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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the notion that persons at risk of failure to achieve an adequate education are in that position partly because of their social circumstances, i.e., their ethnicity, culture, language, or economic status. It discusses the impact of culture on what one does and how one does it, addresses the manner in which culture frames as well as enables one's feelings and thoughts concerning what one does, and examines the question of what mechanism of culture serves as the vehicle and context for human activity. Based on this analysis of cultural influences and their relationships regarding academic achievement, several implications for educational reform are examined covering: (1) the limitations of reform in school governance alone; (2) the limitations of the manipulation of standards and accountability based on educational achievement tests data; (3) the applicability of principles of social justice, i.e., the distribution of equity; (4) the pedagogical principles of adaptability and complementarity; and (5) concern for diversity, pluralism, context, and perspective. (Contains 26 references.) (GLR)

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK: CULTURAL DISSONANCE AS A RISK FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS

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In human social organization, when one's characteristics are at variance in significant ways from the modal characteristics of the social group which has achieved hegemony, one is likely to find little correspondence between the developmental supports provided by the dominant group and the developmental needs of the persons whose characteristics are different. This is a function of the operation of a principle of social economy whereby social orders design and allocate social resources in accord with the modal or otherwise valued characteristics of the social order. Thus we have schools, public facilities, media, etc. designed and allocated to fit the needs of persons whose vision and hearing are intact rather than to serve the needs of persons with sensory impairments. Consequently, persons with impairment in these sensory modalities are at risk of developmental and educational failure, not necessarily as a function of the impairment but because the society is not organized to adequately support the developmental needs of persons whose characteristics are at variance with those which are modal.

Following this line of reasoning, the identification of a population as being at risk of failure is always situational and relative. In its early usage, "at risk" status was used to refer to persons with identifiable sensory, physical or intellectual disabilities which were likely to result in their failure to benefit from the normal range of developmental resources generally available. Their risk of failure was related to the goals or objectives the society expected most children to achieve even in the absence of specialized resources, and the implicit recognition that without

such resources, expected achievement was unlikely. It is in the latter half of the current century that we began to think of persons as being "at risk" of failure to achieve an adequate education because of their social circumstances as able to be included in the "at risk" population. Thus we see in the group of papers published together here, little attention is called to persons with physical or sensory disabilities, and major attention is directed at persons whose "at risk" status is based upon their ethnicity, culture, language or economic status.

This shift in emphasis from one class of indicators to another may be a reflection of a decline in the relative number of persons with mental, physical and sensory disabilities, the society's enhanced capacity to address the problems of this group, an increase in the number of persons whose social status places them at a disadvantage in the society, and the increasing recognition of the society's lack of success in meeting the developmental needs of this newly recognized group.

In the identification of populations of children at risk of failure to be adequately developed or educated, it is important that both the old and the new categories of persons be included. It is also important that we recognize the special at risk status of persons who are doubly or triply placed at risk, i.e., those who fall into two or three of the at risk categories. An example of such a person is a language minority group member who is female, hard of hearing and black. For the purposes of our discussions however, these will be treated as extreme cases, and the more common patterns of at risk status will be our focus.

Traditionally, at risk status has referenced the characteristics of the persons so designated. Typical of this approach is Rosehan's (1967) list of attributes of "at risk" students.

1. They commonly come from broken homes;
2. They are nonverbal and concrete minded;
3. They are physically less healthy than their middle-class peers;
4. They lack stable identification figures or role models;
5. They lack stable community ties because of their constant migration;
6. They are often handicapped by their color, which provides them with a negative self-image;
7. They are handicapped in the expression and comprehension of language; and
8. They tend to be extroverted rather than introverted.

It may be more useful to utilize a more dynamic conception of the construct. We hold that at risk status refers not simply to the characteristics of persons but to an interaction between the traits of such persons and the contexts in which they live their lives. Being at risk of failure may be an iatrogenic condition, i.e., it may be more appropriately conceptualized as a condition or circumstance brought on by the failure or incapacity of the developmental environment to support the needs of the developing person. Consider the fact that all persons who show the characteristics that we have targeted do not show other evidences of being at risk. All persons for whom English is a second language or who claim African American identity or who have a physical disability do not flounder. In fact, some such persons have relatively uneventful courses of development and achieve quite adequately. In our work (Gordon and Song, 1992) we have found that many such persons develop in environments which have been specially structured to insure that appropriate supports are available and that incapacitating barriers are eliminated or

circumvented. We conclude that at risk status is a function of the inappropriateness of developmental environments to the needs of the person and that a focus on these deficient environments may be more productive than is a focus on the characteristics of the persons. We can then define at risk as referring to a category of persons whose personal characteristics, conditions of life and situational circumstances, in their interactions with each other, make it likely that their development and/or education will be less than optimal.

To better understand the interactions between these characteristics and life situations, it is important to make still another distinction. Gordon (1988) distinguishes between the status and functional characteristics of persons. Status characteristics like ethnicity, gender, class and language generally define one's status in the social order. Status is likely to influence one's access to resources, the nature of one's opportunities and rewards, what is expected, as well as the character and quality of society's investment in one's development. Functional characteristics refer to the "hows" of behavior and generally refer to the ways in which persons function. Functional characteristics, often culturally determined, include belief systems, cognitive style, dispositions, language systems, mores, skills and technologies (ways of doing things). Obviously there are interactions and overlap between status and functional characteristics, but either set of traits can facilitate or frustrate development and education by virtue of it's primary characteristics. However, there is a secondary characteristic which adheres to each category which may be of greater consequence for development than is the influence of status on the distribution of resources or the influence of function on the organization of behavior. We refer to the personal identification and attribution processes which

derive from one's status as well as from one's way of functioning. Both help to define one's concept of self and the manner in which one identifies one's self. Ultimately, even though status and functional characteristics may be the developmental antecedents of identity, it may be identity which provides the energy behind behavioral adaptation. How then do human characteristics in interaction with social circumstances influence the development of identity and what is the relationship between sources of one's identity and one's being at risk of developmental and educational failure to thrive? We submit that culture is the context and the ubiquitous vehicle.

Culture and Human Development

Psychologists and anthropologists such as Cole, Gay, Glick, and Sharp (1971), have concluded that regardless of cultural, ethnic, gender or class differences among human groups, there are no corresponding differences in cognitive and affective processes. Rather, it is held that the basic processes of mentation in the human species are common — e.g. association, recall, perception, inference, discrimination, etc. — and it is the prior experiences, situations and meanings which form the context for the development and expression of these processes. Because experiences, situations and meanings are culturally determined, the quality of the development of a process, the conditions under which it is expressed and even our ability to recognize its manifestations are dependant upon cultural phenomenon which are often mediated through ethnic, gender or class identity.

Our conception of risk factors offers an example of the importance of discussing the culturally embedded nature of human experience and meaning. In

the past, we have framed our conception of at-risk status or vulnerability in terms of risk factors, such as gender, demographic status, social and intellectual resources, genetic history, mobility patterns and negative or traumatic life events. What we have not accounted for in this conception of at-risk status is the fact that over half of the individuals who may experience the most severe stressors do not report psychological or social dysfunction. (Waxman et al., 1992) Gordon, Rollock and Miller (1990) have suggested that threats to the integrity of behavioral development and adaptation may exist along a continuum, with the degree of threat better defined by existential meaning than by "reality" factors; the individual's reaction to the threat may depend upon the actual perception or the connotation which is permitted by the context in which the phenomenon is experienced.

It is becoming clear, then, that culture is a construct with a wide variety of definitions and conceptions. Authors have often sought to distinguish between material and non-material aspects of culture. Belief systems, attitudes, and attributions are examples of non-material culture, while tools, skills and artifacts serve as examples of material culture. We hold however, that at its core culture is responsible for all human behavior. That is, when we speak of culture we are speaking of both the cause and the product of human affect and cognition.

Both Geertz (1973) and Tyler (1949) have provided us with widely accepted indices and definitions for culture. In his perception of culture, Tyler (1949) included "knowledge, beliefs, art, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society," while Geertz viewed culture as "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and

attitudes toward life" (p. 89). We see then, an effort to discuss culture in terms of objects or tools as well as language and shared conceptual schemata. In joining these perceptions of culture, we can derive five fundamental dimensions of the construct:

1) The judgmental or normative is a reflection of society's standards and values, which often provides the constraints within which thought is facilitated;
2) The cognitive dimension consists of categories (such as social perceptions, conceptions, attribution and connotations) of mentation which are often expressed through language;
3) The affective dimension refers to the emotional structure of a social unit and its common feelings, sources of motivation, etc;
4) The skill dimension relates to those special capabilities the members of a culture develop in order to meet the demands of their social and techno-economic environment (Ogbu, 1978); and finally
5) The technological dimension refers not only to different, or more highly developed technological practices, but more importantly it refers to the impact of the different information inherent in these practices on cognitive and affective behavior.

These dimensions serve to emphasize those characteristics by which a culture may be identified or by which the culture of a group may be characterized. It is in this descriptive definition of culture that we begin to see the reference points for one's social or group identity, as well as the experiences which provide a context for one's conception of his or her own (as well as other's) patterns of behavior.

The function of culture in human activity, however, does not end with its role as a descriptive concept. In addition to providing the referents for group identity, culture also provides the stimuli and the consequences of human behavioral patterns. Thus, culture also serves as an explanatory construct. As mentioned earlier, when we discuss cultural information in terms of description, we are articulating the status phenomenon of culture, and in general are referring both to the social identity of individuals (Goffman, 1963) — the group to which I belong — as well as describing the effect of this identity on an individual's access to resources. When we seek to explain behavior, however, and discuss the influence of one's personal identity — the group to which I feel that I belong — we begin to wonder how particular language and belief systems, specific objects and tools, not to mention technological advances, influence or enable the behavior of individuals. When we examine ways of thinking — such as linear and sequential thought, tendency to generate abstractions, field dependence and independence, connotations and taxonomies as well as allowable metaphors — we are becoming aware of culture as a vehicle for cognition. Ultimately, culture provides the constraints within which mentation and affect are enabled.

Furthermore, culture serves as a mediator for learning in two fundamental respects. According to Vygotsky's notions of cognitive development, learning occurs within social interaction. That is, in contrast to the Piagetian conception of self-constructed knowledge, Vygotsky (1978) argued that the development of higher psychological functions is rooted in children's primary social interactions. Learning, based on the cultural-historical theory, consists of four fundamental activities: transmission of knowledge and cognitive skills, cultivation of cognitive

abilities and the encouragement of these cognitive abilities. According to this conception, knowledge in one's culture is socially transmitted by adults and capable peers to children. The adult or capable peer, in joint activity, serves as a role model or expert tutor on a task which allows for cognitive processes to be demonstrated and then practiced and learned. New cognitive abilities emerge as the adult works with the child on tasks which may have originally been too demanding for the child. As the pair work in collaboration, with the adult providing encouragement as well as appropriate feedback, the child gradually begins to take on the responsibility of the task. While initiating the activity within the child's "zone of proximal development," with time the adult begins to remove support as the child becomes more competent at the task. It is in this form of social scaffolding that we see the mechanism for growth and development in cognitive functioning.

We can not overstate the importance of an individual's group and personal identity in the social interaction which comprises the learning process. A secondary human characteristic to status and functional characteristics, one's sense of self — mediated by culture — provides the fuel for the social interaction inherent in learning behavior. It is not only through cultural encounters that human cognition develops, but it is also through these same social interactions that we begin to recognize and identify our identity. Culture provides the reference points which allow me to recognize myself not only in terms of my gender, class and ethnicity, but also to acknowledge that I am separate from others. It is this complex sense of self which I bring to the classroom, that must in turn be met and integrated into the dynamic culture of the learning environment in order for optimal development to occur. This interaction between self and the learning environment is dialectical in

nature: Not only will the learning process enable me to grow and change in fundamental ways, but my development will clearly impact on the culture of the learning environment.

We have discussed in detail the impact of culture on what one does and how one does it. Similarly, we have also addressed the manner in which culture frames as well as enables one's feelings and thoughts concerning what one does. The question arises, however, by what mechanism does culture serve as the vehicle and context for human activity? This question can be answered across several levels of understanding —biological, psychological and social. We will begin at the cellular level and work our way up to the arena of social institutions.

Work in the field of cell assemblies and synaptogensis provide new perspectives on the interrelationship between neural activity, experience and behavior. Specifically, Hebb (1949) has discussed a model for understanding the relationship between brain function and experience. Neural cells differentiate, and based on experience associate with each other in a manner which forms "cell assemblies." While a single cell may associate with several assemblies, under appropriate stimulation, specific assemblies are activated. It is possible to argue, then, that it is culture which provides the stimuli and the context through which experience actively shapes the organization of brain cells. Further, with respect to reinforcement, it is certainly culture which serves to give meaning to the overt expressions of behavioral products of these cell assemblies —meanings and reinforcements which in turn allow the behavioral products to become established patterns of behavior activity.

In addition to the association or differentiation patterns of cells, the density of synaptic connections is also fundamentally determined by experiences during the late prenatal and early post-natal periods of development. During the process of synaptogenesis, synaptic connections are first over produced, followed by a later period of selective degeneration. Greenough et al. (1987) has theorized that experience, in its role as activator of neural activity is responsible both for the organization of synapses, as well as for the selection of which synapsis will degenerate.

Greenough et al. (1987) further advanced a theory of experience-expectant and experience-dependent processes to account for the relationship between synaptic connections and experience. Briefly, the experience-expectant theory hypothesizes that relevant or normal experience results in normal neural activity which in turn maintains typical synaptic connections. Conversely, an absence of experience or atypical experience may lead to irregular synaptic connections. In Greenough's second theory, the experience-dependent hypothesis states that specific neural activity, which results in the formation of synapsis, is the result of new information processing on the part of the organism.

It is clear, then, on the biological level we see a dynamic interaction between the environment and human development. This is also true for the interaction between social institutions and human behavioral patterns. Socio-cultural context is mediated through institutional structures as well as personal interaction. This socio-cultural context, in the form of family, religious institutions, schools, etc, provide the stimuli (e.g. values, norms, skills and technological devices) that serve to organize cognitive and affective behavior in much the same way that experience

shapes synaptic connections. It should be understood, however, that the relationship between culture and social institutions is a reciprocal one. The relations between education and culture serve to exemplify the dialectical nature of change. Our educational system exists as a subset of our broader social context. Over the course of time, our society has moved to embrace the concept of education for all citizens. In turn, however, this educated citizenry is now capable of creating tremendous change within our culture.

On the micro level, the socio-cultural context is mediated through personal social interactions. It is here, in teaching interactions that take the form of social scaffolding, that learners develop a system of knowledge structures and affective cognitive skills that are congruent with the values, beliefs and conventions of their socio-cultural group. The interaction between learner and significant other is premised on reciprocity. While it provides the learner with the opportunity to develop personal attributions, dispositions and motivations to behave in essentially appropriate ways, the growth of the learner creates new demands for the tutor.

Ultimately, it is the social institution which may come to replace or function in parallel with the significant other, both as a source of reinforcement as well as a vehicle for the normative dimension of culture. It is through the processes of assimilation, accommodation, and adaption of schemata, that cultural transmission occurs. Schematization represents the mechanism by which conceptual structures come to represent cognitive, conative and affective components of phenomena experienced. In accommodation, then, the acquisition and replication of stimulus/response/situation triads is related to existing schemata, while in adaption

the existing schemata or emerging conceptual frames are adapted to the demands of currently perceived or changing conditions.

It is in the relationship between social institutions and the learner that high degrees of dissonance can result in failure to learn or a distortion of the learning process. In a society with tremendous cultural diversity and a culturally hegemonic educational system, dissonance between what is learned in personal interaction with the significant other often may come into conflict with demands and expectations of the social institution. Precision of language offers an example of such dissonance. It is not uncommon in some cultures for individuals to use signal words to represent deeper meanings rather than the elaborated language we have come to associate with the academy. In some groups numbers and time are evoked in the form of estimation rather than the precise calculations and specific references used in high technology dominated cultures. In the context of an educational system which allows only for the precision of exact calculation, and which does not appreciate the potential for cultural differences in the ways that number are used, this demand for exactness may place a child at risk for failure to thrive in the school setting.

It should be understood that while some cultures may place a greater emphasis on technological development than other cultures, the notion of a "culturally deprived" people is a misnomer. The challenge for education thus becomes the enabling of bridging between cultures, of the learning of multiple cultures, and the appreciation of multiple ways of viewing things in all students.

It is the failure or inability of the school to bridge between cultures which are in conflict that renders schooling a risk inducing phenomenon for many students.

Since learning is such a personal achievement, it is critically dependent upon the learner's engagement in the process. When the learning process comes to be associated with that which is "not me," that which is alien to me, learning task engagement is interfered with. E.T. Gordon (1992) has described what he calls "resistant culture" to refer to the, sometimes, elaborate systems of belief and behavior adopted by African American males to insulate themselves from the demands of acculturation and socialization experiences that they consider alien or hostile to their interests. Some of these adaptations serve pro-social ends. Others are clearly anti-social. In both instances, however, they represent defense mechanisms for the youth and barriers to intervention. Given the ineptness of much that we do for these youth and the actual destructiveness of some, these adaptations can not be rejected. Rather they must be understood and taken into account as intervention plans are developed. In the absence of such respect, alienation and resistance in the face of cultural conflict must be expected.

They are these instances of cultural conflict which are so challenging and frustrating in the design of educational services for children who are at risk. Educators sensitive to the diversity of at-risk children should be respectful of the indigenous orientations and values, but these are sometimes at odds with the goals toward which education is directed. If it were simply a matter of cultural taste, the choices would be simpler even if the implementation were not. However, in some circumstances what we are dealing with are resistant cultural values which are politically functional but developmentally dysfunctional. Decisions concerning the quality of educational pursuits and the choice of more challenging courses are examples. For some time now we have taken the position that the educator has a

professional responsibility to make these hard choices for the student, when the student's risk status renders him or her incapable of making an informed decision. In such cases the final criterion must be the increasing of options for the student. If the professionally made choice reduces future alternatives for the student, we feel that it is probably not in his or her best interest. If it increases alternatives for choice, we feel that the professional has the responsibility to act.

Implications for Educational Reform

Several implications for educational reform flow from this way of thinking about at risk status. Among these are:

1. The limitations of reform in school governance alone;
2. The limitations of the manipulation of standards and accountability based upon educational achievement tests data;
3. The applicability of principles of social justice; just savings and the needs of the weakest as bases for distributional inequalities;
4. The pedagogical principles of adaptability and complementarity; and
5. Concern for diversity, pluralism, context, and perspective.

Limitations of Reform of School Governance

Most of the action on the school reform front has been directed at changes in the organizational structure and governance of schools. In a number of school systems across the nation, efforts are underway to increase teacher participation in decisions concerning what happens in schools. This notion rests on the logical conclusion that people are likely to work more effectively when they are pursuing goals and actions of their own choosing — when they feel some sense of ownership of the programs and projects in which they are engaged. The basic idea

is consistent with related developments in the industrial sector and is thought to partially explain the reported differences between the productivity of Japanese and U.S. workers.

In what is perhaps the largest current effort to apply this concept, the public school system of Chicago has devoted most of its reform efforts at the decentralization of governance and site-based management despite a consent decree which requires that academic underachievement be reduced by 50% in five years (Gordon,1991). The implied logic here is probably based on the assumption that decentralization will result in more effective teaching and greater student learning. In this instance, the proceeds from an $83,000,000 court decree have been used to support schools that are actively working to implement site-based management. The funds have been used in large measure to provide staff development in decision-making and management, as well as to provide modest support for curriculum enrichment. However, available achievement data do not yet suggest that the goal of 50% reduction in underachievement will not be reached. (Gordon, 1991).

Site-based management seems to have become the current panacea for much that is considered to be wrong with schooling, despite the finding that such efforts to date have done more for teacher morale than for student achievement (Miami Study, 1990). Most advocates for this approach to school reform argue that real change can not occur without support from staff, and site based management is the supposed route to such involvement and support. But active participation in the decision-making and management of schools requires more than authorization to participate. It requires know-how, resources and societal commitment. None of

which are in adequate supply. With respect to know-how, until we strengthen the pedagogical and substantive competence of our teaching force, their involvement in decision-making and school improvement is likely to be of limited effect. In addition, if the primary goal of many of our efforts at school reform is to reduce the incidence of school failure in a variety of students who present very diverse characteristics to the school and who are currently served poorly by our schools, the current reforms in school governance hardly seem to be the treatment of choice.

Limitations of Efforts at Accountability and Standards

Many of the states and certainly the federal government have staked their hopes for school reform and the improvement of education for children at risk of failure on the imposition of higher standards of academic achievement and some attempts at establishing systems by which schools can be held accountable for their productivity. Now there is no question but that the standards by which we judge academic achievement and to which we consistently fail to hold schools accountable, are too low. They compare poorly to the standards achieved in other technologically advanced countries. However, it can be argued that our standards and achievement are low, not simply because our sites are too low, but because our practice of and provision for education are inappropriate to the requirements of educational excellence. Among the most prominent efforts at goals' and standards' setting are the President's National Goals of Education and the non-government New Standards Project. Both have begun with prime attention being given to the achievement outcomes of schooling. While, for some, the National Goals would be measured by a new educational achievement test, New Standards proposes a new system of educational assessment. The latter is headed in the right direction

with respect to assessment, but both give woefully little attention to the importance of educational inputs.

One cannot argue with the substance of the national education goals; that is:

1) By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn;
2) By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent;
3) By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy;
4) By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement; and
5) By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. (National Education Goals Panel, 1992)

In each instance we have iterated a rational expectation of what will be required for meaningful, satisfying and responsible participation in the social order. The values reflected in such goals, especially goal three, send a powerful message to school systems across the country concerning what the nation is coming to expect from its schools. However, an extremely negative message is sent by the promulgation of such goals in the absence of the resources, know-how, and national commitment to

ensure that schools and students are enabled to meet these goals. Nothing in the national effort speaks to the desperate need for staff development and the improvement of the quality of the labor force in schools. Nowhere in that effort is there attention given to the state's responsibility for ensuring that schools have the capacity to deliver the educational services necessary to the achievement of such goals. Nowhere is there any recognition of the things that must happen outside the school to enable schools and students to reach these goals. Without attention to these extra school forces, it is folly to expect that the national effort will address questions of responsibility for ensuring that these enabling conditions will prevail.

In the NYC Chancellor's Commission on Minimum Standards (Gordon, 1986) the case was made for the importance of symmetry in the pursuit of accountability in schooling. After identifying achievement level targets as standards, the Report proposed that standards also be set for professional practice and for institutional capacity. New York City, other school districts, the federal government and New Standards have yet to seriously engage standards for practice and capacity. Yet if we are to expect that children at risk of failure and other children as well will experience great improvements in their academic performance, it is more likely to come from holding to higher standards those of us who manage their education and as teachers, guide their learning. In a forthcoming collection of essays Standards of Excellence in Education (Gordon, 1992) Darling-Hammond has begun the iteration of an approach to such standards of practice and capacity. The problem is that it is relatively easy to arrive at agreement on what students should be, know and know how to do. It is very difficult to agree on what the educational inputs should be without becoming overly prescriptive, or without

facing, what is more problematic politically, questions concerning entitlements and the fixing of responsibility for their costs. If the field can ever agree on a set of standards for professional practice and school capability, do we then have a basis for asking the courts to hold the school or the state responsible for making them available, especially to children at risk of school failure?

Social Justice and Distributional Equity

As we turn to the actual distribution of educational resources, we encounter different kinds of problems. In his now classic report, Coleman (1966) challenged the society to separate school achievement from such social origins as class and race. The nation responded with several efforts directed at the equalization of educational opportunity. Enlightened as these efforts were and despite considerable expenditure of money and effort, educational achievement has continued to adhere to the social divisions by which status in our society is allocated. One of the reasons why this problem may be so recalcitrant is the confusion of distributional equality (insuring that all have equal access to the educational resources of the society) and distributional equity which requires distribution which is sufficient to need. Persons who need more educational resources cannot be said to have been treated with equity upon receiving an equal share, when what is needed is a share equal to their need. What is required here is a more appropriate conception of justice. Rawls (1971) has advanced a theory of justice in which the unequal distribution of social goods is justified by the principle of "just savings" through which the future claims of persons as yet unborn are protected, and a second principle which holds acceptable unequal distribution of resources which favors the weakest members of the society. Our concern for resource distribution sufficient to

the needs of persons most at risk of failure meets one of Rawls' principles of social justice. Gordon and Shipman (1979) have argued that in the presence of students with widely diverse learning characteristics and conditions of life, standardized educational treatments may be dysfunctional. We may not be meeting the needs of student A when we provide for her the same educational treatment that we provide for student B, just as we do not provide for medical patients with different needs, the same medical treatment. Where there are groups of students known to present themselves at school without the acknowledged prerequisites for optimal learning, social justice requires that they be treated differently in order to serve those needs. We have begun to honor this notion in the court decision Lau v. Nichols (1974) which requires that where there are certain concentrations of non-English speaking students, the schools must provide some instruction in the student's first language. In such cases the school's adaptation is to the language characteristic of the student. The courts have not yet extended this concept to include learning styles, cultural referents, temperament,temporal factors or health/nutritional conditions. Yet if the needs of students who are at risk are to be adequately (and equitably) served, those characteristics by which the school's inability to serve places them at risk must be addressed. Without such adaptation the values implicit in our conception of social justice and equity are not served.

Adaptability and Complementarity as Conditions of Effective Teaching and Learning

If we recognize that children come to our schools with varying degrees of readiness for academic learning and differential patterns of support for educational pursuits, it is necessary that schools be adaptable to these different characteristics

and circumstances as educators guide students toward the goals of schooling. When we add the fact that students have been differentially acculturated and socialized, giving them quite different cultural schemata, cultural styles and related attitudes and dispositions, schools have the added task of developing the capacity to complement much of what students bring to school in the process of bridging from where these children are to where they will need to go in the process of gaining a sound, basic education and becoming effective adult members of society. In the service of adaptation, both our students and our schools must give and take as we try to reconcile differences between the worlds of home and school. In the service of complementarity, the focus is on conserving the respective strengths of both students and schools as we construct connections (bridges) between the two. Complementarity assumes that beneath the surface differences that exist between groups and institutions, the basic human needs and goals are quite similar, and when made explicit, can be brought into facilitating and supportive relationships with each other. For example, my colleagues and I have been investigating the acquisition of higher order thinking skills and strategies by inner city high school students. After considerable effort at teaching such skills with little success at getting them to transfer what they had learned in the laboratory to regular academic tasks, we discovered that many of these young people already know and use some of these skills "executive strategies," for example, in their daily lives. However, they were unaware of their applicability to academic problems and, consequently, did not use them there. In addition, then, to teaching them new skills and strategies, we turned to making the utility of such skills explicit in their application in academic settings. We bridged the two problem solving situations and made

explicit the applicability of these strategies, that they knew from the indigenous situation, to the alien situation. Success in using something you already know from an old setting, to solve problems in a new setting, proved to be easier than learning what appeared to be new skills to be applied in a new (academic) setting. Good teachers for ages have attempted to adapt learning experiences to the characteristics and circumstances of learners. In Bloom's (1976) mastery learning, it is not simply more time utilized for those who require it, but the variations which are introduced to counteract boredom that must partially account for its effectiveness. Even some of our misguided efforts at ability grouping are based upon the idea that different teaching strategies and pace are useful in the teaching of students who differ. Although the aptitude-treatment-interaction paradigm has failed to find support in much of the extant research, even Cronbach and Snow (1977) still find the paradigm appealing. It may well be that Messick (1976) is correct in suggesting that the problem with the absence of supportive research findings is related to the fact that many of us have been counting the score before we have learned to play the game. Cronbach and Snow provide an excellent critique of the technical problems in much of this research. Gordon (1988) has suggested that the prevailing conception of the relationships in the paradigm may be misconceived. He has advanced the notion that it is not the direct interaction between learner characteristics and learning treatments that produce learning outcomes, but that learner characteristics interact with learning treatments to produce learner behaviors (time on task, task engagement, energy deployment, etc.) and that it is these learner behaviors that account for learning outcomes. Without appropriate learner

behaviors learning achievement is not likely to occur even in the presence of an appropriate match between learner characteristics and learning treatments.

Diversity, Pluralism, Contextualism and Perspectivism

Concern with the cultural backgrounds out of which learners come forces us to give attention in education to such philosophical constructs as diversity, pluralism, contextualism, and perspectivism. Each of these notions has its conventional meaning, but in education each has special significance. Attention to diversity requires that differences which adhere to individuals and groups be factored in the design and delivery of teaching and learning transactions. We have discussed some of these implications above under adaptability and complementarity. This construct is often reflected in the individualization or at least the customizing of education in relation to these idiosyncratic characteristics. Pluralism, which is often used as if it were synonymous with diversity, actually refers to the increasing demand that learners develop multiple competencies, some of which are in common with learners who may differ from them, while others are appropriate to idiosyncratic settings. All of us find ourselves increasingly in situations were we must meet other than indigenous standards. Thus it is required that we become multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-skilled, and capable of functioning in multiple environments and settings. So that while education is influenced by and must be responsive to the differences with which learners enter the educational system, the exit characteristics of its students must reflect the pluralistic demands of the society in which they must live. In a similar manner, education must be sensitive to variations in the contexts from which students come and in which schooling occurs. Here values and belief systems provide important

examples. Engagement in schooling and effectiveness of learning seem to proceed best when there is congruence between the home context and the school context, when the values of the community are not contradicted by the values of the school. Our concern for parent involvement in the school is often misplaced on actual presence or participation in school activities. We are increasingly persuaded that the critical variable is not participation but the absence of dissonance between home and school. Where both are about support for common values, participation on the part of parents may be a bi-product. Nevertheless, while participation is desirable, it is neither essential nor sufficient, whereas contextual complimentarity — congruence — is both. Context then refers to environment, surrounds, conditions, situation, circumstance. Context specificity, however, cannot be permitted to preclude the school's attention to perspective. In our concern for perspective we recognize that diverse characteristics and contexts are associated with differences in world views. People who live their lives differently are likely to have different perspectives on things. However, it is dysfunctional for education if students are not enable to see the world from the perspectives of persons and peoples who differ from themselves, and from one's own perspectives which may differ as a function of different disciplines, different instruments of measurement, and different environmental conditions. Cultural variation in populations is associated with people with different characteristics, who come out of different contexts, and who may have different perspectives. These differences may place them at risk of school failure if education does not function effectively to build upon these differences to enable pluralistic competencies and the capacity for multi-perspectivist thought and problem solving. Especially for children who are at risk

of failure by virtue of their differences from those children schools find it easy to serve, respectful concern for diversity, pluralism, context and perspective must be at the heart of educational planning and service.

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