

Cultural Self-Identity* and the Cultural Continua

	Action	Example
Assimilation	Rejecting of native culture	Speaks English only and adopts dominant aspects of U.S. culture.
Acculturation or Accommodation	Choosing aspects of both dominant and native cultures	Speaks English and L1. Incorporates values, beliefs, traditions, etc. of both cultures. May speak English in public, but the L1 at home or when with members of own cultural group.
Transculturation	Blending of cultures	Integrates both cultures in a seamless manner.
Alienation	Rejecting of dominant culture	Only speaks L1, maintains culture separation and holds on to native cultural framework. May not speak any English even after having lived in the U.S. for many years.
Marginalization	Rejecting of native culture with no connection to other cultures	Neither acknowledges nor engages in native culture or language. Does not identify with any other cultural groups.

*Adapted from Gutierrez-Clellen (2004) and Lynch & Hanson (2004).

The **cultural continua** identified by Lynch and Hanson (2004, pp. 49-5), while not new to the behavioral and social sciences, provide a way of considering the range (continuum) for each of the systems of values and beliefs that characterize various cultural groups (i.e., how they define *family*, *time*, etc.):

1. **Family constellation:** A “family” may consist of a small unit (single parent and child) to an extended kinship network of siblings, multiple generations, and/or friends and neighbors. The decision-making process and caretaking arrangements may vary (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 50).
2. **Interdependence/Individuality:** While U.S. culture applauds individualism, many other cultures emphasize interdependence and cooperation. Individuality may be viewed as selfish (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 51). In their research, Trumbull et al (2001) have found that culturally and linguistically

3. diverse children encounter two different value-based orientations—the collectivist or interdependent emphasis of home and the individualistic emphasis of school culture—that influence the levels of independence, achievement, self-expression, and choice manifested by these children and may cause conflict.
4. **Nurturance/Independence:** Many cultures define nurturance in such a way that young children are fed, dressed, and kept by their parents and families much longer, sometimes even until age 6 or 7. They may be watched or cared for at home or by relatives rather than placed in an early learning environment (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 51-52), as also noted by researchers studying early childhood education participation by immigrant families (CLASP, 2008; Matthews & Ewen, 2006; Matthews & Jang, 2007) This particular value may explain, in part, some of the statistics related to ELL participation in early care and early learning programs.
5. **Time:** In other cultures, time is viewed and handled differently. It is *given* rather than *measured* (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 52). Tending to a family member or neighbor in need may take precedence over keeping an appointment with a service provider, or it may determine when someone shows up at a party or funeral (i.e., several hours after the stated starting time).
6. **Tradition/Technology:** Cultural values, beliefs, and traditions, including folk wisdom, may hold more weight for ELL families and children than more modern technology (i.e., computers) and improvements (i.e., medical interventions) (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 53). A cultural belief may dictate that someone who is ill seek attention from a healer who uses herbs and prayers, rather than seek formal medical attention. An oral tradition of passing on family history or learning information may preclude having a formal written system of recording information or having written documents.
7. **Ownership:** Property is viewed by many other cultures as belonging to the family or community. It may be borrowed or shared. Therefore, if school materials are sent home and not returned, it may be that they have been shared with others rather than lost or stolen (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 54).
8. **Rights and Responsibilities:** Within other cultures, gender and generational roles and responsibilities may be viewed quite differently than in the U.S., where equality is emphasized (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 54).

9. **Harmony/Control:** Harmony and peace, for a number of ELL families and communities, are central goals within their cultures. What might be viewed by an early learning professional as lack of cooperation or judgment may be the way in which an ELL family or child maintains harmony and avoids conflict (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 55).

The framework for a “**cultural continua**” (Lynch & Hanson, 2004, p. 49) avoids culture-specific information that may not be accurate or relevant for a given cultural group. The continua do provide ways of considering factors that may influence or impact the cognitive, academic, linguistic, physical, and socio-emotional development of young ELLs. This can help early learning professionals reflect upon what other perspectives or assumptions may exist when misunderstandings or miscommunication occur with ELL families and their children. Miscommunications may take place in an early care setting, center, or home, or during a home visit, interview, or meeting. The continua may also assist in identifying who, besides the early learning professional, may need to be involved in working with a particular young ELL and his/her family.

Culturally competent professionals are knowledgeable and sensitive to the range of values, beliefs, and traditions that may be reflected in the behaviors of a given ELL family or child. By considering the worldviews presented by another cultural group and being aware of their own perspectives (or biases), early care and early learning professionals can become more effective in addressing the cultural, linguistic, and educational needs of young ELLs.

Sources: Gutierrez-Clellan, V.F. (2005). Assessment of English language learners: Challenges and strategies. *Head Start Bulletin*, 78, pp. 47-49. Lynch, E.W. & Hanson, M.J. (2004). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide to working with children and their families* (3rd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.