Brigham Young University–Hawaii Campus
Vol. 14, No. 2 ▫ Laie, Hawaii ▫ Winter 1981

REPORTER

FOCUS: INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

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Vol. 1,	Nos. 1-4--ED	184	351	Vol. 6,	No. 1--ED	077	287
Vol. 2,	Nos. 1-4--ED	184	349	Vol. 6,	No. 2--ED	077	288
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Vol. 5,	No. 3--ED	077	298	Vol. 11,	No. 4--ED	159	893

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TESL REPORTER

A quarterly publication of the Communications and Language Arts Division of Brigham Young University–Hawaii Campus. Subscription available upon request.

Editor . . . . . Lynn E. Henrichsen

Staff . . . . . Gregory Larkin
Jeffrey Butler

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TESL Reporter
BYU–HC Box 157
Laie, Hawaii 96762

Abstracts of articles published in the *TESL Reporter* appear in *Language and Language Behavior Abstracts.*

Cultural Perspectives on Second Language Learning

by Lily Wong Fillmore

A paper delivered at the Symposium on Culture, Thought and Learning held at BYU-Hawaii Campus (see related story on page 32).

The questions raised in this symposium concerning the relationship between culture and learning are important ones for American educators to consider. The children we serve represent perhaps the most culturally diverse student population in the world. In California schools alone, students represent some 70 to 80 different linguistic, and presumably cultural, backgrounds. This cultural diversity in all likelihood gets expressed in the different ways children approach the business of learning what they are expected to learn at school, especially the school language.

At the same time, the questions being raised here need to be treated cautiously and thoughtfully. They carry with them the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. There is a too ready tendency among many people in our field to seek easy solutions to complex educational problems. Casual conjecture can become accepted as causal explanations, and the most preliminary research findings and generalizations become the basis for reform in educational practices and curriculum.

An example: Some years ago, Basil Bernstein in England studied the relationship between social class and language use. Bernstein theorized that speakers of a language have two levels of speech available to them (1964). One, which he characterized as an "elaborated code," tends to be structurally more complex and linguistically more complete than the other, which he described as a "restricted code." The restricted code is used in informal situations among people who share a great deal of common knowledge and assumptions. Because of this shared background, much information can be assumed rather than made explicit in speech. The elaborated code is used in more formal situations and between people who are less closely related. In a situation in which speakers and their addressees have less shared information and fewer shared assumptions, all information which cannot be presupposed must be made linguistically explicit. By being more informationally complete, speech in the elaborated code is more context independent than is speech in the restricted code. Not dependent on context, it can be understood by more people than those who were present in the situation in which it was produced; not dependent on context, it can be put in writing without, in certain ways at least, losing its communicative value.

In examining the relationship between social class and language use, Bernstein found that working class families tended to make somewhat greater use of the restricted code than they did of the elaborated code. The reverse seemed to be true of middle class families. Further, he found that while middle class children had and made use of both the elaborated and the restricted codes, working class children appeared to have use of only the restricted code.

These findings had a profound and immediate influence in American educational circles. Educators saw in this difference in language use a reasonable explanation for the associations between school performance and socio-economic status. The elaborated code was taken as reflecting linguistic adequacy: it was seen as the vehicle not only for effective communication but also for abstract thought and adequate cognitive functioning as well. Children who had it could deal with the kind

of thinking required in school. Those who did not have it lacked the tools for handling the demands of the school experience: they were linguistically and cognitively deficient. These educators went on to conclude that such deficiencies needed to be dealt with before the educational lot of working class children could be improved. Hence, a great deal of effort and a lot of resources went into the planning and implementation of compensatory education programs which were meant to help the children of the poor make up for their "linguistic and cognitive deficiencies." That these programs did not work is history now, something most educators are willing to chalk up to experience. They did not work because they were based on a fundamental misinterpretation of what the research findings meant. Differences in working-class children's linguistic behavior as compared with that of middle-class children stem from a whole set of social experiences that are sufficiently different from those of the middle-class that this behavior simply can not be taken as representing the same kind of problems it might represent in the middle-class.

Professor Fillmore did her graduate training in linguistics at Stanford University. She was assistant dean in the School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley for five years, and left that position a year ago to devote full attention to teaching and research.

Bernstein himself never intended for his work to be understood or used in this way. His own view (1972) was that while working-class and middle-class children probably have access to both elaborated and restricted codes, they differ with respect to the extent to which they make use of them, and they also differ in their recognition of the social circumstances that call for one code or the other. School is a social context that calls for elaborated code usage. Children are judged as successful communicators, and therefore as socially competent students, if they recognize this fact and behave accordingly. Those who do not recognize this, or who do not have access to the elaborated code, and who therefore tend to use the restricted form of the language at school will be judged as communicatively and socially incompetent. This, Bernstein claims, is where at least some of the educational problems of poor children lie. A negative evaluation of a child's competence can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

And so, while I regard the question of cultural influences on learning–especially on language–an important question for us to consider, it is one that I approach with a good deal of caution and trepidation. Such considerations all too easily become the basis for creating stereotypes, and for misjudging the complexity of learning problems. What I have to say is meant to provoke thought and investigation rather than to inspire immediate change in educational practice. I hope my remarks will be taken in that way.

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Let us first consider whether or not there is any evidence for believing that culture plays a part in language learning. If culture does affect language learning, then we would expect to find variation in how well or how quickly different groups acquire language. In first language learning, at any rate, there appears to be little such evidence. Children begin learning their first languages at more or less the same time (usually at around 18 months of age), and despite considerable variation across languages in the amount of structural complexity to be dealt with, and despite well-documented variation across cultures in how a child's first language-learning experiences are structured, these learners manage to achieve quite comparable levels of control over their first language in more or less the same mount of time–say at about age five or six (Slobin, 1978). This fact has been a strong argument for believing that first language acquisition is under the control of quite universal learning mechanisms which are not influenced by culture.

The case appears to be different, however, when we consider the learning of languages after the first. Here it appears that even among quite young learners a

substantial amount of variation can be found in how quickly and how well they manage the learning of a new language. Some children do it handily in six months or so; others take as long as three to four years. Some achieve a native-like command over the new language with ease. Others have a much harder time managing it, or never quite achieve that level of control. Such differences offer evidence of individual variation in second language learning. Is there any evidence for believing that there are group differences superimposed over these? Among educators there is certainly a belief that there are group differences in language learning. Asian background children are generally regarded as "good language learners": their need to learn English is viewed as a temporary educational problem that will take care of itself soon enough. These children are frequently given very little help in dealing with their language problem, because such help is seen as unnecessary. Hispanic background children, on the other hand, are regarded as poor language learners: their inability to speak English is seen as a major educational handicap, one that must be overcome at all costs. To that end, some educators are willing to set aside all of these children's other educational needs in order to concentrate on teaching them English. In both cases, the children are victims of a sort of cultural prejudice: in the case of the Asian children, it is a positive one; in the case of the Hispanic, a negative one.

RESEARCH ON CULTURE AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

How much research evidence is there to support the views I have just mentioned? Almost none. Very little in the way of actual research has been carried out comparing learners of different cultural backgrounds with respect to second language learning. I am currently doing some research which deals with this question at least peripherally, and I will tell you of it later in this paper. But concerning research that looks at cultural comparison explicitly, I know of very little that has been done. There is, to be sure, the Dulay and Burt (1974) study which compares the acquisitional order of morphemes in the English learned by Chinese and Spanish-speaking children. They found little difference between these groups in the appearance of the morphemes they were studying. But this study was not designed to be sensitive to the kinds of group differences that might exist. Theirs was a cross-sectional study which compared language samples produced by groups of children at a single point in time, rather than at a comparable point in their acquisition of English. In order to reveal cultural differences one would have to design a study comparing learners at various points during the acquisition period, and the study would have to examine both the processes and the products of learning, rather than just the products.

In designing such research we would want to begin with some fairly good ideas on how cultural differences can be expected to show up in language learning, ideas based on prior research and careful observation. If we do not know where to look for the differences that might exist, we are unlikely to find them. Let us consider a few obvious places to look.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE ON THE LEARNING OF THE SECOND

The first obvious place to look for group differences is in the influence of the first language on the learning of the second. It is currently not very fashionable to believe in *first language interference*, but it is hard to ignore the ever present evidence of it whenever we come into contact with language learners. What we need to realize is that the most important ways in which first language interference affects second language learning might not be as straightforward as are the kinds of interlingual identifications of forms or structures we have trained ourselves to look for. There will be that familiar kind of interference, to be sure. But while we can compare groups with respect to the amount and seriousness of the first language interference each experiences, I think we would find that such differences are not, in the long run, all that influential in learning. Instead we should be looking for the more subtle and far-reaching ways in which first languages are liable to influence the learning of new ones.

Consider, for example, the question of pragmatics or language use. Languages differ in the rules which govern their use in social settings. As we have learned from the classroom research of ethnographers such as Steven Boggs and Sue Phillips, children coming from cultural backgrounds that differ from that of the culture found in the standard American classroom may be following quite different patterns of language use.

Phillips (1970), for example, found that the Native American children she was studying followed the discourse patterns of the Sahaptin language spoken by their parents, even though they themselves spoke only English. These discourse patterns, which differed substantially from usual English patterns, had the effect of making it quite difficult for the children to participate verbally in the classroom. The social conditions favoring verbal performance in the classroom ran counter to those required by the culture of these children, with the result that they were unable to find their way into the kinds of classroom activities through which they might have acquired the rules for language use which are associated with English.

Boggs (1972) found that while Hawaiian school children were eager to volunteer information and to answer questions when they could do so voluntarily, they were not so eager to participate when they were being called upon, or when questions were directly addressed to them. Boggs suggested that the difficulty experienced by these children stemmed from their need to interact with adults in groups rather than on a one to one basis, particularly when the interaction was initiated by the adult. In that manner, they equalize the unequal social statuses that exist between children and adults. Such patterns of language use can have an important effect on language learning.

The children studied by Boggs and Phillips were English speakers, although they followed the patterns of language use associated with their native languages and cultures. As such, these patterns affected the manner and degree of success with which the children were able to participate in classroom activities. Now, if the children had been non-English speakers, the effect of their following such patterns would have been far more drastic. For children who need to learn the school language, such classroom activities often constitute a major opportunity for learning and practicing the new language. Activities in which teachers ask questions and children provide responses are particularly important since the learners are provided with instances of the new language, which have been addressed to them and which have been formulated in a way intended to maximize ease of comprehension. Further, such activities require the student to provide some sort of appropriate response, responses by which the teachers can immediately determine whether the learners have understood what was just said to them. If the response is appropriate, its appropriateness will be acknowledged in the continuing interaction; if it is not appropriate, the learner will usually be given help in reformulating it. All of this is the kind of help learners need if they are to progress in the new language. But if the pragmatic rules the learners are following prevent them from participating in such activities, then the children are not in a position to take advantage of these opportunities to learn the language.

CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN COGNITIVE STYLE

The next area we should consider, as a way in which culture can affect language learning, has to do with the way learners approach any kind of cognitive activity--of which learning a new language is a particularly complex type. There has been a smattering of research addressed at cross-cultural differences in cognitive style which seems potentially relevant, but which we should look at cautiously. Language learning is, of course, different in many ways from other kinds of learning. It is quite clearly under the control of some sort of highly specialized, innate cognitive mechanism which permits learners to handle the complexities of the task with relative ease. And while none of us could begin to say just what that cognitive mechanism is like, or how it functions, few of us would want to deny its existence. But while the nature of this language learning mechanism remains a mystery to us, there are never-

theless a number of cognitive behaviors that play a part in language learning and which can be examined as potential sources of cultural influence in learning.

Sustained and Systematic Attention

Learning a new language is an enormous task, one requiring the attention and involvement of the learner for an extended period of time. The task calls for sustained attention and systematic attention. The learner has to be systematically attentive to linguistic and contextual information in order to figure out what people are saying and in order to figure out how the new language is to be used. While the evidence on cross-cultural differences along this cognitive dimension is scant indeed, it seems clear that if there are any, they are likely to affect language learning. In my current research I am following 30 Chinese and 30 Mexican kindergarten and first grade students in their learning of English. I have had an opportunity to watch and compare these children quite closely for a year now, having spent a day each week last year in each of the four kindergarten classes in which they were distributed. What I have noticed have been some rather striking differences between these two groups in the levels of attention they exhibit in classroom activities.

The Mexican children were very much like children their age—they were just learning to give sustained attention to tasks requiring care and precision in execution, such as in printing letters or numbers and in tracing detailed drawings. They had difficulty staying engaged in such activities for much longer than fifteen or so minutes at a time.

The Chinese children, on the other hand, not only were able to stay at such tasks for the duration of the activity (between 15 and 20 minutes usually); they could actually keep going for an hour or more, if they were left alone. Indeed, if they were not stopped, they would just continue working until they wore their pencils and knuckles down to nubs. Once I made the mistake of giving a child who wanted to practice his writing a 12 x 18 sheet of paper rather than the 9 x 12 sheets the teacher usually gave the children for this purpose. An hour later, I noticed the child still hunched over the paper which by now was almost entirely covered with tiny letters and numbers. I convinced him he probably didn't need to practice anymore, pried the pencil from his fingers, and sent him on to do more interesting things. I saw him a few minutes later at the blackboard—he had blocked off an area, about 12 x 18 in size, and had begun to fill it with meticulous rows of numbers.

I don't know yet in what way or to what extent such differences will be reflected in the second language learning of these children. It is a characteristic that warrants more careful examination than I am giving it in my present work.

Verbal Memory

The second capacity that seems rather clearly related to language is verbal memory. Learning a new language requires a healthy exercise of memory functions. The learners have got to remember how things in the new language are said, otherwise they will never have use of its forms. One assumes that cultures are not likely to differ much on this basic dimension, but again they just might, at least in the area of rote memorization skills. Cultures that encourage the memorization of poems, stories and songs are likely to have members with better developed verbal memory skills and strategies than groups that do not encourage such activities.

At present there is little in the way of cross-cultural research examining verbal memory in children. What little cross-cultural research on memory has been done has looked at the development of memory in general, rather than that the development of memory for verbal materials in particular (Kagan et al, 1977).

Analyticity

The third type of cognitive activity that we might consider in our attempts to find cultural effects on language learning involves analyticity or hypotheses generation. Learning a new language requires learners to make use of both the linguistic information available as input and the contextual information that needs to be extracted from the speech situation to help figure out

how the language is constructed and how it is used socially and communicatively. Once they have figured out some of the principles according to which the language is structured, learners can follow those principles in constructing their own utterances in that language. All of this requires a high degree of analytical activity. The learner has to make astute guesses based on the available data as to what rules appear to be operating in the language, and then to try these out productively. These processes are no doubt a major aspect of that language learning mechanism I have mentioned.

These analytical mechanisms seem to work in a comparatively smooth fashion, for most learners, in the learning of a first language. In second language learning, however, there is evidence of considerable variation in how easily and accurately learners engage in this kind of analytical activity. In my own earlier work in second language acquisition (Wong Fillmore 1976, 1979) I have found that learners seem to vary considerably in how quickly and successfully they are able to figure out the patterns of the new language. Some are able to find patterns—right or wrong—almost immediately. These children are putting their own sentences together soon after they get started learning the new language, and therefore are able to achieve a degree of communicative freedom from the beginning. Others are quite slow at finding patterns. These children can acquire expressions they hear others using and put them to use in their own speech, but they tend to preserve what they learn in precisely the form in which they learn them, rather than to extract the structural principles represented in them for their own use. Such children tend to be much more limited in their language use, at least during the early periods of language learning. Obviously, they eventually analyze the linguistic materials they have available to them, but it takes them a lot longer getting to it than those children whom I regard as highly analytical.

Playfulness

The children who are best at this kind of activity are inclined to be playful with language. When they hear anything new and catchy, they are liable to put it to immediate use. They experiment with it, trying out its possibilities, whether or not appropriate occasions for its use turn up. My favorite example of this kind of language play comes from my earlier research in second language acquisition. Nora, the best of the five learners I followed in a longitudinal study on the use of cognitive and social strategies in language learning (1976), had just picked up the expression "cookie cutter" which she enjoyed saying. In a conversation with a friend who had just corrected her language use, Nora used "cookie cutter" first as an insult and then as a refrain:

> And you're a cookie cutter! How do you like to be a cookie cutter? (Sings:) How do you like to be a cookie cutter?

This sample was produced by Nora just 29 weeks after her first contact with English.

Mental Flexibility

Verbal playfulness seems to go along with mental flexibility, a kind of talent for seeing and entertaining multiple possibilities. The children who tend to be mentally flexible in my research are able to generate multiple guesses as to what this or that means, and they are able to come up with different ways of doing or saying almost anything that you might suggest to them. If they want to say something but lack the linguistic resources to say it, they can get around their linguistic handicap by using paraphrases. Children who are not as flexible tend to be stymied when they do not find obvious ways of saying what they want to say.

I am convinced that individual differences exist among language learners in this aspect of cognitive behavior, and that these differences constitute important sources of variation in second language learning. Whether culture affects such behavior or not is another question. If we believe that early experience—the kind involved in cultural transmission—affects patterns of cognitive behavior, then quite likely we will find differences along these dimensions that are related to culture. At the same time, we should ask whether all such culturally related differences in cognitive behavior as we are able to find are likely to affect language learning.

Field Dependence/Independence

The cognitive style construct which has been most thoroughly investigated and which has been shown by many different researchers to be related to cultural experiences (e.g., Berry, 1966; and Ramirez and Castaneda, 1974) is Field Dependence/Independence (FD/I). In its simplest formulation, FD/I can be described as a perceptual tendency–it is the ability to overcome embedding contexts and to perceive identities and relationships independent of their backgrounds. But while there are clear indications of cultural differences to be found along this dimension of cognitive functioning, there has been scant research evidence indicating that FD/I has any effect on language learning. There are those who would argue that a cognitive style construct such as FD/I is "a major organizing principle around which many aspects of a learner's functioning can be shown to cluster" (Kagan and Kogan, 1970), and that showing that an individual is Field Dependent as opposed to Independent reveals much more about general cognitive functioning than about perceptual style. That being the case, one might find relationships between a broad construct such as FD/I and language learning which are not directly related to perceptual style *per se*, but rather to some other cognitive dimension that is associated with it. This question is certainly worth pursuing in research.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

But let us turn our attention to ways in which culture more obviously affects language learning. This has to do with the social aspects of language learning. Susan Ervin-Tripp and I are presently engaged in a three year longitudinal study which addresses the question of individual variation in second language learning. We are looking at sources of variation stemming from both the cognitive and social aspects of language learning. Among the learner characteristics being examined are language learning style–aptitudinal factors which affect the ways learners approach the cognitive activities involved in language learning–and social style–interactive factors which affect learners' abilities to get access to the linguistic data needed to support language learning. The assumptions on which this research is based are (1) that the process of second language acquisition has both social and cognitive aspects, (2) that learners play an active role in both aspects of the process, and (3) that anyone can learn a second language, given adequate exposure to it, but how fast and how well any individual does depends on the nature of the exposure and on his or her characteristic approaches to learning tasks of a complex cognitive and social nature.

The social side of the task involves the social activities the learner has to engage in, in order to get access to the language input which is necessary for acquisition. The cognitive side of the task relates to the analytical activities that the learner must carry out, in order to figure out how the language is structured and how meanings get expressed in it. Learner characteristics such as social skill, sociability, communicative needs, interactive style, and activity preference will affect the learner's ability to interact with the speakers of the language to be learned, and hence the quantity and quality of linguistic input to which the learner has access. Learner characteristics such as verbal memory, verbal fluency and flexibility, and sensitivity to linguistic patterns and meanings can affect the speed and success of the learner's efforts to discover a set of rules to use in producing his own versions of that language.

The main hypothesis being tested in this study is that speed and success in language learning from a particular type of input depend on a felicitous combination of such social and language learning characteristics in the learner. The research problem, then, centers on determining the part that each component of these two personal-style constructs plays in producing variation in speed and success in second language learning, with *speed* defined as how quickly learners are able to express themselves in the new language, and *success* as how efficaciously and accurately learners are able to sort out the rules of the new language and put them to productive use. Both variables involve a comparison of the developing skills of learners across time, but "success" involves comparisons of the range of patterns learners control productively and grammatical accuracy in the exercise of those

patterns, whereas "speed" involves comparisons only of learners' ability to express themselves and to communicate in the new language irrespective of correctness or complexity.

While the data are not all in yet, it is clear that the variables we are interested in are indeed important sources of differences in second language learning. At this point, both kinds of characteristics appear to be equally involved in producing the enormous variation we are finding in our 60 subjects. However, while there appear to be only suggestions of cultural differences on the cognitive characteristics we are examining, there appears to be quite clear evidence of such differences related to the social characteristics.

Socially Dependent Behavior

Among the social characteristics that seem to be most influenced by culture is something we might describe as socially dependent behavior—the extent to which children need support from others, or are able to maintain separate identities, especially with respect to authority figures such as adults. The Mexican children we are observing are far more inclined to be socially sufficient and independent rather than dependent. While they are undoubtedly dependent on adults to a certain extent, they nevertheless are a lot less dependent on them in shaping their activities than are the Chinese children in our study. The Chinese children are more likely to turn to adults for guidance than they are to turn to one another, or to seek activities on their own. They ask: "Now what should I do?" "What do you want me to do with this?" And when they have done what has been suggested, they turn to adults again for evaluation and recognition: "Look at my paper." "I'm finished." "Is this right?" The Mexican children are much more oriented to their peers—it is to their friends and classmates that they turn for ideas and recognition. These, of course, are differences in degree rather than absolute differences. At the same time that the Mexican children tend to be peer-oriented, they also look to the adults in their world for guidance and recognition, and while the Chinese children tend to be adult oriented, they were obviously also concerned with one another.

Peer Orientation

The children of both groups who are peer oriented tend to spend a lot more time talking to classmates than t ıey do to adults, not surprising since there are more classmates around to interact with than there are adults in the classroom. However, we have noticed that such children tend to pay more attention to the speech of their peers, and to model their own speech to a greater extent after that of their peers than that of the adults in the same setting. Or so it seems to us. How is this likely to affect language learning? Drastically, of course. If everyone in the peer group shares a common first language, there is likely to be little incentive or opportunity for them to learn or use a new language, particularly for those who are peer-oriented rather than adult-oriented. Since they already speak a language that can be used with their classmates, there is no obvious need for them to learn a new one. And if they did choose to use the new language among themselves, the result would be that they would supply each other with an imperfect version of it as input. And so, in a classroom consisting mainly of limited or non-English speaking children, the major reason for learning the new language would be to please the adults in their world. If the learners are peer-oriented, chances are that they will make less use of adult language for language learning purposes, with the result that they will probably not have adequate exposure to the new language.

Individual Needs of Children

I have called this evidence—they are actually observations for the moment. They reveal some aspects of language learning that culture may affect in unexpected ways. What we need to do now is to examine the relationship between language learning and culture more directly so that we can discover how much such differences actually affect language learning. Until then, we do not have any basis on which to say just how best we can tailor educational programs to suit the needs of particular groups. I began this paper by suggesting that we take a cautious approach to examining the relationship between culture and learning. I would like to end it by urging restraint in applying research findings on such relationships to edu-

cational practice. I believe that the safest practice is to always consider individual needs of children before we consider group needs. Cultural differences are never absolute—they are ordinarily expressed as group tendencies towards a particular kind of behavior or characteristic.

The fact is that no matter how much culture influences learning, these influences will be expressed in unique ways in individual children. And while we can consider such influences in our planning, we need always to be ready to assess and to meet the individual learning needs of the children we serve.

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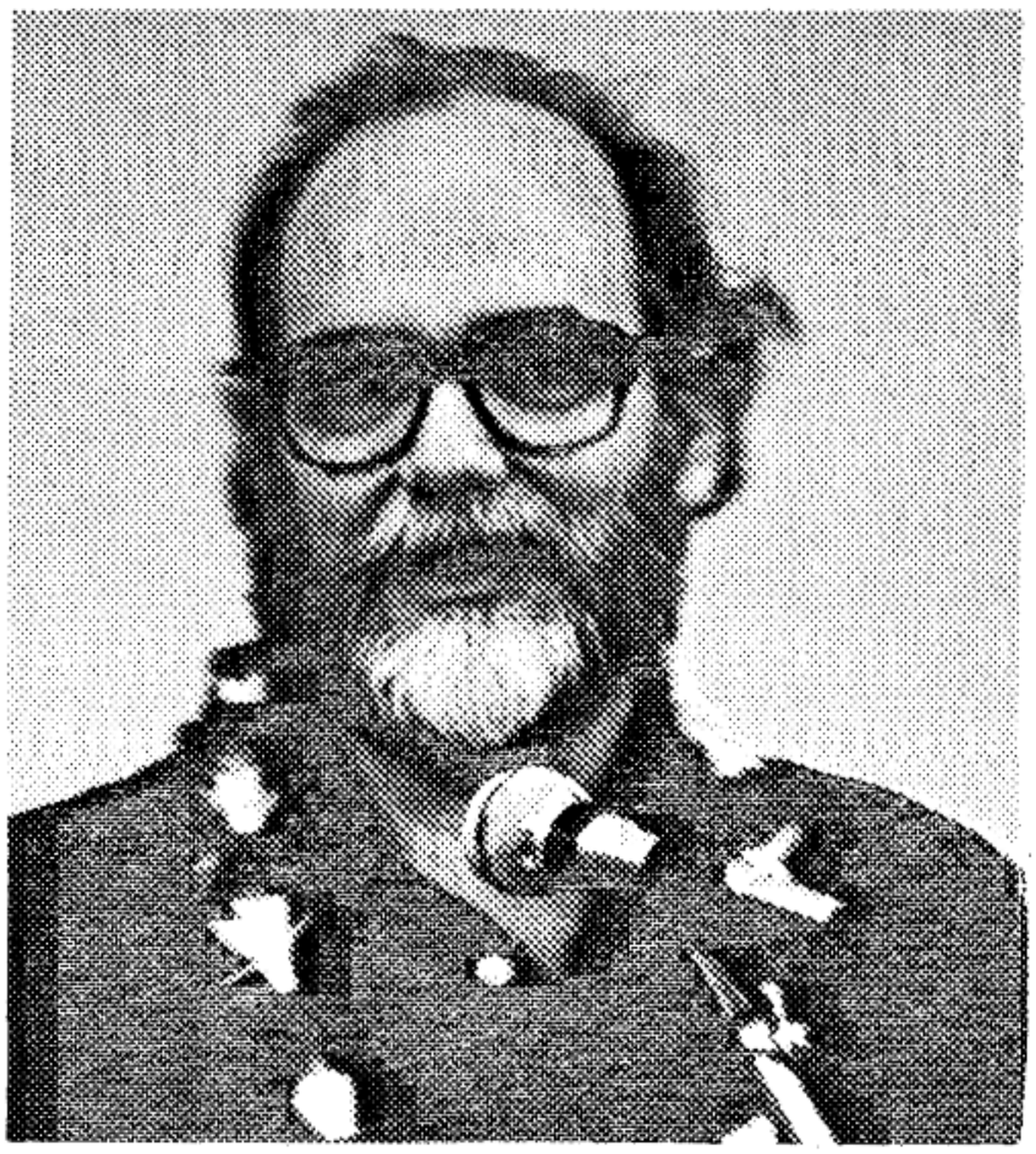


Symposium on Culture, Thought and

by Lynne Hansen

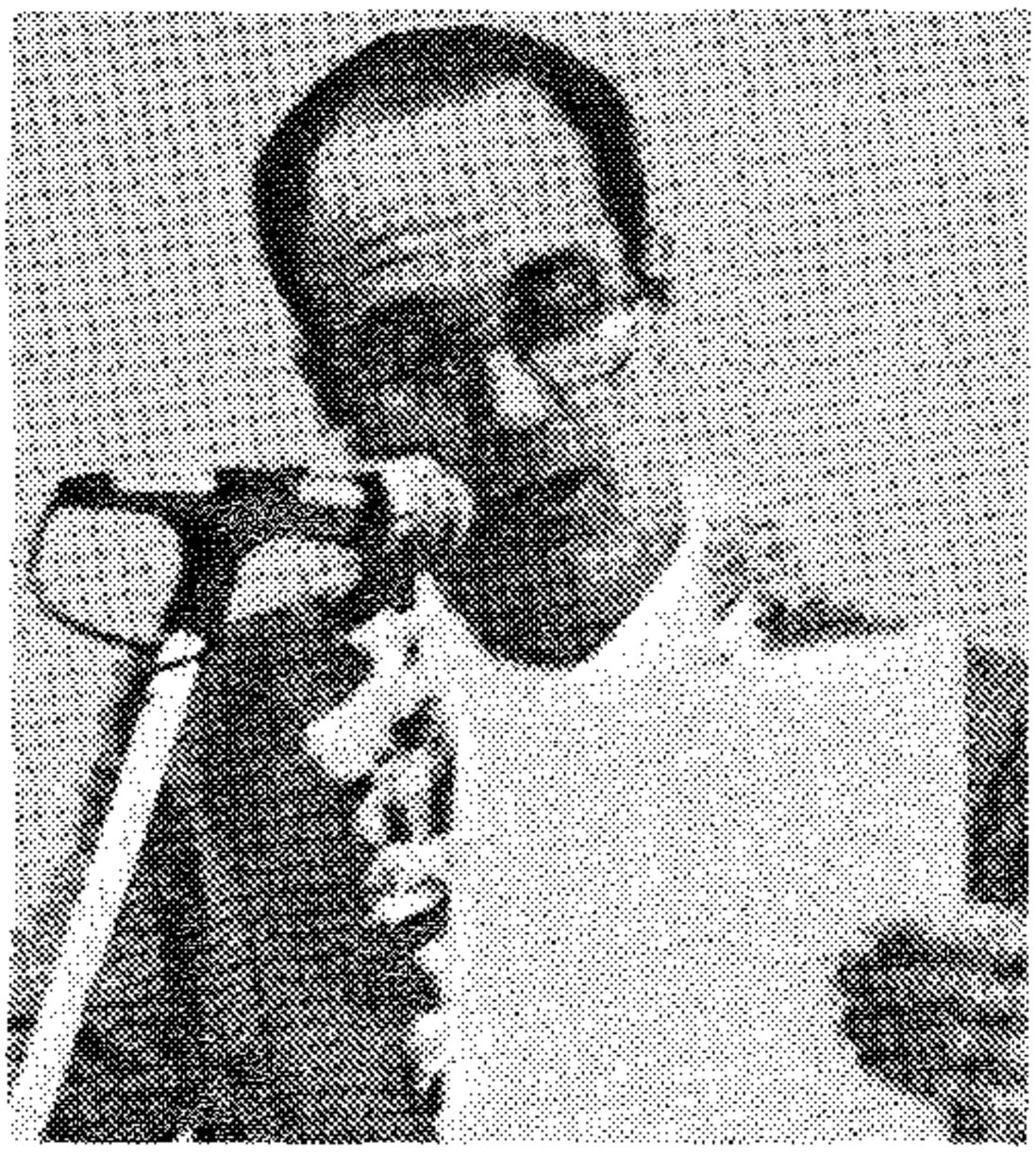
Do patterns of thought and learning vary from culture to culture? If so, how can the differences best be dealt with in the classroom? These key issues in intercultural education were addressed in a symposium held on October 1 and 2, 1980 at the Brigham Young University–Hawaii Campus. Sponsored by the Communication and Language Arts Division, the event was one of a series of symposia which commemorated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the university with the general theme, "LDS Educational Horizons from a Multi-Cultural Perspective."

The featured speaker at the first symposium session was Lily Wong Fillmore from the School of Education, the University of California at Berkeley. An internationally recognized authority on bilingual education and second language acquisition, Fillmore brought to the symposium not only the abundant insights gained through a brilliant academic career but also those which had grown out of her own personal experiences early in life.

As a monolingual Chinese speaker (the only one in her first grade class) entering school in Watsonville, California, she found greater acceptance among the Spanish-speaking minority group than the English-speaking majority. Thus, from a young age she acquired not only the language (and culture) of the school and larger community, English, but also Spanish, a tool that would facilitate her future contributions to the education of minority children.

During the past 11 years Fillmore has developed four major Spanish/English bilingual programs, and before that she was heavily involved in the development and implementation of educational programs for migrant farmworkers' children in California.

She is currently in the second year of a study (with Susan Ervin-Tripp) of individual differences in second language acquisition. An additional three-year research project funded by NIE was begun this fall under Fillmore's direction. This massive study will involve the collection of longitudinal data from 16 bilingual classrooms (8 Cantonese, 8 Spanish). These data will then be used to assess instructional practices, that is translation and direct language use, and to approach the question of what characteristics of learners interact with these two bilingual



Learning Held at BYU–Hawaii Campus

instructional practices to affect the acquisition of language skills.

Fillmore's symposium talk (see p. 23 for the complete text) included an overview of the sources of evidence on cultural variation in language learning. An underlying theme was the need for a cautious approach in applying research findings to educational practice.

The second symposium session featured presentations by three local scholars: Roland Tharp, Cathie Jordan and Morris Graham.

Roland Tharp, professor of psychology at the University of Hawaii, is also a consultant to the Kamehameha Early Education Program and has done extensive research on teacher strategies in the elementary school. His books include *Perspectives in Cross-Cultural Psychology, Behavior Modification in the Natural Environment* and *Self-Directed Behavior.* Tharp's symposium presentation (the text is on p. 35) examined areas of conflict between institutional formal education and other educational modes, offering suggestions for the resolution of these conflicts in a multi-cultural society.

Cathie Jordan is a research anthropologist for the Kamehameha Early Education Program and has co-authored a book, *Culture, Behavior, and Education,* which is based on the first ethnographic and psychological study of the culture of modern Hawaiians. The major portion of Jordan's symposium paper was devoted to examples of cultural adaptations in classroom practices which have been found to be culturally compatible and educationally effective for children of Hawaiian culture. In her conclusion, the generalizability of these findings to other populations was suggested.

Morris Graham is a Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University–Hawaii Campus. His presentation was a report of a cross-cultural study of semantic development. According to Graham, among ten cultural groups examined, two (Papago and native Hawaiian) displayed significantly slower development than the others in terms of the measures employed in his investigation.

In the culminating session of the symposium the four participating experts interacted with each other and the audience in a joint effort at clarification and synthesis of vital issues in intercultural education.

Culturgrams: People-oriented Briefings to Help You Understand Your World Neighbors

by Debbie Coon

Have you searched in vain for people-oriented briefings on cultures you are studying or working with? If so, *Culturgrams* may be worth investigating. A *Culturgram* is people-focussed, briefly describing greetings, visiting, eating, etiquette, gestures, and other valuable information which will help you understand your world neighbors.

These four-page culture capsules are published by the Language Research Center at Brigham Young University. Covering almost seventy cultures, these and other materials have been popular in elementary through university classrooms around the country and in many parts of the world.

Uses have ranged from orientation of international students to teachers and host families to aids for curriculum development in the classroom. A program officer from the Institute of International Education wrote, "I am very impressed with the work of the Center and the practical nature of the materials you produce." An elementary school teacher in Tennessee said, "I was very pleased with the quantity and superb quality of the *Culturgram* contents. Your publication has helped me when books have failed." From Redondo Beach, California, a gentleman wrote, "I recently read some of your excellent *Culturgrams* in a local library. I am a teacher of English to foreign students and would very much like to order for my school a complete set of the *Culturgrams*." From the Marylhurst Education Center comes, "After a lengthy search for materials, BYU's are clearly the most universally useful and meaningful to the intercultural situation."

The BYU Language Research Center develops and makes available learning materials to help promote better communication and understanding between Americans and other people throughout the world.

As a special service to you, send a legal-sized, self-addressed stamped ($.28) envelope for one complimentary *Culturgram* of your choice, a complete publications list with prices, and an intercultural communicator resources brochure. Write BYU/LRC, 246 B-34, Provo, Utah 84602, or call (801) 378-2651.

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El Salvador
England
Fiji
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France
Germany
Greece
Guatemala
Honduras
Hong Kong
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran
Republic of Ireland
Ireland (Northern)
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Israel (Palestinian Arab)
Italy
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South Africa
Spain
Sweden
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Venezuela
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Culture and Education: Problems at the Interface

by Roland G. Tharp

A paper delivered at the Symposium on Culture, Thought and Learning held at BYU--Hawaii Campus (see related story on page 32). Adapted from "Culture and Education" by C. Jordan and R. G. Tharp in Marsella, A. J., Tharp, R. G., and Ciborowski, T. 1979. Perspectives in cross-cultural psychology. *New York: Academic Press.*

From the perspective of cross-cultural psychology, "education" is a vast domain. The term can refer to early infant socialization, to belly-dancing classes, and to the modern university. It occurs at the mother's breast, in fishing boats, and at the cobbler's last, in eighth-grade discussion groups and graduate seminars. Beginning with birth and ending with death, education—in some form—seems always with us.

THE VARIETIES OF EDUCATION

Even in the context of the most *formal* "school," other aspects of education are always present and interacting. Indeed, these little-noticed aspects are often the small stones which send the great wheel of formal education lurching from the road.

A commonly-used system of classification distinguishes among types of education according to their social organization (e.g., Scribner & Cole, 1973). The types so distinguished are (a) informal education, (b) non-institutional formal education, and (c) institutional formal education.

Informal education designates the everyday process by which children (and to a lesser extent, adults) learn to participate increasingly in their culture, without any particular place, time, personnel, or activity being set aside expressly for the purpose of teaching. A child imitating with a small broom an adult who is sweeping the floor, or one person watching another repair a car, thus storing up information about cars and their workings, would be examples.

Non-institutional formal education is a process of cultural transmission in which there are particular activities with specified personnel in designated circumstances which are expressly designed to transmit a particular body of cultural information. However, this last is usually fairly limited in scope and the occasions of transmission occupy limited time periods. Examples would be the instruction of adolescents that precedes initiation rituals in many traditional societies, or the pre-Confirmation classes run by some churches in our own.

Institutional formal education shows the characteristics mentioned above, but has the added attributes of being carried out by professional teachers operating in a graded, hierarchical system which exists continually over a long period of time, taking place in relatively permanent sites, and being responsible for the transmission of a broad spectrum of information.

It is this last type of education in which we are most interested, but within the context of formal institutional education, non-institutional and informal education can also take place. An example of the former situation would be the training of a choir group or a football squad; of the latter, the information transmission that takes place among peers when they are brought together in a formal education setting. If we take these secondary characteristics of formal education institutions into account and also keep in mind that participants in institutional formal education are, at other times, being educated in non-institutional and informal "modes," it becomes evident that institutional formal education does not exist in a vacuum and that when there are important differences between the content or processes of one mode and another, or between different aspects of the same mode, there is potential conflict.

Most issues currently of interest in the cross-cultural study of education occur at the interface of institutional formal education and other educational modes/character-

istics. For example, the minority student in a multi-cultural society often finds different goals in the formal institutional school than in his informal home-culture education. Indeed, such conflicts may be found between different aspects of the school: the goals and methods of mathematics class are not the same as the education of the playground. We will devote a major portion of this paper to examining such areas of conflict, and the last section will illustrate methods of resolving these conflicts in a multi-cultural society. But before undertaking that task, it is necessary to clarify the nature of the school itself.

THE TRANS-NATIONAL CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL AND THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION

This section concentrates on formal institutional education as it has developed in technological, literate societies. Formal institutional education can be distinguished from other kinds of education in several ways, some of which have already been mentioned. To these can be added that formal educational institutions of literate, technological societies–or "schools" as we will refer to them from this point on–tend to undertake the following functions: (a) They attempt to teach broad-based, generalizable skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. (b) They bear explicit responsibility for the transmission of some cultural information, such as the history of the society, scientific knowledge, community standards, and the nature of civic responsibilities. In a multi-cultural society, the cultural information usually pertains to the majority or dominant culture which operates the school. (c) Schools also bear, in a less explicit way, the burden of transmitting a large freight of cultural norms which, again, in a multi-cultural society, usually represent those of the public or dominant culture. This latter transmission is not often a formally imposed obligation, but it is felt as an implicit responsibility by instructors.

Schooling is so similar from country to country that it is best seen as a culture unto itself, a trans-national culture, the culture of the school. These similarities are present in schools' architecture, their social organization, their goals, their responsibilities, and, most especially, their personnel's adaptation to the institution. It is when the trans-national culture of the school conflicts with the recipient culture that we see the crucial current issues in culture and education.

However, the concept of a trans-national culture of the school has not yet been clearly enough formulated to allow detailed study. It is as yet no more than an hypothesis; but it is often taken as an assumption. The general inquiry into the effects of education, internationally, seems to presuppose that education in Ghana is like education in Mexico, and also like that in London. The logic of this assumption would be strengthened if it were found that education everywhere has the same effects on the student. That inquiry is unfortunately beset with methodological and conceptual problems.

The study of the cross-cultural effects of education has an odd history. Because in Western countries, age and amount of education are so highly correlated, develop-

Roland Tharp, professor of psychology at the University of Hawaii and a consultant to the Kamehameha Early Education Program, has done extensive research on teaching strategies and cross-cultural psychology.

ing intellectual capacities cannot be clearly attributed to environmental effects (education) or to maturation. To disentangle these effects, developmental and cognitive psychologists have compared the schooled versus unschooled members of many exotic cultures, in an effort to see whether the typical course of cognitive development of Western children is in fact maturational and universal, or whether it is a result of Western education; formal and informal. As a result of this enterprise, the cross-cultural educational psychologist finds a detritus of data in which schooled versus unschooled children of many cultures are compared–Liberians, Guatemalans, Soviets, Native Americans and so forth–and in order to make general statements, must assume that "school" in the African bush is in some important way equivalent to the "school" of the Yucatecan Mayan. Even

in those exceptional studies whose purpose is to determine school effects in a particular population (for example, Cole, Sharp, & Lave, 1976), ethnographic descriptions of the schools are rarely included. In our own view, however, here is a modal tendency of schools trans-nationally, and the concept should guide research toward its clarification.

For example, many researchers have emphasized that learning in the school is characteristically "decontextualized;" that is, compared to traditional societies' teaching, school removes skill learning from those situations to which the skill is to be applied. Thus one does not learn to count beads or bags, one learns to count; rather than memorizing a list of trail markers, one learns to memorize lists. The assumption of psychologists and educators has been that this "context-free" learning produces generally applicable skills, ones which can then transfer to many contexts. Cole and Scribner and their associates have been the group most vigorously pursuing these issues, and while once sanguine for the identification of these transferable operations (Scribner & Cole, 1973), they lucidly presented the measurement pitfalls in cross-cultural comparison (Cole & Scribner, 1974): and then somewhat gloomily speculated that perhaps schooled-skills were applicable after all only to school situations (Cole, Sharp, & Lave, 1976). In the recent works of Lave (1977a; 1977b), there may be data encouraging to a more intermediate position; that is, learned skills, wherever learned, will transfer to situations which are similar enough to the context of original learning.

This position accords well with logic, and with the known laws of stimulus generalization. It also forces us to a somewhat more sophisticated view of schools; they are not to be seen as "decontextualized," but rather as being a *specific context.* If transfer is to be predicted, we must have a precise description of schools, and a precise description of to-be-transfered-to situations--in short, a taxonomy of situations, which will allow predictions of transfer according to principles of generalization.

In spite of the difficulties just discussed, we will proceed on the tentative assumption that, whatever may prove to be the details of the school-context, the general outlines are similar enough from country to country that a trans-national culture of the school is a useful working concept. We will now examine problems which arise when the school is so different from the culture of some of its children that the two conflict significantly.

PROBLEMS IN CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION

Cross-cultural issues in education are of more than theoretical interest. Passions of citizens and vexations of educators are present whenever the schools of a dominant culture undertake the education of the children of a minority, whether in the United States, Nigeria, Australia, Mexico, or Guatemala.

Conflicts at the interface of schools and the populations that they serve may arise over what is to be transmitted (content), over the efficacy of transmission, or both. "What is to be transmitted" can be characterized as general skills such as reading and writing, cultural information like geography or history, or cultural norms, "working hard" or "honesty," for example. The kinds of problems that arise tend to differ according to the goal of transmission.

Goals in the areas of **general skills,** more often than goals in the other areas, tend to be explicit and to be shared by dispensing and client populations. That is to say, even minority group parents frequently favor these goals. They want their children to learn reading and arithmetic and, often, mastery of the dominant language or dialect. Conflicts and problems in this area tend to be, not over the nature of the goals, but over their implementation. Difficulties arise when schools fail to transmit effectively the general skills which they claim to teach; that is when students "fail to learn."

The second area, that of **cultural information,** is one in which the goals are usually explicit, but may well *not* be shared by client and dispensing populations. Problems may arise either because of failure to transmit effectively, or from disagreements about the appropriate cultural information to transmit. Examples of the latter would be the current conflicts in some areas of the United States between Black community

members and schools over the variety of history to be taught, or the resistance of Old Order Amish parents to their children learning conventional geography, due to the supposed ill effects of such learning on important cultural norms (Hostetler & Huntington, 1971).

The third area, that of **cultural norms,** involves goals which are often neither explicit nor shared, such as competition vs. cooperation, group vs. individual achievement, expressiveness vs. reticence, etc. Difficulties which arise in this area tend to be rather subtle ones because, due to the implicit nature of the goals involved, client and dispensing populations may not clearly understand what is at issue. Again, however, the kinds of conflicts that arise can be seen as two-fold: (1) Difficulties arising over failure to transmit cultural norms effectively, and/or (2) disparities in the cultural norms which are held by the client and dispensing populations.

MINORITY ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT

While issues in all three of these areas can overlap, and difficulties in one area can contribute to problems in the others, we will limit our focus here to problems arising from failure to transmit general skills valued by both recipient and dispensing populations. In other words, we will examine the problem of minority academic underachievement.

There are two basic models that have been used in considering minority underachievement. One is the **deficiency** model, which can take many forms, from hypotheses that certain ethnic or social groups are genetically inferior (e.g., Jensen, 1969) to cultural deprivation models, which see individual capacities as equal, but posit that some cultural or social groups do not provide their children with certain essential socialization experiences. Deficiency models have been called into serious question (e.g., Keddie, 1973) and are not much in favor in the social science community today. However, they are still very much alive in the classroom, and their assumptions are often taken for granted by members of the education community and its controlling bureaucracy. They are also held by some minority group people, both parents and children. And, in their more benevolent forms, they still appear not infrequently in literature on minority underachivement.

The second model, and the one with which we will operate, is that of **cultural difference.** It takes the general position that minority underachievement results from some lack of congruence between the assumptions, norms, values, and behaviors of school personnel on the one hand; and, on the other, the assumptions, norms, values, and behaviors of minority student populations.

Different varieties of the cultural-difference model can be distinguished by the specific lack of congruence posited as the cause of the problems between school and child. On this basis, most of the major hypotheses can be viewed as falling into one of six categories; these are: (a) cultural understandings and misunderstandings; (b) motivation; (c) cognition; (d) language; (e) social organization; and (f) sociopolitical issues.

Cultural Understandings and Misunderstandings

Explanations for minority school failure which fall under this heading attribute the problem to misunderstandings between pupils and teachers arising from different culturally-based assumptions, or to misunderstandings on the part of educators about the nature of culture and cultural differences (e.g., the use of deficiency models as the bases for designing school programs). For example, Valentine (1971) suggests that schools cause minority group failure because they assume that cultural differences interfere with education and therefore attempt to wipe out such differences; Rosenfeld (1971) places part of the responsibility for slum school failure on teachers who "give up" on their pupils as unteachable, partly because they do not understand their students' culturally different social organization and motivation; and Wax and Wax (1971) attribute the inappropriacy of many educational programs designed for minority children to the use of a "vacuum" or cultural deficiency model for minority cultures.

In the Hawaiian case, previous research has demonstrated that simply educating

educators about cultural differences is not by itself effective in remedying underachievement (MacDonald & Gallimore, 1971).

Motivation

Motivational explanations are those which attribute academic underachievement on the part of minority students to their failure to perform the necessary learning activities in school. Although a deficiency model may attribute such nonperformance to individual or cultural weaknesses, in the cultural difference framework it is postulated to occur because the conventional school environment does not contain the proper cues to effectively elicit such behaviors from minority children (e.g., McDermott, 1974). Some workers suggest that the school environment is so inimical to minority children that they may actively rebel and refuse to do what is asked of them by the school, in a show of hostility toward teachers or the system (e.g., Rosenfeld, 1971), or in a perhaps not-altogether-unconscious attempt to preserve their own cultural indetity and dignity (e.g., Howard, 1973). The Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP), as discussed in this conference by Jordan, has trained teachers to shape the classroom environment in ways that are conducive to a willing engagment with school tasks on the part of Hawaiian children, although that outcome proved to be a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective learning.

Cognition

Explanations having to do with culturally-derived differences in cognition are increasingly popular among psychologists, but encounter problems of the difficulty of measuring cognition and differences in cognitive operations across cultures or even across situations. There is the matter of task specificity of cognitive operations, already discussed. There is the difficulty of measuring cognitive characteristics. As a further complexity, one can view the problems of minority students as due to differences in organization of cognitive operations (e.g., Cole & Scribner, 1974); that is, pupils may fail to learn because their cognitive operations, though adequate, are organized in systems which do not mesh well with the way the school presents information.

A further tension exists in issues of cognitive training: Will the performance of the pupil be improved by formal cognitive training as Ann Brown (in press) and others have suggested? Or is it necessary, instead, to only engage or elicit, by changes of context, the appropriate cognitive processes, which are assumed to already be present and well-developed? Furthermore, would the teaching behaviors generated by those two hypotheses be, in fact, any different?

In my opinion, effective innovations in the cognitive area are difficult to separate conceptually from innovations generated by sociolinguistic hypotheses, to which we now turn.

Language Issues

Two kinds of explanations can be included in this category. One is that of actual **code interference.** That is, failure to learn may occur because material is presented in a school, or "standard" code (i.e., language or dialect), which is unfamiliar to the student. He may not understand the code well enough to absorb the content, while his teacher may not understand the student's first language or dialect well enough to recognize and be able to mobilize his real academic potential; or there may be interference between specific features of the two codes which produce learning difficulties, especially in reading. The recent bi-cultural, bi-lingual impetus in education (e.g., Torres-Trueba, 1976) has grown partially out of these concerns.

The other variety of explanation involving language is sociolinguistic. Even if teacher and pupil share the same language code (and to a greater degree, if each is **not** at ease in the other's code), it may well be that the ways in which they use that code, the particular social circumstances of speech and the paralinguistic acts surrounding it, are sufficiently different that effective communication is hampered. Sociolinguistic explanations emphasize social circumstances of speech acts and the ways that language is used in interaction. These vary wildly from one cultural group to another. Laura Lein (1975), for example, points out how differ-

ences in sociolinguistic rules result in mutual misinterpretations by teachers and Black American immigrant children; and Boggs (1972) has reported similar phenomena for Hawaiian children and their teachers. Courtney Cazden (1977), among others, has emphasized the great difficulty of even evaluating the linguistic repertoire of minority children, because of misfits between the sociolinguistic parameters of school and conventional testing situations, on the one hand, and those of the settings in which such children will produce the full range of language performance, on the other.

The failure of schools to fully engage the cognitive and linguistic capacities of minority children is a source of consternation to educators as well as social scientists; and sociolinguistic analyses are more and more looked to for solutions.

Social Organization of the Classroom and of the Teaching Process

Even within the trans-national school culture, there are a variety of classroom social organizations possible, ranging from that symbolized by the traditional self-contained ranks and files of desks, through small-group formats, to individual tutorial systems, and to the radical "free-school" minimum-organization style. Social organizations willy-nilly emphasize different interaction styles--competition or cooperation, individualization or group-linking, personal or impersonal teacher relationships, formality or informality of teaching style, peer-peer or student-teacher relationships--which in turn, implicate cultural norms. Incongruencies between preferred types of social interactions, and even social norm conflicts, can result from classroom social organization which is alien to the child's culture.

Although this kind of hypothesis is not common among educators, or even recipient-culture parents, it is of interest and concern to the cross-cultural social scientist, and a number of workers have placed major responsibility for cross-cultural educational problems on misfits in this area. Frederick Erikson (1977), for example, has argued that social interactional "styles" of being a student and being a teacher need to be matched with each other for satisfactory educational achievement. Rosen (1977), although he sees social interaction issues in the classroom as ultimately stemming from the social class divisions of society as a whole (a "political" explanation), advocates change of the social organization *within* a classroom and school as at least a partial solution. Cazden and John (1971), among others, cite "discontinuities" between instructional methods and American Indian children's customary learning interaction styles and suggest the instructional processes could be better adapted to that style.

Socio-political Issues

In this last category of explanation is the attribution of educational problems in cross-cultural circumstances to the structure of the larger society and the relationship of minority or subordinate groups to the dominant group which controls the educational institutions. Eleanor Leacock (1971), for example, has given some support to this position as an outcome of a comparative study of Black and White low-and middle-income schools, while Thomas and Wahrhaftig, in the same volume (1971) come to a similar conclusion from work with Cherokee Indian and folk Anglo-Saxon populations.

Proponents of political explanations often see solutions to cross-cultural educational problems as resulting only from changes in the larger society, or at least necessitating a drastic reorganization of the total school system. While they may concede that the immediate problems that minority and subordinate group children experience in school can be due to factors included in any of the other five categories, solutions to these problems cannot be reached, these theorists feel, by changes which are confined to the classroom alone. Only by alterations in the larger socio-political frame can effective and lasting educational change be produced.

Researchers in cross-cultural education must recognize the reality of socio-political issues. However, educational research and political action are separate spheres of activity with different ways of proceeding. and the researcher must most often attack classroom issues directly, in the hope that making the trans-national culture of the

school operate more effectively for minority students will go to the root issue of political discontent. In my view, social scientists, humanists and educators have quite enough to manage in solving the practical problems of making education truly responsive to the differences among cultures.

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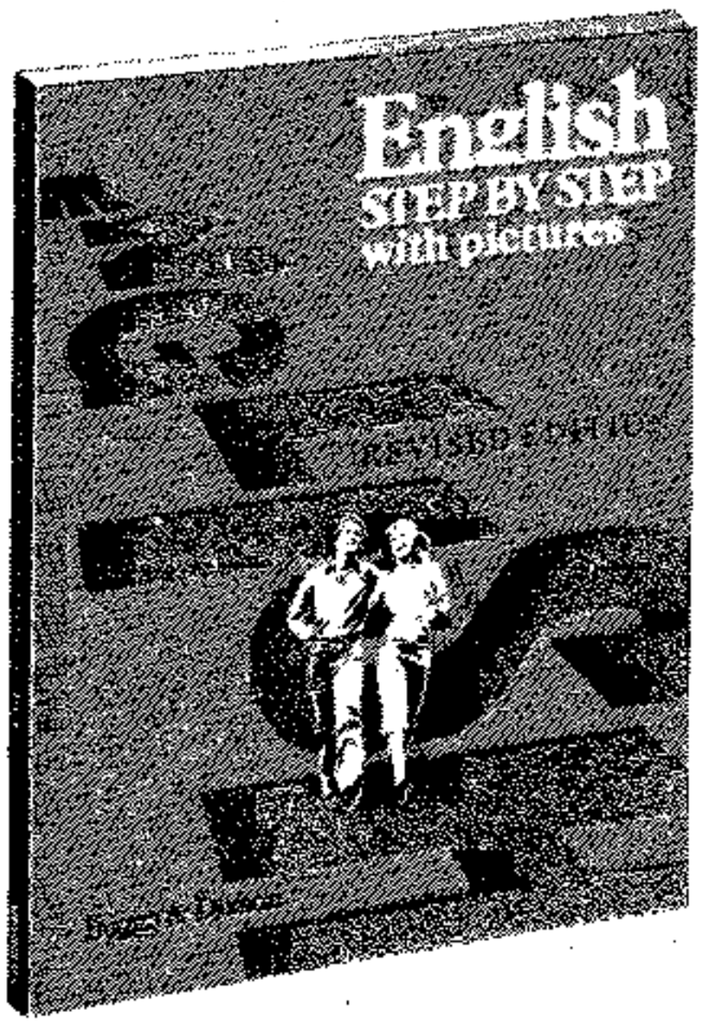

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Conference Announcements

The next SIETAR annual conference will be held March 11 to 15, 1981, at the Sheraton Landmark, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The theme of the conference is "Understanding People and Ideas: Approaches to Effective Intercultural Interaction." The conference offers an opportunity to explore each of the themes and sub-themes through workshops, roundtables, case studies, concurrent sessions, special-interest groups, and a new concept, "poster sessions." Films that are integrated with the various topics will be shown in the evenings. This year, for the first time, each activity will include participants from Africa, Asia, Canada, Europe, Latin America, and the USA. The key events of the conference will be the four roundtables in creative multi-ethnic interaction, management of cultural differences, cultural services to migrating peoples, and cultural dimensions of the North-South dialogue. For registration forms and more information, write to: SIETAR, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057, USA.

The fifteenth annual convention of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages) will be held March 3-8, 1981 in Detroit Michigan. For registration forms write to the TESOL Central Office, 202 D.C. Transit Building, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

The Association of British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language (TEAL) in conjunction with its fifteenth annual convention, is hosting the national meeting of TESL Canada. TEAL '81—TESL Canada will be held at the Hotel Vancouver on March 12, 13, and 14, 1981. Thomas Scovel (Pittsburgh), Bernie Mohan (Vancouver), and two as-yet-unnamed British educators will be plenary speakers. They and the fifty or more workshop presenters will be addressing the concerns that arise in almost all classrooms at all levels of education where there are ESL students. For further information contact Earl D. Wyman, Chairman, TESL '81—TESL Canada, 2684 Eagleridge Drive, Port Coquitlam, B.C. V3E 1A6.

On April 1, 1982 (April Fool's Day), the Western Humor and Irony Membership (WHIM) will hold its first annual conference at Arizona State University. The conference theme will be "The Language of Humor and the Humor of Language." Proposals for papers conforming to the general theme of the conference from such fields as psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, literature, linguistics, bilingualism, etc., are encouraged. Send your one page abstract to Don L.F. Nilsen, WHIM Conference, English Department, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85281 by July 4, 1981.

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