

Indigenous Birthing Rituals

By Linda E. Grice

Overview

This curriculum is developed to stimulate the student to think about motherhood and child birthing practices of different cultures and how those practices have evolved over time. The student is introduced to certain case study scenarios, asked to discuss and or critique said situations. Through their critiquing of the case studies the student develops an understanding and flavor for the popular culture of diverse groups of people.

The student is guided through participation in the birthing ritual and should develop an overview as to the reasons why certain cultures do certain things in their birthing rituals. A detailed procedure is offered in some examples. The student is encouraged to discuss their feelings concerning these procedures.

The Navajo view of pregnancy is studied with the state of wellness being discussed. The Bangalore of India's, ritual of honoring new mothers is also explored. The Philippine culture of Midwifery and the practice of said cultured is developed. The Thai people have great concern about protection from evil spirits. The Hmong people's beliefs are discussed. The Nation of Ghana and how the women are treated in Ghana is presented in a way that the students can create an appreciation for the Ghanaian culture. The Indian in Guatemala ritual is presented. The African American birthing experience is given by a personal example.

Lesson plans are developed which allow the students to explain the terminology of popular culture. Assess the influence that popular culture has on others through the research and study of birthing rituals of other countries. Then students will recognize the role of environment, personality and genetic influences that shape self and others. They will become aware of their needs and the needs of others to aid their ability to work effectively in their childcare career. Through presentations the student will respond orally to information and ideas gained by the readings. By using the pictures taken at the birthday celebrations the student will be able to create a book for the children in the laboratory school which is age appropriate because the parties that will be planned will be developmentally appropriate for pre school age children.

Rationale

The course that I teach will allow students to earn a living by working for someone in a daycare, nursery school as a nanny etc. or for oneself as a private daycare owner. Adolescents developmentally are egocentric and at times don't see other people's point of view. It is so important to understand that people are different and since childcare is a service related profession it is necessary to get along with other people see their point of view and realize that

one does not have to agree with that view but still respect the person. The course Popular Culture in the U.S. and Latin America peaked my interest in how popular culture influences behavior. As a result of high or popular culture, people behave according to what is dictated by society's likes, dislikes, approvals and disapprovals. The different readings from the book *EVERYDAY, EVERYWHERE; GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON POPULAR CULTURE* by Stuart and Terry Hirschberg dealt with different writings on popular culture's ideas about food, dress, language, entertainment, otherness and more brought excellent examples to life. The chapter on "Otherness", reminded me of the importance of teaching the students to accept the children and their parents as people of dignity and self worth no matter how they might smell, look or speak. I'm also reminded that showing favoritism among the children can have a detrimental effect on the shaping of the child's self concept, which is being formed by the child's caregivers. It renewed the importance of informing the student of his responsibility to exclude the influence of popular culture when dealing with his charges. By studying aspects of popular culture, the point of view of the students will broaden. The student will expand his/her knowledge to understand that different doesn't make one strange. The student will be able to plan and implement child appropriate activities that deal with culture. This will have a two fold purpose: one the student will research and plan child-oriented activities and two the student teacher and child will gain a new awareness of another culture. The student will meet communications, family and consumer science, citizenship and career and education standards. By researching, reading, planning, presenting, and compiling a book for the children the student will be successful in their studies and career planning.

There is a unit in the Childcare/ Child Development curriculum called "Socialization in the Workforce" that deals with the importance of understanding ones self and other people. This unit on Indigenous Birthing Rituals will be a positive addition to the training of the childcare students.

Strategy

Birthdays have always been very important for me and my family. I will begin by planning a Russian birthday celebration for the class. A giant card will be placed on the bulletin board stating—s dniom razhdjenia! (Happy Birthday in Russian) Then I would serve pie to the class with "Have a Good Day!" written in the crust. This is how people in Russia celebrate birthdays. I'd ask, "How is this celebration different than our culture?" After having discussed the differences, the student's will share birthday celebrations in which they have participated and enjoyed. Then I will read the book *BIRTHDAYS' CELEBRATING LIFE AROUND THE WORLD* by Eve Feldman. Students will discuss the celebrations and examine reasons why each country celebrates birthdays in different ways. The students will be informed that they will plan and implement birthday parties for the children in the nursery school after we have studied about indigenous birthing rituals.

In order to begin the process of learning about birthing rituals, I will explain to the class how I was born.

One day before dirt was discovered, I was born in a hospital in Pittsburgh. It was discovered that I was not going to be born head first. The nuns turned me while I still was in my mother's womb. My mother told me the pain was unbelievable. The doctors set me aside and attended to my mother and disregarded me. After seeing that I was a fighter and was still alive they attended to me cleaned me up and placed me with the other infants. My mother was placed in a ward with sick patients and not in the maternity ward. Therefore when I was brought to nurse, I was placed in with my mother in the room with sick patients. At the time it was popular culture to segregate the African-American patients from the white patients. As a result my mother and I were exposed to any sickness that was in the ward. After a week, my mother and I left the hospital.

After telling this story I will inform the students that the words culture, rituals and indigenous have something to do with this story. After studying the definitions we will revisit the story and the students will interpret my story according to the meaning of the words. Hopefully this will hook the students into the study of indigenous birthing rituals.

Background

The sanctity of motherhood and childbirth practices date back to ancient times in the bible days. In the book of *Leviticus* which dates 500 to 450 B.C. If a male child was born to a family, the mother remained unclean and separated for seven days. On the eighth day the child was circumcised. After that process the mother of the male child was not to touch anything hallowed or come into the sanctuary until purification which was thirty three days was fulfilled. For a female child the rites were a little different. The mother remained separated for two weeks. Then the purification rites were performed sixty six days later. A burnt offering was offered to God for atonement.

In the book of *Genesis* Tamar the daughter-in-law of Jacob had twins. The midwife tied a red cord around the arm of the child who was coming out first, but his brother grabbed his heel and came out before the child with the red cord. The son with the red cord was born breech. "And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Luke 2:12 in the Bible. Through the centuries other cultures have created traditions of birthing practices. These practices offer a wealth of knowledge of how people treat their children and mothers.

The most familiar birthing rituals are the ones in the popular culture of the United States. Motherhood is regaining an esteemed position once again, even Dateline featured women who were concerned about their biological clock. Women were hoping that it was not too late to have children. Fashion statements have even changed, pregnant women are posing nude and wearing clothing that accentuates their pregnancy.

There are a variety of methods that can be used to deliver the infant. It's funny that an act as natural as giving birth needs to be named Natural childbirth. This is a way of delivering the child without the use of drugs. The mother is trained to breathe and relax in order to ease the pain during the birth process. The Lamaze Method which was popularized by Dr. Fernand Lamaze teaches the mother to focus on something other than the pain of childbirth by using deep breathing patterns. By using a coach who knows the breathing patterns and attending childbirth classes many women are successful in delivering with minimal pain. The Leboyer Method assumes that delivery is painful for the baby and the mother. Therefore to help the child make an easy transition from womb into the room, the delivery area has dimmed lighting and the child is placed on the mother immediately upon exiting the womb. The umbilical cord is cut after it stops working for the newborn. Then once the neonate breathes on its own it is placed into water that is body temperature then removed from the water and wrapped in a warm blanket. Some people think this produces a calmer baby. Finally on a feature of "Judging Amy" the television show one of Amy's aides gave birth in a portable pool large enough to fit three adults. This process is called hydro birth. It is believed that giving birth in water connects the mind and body during labor.

I'd like to discuss some indigenous traditions of birthing practices of the Navajo, the Ayurvedic style, the Balinese style, the people of the Philippines, the Thai, Hmong, the people of Ghana and an Indian woman in Guatemala.

The Navajo view of pregnancy is as a state of wellness and everything that the expectant mother does is for the well being of the fetus and the mother. She is to exercise and do chores but nothing heavy. She is not to be around anyone or thing that is dead or even go to funerals. A Ceremony called the Blessingway is done by a holy man. This puts the mother and baby in tune with the Holy people and causes balance. All mothers are expected to breast feed their children so that the child will not take on the nature of the animal. (My father was a firm believer that a child who is fed cow's milk adopts the nature of the cow. He was not Navajo.) The umbilical cord and placenta are buried near home so the child will always return home. The placenta also was buried next to objects of the profession the parents hoped that the child would become. Sometimes it was given to the grandmother to discard. Or it could be buried in the fire of by the Hogan to ward off evil spirits. The child is introduced into the community with a baby shower and a Blessingway ceremony.

The Bangalore of India believe that the new mother is honored as an "exalted one." The Ayurvedic style of birthing practice gives the mother a special diet which consists of soupy dalhs with ghee, mild spices and herbs. The mother must receive plenty of rest. A few days after the birth of the child, the mother's abdomen is splashed with warm tea from eucalyptus leaves to cleanse the mother inside and outside. She stays home and is pampered for twenty- two days after giving birth.

The Balinese mother is purified twelve days after the child's birth. The placenta is buried with other appropriate offerings. For the first one hundred five days of the child's life he doesn't touch the ground. The child is held continuously in the arms of family until another ceremony which introduces the child to the family.

In the Philippine culture the midwife has a high status. She is called Lola. After she aids in the birthing of the child, she massages the mother's abdomen. She is thought to be a wise woman who blesses the child.

I found that the fear of the child being possessed by evil spirits was a great concern of the Thai people. No gifts are given before the baby is born in order to keep evil spirits away. The evil spirits are believed to be the dead childless unmarried women. The first three days to a month the child is considered a spirit child. The newborn child is referred to as an animal to escape the attention of evil spirits. The priest gives the child a two syllable name. But a one syllable nickname is used by family members this is intended to trick the evil spirits thus keeping them away from the infant.

The Hmong people believe that when a man dies he is reborn as a woman and when a woman dies she is reborn as a man. Every child is seen as a reincarnated soul. The Shaman puts the soul into the child after he is three days old and places a silver necklace around his neck to keep the soul from wandering. If the child dies before three days no funeral is planned because the child had no soul.

From my study of some of the practices of the people of Ghana, I would have probably died. One of the beliefs is that if the mother's labor is difficult, she has done something wrong to a person and needs to go back to that person and make the problem right. Since I had two breech births, I might not have survived.

Childbirth is the number one asset of womanhood in Ghana. Matter of fact it is believed that without birth womanhood is incomplete. Children are the parent's old age security. Delivery is normally done in the home in the bathtub because it is easier to clean. The placenta is buried near the family house so that the child will not grow wayward. Forty days after delivery the child is deemed safe and then is named during a special ceremony.

"It takes a whole village to raise a child." (African Proverb) is truly stated for the Indian in Guatemala. A person in the village is elected as the father of the woman. This person is the first to be told that the woman is pregnant. The elected parent visits the pregnant mother and gives her little things every day and in turn she tells him her problems.

As the expectant mother does chores, she talks to the child about his growth, life, how to do the chore that is being done by the mother and blessing prayers are offered. The mother to be takes baths using special herbs and natural aromas. She eats special leaves that are nutritionally good for mother and child. No one eats in front of the mother without offering her some of the

item even if the person does not know her. The belief is that she might abort the child because she did not have enough to eat.

When the child is born it is believed that the child has a Nahual. A Nahual is a protective spirit who grows through life with the child. It is a representative of the earth, the animal world, the sun or the water so the child can communicate with nature. Depending on what day the child is born determines what representative is the child's Nahual. Only the persons who were present at birth know the day the child was born and the Nahual. The child isn't even told until he is older what his Nahual is. This is done to insure good behavior and not use the knowledge of his Nahual as an excuse to misbehave or act unseemly. At the time of the birth of the baby three adult couples are present. One of these couples is the parents of the mother but if the parents cannot be present, other family members are expected to be there. The child is looked upon as the "fruit of communal love." Single women are not permitted to be present during birthing unless it is an extreme emergency. Children are not allowed to be around the birthing process. If the new born has siblings, the brothers and sisters can not see their mother for eight days. During the eight days the community takes care of the family. The family need not spend any money because the community supports the family during this time. After the eight days the baby is introduced to the family and the community with a fiesta. During the eight days the bed area is scrubbed with lime which is thought to be sacred and a bone strengthener. Four candles are then placed on the four corners of the bed. This symbolizes the respect that the child must have for the community and for his home. The newborn's hands are bound to symbolize the child will not accumulate things the rest of the community does not have and to learn to share with open hands. The child's feet are bound to symbolize the child is sacred and must not abuse nature or steal. After the eight days the child's hands and feet are untied. Then the child is put in a clean new bed with the mother. After the child has finished this ritual he is now ready to be welcomed into the community.

Another candle ceremony is performed which welcomes the child into the universe. A bag filled with garlic, a bit of lime, salt and tobacco, which is a scared plant to the Indians, is tied around the infant's neck. When girls are born the midwife pierces her ear at the same time as she ties the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord is tied with a red cord. The color red symbolizes heat, strength and all living things.

Forty days after the birth of the child the people of the community give speeches and promises on the child's behalf. The speeches consist of having respect and keeping the Indian secrets; the types of food he will eat because he was made from the food his mother ate; the child's duty to multiply the race and finally remembering the Indian heroes of old. Boy children are celebrated because they will have to work hard and will have lots of responsibilities; as a result the child has one extra day alone with his mother. Girl children are celebrated because she symbolizes mother earth and life. Then he becomes a full member of the community.

The baby's companion which is the placenta can be either burned or buried. If it is burned it is burned according to the time of day the child was born.

In most cultures childbirth is very important and the child is cherished. The placenta is a very important issue that must be disposed of properly or the child will not have a good life. The elders in the African American culture also believe in burying the placenta. Finally some sort of ritual is done to welcome the child into the world. These traditions give students insight to others' belief systems and hopefully will broaden their scope on dealing with other people. It's also important that childcare students lead their charges in understanding that other children live and do things differently than they do. The childcare students will be exposed to many different types of children, parents and staff members.

Lesson Plans

(Classroom Activities)

The Child Development/Childcare class is an elective course which teaches high school students to work with children from ages six weeks through four years. At the end of the first year of the class students are prepared for entry level positions in daycares, nursery schools etc. If the student chooses to take the course for two years, upon completion the student will have attained enough education and hours to become an assistant teacher. Therefore the goal for all lessons must equip the student to work with children, staff, parents and the community. Along with each theory class there is a lab class which is attended by children. The lab is a licensed day care.

Each theory class must include the student learning standards of the Pittsburgh Board of Education. The lessons below will include the following standards:

Communications: All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems. This will be done by reading the books and articles, presentations and the student created children's book.

Family and Consumer Sciences: All students demonstrate their knowledge of basic child health and child care skills. This will be accomplished by planning, implementing the parties that are developmentally appropriate. Also the students will interact with the children in the school daycare.

Citizenship: All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations and describe the patterns of historical development. The students will be studying other cultures in order to learn about birthing rituals and birthdays.

All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others. This will be done by working in groups and interacting with the parents of the children.

Career Education and Work: All students assess how changes in society, technology, government and the economy affect individuals and their careers and require them to continue learning. Since the students are working in an Applied Technology class for employment, they will be performing the duties necessary to learn as a caregiver.

The purpose of this unit is to make the students sensitive to cultural differences in order to get along with parents, children and staff.

The time required for this purpose is four weeks.

The materials needed are: cultural pictures, text *WORKING AT HUMAN RELATIONS* by Rosemary T. Fruehling and Neild B. Oldham, Video: The Learning Channel—"World Birthday", digital camera and materials for making student books.

LESSONS

Lesson I

The students will explain three terms, indigenous, culture and rituals. The students will be divided into three groups in order to explain the definitions of the terms given. The students will be given the definitions of the three words. They are to give examples of each definition. For example after the word indigenous is explained the students will come up with a list of things that are natural for areas in the world. Then the story *BABIES ON THE MOVE* by Susan Canezares and Daniel Moreton will be read to the students. Afterwards a discussion on how our natural environment influences behavior.

Lesson II

. The word culture will be dealt with by using pictures that represent high and popular culture and categorizing them according to the definition and explain how the pictures might influence behavior.

Lesson III

The final word rituals will be dealt with by each group listing seven different rituals and explaining how behavior of adults and children might be influenced. In order to evaluate the assignment each student must choose one of the definitions, make a poster to present to the class explaining the definition and how behavior is influenced.

Since children are our golden resource, there is nothing more important than our children. Different people in different areas treat the birth of children according to customs of that people. It's important for students to recognize that their charges might have been part of a different birthing custom which will influence behavior and help shape the personality of the children in a daycare program. Being made aware of these differences will help erase ignorance and maybe disrespect of someone who is different.

Lesson IV

The student will weigh the advantages and disadvantages of birthing rituals used in the United States such as Natural Childbirth, the Lamaze Method and the Leboyer Method of child birth. Guests such as the school nurse and a representative from the local hospital will speak on the above rituals. The students will develop a chart that will list the advantages and disadvantages.

The students will explain our methods of birthing rituals.

Each student will choose a partner and decide on one the following activities: Interview two mothers from different generations. Then write an article summarizing the interview. The other activity is to research a birth defect and explain the birthing rituals and influences on behavior that might occur.

Lesson V

The students will describe birthing rituals in different areas of the world. They will view the video entitled "*World Birthday*" narrated by Matthew Modine from The Learning Channel. The video records the excitement and drama of twelve children being born in nine countries on five continents around the world. The locations are Beijing, China; Kerala, India; Cairo, Egypt; Nazareth, Ethiopia; Berlin, Germany; Manchester, United Kingdom; Sao Paulo, Brazil; Mexico City, Mexico; San Francisco, United States. They will observe and record the care of the mother prior to birth, the birthing process, the introduction of the infant to the society and how this might influence behavior.

The students will then go to the computer lab and use the websites to study about other countries birthing rituals using the sites used from the teacher's research. The students will then write a letter to the expectant mother from a country of their choice explaining the procedure that will take place during her pregnancy and the birth of the baby.

Lesson VI

After a discussion on how student birthdays are celebrated and interviewing family members on what is done on their birthday, students will choose a country and find out what are the birthing

practices of the area? How the child is introduced to society? How the birthday is celebrated? This information will be discussed in class in order that everyone is aware of the rituals. The students will have to pick six parties to plan with the children.

Lesson VII

The students will plan and celebrate six birthday parties for the children in the laboratory school. We will celebrate the birthday according to the custom of that country, play games, choose, prepare and serve birthday food. Pictures will be taken to capture the events of the celebration. With the use of the pictures, the students will create a children's book of birthday celebrations of the world. The book will include background of the country that is age appropriate for a preschooler, a description of how birthdays are celebrated, the recipe of the food served and pictures of the party. A rubric will be created by the class to evaluate the book. Then the books will be read to the children and then given to the children to take home at the end of the school year.

Lesson VIII

In order to relate to others and understand the clients that the students will work with the students will assess the forces such as heredity, environment, personality and needs that shape a person. After reading and discussing *WORKING AT HUMAN RELATIONS*, case studies that illustrate relationship problems in the above areas will be reviewed and discussed by the students. The students will be evaluated during lab on how they relate to staff and parents via a standardized checklist from the curriculum.

Annotated Bibliography

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This book tells about the Guatemala birthing rituals.

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This book helps one to understand how to work with and care for children as they grow.

Feldman, Eve B. *BIRTHDAYS!: CELEBRATING LIFE AROUND THE WORLD*. Bridgewater Books. 1996.

Twenty-five drawings of birthday celebrations by children around the world which show different traditions.

Fruehling, Rosemary and Neild B. Oldham. *WORKING AT HUMAN RELATIONS*. Paradigm. 1990.

This book deals with the forces that shape our understanding of who we are and understanding others.

Hirschberg, Stuart and Terry Hirschberg, eds. *EVERYDAY, EVERYWHERE: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON POPULAR CULTURE*. McGraw Hill. 2002.

This book is a collection of pop culture topics.

Kindersley, Anabel. *CHILDREN JUST LIKE ME CELEBRATIONS*. DK Publishing Inc. 1997

Kindersley, Barnabas and Anabel. *CHILDREN JUST LIKE ME*. DK Publishing Inc. 1995.

Video: *WORLD BIRTHDAY*. Narrated by Matthew Modine. The Learning Channel. 2002.

This video is a collection of birth rituals of twelve children born in five continents around the world.

Internet Sources

THE CAULING OF MIDWIFE..A HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF MIDWIFERY THROUGH THE HANDS OF MIDWIVES OF AFRICAN DESCENT. 5/27/2002. [http://www,. Birthinthetradition.com/1.0bitt_hist.html](http://www.Birthinthetradition.com/1.0bitt_hist.html).

A history of being a midwife, their duties and problems that they faced were discussed.

BELIEFS, VALUES AND PRACTICES OF NAVAJO CHILDBEARING WOMAN. 4/18/2002. <http://ehostvgw18.epnet.com/delivery.asp?deliveryoption=citation+with+formatted+full+te...>

This reading gave a wealth of knowledge about birthing customs.

CHILDBIRTH; BIRTH CUSTOMS; INFANTS. 4/18/2002. <http://ehostvgw18.epnet.com/delivery.asp?deliveryoption=citation+with+formatted+full+te...>

This reading dealt with birthing customs.

CULTURAL PRACTICES IN GHANA. 4/18/2002. <http://ehostvgw18.epnet.com/fulltext.asp?resultSetId=R00000009&hitNum=33&booleanTe...>

This reading discusses birthing customs of the women of Ghana.

HISTORY OF AMERICAN INDIAN BIRTHING. 4/18/2002. <http://ehostvgw18.epnet.com/delivery.asp?deliveryoption=citation+with+formatted+full+te...>

This article discussed general information of birthing practices.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY. 7/7/2002. <http://www.shabbir.com/romance/bday.html>.

This article discussed saying happy birthday in other languages around the world.

HISTORY OF BIRTHDAY

CELEBRATIONS. 4/1/2002. <http://www.kidsparties.com/traditions.htm#Birthday%20Traditions%20in%20Different%20Countries>.

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HMONG BIRTH

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The birthing customs of Hmong were discussed.

THAI BIRTH

CUSTOMS. 4/18/2002. <http://ehostvgw18.epnet.com/delivery.asp?deliveryoption=citation+with+formatted+full+te...>

The article lists birthing customs of the Thai people.