

## **Fostering Sensitivity & Celebrating Diversity**

Culture is a context into which each of us is born. And to a large extent we take our own culture for granted, as 'normal' and as 'common-sense'. Our family's way of doing things; our language(s); our values and beliefs; the food we eat and how it is prepared; how we dress; our behavior patterns; and the things we see as important; are all part of our culture. As such they strongly influence the way we understand the world, and ourselves in the world.

To a large extent this definition of 'culture' explains why, when first becoming aware of different cultures, many people label other cultures as 'strange'. Without realizing that their ways are not universal, and may also appear to others as strange.

The above definition also shifts the focus away from some of the more visible cultural differences, to seeing culture as a form of understanding which influences almost every aspect of people's lives.

Recognizing that culture includes, but is much more than, language, clothes, food, and/or religion, means that cultural sensitivity requires more than token gestures acknowledging differences. At the very least it requires tolerance of difference. If not willingness and openness to multiple interpretations and a willingness to learn.

There is also now much more emphasis on acknowledging multiple, rather than single, differences. A person is never just one kind of identity. Each person has a cultural identity based on their own particular combination of race, color, gender, language, socio-economic circumstances, religion and beliefs and location and temporal context. All which are constantly impacting on how they understand themselves and how people perceive them.

Whether in the corporate culture, classroom environment, or everyday experience these multiple differences means supporting open communication between and about cultural differences, as well as a learning environment which values and supports all kinds of differences.