

Cultural Specificity vs. Cultural Competence

Culturally Specific Approach

- This approach acknowledges the existence of different cultural customs, beliefs and practices. The “problem” is the cultural differences between the service provider and the client.
- The service provider tries to learn about the specific beliefs and practices of each client’s cultural background.
- This approach provides only a superficial understanding of cultural differences.
- This partial understanding of cultural differences can lead to service delivery based on stereotypes.
- The service provider may operate from his/her own ethnocentrism without realizing it.
- The difference in power between client and service provider is not acknowledged.

Culturally Competent Approach

- This approach acknowledges the validity of different cultural customs, beliefs and practices. The “problem” is the service provider’s lack of knowledge and/or skills to work with cultural differences.
- The service provider is personally committed to developing the beliefs, knowledge and skills to accept and work across cultural differences.
- This approach acknowledges that cultural identity is made up of many layers.
- Service delivery acknowledges the validity of cultural background but focuses on each client’s individual needs.
- The service provider acknowledges his/her own ethnocentrism and biases.
- The inequity in power between client and service provider is acknowledged.