

Cultural Problems in Minority Education: Their Interpretations and Consequences—Part One: Theoretical Background¹

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Culture has featured prominently in minority educational research, policies, and intervention since the early 1960s. It is receiving even more attention today in minority education discourse due to the emergence of cultural diversity and multicultural education as popular national issues. A careful analysis of the new discourse suggests, however, that the issue has shifted from how cultural differences enhance or deter the school adjustment and academic performance of minority children to the problem of cultural hegemony and representation in school curriculum and other domains of education. But cultural diversity and multicultural education are only a partial solution to the problems of culture in minority education. This essay is in two parts. In part one I argue for a reconsideration of the earlier question about how culture affects minority school adjustment and academic performance. I also propose *cultural frame of reference* as a new level of analysis of the cultural problems that confront minority students at school. In part two I illustrate my points with two case studies from Minority Education Project in Oakland, California.

Culture has featured prominently in minority educational research, policies, and intervention in the U.S. since the early 1960s. It began with the designation of minority children as *culturally deprived*. By the mid-1960s ethnic minorities rejected this explanation. Instead, they argued that their children failed because the public school did not teach them in their own cultures and languages. Anthropologists supported the minorities, adding that cultural differences that resulted in cultural discontinuities and conflicts in teaching and learning were at the root of minority children's school failure (Philips, 1976).

Culture is receiving even more attention today in educational discourse with the emergence of cultural diversity and multicultural education as national issues. A careful analysis of the new discourse as represented in the literature, public debates, policies, and programs, suggests, however, that the discourse is

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no longer about whether and how cultural differences enhance or deter the school adjustment and academic achievement of minority children. Rather, it is about hegemony and inadequate representation in the curriculum and some other areas of education. Of significance is that even those minorities who have not traditionally done well in school think that more inclusion of their cultures and languages or having culturally diverse curriculum and the like will solve their school adjustment and academic achievement problems. It is, of course, very important that the schools should reflect the cultural diversity of the U.S. populations. But cultural diversity and multicultural education are only a part of the answer to the cultural problems of minority students.

In this paper I want to return to the earlier question about how culture affects minority school adjustment and academic performance for four reasons. The first is that this question is important and should not be abandoned. I have been surprised on occasions to hear public school officials say that multicultural education is not about raising minority children's academic performance; at least, it is not the primary goal. Rather the goals are to promote (a) social integration (i.e., promoting understanding between minorities and whites), (b) citizenship (e.g., less suspensions), and (c) self-esteem (i.e., the children should feel good about themselves). They admit, however, that these might eventually lead to higher academic performance. Second, in working with some agencies and schools trying to use culture to enhance minority children's school adjustment and performance I find some resistance to the suggestion that they study the cultures of the minorities they want to help or that they specify the cultural problems they want to address in the school. Instead, they want prepackaged "cultural solutions." Third, I want to introduce the concept of *cultural frame of reference* to raise the discourse on minority education and culture to a new level. Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of minority adaptation for subsequent school experience. Different minorities make different adaptations to minority status in the U.S.; and the differential adaptations affect their interpretations of, and responses to, the cultural problems they encounter in the public school.

PROBLEMS WITH CONVENTIONAL CULTURAL EXPLANATIONS AND SOLUTIONS

I consider three problems with current cultural explanations of and solutions to the academic problems of minority children. First, they are noncomparative; therefore, they ignore those minority groups who are successful in school, although they are not taught in their cultures and languages. The success of these minorities does not support the theory that minority children are failing in school primarily because of cultural differences. Second, there may well be

some cultural values, orientations, and practices among minorities (and among mainstream white Americans) that are not necessarily conducive to academic striving and success. Third, cultural compatibility and cultural incompatibility explanations fail to acknowledge that present and future participation of minorities in competitive national and global technology and economies does not, and will not, depend on minority cultural values, cultural practices, and languages. National and global technological and economic developments are at the heart of current school reforms. Whether minorities like it or not, their participation depends and will depend on their acquisition of appropriate language, knowledge, skills, and credentials to compete successfully for positions in complex economic and technological systems. Education that promotes better intergroup relations, better citizenship, and better self-esteem, and preserves or incorporates minority cultures and languages into the curriculum, but does not provide the minorities with the academic credentials, professional skills, and appropriate language to participate in the technological and economic domains, is not a reasonable solution to the problem of those minorities who have not traditionally done well in school.

Furthermore, the fact that minorities are becoming "the majority" by their numbers in some states is not a consolation. Teaching minorities in their cultures and languages but not ensuring that they learn math and science, which are not a part of their cultures, languages, and identities, will surely limit their economic and political advantages as "the majority population."

Comparative research shows that *some* minorities do well in school, although they are not taught in their cultures and languages; *other* minorities facing similar cultural and language differences do not do well in school (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991). In some cases minority groups who are doing well in school differ most from the dominant group in culture and language. For example, students from Mexico, after learning English, appear to be more successful than native-born Chicano students (Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Valverde, 1987; Woolard, 1981). Another example is that East Asians differ more than West Indians from the white British in culture and language; they do better than West Indians in British schools (Ogbu, 1978; Taylor and Hegarty, 1985).

Another evidence that cultural differences per se do not determine minority adjustment and school performance is found by comparing the school performance of the same minority group in different settings. A good example is the Japanese Buraku. In Japan itself, Buraku students continue to do poorly in school when compared with the dominant Ippan students. But in the United States the Buraku do as well as other Japanese Americans (DeVos, 1973; Ito, 1967; Shimahara, 1991). Another example is that West Indians do better in U.S. schools than they do in British schools.

Cultural differences do not affect the education of all minorities in the same

way. To understand why and how cultural differences affect minority education I explain the meanings of (a) culture, (b) cultural differences, (c) cultural frame of reference, and (d) minority status in the United States.

CULTURE, CULTURAL, DIFFERENCES, AND CULTURAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

What Is Culture?

Culture is a people's way of life. It has five components: (a) customary ways of behaving—of making a living, eating, expressing affection, getting married, raising children, responding to illness and to death, getting ahead in society, and dealing with the supernatural; (b) codes or assumptions, expectations, and emotions underlying those customary behaviors; (c) artifacts—things that members of the population make or have made that have meaning for them; (d) institutions—economic, political, religious, and social—*the imperatives of culture* that form a recognizable pattern requiring know-how, skills, and customary behaviors in a fairly predictable manner; and (e) social structure—the patterned ways that people relate to one another. Culture influences its members, even though the latter create, change, and pass on their culture to their children who, in turn, further change it (Cohen, 1971; Edgerton and Langness, 1968; Jacob, 1993; LeVine, 1973; Spradley, 1979).

People behave, think, and feel in “cultural worlds,” and each human population lives in a somewhat different cultural world. Culture is a framework within which members of a population see the world around them, interpret events in that world, behave according to acceptable standards, and react to their perceived reality. To understand members of different populations (e.g., African Americans, Chinese Americans, mainstream white Americans, the Navajos, etc.) it is necessary to understand their cultures (Edgerton and Langness, 1968).

An example of a cultural or customary way of behaving in the U.S. is the American ritual of caring for the mouth (Miner, 1956, pp. 503–507). But it is not enough to observe that Americans perform the ritual of brushing their teeth every morning, that their homes have shrines for this daily ritual, and that occasionally they consult a “holy-mouth-man,” called *dentist*, who specializes in the magical care of the mouth. One must also understand the reason for this customary behavior, namely, that Americans believe that there are debility and disease in the body that must be prevented from breaking out and harming their mouths.

Another cultural behavior characteristic of one segment of the U.S. society is the “stylin’ out” of the black preacher through a special “code talk” (Holt, 1972). It is difficult for mainstream white Americans to understand the black preacher’s language and style. The reason is that the preacher’s code talk devel-

oped as a specialized communication style to facilitate in-group feeling and to conceal black aspirations and feelings from the dominant white society.

Cultural Differences

Cultures differ at two levels. First, they differ in the components indicated above, namely (a) customary ways of behaving, (b) codes or assumptions, (c) artifacts, (d) institutions, and (e) social structure. Second, they differ in frames of reference (i.e., ideals). I explain the first level with four examples, focusing primarily on customary behaviors and the underlying assumptions (i.e., rules and meanings of the behaviors).

My first example is where the same overt behavior—*raising eyebrows*—has different meanings in different populations. In mainstream white American culture raising eyebrows means a surprise. For the people in the Marshall Islands in the Pacific it signals an affirmative answer. In Greece it is a sign of disagreement (Taylor, 1980).

A second example is about the same goal—achieving upward social mobility or getting ahead in society—accomplished by different customary behaviors in different cultures. Mainstream white Americans emphasize individual competition in getting ahead. They assume that social mobility, upward or downward, depends on an individual's ability or fate. Lowland Christian Filipinos achieve social mobility through group cooperation. They believe that social mobility depends on one's ability to cooperate with others. The Kanuri of northern Nigeria exhibit a third variant. Among them, an individual achieves social mobility through a patron-client relationship. An aspirant for upward social mobility usually attaches himself to and serves a patron who rewards him with desired position or wealth *after* the aspirant has served the patron and demonstrated his "trust" by showing loyalty, obedience, servility, and compliance to the patron (Cohen, 1965).

Third, cultures differ in the use of language to code environment and its members' experiences in that environment. Thus, some concepts that one finds "natural" in his or her own language are not necessarily universal. The reason members of a population do not have a given concept is not that (a) they do not have the biological structures or genes for those concepts, (b) their parents failed to teach them the "missing concepts," or (c) as individuals they "lag in development," for yet unspecified reasons. They do not have the concept because concept is not part of their coded environment, activities, and experience.

One result of differential coding is that one culture may have several terms for a given phenomenon, while another culture has only one term and a third culture has none. Here are some examples: (a) English speakers have several terms for ideas and objects associated with *flying*, such as fly (n.), fly (v.) pilot,

airplane. Hopi speakers have only one term. (b) English speakers have two terms for *snow*, Eskimos have several terms, and the Ibos of Nigeria have none. (c) English speakers have several terms for describing *coldness*, such as cold, ice, and snow; Aztecs have one term. (d) Hopi speakers have two terms for *water*, depending on whether it is standing still or in motion; English speakers have only one term for water (Fishman, 1964).

My final example is the differences in mathematical concepts and customary behaviors. Closs (1986) reports that the Western (or U.S.) mathematical system emerged from cumulative efforts of peoples of diverse cultures (e.g., Greeks, Egyptians, Babylonians, East Indians, Persians, and Mediterraneans). After thousands of years this system became a part of Western culture and is now designated as Western mathematics. There are, however, other mathematical systems in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and Australia that differ from the Western system. One difference is that the Western mathematical system uses 10 as the basis of number grouping (i.e., it is a 10 system), whereas I come from a culture, the Ibo culture in Nigeria, whose mathematical system uses 20 as the basis for number grouping (i.e., the math system of *my non-Western culture* is a 20 system). The Ibos share this 20 system with several populations in the Americas and elsewhere: (a) the Inuit region (b) native peoples in some parts of Mexico, (c) Central America, and (d) parts of California, as well as (e) the Celtic of northwestern Europe, (f) the Ainu of northeastern Asia, and (g) the Yoruba and Ganda in Africa (Closs, 1986, p. 3; Crump, 1990; Lancy, 1983).

Cultures also differ in customary mathematical behaviors. The difference between mainstream white Americans and the Kpelle of Liberia in West Africa is a case in point. I briefly summarize the study by Gay and Cole (1967) of mathematical concepts and behaviors in the two cultures.

Americans and the Kpelle are similar in arithmetic concepts because both people classify things. But they also differ because the Kpelle do not carry out such an activity explicitly or consciously like the Americans. Furthermore, the Kpelle do not have concepts of "zero" or "number." Neither do they have concepts for describing operations like addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, even though in their daily mathematical behaviors they add, subtract, multiply, and divide things. Finally, although the Kpelle, like the Americans, measure length, time, volume, and money, they do not measure weight, area, speed, or temperature.

These types of cultural differences cause real problems when people from different cultures come into continuous interaction in the wider society or in school. They encounter misunderstandings and inappropriate behaviors. However, over time and under appropriate circumstances the interacting parties learn to understand each other, acquire the competence of the other interacting group, and learn to behave in a culturally appropriate manner.

In anticipation of my later discussion of culture and school learning, the

following points should be kept in mind. Children in every population successfully learn their culture, including the meaning of raising eyebrows, how to get ahead, their language, mathematical concepts, and behaviors. How children learn these things differs from population to population. How they learn them in their respective populations differs from how things are learned in school (Scribner and Cole, 1973). School learning for children of every population is culturally discontinuous (Ogbu, 1982). When children go to school they are expected to learn both what the school teaches (the school culture or curriculum) and the learning style of the school. In many cases this transition happens; in some cases it is more problematic. To understand why it is more problematic for some groups than for others I introduce the concept of cultural frame of reference and discuss its role in cross-cultural learning and behavior.

Cultural Frame of Reference

One feature of contact deserving a serious conceptual consideration is cultural frame of reference. A cultural frame of reference, from the point of view of members of a given population, refers to the correct or ideal way to behave within the culture (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, preferences, practices, and symbols considered appropriate for members of the culture). There usually exists in a culture a widely accepted and sanctioned cultural frame of reference that guides people's behavior.

When people from two populations come into continuous interaction they bring with them respective cultural frames of reference that may be (a) similar (e.g., mainstream white Americans from Los Angeles interacting with mainstream white Americans from San Francisco), (b) different (e.g., Americans interacting with Russians; see Richmond, 1992), or (c) oppositional (e.g., mainstream white Americans interacting with the hippies in the 1960s; see Yinger, 1982).

Cultural frames of reference that are different and not oppositional have usually existed *before* two populations come into continuous contact. For example, Punjabi Indians in California spoke Punjabi, practiced the Sikh, Hindu, or Moslem religion, had arranged marriages, and males wore turbans *before* they came to California, where they continue these beliefs and practices to some extent. Elsewhere I have designated the kind of cultural differences that do not involve opposition as *primary cultural differences* (Gibson 1988; Ogbu, 1992, 1994).

The origin of oppositional cultural frame of reference is different. Cultural differences involving opposition usually develop among subordinate groups *after* two populations have come into continuous contact. I have designated such cultural differences elsewhere as *secondary cultural differences* (Ogbu, 1982). These differences arise as a kind of solution to status problems faced by the subordi-

nate group. They usually result in formation of an oppositional cultural frame of reference. Continuous contact situations giving rise to status problems include but are not limited to colonization, conquest, exile, immigration/migration, minority status, persecution, refugee status, slavery, social movement (including religious movement), trading relations, and all forms of subordination.

Continuous contact is necessary but not sufficient for an oppositional cultural frame of reference to emerge. There are two other conditions. One is that the relationship between the interacting populations should be characterized by status or collective problems that the subordinate population cannot solve ordinarily within the existing system of intergroup relations.

The other necessary condition is the *impact* of the collective problems on individual members of the subordinate group, i.e., how, as individuals, subordinate-group members experience these problems in their lives. This condition is readily observed when an oppressed group attempts to solve its status problems through a social movement: a liberation, messianic or revitalization movement (Cantril, 1963; Lanternari, 1963; Shepersen and Price, 1958; Thrupp, 1962; Touch, 1963; Worsley, 1968).

The difficulties and frustrations experienced by the members of a subordinate group propel them to forge collective solutions to their collective problems. A crucial part of forging successful collective solutions usually entails agreeing to accept some criteria, norms, or standards for defining the group's status and for deciding who is a *bona fide* member. The norms define attitudes, behaviors, and speech styles for members that are "good" and "bad." The "good" attitudes, behaviors, and speech styles constitute the content of their new cultural frame of reference. Note that the approved attitudes, behaviors, and language are not a matter of individual preferences but are shared by the membership. Because they are shared, those attitudes, behaviors, and way of talking become a part of the subordinate group's culture repertoire and, as noted above, become incorporated into their cultural frame of reference (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960).

The cultural frame of reference of the subordinate group may include attitudes, behaviors, and speech styles that are stigmatized by the dominant group. It often excludes the attitudes, behaviors, and speech styles of the dominant group rejected by the subordinate group. Consequently, the cultural frame of reference of the subordinate group is not only different from that of the dominant group; it is also oppositional to it.

From the point of view of the members of the subordinate group there coexist two opposing cultural frames of reference: one is appropriate for the dominant group, the "enemy," but not for subordinate group members; the other is appropriate for subordinate group members. The attitudes, behaviors, and speech styles of the dominant group are symbols of opposition and disaffiliation, while those of the subordinate group are symbols of group identity and affiliation with the subordinate group. The subordinate group members find

ways to avoid manifesting attitudes of behaving or talking like participants in the cultural framework of their enemy, the dominant group. They may express their oppositional cultural frame of reference in day-to-day attitudes, speech, and behaviors as well as in rituals, literature, folklore, music, and theater. In some things, subordinate group members show their opposition by trying to "outdo" the dominant group to prove they are "better" than what the dominant group thinks of them. As long as the two populations—the dominant group and the subordinate group—operate in two separate cultural worlds, by law (e.g., *de jure* social and economic segregation) or custom (e.g., *de facto* social and economic segregation) there are no cultural problems because such a situation does not require crossing cultural boundaries.

Cultural frames of reference are intimately related to collective or group identity, i.e., "ingroup feeling" of belongingness. Where cultural frames of reference are not in opposition, collective identities of populations in continuous contact are also not in opposition but different. But where cultural frames of reference are in opposition, the collective identities of the populations in continuous contact are also oppositional.

Among subordinate peoples with oppositional cultural frame of reference, the perceptions of what is appropriate or inappropriate for group members is emotionally charged because it is intimately bound up with their sense of self-worth and security in the face of denigration by the dominant group. Therefore, individual members who try to cross cultural boundaries or act like members of the dominant group, i.e., the "enemy," in selected domains may experience anxieties as well as opposition from their peers (Bruner, 1975; DeVos, 1980).

Once established, a cultural frame of reference may persist beyond the lifetime of its creators; it persists as long as it continues to serve the functions that brought it about. It may also take on a life of its own and act as a ready-made solution for subsequent generations confronting collective problems similar to the one faced by their predecessors. (DeVos, 1980).

The ability of people from different cultures to cross cultural boundaries depends partly on their cultural frames of reference being similar, different, or oppositional. It is easiest for people with similar cultural frames of reference to cross cultural boundaries (e.g., mainstream white middle-class people from Los Angeles and San Francisco); next are populations with *different* but not oppositional cultural frames of reference (e.g., French and Americans; immigrant minorities in the U.S.); finally, crossing cultural boundaries is most problematic for populations with *oppositional* cultural frames of reference (e.g., colonized people involved in messianic movements; involuntary minorities).

In the U.S. both immigrant minorities with nonoppositional cultural frames of reference and nonimmigrant minorities with oppositional cultural frames of reference are expected to attain upward social mobility by behaving according to the cultural frame of reference of the dominant white Americans in school and the workplace. Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 represent schematically the situation facing

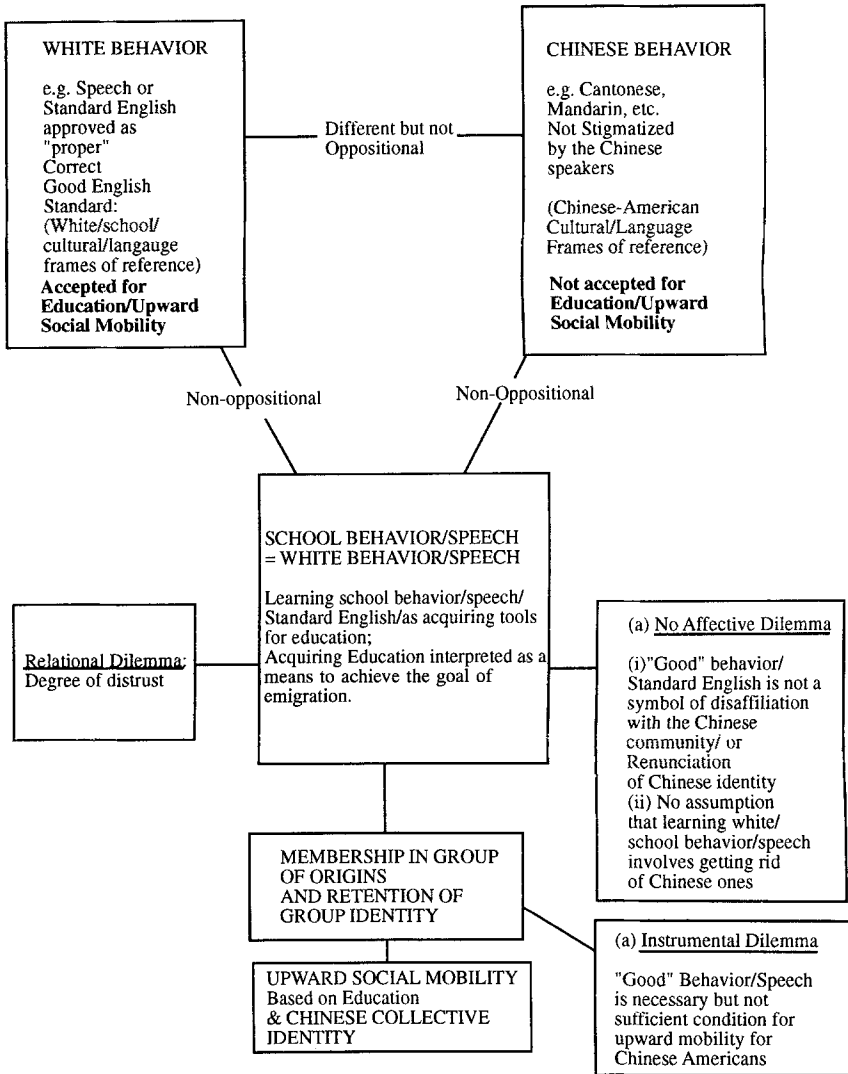


FIG. 1. Interpretations of schooling: voluntary minorities.

the two minority types with respect to the relationship between cultural frames of reference and upward social mobility. Both types of minorities know that their own minority cultures and languages (hence, their cultural frames of reference) are not accepted for self-advancement in the larger society. They know that they have to acquire the cultural frame of reference of the dominant group as presented at school or at the workplace to attain upward social mobility.

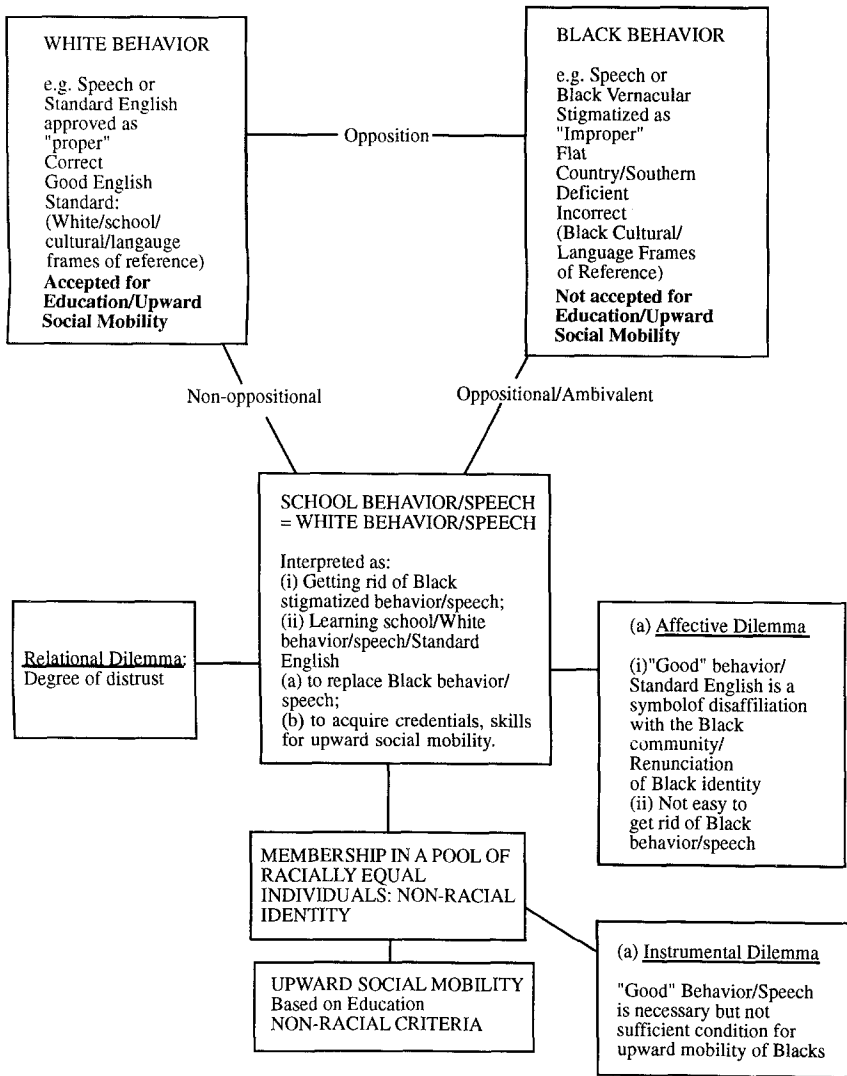


FIG. 2. Interpretations of schooling: involuntary minorities.

However, they differ in how they interpret what behaving according to the dominant group's cultural frame of reference means, in their responses to the requirement and in their ability to cross cultural boundaries. The situation regarding learning the standard English in school will illustrate the problem. The cultural frame of reference to be acquired at school includes speaking standard English, which is the language of the white (see Figs. 1 and 2).

Voluntary or immigrant minority groups who do not have oppositional cultural frames of reference cross cultural or language boundaries more easily. This is partly because they do not experience what DeVos (1980) calls "affective dilemma." Take the case of Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants. They know even before they emigrated to the U.S. that the standard English of the mainstream white American, not Cantonese, is the approved language for upward social mobility. They know that their Cantonese is a different language, is not stigmatized by white Americans, and is not oppositional to the standard English. Immigrant Chinese children are not asked by the public schools or employers to give up their Cantonese so that they will be able to learn the standard English. Nor do the Chinese assume that they have to give up their Cantonese *before* they can successfully learn the standard English. Chinese immigrants simply learn English as an additional language, a tool, with which to achieve the goal of emigration, namely, self-advancement. Moreover, the Chinese community supports the children's learning of the standard English because they think it is good to know how to speak it. The Chinese do not imagine that learning the standard English is detrimental to their language identity or group membership.

Another reason the immigrants are able to cross cultural boundaries is that they came to the U.S. knowing that they would have to learn to act according to the cultural frame of reference of the mainstream white American at school and work in order to achieve the goal of their emigration. They therefore consider not knowing how to act according to the mainstream white American cultural frame of reference as a problem and interpret the cultural and language differences between them and mainstream white Americans at school and at work as *barriers to overcome*. Although the immigrants may not get jobs and wages equal to their white peers for their success in learning the standard English and subsequent school success, they consider what they get "better" than what they would have achieved "back home." That is, they have a positive "dual frame" of status mobility.

Non-Western peoples attending Western-type schools also cross cultural boundaries selectively without affective dilemma. Take the case of the Toba Batak in Indonesia. Among them, learning to behave in nontraditional ways (e.g., acquiring Western-type education, technological skills, etc.) for self-advancement is interpreted as becoming "modern" (Bruner, 1975; DeVos, 1980).

It is nonimmigrant minorities with oppositional cultural frames of reference who experience the most difficulties in crossing cultural boundaries at school and the workplace. One reason discussed already is that they developed an oppositional cultural frame of reference to solve collective economic, social, and psychological problems in their relationship with the dominant group or their "enemy." Under this circumstance they interpret the cultural differences they encounter as *markers of group or collective identity* to be maintained and

as boundary-maintaining mechanisms between them and the dominant group. In segregated areas of life this is not a particularly serious problem since much cultural boundary crossing is not involved.

However, when these minorities are required to operate according to the mainstream white American cultural frame of reference they face an affective dilemma. Like the Cantonese-speaking immigrant Chinese, black Americans, for example, know that the standard English, not black English vernacular, is the approved language for upward social mobility in the wider society; they know that they are expected to learn it in order to get ahead. They also know that their speech is stigmatized by white Americans. White Americans, for instance, regard black speech as "improper," "flat," "country" or "southern," "deficient," and "incorrect." Some blacks have, at least partially, internalized this stigmatization, and have come to believe that their speech is "improper," etc. The affective dilemmas faced by blacks and similar minorities arise partly from white and school attitudes toward their languages: The schools and white employers expect these minorities (a) to give up or get rid of their ethnic dialects or languages and (b) to imply in their expectation that in order for the minorities to successfully learn the "proper" or "correct" English they must first give up their "incorrect" dialect or speech. Involuntary minorities also contribute to the affective dilemmas because they also assume (a) that they have to get rid of their "improper" dialects before they can learn the "proper" English. Furthermore, (b) they assume that they are learning the "proper" English *to replace* their own minority dialects. Unlike the immigrant Chinese, the nonimmigrants do not think that they are acquiring an additional language as a tool to achieve a goal. They think of the situation as learning something that will change their language identity: it is a subtractive learning and replacement, not an additive learning.

Thus, although nonimmigrant minorities *want* to learn the standard English for self-advancement, they face at least two affective dilemmas in doing so. One is that within their community "talking proper" or speaking the standard English has been regarded historically as a symbol of disaffiliation with the community. "Talking proper" does not have the same positive value and community support noted for the Chinese immigrants. So, the nonimmigrant may be discouraged from learning or using the standard English for fear of peer or community response.

The second problem is that it is not easy to get rid of minority speech. Even when individuals take special lessons or coaching on standard English, they often come out sounding like minority speakers.

The instrumental dilemma faced by the nonimmigrants has more of an adverse effect on behaving according to the white cultural frame of reference than that faced by the immigrants. Nonimmigrant minorities do not assume that learning the standard English is primarily acquiring additional language to

achieve a goal. They know from a long history of discrimination that “good speech behavior” or “talking proper” is a necessary but not sufficient condition for upward social mobility for minorities. Because they do not have a “back home” situation, these minorities usually compare the jobs and wages they get for speaking good English and for their education with those of their white peers. They generally conclude that they are rewarded with less jobs and wages because of their minority status. They have “a negative dual frame” of status comparison.

In summary, unlike immigrant minorities, the nonimmigrants with their oppositional cultural frames of reference face affective dilemmas when they have to behave according to the cultural frame of reference of their “enemy” in school or the workplace. Although *they want to* behave according to the mainstream white cultural frame of reference (e.g., speak the standard English) for self-advancement, they also consciously or unconsciously tend to interpret their behavior as giving up one’s cultural or minority identity.

Bruner (1975; DeVos, 1980) illustrates this problem with the case of Native Americans. According to Bruner, until recently, Native Americans assumed that in order to become “modern” or attain upward social mobility in the wider U.S. society they had to renounce their minority identity. This generally aroused a sense of betrayal to one’s group, the fear of isolation from the group, and uncertainty of acceptance by the white society. This tended to discourage individuals from trying to succeed in education and professionally.

Minority Status

As might have become obvious by now, regardless of their origins, minorities in the U.S. encounter cultural and language problems in society and school. But they differ in the degree to which they succeed in overcoming these problems. Comparative research suggests that voluntary minorities are more successful than involuntary minorities in solving the cultural and language problems, i.e., in being able to cross cultural boundaries.

Voluntary minorities are people who have moved to the U.S. more or less voluntarily because they believe that this move will result in more economic well-being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom. Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and West Indians are examples of voluntary minorities. Chinese Americans are a voluntary minority group because neither the U.S. government nor white Americans forced them to come or conquered and took over their land. Voluntary minorities bring with them cultural/language frames of reference that are different from, but not necessarily oppositional to, mainstream white American cultural/language frames of reference.

Refugees who were *forced* to come to the United States by war, famine,

political persecution, or other circumstances in which the U.S. government and/or her allies were involved are not voluntary minorities. The reason is that the refugees *did not plan* their coming to the U.S. with the expectation of achieving self-betterment through hard work in a land of opportunity. *Migrant workers* who came to the U.S. initially to seek temporary employment are *not* voluntary minorities, regardless of how long they remain. Likewise, *binationals* such as those found among Mexicans living in the U.S. are not voluntary minorities. The binationals work in the U.S. but maintain residences in both the U.S. and Mexico. They maintain contact with their native communities in Mexico and remain integrated in the social life of those communities. They use their earnings in the U.S. to accumulate animals, stocks, and land and to establish small businesses in Mexico. These accumulations, in turn, increase their obligations and ties to their place of origin in Mexico (Baca, 1994).

Involuntary minorities are people who were originally brought into U.S. society more or less *permanently against their will*, through slavery, conquest, or colonization (e.g., African Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans). Black Americans were originally brought by white Americans to the U.S. as slaves. In contrast, black people coming from Africa and the Caribbean in this century come either as voluntary minorities (i.e., immigrants) or refugees. (See Ogbu, 1994, for details of the distinction.) Involuntary minorities develop an *oppositional* cultural frame of reference *after* their forced incorporation.

Cultural and language differences and conflicts in U.S. public schools are interpreted differently and, therefore, have different implications for voluntary minorities (e.g., Chinese Americans) and involuntary minorities (e.g., black Americans). In Part Two (to appear in *The Urban Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4) I will describe the cultural problems and how these minorities interpret and respond to them.

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NOTES

1. I want to make some points perfectly clear so that white Americans and minorities will not misread or misinterpret this paper. First, I do not mean or imply that white Americans and the U.S. society are not responsible for the problems encountered by the minorities in trying to succeed in school and society because the immediate difficulties of the minorities I describe are the result of their own adaptive responses to their treatment by white Americans and societal institutions controlled by the whites. The treatment of the minorities by the dominant group and the institutions controlled by the dominant group have caused the minorities to respond in ways

that may adversely affect their striving for school and postschool success. For nonimmigrant minorities the ultimate cause of their interpretations of cultural and language differences are white treatment, including forced incorporation of the minorities into U.S. society. Second, by analyzing minorities' interpretations of the cultural and language differences they encounter and the implications for their responses to schooling, I am not blaming the victim. At the same time, I do not deny that the victim can contribute to his or her own victimization. Third, no one should interpret this essay to mean that schools and society can do nothing to improve the school and postschool success of minorities. Nor should it be interpreted that nothing can be done to change the situation. My purpose in writing this essay is to make certain things explicit that have hitherto not been recognized as a part of the problem of schooling for minorities. I believe that by making these factors explicit, educational policymakers, schools, and interventionists will take them into account in formulating policies and designing programs to improve minority students' school success. I also believe that minorities themselves will give serious thought to these factors and that their reflections will contribute positive change.

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