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chapter 5

Cultural Issues and Their Impact on Learning

Many teachers and schools, in an attempt to be color-blind, do not want to acknowledge cultural or racial differences. "I don't see Black or White," a teacher will say, "I see only *students*." This statement assumes that to be color-blind is to be fair, impartial, and objective because to see differences, in this line of reasoning, is to see defects and inferiority. Although this sounds fair and honest and ethical, the opposite may actually be true. Color blindness may result in *refusing to accept differences* and therefore accepting the dominant culture as the norm. It may result in denying the very identity of our students, thereby making them invisible. What seems on the surface to be impeccably fair may in reality be fundamentally unfair. In the classic sense, being color-blind can mean being *nondiscriminatory* in attitude and behavior, and in this sense, color blindedness is not a bad thing. However, too often it is used as a way to deny differences that help make us who we are.

A good example was provided by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Lau* decision of 1974.[1] The San Francisco School Department was sued on behalf of Chinese-speaking students who, parents and other advocates charged, were not being provided with an equal education. The school department, however, argued that they were indeed providing these students with an equal education because they received *exactly* the same teachers, instruction, and materials as all the other students. The U.S. Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, ruled against the school department. The Court reasoned that giving these students the same instruction, teachers, and materials as English-speaking students flew in the face of equal educational opportunity because Chinese-speaking students could not benefit from instruction provided in English. The dictum "Equal is not the same" is useful here. It means that treating everyone in the same way will not necessarily lead to equality; rather, it may end up perpetuating the inequality that already exists. Learning to *affirm* differences rather than deny them is what a multicultural perspective is about.

What are the educational implications of "Equal is not the same"? First, it means *acknowledging the differences that children bring to school*, including their gender, race, ethnicity, language, and social class. Not acknowledging these differences often results in schools and teachers labeling children's behavior as deficient.

Second, it means *admitting the possibility that such differences may influence how*

students learn. This should in no way devalue children's backgrounds or lower our expectations of them, yet this is precisely why so many educators have a hard time accepting "Equal is not the same." That is, they are reluctant to accept this philosophy because they may feel that in doing so, they must lower their expectations or water down the curriculum so that all children can learn. Yet neither of these practices should be seen as necessary.

Third, *accepting differences also means making provisions for them*. That is, students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds should be viewed as a strength on which educators can draw. Although this approach is based on the best of educational practice, that is, that individual differences must be taken into account in teaching, it is often overlooked for cultural and linguistic differences.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore cultural differences and the importance they may have in student learning. Rather than being viewed as a burden, a problem, or even a challenge, cultural diversity will be approached as a key factor that must be taken into account if we are serious about providing all students with educational equity. We will review a number of cultural differences among students, including learning and communication styles, and then considers some of the instructional and curricular changes that have been developed to help students succeed in school.

We are always on shaky ground when considering cultural differences. Although it is important to examine how culture may influence learning and therefore achievement in school, the danger lies in overgeneralizing its effects. Overgeneralizations can lead to gross stereotypes, which in turn may lead to erroneous conclusions about individual students' abilities and intelligence. We have all seen some of the more disastrous consequences of this line of thought: checklists of cultural traits of different ethnic groups; mandates on pedagogical strategies to use with students of particular backgrounds; and treatises on immutable teacher behaviors. Culture, in such instances, is treated as a product rather than a process, and it is viewed as unchanging and unchangeable. Yet although culture is indeed integral to the learning process, it affects every individual differently. It may be true that Appalachian people share a rich heritage that includes a strong sense of kinship, but this culture may not have the same effect on every child.[2]

Given differences in social class and family structure, psychological and emotional differences, birth order, residence, and a host of individual distinctions, it would be folly to think that culture alone accounts for all human differences. Anyone who has had children can confirm this truth: Two offspring from the same parents, with the same culture and social class, and raised in substantially the same way, can turn out to be as different as night and day. Culture is neither static nor deterministic; it gives us just one important way in which to understand some differences among student learning and thus can indicate appropriate strategies and modifications in curriculum. The assumption that culture is the primary determinant of academic achievement can be oversimplistic, dangerous, and counterproductive because, while culture may *influence* it does not *determine* who we are. Thus, culture and cultural differences should be handled with great

caution to avoid assumptions about students because of their cultural backgrounds.

One reason for insisting on the importance of cultural differences is that some people, primarily those from dominated and disenfranchised groups within society, have been taught that they *have no culture*. This has resulted in, among other things, what Boateng has called *deculturalization*, that is, a process by which people are first deprived of their own culture and then conditioned into other cultural values.[3] This is how a term such as *cultural deprivation*, which in reality means that some people do not share in the culture of the dominant group, came to mean that a group was deprived of culture *altogether*. This, of course, is nonsense. Everybody has a culture because everybody has the ability to create and re-create ideas and material goods and to affect their world in a variety of ways. Multicultural education is one way of counteracting the notion that culture is within the purview of only the privileged.

Before we can ask schools to change in order to teach all students, we need to understand the differences students bring with them to school. This chapter considers how one primary difference, culture, may affect the learning of students. *Culture can be understood as the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created and shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of factors that can include a common history, geographic location, language, social class, and/or religion, and how these are transformed by those who share them.* Thus, it includes not only tangibles such as foods, holidays, dress, and artistic expression, but also less tangible manifestations such as communication style, attitudes, values, and family relationships. These implicit features of culture are often more difficult to pinpoint, but doing so is necessary if we want to understand how learning may be affected.

Cultural differences in learning may be especially apparent in three areas: *learning styles, interactional or communication styles,* and *language differences*. Examples of the first two areas are explored below. Language and language issues will be considered in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, it should be understood that language is an indispensable component of culture and therefore interacts with it in numerous ways.

Much of the research reported here, and from which part of the conceptual framework for multicultural education is developed, is *ethnographic research*, that is, educational research based on anthropological constructs and including methods such as fieldwork, interviewing, and participant observation. According to McDermott, *ethnography* is "any rigorous attempt to account for people's behavior in terms of their relations with those around them in different situations."[4] This important area of research has profoundly effected educational thinking, particularly during the past two decades. Trueba and Wright, in their review of 15 ethnographic studies, concluded that this kind of research can lead to a better understanding of the educational process in multicultural settings because it has numerous implications for policy and practice in schools.[5] Results are being seen in educational settings, and some of these are reported here.

LEARNING STYLE

By *learning style* we mean the way in which individuals receive and process information.[6] Some of the early research in this field concentrated on ethnic and racial differences in learning, and this perspective can skirt dangerously close to some of the current research on racial differences in IQ. As such, this research has been the subject of some controversy and criticism.[7] Exactly how culture influences learning is unclear. Learning style research maintains that mothers' (or primary caregivers') child-rearing practices are primarily responsible for the learning styles that children develop. The case is made that the values, attitudes, and behaviors taught at home are the basis for how children learn to learn. The direct process implied by this theory is not entirely convincing, however. There are vast differences among learners within all ethnic groups, and these differences may be due to social class, language spoken at home, number of years or generations in the United States, and simple individual differences. Moreover, the differences among some children who share many such characteristics or even come from the same home are often striking. It is clear that child-rearing practices alone, although important in influencing children's learning styles, do not offer a sufficient explanation. Other factors are at work here as well, and some may be even more important.

Social class, for example, has been proposed as equally or more important than ethnicity in influencing learning style. Because membership within a particular social grouping is based on both economic variables and values, the working class may differ from the middle class not only in economic resources but also in particular values and practices. The reasoning behind the hypothesis that social class is a more important influence on learning style than is ethnicity is that the intellectual environment and socialization of children in the home may be due more to economic resources than to cultural resources. In a comprehensive review of related studies, Banks found in general that ethnicity seemed to have a greater influence on cognitive style than did social class. He also found that ethnic differences persisted in spite of upward mobility.[8] This line of research points out the apparently strong and continuing link between culture and learning.

The early research on learning styles that emphasized two approaches to how people learn implied that all children should be exposed to and become adept at a variety of styles. This research also contained inherent problems because it tended to dichotomize learning. It is doubtful that a process as complex as learning can be characterized with only two poles. As many as 14 learning styles and 13 different learning style theories have been suggested. Some studies have focused on differences in visual or verbal emphasis, which can be related to holistic thought processes versus analytic thought processes.[9] All of these point out the pitfalls in developing static learning classifications. In addition, although helpful in identifying learning differences that may be related to ethnicity and culture, this research also runs the risk of oversimplification and stereotyping and can be used as a rationale for poor or inequitable teaching.

For example, in integrated classrooms in which Hispanic children were pre-

sent, research by Ortiz revealed that they tended to receive a lower quality edu tion than others.[10] Ironically, teachers used the "cooperative" attribute from t learning style literature to justify a number of clearly discriminatory pedagogi decisions: seldom granting Hispanic students solo performances in plays or lea ership activities in other situations; placing them in activities they had not the selves chosen, whereas other children were allowed choices; and having the share books when there were not enough to go around, whereas the non-Hispa students could have individual copies. Teachers rationalized that because they fe that Hispanics were field sensitive, they would be more likely to feel uncomfort able in the limelight or in leadership roles (see note 7). They also reasoned tha Hispanic children liked to share books because of their preference for workin cooperatively. The teachers' negative, preconceived notions of children's ability were thus reinforced by faulty interpretations of research. It is a good example of the truism, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." It is best to keep in mind Swisher's conclusion in her review of learning style research, namely, that it is a promising but not "panaceaistic" view of successfully educating our increasingly multicultural student population.[11]

Although not specifically related to cultural differences, Gardner's work on "multiple intelligences" has important implications for culturally compatible education.[12] According to this theory, each human being is capable of several relatively independent forms of information processing, and each of these is a specific "intelligence": logical-mathematical, linguistic (the two most emphasized in school success), musical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. *Intelligence* is defined here as the ability to solve problems or develop products that are valued in a particular cultural setting. The salience of what may be cultural differences in intelligence becomes apparent. Gardner's research has demonstrated that individuals differ in the specific profile of intelligences that they exhibit. These differences may in effect be due to what is valued in their culture. The importance of this research lies in the fact that because a broader range of abilities is considered, the talents and abilities of individuals previously considered inferior or unexceptional may be brought to the surface.

The implications of the theory of multiple intelligences for multicultural education may be significant because the theory goes beyond the limited definition of intelligence valued in the school. In Gardner's words, it centers on "breaking out of the hegemony of a single intelligence."[13] In opening up our understanding of intelligence, this theory permits schools and teachers to look at their students with a different perspective and may be particularly helpful in helping them challenge current assessment practices that focus almost exclusively on logical-mathematical and linguistic intelligence. The danger, as always, lies in extrapolating from individual cases to an entire group. Although it may be true, for example, that certain cultures are highly developed in bodily kinesthetic intelligence, we should not conclude that all its members will manifest this intelligence equally. Nor should educators assume that individuals from this culture would be *primarily* or *only* intelligent bodily-kinesthetically, and therefore unable to manipulate language, for example.

OMMUNICATION STYLE

ther examples of cultural influences are found in interactional or communication yles. This area focuses on the ways individuals interact with one another and the essages they may send, intentionally or not, in their communications.

McDermott, for instance, has hypothesized that for many culturally different hildren, school failure is best explained not by biologic, psychological, or linguis ic deprivation but by the cultural makeup of the classroom.[14] He labels schools in which African American children are taught by European American teachers as "pariah-host" communities and maintains that children and teachers in these environments produce communication breakdowns simply by being themselves, that is, by behaving in ways their subcultures see as "normal." The result of this cultural conflict may be school failure. Thus, school failure is actually "achieved" because it is the product of miscommunication between teachers and students and a rational adaptation by students who are devalued by schools. Unless changes are made in these environments, school failure is almost inevitable.

Cultural variables may be compatible or incompatible with the expectations and structures of schools. Tharp has suggested at least four: *social organization, sociolinguistics, cognition,* and *motivation.*[15] An example or two can be considered under the general rubric of communication style and will suffice to demonstrate their complex and fascinating interplay. Social organization, for instance, refers to the ways classrooms are organized. Tharp reviews a number of classroom organizations that have proved effective and concludes that the traditional U.S. whole-class organization, with "rank-and-file" seating and a teacher/leader who instructs or demonstrates, is not necessarily the best arrangement for all children. For example, Williams's ethnographic work in an inner-city school suggests that African American students are skillful at manipulating the dynamics of their classrooms. This is often interpreted, particularly by European American teachers, as "acting out" or delinquent behavior, such as staging spontaneous "dramas" designed to tease and even intimidate teachers. Rather than ignoring such skills, some teachers have reported using them successfully in front-of-the-class performances related to instructional goals.[16]

In the area of sociolinguistics, Tharp explains how short "wait times" tend to be disadvantageous to American Indian students, who generally take longer to respond to teachers' questions because the culture of most American Indians tends to emphasize deliberate thought. The cultural expectation here is that one can make informed and appropriate choices only when considering all possible ramifications and implications of a decision. This value of careful consideration may influence the classroom behavior of many American Indian students. Another example of sociolinguistics has to do with "rhythm." For example, African American mothers and their children often use a "contest" style of speech that approximates the call-and-response patterns found in Black music. Research using such rhythms in classroom instruction by teachers of African American students has had positive results.[17] On the basis of his extensive review of culturally compatible education, Tharp concludes that when schools change and are more

attuned to children's cultures, the children's academic achievement invariably improves.

Relationships between students and teachers and how these can be either improved or damaged by their interactions is another important area of research. For example, students and teachers from the same background are often on the same wavelength simply because they have an insider's understanding of cultural meanings and therefore need not engage in the process of trying to figure out nonverbal and even verbal messages they may be sending one another. In this regard, Foster reviewed findings from sociolinguistic research conducted in African American communities and schools and examined specifically how a shared cultural background or shared norms about how to use language can have a positive impact on classroom interactions. She found that in classrooms taught by teachers of the same background as their students, there are subtle but important interactional differences from other classrooms. For example, she documented a positive classroom effect of one African American teacher of African American students who used standard English to regulate student behavior, but "performances" (i.e., what Foster described as stylized ways of speaking that resemble African American preaching style) to relate everyday life experiences of her students to more abstract concepts.[18]

Cultural differences probably influence students in more ways than we can even imagine. A teacher of English as a second language (ESL), a young woman who was sincerely committed to her students' achievement, was nevertheless unaware of many aspects of their culture. The children, all Puerto Rican and recently arrived in the United States, used the communication style typical of their culture. For example, many Puerto Ricans use a nonverbal wrinkling of the nose to signify "what?" When this teacher would ask the children if they understood the lesson, some would invariably wrinkle their noses. Not understanding this gesture, the teacher simply went on with the lesson, assuming that their nose wrinkling had no significance. It was not until two years after first being exposed to this behavior, while attending a workshop on Puerto Rican gestures in which the work of Nine-Curt was reviewed, that she learned that nose wrinkling among Puerto Ricans was a way of asking "What?" or "What do you mean?" or of saying, "I don't understand."[19] From that point on, she understood that when they used this gesture, her students were asking for help or for further clarification. This rather humorous anecdote is not without its serious consequences: Students whose culture, verbal or nonverbal, is unacknowledged or misunderstood in their classrooms are likely to feel alienated, unwelcome, and out of place.

In Alaska Native cultures, we find a similar example of nonverbal gestures: Raised eyebrows are often used to signify yes, and a wrinkled nose means no. Because teachers might interpret these as rude nonresponses to their questions, there have been communication problems between Alaska Native students and their non–Alaska Native teachers. Many teachers tend to look for verbal responses rather than nonverbal responses. Promoting teachers' familiarity with these communication differences would go a long way in helping them to transform their curriculum to address their students' backgrounds more adequately.[20]

Through ethnographic research, some of the ways teachers and students miscommunicate are becoming more visible. If such research helps teachers to design appropriate environments for all their students, it will be extremely useful. The communication styles explored above are only the tip of the iceburg, but they help to point out the sometimes subtle ways that culture, if not understood, can actively interfere with learning.

CULTURAL DISCONTINUITIES AND SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT

A review of some literature on culture-specific educational accommodations will be helpful in pinpointing cultural discontinuities between schools and some ethnic groups. A number of researchers have focused on the differences between African American culture and the school culture. Gilbert and Gay have identified four areas of potential cultural conflict: *learning style, interactional or relational style, communication style,* and *differing perceptions of involvement.*[21] They suggest, for instance, that African American students devote a lot of energy to the "stage setting" that precedes the performance of a task. This may include a host of elaborate activities such as sharpening pencils, preparing paper, rearranging posture, and asking teachers to repeat instructions. Such activities are often interpreted by teachers as either wasting time or not paying attention.

Regarding communication style, the researchers focus on the use of the spoken language among African Americans and the attendant "stylistic flair" valued in that community. Schools, by contrast, most value precision and conciseness in the written language. The conflict in communication is thus a dual one: written language versus oral language and direct language versus dramatic use of language. Finally, Gilbert and Gay consider differing "perceptions of involvement." Whereas the schools generally define cognitive involvement as taking place only within a structured and orderly environment, African American students tend to be multimodal; that is, their involvement is cognitive, emotional, and physical all at the same time. Their behavior may be disconcerting to teachers who are unfamiliar with this style.

Hence, there is an intriguing connection between culture and the sociopolitical context of schooling. A study by Kathleen Bennett is a good example. Bennett found that even though a teacher was considered excellent by her principal and peers, she was unable to make a significant difference in the reading achievement of a group of Appalachian first graders. There were several reasons for this, including (a) a sharp dissonance between the expressed philosophy of the district and the actual reading program offered in the classroom and (b) the ideology of stratification that permeated the entire reading program. In addition, the culture of the classroom was in stark contrast to the culture, natural language, and experiences of the children. There was thus a cultural incongruence between the children's backgrounds and the classroom and school they attended.[22]

Heath's research in the Piedmont Carolinas during the 1970s is another exam-

ple.[23] In exploring the language of Black children at home and at school, she found that different ways of using language resulted in certain tensions between the children and their mostly White teachers in the classroom. To repair this communication breakdown, teachers began to experiment with different ways of asking questions. The result was that teachers helped children bridge the gap between their home and school experiences and the children's language use in the classroom was enhanced.

A very different example might come from the experiences of a newly arrived Vietnamese immigrant attending a U.S. school. Such a child might feel extremely off-balance and uncomfortable in a classroom environment in which teachers are informal and friendly, students are expected to ask questions and speak in front of the class, and group work is the order of the day.[24] The cultural discontinuity from a learning environment in which teachers are revered and have a formal relationship with their students, and students are expected to learn individually and by listening and memorizing, can be a dramatic one. Another example concerns Alaska Natives. Because going to high school often meant that students were physically separated from their parents in distant boarding schools, half of the boarding school students experienced school-related social and emotional problems. The dropout rate among Alaska Native students was very high, and although it remains high in some areas, it has been reduced dramatically in the rural schools in which secondary education has been returned to local communities.[25]

A further example is seen in research by Sindell.[26] He found that when they first enter school, Mistassini Cree children must learn to act according to norms that contradict much of what they have learned at home. Some of the cultural expectations are almost polar opposites. For example, at home children are expected to be self-reliant, but at school they have to be dependent on the teacher; at home they learn to do tasks cooperatively, but at school they must compete; at home they learn to do practical tasks that are important for the welfare of their community, but at school they are expected to live in a world of play unrelated to their future participation in society. The result of these cultural discontinuities may be that children reject their parents' definition of appropriate behavior, and serious intergenerational conflicts often develop. Although this is an extreme example of cultural incompatibility, because the children in this case actually leave their home environments to live at school, it nevertheless illustrates the miscommunication that can result when schools and homes have radically different values, objectives, and practices.[27] Children from such homes often feel that they must choose between home and school, and that choosing one over the other will make them unsuitable for life in the other setting.

An example from a field unrelated to schoolchildren can illustrate this communication breakdown dramatically. Based on several years of ethnographic research, Jordan described the participation of Mayan midwives in government-sponsored training courses in the Yucatán region of Mexico. She found that these courses, for all their good intentions, generally failed; that is, although the midwives were exposed to years of training, their day-to-day practice did not change as a result, partly because of the culturally inappropriate teaching strategies

employed in the government-sponsored courses. Specifically, Jordan mentions the teachers' imperialist view of the world and thus their dismissal of the local culture and its solutions. Official training sessions, in Jordan's words, "render midwives' praxis and discourse deficient and without import."[28] It is not farfetched to apply this description of cultural imperialism in the Yucatán to the way children's cultures and life-styles are devalued every day in U.S. classrooms. Although the settings are quite different, the process is unfortunately very familiar. The culture and language children bring to school are often disregarded and replaced.

Let us consider an additional example concerning American Indian children. Core Indian values of respect and value for the dignity of the individual, harmony, internal locus of control, and cooperation and sharing inevitably influence students' reactions to their educational experiences. That a teacher's best intentions may be ineffective if students' cultural differences are neglected in curriculum and instruction is seen by Philips's influential ethnographic work among Indian schoolchildren on the Warm Springs Reservation.[29] Students performed poorly in classroom contexts that demanded individualized performance and emphasized competition. Their performance improved greatly when the context did not require students to perform in public and when cooperation was valued over competition. Cooperative learning, which is compatible with many values of Indian families, is an approach worth exploring. It may be helpful in other settings as well.[30] That is, cultural compatibility is only one criterion for using particular strategies; another is exposing *all* children to a variety of ways of learning. Nevertheless, research of this kind is important if we are to grasp how children from different cultural backgrounds respond to teachers' behaviors and what teachers can do to change how they teach.

All of these examples demonstrate that the cultural incompatibilities of children with their teachers and schools are varied and complex. In spite of the importance that culture may have, however, overgeneralizing its effects may be dangerous. No one solution will bridge the gap between school and home cultures. In the next section, we examine a number of programs that have designed environments specifically for one cultural group, and then explore some of the problematic features of these approaches in the chapter summary.

CULTURE-SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL ACCOMMODATIONS

A number of examples of modifying instruction to be more culturally appropriate can reveal the reasoning behind the approach known variously as *culturally compatible, culturally congruent, culturally appropriate, culturally compatible, culturally responsive,* or *culturally relevant instruction,* as well as some preliminary promising results.[31] Described by Vogt and others, the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) in Hawaii is a particularly striking example.[32] Cultural discontinuities in instruction were identified as a major problem in the poor academic achievement of Native Hawaiian children. As a result, KEEP was begun. A pri-

vately funded, multidisciplinary educational research effort, its purpose was to explore remedies for children's chronic academic underachievement by changing certain educational practices: from a phonics approach to one emphasizing comprehension; from individual work desks to work centers with heterogeneous groups; and from high praise to more culturally appropriate praise, including indirect and group praise. The KEEP culturally compatible K–3 language arts program has met with great success, including significant gains in reading achievement.

The changes in instructional style more closely paralleled the children's cultural styles. The move from phonics to comprehension, for instance, allowed the students to contribute in a speech style called the "talk-story," which is a familiar linguistic event in the Hawaiian community. The other instructional changes, including a preference for cooperative work and group accomplishment, were also compatible with Native Hawaiian culture.

The logic of KEEP was then used as the basis for the KEEP–Rough Rock Project, a collaborative project with the Rough Rock Demonstration School on the Navajo Reservation. It was not simply a replica of KEEP, however. Several of the features of KEEP had to be modified to be more culturally compatible with the Navajo culture because the instructional approaches in KEEP could not simply be transferred to any cultural setting. For example, it was found that Navajo children preferred working in same-sex groups, a preference that is culturally congruent. Therefore, same-sex groups became a feature of KEEP–Rough Rock. In addition, it became clear that Navajo children were more comfortable with holistic thinking than with linear thinking. The preference for holistic thinking among American Indians had been documented before, but this was probably the first time that an entire school had purposely used these data as a basis for the comprehensive modification of its curriculum and pedagogy. In the case of the Navajo program, once these adaptations were made, the program proved to be more compatible with the cultural values and learning styles of the students. The need to make modifications such as these in order to provide optimum learning conditions for students from other backgrounds is a reminder that particular approaches are not always appropriate for all students.

Recent research in the pedagogy of African American teachers of African American students provides important illustrations of how teachers use their cultural knowledge and experiences to overcome some of the debilitating and negative messages to which their students are subjected in schools and in society at large. Studies document how successful African American teachers use students' culture as a bridge to the dominant culture. Furthermore, their pedagogy is empowering because rather than simply teach their students blind acceptance of the inherent values of the dominant culture, teachers encourage students to think critically and work actively for social justice.[33] In addition to the skills and competencies of African American teachers, these studies document other effective practices of such teachers, including their use of more interactive than didactic methods and the high standards they set for their students.[34]

Another inspiring example of culturally congruent education is provided by Abi-Nader in her description of a program for Latino youth in a large, urban high school in the Northeast. In this particular classroom, interactions between the teacher and students are based on Latino cultural values of *familia:* The program is imbued with a sense of caring and support; the teacher acts as a father, brother, and friend to students; he holds high expectations for them; students learn to develop collective responsibility for one another through activities such as peer tutoring and mentoring; and there is a commitment to extending the life of "the family." Unlike the dismal dropout statistics in so many other Latino communities, up to 65 percent of the high school graduates of this program have gone on to college. Furthermore, the youth attribute their academic success to the program, making enthusiastic comments about it, such as this one from a written survey: "The best thing I like about this class is that we all work together and we all participate and try to help each other. We're family!"[35]

Research that focuses on culturally compatible education is helpful because it points out that all children can learn if appropriate modifications in instruction are made. Many teachers intuitively and consistently make such modifications, both in their curriculum and in their instructional practices. Erickson and Mohatt, for example, reported on the social relationships in two classrooms of culturally similar Indian children, one taught by an Indian and the other by a non-Indian.[36] Although the classroom organizations differed substantially at the beginning of the year, both teachers had adapted their instructional practices by the end of the year in the direction of *greater cultural congruence.* The non-Indian teacher, for example, ended up by seating children in table groups, rather than individually in rows, and also began to spend more time on small-group lessons and tutoring than on whole-group lessons. This teacher used what Erickson and Mohatt call "teacher radar," and the result was cultural congruence, apparently arrived at intuitively.

Although this dramatic example focuses on one particular cultural group, changes in instruction and curriculum that reflect the *multicultural* character of schools are also possible. For example, most schools favor a highly competitive and individualistic instructional mode. In this environment, dominant-culture children and males are more likely to succeed, whereas students from other cultural groups and females may be at a distinct disadvantage. By combining this style with a more cooperative mode, the learning and cultural styles of all children can be respected and valued. The lesson is that although all schools cannot become *culturally compatible,* they nevertheless can become *multiculturally sensitive.*

◆ *SUMMARY*

In this discussion we have identified some of the ways in which cultural differences may affect students' learning. Relatively recent methodologies of ethnographic investigation have yielded important findings that can help teachers and schools recognize the possible impact of culture and some of the modifications they can make in interactional style, programmatic structures, and instructional strategies. Ethnography has been helpful in providing insights that can influence educational policy and practice.

In spite of their usefulness, however, culture-specific accommodations are limited by several factors. First, the multiplicity of student needs in most schools mitigates against culturally specific modifications in all cases. Most of our schools are multicultural, with students from a diversity of ethnic, social class, and linguistic backgrounds—which means that few children go to culturally homogeneous schools. Although many schools are still largely segregated, few are made up of only one ethnic group. Thus it is unrealistic to expect that completely culturally compatible instruction can be provided for all children. For instance, making the educational experience of the Mexican American students in a particular school culturally compatible while ignoring the cultures of other students in the school might jeopardize others and prove to be a replication of the policy common today in most schools: It would be a monocultural education, except that it would based in this case on Mexican American culture rather than European American culture. Thus, while schools can change their instructional strategies to be compatible with students from one ethnic group, these same strategies might be just the opposite of what students from other ethnic groups need.

Another problem with making educational choices that are solely culturally compatible is that segregation is posited as the most effective solution to educational failure. Recent U.S. history has upheld integration of students as a good to be strived for and as a situation that inevitably leads to increased educational equality. Nevertheless, we need to distinguish between segregation imposed by a dominant group and the self-segregation that is demanded by a subordinated group that sees through the persistent racism hidden behind the veneer of equality in integrated settings. When a dominant group imposes educational segregation on a subordinate group, our history has amply demonstrated that it inevitably leads to educational inequality. "Separate but equal" is rarely that; on the contrary, it usually means that powerless groups end up with an inferior education because, for one, they receive the least material resources with which to educate their children.

Nevertheless, although culturally separate schools are qualitatively different from the segregated schools of both the past and present because they are generally developed by those within disempowered communities, these schools might unwittingly take the burden off society in general for providing all youngsters with the equal and high-quality education they deserve. Thus, culturally separate schools may indeed challenge a hegemonic system to consider other approaches to education, but may end up by effectively isolating themselves from receiving some of the very benefits of the public school system that will help them meet the needs of the children they serve.

In addition, although culturally compatible education has been shown to be dramatically effective in some cases, it may be unworkable in other situations, including schools where there are students from many different backgrounds.

Finally, culturally compatible education can provide only a partial explanation for school success and failure, because there are numerous cases of students of culturally diverse backgrounds who have been successfully educated in what by all accounts would be considered culturally incompatible settings. Yet these children have thrived. There are also many examples of successful schools that do not

provide any culturally defined instruction. Education that is *completely* culturally compatible is not necessarily a requisite for academic success. Other factors not related to cultural conflict must be involved as well. After we review the implications of linguistic diversity for multicultural education in the next chapter, we will explore in Part II a more comprehensive explanation of school success and failure by taking into account some of these factors.

◆ TO THINK ABOUT

1. What are the advantages of being color-blind? What are the disadvantages? Give some examples of each.
2. What do we mean when we say "Equal is not the same"? To help you consider this question, think about some of the students you know.
3. Observe three different students in a classroom. How would you characterize their learning styles? How do they differ? Do you think these differences have something to do with their gender, race, ethnicity, or class? Why or why not? What are the implications for teaching these children?
4. Can you identify any pedagogical strategies that have seemed to be successful with particular children? How can you use these with students of different cultures?
5. Tharp (see note 9) has suggested that the traditional "rank-and-file" seating of students with a teacher in front of the classroom is not an appropriate learning environment for a great number of students. What do you think? What are the implications for classroom organization? Suggest some alternatives to the traditional classroom organization that might give more students an equal chance to learn.
6. Review the research on Mistassini Cree children cited by Sindell (see note 26). Given the contradictory messages between home and school received by the children, they began to reject their parents' culture and way of life. What could the school have done to minimize the contradictions?
7. Think about a culturally pluralistic school with which you are familiar. What steps could be taken by the school to make it more culturally compatible with its student body? Consider changes in curriculum, organization, use of materials, and pedagogical strategies.

◆ NOTES

1. *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1974).
2. See Kathleen P. Bennett, "Doing School in an Urban Appalachian First Grade." In *Empowerment through Multicultural Education*, edited by Christine E. Sleeter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Rebecca Eller-Powell, "Teaching for Change in Appalachia." In *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base*, edited by Etta R. Hollins, Joyce E. King, and Warren C. Hayman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
3. Felix Boateng, "Combating Deculturalization of the African-American Child in the Public

School System: A Multicultural Approach." In *Going to School: The African-American Experience*, edited by Kofi Lomotey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

4. R. P. McDermott, "Social Relations as Contexts for Learning in School," *Harvard Educational Review*, 47, 2 (May 1977), 198–213.
5. Henry T. Trueba and Pamela G. Wright, "On Ethnographic Studies and Multicultural Education." In *Cross-Cultural Literacy: Ethnographies of Communication in Multiethnic Classrooms*, edited by Marietta Saravia-Shore and Steven F. Arvizu (New York: Garland, 1992).
6. For excellent overviews of different categories of learning styles and an analysis of each, see Christine I. Bennett, *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1995); Karen Swisher, "Learning Styles: Implications for Teachers." In *Multicultural Education for the 21st Century*, edited by Carlos Díaz (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1992); Jacqueline Jordan Irvine and Eleanor Darlene York, "Learning Styles and Culturally Diverse Students: A Literature Review." In *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, edited by James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (New York: Macmillan, 1995).
7. Witkin, an early theorist in this field, suggested that people are either *field independent* or *field dependent* in their learning (see Herman A. Witkin, *Psychological Differentiation* [New York: Wiley, 1962]). According to this theory, the former tend to learn best in situations that emphasize analytic tasks and with materials void of a social context. Individuals who favor this mode generally prefer to work alone and are self-motivated. Field-dependent learners, according to this theory, tend to learn best in highly social settings. Ramirez and Castañeda applied Witkin's theory to ethnic groups (see Manuel Ramirez and Alfred Castañeda, *Cultural Democracy, Bicognitive Development and Education* [New York: Academic Press, 1974]). In research with children of various cultural backgrounds, they concluded that European American students tend to be the most field-independent learners. Mexican American, American Indian, and African American students, by contrast, tend to be closer to *field sensitive* (their substitution for *dependent*, which may have negative connotations), with Mexican Americans closest to this pole.
8. James A. Banks, "Ethnicity, Class, Cognitive and Motivational Styles: Research and Teaching Implications," *Journal of Negro Education*, 57, 4 (1988), 452–466.
9. For a review of holistic versus analytic thought processes and implications for educational practice, see Roland G. Tharp, "Psychocultural Variables and Constants: Effects on Teaching and Learning in Schools," *American Psychologist*, 44, 2 (February 1989), 349–359. For a review of different learning style theories, see Lynn Curry, *Learning Styles in Secondary Schools: A Review of Instruments and Implications for Their Use* (Madison: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin, 1990).
10. Flora Ida Ortiz, "Hispanic-American Children's Experiences in Classrooms: A Comparison Between Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Children." In *Class, Race and Gender in American Education*, edited by Lois Weis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).
11. Karen Swisher, "Learning Styles: Implications for Teachers."
12. A recent update on the theory of multiple intelligences contains a number of relevant articles. See Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
13. Ibid., 66.
14. Ray McDermott, "Achieving School Failure: An Anthropological Approach to Illiteracy and Social Stratification." In *Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches*, 2nd ed., edited by George D. Spindler (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1987).

15. Tharp, "Psychocultural Variables and Constants."
16. Melvin D. Williams, "Observations in Pittsburgh Ghetto Schools," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 12 (1981), 211–220.
17. Tharp, "Psychocultural Variables and Constants."
18. Michele Foster, "Sociolinguistics and the African-American Community: Implications for Literacy," *Theory into Practice*, 31, 4 (Autumn 1992), 303–311.
19. Carmen Judith Nine-Curt, *Nonverbal Communication*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Evaluation, Dissemination, & Assessment Center, 1984).
20. For an example of a curriculum based on nonverbal communication, see Virginia Vogel Zanger, *Face to Face: Communication, Culture, and Collaboration*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1993).
21. Shirl E. Gilbert and Geneva Gay, "Improving the Success in School of Poor Black Children," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67, 2 (October 1985), 133–137. See also Janice E. Hale-Benson, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
22. Kathleen P. Bennett, "Doing School in an Urban Appalachian First Grade."
23. Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
24. Tam Thi Dang Wei, *Vietnamese Refugee Students: A Handbook for School Personnel* (Cambridge, MA: National Assessment & Dissemination Center, 1980).
25. See Quality Education for Minorities Project, *Education That Works: An Action Plan for the Education of Minorities* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990).
26. Peter Sindell, "Some Discontinuities in the Enculturation of Mistassini Cree Children." In *Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches*, 2nd ed., edited by George D. Spindler (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1987).
27. For an excellent review of related examples of cultural discontinuity, see Kathryn H. Au and Alice J. Kawakami, "Cultural Congruence in Instruction." In *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base*, edited by Etta R. Hollins, Joyce E. King, and Warren C. Hayman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).
28. Brigitte Jordan, "Cosmopolitan Obstetrics: Some Insights from the Training of Traditional Midwives," *Social Science and Medicine*, 28, 9 (1989), 925–944.
29. Susan Urmston Philips, *The Invisible Culture: Communication in Classroom and Community on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation* (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1982).
30. See Lee Little Soldier, "Cooperative Learning and the Native American Student," *Phi Delta Kappan* (October 1989), 161–163; Hap Gilliland, "The Need for an Adapted Curriculum." In *Teaching the Indian Child: A Bilingual/Multicultural Approach*, edited by Jon Reyhner (Billings, MO: Eastern Montana College, 1992).
31. For a review of these terms, see Kathryn H. Au and Alice J. Kawakami, "Cultural Congruence in Instruction"; also Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Who Will Teach Our Children? Preparing Teachers to Successfully Teach African American Students." In *Teaching Diverse Populations: Formulating a Knowledge Base*, edited by Etta R. Hollins, Joyce E. King, and Warren C. Hayman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). This volume provides numerous examples of culturally responsive education in a number of communities.
32. Lynn A. Vogt, Cathie Jordan, and Roland G. Tharp, "Explaining School Failure, Producing School Success: Two Cases." In *Minority Education: Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Evelyn Jacob and Cathie Jordan (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1993).
33. See, for example, Joyce E. King, "Black Student Alienation and Black Teachers'

Emancipatory Pedagogy." In *Readings on Equal Education, Volume II: Qualitative Investigations into Schools and Schooling*, edited by Michele Foster (New York: AMS Press, 1991); J. MacLeod, "Bridging School and Street," *Journal of Negro Education*, 60 (1991), 260–275; Gloria Ladson-Billings, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

34. For an excellent review of these, see Jacqueline Jordan Irvine, "Making Teacher Education Culturally Responsive." In *Diversity in Teacher Education: New Expectations*, edited by Mary E. Dilworth (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).
35. Jeannette Abi-Nader, "Meeting the Needs of Multicultural Classrooms: Family Values and the Motivation of Minority Students." In *Diversity and Teaching: Teacher Education Yearbook 1*, edited by Mary John O'Hair and Sandra J. Odell (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993).
36. Frederick Erickson and Gerald Mohatt, "Cultural Organization of Participation Structures in Two Classrooms of Indian Students." In *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling: Educational Anthropology in Action*, edited by George Spindler (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982).