future segment.

How would you describe the major differences between mainstream culture and the values in the proverbs from other cultures?

These are major differences between mainstream culture and many other cultures. Keep in mind, the differences in beliefs, values, and behaviors within groups are great. The following points are generalities.

### **Mainstream Culture**

**Individual orientation**  
**Competition**  
**Achievement motivation**  
**Risk-taking**  
**Independence**  
**Time/schedule oriented**

### **Diverse Cultures**

**Group orientation**  
**Cooperative**  
**Affiliation motivation**  
**Reflection**  
**Interdependence**  
**Time/people oriented**

*Reflection: Think about these differences in relationship to teaching and learning. What are some of the possible misunderstandings and misconceptions that may spring from these differences in school?*

In the next segment of this module, you will become more familiar with the concepts of individualism and collectivism and reflect on how these two different cultural perspectives influence teaching and learning.