



A Guide to **Culture in the Classroom**  
by Muriel Saville-Troike

National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1978.

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## Foreword

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The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education was authorized by Congress through the enactment of Public Law 93-380, as amended in 1974. On October 1, 1977, the U.S. Office of Bilingual Education and the National Institute of Education jointly funded the Clearinghouse.

One of the activities of the Clearinghouse is "to implement a program of information products and services" during its first year of operation. *A Guide to Culture in the Classroom*, authored by Dr. Muriel Saville-Troike, is the first of such information products produced by the Clearinghouse.

*A Guide to Culture in the Classroom* is an invaluable tool for educators who want to know more about the minority culture and language of children in their school. Academic achievement and school can be made more meaningful when educators understand and appreciate the richness of the culture and heritage their students bring to school. It is with this belief that this publication was prepared.

Dr. Muriel Saville-Troike, currently a faculty member in the Linguistics Department at Georgetown University, has had much experience in the area of bilingual education. She has had experience at the university level and has written numerous books and articles on language and bilingual education. In addition, Dr. Saville-Troike has taught Spanish-speaking pupils as a kindergarten teacher and has directed the development of materials for bilingual education in Navajo.

The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education is pleased to have this publication as its first information product. Subsequent Clearinghouse products will similarly seek to contribute information and knowledge which can assist in the education of minority culture and language groups in the United States.

Joel Gómez  
Director

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## Introduction

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Bilingual education in the United States is founded largely on the premise that linguistic differences as such, and particularly a lack of proficiency in English, are a primary causative factor in the low academic achievement of students in American schools who are from limited English backgrounds. This is certainly a plausible argument, especially in those cases where students with limited English-speaking ability have been required to learn exclusively through the medium of English. Certainly these students are at a disadvantage trying to understand instruction and express themselves in a foreign language, especially when they must compete with other students who have already mastered English. The *Lau vs. Nichols* decision is a clear indicator that such an argument is plausible even to the Supreme court of our country.

It is quite likely, however, that such an explanation is overly simplistic, and that educators must look further than the linguistic differences to find a cause for low academic achievement among limited English speakers. There is good reason to suspect that students' competence in English at the time they enroll in school does not correlate as highly with their ultimate academic success as do some other sociocultural factors, and that a foreign language of instruction is only one dimension of the cultural discontinuity between home and school which has traditionally raised such a barrier to learning for the students from linguistically diverse backgrounds who are now the primary target for bilingual education. This is essentially the view developed by Cárdenas and Cárdenas (1972) in their Theory of Incompatibilities. They identify five basic areas in which serious discontinuity occurs: poverty, culture, language, mobility, and societal perceptions. The definition of 'culture' which I have adopted in this paper includes most of the incompatibilities they discuss.

In this discussion of the role of culture in the bilingual classroom, my intention is to explore the relationship of language, culture, and education; to recommend in-service and pre-service training procedures for developing cultural competencies in bilingual educators; and to suggest applications of cultural information to classroom practices, curriculum development, and evaluation. It is my hope that these concepts and methods may prove useful not only in bilingual programs, but for improving equal educational opportunity for all minority-group students, and for all those commonly labeled the 'disadvantaged': one of the major unresolved problems in their education is the lack of consonance between the culture of lower socioeconomic groups and that of the school, or that which is taught in the school, no matter what the language of instruction. Whether the student is from a lower class Spanish-speaking background, from the inner city, from the 'hollers' of Appalachia, or from a Vietnamese fishing village, it is well known that he is likely to have greater difficulty in school than if he is from a middle class urban background. The complex factors which are frequently labeled merely 'low socioeconomic background' currently lack explanatory power and need to be 'unpacked' in order to identify the specific cultural variables which lead to inequality in educational achievement.

Students from higher socioeconomic groups are also frequently from culturally different backgrounds, of course. Although they are less likely to have difficulty in school, recognition and understanding of these differences can only enrich the educational experience of all with whom they are in contact, and increase their level of personal fulfillment and the contribution they will ultimately make to our society.

Man is a cultural animal. All of us in one way or another are products of our culture, and many of our behaviors, values, and goals are culturally determined. Our task is to explore how the positive and humanistic aspects of this force can be maximized in education, how it can be used to further our goals and enhance the opportunities of both teachers and students to develop to their full potentials, and how the potentially distorting effect of cultural conditioning (which can result in stereotyping and in prejudice) may be minimized. Because we are human, we can never hope to be culture-free in teaching and evaluating our students, but we can at least attempt to be culture-fair by being sensitive to our own biases and by recognizing that cultural

differences do not represent deficiencies.

There are indeed real differences between groups of people; we must recognize, understand, and respect these real cultural differences, and not simplistically proclaim that 'all people are the same underneath the skin'. This assertion seems to be egalitarian, but it often hides a basic ethnocentric assumption, that all people are like me, and that to say otherwise would be degrading them.

Just as we are now accepting multiple languages as a positive resource in education, we must learn to accept and use the wider range of cultural differences of which languages are a part. And as in teaching a second language, we must view teaching a second culture as an *additive* process, and not as replacing the culture of the home.

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## The Nature and Scope of Culture

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The concept of *culture* represents differing ranges of human behaviors, products, and institutions to people with differing academic and experiential backgrounds. The most common range included in the definition is the narrowest, encompassing only 'the arts', or perhaps admitting the uniquely identifiable behavior of 'cultured' individuals, such as extending the little finger at an appropriate angle when holding a tea cup, or pronouncing *tomato* with the 'proper' sound for *a*. Educators have generally recognized a broader scope of phenomena: evidence of 'culture' in a classroom includes such things as travel posters hanging from the wall and piñatas hanging from the ceiling, art projects ranging from making maracas out of gourds to constructing kites for Chinese holidays, and cooking-and-tasting sessions with tortillas, fry bread, or rice boats. Meetings and in-service workshops for teachers often feature 'cultural events', defined as singing and/or dancing typical of 'folk' in another country.

This may be good; this is certainly fun; but this is also an entirely inadequate perspective on 'culture' for the nature and goals of bilingual education.

To the anthropologist, the ethnographer who describes and explains the life-ways of diverse groups of people, culture includes all of the rules for appropriate behavior which are learned by people as a result of being members of the same group or community, and also the values and beliefs which underlie overt behaviors and are themselves shared products of group membership. It is this scope of 'culture' which I believe must be understood, accepted, and accounted for in bilingual education.

Formal education (including the American educational system) is itself a cultural invention. In the United States, it is a system which serves primarily to prepare middle-class children to participate in their own culture. Students who come into the system from other cultures, including the lower social classes, have generally been considered 'disadvantaged' or 'deficient' to the degree that their own cultural experiences differ from the mainstream, middle class 'norms'. (Programs in compensatory education in the United States have been based primarily on this rationale, and serve to provide middle-class cultural experiences to children who have been 'deprived' of them.) Our educational system cannot be blamed for attempting to teach the dominant American culture to all of its students, since such enculturation (or socialization) is the essential purpose of education in all cultures. We can blame our traditional educational system for inadequate provision or respect for students culturally diverse backgrounds, however, and such criticism has constituted one of the basic motivations for the implementation of bilingual programs.

Culture is not an optional component of bilingual education, whether or not we add the term *bicultural* to the title of our programs. Nor is it an optional component of the programs which train bilingual teachers. Whether consciously recognized or not, culture is a central force in all education.

Use of the hyphenated label 'Bilingual-Bicultural Education' is meant to stress the view that more than language learning is involved in bilingual programs. Such a usage implies that formal recognition is given to aspects of the student's traditional culture within the instructional program, both to ensure that the student has the opportunity to learn about it, and to enhance the student's feelings of acceptance within the school context. The relation of second language learning to the development of *biculturalism*, however, is a question that so far has received little attention.<sup>[1]</sup>

To what extent is learning a second culture necessarily related to learning a second language? Historically, the pragmatic answer to this question has been somewhat imperialistic in nature, and often also in intent. It has been considered axiomatic that because language is an integral component of culture, only the culture of the

speech community from which the language derives is appropriate content for its expression, and that teachers must transmit that content to those who are learning the language.

Similarly, when the focus is explicitly on inculcating a second culture, teaching the language that goes along with it has been considered a primary and necessary means to that end. This has been shown clearly in American history by the language and educational policies adopted toward Native Americans. In the 1880's, for instance, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs reported:

The first step to be taken toward civilization, toward teaching the Indian the mischief and folly of continuing in their barbarous practices, is to teach him the English language .... we must remove the stumbling-blocks of hereditary customs and manners, and of those language is one of the most important ([Berry 1968](#)).

More recently, learning English in Puerto Rico was explicitly equated with accepting American cultural dominance:

Since the United States is a major nation of the world, Puerto Rico can well get the pace from a growing and ascending nation and learn the expression of the ways of a great people ([Cremer 1932](#)).

Even today, it is probably fair to say that most of the foreign language teaching efforts of such official agencies as the ICA (International Communication Agency), the British Council, the Goethe Institute, and the Alliance Française are much more concerned with spreading the influence of their respective cultures than with teaching their languages in and of themselves.

This same belief in the intrinsic relation between a language and the culture of the speech community from which it historically derives forms the basis for one of the principal arguments raised against bilingual education in the United States: the language of the United States is English; to speak anything else is considered somehow un-American, and to teach another language is viewed as culturally divisive, and contrary to the goals of national unity.

There is no intrinsic reason that the structures and vocabulary of one language cannot be used by many diverse speech communities to express their respective cultures, and in ways in keeping with their rules of appropriate behavior. Thus, although language is unquestionably an integral part of culture, the supposedly necessary relation between learning a language and learning the traditional culture associated with that language is not automatic. The relationship between a language and the culture in which it is used depends on the social context for learning and teaching the language, and the social functions which it assumes.

In the learning of a native language, that language is both part of the native culture being acquired in the process of children's enculturation, or socialization, and a primary medium for the transmission of other aspects of that culture from one generation to the next, such as values, beliefs, and rules for social behavior. If speakers remain in contact with their native culture, their native language proficiency, expands to include expression of the new concepts they develop, the new domains in which they function, and the new role-relationships in which they participate. This intrinsic relationship of language to culture is so 'natural' as to operate at an unconscious level for most native speakers, furthered by informal means more than by formal education, and by family and peers more than by professional educators.

When English is learned as a second language in countries such as the United States where it is the language of the dominant culture, and where proficiency in English is essential for full educational, political, and economic participation in the larger society, acquiring the language involves much more than merely learning English phonology, syntax, and vocabulary, for it must be able to serve most of the same functions that English does for the native speaker: medium of instruction, expression of concepts and feelings, participation

in expanding social domains and role-relationships. Thus, second language speakers must be able to function according to the rules of the English-dominant American culture. While the native of a culture acquires these rules quite naturally and unconsciously in the process of *enculturation*, the process for students acquiring a second culture is *acculturation*, the addition of a second set of rules for behavior which may coexist beside the first, replace them, or modify them. One possible result of this acculturation process is loss of the native culture or the merger of cultures until they are indistinguishable, called *assimilation*, and the resulting society a 'melting pot'. Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the movement for bilingual education in the United States has been the valuation of another possible result of acculturation: the selective maintenance and use of both cultural systems, or *biculturalism*.

The nature and extent of students' *cultural competence* is thus just as important as their linguistic competence for determining appropriate level and content for instruction in bilingual-*bicultural* education. It is now beginning to be recognized that students who enroll in bilingual programs in the United States have varying degrees of proficiency in the two languages of instruction. Cultural competence will also vary. There is no reason to assume, for instance, that Spanish-dominant students have acquired the culture of such Spanish-speaking countries as Cuba, Mexico, or Spain in the process of acquiring Spanish as their native language. They indeed have acquired a culture, but it might well be the beliefs, values, and rules for appropriate behavior common to the dominant American society; in this case, being 'bicultural' would involve learning about their *ancestral* cultural heritage, which is analogous in many respects to learning about the culture associated with a foreign language.

Most probably, except for students who have immigrated directly from Spanish-dominant countries, Spanish-speaking students in the United States will have been enculturated into the minority subculture of a bilingual community. It is important that bilingual educators recognize the validity of these students' culture; comments have been made that students who have not acquired the culture of the dominant American society or the culture of the dominant society of a Spanish-speaking country have no culture at all. These comments are often from the same people who feel that students who do not speak a standard variety of English or Spanish, or who code-switch between them, are 'alingual'. These views are based on ignorance and misunderstanding of the nature of language and culture, and are potentially as damaging to students' self-concepts and identity as those which forbid the use of their native language at school.

While I have been making my point with specific reference to Spanish-speaking students because these constitute the largest target group for bilingual education, the same is also true for most other language groups in the United States: French speakers may or may not have learned the culture of France; Chinese speakers may have acquired the culture of a Chinese American community in San Francisco, New York, or Seattle or of the dominant American society rather than the culture of Taiwan or Hong Kong; Polish speakers in New England or Texas might well feel like (and be considered) cultural aliens if they returned to Poland.

The relevance of these observations for teaching culture in a bilingual classroom is in recognizing the range of cultural backgrounds which may be 'native' even to speakers of the same language. Bicultural education assumes there are only two: the culture of the student's home and that of the dominant society; but the result is often the teaching of two foreign cultures without recognizing or providing for the student's native culture at all in the process.

While recognizing and accepting the culture which students bring to school is important, however, the fact remains that the same reasons exist for learning the dominant American culture as for learning English: it is necessary for full participation in the larger society. Teaching an ancestral culture, such as that of Spain or Mexico for Spanish-speaking students, or of the Philippines for Tagalog or Ilocano-speaking students, may be of considerable value for developing and understanding of traditions and for developing 'roots' for ethnic identity, but the objectives for developing positive self-concepts through bicultural education will be negated if the actual culture of home and community is ignored or disparaged.

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## Sociocultural Influences on Learning and Teaching

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To understand and facilitate learning in any area of the curriculum, teachers should know not only what it is that is being acquired, but how it relates to what has already been learned. The learning of culture, like the learning of language, begins with a child's first experiences with the family into which he is born, the community to which he belongs, and the environment in which he lives. By the time children begin their formal education at the age of five or six, they have already internalized many of the basic values and beliefs of their native culture, learned the rules of behavior which are considered appropriate for their role in the community, and established the procedures for continued socialization; they have learned how to learn.

Different child-rearing practices are preferred in different cultures, and these will have a significant effect on later learning (Saville-Troike 1973). They range from very lenient when compared to dominant group standards, with little physical restraint or coercion employed, to very strict control of early behaviors. For example, although few pronouncements can be made about 'Indian children' as a group, since the many tribes maintaining their identity in the United States are very heterogeneous with regard to language, culture, and even physical (racial) traits, there are a few social values and practices that are quite wide-spread among the various Native American communities. In general, little or no physical punishment is used, for instance, with children commonly disciplined by teasing, ridicule, or fear (as with Hopi Kachinas), or by indirect example through folklore. Their learning of physical tasks is often more through observation than verbal instruction, but many social and religious lessons are also taught through story-telling. A number of studies suggest that the visual perception and visual memory of Native American children raised in these groups are much higher than that of their Anglo age-mates ([Kleinfeld 1970](#), [Lombardi 1970](#), [Cazden and John 1971](#)).

Another example of the effect of traditional child-rearing practices is the Puerto Rican differentiation of sex roles from a very early age; these make a significant difference in educational attitudes and performance. For one thing, Puerto Rican girls show a higher anxiety pattern than boys when they are in a situation where they are threatened with failure, as when taking a test. The boys' lower anxiety is probably a function of the cultural attitude toward their admission of anxiety ([Siu 1972](#)).

Other behaviors of three and four year old Anglo and Puerto Rican children have been observed and compared while they were responding to a 'demanding cognitive task' ([Hertzog, et al 1968](#)). The differences were not believed to be due to differences in socio-economic level (although this was evidently not controlled), but in home experiences: focus on social interaction rather than tasks; age at which independence is expected; and regarding toys as entertainment rather than education. Such differences should be related to questions about cultural differences in values, stages in the life cycle and acquisition of roles, and perceptions of the nature of work and play.

It is obvious that children who learn to learn in one culture and then must learn in the modes of another must experience some confusion and dislocation in the process. They are unfamiliar with the school structure, the expectations of the teacher, and the classroom procedure. They may encounter very different values which are being considered essential for learning (i.e., cleanliness, attendance, and punctuality). They may find behaviors which they have been taught to follow suddenly and inexplicably penalized or rejected (e.g., not asking questions, not attempting to do what you are not sure of being able to do successfully, being very concerned for correctness even on a timed test). All of this is in addition to the communication problems they may be facing when their language is other than English and the social stress and culture shock they may be experiencing if, as with many Koreans or Southeast Asian or Pacific Island students, they have only recently immigrated to this country.

Many research projects have been designed to show what differences in cognitive styles are systematically related to particular social group membership and cultural practices (see [Cazden and Leggett, 1976](#)). The visual modality has been shown to be a relatively stronger learning style for Chinese and Native American students than for Puerto Ricans and Anglos (see [Stodolsky and Lesser 1967](#), [Cazden and John 1971](#), [John-Steiner and Osterreich 1975](#)), and there is considerable evidence that Mexican American students may be more field dependent (i.e., make more use of the overall context in, learning and processing information) than are Anglo students, who may be more field independent (see [Witkin 1967](#), [Cohen 1969](#), [Ramirez and Price-Williams 1974](#), [Ramirez and Castañeda 1974](#)).

There are cultural differences in teaching styles as well, although the acquisition of specific teaching skills during professional training is part of the socialization of educators to the subculture of the school. It is not at all certain that teachers from a similar cultural background to the students' will teach them more effectively, although research in this area is still far too sketchy to draw definite conclusions. It does seem clear, however, that all teachers would profit from greater understanding of differences in learning styles, and greater tolerance of differences. Particularly inappropriate for bicultural education are categorical claims about the best way to learn or teach *anything* (which are all too common in teacher training); the claim that 'children learn best by doing', for instance, is not true for all children. Cultural sensitivity and respect requires *relativism* and *flexibility* in teaching styles. Such eclecticism is nothing new as an option in pedagogy, but it is necessary, not optional, when teaching students from diverse sociocultural backgrounds.

Also clearly affecting learning are the attitudes and motivation of students and their parents, many of which are culture-specific. Cultural attitudes and values most assuredly affect teaching as well, since educators acquire these as members of their own cultural group, learn and generally adopt those of the dominant group where it is different, and have different attitudes and expectations toward students from different minority cultures.

Our educational goals are not limited to instructional objectives, but include the enculturation or socialization of children to values and expectations as well. This involves a weighty responsibility and requires careful thought, because, for good or ill, we often succeed. For example, accepting the goal 'success in school' often requires alienation from home, family, friends, and cultural heritage, and this is a terrible price to ask students to pay. We must learn to understand both the medium and the content of what we are teaching, and learn to be sensitive to the differences between what we are teaching and what the student brings to the classroom, so that our teaching becomes an aid and not a hindrance to the full realization of the student's potential as a human being.

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## Cultural Identity

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People are categorized by themselves and by others along a variety of dimensions: according to race primarily by skin color and other physical characteristics; according to social class by the amount of money they earn and where they live and work; and according to ethnicity by their national origin or ancestry, and their own feelings of group membership.

The dimension of race is in part biologically determined and in part socially defined, and social class is at least partly determined by environmental factors and partly by the constraints and opportunities which our social system permits. It is along the dimension of ethnicity that we in the United States are most clearly categorized according to cultural knowledge, behaviors, and identity.

Both adults and children have diverse attitudes about their cultural categorization, as perceived by them or by others. Most value their own group membership. Some reject their own group and wish to change. This is always a possibility in our society, using such means as education, marriage, or emigration (including just moving across town). Many may wish or need to function as members of more than one group and be 'bicultural'.

These diverse attitudes can all be viewed as positive forces, and all can be compatible with learning a second language and with other school achievement, but they are often viewed in a negative light. Those who value their own group membership and don't wish to acculturate to the dominant group may be treated as not 'well adjusted' to our society. Those who reject their own group and wish to change may be viewed as 'traitors' to family and old friends.

Those who wish to belong to more than one group may be mistrusted by both, and seen as 'spies'.

Whatever choice is made regarding group membership, language is often a key signal of identification, and this fact is critical in bilingual education. I am quite sure that students will have a better chance to reach their intellectual potential if early cognitive development continues in the native language, where the expanding reasoning processes can be most fully expressed and understood, but students must want to continue identification with their native culture if such native language development is to succeed. Students who want to change cultural identities generally also want to change their linguistic identification badge; such a shift before a critical level of first language competence has been achieved may result in 'semilingualism'<sup>[2]</sup> --full competence in no language.

I am also quite sure that students must learn English as a second language if they are to participate fully in the dominant society, but negative attitudes toward features of the dominant culture might well inhibit learning. Above all, this culture should not be perceived as threatening by students if their participation is really desired.

While dominant group membership should be an available option, it cannot be imposed. The task is to teach about the second culture, and how to operate within it effectively--without requiring changes in students' cultural identity and loyalty--and to develop positive feelings about both cultures.

To some extent I am expressing a personal conviction, but recent research supports these claims:

Psycholinguistic research... although only, now getting underway, indicates that the hyphenated American can perhaps most easily become fully and comfortably American if the Spanish, Polish, the Navajo or the French prefix is given unlimited opportunity to flourish ([Lambert 1975](#)).

Other studies which conclude that minority group students who have maintained cultural ties are more likely to succeed academically than those who have left their cultural ties are reported by Espinoza (1971), Romano, et al (1971), Ramírez and Castañeda (1974), and Valentine (1971).

Full biculturalism is probably a rare phenomenon, if by 'full biculturalism' we mean cultural knowledge, values, skills, and rules for appropriate conduct in all of the domains of two distinct cultures. A more reasonable goal for bicultural education may be the creation of a cultural state in students analogous to linguistic *diglossia* (first described by Ferguson 1959 and extended by Fishman 1972). The minority culture first learned by many limited English speakers in the United States is comparable to the 'Low' (L) variety of a language as it is described by Ferguson, and the dominant American culture to the 'High' (H) variety of a national language. Just as with Ferguson's L and H language varieties, the minority cultures are generally learned by children at home, the dominant one at school; the dominant culture has more prestige in the society than the minority ones; and most importantly for educational applications, there is a specialization of function for H and L language, for dominant and minority cultures. I have proposed that this relationship and distribution be called *dinomia* as it relates to varieties of culture. [3]

This concept has importance for teacher training and curriculum development because it recognizes the nature and viability of students' native culture, while at the same time providing for identification of the aspects of the dominant culture which need to be acquired for appropriate situations, and prediction of potential areas of cultural interference where there are conflicts or overlap between the two. All instruction which relates to developing and reinforcing positive feelings of individual and group identity should be based on such recognition and understanding.

A major hazard in teaching a second culture is that students may reject parts of their native culture without knowing or accepting comparable parts of the second, or that they will find themselves repeatedly facing cultural interference as the rules or values of one conflict with the other in a single situation or domain. When this happens, either one culture 'wins', or students must deal with emotional and cognitive stress.

As a target for bicultural education, *dinomia* emphasizes the acquisition of the dominant culture for minority group students in only those domains in which it is in minimal conflict with the minority culture, or in which is essential for 'success' in the dominant society: education and communication to be sure, and perhaps business/economics and politics as well. Values, beliefs, and behaviors of the dominant culture in such domains as religion and family life only need to be learned for passive recognition and understanding, but not necessarily adopted for active use. (The converse would be true for majority group students in a bilingual-bicultural program.) *Dinomia* requires the productive acquisition of only those elements of the second culture which could coexist in complementary distribution with those elements of the first culture which must be maintained by their students who choose to retain native cultural identity.

Bicultural education should be an enriching experience for all students, not a limiting or compensatory one; it should broaden the range of choice for cultural identity which students may one day make, but it should not make such choices for them, nor force unnecessary or premature decisions.

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## Culture Traits and Generalizations

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Many of us are uncomfortable when referring to or being identified as members of any special social group because of the stereotyping so frequently associated with such identification, and the pejorative connotations group labels may engender--including the label 'Anglo'. On the surface, at least, this discomfort with categorization is somewhat at odds with our positive views about 'cultural identity' in a more abstract sense. Identification with *which* culture(s)? With *what* beliefs, values, and behaviors (culture traits)? The fact that these traits operate primarily at an unconscious level--coupled with our hesitancy to make generalizations about cultural differences--probably explains the typical limitation of the cultural content of bilingual education to such superficial and relatively trivial phenomena as piñatas, rice boats, and folk dancing.

Our hesitancy to make cultural generalizations is justified. For example, the following list of characteristics of 'disadvantaged' or other 'culturally different' children is found in a textbook widely used for a course entitled Cultural Foundations of Education:

1. **Their parents are less likely to belong to or attend church.**
2. **They do not share the principle of cleanliness. "Water costs money or effort if it must be carried from an outdoor pump."**
3. **They do not understand the principles of saving.**
4. **They cannot put reason before emotion.**
5. **They are freer and more social in their expressions of sex.**
6. **They have not learned that doing one's duty and living up to the expectations of others pays off.**
7. **They believe the future is non-existent.**
8. **They believe education is an obstacle course to be surmounted until they can go to work.**

This exemplifies generalizations of a type which have no place at all in teacher training and classroom practices, except as examples of stereotyping. They are not culture traits at all, but negative statements of the values held by the stereotyper: attending church, cleanliness, thrift, sexual repression, future orientation, and the Golden Rule. These *positive* values might well be included in a list of traits for our dominant culture, but their expression in negative form says nothing about others. It does, however, say a great deal about the attitudes of the stereotyper toward the minority culture. [4]

Even some 'traits' which are supposed to be soundly based on educational research must be questioned for cultural bias. We are told, for instance, that American Indians have a low self concept. The Coleman report (1966) indicates that the pupil attitude factor has a stronger relation to achievement than all the 'school' factors together, and that Indian pupils in the twelfth grade have the lowest self concept of all minority groups tested. These data and similar interpretations of the Havighurst study (1970) have been widely accepted, but the low self concept is inferred largely from students' feelings that they have little or no control over their environment. However, many Indian cultures do not believe that actively controlling natural forces is desirable, or even reasonable. This research does not seem to take into account *Indian* perception of what constitutes a positive self concept, but rather evaluates the Indian self concept in terms of the values of the dominant culture.

Other conclusions about students' 'negative self image' may be equally ethnocentric when based on such 'evidence' as not knowing their birthdays. Children from some groups don't know their precise birth date because they have never celebrated it: it is not culturally important. Other dates may be emphasized instead.

Vietnamese children, for instance, traditionally add a year to their age at Tet, and many children from a Latin American heritage traditionally celebrate their saint's day instead.

A trait often attributed to Mexican American culture is non-competitiveness. 'They lead a peaceful rural existence and do not care to join the urban rat race. Nor is much attention paid to such competitive aspects of school as test scores and grades.'

A study of the cooperative vs. competitive behavior of Anglo, Black, Mexican American, and Mexican elementary school students ([Madsen and Shapira 1970](#)) shows the Anglos and Blacks most competitive, with Mexican Americans somewhat less but still much more so than the Mexicans. This may well be an urban/rural difference instead of an ethnic one, however, since the Mexican group was rural and only about twenty percent of the Mexican Americans in the Southwest still live in rural areas. It may also be a social class difference, since Wasserman ([1971](#)) reports more cooperative behavior among 'blue-collar children'--whether Mexican American, Black, or Anglo. Another study by Kagan and Madsen ([1971](#)) included four and five year old children and showed no differences at all at that age. Only three percent of the moves of each group in the test rated 'competitive', and no group behavioral differences appeared along this dimension until age seven to nine. Yet another study ([Del Campo 1970](#)) finds that Mexican American children score *higher* on competitive values than do Anglos.

I am also suspicious of the 'active-passive' distinction reported in educational research. A number of years ago I heard a well known Mexican psychologist report on his cross-cultural studies during a meeting at the National University in Mexico City. At the very time he was presenting his statistically impressive evidence that Mexicans are passive, the University was just beginning to recover from a full-scale student riot. His conclusions were drawn from the responses to such multiple-choice questions as, 'What would you do in case of an earthquake?' Texas Anglo students included in the study were judged 'active' for responding that they would run outside, while Mexicans were judged 'passive' for responding that they would stay inside. These responses prove only that Mexicans know more about earthquakes than do Texans. Californians, too, stay inside in doorways during an earthquake if they are in an area of tall buildings, and it usually takes only one such experience for children to learn such 'passivity'.

Yet another probable example of cultural bias in the interpretation of data results from the use of 'interaction analysis' (such as in the classroom observations reported by the Commission on Civil Rights 1973, which contrasted teacher 'positive responses' to Anglo vs. Mexican American students, and by Anglo vs. Mexican American teachers). Such studies are often questionable because they fail to recognize that assumptions as to what behavior constitutes a 'positive response' by a teacher to a student are themselves culture-bound and will not be the same for members of diverse cultural groups. Direct eye contact with the student may be positive, but it may be interpreted as aggressive or humiliating; smiling may be positive, but it may be derisive; touching may be positive, but it may be embarrassing or repugnant. Singling a student out for attention of any kind would not be considered a positive teacher response by a number of minority groups in the United States.

The kinds of cultural information which seem crucial for us to have, therefore, include answers to such questions as what constitutes a positive self image, and what behaviors will be interpreted as a positive teacher response. Because there are no 'canned' lists of culture traits which can be accepted out of band, teacher competencies for bicultural education must include first knowing the significant questions to ask about cultures and then knowing how to get the answers, as well as knowing how to use the cultural information for instructional purposes.

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## Questions to Ask About Culture

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This is not meant to be a definitive list of questions, but an indication of what general areas of culture might contain significant information for the teacher in a bilingual education program, together with illustrations of what kinds of specific questions might need answers and what their significance might be. The various aspects of culture do not have the same relative importance to people in different groups, but that is among the questions for which we need answers.

- 1. [General](#)
- 2. [Family](#)
- 3. [The Life Cycle](#)
- 4. [Roles](#)
- 5. [Interpersonal Relationships](#)
- 6. [Communication](#)
- 7. [Decorum and Discipline](#)
- 8. [Religion](#)
- 9. [Health and Hygiene](#)
- 10. [Food](#)
- 11. [Dress and Personal Appearance](#)
- 12. [History and Traditions](#)
- 13. [Holidays and Celebrations](#)
- 14. [Education](#)
- 15. [Work and Play](#)
- 16. [Time and Space](#)
- 17. [Natural Phenomena](#)
- 18. [Pets and Other Animals](#)
- 19. [Art and Music](#)
- 20. [Expectations and Aspirations](#)

### 1. GENERAL

- a. **What are the major stereotypes which you and others have about each cultural group? To what extent are these accepted by the group being typed?**
- b. **To what extent and in what areas has the traditional culture of each minority group changed in contact with the dominant American culture? In what areas has it been maintained?**
- c. **To what extent do individuals possess knowledge of or exhibit characteristics of traditional groups?**

These general questions must be kept in mind when asking questions about 'traditional' or 'typical' cultural beliefs or behaviors in all of the areas of culture which follow. While there are systematic differences between groups of people which we need to recognize and understand, we need to critically analyze all information for the effects of stereotyping, recognize the facts of acculturation, and be sensitive to individual differences. Otherwise there is a danger of merely adding to the stereotypes, of incorrectly identifying minority groups in the United States with ancestral groups in the country of origin, or generalizing what is 'typical' to all.

### 2. FAMILY

- a. **Who is in a 'family'? Who among these (or others) live in one house?**
- b. **What is the hierarchy of authority in the family?**
- c. **What are the rights and responsibilities of each family member? Do children have an obligation to work to help the family?**
- d. **What are the functions and obligations of the family in the larger social unit? To the school? To its individual members?**

- e. What is the relative importance of an individual family member vs. the family as a whole? What is the degree of solidarity or cohesiveness in the family?**

The family is the initial and often the primary socialization unit for the child, and many of the individual's most basic social perceptions and values are formed in that context. An understanding of the family structure and system of expected responsibilities, values, and behaviors is essential to the teacher, not only so that these may be realistically portrayed and reflected in the classroom, but also to provide a source of guidance in dealing with the child or the child's parents or guardians. Such knowledge can be helpful in anticipating and interpreting the behaviors or attitudes of the child or other family members in particular situations. In addition, it may serve as a point of departure or contrast in presenting information about family patterns in the majority culture. Teachers at all levels should be aware of the often very subtle presuppositions about family structure and responsibilities which pervade literary and even nonfictional writing, and can lead to misunderstandings or self-depreciation on the part of the student. Since family structure is so variable, particularly under circumstances of immigration and acculturation, individual differences (including those associated with social class) should be carefully determined. At the same time, differences between expressions of group 'norms' or 'ideals' and individual reality should be appropriately recognized.

### **3. THE LIFE CYCLE**

- a. What are criteria for the definition of stages, periods, or transitions in life?**
- b. What are attitudes, expectations, and behaviors toward individuals at different stages in the life cycle? What stage of life is most valued? What stage of life is most 'difficult'?**
- c. What behaviors are appropriate or unacceptable for children of various ages? How might these connect with behaviors taught or encouraged in the school?**
- d. How is language related to the life cycle?**
- e. How is the age of children computed? What commemoration is made of the child's birth (if any) and when?**

The stages in the life cycle, while to some extent biologically determined, are like all aspects of human existence, basically culturally defined. *When* one ceases to be a child, when and by what criteria one becomes an adult, how one is treated at different stages by members of other age groups, what one's privileges and responsibilities are at different stages, are quite different in different societies. It is not 'natural', for example, for children to be uninhibited and noisy--this is a product of socialization in a particular society. In many societies (e.g., Samoan), children already have significant economic responsibilities by the time they are seven. Stages recognized in one culture, e.g., teenage, may be absent in others. Adulthood may be defined by something other than age, such as marriage or becoming a parent. Attitudes and values regarding stages differ widely; in some cultures, sixty is the age of wisdom, in others of retirement. Passage from one stage to another may be totally unmarked in one society, and a major traumatic event in another. Stages may also differ by socioeconomic class, as may also the attention given to occasions of passage. Of particular significance for educational (and sometimes mental health) concerns is the fact that for groups undergoing rapid acculturation, such as Koreans or Arabs, there may be wrenching changes taking place in the traditional roles, relationships, and responsibilities of different stages in the life cycle, making them individually variable and causing great psychological stresses and strains.

### **4. ROLES**

- a. What roles within the group are available to whom, and how are they acquired? Is education relevant to this acquisition?**

- b. What is the knowledge of and perception by the child, the parents, and the community toward these roles, their availability, and possible or appropriate means of access to them?**
- c. Is language use important in the definition or social marking of roles?**
- d. Are there class differences in the expectations about child role attainment? Are these realistic?**
- e. Do particular roles have positive or malevolent characteristics?**

In addition to many other aspects of culture, the early socialization of children involves learning a role. Initial role acquisition includes learning what behaviors are appropriate (and expected) when relating to different members within the family, and then when relating to different classes of individuals within the wider social group. Most children find the new roles they assume when beginning school a fairly natural extension of their earlier socialization experiences, but for some, patterns of social interaction, which they have learned at home are not of value in the school context, and these children must acquire entirely new roles. Since the child's life aspirations are often based on roles recognized by the group, it is important for the teacher to know how these differ from or match roles which may be explicitly or implicitly taught in school. In addition, since children (and parents) from minority cultures often have limited experience with and understanding of majority culture roles and how to acquire them, the child's knowledge and perception of these matters should be examined also.

## **5. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

- a. Is language competence a requirement or qualification for group membership?**
- b. How do people greet each other? What forms of address are used between people in various roles?**
- c. Do girls work and interact with boys? Is it proper?**
- d. How is deference shown?**
- e. How are insults expressed?**
- f. Who may disagree with whom? Under what circumstances?**
- g. Are mitigating forms used?**

Mitigation techniques are different within different groups, and students may encounter many problems in our schools when they come from cultures that do not use the same ones that are accepted there. A middle-class child from the dominant culture has learned to avoid unpleasant tasks with such indirect excuses as 'I'm tired. Can't I do that later?', 'Can I finish this first?', or by dawdling or day dreaming until the time is up. While these techniques are often unsuccessful, the attempt brings no serious reproof. If a student has not learned these cultural strategies and says 'No, I don't,' or just 'No'--which have essentially the same meaning--he may be considered belligerent or rude, and threatened with the principal's office. Teachers must be perceptive as to how they themselves (as culturally conditioned beings) interpret and respond to violations of sociolinguistic expectations and recognize that such 'violations' may simply reflect cross-cultural differences in interactional rules and norms, not occasions for punishment.

## **6. COMMUNICATION**

- a. What languages, and varieties of each language, are used in the community? By whom? When? Where? For what purposes?**
- b. Which varieties are written, and how widespread is knowledge of written forms?**
- c. What are the characteristics of 'speaking well', and how do these relate to age, sex, context, or other social factors? What are the criteria for 'correctness'?**
- d. What roles, attitudes, or personality traits are associated with particular ways of speaking?**
- e. What range is considered 'normal' speech behavior? What is considered a speech defect?**

- f. **Is learning language a source of pride? Is developing bilingual competence considered an advantage or a handicap?**
- g. **What is the functionality of the native language in the work-place or larger environment?**
- h. **What gestures or postures have special significance or may be considered objectionable? What meaning is attached to direct eye contact? To eye avoidance?**
- i. **Who may talk to whom? When? Where? About what?**

There is no complete inventory of different social rules for language usage or of different attitudes toward language which may be consulted, but we must still consider both to be very important components of bilingual education; all aspects of culture involve communication. One very general difference concerns who should talk and when. The school supports the convention of talking one at a time (after raising a hand and being called on) and not interrupting; other cultures would consider that rude, a sure sign that no one was interested in what the primary speaker was saying. Some cultures feel it is inappropriate for children to talk at all in the presence of adults, and others that it is inappropriate to respond immediately to a question. The uses of silence differ, as do the contexts for the uses of different languages. Code-switching between English and the native language--actually a very complex linguistic skill--may be highly valued socially. No teacher in a bilingual program can afford not to have a thorough understanding of the status and uses of languages in the local community.

## **7. DECORUM AND DISCIPLINE**

- a. **What is decorum? How important is it for the individual and for the group?**
- b. **What is discipline? What counts as discipline in terms of the culture, and what doesn't? What is its importance and value?**
- c. **What behaviors are considered socially unacceptable for students of different age and sex?**
- d. **Who or what is considered responsible if a child misbehaves? The child? Parents? Older siblings? School? Society? The environment? Or is no blame ascribed?**
- e. **Who has authority over whom? To what extent can one person's will be imposed on another? By what means?**
- f. **How is the behavior of children traditionally controlled, to what extent, and in what domains?**
- g. **Do means of social control vary with recognized states in the life cycle, membership in various social categories, or according to setting or offense?**
- h. **What is the role of language in social control? What is the significance of using the first vs. the second language?**

The choice of a language for controls and directions is important in a bilingual program, with English often perceived by students as milder than their home language; at the same time, students from other backgrounds may interpret the normal classroom projection level of English as a signal of anger, even when none is intended. Attempts by teachers to get parents to force children to do their homework or attend school may prove futile if the concept of coercion conflicts with basic cultural values. The desired ends may be achieved, not by imposing the will of the teacher or the school on the parent or child, but by cooperating with other effective mechanisms employed in the child's culture.

## **8. RELIGION**

- a. **What is considered sacred and what secular?**
- b. **What religious roles and authority are recognized in the community?**
- c. **What is the role of children in religious practices? What are they supposed to know or not to know about the religion?**

- d. **What should an outsider *not* know, or *not* acknowledge knowing?**
- e. **What taboos are there? What should *not* be discussed in school; what questions should *not* be asked; what student behaviors should not be required?**
- f. **Are there any external signs of participation in religious rituals (e.g., ashes, dress, marking)?**
- g. **Are dietary restrictions to be observed, including fasting, on particular occasions?**
- h. **Are there any prescribed religious procedures or forms of participation if there is a death in the family? What taboos are associated with death and the dead?**

Violations of beliefs and practices in this area of culture probably result in the most serious conflicts which occur between home and school. Forcing a child to wash 'dirt' off his face (when it had ritual significance), bringing human bones to class for a science lesson, and insisting that children eat lunch during a period of a prescribed religious fast are all examples of very real mistakes made by teachers who did not understand the religion of their students.

## **9. HEALTH AND HYGIENE**

- a. **Who or what is believed to cause illness or death (e.g., the 'germ theory' vs. supernatural or other causes)?**
- b. **Who or what is responsible for curing?**
- c. **How are specific illnesses treated? To what extent do individuals utilize or accept 'modern' medical practices by doctors and other health professionals?**
- d. **What beliefs, taboos, and practices are associated with menstruation and the onset of puberty?**
- e. **What are beliefs regarding conception and childbirth?**
- f. **What beliefs or practices are there with regard to bodily hygiene (e.g., bathing frequency and purpose)?**
- g. **If a student were involved in an accident at school, would any of the common first aid practices be unacceptable?**

Most cultures have traditional concepts regarding the body, health, illness, and curing which are based in part on the accumulation of practical experience and in part on often profound philosophical and religious beliefs. The cooperation and support of the local community in a bilingual program may depend upon the evidence of respect and acceptance of these beliefs and practices, many of which are in fact demonstrably efficacious. At the same time, lack of understanding by parents of the cause and spread of certain diseases creates a need for culturally sensitive communication to ensure appropriate treatment (including quarantine for infectious diseases, regular administration of prescribed medication, etc.). In addition, an adequate understanding of traditional concepts may be necessary for the adequate diagnosis of illness.

## **10. FOOD**

- a. **What is eaten? In what order? How often?**
- b. **What foods are favorites? What taboo? What 'typical'?**
- c. **What rules are observed during meals regarding age and sex roles within the family, the order of serving, seating, utensils, used, and appropriate verbal formulas (e.g., bow, and if, one may request, refuse, or thank)?**
- d. **What social obligations are there with regard to food giving, preparation, reciprocity, and honoring people?**
- e. **What relation does food have to health? What medicinal uses are made of food, or categories of food?**

**f. What are the taboos or prescriptions associated with the handling, offering, or discarding of food?**

Food--including the very definition of what does and what does not constitute food--is of enormous social, symbolic, and economic importance in all cultures. The exchange of food and conditions on its exchange form a central theme in some cultures, and major social values are built around it in others. In many cultures it even has religious significance, often as expressed in taboos on consumption or prescribed use in ceremonies. The rules for the eating of food may significantly reflect and provide a means of maintaining the social order. The growing realization that some of the nutritional concepts of the majority culture (such as drinking milk) may be deleterious to certain groups or individuals underscores the cultural basis of nutritional science. Textbooks should be examined for ways in which their portrayal of food may conflict with community values.

## **11. DRESS AND PERSONAL APPEARANCE**

- a. **What clothing is 'typical'? What is worn for special occasions? What seasonal differences are considered appropriate?**
- b. **What significance does dress have for group identity?**
- c. **How does dress differ for age, sex, and social class?**
- d. **What restrictions are imposed for 'modesty' (e.g., can girls wear shorts, or shower in the gym)?**
- e. **What is the concept of beauty, or attractiveness? How important is physical appearance in the culture? What characteristics are most valued?**
- f. **What constitutes a 'compliment', and what form should it take (e.g., in traditional Latin American culture, telling a woman she is getting fat is a compliment)?**
- g. **Does the color of dress have symbolic significance (e.g., black vs. white for mourning)?**

Since dress and personal appearance are for the most part readily observable, most of the questions raised are fairly easy to answer. Despite this fact, however, probably more cross-cultural communication 'misfires' take place in this area than any other. In part this is because the values underlying dress and appearance are not as easily discovered, leaving the superficial aspects highly susceptible to misinterpretation and stereotyping, and in part because no other aspect of a person's behavior (except perhaps speech) is so strongly tied to self image and group identity. The significance of this area makes it one which teachers and administrators need to thoroughly understand. At the same time, it is an area for which textbooks need to be examined for implicit cultural bias.

## **12. HISTORY AND TRADITIONS**

- a. **What individuals and events in history are a source of pride for the group?**
- b. **To what extent is knowledge of the group's history preserved?**
- c. **In what forms and in what ways is it passed on?**
- d. **To what extent is there a literate tradition of the history of the group (i.e., written history, and knowledge of written history within the group itself)?**
- e. **To what extent are traditions and historical events reflected in aphorisms and proverbs?**
- f. **Do any ceremonies or festive occasions reenact historical events?**
- g. **How and to what extent does the group's knowledge of history coincide with or depart from 'scientific' theories of creation, evolution, and historical development?**
- h. **To what extent does the group in the United States identify with the history and traditions of their country of origin?**
- i. **What changes have taken place in the country of origin since the group or individuals emigrated?**

**j. For what reasons and under what circumstances did the group or individuals come to the United States (or did the United States come to them)?**

Prior to the spread of mass public education in this century, the majority of people in most countries were totally or largely illiterate, and possessed little knowledge of the history or cultural achievements of their country or ethnic group. Among native groups on this continent and elsewhere who lacked a means of graphically representing their languages, knowledge of historical events rarely extended back more than a few generations and, beyond that point, merged into myth. Even with compulsory public education and a highly literate population in the U.S. today, actual knowledge of history on the part of most people is minimal and of literature and art even less. Viewed against such a background, it should not be surprising that many members of minority groups in the U.S., drawn as they have been primarily from uneducated peasant stock, possess little knowledge of the history of their country of origin, or of its literary and artistic monuments. Immigrant farm workers from Mexico do not revel in the glory of 16th century Spanish literature any more than Anglo farm workers in the Midwest take rapturous delight in Shakespeare. These realities must be kept carefully in mind if the absurdities of the 'romantic fallacy' are to be avoided. Many bilingual education curricula commit the error of introducing historical and literary-artistic content of questionable relevance from a group's country of origin, and totally ignore the history and achievements of the group within the U.S. The effect of the romantic fallacy is to produce a curriculum which is irrelevant to the actual background and experiences of the students in the program. The questions above are designed to provide a more realistic basis for the treatment of this area in the curriculum.

### **13. HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS**

- a. **What holidays and celebrations are observed by the group and individuals?**
- b. **What is their purpose (e.g., political, seasonal, religious, didactic)?**
- c. **Which are especially important for children and why?**
- d. **What cultural values do they intend to inculcate?**
- e. **What aspects of socialization/enculturation do they further?**
- f. **Do parents and students know and understand school holidays and behavior appropriate for them (including appropriate non-attendance)?**

Holidays and celebrations are among the most obvious aspects of a culture, and for that reason are readily adopted by schools attempting to be 'bicultural'. However, often only the most superficial aspects of the celebrations are imported into the school context, and there is great danger that they may be distorted in the process, or that the incorporation of the activities in the curriculum may be taken to satisfy the need for minority cultural content, and so prevent the inclusion of much more basic and important aspects of culture. Worse yet, the observance of celebrations may reinforce the stereotypic misconception that this is all there is to the other culture. Hence great care should be taken to learn the true significance of such events, and their function within the context of *the student's own culture and community* (not just that of some foreign country). Some aspects of some celebrations, including songs, belong to the home or other locale and should not be brought into the school. Among Native American groups, certain songs or dances are of a sacred nature and should never be performed by the wrong persons or at the wrong time of year. Conversely, parents may not understand the meaning of American holidays, and especially why school may be closed, so these matters must be carefully taught, and communicated to the parents as well as the students.

### **14. EDUCATION**

- a. **What is the purpose of education?**
- b. **What kinds of learning are favored (e.g., rote, inductive)?**

- c. **What methods for teaching and learning are used at home (e.g., modeling and imitation, didactic stories and proverbs, direct verbal instruction)?**
- d. **Do methods of teaching and learning vary with recognized stages in the life cycle? With the setting? According to what is being taught or learned?**
- e. **What is the role of language in learning and teaching?**
- f. **Is it appropriate for students to ask questions or volunteer information? If so, what behaviors signal this? If not, what negative attitudes does it engender?**
- g. **What constitutes a 'positive response' by a teacher to a student? By a student to a teacher?**
- h. **How many years is it considered 'normal' for children to go to school?**
- i. **Are there different expectations by parents, teachers, and students with respect to different groups? In different subjects? For boys vs. girls?**

Although our educational system most closely represents the culture of our mainstream middle-class population, it has developed some attitudes, values, and expectations in its own right which set it apart as a subculture within our society in these respects. Successful advancement in the system quite naturally requires adoption of or adaptation to these concepts. Educators must be seen from this perspective as successfully acculturated (since they must have adapted themselves to the subculture in order to complete the years of training for certification); they are transmitters of these attitudes, values, and expectations to the next generation so that it, too, may 'achieve' in school. It is a self-perpetuating cycle.

Educators must therefore learn about their own system of learning and realize that education does not have the same ends and means for members of different social groups. Stereotypes result if we assume that other systems of education are less advanced, or the students who don't succeed in our particular system are 'deficient' in some respect. Since students learn how to learn from their families in early childhood, cultural differences are very well established by kindergarten or first grade.

## **15. WORK AND PLAY**

- a. **What range of behaviors are considered 'work' and what play'?**
- b. **What kinds of work are prestigious and why?**
- c. **Why is work valued (e.g., financial gain, group welfare, individual satisfaction, promotion of group cohesiveness, fulfillment or creation of obligations to/from others, position in the community)?**
- d. **Are there stereotypes about what a particular group will do?**
- e. **What is the purpose of play (e.g., to practice social roles, skills training, muscle development and coordination)?**

Play is often not valued positively in our culture, but is counterpoised to the serious business of life, which we call work. Nevertheless, as anthropologists have shown, what is thought of as play may have a strong educational function aimed at developing certain patterns of socialization. In addition, what may superficially appear to an outside observer to be play may have a serious religious purpose. The system of rewards associated with the attainment of particular roles or the fulfillment of various kinds of activities may differ considerably between cultural groups or even between social classes, and are subject to change over time or under conditions of acculturation. The teacher should be familiar with these factors, particularly in implementing a career education program, to minimize cross-cultural conflict and maximize effective learning.

## **16. TIME AND SPACE**

- a. **What beliefs or values are associated with concepts of time? How important is 'punctuality'? Speed**

- of performance when taking a test?**
- b. Is control or prescriptive organization of children's time required (e.g., must homework be done before watching TV, is 'bedtime' a scheduled event)?**
  - c. Are particular behavioral prescriptions or taboos associated with the seasons (e.g., not singing certain songs in the summertime or a snake will bite, not eating oysters when there is an R in the month)?**
  - d. Is there a seasonal organization of work or other activities?**
  - e. What is acceptable presence or grouping of individuals (e.g., do children stay with adults and listen or go outside)?**
  - f. How do individuals organize themselves spatially in groups (e.g., in rows, circles, around tables, on the floor, in the middle of the room, around its circumference)?**
  - g. What is the spatial organization of the home (e.g., areas allotted to children or open to children, appropriate activities in various areas of the home)?**
  - h. What geo-spatial concepts, understandings, and beliefs exist in the group or are known to individuals?**
  - i. What is the knowledge and significance of cardinal directions (North, South, East, West)? At what age are these concepts acquired?**
  - j. What significance is associated with different directions or places (e.g., heaven is up, people are buried facing West)?**

The organization of time and space is of enormous significance in most cultures, and one of the most frequent areas for cross-cultural conflict or misunderstanding, in large part because it is so often unconscious. Edward T. Hall (1959) has even referred to it as 'the silent language' in the title of his book by that name. In particular, the teacher cannot assume that many of the concepts and attitudes regarding time and space (including personal space) held by the majority culture can be taken for granted, but must be explicitly taught. At the same time, a knowledge of the concepts and attitudes of the minority group regarding time and space is important, since it must form a point of departure in teaching, and is essential if the teacher is to recognize when students (or their parents) are following the rules of their own culture for appropriate behavior, so as to avoid penalizing them for apparent infraction of rules they do not know.

## **17. NATURAL PHENOMENA**

- a. What beliefs and practices are associated with the sun and moon (including eclipses and phases of the moon), comets, and stars?**
- b. Who or what is responsible for rain, lightning, thunder, earthquakes, droughts, floods, and hurricanes?**
- c. Are particular behavioral prescriptions or taboos associated with natural phenomena? What sanctions are there against individuals violating restrictions or prescriptions?**
- d. What means are there for obviating the negative effects of natural phenomena?**
- e. How and to what extent does the group's beliefs about these phenomena coincide with or depart from 'scientific' theories?**
- f. To what extent are traditional group beliefs still held by individuals within the community?**

Science is sometimes considered a culturally neutral area of the curriculum, but many of the topics taught under that label are loaded with culture-specific beliefs, values, and behavioral rules. While many students succeed in keeping the theories learned at home and school compartmentalized so they may 'believe' both concurrently, with one or the other called to consciousness depending on the context and even the language being used, many others find this area of the curriculum a source of cultural conflict and confrontation. Whenever such conflict can be anticipated, or when students question a scientific theory on the basis of

teachings from home and community, the teacher should not hesitate to say that while the school theories are believed by many, there are also many who disagree (which is quite true). Above all, the teacher should not convey the impression that there is only one explanation for natural phenomena, or that people who hold differing views are stupid or superstitious. Even scientists today are increasingly becoming aware of the extent to which culture affects their concepts and perceptions. Science, as a cultural phenomenon itself, can never be entirely culture-free.

## **18. PETS AND OTHER ANIMALS**

- a. **Which animals are valued, and for what reasons?**
- b. **Which animals are considered appropriate as pets; which are inappropriate, and why?**
- c. **Are particular behavioral prescriptions or taboos associated with particular animals?**
- d. **Are any animals of religious significance? Of historical importance?**
- e. **Are there seasonal restrictions on talking about or depicting certain animals (e.g., except when hibernating, during hunting season)?**
- f. **What attitudes are held toward other individuals or groups which have different beliefs and behaviors with respect to animals?**
- g. **Which animals may be kept in the classroom? Which may not, and why?**

The typical social studies unit on pets begins with the ethnocentric assumption that everyone considers the same species of animals to be appropriate for this category. The most serious cultural violations occur in cases where particular animals have religious significance, and where even talking or reading about them is restricted or prohibited. Less serious, though unpleasant, are the negative attitudes which may be directed toward the teacher who expresses fondness for cats or dogs, for instance, which are considered 'unclean' in some other cultures. Again, information on cultural differences is essential.

## **19. ART AND MUSIC**

- a. **What forms of art and music are most highly valued?**
- b. **What media and instruments are traditionally used?**
- c. **What conventions are of particular significance? How do artistic conventions differ from those used or taught in school (e.g., the musical scale, two-dimensional representation of distance or depth)?**
- d. **Is the creation of art and music limited to specialists, or within the competence of a wide range of individuals in the community?**
- e. **What forms of art and music are considered appropriate for children to perform or appreciate?**
- f. **Are there any behavioral prescriptions or taboos related to art and music (e.g., can both men and women sing, does cutting faces in pumpkins or other fruits and vegetables violate religious concepts)?**
- g. **How and to what extent may approval or disapproval be expressed?**

Most serious conflicts in this area of the curriculum, as in others, occur when religious restrictions are violated. These range from depiction of the human form to the 'desecration' of living things (as in cutting jack-o-lantern faces or stringing berries). Artistic conventions are very important for the interpretation of any tests which make use of pictures, adding to their potential for cultural bias. Each culture has prescribed conventions for both art and music, and no experience which is outside the bounds of those conventions will be recognized or appreciated as 'art'. Receptive appreciation of culturally different conventions may be cultivated, but truly satisfying aesthetic experience is probably limited to the range of conventions which has been internalized as part of socialization. Of course, in art as in all else, it is essential to avoid stereotyping the individual, particularly in minority groups undergoing rapid acculturation.

## 20. EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS

- a. **What defines the concepts of 'disadvantaged' and 'successful'?**
- b. **To what extent is it possible or proper for an individual to express future goals (e.g., is it appropriate to ask, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?')**
- c. **What beliefs are held regarding 'luck' and 'fate'?**
- d. **What significance does adherence to the traditional culture of the group have for the individual's potential achievement (from both the viewpoint of the minority and dominant cultures)?**
- e. **What significance does the acquisition of the majority culture and the English language have (from both minority and dominant cultural perceptions)?**
- f. **What potential roles are available within the native community which can provide individual fulfillment and satisfaction?**
- g. **Do parents expect and desire assimilation of children to the dominant culture as a result of education and the acquisition of English?**
- h. **Are the attitudes of community members and individuals the same as or different from those of community spokesmen?**

One of the primary rationales for bilingual education is the enhancement of minority students' self-image, but little attention is given to the cultural relativity of that concept. Adopting dominant values for personal 'success' and 'fulfillment' is usually a late stage in the process of acculturation; dominant-culture expectations and aspirations should never be assumed of children who are still primarily under the enculturation influences of the home, and they should never be imposed on individuals who choose to find their own fulfillment and satisfaction within the native community. More members of minority groups today are seeking to find fulfillment within their traditional communities, and the expectation that success is to be measured in the context of the larger society--which is implicit or subtly present in much school text materials, tests, and teacher attitudes or behaviors--can have the strong and dysfunctional effect of contributing to a sense of *anomie* or failure on the part of the student.

To reiterate, education is not just formal schooling, but includes all of the formal and informal procedures for transmitting the knowledge and values of a group from one generation to another, whether in the form of telling stories and proverbs in the family or holding organized classes to teach factual or technical information. Similarly, preferred styles of learning may be present among certain groups or in particular contexts. Trial and error learning, the cornerstone of our educational methodology (including the use of tests), may be antithetical to students' cultural values and have dysfunctional results because it causes embarrassment by forcing students to demonstrate knowledge or skill mastery before they are ready. Traditional education in some cultures may be primarily religious in orientation, or may have the important function of supporting the maintenance of social structures or values which are at variance with those taught in the majority-culture secular public school. The potential conflicts which may arise in bicultural situations clearly need to be recognized if the students' educational experience is to be positive, and consonant with the expectations and desires of the parents and the community.

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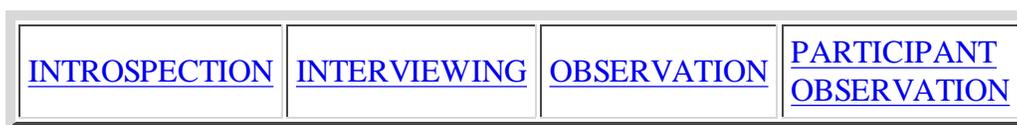
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## Getting the Answers: Suggestions for Teacher Training

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The most important steps in getting answers to the kinds of questions about culture which may yield significant information for the bilingual classroom are **1)** recognizing that the beliefs, values, and behaviors which are questioned are part of culture, **2)** being sensitive to the probability that there will be diverse responses whenever such questions are asked of people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and **3)** accepting the fact that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers--just differences. Securing information about one's own or another culture requires some degree of objectivity and openness; anyone who does not accept the reality and validity of cultural differences as a general concept is not ready for experiences in cultural data collection and interpretation. A strongly ethnocentric or culturally insensitive person might well offend those from whom data are to be collected and thus hinder, rather than further, the goals of bilingual education.

The basic data collection skills which should be developed are *introspection*, *interviewing*, *observation*, and *participant observation*. Selection among procedures will be dependent on the teacher's relation to the group in question, the cultural topic, and the situation or context within which the information is being collected.



*Introspection* is a means for data collection only about one's own culture, but it is an important skill to develop for that purpose. This is important not only for data collection per se, but for establishing the fact that everyone has a culture, and that questions about various aspects of culture require answers from the perspectives of the teacher's own culture (and that of the school) as well as the culture(s) of the students. Teachers who are themselves bicultural need to differentiate between beliefs, values, and behaviors which were part of their enculturation (first culture learning) and acculturation (second culture learning or adaptation). This exercise in itself will provide valuable information and insights on the group and on individuals.

The most productive means for developing this skill in a training program is to ask individuals to formulate very specific answers from their own experience to various questions about culture. A second step is to recognize the significance of differences between answers which reflect cultural 'ideals' or norms, and the 'real', or what actually occurs. This distinction between the 'ideal' and the 'real'--long familiar to anthropologists--is not a matter of truth versus falsehood, and should not be put in a negative light. Rather it is a recognition of the differences between abstract normative rules and specific behaviors. A useful analogy may be drawn with the question of what drivers do when they encounter a stop sign: the 'ideal' answer is that they always stop; the 'real' specific behaviors show that slowing (but not completely stopping) is a common response. Distinguishing between 'ideal' and 'real' behaviors is an important stage in viewing culture objectively. Responses to questions about culture will usually be in 'ideal' terms, and learning the 'ideal' answers is an important part of the formal education of group members. 'Real' behaviors are more often acquired by informal modeling, and are more likely to occur at an unconscious level where they may be difficult for individuals to consciously recognize.

Group discussion is the next stage in teacher training, with members of the same cultural groups comparing answers, and members of different groups contrasting them and trying to identify potential areas of interference for students who might come from similar cultural backgrounds to their own. Again, it is critical

to remember that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to questions about culture, since individual perceptions, conceptions, and behaviors may always be expected to differ to some extent.

**Interviewing** is the next skill to be developed, beginning with the questions about culture which are to be discussed by the group of teachers in training. It includes developing a sensitivity to signs that a question is making someone uncomfortable in some way. Such questions should never be pursued directly when the interviewing context advances to asking questions of students, parents, or other community members; interviewing a friend and colleague under such circumstances may allow an opportunity to discover sensitive cultural information, but questions should not be pushed when there is any sign of discomfort, even with someone who is quite close. One of the most valuable contributions which teachers can make to each other in the intragroup training stage of interviewing is an overt statement of such discomfort, as 'That's too personal', or 'I'd rather not answer that kind of question'.

Interviewing of students or parents should first be conducted as limited and closely supervised activities. Answers to specific and non-threatening, non-personal questions should be elicited and compared in the group. Tape recorders should generally not be used during interviews about culture unless the interviewer has already established trustworthiness and credibility, and a recorder should *never* be used without the knowledge and consent of the person or group being questioned.

Questions that might be asked of students at this stage are:

- **Who is in your family?**
- **Who lives in your house?**
- **What language do you usually use with \_? (Repeat for each person in the house.)**
- **What is your favorite food?**
- **What do you usually eat for breakfast? For dinner?**
- **What holiday do you think is most important? Why?**

It is important to be sensitive even when asking such questions as these; no questions about culture are guaranteed to be 'neutral'. Family membership and house occupants may be considered sensitive topics if dominant marriage customs are not being followed, and very threatening if undocumented aliens are present in the home. Questions on food may be very sensitive if students have already been taught at school what they *should* be eating at home. Many minority group members report having had strong feelings of guilt or shame as students when their family meals differed greatly from what was on the charts used for Health lessons in school. In any case, 'ideal' answers should always be accepted without challenge, even when they seem to be unrealistic. This is a clue that an area of cultural or individual sensitivity may have been broached.

Parents might be asked:

- **What do you think is most important for your child to learn at school? Why?**
- **What else is it important for him to know?**
- **What holidays or celebrations are most important? Why?**
- **Has your child ever been sick? What are you supposed to do when someone has \_\_\_? (Repeat for any illnesses mentioned.)**

Many other questions may best be answered by interviewing, but the selection of informants is very important when you begin to touch on potentially more sensitive questions. Someone well known to the interviewer, fully accepted by the community, and well informed about traditional beliefs and practices is ideal. Interviewing a small group rather than a single individual may yield more reliable information, although an interviewer who is not a member of that cultural group may find it more difficult to elicit sensitive information from a group than from an individual. In any case, any information which is given confidentially must be kept

in confidence. Part of what must be determined by individual teachers is what cultural content should *not* be included in the curriculum or shared with others.

**Observation** is a primary method of data collection used by anthropologists, and ultimately of great value to teachers as well. The first steps in developing the skill require reporting observable behaviors without imposing value judgments or drawing conclusions, but more advanced steps involve making inferences about such unseeable aspects of culture as beliefs and values from the behaviors or things which are observed. The key to successful observation and inference is freeing oneself as much as humanly possible from the filter of one's own cultural experience (remembering that the possibilities for self-delusion are great). This requires cultural relativism, knowledge about cultural differences, and sensitivity and objectivity in perceiving others. Observation is often aided in educational training by check lists, including scales for 'interaction analysis', but most of these begin with a cultural bias by having observers rate occurrences of 'positive response', etc., without first determining what -, positive response would be in the culture being observed. These should not be used in multicultural contexts without critical analysis for cultural bias.

When observing in classrooms, it is often useful to note differential behavior of students from dominant and minority groups, or of a student considered 'well adjusted' by the teacher versus one with 'problems'. While the quantification of observational data may be useful for some purposes, the basic tasks to be emphasized here are *description* and *contrastive analysis*.

Observational exercises for teachers developing this skill might take the following form:

1. **What question is to be answered?** (e.g., *How do individuals organize themselves spatially in groups?*  
In the case of this question, behaviors are often best recorded in the form of a diagram indicating the location and/or pattern of movement of those being observed in relation to others in the same setting.)
2. **Who is being observed?** (List one or more individuals or groups, identifying by age, sex, role, and group membership.)
3. **Where?** (e.g., Setting: classroom, playground, home.)
4. **In what situation and event?** (e.g., In the classroom: reading lesson, committee project, or 'free' activity.)
5. **What is being done/not done?** (By whom, to whom, in what manner, for what purpose, in what relation to other events?)

One observer answering this question in a bilingual kindergarten classroom noted that all of the Anglo children in the class were seated around tables during unstructured art activities, while all but one of the Latino children seated themselves in small groups on the floor, in close proximity. In one junior high social studies class I observed in which seating was student-selected, all and only Chinese students were in the two rows on the left side of the room, all and only Blacks were in the back of the middle and right two rows, and all and only Anglos were in the front of the middle and right rows. Much can reasonably be inferred about interaction patterns from such observational data, and more integrative classroom procedures suggested and evaluated on such bases--if integration is an educational goal.

Other questions which lend themselves to analysis from observational data are:

- **How do people greet each other? What forms of address are used between people in various roles?**
- **Do girls interact with boys?**
- **How is deference shown?**
- **How are insults expressed?**
- **Who may talk to whom? When? Where? About what?**
- **How does dress differ for age, sex, and social class?**
- **What methods for teaching and learning are used at home?**

Still other questions may be answered on the basis of observational data, but require an additional level of inference and interpretation. These include:

- **What is the hierarchy of authority in the family?**
- **Who has authority over whom? To what extent can one person's will be imposed on another? By what means?**
- **What is the role of language in social control?**
- **What constitutes a 'positive response' by a teacher to a student? By a student to a teacher?**

In these cases, observation should be combined with interviews of group members before interpretations can be considered at all reliable; hasty generalizations only add to the already abundant store of stereotypes.

Observation of student and teacher behaviors in the classroom or on the playground is easy to effect, but great care and tact should be exercised when behaviors are to be observed or interviews conducted in students' homes or elsewhere in the community. Willingness on the part of teachers to visit students' homes does not insure they will be welcome there, and the presence of an outsider in any case is likely to influence behaviors to a degree that makes observation of natural conditions very difficult. Prolonged contact with the community is generally necessary before observations in that context may be considered reliable.

With the involvement and consent of community members, however, cultural training should include guided information-gathering trips into the students' home area to observe, ask questions, test interaction techniques and reactions, and participate in community activities relating to the students. Other cultural training activities at this level might include preparation of behavioral profiles of culturally diverse students observed in demonstration classes or on video tape, objectively describing their language use, their non-linguistic interaction techniques, and their styles of coping and learning. This exercise should be followed by discussion and comparison of observations and interpretations among the teachers, with a leader who is trained and experienced in cross-cultural observation, and with one or more members of the other cultural group(s) being observed who have seen the same demonstration class or tape. Also useful is role-playing in assuming the role of parents or students in different cultural groups under different (staged) circumstances, again followed by supervised discussion of the interpretations.

**Participant-observation** skills must be developed by teachers in order to collect data in situations in which they are themselves taking part, including data on their own behaviors in relation to others. In these cases the use of a tape recorder can be an aid in reconstructing the event for description, as can videotaping when available. Also very valuable is team observation, where teachers take turns visiting each other's classes and comparing observations.

Teachers should also make a conscious effort to practice participant-observation skills within their own cultural group, whether dominant or subordinate in the larger society, and in the subculture of the school. Answers to the questions about culture which were arrived at in the earliest stages of training through introspection should be tested and expanded by teachers observing behaviors in themselves, family, and friends.

**Contrastive analysis** may simply involve a comparison of responses to questions about culture, and a search for systematic and consistent differences between cultural groups. Robert Lado (1957) suggests a model for contrasting aspects of culture which is quite relevant to educational purposes. He suggests that aspects of culture (as language) which are entirely different are less likely to cause interference and cultural misunderstanding than those which are similar on the surface but differ significantly in other ways. Three types of cultural difference which might predictably cause problems are:

1. Same form, different meaning.

Very similar (even the same) overt behaviors may have very different meanings in different cultures. Hissing, for example, means disapproval in the United States, but asks for group silence in Spanish-speaking countries; in Turkey, it may be a means of calling a cat. Silence, or lack of verbal response, in a conversation may mean agreement, disagreement, anger, insult, politeness, or deference, depending on the cultural context.

## 2. Same meaning, different form.

Depending on the culture, the meaning of 'positive acceptance of a student by a teacher' might take the form of singling that student out for praise, of teasing, or of paying no apparent attention to the student at all. Students from different cultures requesting a teacher's attention might raise their hand, snap their fingers, or merely wait with an expectant posture.

## 3. Same form, same meaning, different distribution.

The same behaviors expressing the same meaning, such as cooperation on school assignments, may have culturally different contexts in which they are appropriate or inappropriate. The same 'cooperative' behavior, for example, may be considered 'cheating, on some occasions. Another type of problem in this category relates to social distribution, when the same form and meaning may hold for an aspect of culture across groups, but only for a restricted segment of one or both of the populations.

Different cultural groups often behave toward each other in accordance with the stereotypes they hold. To return to the general questions about culture which should pervade all data collection and analysis, we need to critically analyze all information for the effects of stereotyping, recognize the facts of acculturation, and be sensitive to individual differences.

The methods for getting answers which I have been discussing should be developed primarily through field-based training, but formal training in classes, workshops, and seminars can contribute to an understanding of cultural relativity as well, primarily by illustrating the great variety of beliefs, values, and behaviors which can and do occur in diverse cultures of the world. While no sets of culture traits described may be assumed to exactly fit any particular group of students, an awareness of the range of possibilities can help teachers think more flexibly about alternative life-ways, and thus ultimately be better prepared to recognize and accept the cultural diversity they encounter among their students. Course activities should include learning about the possible range of responses which might be given to questions such as those given earlier. The training program should include many specific examples from written sources or the experiences of the course instructor, participating teachers or teacher-trainees, and invited guests.

While printed lists of cultural traits cannot be accepted without question, the guided and critical analysis of such lists in group contexts may be useful in developing skills for recognizing stereotypes and cultural bias. Lists of dominant American culture traits, such as those prepared for the training of foreign service personnel, should be included for discussion.<sup>[5]</sup>

Some programs include 'cultural sensitivity' sessions of one kind or another, but these should be approached critically, and with great caution, inasmuch as they have the potential for doing more harm than good, or for creating a very superficial sense of understanding. The concept is a very important one, since having awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge about culture also entails being able to recognize cultural influences on oneself and others. All of us know that we have culture, but seldom do we recognize that this culture determines much of our own thinking and behavior. It is precisely because our culture is so much a part of us that it controls us at a subconscious level, unless we are trained to be conscious of its influence.

The potential hazard of 'cultural sensitivity training' is that it may be limited to the 'I'm O.K., you're O.K.'

variety, which may merely serve to reinforce naive ethnocentrism. True cultural sensitivity training means learning to observe cultural patterns and learning how to respond to them appropriately; it does not deal just with attitudes, but involves training in ethnographic, observational techniques and changes in unconscious microbehaviors. It is an active process which has relevance for curriculum development, classroom practices, and testing.

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## Applications of Cultural Information in Instruction, Curriculum, and Evaluation

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Information about culture can be applied in many aspects of bilingual education, including the three to be discussed here: instruction (or classroom practices), curriculum, and evaluation. There are two primary ways in which, cultural information should be taken into account in each of these areas, and one kind of application without the other would not, result in bicultural education.

1. The student's native culture should be accepted and accommodated to the extent possible; the teacher, indeed the whole educational system, should seek to expand and enrich the existing repertoire of teaching styles, instructional activities, and even administrative procedures to provide for the cultural diversity of students.
2. Important and useful components of the second culture should be taught; students should expand and enrich their repertoire of knowledge, skills, and behaviors, and extend their cultural competence: in short, develop positive biculturalism.

It is critical in all phases of application to keep in mind potential areas of interference between the two cultures, and to minimize any cultural conflict for the students.



### Instruction

Because of the different learning styles which are brought to school by students, whatever their cultural background, the teacher should use a variety of instructional methods whenever possible (including visual and manipulative) and *never assume there is one best way to teach anything*.

Inductive procedures for dealing with such topics as 'what is a family' are increasingly being incorporated in social studies text books, and this is clearly more appropriate than an approach which assumes that family composition and role-relationships are the same for all students. Teachers must still be alert, however, to the need for an inductive approach for other topics which may still be treated in an ethnocentric manner in many books, and must be particularly careful to allow for cultural differences without degrading or ridiculing them. A lesson on 'pets', for example, should not begin with a preconceived list of animals that are included in that category, nor a lesson on 'food' with a preconceived list of things that are considered edible. Cultural differences in such categories will, of course, be part of the content for 'lessons designed to develop biculturalism.

Attitudes toward categories or objects within categories also differ. There is danger of developing negative feelings about other cultures, for example, by saying that they eat dogs, or snails, or by presenting differences as 'funny' in any respect. However, the concept of cultural relativity might be enhanced by conveying the contrastive opinions of some other groups about the dominant U.S. culture: some feel that cats and dogs are unclean, and think it is odd that Americans eat corn, and consider it appropriate only for pigs, etc. Teacher attitudes and behavior may be much more significant than curriculum content in teaching culture, and

teaching culture should be distinguished from teaching *about* culture. Teachers are models; what they value and respect is often valued and respected by their students as well.

Students may differ in their willingness to ask questions or volunteer information because of cultural differences in the appropriateness of these behaviors. Teachers should both use and allow a variety of procedures, and be sensitive to which procedures are appropriate for which students, and to which differences in behaviors are due to cultural differences between groups and which to individual personality factors. Many students have been incorrectly stereotyped as 'shy' because the teacher was requiring inappropriate behavior (from the perspective of the student's native culture). At the same time, students should be taught, at least by the secondary level, that asking questions and volunteering information is not considered inappropriate or overly aggressive in school, but rather is valued, and often rewarded with a higher grade. Teaching this, and guiding students to behave accordingly, is part of teaching the second culture.

Other classroom procedures and behaviors may need to be explained or taught, including some which generally operate below the level of consciousness. We already recognize such behaviors as walking in line, or raising a hand to talk or ask permission to go to the bathroom, as unique to the subculture of the school, and therefore we formally teach them. But many students will also not know the more subtle sociolinguistic rules which are appropriate for school, and these, too, should be made the subject of explicit instruction. These include recognition of indirect instructions and commands (e.g., 'I like the way Mary is sitting 'meaning' Billy, get off the table!' or 'Would you like to do your arithmetic now?' meaning 'Do it!'), means of verbal mitigation ('Couldn't I do something else' vs. 'I won't do it'), and even how to prevaricate acceptably (e.g., how to make excuses). These patterns can be and should be taught as part of teaching English. The teacher might designate the meaning to be conveyed (explained in the native language) and then teach various English forms which would express this, having students practice in role-playing activities, or the teacher might give a single English form and then interpret its possible meanings.

Techniques for motivating students should also be adapted to provide for cultural differences. Competitive games may be inappropriate, as may stress on individual achievement, and praise by the teacher may be more embarrassing than rewarding. In this area of culture, it is quite possible that the values of the second culture cannot or should not be explicitly taught, although they may be acquired as part of the acculturation process. It is possible for individuals to comfortably hold culturally different motivating forces in a *dinomic* relationship, but there is also great potential for cultural interference.

Effective classroom management and discipline requires a mutual adaptation, first on the part of teachers to cultural differences among students, and then on the part of students to what behavior is considered appropriate in the subculture of the school. Teachers must recognize that even unconscious signals used in communicating classroom management expectations may not be read in the same way by students from different cultural backgrounds. It is particularly important to know how particular disciplinary measures are perceived by students, and to be sure that a student knows and understands a behavioral requirement or expectation *before* he is disciplined for not complying with it.

Teachers can make positive use of the internal social organization of the class as an instrument in management procedures, with leaders given responsibility for collecting playground equipment or other tasks which may require some authority. These are often the students who conform least to the dominant behavioral norms and are thus most alienated from the school; those who are marginal to the community culture often adopt most easily the subculture of the school (and are thus more likely to be used as 'helpers' of various kinds), but they will be alienated even more from their peers in the process.

'Accepting the culture of the home' does not necessarily entail that all behaviors allowed there should be allowed in school. It may be considered 'normal', for instance, for boys to establish a hierarchy of dominance in their neighborhood according to physical strength, but they cannot be allowed to fight with each new boy who enrolls in the class--at least not at school. Also, students of one group may hear cultural epithets

regularly used about another group by their family or community, but these cannot be allowed at school. Part of socialization to the subculture of the school is learning what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior for that context. This should involve explicit statements by the teacher, and not depend on informal learning (although that is the way most of these rules are discovered by successful students in a dominant and homogeneous group--students figure them out for themselves). Instruction should be in terms of 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' for school, and not 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad', in order to avoid moral judgments about behaviors which may be appropriate in the home or community.

Serious discipline problems have occasionally developed for the young female teacher with a group of students from a culture in which authority is accorded to age and males. In these cases, hiring a male aide from the community is a very reasonable solution, which can help in maintaining discipline at the same time that it allows for students eventually learning that female teachers are accorded authority in the second culture as well.

When the school wishes to make contact with the home regarding an individual discipline problem, it is important to know who in the family is an appropriate person to reach. The assumption in the dominant society would be that this is the father, but in some cultures it may be another family member who assumes this responsibility (e.g., the mother's oldest brother), or no one at all. Discipline problems of older students may be due to acculturative stress within the family itself, in which case the family cannot deal with the problem, and may be part of the cause. If it is determined that this is the case, there should be some source of additional educational and community support made available to the family, and teachers need to have information about such resources.

## Curriculum

All of the areas of culture in which I suggested questions (pp. 19-34) are relevant for curriculum selection or development --even religion, which we usually don't think we are teaching at school. The basic question related to cultural differences is: What is considered religious and what secular? Much of what would appear to be relevant native cultural content for bilingual education may have religious significance, and it is important to find out what is *not* appropriate for school. Many aspects of culture with religious significance have long been included in the curriculum content of American schools, including the observance of special days and information on their history and meaning, and many topics in health, science, or social studies may be considered religious by other cultures. The dominant religion is evident in oaths of office and mottos on coins, and serves as a base for many present laws and holidays.

In the area of food, the native cultural component of the curriculum should deal not just with the 'special' or the 'exotic', but with regular patterns of eating, and with sociolinguistic and other behavioral rules which are observed in conjunction with eating. Cultural taboos concerning food should be respected, both in lessons on nutrition and in the school cafeteria, whether these involve fish, pork, beef, or anything else. As a practical matter, this means providing for a choice of food when it is to be consumed at school, or at least not forcing students to 'clean their plates'. (In regard to this latter, however, it is important to know what restrictions are cultural and what are individual, e.g., students who can't eat pork vs. students who don't like spinach.) In teaching the second culture, 'table manners' is a relevant topic, as is the use of knife and fork for immigrant students from the Far East.

In the area of history and traditions, the role of the particular group to which the students belong--in its own right and in American history--should be included, and not merely that of a foreign culture in the country of origin. Social studies books from other countries may be quite irrelevant for this area, at least for younger students. They will probably be of interest and value for the intermediate and secondary levels, but cultural relevance should not be assumed just because they are in the students' native language. The kinds of curricular content to guard against would be exemplified by a California history textbook translated into Chinese for bilingual education, but excluding attention to the role of the Chinese in the settlement and

development of California, or lessons on the first Thanksgiving taught to Navajo students with the intention of illustrating the importance of 'Indians' to the Pilgrims. Navajos have no sense of identification with the Algonquian groups of Massachusetts, who are entirely unrelated linguistically and culturally. A positive example would be teaching Mexican American students in Texas about the role of a Mexican such as Seguin (for whom the town was named) in the fight for Texas independence against Mexico.

The collection of oral history is another means of including native culture in the curriculum. Not only does this kind of activity involve learning skills of data collection which will be of lasting value, it teaches respect for traditional members of the community, and guarantees relevance of content for the particular community to which the students belong.

In the area of communication, it is important that the curriculum reinforce the functional strength of the native language in the school context in order to help overcome any stigma of limited utility which may be present in the larger society. This can be promoted by the use of attendance forms and other forms in students' language(s) other than English; school plays, films, and news in other languages; creative writing and essay contests; books in the school library; and so forth. I would also suggest announcements on the school public address system in languages other than English which are represented in the school, as well as guest speakers in assemblies who are bilingual. It seems particularly important to include speakers from a wide representation of occupational areas, particularly if students may hold stereotyped ideas about what work is available to them, and before any decisions which involve 'tracking' in the curriculum must be made.

Particularly in the curricular areas of social studies, science, and health education, some of the concepts which are traditionally taught may be in conflict with the beliefs of some cultural minorities, and conversely, aspects of the native culture may connect with some of the beliefs and values which the school feels it is important to transmit. Numerous questions arise which must be dealt with: Should the traditional culture be taught when it reinforces the second class status of females? Should the germ theory of disease be taught (including the concepts that insects carry disease, that food should be kept covered, etc.) when it conflicts with traditional supernatural explanations? How should scientifically documented origins or history of a group be taught when it conflicts with traditional legendary accounts or religious beliefs? What about teaching the concept of individual initiative and choice vs. parental authority and respect? This last in particular points to an arena of value conflict having great potential for social disruption within the community, and perhaps of equally great significance for attainment within the dominant society. There are no simple answers to such questions, and they underscore the importance of community involvement in determining potential conflict in the curriculum, and working out ways to get around it.

As a general procedure in bilingual curriculum organization, I would recommend treating teaching second culture content in an analogous manner to teaching a second language, and developing a coherent scope and sequence for introducing the second culture in the bilingual curriculum. Young children should be introduced only to those aspects of the second culture which are least likely to create interference or conflict, such as behaviors unique to the subculture of the school (e.g., hand raising and walking in line) or topics which have not been of great importance in the enculturation process. The practice of beginning social studies with topics closest to the experiences of a child (as 'the family') does not seem appropriate for bilingual-bicultural education, as it is these topics which probably include the most culturally sensitive content, and the most likelihood for cultural interference. If such topics are selected, second culture content in them should be postponed until the students are older and better able to deal with the differences intellectually. In any case, elements of the second culture (just as of the second language) should be added gradually, and never with the intent of replacing the first. Older students may be taught about aspects of the second culture which conflict with native religious or moral teaching, for purposes of receptive knowledge, but these should never be required as part of the students' productive cultural competence.

## **Evaluation**

Cultural factors are critically relevant to all evaluation of student achievement, teacher performance, and program effectiveness. Testing is itself a social event, and students may perform differentially in differing testing conditions. Evaluation instruments can never be considered culturally neutral, no matter how 'objective' their format.

Validity and reliability of tests should be considered culture-specific. While a test may be valid for members of one culture, it may not measure what it purports to measure in another. For example, a test that has been used to 'prove' that Mexican American children have poorer auditory discrimination than Anglo children was based on the discriminations made in the sounds of the English phonological system. If the test had included the task of distinguishing between the sounds [r] and [F] (as in *pero* 'but' and *perro* 'dog') or the identity of vowels in unstressed position, Spanish-speaking students would probably have scored higher than native English speakers; if the length of vowels were tested, Navajo speakers would score higher; if tone, speakers of Chinese and Vietnamese; and if nasal vs. oral vowels, speakers of French and Navajo.

The reliability of tests is affected by the ethnicity of the tester, the experience which students have had taking tests, the type of questions (e.g., true-false questions are not widely used in Latin America), the modality of the test (written vs. oral), and the linguistic code which is used. The language choice is relative to the subject area (depending on the language in which a particular subject was learned), and tests in the 'native language' should take cognizance of the variety of that language which the students speak (e.g., a test prepared and normed in Puerto Rico contains many vocabulary items not recognized by Spanish speakers in California).

Test scores are clearly affected by differential cultural experiences, but they may reasonably include those which students should have been expected to learn in school. A reading readiness or intelligence test which requires recognition of oil furnaces and fire escapes is culturally biased against any student who has not lived in the urban North or East, but a test which requires recognition of the alphabet or other content taught at school seems reasonable for achievement testing, even if students who have few books at home may be handicapped in this area of the curriculum. 'Culture-free' tests (or instructional materials) would be sterile and irrelevant; 'culture-fair' is a reasonable goal.

Part of any evaluation process should be to discover why students who made 'mistakes' on a test answered questions the way they did, especially if they are from a linguistic or cultural group other than that to which the test-maker belongs. The students may be using perfectly valid logic to come up with 'wrong' answers. In an English test for reading readiness, for instance, one of my Spanish-speaking students marked *k* as the initial sound of *house*. When I asked him to name the picture, he responded 'casa', then realized another language was being asked for, and changed his answer to 'house' and the letter *h*. He was not 'wrong' at all, but functioning bilingually, responding to semantic content rather than just surface form in language, and was certainly 'ready' to read. Whenever pictures are used in tests, culture-specific artistic conventions create additional dimensions for potential cultural interference, and make debriefing students even more important in the assessment process.

Teaching students how to take tests of various kinds is part of second culture learning, and they should have adequate opportunity for instruction and practice, including practice in how to work under time constraints. Even when standardized tests and procedures are not considered appropriate for assessing student achievement in a particular program, students need to learn how to take such tests or they may be handicapped in the larger society. The trend in many states to set competency-based criteria for high school graduation must be taken into account, as should the continued use of standardized tests for entry into many institutions of higher education, and even placement and advancement in the armed services.

Evaluation of teacher performance should include looking for behaviors which indicate awareness of cultural differences. One common criterion is 'evidence of native culture in the classroom', but this should not be interpreted merely as travel posters hanging on the wall, as it sometimes is. If an evaluator enters a Spanish-English classroom around Halloween and sees only pumpkins and no calaveras, this is evidence of probable

disproportionate emphasis on the dominant Anglo culture; if he enters a Navajo-English classroom at the same time of year and sees jack-o-lanterns, this may be evidence of ignorance or disregard for the traditional taboo against the desecration of foodstuffs.

Commonly used scales for 'interaction analysis' are ethnocentric, and of questionable value for a bilingual context, because they do not take into account cultural differences in what constitutes a 'positive response' by teacher to student and other culture-specific aspects of interaction. One quantifiable aspect of teacher performance which *is* relevant and should be noted is how much each language is being used, and for what purposes. Teachers are usually more comfortable teaching a subject in the language in which they learned it, and sometimes (often unconsciously) use one language more than they intend, and more than is called for by the program objectives and design.

It is important that external program evaluators also be sensitive to cultural differences, and that they do not impose their own cultural expectations and experiences on the evaluation process. Too many evaluation reports simply constitute reflections of the evaluator's values: trial and error learning, 'learning by doing', adherence to time schedules and routines, competitiveness, or the use of tests for diagnostic/prescriptive purposes.

Program evaluation should take into account the goals and expectations which parents and the community have for the education of their children, as well as those set by teachers, school, and the larger society, and parents and community leaders should have a significant role in the evaluation process.

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## Cultural Competencies for Bilingual Education

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The following list of competencies has been developed by a group of leading bilingual educators and issued by the *Center for Applied Linguistics as Guidelines for the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of Bilingual/Bicultural Education* (1974). All are important competencies, but I have starred those which I believe to be particularly important for the cultural component of bilingual programs. These have been taken into account in the preceding discussion as I have suggested questions to ask about culture, methods for data gathering, procedures for teacher training, and applications of cultural information; I would suggest that they further be given serious consideration in bilingual teacher training, in certification, and in teacher selection.

- [Personal qualities](#)
- [Language proficiency](#)
- [Linguistics](#)
- [Culture](#)
- [Instructional methods](#)
- [Curriculum utilization and adaptation](#)
- [Assessment](#)
- [School-community relations](#)
- [Supervised teaching](#)

### PERSONAL QUALITIES

The teacher of bilingual-bicultural education should have the following qualifications:

- \*1. A thorough knowledge of the philosophy and theory concerning bilingual-bicultural education and its application.
- \*2. A genuine and sincere interest in the education of children regardless of their linguistic and cultural background, and personal qualities which contribute to success as a classroom teacher.
3. A thorough knowledge of and proficiency in the child's home language and the ability to teach content through it; an understanding of the nature of the language the child brings with him and the ability to utilize it as a positive tool in his teaching.
- \*4. Cultural awareness and sensitivity and a thorough knowledge of the cultures reflected in the two languages involved.
- \*5. The proper professional and academic preparation obtained from a well-designed teacher training program in bilingual-bicultural education.

### LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

- \*1. Communicate effectively, both in speaking and understanding, in the languages and within the cultures of both the home and school. The ability will include adequate control of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and regional, stylistic, and nonverbal variants appropriate to the communication context.

2. Carry out instruction in all areas of the curriculum using a standard variety of both languages.

## LINGUISTICS

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

- \*1. Recognize and accept the language variety of the home and a standard variety as valid systems of communication, each with its own legitimate functions.
- \*2. Understand basic concepts regarding the nature of language.
  3. Understand the nature of bilingualism and the process of becoming bilingual.
  4. Understand basic concepts regarding the natural effects of contacts between languages and the implications of this information for the instructional program.
  5. Identify and understand regional, social, and developmental varieties in the child's language(s) at the phonological, grammatical, and lexical levels.
  6. Identify and understand structural differences between the child's first and second languages, recognizing areas of potential interference and positive transfer.
  7. Develop curricular activities to deal with areas of interference.
  8. Understand theories of first and second language learning, differences between child and adult language learning, and their implications for the classroom.

## CULTURE

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

- \*1. Respond positively to the diversity of behavior involved in cross-cultural environments.
- \*2. Develop awareness in the learner of the value of cultural diversity.
- \*3. Prepare and assist children to interact successfully in a cross-cultural setting.
- \*4. Recognize and accept different patterns of child development within and between cultures in order to formulate realistic objectives.
- \*5. Assist children to maintain and extend identification with and pride in the mother culture.
- \*6. Understand, appreciate and incorporate into activities, materials and other aspects of the instructional environment:
  - a. The culture and history of the group's ancestry.
  - b. Contributions of group to history and culture of the United States.
  - c. Contemporary life style(s) of the group.
- \*7. Recognize both the similarities and differences between Anglo-American and other cultures and both the potential conflicts and opportunities they may create for children.
- \*8. Know the effects of cultural and socioeconomic variables on the student's learning styles (cognitive and affective) and on the student's general level of development and socialization.
- \*9. Use current research regarding the education of children in the U.S. from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- \*10. Use current research regarding the education of children in the U.S. from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- \*11. Recognize differences in social structure, including familial organizations and patterns of authority, and their significance for the program

## INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS

The teacher is expected to demonstrate the following competencies:

1. Assist children to maintain and extend command of the mother tongue and the second language in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- \*2. Apply teaching strategies appropriate to distinct learning modes and developmental levels, including preschool, taking into consideration how differences in culture affect these and other learning variables.
- \*3. Organize, plan, and teach specific lessons in the required curriculum areas, using the appropriate terminology in the learner's language(s) and observing the local district curriculum guidelines. Basic elements and methodologies best suited to the teaching of reading and language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science, as a minimum, must be identified and applied in the learner's language(s).
- \*4. Utilize innovative techniques effectively and appropriately in the learner's language(s) in the various content areas, namely:
  - a. Formulation of realistic performance objectives and their assessment.
  - b. Inquiry/discovery strategies.
  - c. Individualized instruction.
  - d. Learning centers.
  - e. Uses of media and audio-visual materials.
  - f. Systems approaches to the teaching of reading and mathematic skills.
  - g. Team teaching and cross grouping.
  - h. Interaction analysis.
- \*5. Develop an awareness of the way in which learner's culture should permeate significant areas of the curriculum.
6. Utilize first and/or second-language techniques in accordance with the learner's needs at various stages of the learning process.
- \*7. Utilize effective classroom management techniques for optimal learning in specific situations.
- \*8. Work effectively with paraprofessionals and other adults.
- \*9. Identify and utilize available community resources in and outside the classroom.

### **CURRICULUM UTILIZATION AND ADAPTATION**

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

- \*1. Identify current biases and deficiencies in existing curriculum and in both commercial and teacher-prepared materials of instruction. Materials should be evaluated in accordance with the following criteria:
  - a. Suitability to student's language proficiencies and cultural experiences.
  - b. Provision and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity.
  - c. Objectives, scope, and sequence of the materials in terms of content areas.
  - d. Student's reaction to materials.
- \*2. Acquire, evaluate, adapt, and develop materials appropriate to the bilingual-bicultural classroom.

### **ASSESSMENT**

#### *General*

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

- \*1. Recognize potential linguistic and cultural biases of existing assessment instruments and procedures when prescribing a program for the learner.
2. Utilize continuous assessment as part of the learning process.
3. Interpret diagnostic data for the purpose of prescribing instructional programs for the individual.

- \*4. Use assessment data as basis for program planning and implementation.

### *Language*

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

1. Determine language dominance of the learner in various domains of language use--oral and written.
- \*2. Use assessment results to determine teaching strategies for each learner.
3. Identify areas of proficiency (oral and written vocabulary, syntax, phonology) in the learner's first and second language.
4. Assess maintenance and extension levels of the learner's language(s).

### *Content*

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to:

1. Evaluate growth using teacher-prepared as well as standard instruments, in cognitive skills and knowledge of content areas utilizing the language of the home.
- \*2. Assess accuracy and relevance of materials utilized in the classroom.
- \*3. Prepare tests to evaluate achievement of proposed objectives of instruction

### *Self*

The teacher should demonstrate the ability to identify and apply procedures for the assessment of:

- \*1. Own strengths and weaknesses as a bilingual teacher.
- \*2. Own value system as it relates to the learner, his behavior, and his background.
- \*3. The effectiveness of own teaching strategies.

### **SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS**

The teacher should demonstrate the following competencies:

- \*1. Develop basic awareness concerning the importance of parental and community involvement for facilitating the learner's successful integration to his school environment.
- \*2. Acquire skills to facilitate basic contacts and interaction between the learner's family and school personnel.
- \*3. Demonstrate leadership in establishing home/community exchange of sociocultural information which can enrich the learner's instructional activities.
- \*4. Acquire and develop skills in collecting culturally relevant information and materials characteristic of both the historical and current lifestyles of the learner's culture(s) that can serve both for curriculum content and for instructional activities.
- \*5. Acquire a knowledge of the patterns of child rearing represented in the families of the learners so as to better understand the background of the learners' behaviors in the classroom.
- \*6. To act as facilitator for enhancing the parents' roles, functions and responsibilities in the school and community.
- \*7. Serve as a facilitator for the exchange of information and views concerning the rationale, goals, and procedures for the instructional programs of the school.

- \*8. To plan for and provide the direct participation of the learner's family in the regular instructional programs and activities.

## **SUPERVISED TEACHING**

Because of the great disparity between theory presented in the context of a college environment and practical teaching realities in a bilingual-bicultural classroom setting, it is essential that a portion of every teacher's training experience include on-site supervised teaching experience in a bilingual-bicultural program. To the extent possible, relevant competencies should be demonstrated in the direct context of such a classroom setting.

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## Notes

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[1] The following discussion has been adapted from my paper 'On Bilingualism and Biculturalism in Education', in *Language Development in a Bilingual Setting*, ed. by Eugene J. Brière (Pomona, CA: Multilingual Multicultural Materials Development Center, 1978).

[2] See Christina Bratt Paulston's review of research on bilingualism in the *Linguistics* volume of *Bilingual Education: Current Perspectives* (Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1977). She concludes: 'The evidence is perfectly clear that mother tongue development facilitates the learning of the second language, and there are serious implications that without such development neither language may be learned well, resulting in semilingualism' (p. 93).

[3] The term *dinomia*, which I have proposed to refer to this phenomenon, translates roughly from Greek as 'two systems of laws', and may be defined as 'two or more cultural systems which are used by the same people under different conditions, one of which is the dominant cultural system of the larger society and the other subordinate and less prestigious cultural varieties from within that same society' ([Saville-Troike, 1978](#)).

[4] For an excellent discussion of this process, see Roger D. Abrahams', 'Stereotyping and Beyond', in *Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education*, ed. by Roger D. Abrahams and Rudolph C. Troike (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972).

[5] For example, see Alfred J. Kraemer, *Workshop in Intercultural Communication: Handbook for Instructors* (Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Research Organization, 1974).

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