

## Activity Idea: Exploring the Concept of Culture Using School Culture

By Carol C. Mukhopadhyay (copyright 2006)

For conceptual background material for this activity, see Chapter 5 (Mukhopadhyay), in *How Real is Race? A Sourcebook on Race, Culture, And Biology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. C. Mukhopadhyay, R. Henze, and Y. T. Moses, 2014. Altamira Press <https://rowman.com/ISBN/978-0-7591-2273-4>

This material can be used for non-commercial purposes with proper citation.

Apply the concept of a school as a microculture to a school you know fairly well (e.g. where you attend, teach, work, etc.). Specifically, give examples of the Material, Social/Behavioral, and Mental Products that are associated with the microculture of the school.

### Examples of Appropriate Responses

#### **Material Culture of the School:**

School building, chairs, blackboard, books, pens, notebooks, transparencies, flag, maps, lunchroom, playground, Audio-Visual equipment, tests, gradebooks, files and student records, the school insignia, if any; etc. (Note that some aspects of the material culture of the school are unique to the school while other material artifacts are part of the wider culture of which the school is a part.)

#### **Social/Behavioral Products of the School:**

School-focused social groups: faculty, staff, students, custodians, cooks, administrators, nurse, librarian, bookstore manager, grounds and maintenance people; specific roles within these groups such as the principal, counselors, teachers, etc.

Appropriate-Role-Related Behaviors between members of different social groups (e.g. principal-teacher behavior; teacher-pupil behavior; male-female pupil behavior)

School Rituals: flag salute, going to recess (lunch, playground), assemblies, greeting behavior, school dismissal rituals, cleaning up the room

Other informal patterned school-focuses behaviors: play activities, “taking a test”, “obtaining a hall pass”, “readmission after absence from school”, class participation

rules, school “discipline”, communication devices such as loudspeaker announcements, etc.

**Mental Products of the School:** Note: This is the most abstract and difficult set of products to identify. However, these products are crucial since beliefs and cultural knowledge really underlie and give meaning to the school/behavioral and material products of culture.

**Conceptual Systems:** Labels for things; Concepts and Categories; e.g. subjects (math, science, English, Social Studies) and content of subject (in Geography the division of the world into continents such as “Africa”, “Asia”, “Europe”); or in Social Studies the idea of “Western” and “Eastern” Civilizations; the “labels” for various teaching approaches or methods and devices (e.g. “lesson plans”; “Grades: A, B, C, ...”; “Cooperation” – “Satisfactory”; various “Achievement” tests or “Aptitude” tests).

**Belief Systems** (see the content of most subjects, particularly Biological and Social Sciences); belief systems about how children learn most effectively; beliefs about what produces academic “success” or “failure”; beliefs about what constitutes “cheating” vs. “cooperative learning”.

**Rules for Actions:** These provide the foundation for many of the Social/Behavioral Products) and include how one goes about “studying”, “taking tests”, talking appropriately (or inappropriately) in class, on the playground, and how one “disciplines” students for “breaking rules”.

**Values:** Respect for authority; promptness; the meritocracy (reward for effort and achievement); competition; notion of limited goods (a limited number of A’s); justice; the value of literacy, especially the literary products of some cultures; self-control; restraint; honesty.