

5-23-1999

# Schooling in Cultural Context

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**SCHOOLING IN  
CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**Marilou Bradley  
January 9, 1999**

*Being able to think imaginatively, resolve conflicts with grace, trade ideas with others and feel compassion are the building blocks of human relationships.... How different some adults' lives would be if they had learned these skills as children (Heidemann & Hewitt, 1992).*

*Our personal identity -- the very center of our humanness -- is achieved through the early bonds of child and parent. Conscience, itself the most civilizing of all achievements in human evolution, is not part of constitutional endowment, but the endowment of parental love and education (Psychologist Selma Fraeberg 1959).*

*What sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attraction and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favors death. The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life (Octavio Paz 1967).*

*The individual is born into an existing social world of existing patterns, relationships and ways of understanding. Learning the language of the social world involves acquiring this heritage of meaning and patterns for understanding in a manner that becomes part of the individual's natural attitude... The process of learning to think and speak the language that encodes the cultural forms of understanding provides the individual a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for understanding new phenomena. (Martin Heidegger 1927).*

*For those who are walled up everything is a wall... The vistas of all the great windows of walled-up cultures are simply mirrors. We see the world in terms of ourselves (Poet René Char).*

*Do not underestimate your power as an educator: your power to make all of your students feel included, and perhaps, more importantly, your power to plan hope (Wu 1992).*

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## **SCHOOLING IN CULTURAL CONTEXT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

A child's culture may be the mainstream or dominant culture, or it may be one of many subcultures that can be found in almost any country. Children's experiences and expectations are determined by their local communities, particular political and economic strata, and specific ethnic or cultural groups. Therefore, children need educational services that take into account their diverse cultural, economic and ethnic backgrounds. More than ever, those responsible for educational planning and delivering educational services must be responsive to children's diverse needs. They must consider both the learners and the learning context when defining what type of education to produce. To be effective, education agendas must be provided in ways that focus upon sameness and difference, that recognize children's uniqueness as well as their common ground, and that are rooted in each child's primary frames of reference like family, society, and culture. Children's development and learning can only be fully understood when viewed in the larger cultural context. Today's diverse, heterogeneous societies demand culturally responsive education practices and programs that can actively engage learners, help them build upon their own sense of identity, and increase their meaningful participation in and contribution to society.

In the past few decades, many countries have realized important gains in reforming their education systems. Yet, many schools continue to operate in ways that result in poor achievements. This scenario can be explained partly by numerous factors spanning several spheres; it can also be attributed to the qualitatively deficient and often culturally incongruent practices many schools embrace. Rather than aspiring to teach the kinds of knowledge and skills that can help educate and prepare students to take their place within a society from a position of self and social empowerment, many schools often engage in ineffective instructional and pedagogical practices that hinder student learning; many engage in a "hidden curriculum", that perpetuate ideological, social, and economic subordination.

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This research paper attempts to address the cultural dimensions of children's schooling, an area which has not yet found a secure place in the analysis of education and schooling processes. In large measure, many societies continue to view schools simply as instructional sites. This paper argues, however, that schools are not simply instructional sites, but are also cultural sites where different ideologies, values, conventions and knowledge variously intersect, juxtapose, and exclude one another. As cultural sites, schools define, organize, and deliver their curriculum in ways that reflect the ideologies that characterize a particular society. In this context, schools become important agencies for legitimation. They are part of a complex structure through which social groups are given legitimacy and through which social and cultural ideologies are built, recreated, and maintained.

This research adopts the viewpoint that a more holistic and student-centered approach to children's schooling is required to reverse the trend of low achievement. To demonstrate the saliency of such an approach to achieving higher levels of achievement, four key questions are examined. How and in what context does culture contribute to children's learning? What factors shape the schooling process? What do schools actually do? How can schools be more effective?

In an attempt to answer these questions, Chapter I provides an overview of how the self is developed and nurtured by culture. Drawing on several development theories, it illustrates how children's cognitive development, in the first instance, is established by social relationships and socio-cultural tools and practices. Chapter II explores several salient factors that affect children's schooling, highlighting the need to equally interpret schools socially, culturally, and structurally. Because many societies often link schooling with literacy, this chapter also briefly examines several pedagogical practices which schools adopt to facilitate children's acquisition of literacy and reasoning. Recognizing that the school is the locus of change, Chapter III examines various ideologies, behaviors, and practices that are adopted in the school setting. Drawing on the experiences of eight classrooms in the United States and Mali, this chapter examines how a classroom's day-to-day curricular, pedagogic and evaluated activities, including the ideologies that are permeated in the school affect student performance and learning achievements. These experiences reveal how schools fundamentally operate as instructional sites and as cultural sites. Qualitative

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deficiencies that exist in these schools demonstrate how schools fail to provide the cognitive and effective classroom environment necessary for promoting reflective and effective learning. This chapter concludes with a summary of lessons learned.

Chapter IV proposes an operational framework to improve low levels of achievement. The framework is based on a tripartite partnership between the school, the community, and children, working towards building a “community for learning” , where the uniqueness of each child is recognized and where learning experiences are transformed in ways that engage and offer stimulation and enjoyment to all students. Efforts aimed at improving achievement require a coherent and focused school-wide effort. Recognizing this, the framework provides several key change elements which school-based personnel can adopt to create a dynamic and effective school that can lead to positive changes and improved student outcomes. Building on the principles of a “community for learning” and the change elements that promote successful achievement, several strategies are also proposed to improve student learning outcome. These strategies aim to address the learning needs of the students, the organizational and administrative support requirements for achieving a high degree of program implementation, and the professional development needs of school personnel, including forging closer ties with the family and community. Overall, these strategies seek to impact three areas of student outcomes: improved student learning achievement, active learning and teaching processes, and positive attitudes by students and school personnel toward their learning environment.

To conclude, this research paper aims to illustrate how schools operate equally as instructional sites and cultural sites, a phenomenon which has received little attention in the past and which can partly explain why many schools fail in their attempts to promote greater learning achievements. Overall, schools are not efficient in providing the cognitive and effective classroom environment, including the social support, necessary for learning and promoting greater achievements. Schooling processes are defined in ways that support dominant or mainstream ideologies. They promote universal remedies which are premised on the assumption that the same instructional materials and pedagogical practices hold constant meaning in the eyes of teachers and children across diverse cultural settings. These simplistic and “blue print” approaches to schooling lead to the adoption of poor and inequitable schooling

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practices which have important consequences for children, particularly children of low status backgrounds. In the classrooms examined, schooling is not recognized as a form of “human learning”, which emphasizes how children construct and assign meanings to “facts”, tasks, behaviors within the particular cultural contexts. It is important to recognize that cognitive knowledge and achievement blend with the normal rules and meanings that children learn implicitly often through the socialization process to which schools contribute. Fundamentally, pedagogical approaches, particular rules of participation and authority, linguistic norms, orientations toward achievement, and conceptions of status, including the forms of sanctions, affect the quality of each child’s schooling and learning experiences. The effects of how such elements are played out in the school setting are particularly important for low-status children who are generally (and subjectively) viewed to be lacking competence or cognitive abilities typically required in mainstream society not because of their academic performance or achievements, but rather because of their socio-economic backgrounds.



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## CHAPTER I. CULTURE AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Culture is a central part of people's life; it reflects a total way of productive life. Whatever the ideological characteristics of its expression may be, culture constitutes an essential element of the history of people. Like history, culture has a material reality in the environment in which it develops; it reflects the organic nature and growth of the society. Culture can also be viewed as a holistic expression of the social relations and interactions between the individual and the collective members of society.

This Chapter provides an overview of how the self is formed, developed and nurtured by culture. It discusses how children, during the early years of their development process, enter the school of the social world where they learn culture's curriculum. Drawing on several development theories advanced by L.S. Vygotsky (1978, 1981), B. Rogoff (1990), J. Lave and E. Wenger (1991), an attempt is made to illustrate how children's cognitive development is fundamentally embedded in the context of socio-cultural relationships and socio-cultural tools and practices.

### A. CONSTRUCTION AND FORMATION OF SELF IN CULTURE

Selves constitute "... *the source of cultural vitality, allowing individuals within a culture and, in the aggregate, the culture itself to respond to and adapt to an ever changing environment*" (Erchak 1992, p.17). Although in all cultures, there is a certain extent to which individuals are free to develop as they wish, that freedom itself is in large measure culturally determined, because human beings are born dependent. In all cultures, the learning and appropriation of knowledge takes a different form at each stage of life, for each stage of life has its own special potential, both for the individual and society. Erchak (1992) points out that cultural evolution is not blind since it involves the mind and learning at every juncture. In this context, culture can be viewed as the monumental school of life, where individuals draw knowledge, gain experience, and appropriate skills that allow them to engage and become active participants and productive members of society, giving breadth and meaningful purpose to each individual's existence and "sense of being". Because the self is fundamentally adapted to the social environment, it is

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in culture that the self is allowed to gradually develop. It is important to recognize that cultures, however, differ in how the self is expected to develop throughout life, in what behaviors are supported or negatively regarded, and in the degree and contexts for autonomy versus cooperation (LeVine 1982). Because culture is in constant interaction with individual behaviors, behaviors are consequently rationalized in ways that are adaptive to the particularities of a culture. Beliefs, values and traditions constitute an index of a world of cultural assumptions and of scripts of social interaction. The valuation of a person's behavior by members of society constitute an important source of motivation, and indeed, learning for humans everywhere.

During the first few years of the life cycle, children learn to adapt to societal norms through its responses to child-rearing practices, usually provided by parents and other caregivers (Béhar-Pauze et al. 1980; Erchak, 1992; Rogoff 1990; Turnbull 1983). In this socialization process, the child is preparing and is being prepared for entry into society. As cultural agents, parents and other caregivers gradually introduce learned cultural norms into the child's family environment. Parents begin to impart the symbolic knowledge of their own culture to the children. Because they impart cultural rules and notions where none previously existed, the parents' culture become the foundation of the child's enculturation and self formation early in life (Béhar-Pauze et al. 1980; Erchak 1992; Turnbull 1983).

The processes of communication and shared participation in social and cultural activities inherently engage children and their caregivers in stretching children's understanding and skills to apply to new problems and challenges (Bjorklund 1990; Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch 1985). Children can display high levels of performance and can apply sophisticated strategies under special conditions where the environment is supportive in that it provides prompts to children to use a particular strategy or when task-relevant information is known to the children, to permit them to process the information efficiently. In their study of developmental competencies in minority children, Coll et al. (1990, p.1897), point out that *"Children are not simply passive recipients of their experience; rather, they influence their family processes and contribute to their own socialization"* and that *"children's developmental competencies emerge as a direct function of individual contributions of adaptive culture, family processes and the child's own characteristics operating through the interactions among these systems"*. Although culture and society

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guide the socialization process of children, children also actively contribute to their own development process. Through their interaction with more skilled members of culture and their participation in the activities of culture, children are able to develop their thinking processes and ability for problem-solving, process information, and acquire other tools and skills that promote their self-development. Effective and participatory social interaction, therefore, becomes a critical instrument for fostering and sustaining children's learning and development.

## **B. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL CONTEXT**

Research has shown that culture has an important formative role in cognitive development (Bjorklund 1990; LeVine 1982; Rogoff 1990; Rogoff & Wertsch 1984; Tomasello et al. 1993; Wertsch 1985; Vygotsky 1978; Vygotsky 1981). Children appropriate knowledge and information, develop their thinking and reasoning and other skills, and learn to formulate strategies through guided participation and meaningful interactions with more experienced members of society who are adapted to, and constitute a part of, culture. Children observe, interact with, and learn from members of culture who serve as role models and whose behaviors and attitudes are informed by their socio-cultural environment (Erchak 1992; LeVine 1982; Rogoff 1990; Rogoff & Wertsch 1984; Tomasello et al., 1993; Turnbull 1983).

Children's cognitive development, in the first instance, is established by social relationships and socio-cultural tools and practices. As novices in thinking, children appropriate new knowledge, information and skills from their interaction with and participation in social activity with more proficient members of society who encourage and extend their understanding of and skills in using the tools of culture. The particular orientation and skills that children acquire are fundamentally grounded in the specific historical and cultural activities of the community in which children and their social partners interact. With the proper guidance of more skilled members of the culture, children begin to internalize the tools for thinking and for taking on mature approaches to problem solving that children have practiced in a social context (Rogoff 1990; Rogoff & Wertsch 1984; Tomasello et. al. 1993; Turnbull 1983; Vygotsky 1978). To understand the processes and goals of cognitive development, there must be a balanced recognition of the interdependence of children and their social partners in cultural contexts.

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Several development theories demonstrate how children's learning processes are embedded in the context of socio-cultural relationships. Vygotsky's theory (1978) emphasized the societal context of an individual's cognitive development in which primacy is placed on "mind in society" and where the intellectual development of individuals must be referenced to the socio-cultural environment in which the child is embedded. For Vygotsky, children's cognitive development involves the development of skills with socio-historically developed tools that mediate intellectual activity. That is, the social origins of the tools for thinking that children are learning to apply and the social interactions that guide children in their application must be considered in understanding the individual development of higher mental processes. The functions of thinking, logical memory, and voluntary attention result from "*internalized social relations that have become functions for the individual and forms of his/her structure*" (Vygotsky 1981, p.64). Underlying Vygotsky's view of higher mental functions is the awareness that the structure of individual functioning is directed, and indeed, reflected by the structure of social functioning; the mental processes of individuals have particular organizational characteristics that mirror those of the social life from which they derive.

For Vygotsky (1978), the development of a child's individual mental functioning is mediated by interaction with more proficient members of society, working in the "*zone of proximal development*", defined as "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (p. 86). The Vygotskian concept of the "zone of proximal development" provides an essential means through which the social world can guide the child in the development of individual functions. This concept encompasses two levels of development: the level of "actual" development which involves the child's level of individual independent functioning, and the level of "potential" development, at which stage the child can function while participating in instructional social interaction (Rogoff & Wertsch 1984; Vygotsky 1978). "*Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them*" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 88). This growth transpires in the "zone of proximal development" which "... enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development". Thus, the "zone of

proximal development” becomes a dynamic area of sensitivity to learning culture’s skills in which children develop through participation in problem solving with more skilled members of the culture.

Like Vygotsky, Rogoff underlines the importance of recognizing the sociocultural context of children’s cognitive development. For Rogoff (1990) children, as “apprentices in thinking”, are “... *active in their efforts to learn from observing and participating with peers and more skilled members of their society, developing skills to handle culturally defined problems with available tools, and building from givens to construct new solutions within the context of sociocultural activity*” (p. 7). Thus, social relationships and sociocultural tools and practices together define the context in which children’s cognitive development is promoted.

Rogoff’s framework highlights children’s active role in utilizing social guidance, the saliency of tacit and routine arrangements of children’s activities, including their participation in cultural activities that may not necessarily be instructional, and the cultural variations in the goals of development and the means by which children gain a shared understanding with more proficient members of society (Rogoff 1990; Rogoff & Wertsch 1984). To demonstrate the importance of both guidance and participation in culturally valued activities to children’s apprenticeship in thinking, Rogoff (1990) developed the concept of “*guided participation*”, a process “*in which caregivers’ and children’s roles are entwined, with tacit as well as explicit learning opportunities in the routine arrangements and interactions between caregivers and children*” (p. 65). In the process of guided participation, the roles of both skilled members of society and children become collaborative and complementary in nature. Skilled members create an enabling environment for learning, thus allowing children to appropriate new understanding and skills. Children, in turn, utilize the support and guidance provided by experienced members of society to assume increasingly skilled roles in the activities of their community. Key to the process of guided participation is the notion of *intersubjectivity*, the “*shared understanding based on a common focus of attention and some shared presuppositions that form the ground for communication*” (Rogoff 1990, p. 71). In this context, communication, whether expressed verbally or nonverbally, constitutes a salient social activity that can serve as a bridge between one’s understanding of a situation and another.



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Two themes emerge from Vygotsky's concept of "zone of proximal development" and Rogoff's concept of "guided participation". First, they emphasize the sociocultural context in which children's cognitive development is facilitated. Children appropriate higher forms of mental functioning and new skills through interaction and, indeed, with proper guidance from more proficient members of society. Through the process of social interaction, information about cultural tools and practices as well as resources that facilitate appropriate solution to the task at hand, are transmitted. Second, both concepts do not regard children as passive recipients of their learning experience; children's learning is partly mediated by their own active participation in the process. In this context, children's learning becomes a joint social venture, requiring the joint participation of both children and skilled members of society.

Lave and Wenger (1991) provide another analytical viewpoint of learning which gives primacy to learning as a social practice. Learners are engaged in the context of their learning and in the broader social world within which these contexts are produced; they participate in communities of practitioners where the mastery of knowledge and skill requires them, as newcomers, to advance toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. By engaging in social practice, an individual can appropriate skills to perform under conditions of what Lave and Wenger define as "*legitimate peripheral participation*", an interactive, participatory and social process in which learners engage in learning by simultaneously performing in several roles, each implying different types of responsibility, different sets of role relations, and different interactive involvement (Lave & Wenger 1991).

The form that legitimacy of participation takes typifies ways of belonging which is an important condition for learning. Through the process of "*legitimate peripheral participation*", newcomers become part of the community of practice; it provides a way to speak out about the relations between newcomers and old-timers who are more skilled in society, and about activities, identities, and communities of knowledge and practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). Both the individual's learning and the meaning of the learning are defined through the process of becoming a full participant in sociocultural practices. It is in this context that the newcomer's learning of knowledgeable skills becomes subsumed in the social process.

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The community of practice (the set of relations among persons, activity and the world), is a salient condition for the existence of knowledge because it furnishes the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage; therefore, participation in cultural practice where knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning (Lave & Wenger 1991). The process of “*legitimate peripheral participation*” embodies the special structure of practice, its power relationships and the conditions for legitimacy which define the potential for learning. To this end, it is the learning that transpires through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the community and not replicating the performance of others or by appropriating knowledge transferred through instruction that becomes crucial (Lave & Wenger 1991). Given that knowledge is seated within a community of practice, learning must be addressed within the developmental cycles of the particular community.

For Lave and Wenger, “*learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world*” (p. 49), where learning through participation in social practice provides for an evolving and continuously renewed set of relations where the salient and dynamic relations between the person, their action, and the social world can be effectively understood. Within this framework, then, learning, thinking, and knowing constitute relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socio-culturally structured world. This suggests that learning entails the construction of identities, of being a different person with regard to the opportunities enabled by these systems of relations. Viewed within the context of “*legitimate peripheral participation*”, learning does not merely serve as a condition for membership; it constitutes an evolving form of membership in communities of practice.

The work of Vygotsky, Rogoff, Lave and Wenger all provide rich insights on the social context in which children’s cognitive development is promoted. Although all scholars have shown important linkages between cognition and social processes, there are distinct differences in the underlying principles that guide their work. Vygotsky’s work emphasizes the social situatedness of mind and cognition. This emphasis is predicated on the belief that to understand individual psychological development it is essential to understand the system of social relations in which the individual lives and grows. For Vygotsky, the primary tools of each individual’s cultural patrimony is

language, which mediates all thought. Rogoff's work underlines the importance of providing particular conditions and forms of interaction to advance individual learning. In this context, Rogoff's notion of "apprentices" differs from that of Lave & Wenger. She ignores the production aspects of apprenticeship to focus on the instructional features of social interaction. In contrast, Lave & Wenger argue that apprentices learn without deliberate instruction, by participating in activities that are being conducted not necessarily for the sake of instruction, but of production (i.e. through engagement with "communities of practitioners" in broader social system). For these two scholars, learning entails a way of being in the social world, dialectically constituted in social practice that are in the process of reproduction, transformation, and change.



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## CHAPTER II. EDUCATION FOR WHAT

Most societies would agree that education is a good thing. While it is reasonable to assume that most societies today endorse the broad educational goals of promoting social, economic and human development, perspectives often differ on what and how strategies are to be implemented. These differences are often influenced by varying ideologies, values, norms, and traditions that characterize a particular society; they can also be attributed to varying priorities, individual goals, and approximations of expected benefits.

Most educational solutions currently being prescribed in many countries are incapable of meeting the challenges of the present and the future. This situation points to the larger crisis facing education systems all over the world - which are not simply about financial or economic constraints or management inefficiencies, but rather stem from more profound conceptual problems. Much of what we do today in education is at variance with what we know about human potential, learning processes, cultural pluralism, complex adaptive systems, and people-centered approaches to sustainable development. It is becoming increasingly clear that continued "tinkering" with existing educational modalities is not a sufficient response in attempting to continuously adapt to a world filled with increased uncertainty, complexity and diversity. If we are to respond to the challenges of the future, doing more of the same in education will not be enough. We must do things differently. We must emphasize forms of learning and critical thinking that enable individuals to understand changing environments, create new knowledge and skills, and shape their own destinies. We need to promote a more holistic and culturally-responsive education where there can be learning in all aspects of life, through all institutions of society.

Recognizing that the school is the locus of change, this chapter examines several salient dimensions of the schooling process which have important consequences not only for the quality of education and learning opportunities children receive, but also for the manner in which children are being prepared to meet the challenges of the future. The behaviors and practices adopted in the school setting, including the ideologies that are permeated are often at cross purpose with promoting effective and meaningful student learning, particularly for those children of low status backgrounds. Because many societies often link education and schooling with literacy, this chapter also briefly

examines how schools promote the acquisition of literacy and reasoning. Because literacy can be viewed as a means of enhancing an individual's participation in society and constitute an important source for self-empowerment, it is important to understand the socio-political aspects of promoting literacy in the context of defining an individual's place in society.

### C. FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE SCHOOLING PROCESS

We cannot speak about schooling, its meaning and implications, without considering the broader framework within which schools operate. Worldwide, many schools endorse various behaviors, practices, and ideologies which too often hinder students' participation and learning. They engage in conflicts over knowledge, over economic goods and services, and over power relations. Apples & Weis (1984) assert that in order for us to comprehend these dimensions, including its implications, we need to step back from thinking about schools solely as places that seek to maximize the achievement of students; we need to interpret schools more socially, culturally and structurally. Can schools as we know them become more responsive and effective places that produce students who are able to actually engage in meaningful learning? We must ask whether the current structure of schooling and the current web of incentives and disincentives would be likely to encourage greater levels of learning achievements for all children. Serious attempts to respond to this question require some understanding of several dimensions of the schooling process.

The politics of education can be seen very clearly in schools which many scholars would argue reproduce the values and privileges of existing elites, or to the disadvantage of non-elites - the poor, the marginalized and disadvantaged, and minority groups (Apple & Weis 1984; Brice 1983; Bossert 1979; Erickson 1984; McLaren 1989; Pinar 1988; Rist 1970). While many societies endorse democratic and equitable schooling for all, in reality, many schools operate in ways that legitimate and sustain the status quo. In this context, the schooling system in reality perpetuates what it is ideologically committed to eliminate - class barriers which result in inequality in the social and economic life of its citizenry. For many children of low status backgrounds, this reality serves as a harsh disincentive, disempowering them to reach their potential and to improve their standards of living. To this end,

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schools may very well be contributing to the complicity of maintaining the organizational perpetuation of poverty and unequal opportunity. So long as children of low status backgrounds are treated differently in quantity and quality of schooling, there will exist an imperative for change. As instructional sites, schools must define better ways of making themselves vital places for all students. That is, schools must provide an enabling environment conducive to empowering students to gain a sense of control over their destinies, rather than feel trapped by their socio-economic status. In this context, we must acknowledge that underachievement in disadvantaged or marginalized students is not necessarily a result of individual or personal failure but rather a product of economic and social life as we know it.

The political space that education occupies today continues to undermine the struggle for teacher and student empowerment; it generally serves to reproduce the technocratic and corporate ideologies that characterize dominant societies (Bossert 1979; McLaren 1989; Nobilt & Pink 1987; Pinar 1988; Rist 1970). Many teachers cannot utilize education's decision-making potential, including its ethical imperative to analyze and remediate existing societal and institutional practices. When teachers accept merely to serve the role of technicians, they fail to challenge the ways in which educational curricula correspond to the means by which schooling reproduces existing class, race and gender relations in society; they also run the risk of transmitting to marginalized or disadvantaged students the message that their subordinate roles in social order are correct and definitively appropriate. Teachers who embrace ineffective teaching approaches are unable to effectively assist their students in determining how certain individuals, because of their socio-economic background, come to be positioned favorably or unfavorably within larger sociopolitical relations.

There is a need for teachers' evolving political awareness of their relationship with students as knowers and active participants in their own learning. Paul Freire (1987) argues that technical expertise and mastery of content area and methodology are insufficient to ensure effective instruction of students from subordinated cultures. Freire contends that, in addition to possessing content area knowledge, teachers must possess political clarity so as to be able to effectively create, adopt, and modify teacher strategies that simultaneously respect and challenge learners from diverse backgrounds in a variety of learning environments. Working on improving their political clarity,

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teachers must recognize that teaching is not a politically neutral undertaking. They need to understand that educational institutions are socializing institutions that mirror the greater society's culture, values and norms. Schools reflect both the positive and negative aspect of a society. Thus, the unequal power relations among various social and cultural groups at the societal level are usually reproduced at the school and classroom level, unless concerted efforts are made to prevent their reproduction. Teachers striving toward political clarity understand that they can either maintain the status quo, or they can work to transform the sociocultural reality at the classroom and school level so that the culture at this micro- level does not reflect macro-level inequalities, such as asymmetrical power relations that relegate certain cultural groups to a subordinate status.

Bartolome (1994) points out that although a teacher's political clarity will not necessarily compensate for structural inequalities that students face outside the classroom, teachers can, to the best of their ability, help their students deal with injustices encountered inside and outside the classroom setting. A number of possibilities exist for preparing students to deal with the greater society's unfairness and inequality. These range from engaging in explicit discussions with students about their experiences, to more indirect ways such as creating democratic learning environments where students become used to being treated as competent and able individuals (Bartolome 1994). Having been accustomed to the rights and full citizenship in the classroom setting, students will progressively come to expect respectful treatment and authentic estimation in other contexts. Recognizing this, it is important to understand that it is not the particular lesson or set of activities that necessarily prepares the student; rather it is the teacher's politically clear educational philosophy that underlines the different pedagogical methods and lessons/activities she or he adopts that make a difference.

Scholars, including critical educational theorists, have come to view schooling as a resolutely political and cultural enterprise where schools function not only as instructional sites, but also as cultural arenas where a heterogeneity of ideological and social forms frequently collide in a struggle for dominance (Apple & Weis 1983; McLaren 1989; Pinar 1988). Schools can either be analyzed as a form of sorting mechanism for selecting groups of students according to race, class, and gender or as agencies for self and social empowerment. Critical educational

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theorists argue that it is necessary for teachers to comprehend the role that schooling plays in joining knowledge and power in order to use that role for the formation of critical and active individuals (McLaren 1989). Given what we know about the experiences of schools worldwide, the traditional view of classroom instruction and learning as a neutral process dislodged from the concepts of politics, power, history, and context can no longer be credibly maintained.

It is indeed unfortunate that teaching, in many parts of the world, has been reduced to simply helping students acquire higher levels of cognitive skills, without paying attention to the purpose to which these skills are to be utilized. From a moral perspective, this view encourages students to succeed in a tough and competitive world of existing social forms. Many societies have come to accept a view of education that sees the experience of schooling largely in terms of its power to produce employable, rather than intelligent, students and that suffers from basic confusions over the conflicts between pluralism and excellence. Critical educational theorists argue that increasing the implementation of management-type pedagogies and accountability schemes to respond to the logic of market demand has actually resulted in educational policy proposals that actively promote the “deskilling of teachers” (McLaren 1989). For example, McLaren observes that in the United States the proliferation of state-mandated curriculum, which claim to be “teacher proofed”, actually downgraded the role of the teacher to that of a semiskilled, low-paid clerk (p. 161). Although it should be stressed that skill development certainly plays a salient role, critical pedagogy upholds the conviction that schooling for self and social empowerment be ethically prior to the mastery of technical skills, which are primarily tied to the logic of the market place.

Preoccupation with the moral dimensions of education has provoked many scholars to undertake a socially critical reconstruction of what it means to “be schooled”, stressing that any genuine pedagogical practice requires a commitment to social transformation in solidarity with the subordinate and marginalized segments of the population. Americans, for example, have traditionally assumed that schools function as a mechanism for the development of democratic and egalitarian social order. Several research findings suggest, however, that schools do not provide opportunities in the broad Western humanist tradition for self and social empowerment; in fact, they frequently work



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against those opportunities (Apple & Weis 1984; Brice 1983; Erickson 1984; McLaren 1989; Pinar 1988; Rist 1970). What goes on in many classrooms is unfortunately asocial, constrained by belief in individual achievement (encouraged especially for children from more affluent backgrounds) rather than joint social construction of knowledge and insight. Promoting such a climate is indeed a waste for several important reasons. Fundamentally, it encourages the maintenance of the status quo, a disadvantage for children of low status backgrounds. It also dismisses the cultural capital which children bring to the classroom. This, in turn, provides a powerful disincentive for students to express and indeed, tap on existing knowledge bases. Learning is meaningful only when content and process are learned within the context of real situations and problems. Further, it bottles up the natural cognitive energies of a situation in which differences of abilities, outlooks and points of view might motivate and inform intellectual inquiry. An asocial climate discourages teachers and students from engaging in joint productive activity, an important factor to promoting teamwork and collaborative learning, and in constructive dialogue, especially instructional conversation. Finally, such climate is more prone to promoting an educational experience that is homogeneous and inequitable, rather than one that is diverse and flexible in nature and conducive to enhancing knowledge and thinking-skills acquisition that facilitates students' construction of meaning. In this context, children of either minority groups or low status backgrounds who may have special needs are particularly at a disadvantage.

Many schools have difficulties to promote higher learning achievements partly because they have not recognize each child as a whole person, with different abilities, needs, and strengths. The absence of such recognition leads to the homogenization of students in the classroom setting which, among others, hinders individual student's ability to think and express themselves critically, creatively, and in ways that have meaning for them, an important stimulus to developing higher cognitive skills. Rather than acknowledging the cultural capital which all children bring into the classroom and encouraging them to construct knowledgeable and confident self-identity, schools incessantly appear to require children to subtract their language and cultural identity and replace them with the language and culture of the dominant group. This inability (or refusal) to tap students' already existing knowledge and language bases is particularly evident with student populations traditionally perceived as deficient (Anyon 1988).

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Based on her research findings, Anyon (1988) reports, for example, that teachers of working-class students who perceived them as lacking the necessary cultural capital to excel academically imposed content and behavioral standards with little consideration and respect for student input. Although Anyon did not generalize beyond her sample, other studies suggest the validity of her findings for ethnic minority student populations (Brice 1983; Rist 1970).

The school's curriculum is an expression of cultural politics. Defining curriculum as a form of cultural politics assumes that *'... the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions are the primary categories for understanding contemporary school'* (McLaren 1989, p. 185). School life can be understood as a cultural terrain characterized by varying degrees of accommodation, contestation and resistance; it also represents a plurality, a place where classroom and street-corner cultures collide and/or where teacher, students, and school administrators frequently differ as to how school experiences and practices are to be defined and understood (Bartolome 1994; Brice 1983; Delpit 1988; Erickson 1984; McLaren 1989; Muncey & McQuillan 1996; Rist 1970). The curriculum perspective creates conditions for the student's self-empowerment as an active political and moral subject. As Giroux (1988) asserts, empowerment enables students to learn to question and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order.

Hierarchical authority characterizes the social relations in almost all schools. Although the degree of student autonomy may vary in most classrooms, the teacher has the final authority. In turn, the school administration has authority over the teacher. School decisions are generally not made democratically, but by a small minority which comprise school administrators and (sometimes) teachers, and handed down to the majority which comprises the student population. These schools do not promote a "community for learning" where there is partnership between the school, the community, and the child, created around a shared vision, and who hold themselves accountable for educational outcomes. In the absence of such a "community for learning", the approach to educational services delivery becomes disjointed, ineffective, and unsustainable.

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The school (administrators, teachers, and parents associations), the community (parents and community-at-large), and the child are equal stakeholders in the schooling system, each having important contributions to make in improving the quality of education and learning experiences. Together, they can make schools more effective places for promoting learning. Regrettably, the schooling systems in many countries have not achieved this important realization. Broad participation which can help create a common purpose within schools about the kinds of educational services to be delivered are not promoted. Teachers lack autonomy to adjust to special needs of their classroom. Teachers are often excluded from the planning and decision-making process. In many schools, top down, administrative direction and decision are not balanced with community commitment and support. Many students are not given a voice in defining their learning opportunities. Finally, schools continue to operate in ways that view learning as an end in itself, detached from the broader framework of institutions and values, rather than as a continuous process, a life-long learning which needs to be nurtured.

Drawing on several study findings on latent values in classrooms, Anyon (1988) observes that just as students are rewarded for mastery of the formal curriculum, so are they rewarded for acquiescence to the inequities of power. For Anyon, this pattern of reward may very well create a *prima facie* legitimacy to hierarchy and unequal power when encountered in other institutions. Such legitimacy is not socially neutral; it provides practical ideological support for unequal distributions of power in society (p. 178). The present unequal organization of authority in classrooms and schools does not only indicate unequal power in society, but also reifies and legitimates this in consciousness, thereby fostering the impression that unequal power is natural, logical, or merely in the “order of things” and inevitable. Structural constraints that characterize schooling and the wider society persistently reinforce inegalitarian stratification where schools are often reduced to credentializing mechanisms - protected enclaves that generally favor the privileged and more affluent segments of the population. Many schools, whether consciously or not, continue to reinforce inequitable, culturally insensitive and, in fact, dehumanizing behaviors that impede learning, particularly among children of low socio-economic status.



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There are many salient factors inherent in the schooling system to consider if we are to reverse the trend of low achievements. It is important to recognize that these factors, which span the political, social, cultural, and institutional spheres, reflect structural pressures on schools, not foregone conclusions. In part, the possibility that the schooling system may be unable to carry out what is “required” by these pressures is made even more of a reality by the fact that the approaches traditionally taken to address these factors are often at cross-purpose, each operating in a narrow and in ignorance of other salient variables that directly or indirectly affect the quality of schooling. Equally important is to acquire an understanding of how schools contribute to children’s acquisition of literacy. Literacy, like educational goals, can have different meanings for people of different cultures. In this context, notions of literacy, can be viewed as being culture-specific, promoted within a particular social context. Recognizing this, it is important to understand the link between schooling and literacy, particularly as it relates to the development of children’s social identity.

#### **D. LITERACY AND POLITICS OF SOCIAL IDENTITY**

In his book, *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World*, Freire (1987) defined literacy as a form of cultural politics where it can become a meaningful construct to the degree that it is seen as a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people. For Freire, literacy means understanding the details of everyday life and the social grammar of the concrete through the larger totalities of history and social context. According to Freire (1987), literacy must be acknowledged as a relationship of learners to the world and mediated by the transforming practice of this world. Literacy, as an act of learning to read and write, has to begin from an understanding of the *world*, something which human beings do before reading the *word*. To define literacy in the Freirian sense as a critical reading of the “world” and “word” is to lay the theoretical foundation for more fully analyzing how knowledge is produced and subjectivities constructed within relations of interaction in which teachers and students attempt to make themselves present as active authors of their own world.

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In examining the relations between literacy and schooling, Erickson (1984) highlights the necessity of questioning whether fostering literacy constitutes the central activity of public schooling as an institution of mass society, pointing out that it may be that other school activities play equally important roles which may contradict the school's role as fostering literacy. To maintain class position from one generation to the next, schools might engage (although maybe not deliberately) in other activities like social sorting as an item of cultural capital (Apple & Weis 1983; Brice 1983; Erickson 1984; Pinar 1988; Rist 1970). Recognizing the damage this approach can cause, it is useful then to question how various activities of schools work together and how they are organized in relation to students of diverse class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds - that is, the relation between the manifest curriculum of school subject matter (i.e. literacy) and the hidden curriculum of social sorting and ranking.

Many teachers define success exclusively through the ideological correctness of the subject matter they teach. Giroux (1988) cites the classic example of a middle-class teacher who is alarmed at the sexism displayed by male students in her classroom. The teacher responds by presenting students with a mixture of feminist articles, films, and other curriculum materials. Giroux observes that instead of expressing appreciation for being politically enlightened, students in this classroom responded with scorn and resistance, thus further baffling the teacher as students' sexism appears to become even more entrenched. Giroux (1988) highlights several pedagogical and political errors that emerge from this encounter. In the first instance, the teacher, instead of giving any attention to how the students produce meaning, incorrectly assumes the self-evident nature of the political and ideological correctness of her position. By assuming an authoritative discourse, the teacher ignores the possibility for students to "tell" their own stories as well as to present and then question the experience they bring into play. In addition, by denying students the opportunity to question and explore the ideology of sexism as a problem experience, the teacher not only undermines students' voices but also displays what, in the student's mind, parallels the institutional/middle-class authority of telling them what to think. To this end, Giroux points out that what appears at first to be the legitimate pedagogical intervention of the teacher's voice actually weakens the teacher's own ideological convictions by ignoring the complex and fundamental relations among teaching, learning and student culture (p. 256).

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Giroux (1988) also highlights the saliency of articulating the moral aspects of defining a language of public life, emancipatory community, and individual and social commitment. Students need to be introduced to a language of empowerment and radical ethics that allows them to reflect on how community life should be constructed around a project of possibility. Finally, it is important to recognize the need for teachers to provide their students with meaningful opportunities to interrogate different languages or ideological discourses as they are described in various texts and curriculum materials (p. 258). Giroux (1988) provides a number of reasons why this is important. First, critical pedagogy needs to validate and examine the production of differential readings which, in turn, can encourage students to engage in the theoretical and practical task of examining their own theoretical and political positions. Second, critical pedagogy should establish the classroom condition essential for identifying the problematic, the contradictory, and multiple ways of viewing the world that students use in developing their worldview. By creating such a condition, it becomes possible to further develop and examine how students perform particular ideological operations to challenge or adopt certain positions offered in the texts and contexts available to them in both the school environment and in the wider society. Finally, it is important for teachers to recognize that the meanings and ideologies promoted in the text are not the only positions that can be appropriated by the students. Recognizing that student subjectivity and cultural identity are themselves contradictory, there is a need to link how students produce meaning to the various discourses and social formations outside of schools that actively construct their contradictory experiences and subjectivities.

Given the cultural differences that are played out in schools, many scholars have repeatedly stressed the importance of understanding how meaning is negotiated and transformed in schools (Bossert 1979; Brice 1983; Delpit 1988; Erickson 1984; McLaren 1989; Nobilt & Pink 1987; Pinar 1988; Rist 1970). This becomes particularly important as cultural differences can be both a source of conflict in social interaction and a result of conflict. To illustrate this point, Erickson (1984) refers to the work of social psychologists who have found that in situations of experimentally induced conflict and negative effect, individuals who speak different dialects will speak progressively more broad forms of that dialect as interaction proceeds and conflict heightens. One interpretation of

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his finding is that in a situation of inter-group conflict, cultural change may, in fact, function as a symbol of political resistance. In an early grades classroom study in the United States, it was found that if during the course of the school year, the teacher reacted negatively to a child's non-standard speech and continually attempted to get the child to speak more "correctly", the dialect features in the child's speech became broader as the year progressed; if the teacher did not react negatively to the child's speech at the beginning of the school year, the dialect features in the child's speech became less marked at the end of that year (Erickson 1984). Evidence from this study suggests that when the teacher made the child's way of speaking a ground for conflict, the child joined in the conflict by becoming progressively more different from the teacher in interaction style; children resisted commitment to a normative order and expressed it linguistically. In contrast, when the teacher did not make culture difference a ground for conflict, the child adapted in the direction of the normative style; children manifested commitment to the normative order. Cultural difference, therefore, seems to be an element in the politics of inter-group conflict and in the micro-politics of interaction in a face-to-face encounter. Cultural differences in ways of speaking and listening constitute a salient element in the acquisition of literacy and reasoning in schools; they not only cause conflict between teachers and students, they can also inhibit student learning (Brice 1983; Bossert 1979; Delpit 1988; McLaren 1989; Pinar 1988; Rist 1970).

A full understanding of what really happens in schools requires us to move beyond single-factor explanations of school literacy and reasoning. There is a need to understand and embrace a critical approach to literacy and pedagogy that empowers both students and teachers as part of the wider project of social and political reconstruction. As a form of social construction, Freire (1987) reminds us that literacy names experiences considered important to a given society. Therefore, we need to examine schools not simply as instructional sites, but also as complexes of dominant and subordinate cultures, each ideologically linked to the power they possess to define and legitimate a particular construction of reality. It is in this sense that schools become part of a broader cultural system. Finally, it is important to recognize that educational outcomes are also conditioned by norms, attitudes, behaviors, perceptions and ideologies that define a particular society. To this end, one can argue that commitment to ideals of self-

realization and to the language of social attribution is not compatible with social ignorance. Communication of social understanding implies a repertoire of emotions. The experiences of individuals and the articulation of their needs must serve as the guiding principles for defining a new cultural vision, which can be legitimated and translated into more familiar and engaging terms. Key to the process of legitimating a new cultural vision, is an education of awareness of the values of others.

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### CHAPTER III. IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE IN SCHOOLING

This chapter analyzes the findings of three specific studies of American schools and five classroom observations conducted by the author in three primary schools in Mali to gain a better understanding of the kinds of behaviors, practices and ideologies that are promoted in schools which affect children's learning experiences. The analysis highlights in greater detail the phenomenon that schools operate as instructional sites and cultural sites. As instruction sites, schools adopt a wide array of practices which affect the learning opportunities afforded to children. As cultural sites, schools define, organize and deliver their curriculum in ways that reflect ideologies characteristic of a particular society. In this context, schools become important agencies for legitimation; they are part of a complex structure through which social groups are given legitimacy and through which social and cultural ideologies are built, recreated, and maintained.

The material examined in this chapter show how schools, rather than aspiring to teach the kinds of knowledge, social relations, and values that can help educate students to take their place within a society from a position of self and social empowerment, often engage in a "hidden curriculum" - the unintended outcomes of the schooling process. The curriculum delivered in the eight classrooms examined in this chapter favors certain forms of knowledge over others, affirming the realities, desires, and values of select groups of students over other groups with low status backgrounds. By engaging in a "hidden curriculum", not only are students impelled to comply with dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behavior, and morality, but also often displaces the professional educational ideals and goals of the classroom teacher or the school.

Given the highly complex and political nature of the schooling process, there is a need to acquire a broader and more holistic understanding of a wide array of salient issues that influence schooling. Using the three studies of American schools, this Chapter investigates how the denial of students' cultural capital, stratification in the classroom setting, and classroom organization affect children's schooling and learning experiences. Investigation of these three key issues show how schools operate as cultural sites; they also show how the dominant culture at all



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levels of schooling functions to deny, and less frequently, to celebrate the cultural experiences of students from subordinate cultures. This understanding is critical to improving educational outcomes and the quality and relevance of student learning.

This chapter also analyzes findings from five classroom observations conducted in Mali, a developing country in West Africa. Overall, they reveal similar qualitative deficiencies which characterize the American experience, albeit expressed in different ways consistent with the local culture. The analysis of schooling processes in the African context reveals how poorly designed curriculum, ineffective pedagogical practices and classroom task organization, combined with inadequate provisions and poor quality of educational inputs and poor teacher preparation affect children's learning experiences. In concluding this chapter, several emerging trends that affect the quality of education and student learning achievements are discussed.

#### **E. WHAT DO PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES DO**

This section examines how cultural differences are played out in three American schools and their implications on the learning achievements of students from families of low socio-economic backgrounds. More specifically, it examines how the denial of children's cultural capital, perpetuation of a caste-like stratification system of students in the classroom setting, and classroom instructional organization together affect the breadth and quality of students' learning achievements, including their engagement in this process. First, it illustrates how a school's endorsement of a narrow and often biased vision of education and schooling lead to poor student learning, an outcome which can be partly attributed to the school's denial of the cultural capital which children bring to the classroom. Second, it analyzes how schools help to reinforce the dominant class structure of the society, often to the detriment of students with low socio-economic backgrounds who ironically are the ones most in need of assistance to reverse their historically defined cycle of marginalization and deprivation. Finally, it explores the impact of various approaches to classroom instructional organization on student-teacher relationship and student achievement

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*Misinterpreting children's culturally patterned communicative performance,  
a case of denying students' cultural capital*

Brice's ethnographic work in two communities in the Piedmont Carolinas - Trackton and Roadville - explains how schools, especially teachers, uncritically interpret children's culturally-patterned communicative performance as evidence of a lack of cognitive competence. Brice (1983) illustrates how different ways children learned to use language were dependent on the ways in which each community structured their families, defined the roles that community members could assume and laid out their concepts of childhood that guided child socialization. Implicit in this illustration is the saliency of culture, both in terms of learned behavior and on language habits as part of that shared learning. To put into context the variations in which language is used in the two communities, particular characteristics between the two social and linguistic environments in which these children have been socialized are contrasted in Table 1.

In the Roadville community and the Trackton community, striking differences exist in the patterns of both teaching language and learning to talk. These variations, however, are all embedded in the culture of each community group. Brice (1983) observes, for example, that flexibility and adaptability constitute the most important characteristics of learning to be and to talk in Trackton where children learn to shift roles, to adapt their language, and to interpret different meanings of language according to changing situations. Children in elementary school grades take this ability into their "mamma" games, in which they exchange insults; as teenagers, they adapt their responses in repartee between males and females and in boasting and toasting exchanges; and, as adults in their own community interactions, they strive to maintain their status by playing different roles and languages, consistent with the needs of the situation (p. 111). According to Brice (1983), this process of shifting is essential to protect one's own status and maintain status relations within the closed community; it also serves as protection. In Trackton, children learning language come to know when to switch roles and how to use language necessary for each of these role shifts; consequently, they focus on interpersonal relationships as well as connections between things, and across scenes and places. As one Trackton member puts it: "●ur children learn how it all means, un-er-ah, I guess what it



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*all means, you'd say. They gotta know what works and what don't you sit in a chair, but if you hafta, you can sit on other things too - a stool, a trunk, a step, a bucket. Whatcha call it ain't so important as whatcha do with it. That's what things 'n people are for, ain't it?"* (p. 112)

In contrast, the patterns of teaching language in the Roadville community are consistent with those of the church; at the individual and group levels, the belief in and practice of using “the right word” help structure the cognitive patterns which children draw of the world (i.e., what they come to know and their notion of how to demonstrate what they know) (Brice 1983). Strictly prescribed oral performance (often based on a written source like the Bible), is the way to prove learning. As Brice points out, “[c]hildren come to know they must be careful about following directions on the links between words and behavior: if they ‘say it right’, they show they’ve ‘got it right,’ and they themselves are, in turn ‘right’ ”(p. 144). These types of expectations discourage the potential recognition of alternatives, that is, alternative choices of what it is one is to learn, and the alternative ways of saying what one has actually learned. Expectations underlying the fixed uses of language and practices of teaching and learning produce and reproduce support for a fixed set of roles and worldview; they provide a continual test of commitment to current modes and values of social institutions and relationships.

Recognizing these contrasting cultural backgrounds, teachers sought to incorporate the different language values and skills that characterize these two communities into their classrooms. While some attempts at linking children’s “home” environment with that of the “school” environment have been modestly successful, the process was slow and arduous. Fundamentally, it challenged teachers to examine their own habits at home (which often reflected the mainstream culture and ideology) to adapt their pedagogic style in ways that acknowledge the children’s culture, including their strengths and their shortcomings, and to reflect on how they have characterized black and white students in the past who seemed unable to adjust to the social and academic norms of the classroom. In examining their past evaluations of working-class students which they (subjectively) perceived to have discipline and academic problems, teachers found they had recorded primarily attitudes or activities which generally focused on patterns of responding to and using oral and written language; their notes indicated that “... some students had difficulty

**TABLE 1: CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ROADVILLE COMMUNITY AND TRACKTON COMMUNITY**

ROADVILLE WHITE WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITY	TRACKTON BLACK WORKING-CLASS COMMUNITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adults talk of “bringin-up” their children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adults talk of children “comin up”.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infants live within predictable physical and time limits; families watch over as they narrate to infants the objects and events to which they should attend.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infants spend the first year of their lives swathed in human touch and verbal interactions; their lives flow with very limited spatial and time barriers imposed by their caregivers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents consider themselves responsible for “training” their preschool children; they organize ways and means to provide what they view as appropriate experiences before their children begin school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Babies born in Trackton are viewed to be born to the community; integration of babies as a social member of the community is taken over by all; parents are expected to provide for the physical needs of the child.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children learn to interpret and to tell others the rules they live by; for parents there is no substitute for their role; children need parents to train them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents and community members see in each child “the makin’s of sump’n,” but the manner in which the child comes up and uses these “makin’s” depends on the child; parents have limited influence and power over any child, maintaining that “children will turn out the way they turn out.”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents talk to their babies, modify their speech in ways they believe appropriate for speaking to children; children are regarded as conversational partners and therefore are expected to answer questions, read books cooperatively, and learn to label and name the attributes of the real-world and book objects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children hear talk about themselves; their behaviors are described to others; their physical features are encapsulated in nicknames; and their moods and manners mocked and narrated.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children are brought into tasks, encouraged to try other activities, and supported and corrected in their efforts; parents read to and play with their preschool children, with the hope of fostering their ability to carry out both activities independently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When children start to talk, they repeat, vary the language about them, and eventually use their language to work their way into the streams of speech about them; boys are encouraged to demonstrate their nonverbal and verbal skills for interacting before the audience of the community; girls are invited to perform with older girls in play songs, spontaneous games, and role-playing.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children hear their parents’ high hopes for their future, including their abilities to participate in and talk about what they learn from a gradually expanding world beyond the mill community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without giving specific explanations or instructions, children must learn to see one thing in terms of another, to make metaphors of the world about them.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Roadville churches, families are told to know their weaknesses, to struggle for more strength, to celebrate their blessings, and to strive to be worthy of the gifts of grace. Churches provide special materials, places and occasions for the participation of the young. At home, their books, blessings before meals and often proverbs and admonishments regarding behavior remind children that they and their parents have a commitment to a force beyond the immediate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Trackton churches, preacher’s message emphasizes feelings and being, including living one’ life with a spirit of acceptance of what cannot be helped; celebration of blessings of the past and present, and great hopes and responsibilities for the future. During church services, youngsters sit with their parents; their participation (verbal or nonverbal), is cause for comment and reinforcement by their elders. At home, they hear little more than a few stories or Biblical quotations to remind them of church teachings; however, many of their celebrations share the spirit of group participation and construction of meaning they have felt in worship services.</li> </ul>

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*following a unilinear pattern of development from learning labels and features, to producing running narratives on items and events, and asking and answering questions about these.*" (Brice 1983, p. 269). Although this sequence of habits might have appeared "natural" to teachers as mainstreamers, they were probably "unnatural" for many students.

The important point to be made here is that teachers, drawing on their mainstream ideology, probably misinterpreted the reasons for which black children and white children behaved the way they did. The (seemingly) problematic behaviors which children exhibited in the classroom have been, in large measure, attributed to either poor cognitive skills, to a lack of self-discipline, to negative behavioral problems, or a mixture of all three. Teachers translated children's behaviors according to their own mainstreamed culture and ideologies, without considering the cultures in which these children have been socialized. Table 2 illustrates how behaviors (presented in bold) which teachers consider to be problematic may, in fact, be natural or normal for children raised in a specific cultural environments that endorse particular practices (presented in italics). A careful review of this table highlights the disconnect between teachers' interpretation of students behavior and the "normality" of students' behaviors.

The findings of Brice's work illustrate how teachers, by denying children's cultural capital, subject themselves to unfairly misinterpreting children's cognitive ability, the consequences of which can be detrimental to children's learning achievements. In this context, the emphasis on finding the right "methods" to improve minority students' academic achievement hides the less visible but more important reasons for their performance. Among these are the asymmetrical power relations of the wider society that are reproduced in the schools, and the deficit view of minority students that school personnel uncritically, and frequently unknowingly, hold. From this perspective, solutions to the problem of academic underachievement tends to be constructed in primarily methodological, mechanistic, and ideological terms divorced from the sociocultural reality of students.

Taking cognizance of such inclination, Delpit (1988) cautions against the adoption of a "one size fits all" approach which often does not work with the same level of effectiveness with all students across different socio-cultural backgrounds. Denying a child its culture and unique strengths leads to the disillusionment of teachers

**TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF TEACHERS' EVALUATIONS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF WORKING CLASS STUDENTS**

BLACK	WHITE
<b>SOCIAL BEHAVIORS</b>	
<p>1. <b>“verbally &amp; physically aggressive”</b> (<i>Successful verbal performance under challenge is considered to be a sign of quickness and intelligence. Children generally raised without putting boundaries around time, space, or social interactions. Children are Immersed in constant, complex stream of multi-party communication to help them define themselves as speakers. Boys are normally challenged to show their verbal skills for interacting before the audience of community. )</i></p>	<p>1. <b>“quiet, laconic”</b> (<i>Children raised to avoid run-ins with teachers and other authorities)</i></p>
<p>2. <b>“disrespectful”</b> (<i>Children are raised without putting boundaries around time, space, or social interactions. Ritualized insults during word games or play among black children emphasize that listeners make sense of these only by knowing both background meanings and intentions.)</i></p>	<p>2. <b>“respectful”</b> (<i>Back talking, teasing or challenging authorities are punished; children taught to respect elders.)</i></p>
<p>3. <b>“can’t respect classroom rules about asking permission to do things - just barges in and does it without asking”</b> (<i>Children are raised without putting boundaries around time, space, or social interactions. Children raised as conversationalists and through participation, they are allowed to break into adult conversation, making themselves part of ongoing discourse. They may do so by asking a question, introducing a new topic or asking for clarification. Such efforts are accompanied by nonverbal gestures and verbal strategies (i.e. getting in front of the face of a speaker, or outshouting others in the conversation).</i></p>	<p>3. <b>“girls especially will hold back and wait to be sure they understand specific instructions”</b> (<i>Children are given limited roles; they are tutored in pre-scripted performances, in which their parents “hold the book” for them as they learn their parts for labeling, describing and answering questions.)</i></p>
<p>4. <b>“has no respect for private property; thinks anything in the class ‘belongs’ to him</b> (<i>Children are raised without putting boundaries around time, space, or social interactions. Children not brought up in an individualistic manner; viewed as a social actor, they encourage children to participate in group activities).</i></p>	<p>4. <b>“often shy about sharing; wants ‘one of her own’”</b> (<i>Children are brought up to have space and time of their own for their possessions - toys, books, clothes and for other activities.)</i></p>
<p>5. <b>“wants things repeated again and again. I find myself shouting before they’ll listen; if they don’t get it from me, they’ll flit about the room until they find someone who’ll tell ‘em’.”</b> (<i>During their early years, children are socialized into repeating words and varying language use. Also, repetitions are commonly practiced when telling highly valued “junk” stories.)</i></p>	<p>5. <b>“expect simple directions such as those in workbooks to be ‘spelled out’ on an individual to individual basis by me. They won’t work under a buddy system where classmate helps.”</b> (<i>Children constantly exposed to parents prescribing the rules of the game, socially and academically).</i></p>



**TABLE 2: EXAMPLES OF TEACHERS' EVALUATIONS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF WORKING CLASS STUDENTS**

BLACK	WHITE
<b>ACADEMIC BEHAVIORS</b>	
<p>6. <b>“doesn’t seem to know how to answer a simple, direct question”</b> <i>(Children do not expect adults to ask them questions because they are not seen as information givers or question-answers. Questions used at home are usually posed in interactional contexts. The type of questions often used are analogy questions which calls for an open-ended answer which draws from the child’s experience.)</i></p>	<p>6. <b>“shows no imagination; answers are always minimal”</b> <i>(Children are taught to be careful about following directions on the links between words and behavior; such expectations discourage potential recognition of alternatives - both alternative choices of what it is one is to learn and alternative ways of saying what one has learned.)</i></p>
<p>7. <b>“I would almost think some of them have a hearing problem; it is as though they don’t hear me ask a question. I got blank stares to my questions. Yet when I am making statements or telling stories which interest them, they always seem to hear me.”</b> <i>(Trackton men and their friends focus on stories which tell of their own current adventures or recount fairly recent adventures of particular personalities known to all present. All of these are highly self-assertive. Trackton stories show reality through a highly-creative fictionalized account; they also assert individual strengths and powers.)</i></p>	<p>7. <b>“instructions have to be clear and straightforward; little ability to interpret or go beyond minimal requirements; respond to low-level questions minimally, with little imagination or extension of ideas”</b> <i>(Children are given limited roles; they are tutored in pre-scripted performances, in which their parents “hold book” for them as they learn their parts for labeling, describing and answering questions. Religious experiences at church and church related affairs reinforce the home emphasis on the teaching of fixed and memorable statements and labels. Recitation in both church activities and at home calls for bounded knowledge which is exhibited in the repetition of memorized words exactly as they have been taught.)</i></p>
<p>8. <b>“They’ll never tell a story straight - if there ever was a grain of truth in what they say, it’s lost when they get through with it. If they only used that imagination in some constructive way.”</b> <i>(Good story-tellers base their stories on an actual event, but they creatively fictionalized the details surrounding the real event, and the outcome of the story may not resemble what has actually happened. Best stories are “junk” and anyone who can talk “junk” is a good story-teller. Talking junk includes laying on highly exaggerated compliments and making wildly exaggerated comparisons as well as telling narratives. Straightforward factual accounts are rarely told).</i></p>	<p>8. <b>“needs help in moving beyond the bare essentials of restating stories or social studies materials”</b> <i>(When children are asked to retell events, they are expected to tell non-fictional stories which “stick to the truth”. Children carry their requirements for using language: report exactly how something is, maintain a single consistent label for items and events, and render stories in absolute chronological order with direct discourse. Stories should be factual and have little exaggeration; they are used to reaffirm group membership and behavioral norms.)</i></p>
<p>9. <b>“fails to stay on topic during class lessons; talks out of turn and interrupts fellow classmates; always wants to relate class discussion to something else instead of lesson”</b> <i>(Adults talk of children “comin’ up”, where learning is derived from active group participation in social interaction, and lived experiences.)</i></p>	<p>9. <b>“attentive and responsive in class; wait her turn”</b> <i>(As part of their child-rearing practices, parents demand that certain activities take place only in certain areas. Children engage in activities when they are told to do so. They are expected to cooperate with elders and authorities.)</i></p>

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that instructional methods which are effective for the mainstream population will benefit *all* students, regardless of their backgrounds. In this sense, the approach to instructional methods becomes synonymous to the “blue print” approach, which is generally premised on the false assumption of what is the “ideal”. Viewed from the perspective of schooling processes, both approaches suggest that if instructional methods are not effective vis-à-vis learning, the fault is not on how instructional methods are developed and implemented, but rather with the inability of students to understand and learn. By adopting such a narrow focus, schools perpetuate a reproduction of existing asymmetrical power relations among cultural groups; they also discourage quality learning, a consequence that contradicts the goals of educational institutions, like schools. To reverse this trend, it is important for teachers to understand the socio-historical specificities of all students, particularly those from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds. It is only through acquiring this critical understanding (e.g., acknowledging the cultural capital and uniqueness of each child) that teachers can begin to enhance the instructional methods they use in their classrooms to encourage meaningful learning.

### *The case of reinforcing the class structure of the society*

Although several studies have shown a high correlation between academic achievement and social class, few have actually explained how the school helps to reinforce the class structure of the society. In his study of the school experiences of African-American primary school age children, Rist (1970) shows how teachers’ perceptions of students’ home lives made a significant difference in the way they treated students. Students with poor socio-economic backgrounds were placed in lower-ability reading groups while middle-class children, considered as “fast learners”, were given the privilege of more instruction time and more teacher attention. Teachers’ ranking of students on the basis of their socio-economic backgrounds persisted through the first few years of primary schooling; teachers’ behavior toward the different groups became an important influence of children’s achievement.

Teacher-student relationships and the dynamics of interaction between the teacher and students are far from uniform. For any child within the classroom, variations in the experience of success or failure may have significance

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far beyond the boundaries of the classroom situation. Expectations and social interactions give rise to the social organization of the class. In Rist's (1970) study, the development of expectations by the kindergarten teacher regarding the differential academic potential and capability of any student was largely determined by a series of five subjectively interpreted attributes and characteristics of that student. First, the kindergarten teacher constructed an "ideal type" of characteristics (usually based on social criteria) necessary for any student to achieve "success" both in public schools and in the larger society. Second, during their first meeting with students, teachers also made subjective evaluations of whether students have or lack the desired traits required for success. Third, differential treatment was accorded to the two groups in the classroom, with the group considered as "fast learners" receiving more teaching time, reward-directed behavior, and attention from teacher. Fourth, interactional patterns between teacher and various groups in her class took on caste-like characteristics during the course of the school year. Finally, a similar process occurred in students' later years of schooling where the use of a variety of informational sources related to past performance became the basis for classroom grouping.

Rist (1970) points out that when the kindergarten teacher established permanent seating arrangements very early in the school year, she not only had information on the socio-economic background of the children but also had time to observe the children in class. The behavior, degree and type of verbalization, dress, mannerisms, physical appearance and performance of the early tasks assigned during class were available to the teacher as she began to formulate opinions concerning the respective capabilities and potentials of various children (p. 419). Rist notes that within the following days, it was obvious that only a certain group of children was continually being called on; this one group of children that was continuously physically close to the teacher and had a high degree of verbal interaction with the teacher was placed at Table 1, the place for "fast learners". On at least four criteria, there was increasing dissimilarity between each group of children as one progressed from Table 1 to Table 2 to Table 3; the first three criteria are summarized in Table 3, the final criteria, relating to socio-economic factors, are replicated in Table 4.

**TABLE 3: CRITERIA FOR RANKING**

Groups	Physical Appearance	Interactional Behavior	Use of Language
Table 1	all dressed in clean and well pressed clothes; no odors	showed leadership qualities; mostly crowded close to the teacher	quite verbal with teacher, good command of American English (i.e. school language)
Table 2	few dressed in clean clothes; few had urine odors	few would often linger on periphery of groups surrounding the teacher	spoke less with teacher, used black dialect
Table 3	most were poorly dressed with strong urine odor; most had very dark skin	most would often linger on periphery of groups surrounding teacher	spoke less with teacher; spoke black dialect

**TABLE : DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS BY SEATING ARRANGEMENTS AT THE THREE TABLES IN THE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM**

Factors	Seating Arrangements 1/		
	Table 1	Table 2	Table 3
<i>Income</i>			
Families on welfare	0	2	4
Families with father employed	6	3	2
Families with mother employed	5	5	5
Families with both parents employed	5	3	2
Total family income below \$3,000/yr 2/	0	4	7
Total family income above \$12,000/yr 2/	4	0	0
<i>Education</i>			
Father ever grade school	6	3	2
Father ever high school	5	2	1
Father ever college	1	0	0
Mother ever grade school	9	10	8
Mother ever high school	7	6	5
Mother ever college	4	0	0
Children with pre-school experience	1	1	0
<i>Family Size</i>			
Families with one child	3	1	0
Families with six or more children	2	6	7
Average number of siblings in family	3-4	5-6	6-7
Families with both parents present	6	3	2

Source: Rist, R. Study on "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The self-fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education." In Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 40, No. 3. August 1970.

1/ There are nine children at Table 1, eleven at Table 2, and ten children at Table 3.

2/ Estimated from stated occupation

Some combination of the four criteria was used by the teacher to develop a series of expectations about the potential performance of each child and subsequently grouped the children according to perceived similarities in



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expected performance. As the teacher said herself "...[the] first table consisted of her "fast learners" while those at the last two tables "had no idea of what was going on in the classroom." (p. 422). In large measure, the basis for the teacher's evaluation of the children was premised on attributes commonly described by educated members of the middle class; without these attributes achievement success becomes highly unlikely. Rist (1970) describes these highly prized attributes as being demonstrated by "... high degree of verbalization in Standard American English; the ability to become a leader; a neat and clean appearance; coming from a family that is educated, employed, living together, and interested in the child; and the ability to participate well as a member of a group." (p. 422)

The kindergarten teacher appeared to use the "normative reference group" which closely resembled those groups in which she did participate and belong (i.e. middle-class). Given this reference group orientation which defined qualities necessary for "success", the kindergarten teacher responded favorably to those children who displayed such attributes. Her resultant preferential treatment of a select group of children appeared to be derived from her belief that certain behavioral and cultural characteristics are more crucial to learning in school than are others. Thus, dividing the class into those expected to learn and those expected not to permeated the teacher's general orientation to the class (Rist 1970).

Operating under the assumption that children in Table 2 and Table 3 "*just had no idea of what was going on in the classroom*" (p. 424), the teacher relied on a few students of ascribed high social status. As the following narrative shows, the teacher would use one of the students in Table 1 as an exemplar that the remainder of the class was encouraged to emulate:

*(It is Fire Prevention Week and the teacher is trying to have the children say so. The children make a number of incorrect responses, a few of which follows:) Jim, who had raised his hand, in answer to the question, "Do you know what week it is?" says, "October." The teacher says "No, that's the name of the month. Jane, do you know what special week this is?" and Jane responds, "It's cold outside." Teacher says, "No, that is not it either. I guess I will have to call on Pamela. Pamela, come here and stand by me and tell the rest of the boys and girls what special week this is." Pamela leaves her chair, comes and stands by the teacher, turns and faces the rest of the class. The teacher puts her arm around Pamela, and Pamela says, "It fire week." The teacher responds, "Well Pamela, that is close. Actually it is Fire Prevention Week." (p. 424)*

Rist (1970) cites another occasion (the Friday after Halloween) where the teacher announced to the class that all students would be invited to tell their experience in front of the class. In reality, however, the teacher only called on six students, five of whom sat at Table 1 and the sixth at Table 2. As the following narrative shows, the teacher once again focused her attention on higher status students.

*"(The students are involved in acting out a skit arranged by the teacher on how a family should come together to eat the evening meal.) The students acting the roles of mother, father, and daughter are all from Table 1. The boy playing the son is from Table 2. At the small dinner table set up in the center of the classroom, the four children are supposed to be sharing with each other what they had done during the day - the daughter at work, the mother at home, and the two children at school. The Table 2 boy makes few comments. (In real life, he has no father and his mother is supported by ADC funds.) The teacher comments, "I think that we are going to let Milt (Table 1) be the new son. Sam, why don't you go and sit down. Milt, you seem to be one who would know what a son is supposed to do at the dinner table. You come and take Sam's place." (p. 424)*

In this instance not only did the teacher focus her attention on higher status students seated at Table 1; she also penalized a lower-status student not only for failing to have verbalized middle-class table talk, but more fundamentally, for not having middle-class experience. He was unrealistically expected to speak as if he had a father living with him in real life (Rist 1970).

The realization of the self-fulfilling prophecy within the classroom reached its final stages in late May when the school year was coming to an end. During this period, children seated in both Tables 2 and 3 found themselves in situations that can be characterized by a lack of interaction with the teacher, a lack of involvement in class activities, and infrequent instruction. The comments prepared by the teacher after the school year show how biased the teacher oriented her class, often to the detriment of low-status students. For students seated in Table 1, the teacher wrote:

*"I guess the best way to describe it that very few children in my class are exceptional. I guess you could notice this just from the way children were seated this year. Those at Table 1 have consistently the most responses throughout the year and seemed most interested and aware of what was going on in the classroom." (p. 424)*

For children seated at Table 2 and Table 3, the teacher wrote:

*"It seems to me that some of the children at Table 2 and most of all the children at Table 3 at times seem to have no idea of what is going in the classroom and were off in another world all by themselves. It just*

*appears that some can do it and some cannot. I don't think that it is the teaching that affects those that cannot do it, but some are just basically low achievers" (p. 425)*

Despite the obviously distressing behaviors which the teacher exhibited in the classroom, Rist (1970) points out that students did not sit passively, internalizing the behavior the teacher directed towards them. Students responded to the stimuli of the teacher, both in the context of internal differentiation within the class and in their response to the teacher; the response type depended on which Table the student sat. Responses from students seated at Table 1 can be characterized as a form of ridicule and belittlement towards children seated at different tables, a response which children from neither Table 2 or Table 3 made during the school year. The following narratives illustrate this point.

*"Mrs. Caplow says, "Raise your hand if you want me to call on you. I won't call on anyone who calls out." She then says, "All right, now who knows that numeral? What is it, Tony?" Tony makes no verbal response but rather walks to the front of the classroom and stands by Ms. Caplow. Gregory calls out, "He don't know. He scared." Then Ann calls out, "It's sixteen, stupid." (Tony sits at Table 3, Gregory and Ann sit at Table 1.)*

*Jim starts to say out loud that he is smarter than Tom. He repeats it over and over again, "I smarter than you. I smarter than you." (Jim sits at Table 1, Tom at Table 3.)*

*Milt came over to the observer and told him to look at Lilly's shoes. I asked him why I should and he replied, "Because they so ragged and dirty." (Milt is at Table 1, Lilly at Table 3)." (p. 426)*

The problems of lower status children were compounded not only by how the teacher expressed her low-esteem of and lack of respect for them, but their peers had also turned against them. As Rist (1970) points out, the implications for the future schooling of a child who lacks the desired status credentials in a classroom where the teacher accords high value on middle-class "success", values, and mannerisms are indeed tragic. He cautions, however, that we must not easily assume that non-participation in classroom activities by children in Table 2 and 3 (who were also systematically ignored by the teacher) did not learn anything. They probably learned in a fundamentally different way in which children in Table 1 learned (p. 426). Rist (1970) observes that, although children were not able to interact with the teacher, they began to develop patterns of interaction among themselves whereby they would discuss material that the teacher presented to the children in Table 1. Lower status students

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seated in Table 2 and Table 3 responded to the stimuli of the teacher in significantly different ways; they either withdrew or engaged in verbal and physical in-group activities. Some of the lower-status students withdrew as a response to either their peers' ridicule or being isolated from the teacher. Although this occasionally took the form of physical withdrawal, it was frequently psychological.

*"Betty, a very poorly dressed child, had gone outside and hidden behind the door . . . Mrs. Caplow sees Betty leave and goes outside to bring her back, says in an authoritative and irritated voice, "Betty, come here right now." When the child returns, Mrs. Caplow seizes her by the right arm, brings her over to the group, and pushes her down to the floor. Betty begins to cry.... The teacher now shows the group a large posterboard with a picture of a white child going to school.*

*The teacher told the students to come from their seats and form a semi-circle on the floor in front of her. The girls all sit very close to the piano where the teacher is seated. The boys sit a good distance back away from the girls and away from the teacher. Lilly finishes her work at her desk and comes and sits at the rear of the group of girls, but she is actually in the middle of the open space separating the boys and girls. She speaks to no one and simply sits staring off." (p. 429)*

This asocial environment can be attributed to the type of social organization imposed by the teacher in class. Children in Table 1 were socialized into a pattern of behavior which led to expressions of hostility and aggression towards children seated in other tables. Through the teacher's actions, children learned who was and was not vulnerable to hostility. In effect, the teacher established patterns of differential behavior which the class mimicked and integrated.

The process by which seating arrangements were defined in kindergarten continued in first grade where, for children of low-status, there was no chance for upward mobility. The initial labels of "fast-learners" and "slow-learners" given to kindergarten children were reinforced by first-grade teachers' interactions with students throughout the school year. In second-grade, seating arrangements were defined according to children's past performance (especially reading performance in first grade), rather than on teacher's expectations of how each child might perform (p. 430). The caste-like character of the reading groups in second grade became clear as the year progressed. Rist (1970) notes that in all three groups children were reading different books and it was the policy of the school not to allow a child to go on to a new book until the previous one had been completed. Therefore, there was no way for a

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child to advance, even if he or she has demonstrated competence at a higher reading level. Children had to continue at the pace of their respective groups; individual reading was not permitted, preventing a student to finish a book on his own and move ahead. According to Rist, “[n]o matter how well a child in the lower reading group might have read, he was destined to remain in the same group. This is, in a sense, another manifestation of the self-fulfilling prophecy in that a “slow learner” had no option but to continue to be a slow learner, regardless of performance or potential.” (p. 435).

Rist’s (1970) study demonstrates the manner in which there emerges within the early grades a stratification or caste-like system, premised on both teacher expectations related to behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of the child and various socio-economic factors related to the child’s background. When a child begins to move to the upper grades, the variable of past performance becomes a crucial index of the position of the child within the different classes. During the first three years of elementary schooling, there was no movement into the highest reading group. Teacher expectations (and implicit expressions), based on a series of subjectively interpreted social criteria, on both the expected academic potential and subsequent differential treatment accorded to students of low-status, can be considered as one very important factor that affect student learning achievements. Teachers are socializers. In school, they impart not only the norms and values required in school, but also socialize children to maintaining a generally inequitable status quo. It is through these types of behaviors that schools, instead of functioning as a genuine institution for effective learning, become detrimental to students, especially students with low socio-economic backgrounds.

### *The case of classroom instructional organization*

Daily activities in which individuals engage are important to shaping the development of their social relationships; as teachers and students interact within the context of recurrent classroom activities, patterns of interaction surface and particular social relationships develop. Bossert’s (1979) study of two third-grade classrooms demonstrate how classroom organization of instruction creates the context in which teacher and students interact and



social relationships form. Classrooms that differ in their application of various task activities show different patterns of social relationships. As the following two contrasting examples of Ms. Hunt's classroom and Mr. Stone's classroom will demonstrate, these patterns become visible with regard to the varying types of teacher authority, in teachers' allocation of instructional assistance, and in the structure of peer networks.

In Ms. Hunt's classroom, it is typical for the teacher to dominate and control classroom events, leaving few opportunities for students to choose their own tasks or to interact freely with peers. Ms. Hunt's classroom enforces a strict ritual adherence to the class schedule, leaving a small amount of free time for peer interaction. As Bossert (1979) observes, Ms. Hunt rarely deviated from the class schedule she established at the beginning of the school year; activities requiring more time than anticipated were generally either postponed for the following day or rescheduled into "flexible" periods included in the week's schedule.

In Ms. Hunt's classroom, recitation was the main activity. She used recitation from instructions to correcting homework. When class was not doing recitation, children usually engaged in seat work activities (i.e. work sheets). During the seat work period, Ms. Hunt would occasionally conduct "conferences" with each student with the three-fold objective of giving students individual attention, helping children with particular problems, and review students' work. During these conferences, however, Bossert (1979) observes that instead of assisting the student with whom she was conferring, Ms. Hunt seemed to be more predisposed to helping other students who approached the "conference" table, quieting children who were "sharing too loudly", and checking to see which children had finished the various projects listed on the board.

*"[Conferences at center table on spelling work. Class working individually at seats on math or social studies assignments.]*

*(Ms. Hunt finishes with Chris and calls George to table.)*

*Hunt: Andrew, that is enough. (Talking to Martin.)*

*(Hunt goes back to working with George. Lynn comes up to the table and asks Ms. Hunt a question about her assignment.)*

*(Hunt [spending about a minute] helps her. Carol comes up to ask a question.)*

*Hunt: Announcement. I want your attention. Who has done question five on this math?*

*Martin: What page?*

*Hunt: Page 106.*

*(No one raises his hand.)*



*OK, when you get up to that one, ask Lynn about it because I gave her a hint on how to do it. Who is finished with their social studies?*

*Karen (who has her hand raised), you can start on your math.*

*Martin, you too.*

*Get working, Now, we only have three minutes left so let's work hard.*

*(Hunt sits down to work with George again. She notices Martin and Andrew playing swords with their pencils.)*

*Hunt: Martin and Andrew! Martin come over here.*

*(Hunt gets up and brings Martin over to center table. She bawls out Martin - telling him that he should work harder. Lynn comes up to Hunt at center table and reminds her that it is time to go to gym. Hunt tells George that they will continue tomorrow and to go to his seat.)*

*Hunt: All right children, work away. Let's get ready to go to the gym." (p. 24)*

In this classroom, students who responded positively to classroom rules were praised, favored, and given special attention and privileges. These students were often called on to help or run errands, and were allowed to work together on their assignments in the back room while the rest of the class worked independently at their seats. To these students, Ms. Hunt would say, "*Janet, Erica and Lynn are so well behaved. They're just a dream. I don't think I'll have any trouble with them the whole year.*" (p. 27). Here, it is important to note that while these students were the most well behaved, they were also among the top performers in several subjects; often, their work was displayed to the class as exemplary models of what teachers may call "good students".

*"[During seat work on maps]*

*Hunt: Put your things away. I want to take a little time to let Erica and Lynn present a little report they did on Ethiopia. While you all have been working on your map study skills, they have gone to the library and looked up a few things about Ethiopia [the country the class is going to study for social studies]. And, they've even made a few drawings to show you some of the things they've learned. Now pay attention. Girls.*

*(Erica and Lynn give their report and show several pictures.)" (p. 27)*

In addition to using these three girls as academic examples for the entire class, Ms. Hunt also relied on two of the girls to serve as models for correct social behavior. Bossert notes that in the thirteenth week of the school year, Ms. Hunt decided to separate two other girls who had been continually talking and misbehaving and paired them with Lynn and Erica, two top-performing students.

*"[Conversation with Ms. Hunt during recess]*

*Researcher: I noticed that Ellen and Jenny were moved apart.*

*Hunt: Oh yes. You've seen how they just talk and talk. I had to move them because they just didn't seem to respond to my talks with them. I moved Erica by Jenny and put Ellen into Erica's old seat (by Lynn). I hope Lynn and Erica can be good examples for them. They (Lynn and Erica) are such good pupils. Ellen and Jenny won't have someone*

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*always to gossip with. I think Jenny will be OK, but Ellen is going to be a hard one to deal with. She's the initiator of a lot of the trouble."* (p. 27)

Although this change seemed to eliminate some of Ellen's and Jenny's inappropriate behavior, the two pairs of new neighbors never really became friends: As Bossert describes, Ellen started to talk with her other seatmate, Susie, leading to the development of a new friendship; Jenny, whose seatmate was male, withdrew from peer relations; Erica and Lynn continued to associate during work periods and often ate lunch together. Several weeks after this move, Ericka and Lynn requested to be moved to their previously seating arrangement and Ms. Hunt approved. Seating arrangements was an important factor in peer associations; because students rarely had time to interact outside of task activities and because most task activities involved students working in their own seats, most peer interactions occurred among seatmates.

In contrast to Ms. Hunt's classroom, Mr. Stone's classroom promoted a more innovative, flexible, democratic, and "student-centered" approach to student participation and student learning. Rather than exercising control as a formal leader, he sought to establish personal rapport with his students, spent less time controlling his students, and engaged students to participate in their own learning process (Bossert 1979). Mr. Stone provided flexibility in his classroom to accommodate students' changing interests. In this classroom, it was not only the teacher who initiated changes; students also suggested changes in the schedule when they wanted to do something new. For example, it was quite common to allow the class to vote on proposed changes.

*"[Stone had just finished reading a story.]*

*Stone: Well, we still have math left to do. Let's ....*

*Anne: (interrupting) Let's play ball now and do math later.*

*(Several kids agree.)*

*Stone: Well, when are you going to do your reports?*

*Anne: Later*

*Robert: I want to do mine today.*

*(Tim and John agree.)*

*Anne: But we can do those this afternoon.*

*Stone: When?*

*Anne: After foreign language.*

*Stone: OK, it's up to you guys. As long as math sheets and reports get done by Thursday. How many want to play ball?*

*(Fourteen)*

*OK, that's a majority. Go do it."* (p. 29)

In contrast to Ms. Hunt's approach, Mr. Stone limited the practice of recitation in his classroom. Language arts work sheets and independent reading were the two most common tasks used in Mr. Stone's classroom. According to Bossert, since work sheets were not graded, students collaborated in completing them; when a student was confronted with a problem, Mr. Stone provided useful hints or encouragement (pp. 30-31). Unlike Ms. Hunt, Mr. Stone rarely patrolled the room checking each student's progress. Each week, several class periods were devoted to reading, and every child was expected to have and be reading a book (p. 31). Mr. Stone encouraged his students to read more challenging books and allowed them to visit the library nearly as often as they pleased; he also used a number of special "projects" in his curriculum and recruited helpers to demonstrate to students how to start projects. Apart from the initial instruction provided to the students, Mr. Stone usually lets students figure things out themselves in order to develop their problem-solving skills.

*"[Stone writing at his desk. About half of the class out of the room, collecting stories for the newspaper. The "editors" are meeting in the back room trying to decide what to include in their paper.]*

*(Anne comes out of the back room, up to Stone).*

*Anne: Mr. Stone, they won't get anything done. David keeps goofing off.*

*Stone: That's not my problem. You're the editors.*

*Anne: But, we can't figure out what to have. David keeps saying he wants jokes and...*

*Stone: Anne, go back in there and do it yourselves; the editors have to make the decisions, not me.*

*(Anne goes into the back room.)*

*[Ten minutes and three protests for help later, the editors had decided on a format and article list.]"* (p. 31)

Very early in the school year, Mr. Stone made it very clear that each student was responsible and accountable for his or her own work and that he was not there to tell the class what to do but to supply help when needed. He also used work sheets and small group projects to partly reduce students' dependence on him. Given the nature of the group projects, it was not possible for Mr. Stone to assist every group simultaneously; students, therefore, learned to work out their own solutions.

Behaving as the sole authority or the director of activities in the classroom was not an option for Mr. Stone. Often, he participated with his students while they were working on a project; as a participant, he occasionally

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surrendered some of his leadership responsibilities. Students were frequently permitted to organize and run classroom projects. Mr. Stone did not show favoritism. As Bossert (1979) points out, he assigned tasks or grouped the class for projects and allocated his attention quite equally among students; students receiving the most assistance were the ones who were having trouble with a project or in reading. Most of the students in this classroom responded well to this atmosphere of choice by organizing their own activities; they did not wait for Mr. Stone to tell them to do something and began work on their own.

The extent of peer interactions is another important factor which distinguishes Mr. Stone's classroom from Ms. Hunt's classroom: in the former, students were involved in small group projects, peer associations were frequently and constantly changing, and students were allowed to choose their own seats and changed seats when they wanted; in the latter, peer relations occurred primarily between seatmates and among members of the same math group, and because there was more recitation and seat work activities, few opportunities existed for students to interact freely (Bossert 1979). In Mr. Stone's class, friendship groups seemed to change as often as new interests were begun; if an activity occurred that was of different interest to a friendship pair, each participated in separate task.

In observing classroom instructional organization in these two classrooms, Bossert (1979) has identified three distinctive patterns of classroom organization - recitation, class task, and multitask, the distinct characteristics of which are summarized in Table 5. *Recitation*, an instructional activity frequently used in Ms. Hunt's classroom, involves the whole class or a larger group of children in a single task. During this activity, students typically listen to the question the teacher asks, raise their hands, wait to be recognized, and provide an answer; the teacher usually controls the flow of questions and answers; a student's performance becomes very public; and typically, both teacher and fellow students know when an answer is correct or incorrect and given that the task and curriculum are identical for every student, performance can be easily compared. *Class task* constitutes another task activity where work sheets or other tasks are assigned to the entire class. Although in Mr. Stone's classroom students organized some of

their own tasks, a teacher usually assigned a common task for every student to complete. In contrast to performance in recitation activities, performance on class task activities is less public; because tasks are done independently or in small groups, neither all members nor the teacher can constantly observe each other while they are working. Due to the assignment of common tasks, however, the performance of students can be compared generally. *Multitask* organization involves tasks ranging from independent reading, to small group projects, and crafts. In comparison to recitation and class task, multitask involves the greatest amount of student choice in organizing and completing the work. A distinctive characteristic of multitask settings is that many different tasks are being worked on simultaneously; because the class is generally involved in a variety of task activities, the teacher and students are rarely able to observe the task performance of every student and students' performances cannot be compared except among those students doing identical task.

**TABLE 5: WORK ORGANIZATION CHARACTERISTICS OF CLASSROOM TASK ORGANIZATIONS**

	Group size	Division of Labor	Student choice	Evaluation
Recitation	Large Group	Single Task	Teacher control	Public, comparable
Class task	Individuals or small groups	Teacher control but some student choice	Less public; comparable	
Multitask	Individuals	Many tasks	Extensive student choice	Less Public; non comparable

Source: Bossert, S. *Tasks and Social Relationships in Classrooms: A Study of Instructional Organization and Its Consequences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1979).

Several observations emerge from the analysis of classroom task organization. Task activities differ in terms of the size of the work group, the number of different tasks in progress at the same time, the extent of student choice over the task and its completion, and the way in which task performance is evaluated and rewarded. In addition, when classrooms employ different task organizations, different patterns of interaction emerge. For example, between teachers and students, patterns in the exercise of authority and the allocation of assistance varied by task utilization. During recitation, Ms. Hunt used relatively high desist rates (i.e., a teacher's request for a student, a group of students, or the entire class to stop an activity that violates classroom rules) and impartial and impersonal means of controlling students (Bossert 1979). These qualities are constitutive elements of the work organization of recitation;



it creates a group management situation in which teacher and student behavior is public and public attention is necessary for the smooth operation of the task. Because recitation puts the teacher at the center of instruction, she can observe most misbehavior and give quick commands of sanction; if a teacher attempts to treat a child individually during recitation, she may lose control of the entire class, waste instruction time, and violate the demands of equity (Bossert 1979). In contrast, in multitask activities, there is no need for the teacher to control the entire class at once, because children are separated in small groups or are working independently, the teacher only needs to monitor student behavior periodically. If misconduct occurs, it is not likely to be contagious as few fellow students are able to observe such acts. As Bossert points out, this reduced visibility allows the teacher to exercise more personalistic means of control over misbehavior; there are few demands of equity and more time to handle problems on an individual basis (p. 90). Although the teachers observed in this study tended to rely on the control forms associated with the predominant classroom activity, those using recitation relied on formal control sanctions whereas those using multitask activities exercised more individualized personalistic controls.

Different social relationships developed in classrooms having different task organizations. As Table 6 shows, there were considerable variations in the two classrooms in terms of: (i) teacher authority; (ii) the allocation of individual instructional assistance; (iii) the formation of friendship groups; and (vi) the extent of cooperation among

**TABLE 6: VARIATIONS IN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CLASSROOM TASK ORGANIZATIONS**

	<b>Teacher style</b>	<b>Peer relations</b>	<b>Teacher-student relationship</b>	<b>Task, group management and teacher authority</b>
Ms. Hunt	Authoritarian. (Strict and rigid control)	relationships influenced significantly by structure of instructional tasks; children were competitive and chose friends within their own achievement sub-groupings	More reliance on formal control sanctions and allocated most of their special assistance to top-achieving students.	Controlled students; constantly checking to see whether every child had properly centered the title on his paper, calling for attention, or stopping children from talking out of turn during class discussions and recitation. Teacher always center of instruction in classrooms.
Mr. Stone	Democratic, (Favored establishing personal rapport with children rather than exercising control as formal leader)	Student friendship groups changed frequently, and each included children achieving at different levels.	Exercised more personalistic controls and provided considerable assistance to the children having most difficulty with class lessons.	Spent less time controlling students. Instruction less centered on the teacher.



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students. Ultimately, work arrangements of an instructional task not only shape the patterns of interaction among individuals engaged in that task, but also influence the development of social relations within classrooms that rely predominantly on that activity. A classroom's task organization specifies who interacts with whom as well as the context in which the interaction occurs (Bossert 1979). Differences in work organization affect the patterns of teacher-student and peer interaction that arise within a given task activity and within classrooms utilizing distinctive activity structures. As Bossert asserts, the analysis of classroom task organizations and of their effect on the development of social relations reveals some of the contents of the educational "black box" and moves beyond simplistic models of behavior. Fundamentally, it recognizes that all behavior is situated and therefore, influenced by the structural properties of the setting in which it occurs. It is in this context that a basic understanding of the social processes of schooling must take into account the ways in which task forms structure how individuals experience the learning environment.

Study findings of the three studies of American schools demonstrate how culturally incongruent pedagogical practices, including methods of classroom task organization which lead to the formation of different social relationships in the classroom, affect the quality of student participation and learning. Together, these studies show how schooling becomes a form of cultural production through a number of processes are set into motion. These processes include the selection and legitimation of school knowledge and student subjectivities, the organization and sanctioning of particular forms of experience, and the development of forms of subjugation resulting from the enforcement of particular forms of authority. We have also seen that schools shape students both through standardized learning situations and through other agendas (e.g., hidden curriculum), including rules of conduct, classroom organization and the pedagogical practices employed by teachers with particular groups of students. To this end, it can be said that the schooling system more often than not mirrors the configurations of the larger society; they also significantly contribute to maintaining them.

The trends that emerge from the examination of American schools not only have important implications for the quality and kinds of knowledge and skills children appropriate from the school, but also on the kind of human resource base we are developing to meet the challenging demands of a world that is more than ever complex and uncertain. Recognizing this, an essential first step towards effectively re-evaluating the failure or success of particular instructional, pedagogical, and classroom organizational methods used with students, calls for a shift in perspective premised on a more holistic, student-centered, and culturally-responsive approach to students' schooling and learning experiences.

#### **F. SCHOOLING - THE CASE OF AFRICA**

Schools in Africa face problems of relatively low levels of learning achievement. To some degree, their lack of effectiveness can be attributed to the lack of resources required to provide even the most rudimentary conditions for success. Although numerous constraints posed by limited resources should by no means be treated lightly, this section focuses on several qualitative deficiencies at the school level. Drawing on the findings of five classroom observations conducted in Mali, the following aspects are discussed: (i) cultural incongruence between the school curriculum and the students' background; (ii) curriculum planning and management; (iii) pedagogical approaches and classroom task organization that promote ineffective learning; (iv) teachers' inadequate training; (v) inappropriate language of instruction; and (vi) lack of parental and community involvement in the schooling process. The context and manner in which these elements are played out in classrooms help shape certain types of behaviors, interactions, and patterns of learning and teaching. Together, they define the type and quality of learning opportunities provided to children, including the type of cognitive environment to which children are subjected.

**Background.** Observations were conducted in five third-grade classrooms in three primary schools in Djenné, Mali. These three primary schools<sup>1</sup> together form a group of schools, referred to as “Groupe Scolaire”. Many children attending these three schools come from families with low socio-economic backgrounds. Of the five classroom observed, four third-grade classes operate in double-shift with different cohorts attending the morning session and the afternoon session, with each session lasting four hours. These classes follow the traditional (classical) form of education, using French as the official language of instruction. The ratio of students per class in these four classrooms averages 57:1, with almost equal participation of boys and girls. These four classes are taught by two teachers (i.e. one teacher teaches two cohorts (morning and afternoon sessions) in one primary school. The fifth third-grade class included in the observation differs in its pedagogic approach. Unlike the four classes operating in double-shift, this class (like all classes in this school) adopts a non-classical convergent pedagogy (“pédagogie convergente”), which is more conducive to promoting a student-centered approach. This particular pedagogy permits children to learn in their first two years in their mother tongue, and gradually shifts to French; it also provides for culturally-sensitive approaches that allow children to link school life with community life. This particular third-grade classroom has 40 students - 20 boys and 20 girls. The class is taught by one teacher; class lasts for seven hours. Enrollment of primary school-age children in this class (and indeed, in this particular school) is not mandatory as with the formal schooling system. Parents voluntarily enroll their children in this school precisely because of the type of pedagogy it adopts, that is, a pedagogy that respects and acknowledges children’s cultural background.

Findings from the five classroom observations reveal important qualitative deficiencies that affect children’s schooling experiences and learning achievements. Although children are generally eager to learn and are indeed proud to be in school, most of these classrooms fail to fully provide a cognitive and effective classroom environment in which children can be active participants to their own learning. Lack of success in this regard can be attributed to several reasons which are discussed below.

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<sup>1</sup> In these three primary schools, two schools use traditional forms of education from grades 1 to 6; classes for grades 1 to 4 operate in double-shift. The third primary school uses a non traditional form of education, supported by a convergent pedagogy. All classes in this

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*Cultural Incongruence Between the School Curriculum and the Students' Background:* Observation of pedagogic practices employed in the four double-shift classrooms reveals how a school's pedagogy often ignores children's values and cultural resources. Although the pedagogy offered in these classrooms does not fully reflect dominant, mainstream knowledge, it reflects a very diluted and degraded version of it. The attempt in these classrooms to offer mainstream culture to children, many of whom come from poor families, reveals that these schools in general, and the classrooms, in particular, disregards the fact that their student population does not possess the cultural capital that would allow them to succeed in school. There appears to be a tendency for teachers to misinterpret children's cognitive abilities and potential for learning. As a result, teachers slow the pace of learning. This observation echoes the study findings of both Rist (1970) and Brice (1983) which show that teachers are often more inclined to (subjectively) evaluate children's cognitive abilities on the basis of their family backgrounds, rather than to objectively question how they, as teachers, can facilitate all children's learning, regardless of their background. Observations in these four classrooms show how teachers often misjudge children from low status backgrounds to be lacking competence because they fail to acquire mainstream values and knowledge at home. For example, it is not uncommon for teachers to literally yell and insult children when they give incorrect answers to questions or when they fail to respond at all when asked a question. Remarks such as "tu connais rien" (you don't know anything), "imbecile", "stupid", or "zero" are common utterances in these classrooms. Such remarks can equally be accompanied by physical abuses. Teachers are readily predisposed to hitting their children when they either give wrong answers (which generally irritates the teacher), misbehave, or simply do not volunteer to respond to a question. The physical abuses which teachers engage in take many forms ranging from hitting children's heads and/or backs, to tightly squeezing their earlobes, to slapping children's hands with the "big yellow ruler". Children generally have no options but to accept such dehumanizing behavior. Such behavior has important implications for children's participation and learning in class, especially for low status children who already have low self confidence

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and low self-esteem. In essence, by blaming the students, these schools avoid the educational responsibility for the disadvantaged student population and does not question the efficacy of its curriculum content, methods, and means.

In contrast to the four double-shift classrooms in the two traditional primary schools, the third-grade classroom in the non-traditional school showed some promise in linking children's schooling with home and community life. In this entire school, a convergent pedagogy is being used to allow children to learn in the first few years in the local language. Instructional material and methods have been designed in ways that accommodate children's cultural background. In the third-grade, a limited number of subjects are taught in French to gradually introduce children to the official language of instruction in Mali. (As this school only goes up to third grade, children need to learn French in order to continue their studies beyond this level in the formal system.) The majority of subjects was taught in the local language, in this case, Peule.

The non-traditional third-grade class adopts several pedagogical practices which are culturally congruent with the children's background. For example, in teaching "techniques d'expression et communication" which aims to develop children's technical skills through creative expressions, children actively engaged in dialogue, dance, and music while emulating the particular strengths of their culture. During this lesson, children become "alive", forthcoming, and indeed, totally engaged in their own learning. They engage in interactive dialogue and are not timid about expressing their own viewpoints orally which, in turn, seem to enhance their self-esteem and confidence in class. Similarly, the teacher shares the stage with his students and balances students' opinions and past experiences. Consistent with the findings of the three American studies discussed in the previous section, students were more inclined to learn and certainly participate in their learning because the learning opportunities provided to them were relevant to their culture and because they had a voice in the process. In this classroom, the teacher also tries to find opportunities to link the few subject matters taught in French with the practices that characterize the children's cultural and social environment. Lectures about a story presented in French, for example, were related to the day-to-day activities of the families. Often, the questions posed by the teacher about the story, although presented in French,



were presented in ways that challenged children to reflect on their own experiences. With this approach, children appeared to relate and assimilate the meaning of the French word or phrase.

Findings from this classroom suggest that students may be acquiring different skills from those students attending the double-shift classrooms who are exposed to more traditional forms of education. It could be hypothesized that students benefiting from a convergent pedagogy such as the one being offered in this classroom are being trained to undertake more creative tasks while students in traditional schools are being trained for more routinized activities. This dimension, however, remains to be carefully and systematically examined. With respect to the students, adoption of a convergent pedagogy which aims to integrate learning opportunities in ways that capitalizes on students' own knowledge, culture and experiences may very well be a key factor to enhancing students' self-confidence and self-reliance. As the findings of the three studies by Rist (1970), Brice (1983), and Bossert (1979) have shown, the quality of learning opportunities and the breadth of learning experiences of disadvantaged children are often reduced, if not compromised, by the mainstream ideologies and behaviors that are typically permeated in school. When schools ignore the cultural capital which children bring to the classrooms, learning, if it occurs at all, becomes superficial and disconnected. However, when children's cultural capital are acknowledged and there is political will to integrate it in the context of enhancing learning opportunities, children are not only empowered to engage in their own learning processes, but also teacher's effectiveness in the classroom is enhanced.

The convergent pedagogy offered in this third-grade classroom shows promise for establishing the missing link between the students' culture and the dominant culture necessary for success. It aims at using students' culture and knowledge as salient resources and means for teaching those skills and knowledge rewarded in the larger society. Although in this classroom it is still important for students to acquire formal knowledge, this knowledge is presented not as absolute truth but rather as conventions that need to be learned in order to succeed in life. In this context, the curriculum has been designed in ways that acknowledge the student's culture, folklore and traditions, and where topics are usually presented in a more critical form that promotes reflective learning. It is important to acknowledge



that poor children know how to do and actually do a lot of things to guarantee their own survival. However, if left by themselves, they are more unlikely to appropriate the means to learn what is necessary to function in a literate society. The school's task, therefore, is to introduce these children to the literate (mainstream) society. By recognizing and valuing poor children's background and experience, the school has to operate in ways that bridge the gap between children's practical knowledge and the literate society's formal knowledge. When disadvantaged students' culture is accepted, incorporated into the school setting, and used as a stepping stone to the teaching of higher level thinking skills, schools are providing the necessary foundation in which students can effectively prepare themselves to function in a literate society.

***Curriculum Planning and Management.*** Overall, curriculum goals in the primary schools are not well specified. They lack cohesiveness, knowledge within each subject matter area is fragmented, and students are not given the opportunity to make connections between different topical sub-areas. With pedagogical practices consisting mostly of rote memorization, drills, teacher lectures, and copying from the blackboard, students face great difficulties in establishing links even within a subject matter area.

Although each school prepares a curriculum plan each year, consistent with national norms and standards established for each level of education, there are variations in the way individual schools and teachers implement such plan throughout the school year. All teachers in the three primary schools are expected to review their daily lesson plan ("Plan d'emploi") with the school director both to ensure the adequacy of material to be covered in class in relation to the subject matter (and where appropriate, in relation to progress achieved in the previous day), and the effectiveness of approach by which the teacher introduces the lesson to the class. In reality, however, this consultation has been reduced, at best, to a mere showing of teachers' lesson plans to school directors; arriving late, teachers literally drop their lesson plans in the school director's office a few minutes before class begins, making it virtually impossible to engage in any kind of discussion. Similarly, school directors, who also teach full time, do not have the time to review and comment on the lesson plans before class begins. Consequently, teachers simply

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implement what they have prepared, thus defeating the objective of the consultation process - provide objective feedback and appropriate support to teachers to help them increase their effectiveness in the classroom.

A review of some teachers' lesson plans reveals weaknesses in terms of scope, content, and sequence. Typically, teachers do not work towards integrating the curriculum; educational activities are not designed in ways that encourage students to make connections across subject matter areas and promote logical thinking. In the five classrooms, children were rarely offered the means through which they can develop logical reasoning which is not only useful for communication, but also to learn math, science, etc. Often, teachers taught subject matters with no attention at all to their logical relationships. Curriculum was generally presented in the abstract; in the case of the four double-shift classrooms, curriculum was often disconnected from the students' cultural background and past experiences, and classroom activities were rarely introduced. For these reasons, it is understandable why children really have no other options but to memorize the material being presented in class. This is unfortunate because it is not through rote memorization that students can achieve a good command of knowledge.

These constraints which affect teacher's effectiveness in the classroom are further aggravated by the generally poor instructional design of textbooks. Most of the textbooks available in the schools are outdated. They suffer from factual inaccuracies, inappropriate illustrations, and poor choice of text language and script. They also lack materials that reinforce the development of higher order thinking skills (i.e. problem-solving skills and critical thinking). Moreover, teachers generally teach without the benefit of appropriate teaching guides. Most teachers lack teacher guides that can assist them in boosting student learning to higher cognitive levels by suggesting good exercises and questions. In the absence of teachers guides, teachers resort to improvisation which, on balance, lacks coherence and clarity in both structure and content. This discourages both effective learning and effective teaching.

***Pedagogical Approaches and Classroom Task Organization.*** In the double-shift classrooms, almost two thirds of the total class time was spent on recitation, repetition drills, teacher lectures, and copying material from the blackboard. Typically, the day begins with students reciting material which the teacher has written on the board.

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Students together read and recite the material after the teacher, sentence by sentence. Upon completion of this mechanical exercise, individual students are then called to read and recite. Teachers claim that the use of recitation exercises helps students gain proficiency in the French language. For them, learning what the words and sentences mean is of secondary importance. This approach, which is echoed in almost all classrooms in the “Groupe Scolaire, discourages children from acquiring higher level thinking skills. By reinforcing rote learning, students simply memorize material, failing to internalize the substance and meaning behind the words.

The negative effects of excessive recitation on student learning can be seen clearly in the way individual students recite and in the manner in which students respond and formulate their answers to questions raised about the material. Regarding the former, some students, while reading and reciting the text individually, often say words that don't even exist in the text (although they may sound like some words in the text). They make frequent pauses, appearing not to recognize the words they have previously recited together with their peers and the teacher. In some instances, individual students fail to complete the recitation. With regard to the latter, students who respond to the teacher's questions generally follow a persistent pattern that exhibit low-level thinking skills. Typically, when a student responds to a question, they are either unable to answer in complete sentences or they provide answers that are completely identical in structure to a particular segment of the text (i.e. students literally pull out a segment of the text to formulate their response). Similarly, when the same question is asked several times, students provide answers leaving intact the same basic sentence structure as the previous respondent. For example, if the first student answered “A Mopti, il y a beaucoup de moustique” (in Mopti, there is a lot of mosquito), the next student would respond “A Bamako, il y a beaucoup de moustique”.

Most teachers do not pride themselves with developing students' higher level thinking skills through all the academic activities. The centerpiece of almost all lessons taught in their classrooms emphasize recitation and/or repetition drills. Rather than engaging students in meaningful and interactive dialogue, teachers often dominated classroom activities, leading students to become passive participants in their own learning process. Moreover,

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teachers rarely provide students with opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned, particularly in relation to their own experience. Students simply memorize texts with few opportunities to actively work with the material. When students are not engaged in recitation and repetition drills, they are copying material from the blackboard which often occupies more than half of the time allotted to one lesson. Given that the longest lesson in these double shift classrooms lasts 30 minutes, there is virtually no time spent for instructional time.

In the four double-shift classrooms, there is also limited oral interaction between the teacher and students over instructional issues. The dominant type of school work was in students' "ardoises" (small and usually old blackboards which children carry) or in exercise books ("cahiers"). Children are often required to do fill-in the blank types of exercises, usually calling for very short and low-level thinking answers to factual questions. This is typically followed a short introduction by the teacher of some new topic. In general, children executed their work without being monitored or receiving individual help. Regarding the latter, children only received (superficial) help when they approach the teacher during periods when students are supposed to be copying material from the blackboard. This interaction between a student and the teacher generally no more than one to two minutes where the teacher simply flips over the student's exercise book, makes speedy corrections without explaining what the student did incorrectly, and then motions the student to return to his or her seat. On balance, verbal interaction between teachers and students was limited to procedural issues, control, and to low level questions and answer sequences. There is little constructive feedback. A disjuncture between what was being taught and what was supposedly being learned appeared to exist. The extensive use of drills and exercises excluded the use of other modes of teaching and types of activities. There was an depressing monotony to the type of work in these classrooms. Daily activities executed each day were highly predictable. Besides children working individually at their desks (usually copying material from the blackboard or doing fill-in exercises), engaging in recitation and drills, short and often disjointed presentations of new topics by teachers, and occasional dialogues between the teachers and students, little else, as far as school work is concerned, could be seen there.

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Actual time spent in instruction which facilitate learning is further reduced by frequent disturbances that occur during class and, in some cases, by the teacher's tardiness. In these classrooms, visitors may come at any time to talk to the teacher, thus pulling the latter's attention away from the class. Administrative meetings can be organized while class is in session. On occasion, some teachers request students to run personal errands that require them to leave the classroom. While class is in session, for example, teachers have asked students to mail a personal letter, buy cigarettes, including small plastic bags of water. Students are also sometimes asked to fetch water so that the teacher can clean/erase the material on the blackboard. Similarly, teachers exercise very little discipline in keeping their students in the classroom. Many students in the double-shift classrooms, for example, frequently leave the room to go to the toilet, to get a drink of water, to walk around the school corridors, to peek into what students in other classrooms are doing, to stretch outside, etc. While the reasons for such leave taking may be valid in some instances, this pattern seems to be the norm rather than the exception. In any given day, several children leave the classroom more than one time, a recurring trend that is particularly noticeable during periods when children are either copying from the blackboard or when the teacher is not in the classroom.

When the school day itself is shortened, as it is typically in a double-shift situation, instructional time is affected. A reduction in the length of the school day can have different effects on instructional time for particular subjects. For example, it can shorten instructional time in all subjects equally. One important consequence of this approach is to reduce the hours of instruction in key subjects below acceptable norms. At the other extreme, retaining previous levels of instructional time in key subjects, such as reading or math, could necessitate reducing or eliminating time allocated to other subjects like civic education or art design. In some of the double-shift classrooms, instructional time allocated for civic education, physical education, and art design were either drastically reduced or completely eliminated to compensate for overtime spent in key subjects like math and grammar.

Research from several countries has shown that the amount of time available for academic studies, including how effectively this time is used by students and teachers, is consistently related to how much children learn in school

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(cited in Levin and Lockheed 1993). As Levin and Lockheed (1993) point out, the provision of additional time is particularly important for earlier grades; it is also important for enhancing the achievement of low performers. While in-school learning time is indeed valuable for all students, it can be especially important for poor students, whose out-of-school time for learning is restricted. Many students in these classrooms, especially girls, for example, are expected to help with domestic, including caring for their younger siblings; some also help other family members in small-income generating activities (i.e. selling crafts). Time spent in these activities inevitably reduce the time children spend in doing classroom assignments. For poor children and low performers, reductions in time for learning can lead to poor learning achievements. From a moral perspective, they can equally discourage improvements in children's self-esteem.

Overall, the four double-shift classrooms can be characterized by a fragmentation in the teaching of individual subjects and unit within a subject at the classroom level. The classroom pedagogy was predominantly teacher-dominated, with very little dialogue between the teacher and students. Teachers comments and feedback about student responses tended to focus on what was wrong rather than what was correct. In general, curriculum content seemed to be abstract and disconnected from the students' cultural background and past experiences. In these classrooms, activities were rarely introduced by a talk or any other activity that would motivate students to learn the subject.

The approach in the non-traditional classroom differed from those adopted in the four double-shift classrooms. To some extent, the teacher tried to break away from the past system in which children from first grade were taught a plethora of different academic subjects. Recognizing that traditional subject-based curriculum generally creates discontinuity between life at home and life at school, this classroom tried to abandon the teaching of separate subjects. Instead, the teacher aimed (although not always successful) to present lessons in an integrated way, providing appropriate links between each key subject, where possible. When assisting children to develop their special projects, for example, some aspects of math, science, language, art design, and community life were



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discussed. Moreover, students have a voice on the type of special project they would like to do. Because children work together in groups to prepare and construct their projects, this occasion also provided students a forum to interact, exchange, and collaborate with their peers.

In this particular classroom, textbooks were not the main teaching material. Although this may be attributed to the low supply of textbooks, in this classroom, there seems to be more reliance on a series of teachers guide which are prepared in the local language and on culturally congruent kits for practical work. Although the non-traditional approach adopted in this classroom may not necessarily lead to increasing access of poor students to higher levels of schooling, it appears to afford poor students with more learning time in school which does not appear to be the case in the double-shift classrooms.

*Teachers' Lack of Training.* Teachers' generally weak preparation to assume their roles and responsibilities in the classrooms is a serious problem in the teaching of all students, particularly disadvantaged students. In the five classrooms observed, teachers themselves express their dissatisfaction with the quality and the frequency of training they have received. Although two of the teachers in these five classrooms were formally trained to be "teachers" and have been teaching for over 15 years, they have received very little training in the past few years. The most junior teacher (originally a mechanic by training), only attended two training sessions, lasting no more than three weeks each, which provided a general orientation to classroom teaching, with emphasis on math and French. Overall, the training which these teachers received does not adequately prepare them to engage in effective teaching. Of the three teachers teaching the five classrooms, only one received (limited) special teacher training in literacy methods and in effective pedagogical approaches. Consequently, teachers usually rely on what they have previously learned in their teacher training courses years ago.

Teachers working with poor students, as is the case in most of the classrooms observed, are faced with a reality different from their own, and they receive generally no (or very limited) training about how to effectively adapt the curriculum to the students' culture, reality and needs. The findings from the four double-shift classrooms

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demonstrate, for example, how teachers frequently view disadvantaged students as lacking in competence, intelligence and, in some instances, emotions. These teachers' views and attitudes tend to differ according to the students' background. The perceptions of these teachers were generally premised on a misguided theory that attributed most of the problems they face in their daily teaching to the socio-economic characteristics of the children and their families. The problems and traits of the children as a collective seemed to be the focus of the teacher's concerns. There was this tendency to homogenize the student population, failing to acknowledge each child as being unique with different strengths and abilities. The same theory which casts this image of children as being an indistinguishable constellation of problems (misconduct, low motivation, poor achievement), tends to attribute the cause to the supposedly deteriorating material and moral conditions of living of these children's families. In short, these children are penalized for being poor and for not displaying behaviors typically valued in mainstream society.

Another aspect which contribute to teacher ineffectiveness in the classroom is the general lack of supervision and minimal feedback and assistance they receive from the school director and school inspector. Typically, the teaching cadre in this "Groupe Scolaire" works individually in their tasks and maintain a hierarchical relationship. Teachers, when they (rarely) related to the school director, did so on a one-to-one basis and tended to work individually on lesson plans. Teachers applied different literacy methods. It was not common practice to work in teams, to systematically exchange information and experiences, and to give each other support in dealing with problems. The school directors (who also taught full-time) seemed professionally detached from the teachers and from the actual school instruction. Although school directors interacted with the teachers socially, there was hardly any meaningful exchange to discuss educational matters that affect both teaching and learning. School directors rarely showed curiosity about students' progress. In this "Groupe Scolaire", school directors had almost exclusive decision-making power, since teachers rarely had the opportunity or freedom to genuinely express their views to them. However, when not teaching, school directors often limited their activities to (superficially) fulfilling bureaucratic matters. This poor school organization certainly reduced teachers' already constrained abilities to effectively teach in the classroom. Interviews with several members of the faculty in this "Groupe Scolaire" reveal

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how many teachers were uncertain about what the schools' concrete goals were or about what the school was supposed to be transmitting to students. This can be partly explained by the fact that school directors, including the school inspector (who only briefly visited the school once), do not routinely make sure that the major program guidelines were being followed by all faculty members; they also do not engage teachers in decision-making.

*Inappropriate Language of instruction.* With more than 1000 ethnic groups, the choice of language of instruction constitutes a big problem for Africa. Teaching thinking skills in a foreign language to a child entering primary education has important ramifications. In subjecting a child to learn a completely new language all at once, the child becomes alienated from his or her cultural roots. A child, not socialized into a new language, is not apt to effectively develop its mental processes which are of vital importance to learning. The child has no basis for organizing and structuring the content of what is being taught because he or she is not provided with the appropriate socio-cultural context in which prior learning experiences can be based. The conditions in which a child is subjected to learn a foreign language are not generally supportive nor adaptive to the child's abilities and efforts; they do not facilitate and foster a child's inquiry and discovery of new information as well as the validation and evaluation of the information. The consequence of this is that a child does not really learn because he or she has not fully internalized all that is being taught.

Observations from the four double-shift classrooms reveal how children heavily rely and indeed frequently resort to their maternal language to make sense of what is being taught in a foreign language. For example, when the teachers in these classrooms are explaining a lesson in French, students often ask for some explanations and/or clarifications in the local language. Similarly, during lessons in vocabulary, the teacher often has to use a combination of French and local language to help students understand what the words mean. When the teacher resorts to the use of local language, students appear to be more receptive to participating in class activities. This is clearly demonstrated in one example when the teacher asked a question in French about a text (also in French). When the teacher asked the question, very few students (mostly better performers) raised their hands, while most sat

quietly in their seats, looking at the blackboard. Of those students who were called to answer, either partial or inaccurate responses were given. Discouraged, the teacher then posed the same question in the local language, accompanied by a few short explanations of what the question is about. More children, in turn, enthusiastically raised their hands, almost bursting to provide an answer. Of the seven children who responded (of which two are considered to be poor performers), five provided correct (although very simple) answers. All seven students answered in the local language.

A random review of students' notebooks in the double-shift classrooms validate the saliency of the language of instruction to promoting learning. Most of the notebooks reviewed showed either incomplete or inaccurate responses to class assignments (which are rarely checked by the teachers). There are also notebooks where students have not done assigned exercises at all. In some notebooks, what is written is certainly not French. In a few cases, notebooks of poor performers have written material which are completely illegible, suggesting that these students either have not really understood what was covered in class, or have special needs and/or disabilities that make it difficult for them to do class work, or both. These important consequences are consistent with some research findings which illustrate how when pieces of discourse in the classroom have no logical or socially appropriate content that incorporates children's experiences, make it difficult for children to effectively learn the lesson because they have not internalized the meaning behind the lesson (Bude 1990; van Niekerk 1991).

Children rely on the cultural orientation in which they have been socialized. It would seem that children's learning only becomes meaningful when they are able to translate the meaning of new material in ways that are familiar to them, with appropriate guidance from more skilled members of society, in this case, the teachers. Entry into a language is an entry into discourse that requires both participants to engage in dialogue and to interpret a communication and its intent (Bartolome 1994; Bude 1990; van Niekerk 1991). In this context, learning a language must consist of learning not only the grammar of a specific language but equally learning how to realize one's intentions by the appropriate use of that grammar.

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*Lack of Parental and Community Involvement.* Although this “Groupe Scolaire” recognizes the saliency of parental and community involvement to promoting effective schools and effective learning, virtually no attempts have been made to systematically include communities and parents in the activities of school. Community members (many of which are parents) are not aware of what educational activities are being promoted in school. With a few exceptions, many parents only go to the school when they are either called by the school director (generally because of a child’s misconduct) or when their child is sick and needs to go home. Schools do not provide feedback to parents on their children’s progress. There are no occasions for parents and community members to participate in school functions. Teacher-parent conferences are rarely organized to provide feedback on children’s performance. Virtually no attempts are made to mobilize parental and community support to improve the school’s effectiveness. Parents’ viewpoints about the school’s performance, including the teachers’ performance, are generally not solicited.

Parents don’t make it their business to regularly inquire about their children’s progress. Of those parents interviewed, many replied that they don’t need to go to the school to find out how their child is doing; the “notes”<sup>2</sup> (i.e. a form of grading system) which teachers provide in children’s exercise books are adequate in terms of alerting parents of their children’s overall performance. Parents are content with these “notes”; they generally don’t ask questions or explanations, even when children receive low grades. This attitude seems to be consistent with parents’ general view about the scope of their responsibility regarding their children’s schooling. Most parents limit their responsibilities to literally sending their children to school, buying notebooks and pens, and giving children money to buy snacks during recreation period. Beyond this, there is little support to encourage their children’s education. These attitudes in some ways suggest that parents are strangers to their children’s educational process.

In this section, we have discussed salient aspects that affect children’s schooling and learning experiences in Africa. Findings in almost all of the classrooms reveal the general insensitivity of the schooling system to the needs of children, particularly children with low-status backgrounds. By imposing on students an academic curriculum that

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is simply a diluted version of mainstream culture, schools promote educational failure rather than educational equality. In addition, by not acknowledging the cultural capital which children bring to the school place, schools effectively disempower children to take an active role in their learning process. As we have seen in one classroom, children's participation and learning are enhanced when schooling processes are able to link school life with community life. We have also seen how the fragmentation and a lack of integration among subjects, together with poor pedagogical practices characterized by rote memorization and drills, also make it difficult for students to see underlying concepts among the seemingly disconnected bodies of knowledge. Teachers' inadequate curriculum adaptations, as well as their biased belief and attitudes about poor students and poor performers, suggest that they are unconsciously collaborating in the role of schooling in maintaining the status quo. Similarly, poor school management and organization reduce teachers' effectiveness in the classroom which is paramount to promoting effective learning. Finally, the lack of parental and community involvement reduces the school's potential for increasing its effectiveness to better respond to the needs of children and to improve achievements.

To conclude, the needs of children, especially disadvantaged children, cannot be met merely by providing a watered-down version of schooling originally designed for mainstream society. New curricula, new structures, new systems, and new pedagogical approaches need to be developed around current problems of *all* children and the skills and attitudes they will need to cope with their future lives. This is particularly important for poor children who generally start at a disadvantage, given their socio-economic backgrounds. Overall, the performance of most classrooms observed discredit schools as being "instructional sites." It is doubtful whether the type of learning that occurs in these classrooms is what educational institutions, like schools, intend to achieve. That is, to allow children of *all* backgrounds to appropriate the skills, knowledge, attitudes and practices relevant and useful for their lives, while at the same time empowering children to actively participate in their own learning process.

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<sup>2</sup> This grading system is generally presented in one of two ways: (i) numerical grades provided in a scale of 1 to 10, i.e., 4 out of 10, 10 out of 10; and (ii) simple notations like "très bien" (very good); "bien" (good); "passable" (passable); "null" or "zero". In the classroom implementing a convergent pedagogy, the latter form of grading is translated in Peule.



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The two previous sections of this chapter examined how schooling practices affect learning outcomes. Schooling experiences in eight classrooms in the United States and Mali reveal how schools fail to provide quality education and learning for *all* children. Several lessons emerge from this examination which are highlighted in the next chapter. Together, they illustrate how the schools' generally ineffective and insensitive approaches to children's schooling affect learning achievements.

## G. LESSONS LEARNED

We have seen how educational institutions, like schools, fail to provide children with quality education and meaningful learning experiences. Typically operating within a mainstream ideology, schools often force children to close their eyes to the wider world that acknowledges their culture. In this context, schooling can be seen as a form of cultural production through which a number of processes are set into motion. Teachers often employ different pedagogical practices when dealing with particular groups of student. Students of low socio-economic backgrounds receive less teacher respect, less teacher attention, and less education. In most cases, schools deny the cultural capital which students bring to the school setting. The experiences of students with low-status backgrounds demonstrate how schools share in the complicity of maintaining the organizational perpetuation of poverty and unequal opportunity, which contradicts the formal doctrine of education to enhance rather than aggravate the conditions of the poor and marginalized groups.

Several lessons emerge from the studies and classroom observations discussed in the previous chapter. Together, they reveal salient qualitative deficiencies which render schools, as instructional sites, ineffective. They also point to the deep insensitivity of the schooling system to the needs of disadvantaged students. These lessons are summarized below.

*Legitimizing the status quo.* Schools do not function purely as instructional sites. Too often their operations are shaped by dominant ideologies legitimating the status quo, thus maintaining macro-level social

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inequalities. In so doing, schools qualify members of that order for social action and change; those deemed not worthy or incapable are left to experience the vicious cycles of inequality and poverty, socially, politically, and economically. Asymmetrical power relations relegate certain cultural groups to a subordinate status. By maintaining the status quo, schools disempower rather than empower all children to actively engage and take ownership of their learning. Members of the dominant culture who seldom have the opportunity to experience other ways of seeing and knowing, are easily predisposed to dismiss other worldviews as illusions or as being deficient, and thus, in need of remediation. Whenever schools elect to view the world only in terms of discursive facts, they prevent themselves from gaining access to other worlds.

By not viewing learning as a life-long endeavor and by not engaging in reflective self-analysis to examine their attitudes toward different ethnic, racial and social class groups, teachers fail to implement a culturally-responsive learning environment for children, our hope for the future. Ignoring the everyday experiences and problems of minority and/or disadvantaged groups lead to stereotyping. To reverse this trend, schools and teachers, in particular, need to engage in self-reflection and examine the basis of their ideological bias towards low-status children. In short, schools and teachers should promote anti-bias learning by making explicit the deep underpinnings of the dominant culture as well as the deep patterns of others. This effort should be grounded in issues of equity and social justice.

*Denial of children's cultural capital.* A school's endorsement of a narrow and often biased vision of education and schooling lead to ineffective learning and low achievement, partly because it denies the cultural capital children which bring to the classroom. Our examination of schooling experiences have shown how a lack of continuity and congruence between children's home experiences and the social environment impede the effective learning of children from diverse cultures and social classes. In this instance, the diverse languages of low-status children, including their ways of understanding and interpreting the world, are seen as a liability, rather than as assets and valuable resources. Rather than encouraging children to construct knowledgeable and confident self-identity, schools incessantly appear to require children to subtract their language and cultural identity and replace it with the

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language and culture of the dominant group. To promote effective learning of *all* children, schools need to create an enabling environment that acknowledges and builds on cultural differences, while at the same time preparing children to live successful lives in both worlds. Acknowledging and nurturing the cultural knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse children can help bridge the gap between home and schools and foster meaningful learning. The dilemma, of course, is how to evaluate and include multiple perspectives, while at the same time advocating for educational practices which are based on our understanding about how children learn and develop. Although this is a complex, sensitive, and political issue, at the minimum, one can begin by building on the strengths and experiences that children bring to the classroom.

*Pedagogical Practices/Teacher Preparedness.* A teacher's response to the activities of teaching affects what the children in the classroom have an opportunity to learn. A teacher's behavioral role during moments of conflict can also affect the curriculum. If a teacher exhibits extreme vacillation between counseling and controlling roles, some children attempting to adjust to and understand the discrepant, double messages may be hesitant about interacting or participating as fully as possible. Similarly, effects on the curriculum may stem from external influences which create problems for the teacher, given the number of interruptions occurring in a classroom. These interruptions break the continuity of a lesson and affects children's attention, thus limiting their possible degree of learning.

Many educators argue that attempts to "stamp a uniform education" on children leaves the learner out, making it hard for him or her to build new knowledge and new understandings. Children become more disengaged as the curriculum texts and assignments become more standardized. As we have seen, this is particularly true for low-status children, who often start out farthest from the standard and for whom "turning standards into simply yardsticks" can be devastating. It is important not to link teacher respect and use of children knowledge and language bases with a *laissez faire* attitude toward teaching. It is equally necessary not to confuse academic rigor with rigidity that stifles and silences children. The teacher is the authority, with all the resulting responsibilities that it entails. However, it is not necessary for the teacher to become authoritarian in order to challenge children

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intellectually. Teachers who work with low-status children have the responsibility to assist them in appropriating knowledge bases and discourse styles deemed desirable by the greater society. However, this process of appropriation must be additive, that is, the new concepts and new discourse skills must be added, not subtracted from, the children's existing background knowledge. In order to assume this additive stance, teachers must discard deficit views so they can use and build on life experiences, and language styles too often viewed and labeled as "low class" and undesirable.

Teachers play a significant role in creating learning contexts in which children are able to empower themselves. Teachers are cultural mentors of sorts when they introduce children not only to the culture of the classroom, but to particular subjects and discourse styles as well. Numerous teaching approaches and strategies can be ineffective when there is an absence of trusting relations between teacher and children and when power relations are not mutually set and agreed upon.

*Classroom Tasks Organization.* The preceding chapter has shown how ineffective and culturally incongruent curriculum goals inhibit children from developing critical thinking and appropriating the skills for standing up for oneself and others in the face of injustice. This is evident among low-status children. Moreover, cultural incongruities between the patterns of communication experienced by children in the home and at school undermine children's potential to engage in reflective and effective learning. While some classrooms emphasize individual responsibility and achievement and teacher controlled learning, other cultural groups with different socio-economic backgrounds that deviate from the mainstream or dominant culture may be unaccustomed to this style of learning, valuing group work that fosters shared responsibility, instead. A curriculum that emphasizes projects and joint inquiry can help children, who share this cultural value, feel comfortable in the school setting.

Classroom instructional organization affects achievement. One important aspect of a teacher's skills is the ability to handle fluctuations on students' responses to instruction. A teacher must be able to allocate time for individual assistance when students need additional help. The teacher who uses multitask activities is able to provide

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individual assistance when necessary. This organization frees a teacher from constant control over instructional activities and allows him or her to give the most assistance to students having trouble. In contrast, recitation gives the teacher fewer opportunities to provide individual assistance, and when assistance is given, the top achievers receive a disproportionately high share. The task organization of a classroom then, may inhibit or enhance a teacher's ability to supply special individualized assistance to some students. Hence, students' learning achievement may be influenced by the task organization of a classroom through the task activity's effect on teacher assistance patterns.

Task organization of a classroom also has an effect on teacher authority. It is important for teachers to establish a relationship of trust between himself and his students in order to overcome the potentially hostile situation of control that may result from children's involuntary recruitment into schools. Children's trust in teachers is of the greatest importance in teaching as it generates those effective bonds between teachers and children. Trust is important for empowering students to become active participants to their own learning process; it is also important for promoting achievement. A teacher cannot simply rely on the exercise of power; this results in a confrontation between teacher demands and student desires, and can cause student alienation. Teachers who rely primarily on the exercise of formal, institutional authority will not be able to develop affective bonds that promote willing compliance, the motivation to learn, and achievement among their students. To create an effective cognitive environment, the teacher must gain the willing compliance of his students; children's trust in their teachers provides the motivation for children to engage in learning (whatever the content to be learned might be) independently of a teacher's demands for compliance.

***Communication and Language Use.*** Children from different cultural and linguistic environments are often unfairly penalized for not being able to immediately embrace the norms and standards of the mainstream culture which most schools typically emulate. Children are generally "stamped" with a uniformed education and are expected to assimilate the new culture as soon as possible. If schools are to create the environment in which children,



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while being themselves, can appropriate the means to learn what is necessary to function in mainstream society, old school procedures which require children to leave their culture and language at the schoolhouse door must be discarded. It is increasingly understood that the absence of continuity and congruence between the child home culture and the school, an absence of shared meaning, may interfere with children's competent functioning in the new setting and impede effective learning.

Language is not just a tool, a neutral conduit for sending and receiving information; words are not containers into which meaning is put. Language is a medium through which the individual interprets and understands his or her experience, a way not just of communicating, but of organizing reality. In this context, it is important to recognize that children, in expressing themselves, fundamentally rely on the cultural orientation in which they have been socialized. Children's learning becomes meaningful when they are able to translate the meaning of new material in ways that are familiar to them. By respecting children's experiences and allowing children to use multiple modes of expression, schools help foster children's competence and self-esteem. For linguistically diverse children who may constantly struggle to understand classroom directions, routines, conversations, and to communicate their thoughts in a foreign language, greater efforts must be made by schools to provide alternative, flexible, and culturally congruent ways in which children can actively participate in classroom activities and, indeed, in their own learning process.

*Community/Parental Involvement.* Promoting community support can be a strategy for improving the quality of children's schooling and learning. An important aspect of such support consists of household contributions, in cash or in kind, that can be used to increase the quantity or quality of inputs (i.e. instructional materials, teaching aids, etc.) to the teaching-learning process. Another aspect of community support is parental involvement which can be correlated with higher achievements. Parents can set high educational expectations for their children, to talk to them regularly about the importance of school, and to take an interest in the children's activities and the materials that they bring home. They can equally be more assertive in providing feedback to the school about their children's performance which, in turn, can help schools strengthen their approach to delivering



educational services. Moreover, parents can participate in the governance structure of the school through membership on parent-teacher associations. Strengthening school-community relationships is a self-strategy that can mobilize resources and expertise that can promote educational resilience and learning achievements.

These lessons highlight the reality of children's schooling and learning experiences. To reverse the trend of low achievements, schools cannot continue to do business as usual. There is a need to embrace a new vision, grounded on a more holistic and student-centered approach, and endorsed by key stakeholders. Schools should not solely be held accountable for learning outcomes. Effective schools require the forging of a partnership between the school, the community, and children, who collectively support quality education for *all* children and have accountability for and demonstrate ownership of education outcomes. Taking cognizance of the qualitative deficiencies which render schools ineffective, the next chapter proposes an operational framework for increasing the school's effectiveness and improving children's learning achievements.

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## CHAPTER IV. A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING

Whether or not expanded educational opportunities will translate into meaningful development - for an individual or for a society - depends ultimately on what people actually learn as a result of those opportunities (i.e., whether they incorporate useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills, and values). In the context of primary education, emphasis must be placed on actual learning acquisition and outcomes, rather than exclusively upon enrollment, continued participation in organized programs, and completion of certification requirements. Holistic and participatory approaches are particularly valuable in assuring learning acquisition and maintenance, allowing learners to reach their fullest potential.

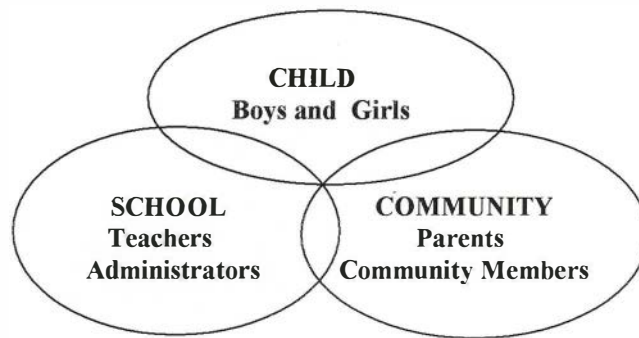
Drawing on the strengths of several school reform models developed in the United States<sup>3</sup>, and observations of schooling processes in developing countries, this chapter attempts to define an operational framework for creating a more cognitive and effective environment that can foster meaningful learning. This framework abandons the notion of schools “doing business as usual”. Rather, it endorses the perspective that schooling should be transformed in ways that enable *all* students, especially those from low-status backgrounds, to effectively appropriate the practical knowledge, skills, and values which they will need when they leave school, without being forced to forfeit their own cultural capital. That is, all children should be provided with learning opportunities which enable them to link school life with community life. As the preceding chapters have shown, this is particularly important for children with low-status backgrounds who are doubly disadvantaged: first because their pattern of behavior, language use, and values do not match those required in the typical school setting; second, because teachers often fail to take advantage of the strengths that these students possess. To this end, schooling must be viewed as partisan - it must be tied to a struggle

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<sup>3</sup> The proposed framework is partly derived from several school reform models developed in the United States. Contributors include: the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented, University of Connecticut; Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University; Center for Research in Human Development and Education; Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence, California State University, and the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence, Santa Cruz, California.

for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on non-exploitative relations and social justice.

The proposed framework is premised on a tripartite partnership between the school (which includes teachers, school administrators, and parents associations), the community (which includes parents and the community-at-large), and the child. This partnership is driven by a shared vision of improving the education of every child, regardless of gender or background, through the joint efforts of the school, the community, and children. To this end, schools aspire to provide the common experience, activity, language, and conversation that learners require, both for individual development and the development of a common, shared, and mutually endorsed community.



A centerpiece of this tripartite partnership is an integrated approach aimed at fostering a collaborative and sustainable process of actively identifying ways to harness all of the resources, local expertise, and energies in linking schools with other learning environments, like homes and the community-at-large, to systematically support the learning of every child. Responsibilities for children's education and learning outcomes are shared between the school, the community, and children. Community attitudes toward the school can be an important determinant to the school's effectiveness. Similarly, community interest in children's education and schooling processes, properly channeled, can endow schools with support that government authorities cannot. The involvement of the community in planning and delivering educational services can go a long way toward giving the community ownership of the school and a stake in its success. Similarly, when children are provided opportunities to link their community life with school life and are given a voice in defining the scope of their learning opportunities, they are empowered to

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actively participate in their learning process. Teachers who typically mimic mainstream ideologies can certainly benefit and learn from the cultural knowledge which children bring to the classroom. This type of contribution which children make, while often ignored, can indeed, enhance the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

The partnership proposed in this framework aims toward building a "community for learning", where there is a coordinated approach to educational services delivery and in which there is shared responsibility among collaborative teams of school-based personnel, and the forging of close connections with the community and the family. Through the establishment of a "community for learning", a school's capacity can be strengthened to more effectively and efficiently serve *all* students, particularly students with low-status backgrounds, by providing inclusive and coordinated educational and related services. By uniting the resources and expertise of the school, the family, and the community, educational resilience and effective learning achievements can be fostered. It could also lead to greater accountabilities for and ownership of educational outcomes. Four key principles for enhancing learning and teaching underline the concept of "community for learning". They are: (i) each learner is unique; (ii) learning is more effective when students enjoy what they are doing; (iii) learning is more meaningful and enjoyable when content and process are learned within the context of real situations and linked to the learner's socio-cultural environment; and (iv) although some formal instruction may be used, the major goal is to enhance knowledge and thinking-skills acquisition through inductive teaching and the application of knowledge and skills that result from students' construction of meaning. As the experiences in the classrooms examined in the preceding chapter reveal, it is the culturally constructed meanings attached to the instructional tools and pedagogy that can promote reflective and effective learning, not the material character of school inputs per se. It is important to emphasize that *all* students, especially low-status students, need to be provided with challenging and accelerated learning content where learning opportunities are designed with the goal to engage and offer stimulation and enjoyment to *all* students. To achieve this goal, children need to be permitted to draw on their own life experiences and their culture in which they have been socialized. By adopting the four principles, schools can initiate, nurture, and monitor change within the school setting. Collaborative efforts should be made to improve, rather than replace, existing school structures by

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concentrating in both internal and external factors that have a direct bearing on student learning. Implementing these principles calls for ownership and involvement of school personnel, families, and students.

Efforts aimed at improving achievement and other student outcomes require a coherent and focused school-wide effort. As some of the classroom findings have shown, when educational goals are not clearly articulated and collectively shared, schools are more susceptible to adopting piecemeal approaches which are often unconnected and generally bear little relevance to children's needs; teachers also reduce their effectiveness in the classroom. There is a need to unify different activities and initiatives at the school level under a common goal. To facilitate this process, key change elements necessary for success would need to be defined which teachers and school administrators can utilize to help bring about positive changes in teaching and learning. First, goals, which are vital for successful change efforts, need to be set and shared. Goal setting is important because goals affect behaviors; teachers who adopt shared and generally understood goals for student learning are more likely to take concrete steps to accomplish these goals and be more accountable for outcomes. Second, indicators for measuring success must be developed. These indicators are important to the overall assessment of student progress towards goals and themselves help produce improvement in student outcomes. In most of the classrooms examined, there were virtually no meaningful indicators that can systematically inform teachers, including parents, about students' progress. In some schools, regular monitoring of students' performance seem to be regarded as another bureaucratic burden imposed on teachers who already feel overburdened. Systematic monitoring of clearly defined performance indicators allows teachers to discover what students already know and what they still need to learn. When teachers and schools make it their business to regularly monitor students' progress, they are better positioned to correct learning problems before they worsen. This is particularly important for disadvantaged students who generally receive less teacher attention, less instructional time, and less education in the classroom. In turn, teachers can also have greater accountability for learning outcomes.

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The third element for success relates to the mutual assistance provided to teachers and school directors. The call for assistance places emphasis on presenting information, exchanging ideas, creating settings that encourage discussion and analysis, and providing opportunities to attempt and reflect upon new behaviors that will assist teachers in accomplishing student learning goals. Many schools promote not only the alienation of a select group of students on the basis of their family backgrounds, but also the alienation of teachers as “professionals” which can have important consequences on teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom. In some of the classrooms we have examined, teachers (some of which have limited experience) work individually in their tasks and generally maintain a hierarchical relationship with the school director and the school inspector. In some schools, teachers have no voice in what and how to teach in their classrooms. To increase teachers’ effectiveness, they need to be provided autonomy and flexibility in managing their classrooms, to be actively involved in school-wide decision making, and to be given opportunities for enhancing their professional development.

Fourth, there is a need for effective leadership, the change element most closely associated with efforts to make schools more effective. In important ways, school administrators lay the foundation for what schools come to be and the type of learning children receive. They help shape the attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies that are permeated in the school. School administrators are effective when they are able to ensure that (i) resources are available to provide adequate support to teachers, sufficient instructional materials, and an adequate and generally well-maintained facility; (ii) pursue high instructional standards through written policies, and high expectations and management of the learning process; (iii) communicate regularly and effectively with teachers, with parents and others in the community; and (iv) maintain high visibility and accessibility to students, teachers, parents and others in the community. Improving student achievements requires that school administrators articulate a vision of what their school should be like and demonstrate an energetic commitment to that vision, including a sense of ownership of educational outcomes.



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Fifth, efforts must systematically be made to ensure a capable teaching force that is able to put the child at the center of all educational and learning intervention. In the classrooms examined, teachers' general lack of preparedness often led to the adoption of piecemeal and inequitable approaches in the classroom, which lead to superficial learning. They also lacked basic materials that can help them boost children's learning in the classroom. Teachers need to be provided with relevant (and ongoing) training that allow them to gain mastery of the material they are suppose to teach, including the basic materials with which they can increase their effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers should also benefit from regular coaching and assistance from more experienced school staff.

Sixth, for schools to be effective, there needs to be sufficient flexibility and autonomy, two criteria that influence the school's level of independence in making decisions about how time and resources are used to increase academic performance. As the experiences of the classrooms we have examined have shown, children's learning opportunities are enhanced when teachers are able to modify the manner in which the curriculum is delivered, including its content, in order to create an educationally-oriented environment adapted to children's background and particular needs. While it is important for teachers to have flexibility and autonomy on how classroom tasks are organized, there should equally be greater teacher accountability for learning outcomes. To increase the efficiency of both schools and classrooms, school administrators and teachers need to collaborate in making decisions about timetabling, about how textbooks and other materials are used, on student assessment techniques, and on other school processes, including teacher development and extra-curricular activities. Also, they should be able to draw on various constituencies for resources.

Finally, educational effectiveness is made more possible when students spend more days per year on school and are actively engaged in longer daily school hours. In the double-shift classrooms we examined, children received very little instructional time. This reduction in instructional time is further aggravated by the adoption of poor pedagogical approaches and classroom tasks organization. The time spent in school, both in terms of hours per day and days per year, does contribute to varying student achievement, even when family background differences are

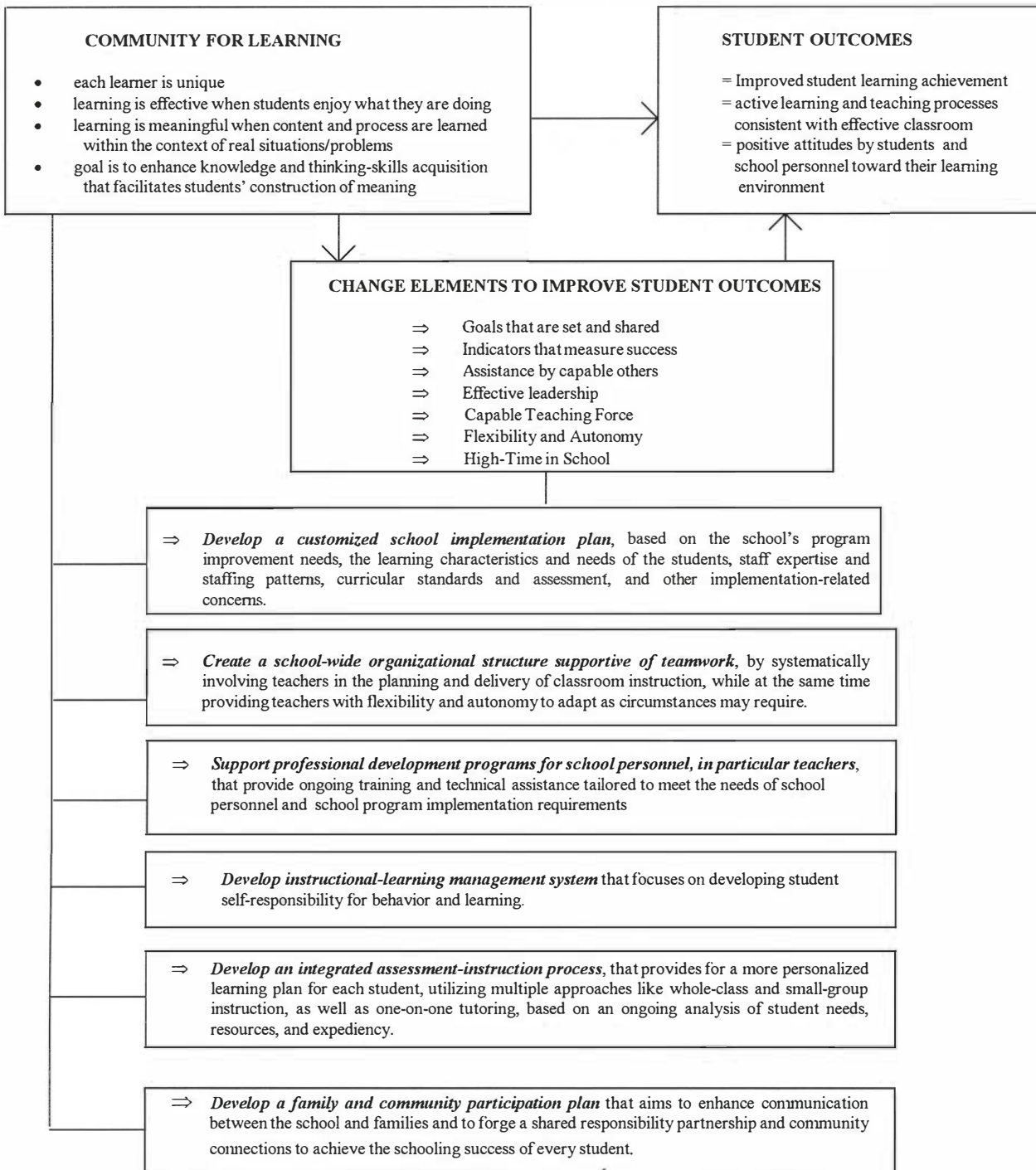
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accounted for. Children who spend more time studying in school tend to learn more. It is important to point out, however, that it is not just the total time spent in school that matters, but rather it is more important how the time is actually used.

Although the change elements highlighted above can create a dynamic and effective school, they are not sufficient to improve student outcomes. There is also a need to simultaneously develop coherent and viable strategies that provide the operational means by which achievement can be improved. The framework outlines several strategies which are described in Diagram 1. These strategies aim to address the learning needs of the students, the organizational and administrative support requirements for achieving a high degree of program implementation, the staff development needs of school personnel, while at the same time forging closer ties with the family and community-at-large.

Schools need to *develop a customized implementation plan*, consistent with local conditions and the lives of the student population which schools serve. This plan should be crafted in a way that addresses the particular needs of the school and of the students. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many schools operate with a “blue print” or “one size fits all” approach usually mandated by the Government which has little relevance to the local conditions in which schools need to provide educational services. While this is not to suggest that schools abandon national policies and strategies, they should be used as a general framework to orient school-level staff on the broader objectives which they should aim for. Operating within this general framework, schools should have the flexibility and autonomy to adopt their curriculum standards and assessment, pedagogical approaches, and staffing patterns in ways that truly accommodate the local situation and characteristics of school and the special needs of students they serve. Schools need to “own” their implementation plan for educational services delivery and assume greater accountability for learning outcomes.

DIAGRAM 1



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The *creation of a school-wide organizational structure support of teamwork* is essential to achieving educational goals. Top-down, administrative direction and decision need to be balanced with grassroots commitment and support. Teachers, who are the closest to the students, need to be systematically involved in the planning and delivery of classroom instruction, while at the same time providing teachers with the flexibility and autonomy to adapt as circumstances may require. Overall, schools need to promote the participation of teachers in decision-making which, in turn, can help create a common purpose within schools about what to implement to better address the needs of students. As the findings in the previous chapter have shown, lack of teamwork generally leads to piecemeal approaches to students' learning; they also reduce teachers' effectiveness in the classroom which is paramount to promoting achievement.

*Support for professional development programs for school personnel*, particularly for teachers, is an indispensable tool for ensuring and sustaining academic excellence. Many teachers, especially those from developing countries, have no more than a secondary education when they are recruited to teach in the classrooms. These teachers, along with other teachers who have the appropriate academic credentials to teach, typically benefit from limited, sporadic and often fragmented training in their years of teaching. As some of the classroom observations have shown, a lack of a coordinated and systematic approach to teacher development often results in a fragmented and ineffective approach to teaching. Teachers without a subject mastery of the material they teach, combined with poor pedagogical skills, reduces children's opportunities to engage in meaningful learning. The academic and professional training of teachers has a direct and positive bearing on the quality of teaching performance and consequently on the achievement of students.

The *implementation of an instructional-learning management system* that focuses on developing student self-responsibility for behavior and learning is another important strategy to promoting achievements. Increasing learning achievements require the active participation of students. Schools need to increase opportunities for students to actively participate in and take responsibility for their learning. Several measures can be taken. To begin with,

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schools should give students a “voice” in their learning process, where they have a say in the types of learning opportunities they receive. Schools can equally emphasize learning opportunities that allow children to use their previous knowledge, linking school life with community life. Similarly, a clear school-wide set of academic and social behavior goals can be articulated and continuously monitored. To encourage more active student participation in school, school personnel should communicate to students and their parents that they expect *all* students to work hard and to excel academically. Such encouragement is particularly important for low-status children who are generally marginalized in most schooling systems.

Findings from the classroom observations show how the absence of an *integrated assessment-instruction process* impedes children’s participation and learning achievements. To address this salient qualitative deficiency, schools need to develop a more personalized plan for each student, regardless of background. That is, schools need to adopt a more student-approach to learning where the special abilities of and the cultural capital which each child brings to the classroom are respected and accommodated. Given that the traditional subject-based curriculum creates discontinuity between life at home and life at school, teachers should be more assertive in adopting pedagogical practices which permit lessons to be presented in an integrated way, ensuring appropriate links between key subjects, where possible. Teachers should aim less at dominating classroom activities. More interactive dialogue that allows children to express their viewpoints, peer interaction, including small-group instructions, small group interactions, class activities that promote both reflecting thinking and higher-level thinking skills, and regular monitoring of students’ performance should be encouraged.

The last strategy focuses on crystallizing the tripartite partnership discussed earlier. Schools should not (and cannot) function effectively in isolation from the community and children’s families. Schools’ effectiveness can be enhanced when community and parental involvement are systematically encouraged and mobilized. It is important to recognize that community and parental attitudes are important determinants of effective schooling. When the community supports the school, the school generally performs well; when the community opposes or is indifferent to



education as some of the study findings have shown, the school’s tasks become a daunting challenge. When community and school values converge, communities and families can offer rich sources of moral, instructional, and material support. For example, communities can play more direct roles in support of the school’s instructional program by giving teachers constructive feedback to improve both pedagogical skills and school management. To this end, a *community participation plan* should be articulated and endorsed jointly by the schools, the community, and parents that allow for a shared responsibility partnership and community/parental connections to achieving the schooling success of every student. Such plan can include several measures to involve community and parents in fostering an effective schooling environment and improving achievements (see Table 7). A key theme underlying this plan is that community accountability for learning outcomes increases with greater participation in the decision-making process. Experience has shown that when parents and community members are encouraged and are provided the right incentives (i.e. participate in decision-making), they are able to make important contributions to the school in general, and to improving learning achievements, in particular.

**Table 7: Some Options for Promoting Community/Parental Involvement**

Provide written policies which legitimate the importance of parent and community involvement; administrators provide ongoing support to parent involvement efforts.	Indicators of school quality are periodically prepared and provided to parents and community members to foster communication and stimulate parent/community action.
Procedures for involvement are clearly communicated to community members/parents and used consistently. Staff make certain that parents know that their involvement makes a great deal of difference in their children’s school performance.	Community members participate in school-wide and classroom activities, giving presentations, serving as information resources.
Parents are offered various options for their involvement, e.g. tutoring their children at home, assisting in classrooms, participating in parent-teacher conferences, etc.	Parent and community involvement activities are monitored and evaluated, and staff, parents, and community members continuously work to keep activities effective.
Parents are offered various options for their involvement, e.g. tutoring their children at home, assisting in classrooms, participating in parent-teacher conferences, etc.	Administrators and staff continually look for ways to involve parents and the community in decision making regarding school governance; parent/community advisors give input into school improvement efforts.
Parents are given especially strong encouragement to become involved in activities that support the instructional program.	Regular, frequent home-school communications are maintained. This includes providing parents with information about student progress and calling attention to any areas of difficulty.
Staff members provide parents with information and techniques for helping students learn (e.g. training sessions, handbooks).	Special efforts are made to involve the parents of disadvantaged students, who are often underrepresented among parents involved in the schools.



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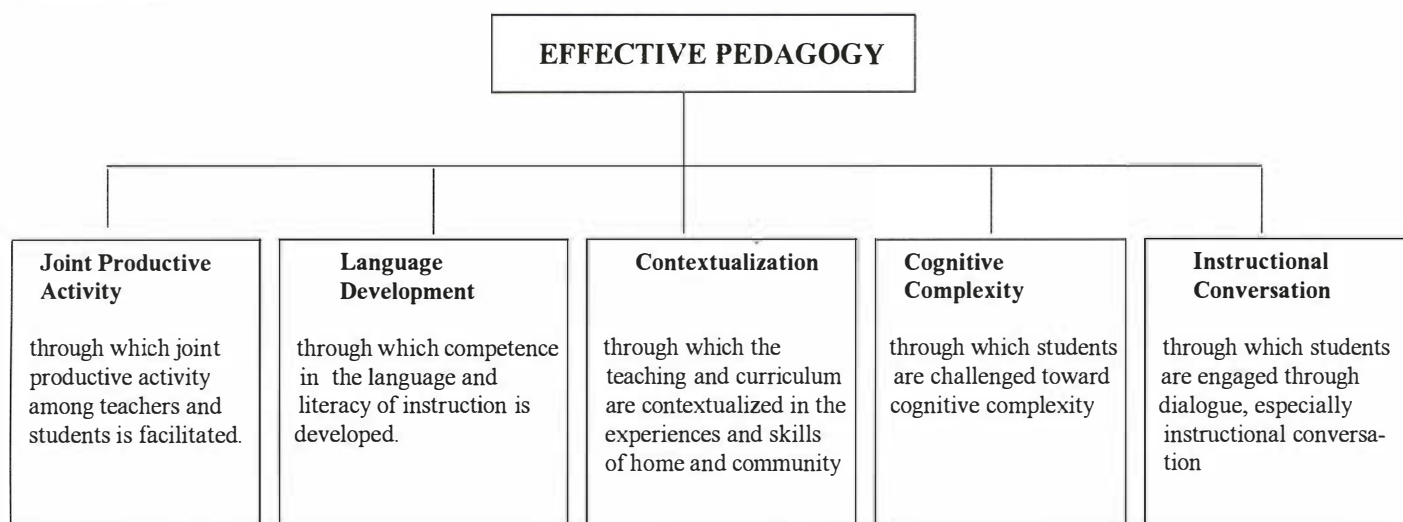
The six strategies highlighted above seek to impact three major areas of student outcomes. These outcomes include: (i) improved student achievement, particularly for those students at the margins of achievement distribution; (ii) patterns of active learning and teaching processes in line with effective classroom practices; and (iii) positive attitudes by students and school personnel toward their school learning environment. The cost of implementing these strategies vary from school to school, depending on the needs and the availability of resources. However, in most schools the only added cost required may be the pre-implementation training of school personnel. The program delivery system is built on existing resources with redeployment rather than requiring additional funds. The ongoing professional development of school personnel builds on and redeploys existing resources.

Implementation of these strategies entails two phases. During the first phase, a needs assessment is prepared in collaboration with principle stakeholder groups which include school personnel, the district leadership team, parents association, the community, and parents. During the second phase, an implementation plan is developed, after which it is executed. Typically, this involves the school personnel who are responsible for program implementation at the school level, as well as involvement of families and the community-at-large whose resources and expertise can be mobilized to support student learning. Each school's customized implementation plan involves identifying targeted program participants (students and school personnel); deploying or redeploying school personnel, student placement and scheduling, space, facilities and materials utilization, program monitoring and evaluation, communicating and disseminating program implementation and monitoring, and specific documentation of program implementation and program outcomes. The design of the strategies to be implemented is based on the information obtained from the needs assessment. Design decisions to be made at the school level include how resources identified during the needs assessment will be used, modified, and reallocation to ensure effective implementation.

We have seen in the preceding chapter the saliency of effective pedagogy to promoting learning and higher achievements. To promote a cognitive and effective classroom environment especially for those students with low-status backgrounds who are at a disadvantage, defining standards of effective pedagogy becomes critical.

Recognizing this, the proposed framework recommends five standards which can be used as the basis for developing effective pedagogy. These standards include: (i) joint productive activity; (ii) language development; (iii) contextualization; (iv) cognitive complexity; and (v) instructional conversation; they are shown in Diagram 2.

**DIAGRAM 2.**



Engaging in joint productive activity allows the teacher to “share the classroom” with his students, where children have equal voice and more opportunities to actively engage in and contribute to classroom activities. In this scenario, teachers do not dominate classroom activities. Rather, they seek to challenge children to engage in reflective thinking and creative and collaborative learning. Similarly, where the official language of instruction is different from the children’s maternal language, teachers provide the necessary tools with which children can make the appropriate connections between the words and what they actually mean. In this context, it is important for teachers to adopt culturally-congruent pedagogical approaches that allow children to draw on their previous experiences to make sense and indeed internalize what is being taught in the classroom. Related to this is the saliency of systematically orientating curriculum delivery in ways that allow children to connect school life with community life. Findings from the studies and classroom observations highlight the difficulties children have in internalizing the meaning behind lessons when they have no logical or socially appropriate content. That is, children are more able to

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internalize the meaning behind lessons when they are put into context based on children's lived experiences. Children are also more inclined to learn new material when the curriculum is presented in an integrated fashion. Similarly, if students are to engage in effective learning, more opportunities toward appropriating higher-level thinking skills should be encouraged. To this end, the manner in which classroom tasks are organized is paramount. Teachers need to understand that the excessive use of recitation and repetition drills, teacher lectures, and copying from the blackboard encourages rote learning. Students need to be provided with more opportunities to engage in activities that are cognitively complex, with teachers providing the necessary support, encouragement, and assistance that allow them to succeed.

The five standards of effective pedagogy described above can collectively transform classrooms into a more differentiated social organization containing varied, simultaneous, related, and appropriate activity settings. Effective teaching can only occur in sound social organization. To this end, knowledge is constructed through activity and socially constructed through conversation, and therefore is determined by the social organization of teaching and learning. It is important that schools design and implement activity settings that are varied, appropriate to the given task, culturally-responsive to all students' background, and meaningfully interrelated.

## **CONCLUSION.**

To conclude, this research paper attempted to illustrate how schools operate both as instructional sites and cultural sites, a phenomenon which is not widely understood. As instructional sites, we have seen how schools fail in providing the proper cognitive and effective environment in which meaningful learning can take place for all students, regardless of background. Often, schools engage in a "hidden curriculum", giving rise to fragmented, ineffective and inequitable learning. There are several salient qualitative and systemic deficiencies that prevent schools from enjoying higher learning achievements. They include: the adoption of poor and often culturally incongruent pedagogical practices, denial of children's cultural capital, lack of teacher preparedness, poor curriculum design and content, weak classroom tasks organization and management, ineffective school management and organization,

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inappropriate language of instruction, deficient monitoring and evaluation systems, poor and often inadequate provision of basic educational inputs, lack of social support that encourage achievement, and low levels of community/parental involvement. Working towards eliminating these deficiencies, schools need to engage in objective and reflective analysis of how and why such deficiencies are detrimental to promoting children's learning. They need to define a coherent, viable, and shared vision of what schooling for *all* children should be and should not be. It is through this process that schools can, in turn, embark in developing more holistic and culturally-responsive approaches to schooling and learning, at the core of which is the child.

The elimination of both qualitative and systemic deficiencies which characterize many schooling systems is not only salient to promoting higher achievements; it is also essential to suppressing the inequalities which exist in this world which make it even more difficult for students of low-status backgrounds to reverse their cycle of poverty and subordination. As cultural sites, schools become battlegrounds on which meanings are defined, knowledge is legitimated, and futures are sometimes created and destroyed; they constitute places of ideological and cultural struggle favored primarily to benefit the more affluent segments of society. Recognizing this, schools need to temper their overwhelming inclination to consistently narrow their vision to embrace the ideologies, attitudes, and behaviors of the dominant or mainstream culture, which often work to the detriment of children with low status backgrounds who are the ones most need of help. Pursuing academic excellence requires that schools abandon the worldview that "one size fits all". Consistent with their mandate to operate as "instructional sites", schools need to respond to the challenge of empowering students of low-status backgrounds to succeed in their lives. This should be one salient indicator for measuring a school's success.

The "raison d'être" of all schools, both as instructional sites and cultural sites, should be the unequivocal commitment to afford each child with the knowledge, skills, and values he or she will need to cope with demands and challenges of the future, while at the same time empowering all children to actively engage in their own learning processes. Promoting school effectiveness and greater levels of learning achievements demand a more holistic and

child-centered approach to children's education and schooling. Fundamentally, it requires that schools respect and acknowledge the uniqueness, strengths and abilities of each child, including the cultural capital which he or she brings to the school. When schools narrow their approach purely to reflect mainstream culture, they effectively undermine their potential to transform students' lives into productive and meaningful lives from which both children and society can benefit. To increase the school's effectiveness, the schooling process should equally be transformed in ways that systematically aims to integrate cultural variables into the school's curriculum. That is, promote a culturally congruent curriculum and instruction that link school life with community life. Finally, there is a need to recognize and understand that schools cannot, and should not, operate in isolation of a broader framework of institutions and values. In this context, there is a need to build a partnership between the school, the community, and the child around a shared vision of improving the education of *all* children, regardless of their background.

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