

## Time Orientation

In the previous section of this module, we examined the concept of self from the individualistic and collectivist cultural perspectives. It's clear that mainstream Americans tends toward individualism, which causes us to be more competitive, achievement motivated, and to value independence and self-reliance. On the other hand, people from collectivist cultures tend to be more group oriented, affiliation motivated, and to value cooperation and interdependence.

In this segment, we will examine how the concept of time can differ between people with different cultural backgrounds. Again, please keep in mind that there will be a wide range of individual differences with regard to the concept of time within any cultural group. The information presented here, like the information in the previous segments, reflects the tendency, or more prevalent pattern of behavior within a group. Not every individual will reflect the pattern and there will be differences in the degree of adherence to the pattern.

Let's first take a look at ourselves. Answer the questions below as a way to reflect on your personal orientation toward time. You may record your responses on your capture sheet.

1. What's the first thing you say when you walk into a meeting late?
2. Could you get by without having a personal calendar at school/work and at home?
3. What's your reaction if an in-service presenter does not give out an agenda?
4. How often do you wear a watch? How do you feel if you forget to put it on one morning?
5. What's your reaction when someone digresses from a meeting agenda or the topic of discussion?

From your responses to the questions above, how would you characterize your orientation to time? How important is time in your life? Does time control you or do you control time?

In mainstream American culture, time is a valuable commodity. It's quantifiable and perceived of as a limited resource. Have you ever said, "There's not enough time." In mainstream American culture there is a high value on adherence to schedules and deadlines. Promptness and punctuality are the preferred characteristics; it's rude to be late or to be kept waiting. The clock is the constant and people are the variable that

must adjust to the time. Time orientation is in the future – we are always planning ahead for events the next day, week, month, and even years into the future. This orientation towards time is not bad or undesirable, but it may be very different from the time orientation of students and families from some other cultures.

Some other cultures view time as limitless and think about more time as always being available. In a culture with this more relaxed sense of time, interruptions to a schedule, waiting, and last minute changes in plans are non-issues. Time is adjusted to fit the needs of the people. How might someone from a culture with a more relaxed sense of time be described by a mainstream American? How might a mainstream American be described by someone from a culture with a more relaxed sense of time?

Think about how the mainstream view of time is reflected in schools. You probably would not have a hard time coming up with five ways time influences teaching and learning. Here are just a few.

- The day revolves around the bell and bus schedule.
- There are very specific starting and ending times in the school day and they are the same number of hours for every student in the school.
- Students who come late to school must go to the office and get a pass.
- Students must stop their work at the end of a given time period whether they have completed the task or not.
- Students are expected to start and complete one task before beginning another.

What other aspects of schools are dictated by the clock?

One important consequence of our time orientation relates to latency or wait time. This is the time between asking a student a question and terminating the opportunity to respond. Research indicates that pausing three seconds or more after asking a question and pausing again for three seconds or more after a student responds, increases the length and complexity of student responses. Ample wait time also has been shown to increase student confidence, increase the variety of students voluntarily participating in discussions, and to decrease the disciplinary actions needed to keep students on task. For all of these reasons, wait time is especially important to English language learners who must formulate a response in a new language.

Though the benefits of wait time are well documented, it is not usual practice in many classrooms. Why don't we wait for students to respond

and again after they respond? TIME! We want the class to hear the right answer quickly so we can move on with the lesson. We also don't want to put a student on the spot or embarrass him/her by waiting. The silence can be deafening. Research suggests that by the time students are in second or third grade they often begin to believe that the "smart" kids are the ones who finish their work first. Quickness becomes valued over accuracy. Quickness is equated with being smart.

Time also impacts assessment. Though with the advent of alternative assessment, students have more flexibility in demonstrating their learning, many important tests are still timed. The MSA, HSA, SAT, and AP exams are all timed. These are high stakes tests for students, schools and school systems. But if the object of an assessment is to determine whether a student has mastered a particular concept or skill, does it matter if the student takes 30 or 45 minutes to complete their demonstrations? In some cases speed is important, but in many others it is not.

Consider the impact of time orientation on communications and relationships with parents. Can you recall an instance when a time issue resulted in a miscommunication or misunderstanding between the school and a parent from another culture?

While we may not be able to accommodate the time preferences of people, we can help them to understand the mainstream orientation to time by explaining how noncompliance can hurt students' learning and achievement and how compliance benefits students. During the explanation, it is helpful to make a connection with the parent and students lives.

For instance, if a student is frequently late to school we can explain to the parent and the student that he/she is missing the beginning of their math lesson each time they are late. Explain further that missing the introduction to the lesson makes it hard to do the work correctly.

As the teacher you may want to help the parent decide on a strategy for helping their child get to school on time. This must be done respectfully by asking the parent what ideas they have instead of offering the solution that you would choose. Be sure to let the parent know how much you appreciate their support and how their understanding is helping their student to succeed in school.

Concepts of self and time orientation are just two of the many features of culture that can have a significant influence on student learning. Though none of us can learn all the nuances of every culture represented by our

students, we can be open to learning about them. If we are willing to self-examine our own belief systems and understand that mainstream culture is not the right and normal way of thinking and behaving in all parts of the world, we can begin to appreciate cultural differences and view them as assets in teaching and learning.

**Summary**

Time is perceived differently by each individual person. With this in mind, teachers can better understand the actions of students and parents.

**Reflection**

How can you maintain the flow of instruction while also keeping the time orientation of others in mind?