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Frameworks

Variability in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation

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This article traces historically the different research approaches in educational anthropology. In doing so, the author presents a theoretical approach to minority school performance based on the important differences that arise from a minority community's experiences in the postschool opportunity structure and how minority community members' perceptions of dismal future opportunities influence their perceptions of and response to schooling. MINORITY EDUCATION, SCHOOL PERFORMANCE, MICROETHNOGRAPHY

Types of Anthropological Study of Minority Education

I have learned from experience that sometimes unnecessary disagreements arise about why minority children do poorly in school because we fail to distinguish between different types and objectives of anthropological study of minority education. Since this issue of *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* is about two different views on the causes of low school performance of minority children, and since readers have different interests and orientations, I will begin my essay by discussing different research approaches in educational anthropology, at least as I see them; and I will do this somewhat historically.

Although some ethnographic research was conducted earlier, systematic anthropological study of minority education began mainly in mid-1960s. As I pointed out in a recent review of the field of educational anthropology (Ogbu 1985), the stimulus for a systematic ethnography was, in part, the need to respond to conventional educational research. Anthropological criticisms of that research paradigm have been presented in detail by McDermott and Hood (1982), Roberts (1976), Spindler (1982), Valentine (1968), and Wax and Wax (1971). I do not intend to repeat them here.

During the initial stage, anthropologists tried to refute the prevailing notion that minority and poor children were failing in school because they were "culturally deprived." This was done through careful ethnographic studies showing that minority and poor children were neither culturally deprived nor deprived of stimulating learning en-

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vironments, and that they came from cultures that were different but as viable as the white middle-class culture. Anthropologists then suggested an alternative hypothesis for the academic difficulties of minority and poor children, namely, that the difficulties were probably due to "cultural discontinuities" or "culture conflicts" (Burger 1968; Philips 1972, 1983). There were and still are excellent case studies documenting cultural differences of the minorities in general as well as in specific domains of culture, including cognition, communication, interaction, teaching and learning, socialization, and so on.

My own contribution in this initial period was not really within the framework of the cultural discontinuities hypothesis. Rather, in my research in Stockton, California (Ogbu 1974), I noted the importance of a minority community's experiences in the postschool opportunity structure and how minority community members' perceptions of dismal future opportunities influenced their perceptions of and responses to schooling.

Having established that cultural/language differences between the dominant group and the schools, on the one hand, and the minorities, on the other, existed, and that the difficulties in social adjustment and academic performance experienced by minority children might be due to such cultural/language differences, anthropological research developed into a second stage. This stage is characterized by divergent approaches or styles that have different objectives. Four approaches can be identified and grouped into two types for the purpose of this essay. I will designate as A, or "improvement research," two research approaches, namely, microethnography and intervention ethnographic studies. I will call studies in Group B "explanatory research," consisting of comparative analysis of ethnographic studies and comparative ethnographic research in minority education.

I have described the microethnographic approach and the rationale behind it elsewhere (Ogbu 1981a). Its practitioners basically accept the assumption that minority children's social adjustment and academic performance difficulties are due to cultural and language differences. The focus of the study is process, how the assumed cultural/language differences interact with teaching and learning to cause the problems experienced by the minorities. Depending on the background of the investigator, the specific cultural domain considered important in the study of the process—the study of how minority children fail—may be cognitive style, communication style, motivational style, classroom social organization and social relations, interaction style, and, nowadays, "literacy" and "writing" styles. As I noted some years ago (1981a), these are among the best studies of classroom processes that lead to minority children's school failure. But I have also argued that they cannot provide a general explanation of the school success or failure of minority children because they focus only on minority groups who do poorly in school; they do not study other minority groups who

do well in school although they, too, possess different cognitive styles, communication styles, interaction styles, teaching and learning styles, and so on. Nor do the microethnographies explore and explain intra-group variability—why, for instance, some black, some Chicano, and some Indian or Native Hawaiian children do well in the same schools and classrooms where their ethnic peers do not, even though they, too, possess the same cognitive style, communication style, and learning style.

Closely associated with microethnography is “applied ethnography,” typified by two case studies in this volume (Moll and Diaz; Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp). In my understanding, these studies are not designed to “explain” why minority children succeed or fail in school. Instead, they are “intervention” studies, as Moll and Diaz repeatedly characterize their case study. Intervention ethnography or ethnographic research in search of “cultural solutions” or “cultural compatibility” is not and cannot be about *why* minority children succeed or fail in school; the orientation is toward discovering “what works” and, perhaps, “what works best for whom?”—for minority students, for teachers of minority students, etc. Regardless of whether the focus is on problems of cognition, communication, interaction or social organization and relations, teaching and learning styles, literacy or writing, the logic of applied ethnography is not and cannot be an explanation, and certainly not a general explanation of minority children’s school success or failure. One reason is that, like microethnography, intervention ethnography generally excludes minorities who are successful in spite of their cultural and language differences.

What I have discussed thus far are improvement studies, not explanatory research, which I take up next. Explanatory research is not explicitly about discovering cultural solutions to educational problems of minority children, and although it includes the study of process, that process extends beyond the classroom and even beyond the school. It is multilevel.

Explanatory research begins with a comparative analysis of available studies, including microethnographic studies and intervention studies, of the school experiences of minority groups in the United States and elsewhere. Such an analysis tends to show that both successful and unsuccessful minorities often face cultural/language difference barriers as well as barriers in employment and other domains in adult life. It is this observation of *variability* in the school performance of culturally different and language minorities that points to the need for comparative ethnographic research. In the latter kind of study the immediate goal is to explain why different minorities adjust and perform differently in school in spite of cultural and language differences. The comparative study is also concerned with determining why and how the problems created by cultural and language differences seem to persist among some minority groups but not among

others. The long-range goal is to provide knowledge for better and more effective educational policy as well as for preventive and remedial efforts.

It is important not to confuse explanatory research with improvement research, and not to evaluate the former by the criteria of the latter, as some have mistakenly done (Trueba 1986). I myself have not been engaged in improvement studies; rather, I have been conducting comparative studies of minority education in the United States and elsewhere in order to understand and explain why some minority groups are less successful than others in social adjustment and academic performance in school.

Cross-Cultural Evidence of Variability in Minority School Performance

What evidence do we have that there are differences in the social adjustment and school performance of minority groups who face cultural, language, and other barriers in school and who also face social and economic barriers in the wider society? Evidence for the variability exists for minority groups in the United States and for minority groups in other societies. In the United States evidence comes from local studies (Gibson 1983a, this volume; Matute-Bianchi 1986; Ogbu 1974; Suarez-Orozco 1986, this volume; Varlede 1987). For example, in my research in Stockton, California (Ogbu 1974, 1977), I found that in the 1930s both Asian-American students (Chinese and Japanese) and Mexican-American students were experiencing difficulties in school because of limited proficiency in the English language. However, a study by the local school district in 1947 (Stockton Unified School District 1948) showed that the language problems had almost disappeared among the Asian Americans but persisted among Mexican Americans. Furthermore, Asian-American students were doing so well that at this time their representation at the junior college level (grades 13 and 14) had risen to almost 250% of their expected rate. In contrast, less than five percent of the Mexican Americans in the seventh and eighth grades made it to the junior college. Local blacks did not do much better. In my own ethnographic study I found that Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese students in the late 1960s and early 1970s did considerably better than blacks and Mexican Americans in the same schools (Ogbu 1974, 1977).

At the national level, Coleman (1966) reports that Asian-American students do better than blacks, Mexican Americans, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans in reading, verbal ability, and math tests. As reported in the *New York Times* (Slade 1982), Asian-American students did better than other language and cultural minorities on the SAT administered by the Educational Testing Service in 1980–81. Asian-American students are, of course, not the only language and cultural minorities doing well in school. A comparative study of various His-

panic groups in the United States reveals some variability, too. As Suarez-Orozco (this volume) summarizes the situation, Hispanics of Central and South American origins, as well as those of Cuban origin, tend to do better in school than Mexican-American and mainland Puerto Rican students. Matute-Bianchi (1986) found in her ethnographic study of Japanese, Mexican-American and Mexicano high school students in Wattsonville, California, that many of the Hispanic students who were doing well were born in Mexico. Similarly, the results of a recent comparative study of Hispanic high school dropouts and graduates in a southwestern city found that students who were born in Mexico were less likely to drop out than those born in the United States (Valverde 1987).

The variability in minority school performance also exists in other countries. In Britain, for example, East Asian students do considerably better than West Indian students, even though the former are less fluent in English than the West Indians (Ogbu 1978a; Tomlinson 1982). In New Zealand the native Maori language and cultural minority group performs less well in school than immigrant Polynesians who share similar language and culture (Penfold 1981).

My conclusion is that some minority groups do well in school even though they do not share the language and cultural backgrounds of the dominant group that are reflected in school features and practices. This conclusion is reinforced by two other observations from the comparative studies. One is that in some instances the minority groups who are doing well in school are the ones who differ more from the dominant group in language and culture. For example, as already noted, some studies indicate that students from Mexico appear to be more successful than native-born Chicano students (Fernandez and Nielsen 1984; Matute-Bianchi 1986; Valverde 1987; Woolard 1982). In Britain the more different East Asians do better than West Indians (Ogbu 1978a). The second reinforcing observation is that a minority group that does poorly in school in its own country of origin or has an involuntary minority status appears to do much better when its members emigrate to another country, where its culture and language are even more different than the culture and language of the dominant group of the host society. A good example of this is the case of Japanese outcastes. In Japan itself, Buraku students continue to do poorly in school when compared with the dominant Ippan students. But in the United States the Buraku do as well as other Japanese Americans (DeVos 1973; Ito 1967; Shimahara 1983). A similar contrast exists for Koreans in Japan, where they are an involuntary minority group, and in the United States, where they are voluntary immigrants (DeVos 1984; Lee 1984; Rohlen 1981).

The challenge for educational anthropology is to explain the variability in the school performance: Why are some minorities successful in school even though they face barriers in culture, language, and

postschool opportunities faced by the minorities that are not successful? It is one thing to conduct research designed to discover "cultural solutions" or other remedies for the school failure of some minorities; it is quite another thing to conduct research in order to account for the variability in the school performance. I do not as yet have a satisfactory explanation for the variability. However, I will indicate below my current thinking on the subject, based on my comparative work.

Emerging Explanation

The question that my studies and those of my students and colleagues have been addressing can be phrased as follows: Why do some minorities successfully cross cultural boundaries and/or opportunity barriers and do well in school? Why do some other minorities not succeed in crossing cultural boundaries and/or opportunity barriers and, therefore, do not perform as well in school?

By comparing the schooling of minority children from different cultural backgrounds it is evident that all minority children encounter social adjustment and academic learning problems, at least initially. For some minority groups these tend to diminish over time, so that they eventually learn more or less successfully. For some other minority groups the problems tend to persist and may even increase in magnitude and seriousness. By comparing different minorities it appears that the primary problem in the academic performance of minority children does not lie in the mere fact that children possess a different language, dialect, or communication style; it is not that they possess a different cognitive style or a different style of interaction; it is not even that the children face barriers in future adult opportunity structure. While cultural, language, and opportunity barriers are very important for all minorities, the main factor differentiating the more successful from the less successful minorities appears to be the nature of the history, subordination, and exploitation of the minorities, *and* the nature of the minorities' own instrumental and expressive responses to their treatment, which enter into the process of their schooling. In other words, school performance is not due only to what is done to or for the minorities; it is also due to the fact that the nature of the minorities' interpretations and responses makes them more or less accomplices to their own school success or failure. There are thus three sources contributing to the school failure of the minorities who are not doing well in school, namely, society, school, and community. Because I want to explain the variability in the school performance of minority groups, I will emphasize the minority groups' or communities' contributions to school success or failure and *why* minority groups differ in their contributions. However, first I will discuss how society at large and the schools contribute to the problem of school performance.

Societal and School Contributions to the Problem

Societal Forces

What are the societal forces and how do they affect minority school performance? One mechanism is the historical practice of denying minorities access to desirable jobs and positions in adult life that require good education and where education pays off. This was the case in the United States for generations of black Americans, even though Americans espoused the ideology of equality of opportunity and even though American schooling has always been structured on the commonsense idea of preparing young people in marketable skills and offering them credentials for labor force entry, remuneration, and promotion on the job. The minorities were denied equal opportunity through a *job ceiling* (Ogbu 1978a). Thus, minority individuals who qualified educationally were denied the opportunity to use their education meaningfully and were not rewarded with jobs and wages commensurate with their training and ability. The history of black American employment experience is the most fully documented and well known. But other minorities in the United States and elsewhere have also experienced a job ceiling (Ogbu 1978a). Consider the case of the minorities against AT&T, which was settled by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1974. It was found that the giant company "saved" about \$362 million a year by not paying black, Hispanic, and women employees what they would have earned had they been white males (DeWare 1978; Wallace 1977). By denying the minorities opportunity to gain entry into the labor force and to advance according to their educational qualification and ability, and by denying them adequate rewards for their education in terms of wages, American society discouraged the minorities from investing time and effort into pursuit of education and into maximizing their educational accomplishments. Since this discouragement went on for many generations, the effects have probably been cumulative and relatively enduring. Furthermore, the experience has probably discouraged the minorities from developing a strong tradition of academic achievement.

Another related societal factor is the practice of denying minorities equal access to good education. In the past, black Americans, for example, were given inferior education by formal statutes in the South and by informal practices in the North. Their inferior education was characterized by inadequately trained and overworked teachers, by different and inferior curriculum, inadequate funding, facilities, and services, and in the case of Southern blacks, by a shorter school year. Although formal aspects of the inferior education have been legally abolished, recent court trials of desegregation cases reveal that some informal practices still remain. Inferior education ensures that the minorities do not qualify as whites do for desirable jobs and other positions in adult life that require good education and where education

pays off. More important, by giving the minorities inferior education, it is certain that minority children cannot learn as much or test as well academically as white children who have superior education. Since the practice of providing inferior education for the minorities lasted for many generations, it is not farfetched to suggest that it probably resulted in the evolution of a tradition of inferior academic performance among the minorities.

School and Classroom Forces

Schools contribute to the academic problems of minority children intentionally and unintentionally because they operate according to the norms of American society and according to the norms of the communities in which they exist. Those who doubt that the form and process of schooling are determined in large part by societal interests and directives should study current debates in education and current changes in American education.

Comparative and historical research shows that there have always been factors within the schools and classrooms operating against minority children's adjustment and academic performance. This is true even where schools are integrated so that minority and white children have available to them the same staff, facilities, curriculum, and services. Among the subtle mechanisms that have been found in such a situation is the lowered expectation of teachers and administrators. Another mechanism with increasing significance is the labeling of minority children as having educational "handicaps." Because of this, a disproportionate number of minority children are channeled into special education, which is inferior education. Then, too, there are problems arising from cultural differences between minority students and school personnel. The failure of school personnel to understand and respect minority children's culturally learned behaviors often results in conflicts that obstruct children's adjustment and learning. Note, however, that I am not saying that it is only school personnel who have an obligation to understand and accommodate cultural differences; minority children also have an obligation to understand and accommodate school culture. It is a two-way thing.

The evidence that this treatment by society at large and by the schools affects how the minorities perceive and respond to schooling is found in the autobiographies of many minority individuals, in interviews with minority parents and students, and in public discussions of educational, employment, and other problems facing the minorities. I will show later in this essay how the minorities respond to this treatment and how their responses enter into their school experiences. Here I want to point out that the treatment of the minorities that elicits responses affecting their schooling encompasses more than the instrumental treatment described above. Equally important are the denigration of the minorities and their culture and the dominant

group's expressive exploitation of the minorities (DeVos 1967, 1984; Ogbu 1987). Generally, dominant group members, such as white Americans, ascribe to themselves the proper moral values, cultural norms, good manners, good and correct speech, and good and correct posture (Haynes 1985). They see in the minorities the opposite qualities. The beliefs of dominant group members in the *collective inferiority* of the minorities and their culture enable the former to exploit the minorities expressively: they project onto the minorities undesirable traits, segregate them residentially and socially, and, in some cases, prohibit intermarriage to avoid contamination; they use the minorities as scapegoats in times of political and economic crisis (see *Governor's Task Force*, State of California 1982). These treatments affect how the minorities perceive and respond to schooling and other institutions controlled by the dominant group. However, all minorities do not perceive the treatment alike or respond alike, and the treatment does not affect the schooling of all minorities to the same degree. Why not?

Minority Responses and Variability in School Adjustment and Performance

The complex and interlocking forces that affect social adjustment and academic performance of minority children are not limited to those of the wider society, the school, and the classroom; they also include those emanating from the minority communities themselves. The community forces, as I designate the latter, thus constitute the third force in the school adjustment and performance problems. It is largely in consideration of differences in the community forces and their influence that we begin to understand the variability in the school performance. And a prerequisite for understanding the differences in the community forces and their influence is to recognize that there are different types of minority status whose distinctive features have different implications for schooling. What are the minority types and their distinctive features?

Types of Minorities

I have identified three types of minorities in cross-cultural studies. One is *autonomous minorities*. These are people who are minorities primarily in a numerical sense. They may possess a distinctive ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural identity. However, although they are not entirely free from prejudice and discrimination, they are not socially, economically, and politically subordinated. Autonomous minorities do not experience disproportionate and persistent problems in learning to read and to compute, partly because they usually have a cultural frame of reference that demonstrates and encourages school success. This type of minority is typically represented in the United States by Jews and Mormons. They will not be considered further in this essay.

Immigrant minorities are the second type. These are people who have moved more or less voluntarily to the United States because they believe that this would lead to greater economic well-being, better overall opportunities, and/or greater political freedom. Although the immigrants often experience difficulties due to language and cultural differences, they do not experience lingering disproportionate school failure. The Chinese in Stockton, California (Ogbu 1974), and Punjabi Indians in Valleyside, California (Gibson, this volume), are representative examples.

Castelike or involuntary minorities are people who were originally brought into United States society involuntarily through slavery, conquest, or colonization. Thereafter, these minorities were relegated to menial positions and denied true assimilation into mainstream society. American Indians, black Americans, and Native Hawaiians are examples. In the case of Mexican Americans, those who later immigrated from Mexico were assigned the status of the original conquered group in the southwestern United States, with whom they came to share a sense of peoplehood or collective identity. The Burakumin in Japan and the Maori in New Zealand are examples outside the United States. It is castelike or involuntary minorities that usually experience more difficulties with social adjustment and school performance.

My classification of minority groups is heuristic; it is not intended to stereotype the minorities, just as it is not stereotyping them to classify them as linguistic and nonlinguistic minorities. Furthermore, while I recognize individual differences within a given minority group, my work is not about individual differences. However, when I refer to or describe the distinctive features of a minority group I do not thereby deny that there are individual and subgroup differences within that minority group. It is necessary to emphasize this point in view of my subsequent discussion.

Distinctive Features

Immigrant minorities and involuntary minorities may differ from the dominant group in culture, language, and social or collective identity, as well as in folk theories of getting ahead. However, *the quality of the differences* in these matters between the immigrants and the dominant group on the one hand and between the involuntary minorities and the dominant group on the other is different. This qualitative difference affects how minority children perceive and respond to schooling.

Cultural Differences. I have suggested elsewhere (Ogbu 1982) that the immigrants are characterized by *primary cultural differences* in relation to the dominant group in society, while involuntary or castelike minorities are characterized by *secondary cultural differences*. Primary cultural differences are differences that existed *before* two populations came in contact, such as before the immigrants came to the United

States. For example, Punjabi Indians in Valleyside, California (Gibson, this volume), spoke Punjabi, practiced Sikh, Hindu, or Moslem religion, had arranged marriages, and males wore turbans before they came to the United States, where they continue these beliefs and practices to some extent. The Punjabis also brought with them their own way of raising children. For example, they differ from white people in Valleyside in the way they train their children to make decisions and to manage money (Gibson 1983b). However, in spite of these differences, Punjabi immigrants are by and large successful in school. What can be said in summary is that most studies of primary cultural differences emphasize *differences in content*, and that *the differences existed prior to emigration* of the minorities to the United States or, in the case of non-Western peoples, prior to their entry into Western-type schools.

Secondary cultural differences are those differences that arise *after* two populations have come in continuous contact or *after* members of a given population have begun to participate in an institution controlled by another population, such as the schools. In other words, secondary cultural differences develop as *a response to a contact situation*, especially a contact situation involving the domination of one group by another.

Although at the beginning of the contact the minorities and the dominant group may be characterized by primary cultural differences, a new type of cultural difference begins to emerge after this initial phase, particularly as the minorities begin to respond or adapt to their treatment by the dominant group.

An example of a contact situation encouraging secondary cultural differences is the case of black Americans. During slavery white Americans used legal and extralegal means to discourage blacks from acquiring literacy and associated beliefs and benefits. After slavery whites also created barriers for blacks in employment and other areas of life, which effectively denied them adequate social and economic benefits of whatever education whites made available to them. Under this circumstance, black Americans, like other involuntary minorities, developed new or "secondary" cultural ways of coping, perceiving, and feeling in regard to their relationship with white Americans and their place in the United States society. That is, they made new adaptations, some of which involved a reinterpretation of aspects of their primary cultural differences or the differences that blacks brought from Africa.

There are specific features of secondary cultural differences that should be noted because they play an important role in the school experience of minority children and in the attempt by educational anthropologists to explain the behavior of these children. One of these features is *style*. The descriptions of the cultural differences faced by involuntary minority children usually stress differences in style, not

differences in content, as in the case of the immigrants. The cultural differences of involuntary minorities have been described in regard to differences in cognitive style (Ramirez and Castenada 1974; Shade 1982), communication style (Gumperz 1981; Kochman 1982; Philips 1972, 1983), interaction style (Erickson and Mohatt 1982), and learning style (Au and Mason 1981; Boykin 1982, 1986; Philips 1976, 1983).

The significance of style also lies in the fact that it is related to another feature, namely, *cultural inversion*. Cultural inversion is the tendency for members of one population, in this case involuntary minorities, to regard certain forms of behaviors, certain events, symbols, and meanings as not appropriate for them because they are characteristic of members of another population (e.g., white Americans); at the same time, the minorities claim other (often the opposite) forms of behaviors, events, symbols, and meanings as appropriate for them because these are not characteristic of white Americans. Thus, what the minorities consider appropriate or even legitimate behaviors or attitudes for themselves are defined in opposition to the practices and preferences of white Americans.

Minorities use cultural inversion sometimes to repudiate negative stereotypes or derogatory images projected onto them by the whites. Sometimes they use it as a strategy to manipulate whites or to get even with whites, or, as Holt put it in the case of black Americans, "to turn the table against Whites" (1972:154).

Cultural inversion usually results in the *coexistence of two opposing cultural frames of reference* or ideal ways orienting behavior, one considered by the minorities as appropriate for themselves and the other as appropriate for white Americans. As will be indicated later, there are social (including peer) and psychological pressures on minorities not to act according to a white cultural frame of reference.

Social or Collective Identity. Another feature that differentiates immigrant minorities from involuntary minorities is the type of social or collective identity they assume vis-à-vis their perceptions of the social identity of the dominant group. From comparisons of the two types of minorities it appears that immigrants perceive their social identity as *primarily different* from the social identity of white Americans. At least during the first generation, the immigrants tend to retain the sense of peoplehood that they had prior to emigration.

Involuntary minorities, on the other hand, appear to *develop a new sense of social identity in opposition* to the social identity of the dominant group *after they have become subordinated*, and they do so in reaction to the way that dominant-group members treat them in social, political, economic, and psychological domains. The treatment by the dominant group may include deliberate exclusion of the minorities from true assimilation, or the reverse, namely, forced assimilation (Castile and Kushner 1981; DeVos 1967, 1984; Spicer 1966, 1971). Involuntary minorities also develop oppositional social identity because they per-

ceive and experience their treatment or "oppression" by the dominant group as collective and enduring. Furthermore, these minorities *know* that they cannot easily escape from their birth-ascribed membership in a subordinate and disparaged group by "passing" or by returning to "a homeland" (DeVos 1984; Green 1981). The oppositional social identity combines with their new cultural coping mechanisms discussed above to give a different meaning to "crossing cultural/language boundaries" than it has for the immigrants.

Folk Theory of Making It and "Survival Strategies." Immigrant and involuntary minorities differ in their "theories" of how one gets ahead in the United States. However, before discussing the differences, I will clarify the role of schooling in getting ahead in general in contemporary United States and other urban industrial societies. The clarification is necessary because those who are making educational policies or involved in intervention research and programs often ignore the fact that people, be they white Americans or minorities, go to school and work hard to succeed when they perceive and experience or anticipate significant economic and other benefits of education.

The United States society, like other societies, structures schools to prepare citizens to support the existing economic system as workers/producers and consumers, and to teach them to believe in the system. It also structures the schools to train the citizens to support other institutions. American schools try to accomplish their task of recruiting people into the labor force by (1) teaching young people the beliefs, values, and attitudes that support the economic system; (2) teaching them some practical skills, like reading and computing, which make the system work; (3) enhancing the development of personal attributes compatible with the habits required at the workplace; and (4) credentialing young people to enter the work force. However, for the schools to succeed in educating children of a given segment of American society, school credentials must play a positive role in the people's folk theory of getting ahead. An example of such a positive role can be found in the case of the white middle class. Their folk theory asserts that one gets a good job that pays well by getting a good education. And they implicitly or explicitly base their education on the idea of preparation for good jobs that pay well. Since white middle-class Americans have traditionally obtained jobs and earned wages commensurate with their school credentials, they have usually not only perceived schooling from this point of view, but have also responded by investing the time and effort necessary to do well in school.

What happens when people, such as the minorities, face barriers that prevent them from getting ahead in the United States according to the prevailing folk theory of success (i.e., through education)? The two minority types differ in their responses to the situation. Initially the immigrants tend to accept the dominant group's folk theory of get-

ting ahead (Gibson, this volume; Suarez-Orozco, this volume; Ogbu 1978a), to believe that in the United States they, too, can get ahead through hard work, school success, and individual ability. Their perceptions of opportunity structure in the United States seem to contrast sharply with their perceptions of the opportunity structure "back home" in their countries of origin (Suarez-Orozco, this volume). When the immigrants encounter discrimination they tend to rationalize it by saying that it is because they are "guests" in the country (Gibson, this volume), because they do not speak the language, or because they do not have an American education. Furthermore, at least cognitively, the immigrants have some options: they can return to their homeland or reemigrate to another country where they can benefit more from their American education (Ogbu 1983; Sung 1967).

Involuntary minorities do not have the option of returning to a homeland or reemigration; nor do they feel that white Americans have a right to discriminate against them in jobs and wages because they, too, are citizens. Furthermore, they know from generations of experience that the barriers facing them in opportunity structure are not temporary. For these reasons involuntary minorities tend to develop a different version of the folk theory of getting ahead, which may emphasize other strategies likely to be in competition with schooling (Ogbu 1974, 1983a).

The situation is, however, paradoxical, for when questioned directly, involuntary minorities often respond, like white Americans and like the immigrants, that to get ahead one needs a good education. But other evidence suggests that the involuntary minorities do not really believe that they have an equal chance with white Americans to get ahead through education. They tend to reject or attack the criteria by which academic achievement is measured and also the use of educational qualifications or measures as a criterion for employment in some situations. They do not work hard enough in school to get the education that will help them get ahead. They employ a variety of techniques, often through "collective struggle," to remove, reduce, or circumvent the barriers in opportunity structure. Moreover, the minorities have developed a variety of "survival strategies" to compensate for apparent lack of equal opportunity for equal and fair competition in mainstream economic and other institutions.

Degree of Trusting Relations. Although immigrant minorities encounter and resent discrimination in the larger society and in the schools (Gibson 1983b, this volume), they do not perceive such treatment as institutionalized or permanent. And their response can best be described as an accommodation. Some immigrants even dismiss the discriminatory treatment as due to white American ignorance of their culture and background (Gibson, this volume). The reason for the accommodation response is that many immigrant minorities came to the United States partly because they perceived the opportunity structure in the

United States to be better than the opportunity structure in their own homeland and partly because they wanted to give their children the opportunity to get an American education. Thus, Suarez-Orozco (1986, this volume) reports that many Central and South American parents interviewed in San Francisco "explicitly stated that they made great sacrifices to come to the United States so that their children could get an education and become somebody." [For a similar expression by other immigrants, see Ogbu 1983a and Wong 1973]. Furthermore, the immigrants frequently find their relationship with American public schools and school personnel much more to their liking than their previous relationship with schools in their homeland. They speak favorably of the fact that in the United States the schools give children textbooks and other supplies (Suarez-Orozco 1986).

In contrast, there is a deep distrust that runs through the relationship between the public schools and the involuntary minorities. In the case of black Americans, for example, one finds many episodes throughout their history that seem to have left them with the feeling that white people and the institutions they control cannot be trusted (Ogbu 1985). The public schools, particularly in the inner city, are therefore not generally trusted to give black children the "right education." This distrust arises from perceptions of past and current treatment of blacks by the schools as discriminatory.

In summary, immigrant minorities differ from involuntary minorities in origins of minority status, in the nature of cultural differences between them and the dominant group, in social identity vis-à-vis white American social identity, in folk theory of getting ahead, and in degree of trusting relations with white Americans and the institutions the latter control. I will discuss in the next section how these differences enter into the process of minority schooling and cause different problems for the immigrants and for involuntary minorities.

Explaining the Variability or Differences in Proportion and Persistence

The Immigrants

The primary cultural differences of the immigrants initially cause problems in school both in interpersonal/intergroup relations and in academic teaching and learning. But the nature of the problems is affected by the nature of primary cultural differences, especially the *differences in content and absence of oppositional quality*. For example, minority children may come to school with different assumptions about getting ahead or about interpersonal/intergroup relations. Thus, Central and South American immigrants enter the public schools from cultural backgrounds that stress getting ahead on the basis of whom you know or because of your name, rather than on the basis of individual training and ability (Suarez-Orozco, this volume). Punjabi Indians enter

the public schools from a cultural background that teaches children to defer to adult authority, in contrast to the school expectation that children should defend their ideas even when those ideas are in conflict with those of adults, including the teacher. The Punjabi also face problems of gender relations in school. Their culture teaches them to avoid eye contact with members of the opposite sex. But in the classroom they are expected to look directly at teachers and classmates of the opposite sex when addressing them or being addressed in order to be considered polite (Gibson 1983b). In some cases immigrant minority children and children from non-Western societies come to school lacking certain concepts that are essential for learning mathematics and other subjects because the concepts do not exist in their own cultures. This problem is more fully documented for non-Western children attending Western-type schools in their own societies (Gay and Cole 1967; Lancy 1983). The children may also bring to school a style of learning that is quite different from the one emphasized by the public schools. For example, the Chinese have a traditional style of learning that emphasizes external forms and rote memorization rather than observation, analysis, and comprehension (Ogbu 1983b). Of course, a major barrier facing immigrant minority children in school is lack of fluency in the English language, the medium of instruction. In some cases the non-English-speaking children, such as the Chinese, come with a language that is structurally and in other important respects different from the English language. Because of these language, cultural, and opportunity structure barriers, the immigrants initially experience difficulties in social adjustment and academic learning. But eventually they appear to adjust and learn more or less successfully or, put differently, the immigrants succeed in crossing cultural/language boundaries to do relatively well in school. Why do they succeed in crossing cultural/language boundaries?

The extent to which the immigrants succeed in crossing cultural/language boundaries and in learning successfully in school depends in part on what schools do to help them. But it also depends on their own perceptions of and responses to the cultural and language differences facing them. In this regard there are features of the primary cultural differences and of the immigrant minority status that aid immigrant minority children, so that they eventually overcome the initial problems, adjust socially, and learn more or less successfully.

One facilitating factor is that the cultural differences developed *before* the immigrants came to the United States and did not arise as a part of their boundary-maintaining mechanisms in opposition to equivalent features in the culture of the dominant group and the schools they control. For this reason, the immigrants see the *cultural differences as barriers to be overcome* in order to achieve their long-range goals of future employment and *not as markers of identity to be maintained*. They therefore do not perceive or interpret learning the cultural

features of the school required for social adjustment and academic performance as threatening to their own culture, language, and identity, but rather as an additive learning, that is, as acquiring another language (standard English) and aspects of the dominant group culture that will help them succeed in school and later in the labor market. Immigrant minorities thus adopt what Gibson (1983b) calls a strategy of "accommodation without assimilation." That is, while they may not give up their cultural beliefs and practices, they are willing and actually strive to play the classroom game by the rules and try to overcome all kinds of difficulties in school because they believe so strongly that there will be a payoff later. Furthermore, because the immigrants perceive cultural and language differences as barriers to be overcome, they do not expect the schools to teach them in their own culture and language. Rather, they usually go to school expecting and willing to learn the school culture and language, although they do not necessarily do so without difficulties. Finally, immigrant minorities are able to cross cultural boundaries because primary cultural differences and the problems they cause for students are usually specific in nature and can thus be identified through careful ethnographic research. This specificity and identifiability make it possible to develop appropriate educational policies, programs, and practices to eliminate them or reduce their adverse impacts.

In addition, the fact that the immigrants came to the United States with the belief that this would lead to greater economic well-being and better overall opportunities influences how they respond to schooling. As we have seen, the immigrants tend to adopt the folk theory of success of the dominant group, and they also tend to have favorable perceptions and interpretations of opportunity structure in the United States. Still another factor facilitating the success of the immigrants is their dual frame of reference in regard to the opportunity structure. The immigrants often compare themselves with the standard of their home country or with their peers "back home" or in the immigrants' neighborhood. When they make such a comparison they usually find plenty of evidence that they have made significant improvements in their lives and/or that there are good prospects for their children *because of better opportunities in their new country*. Thus, the promise of wealth, opportunity, and political freedom that motivated emigration continue to influence the immigrants' adaptive strategies in their host society, including their schooling strategies.

Finally, the immigrants' interpretations of and responses to their relationship with the schools also facilitate their academic success. The relationship between the schools and the minority communities may raise similar educational problems for the immigrants and involuntary minorities. But the two types of minorities may interpret and respond to these problems differently. For example, both may be channeled into segregated and/or inferior schools. In such schools the immi-

grants may still do well academically, whereas the involuntary minorities may not. Three factors seem to work in favor of the immigrants. One is that many immigrants regard the public schools as offering an education far superior to what was available in their homeland, so that even when they attend an inferior school in the United States they may not recognize it as inferior. Their frame of reference in evaluating their education is the quality of education in their homeland, not the quality of education in the white suburbs. Second, some immigrants believe that they are treated better in the public schools than they were or would be treated by the schools of their country of origin. In ethnographic studies, immigrant minorities often express both surprise and appreciation for the fact that they do not have to pay school fees to attend the public schools and that they receive textbooks and school supplies free (Suarez-Orozco 1986, this volume). Third, even when the immigrants recognize, experience, and resent prejudice and discrimination in the public schools, as in the case of the Punjabis in Vallejo, California (Gibson 1983b, this volume), they appear to respond in ways that do not discourage them from doing well in school. They rationalize the prejudice and discrimination against them by saying that as guests in a foreign land, they have no choice but to tolerate prejudice and discrimination. Punjabi parents impress this attitude on their children and place the responsibility for doing well in school on the children themselves.

In summary, the immigrants overcome their initial problems, adjust socially, and do well academically because the primary cultural differences make it easy for them to overcome the cultural/language discontinuities they encounter in school. That is, even though they have their own language, cultural frame of reference, and social identity, the differences existed before they came to the United States; they did not arise in opposition to the language, cultural frame of reference, and social identity of white Americans who control the public schools. Because of this the immigrants do not equate learning English and other aspects of the culture of the whites essential for school success with learning a cultural frame of reference that threatens their own language, culture, and identity. Furthermore, their ability to overcome the initial problems is also due to the instrumental expectations that motivated their emigration to the United States and their trusting or accommodative relationship with the public schools.

As a consequence of these perceptions, responses, or adaptations, the immigrant community, family, and children adopt schooling strategies that enhance academic success and promote social adjustment. What are some of the strategies? At the community and family levels children are encouraged and/or guided to develop good academic work habits and perseverance; parents and other members of the community, sometimes through gossip and related techniques, communicate to children nonambivalent instrumental messages about edu-

cation, namely, that it is a *sine qua non* for getting ahead in the United States and that it is also a means to overcome or reduce discrimination in employment; parents and community tend to insist that children follow school rules of behavior that enhance academic success. For their part, immigrant minority children seem to respond positively to their parents' training and advice and to parental and community pressures. The children try to develop and maintain serious academic attitudes, value making good grades, respect school authority, follow school rules and standard practices, and invest a good deal of time and effort in their schoolwork. If language problems persist, older children tend to select courses requiring less use of language, and they avoid fields of study that prepare them for jobs where there is a job ceiling or discrimination against their group.

Involuntary Minorities

Involuntary minorities also encounter in the public schools interpersonal/intergroup and academic learning problems due to cultural/language differences, conflicts, or discontinuities. But they are less able than the immigrants to overcome these problems and therefore tend to experience a greater degree of social adjustment problems and persistent high rates of school failure. There are complex community forces that make it more difficult for involuntary minorities to overcome their initial school problems. One reason they do not overcome their initial difficulties as easily as the immigrants is that they have greater difficulty crossing cultural/language boundaries due to the oppositional nature of their cultural frame of reference and identity. *Thus, unlike the immigrants, involuntary minorities perceive the cultural differences they encounter in school as markers of identity to be maintained, not as barriers to be overcome.* Moreover, involuntary minorities tend to equate school learning with the learning of a white American cultural frame of reference and to equate following the standard practices and related activities of the school that enhance academic success and social adjustment with "acting white." Consequently, learning some aspects of the school curriculum and adopting the school's conventional attitudes and practices appear to be threatening to their language, culture, and identity. Under this circumstance there are both external (i.e., social) and internal (i.e., psychological) pressures against adopting classroom and school conventional communication and other behavioral "styles" or against "acting white."

The social pressures against "acting white" include accusations of "Uncle Tomism" or disloyalty to the minority group and its cause, fear of losing one's friends, and fear of losing one's sense of community. The psychological pressures come about because the minority individual who desires to do well in school may also define the behavior enhancing school success and the success itself as "acting white." Knowing/fearing that striving for academic success and the success itself

may result in loss of minority peer affiliation and support, and at the same time being uncertain of white acceptance and support if he or she succeeds in learning to act white, creates a personal conflict for the student.

The social and psychological pressures discourage bright minority students from adopting serious academic attitudes and from investing sufficient time and effort in their schoolwork. The dilemma of involuntary minority students is that they have to choose between "acting white" and "acting minority," as it were.

Many of the conflict situations that microethnographers describe as discontinuities in "style"—cognitive style, communication style, interaction style, etc.—are in our framework, good examples of the oppositional process that discourages crossing cultural boundaries to learn successfully in school.

The reluctance to cross cultural/language boundaries or to "act white" appears to begin at the elementary school but becomes increasingly manifest as the children pass through junior and senior high schools. Philips's study (1972, 1983) clearly shows that the phenomenon begins early and that it originates in the community. The Indian children she studied learned in the course of their upbringing "the participant structure" of their community, which appears to be not only different but oppositional to that of school and the white people who control it. Similar oppositional behaviors and attitudes have been reported for blacks (Abdul-Jabbar and Knobles 1983; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Petroni 1970) and for Chicanos (Matute-Bianchi 1986).

Problems of social adjustment and school performance also arise from the instrumental responses of involuntary minorities to economic and related barriers. In contrast to the immigrants, involuntary minorities did not choose to come to the United States motivated by the hope of economic success or political freedom. Nor do they have the comparative reference to conditions or peers "back home" or to a less favorable former status or standards in regard to their present condition in the United States. If they make any comparisons, they are inclined to consider their former state or preminority status period as considerably better than their current state. The main comparative frame of reference they have, though, is that of the dominant white Americans; and when they compare themselves with the whites the minorities often conclude that they are far worse off than they ought to be because of white treatment; and this makes them resentful. They also attribute their poorer conditions to what they perceive as institutionalized discrimination perpetuated against them by the whites and the institutions, like the public schools, controlled by whites.

As noted earlier, because involuntary minorities perceive the barriers against them in opportunity structure as more or less enduring, they tend to evolve a folk theory of getting ahead that stresses other strategies besides schooling. Some of these "survival strategies" are in

competition with schooling, and some shape attitudes and endeavors toward schooling. Ethnographic studies show, for instance, that black children tend to divert their efforts into nonacademic activities as they get older and become more aware of their limited future opportunities for mainstream employment and as they become more aware of how some people in the community "make it" without good school credentials or mainstream employment (Bouie 1981; Ogbu 1974).

Finally, the relationship between involuntary minorities and white Americans who control the public schools, characterized by conflict and distrust, contributes to the minorities' social adjustment and academic performance problems. One consequence of the minorities' distrust of white people and the public schools appears to be that they are skeptical that the schools can educate their children as well as they educate white children. Furthermore, due to this distrust, involuntary minorities do not necessarily accept or interpret school rules of behavior and standard practices in the same way that white people and immigrants do. The latter seem to endorse the rules and standard practices as necessary, desirable, and compatible with their own educational goals. Involuntary minorities appear, on the other hand, to interpret the same rules and standard practices as an imposition of the white cultural frame of reference, which does not necessarily meet their real educational needs. To make the situation worse, the schools themselves appear to approach the education of involuntary minorities defensively through strategies of control and paternalism, which divert attention from efforts to educate minority children. I suggest that the distrust of white people and the public schools as well as the skepticism of involuntary minorities about the appropriateness of school rules and standard practices probably make it more difficult for minority parents and community to teach their children effectively to accept, internalize, and follow the school rules and practices that lead to academic success, *and* for their children, especially as they get older, to accept, internalize, and follow the school rules and standard practices (Ogbu 1984).

These factors—difficulty in crossing cultural/language boundaries, folk theory of making it and survival strategies, and distrust of white people and the public schools—shape the schooling strategies of involuntary minorities. Their strategies appear to be less effective than those of the immigrants in promoting good social adjustment and academic performance. Among the strategies of involuntary minority parents and community are the following: active or passive confrontation with the schools; verbal encouragement but nonteaching involvement with children's education/school learning; continual quest for "better education," involving collective struggle; unconsciously teaching children ambivalent attitudes about education and success in adult life or in the opportunity structure; a weak control of children's use of time; a weak socialization of children to develop good academic

work habits and perseverance at academic tasks; and a weak sanction of academic instrumental behavior and academic responsibility. On the part of the children, involuntary minority students do not develop or maintain good academic work habits and attitudes; they tend to have a norm of minimum effort, do not work hard, and spend limited time on academic tasks; they avoid taking "hard"/"difficult"/"White" courses; they tend to be satisfied with average grades; although the children may do their homework, they do not routinely study; they do not usually separate academic tasks from other activities; they seem to prefer peer solidarity to schoolwork and easily submit to peer pressures that take them away from their schoolwork; they distrust school authorities with whom they are frequently in conflict; and they have a tendency to resist following school rules and standard practices.

Ontogenetic Development

How do these things—the community forces—get into the minority child so that he or she comes to behave at school in the manner described above? In brief, the initial term of incorporation into American society (voluntary immigration or involuntary incorporation) together with subsequent subordination and exploitation shape the minority group's cultural model of schooling. The latter includes the members' perceptions and interpretations of schooling, degree of reliance on schooling as a strategy for "making it," relationship with "the system" and with the white people who control it, and so on. The cultural model, in turn, shapes the strategies that the minorities adopt toward schooling.

Now, the minority group's adaptations to minority status in the wider society, its cultural model of schooling, and strategies toward schooling form an integral part of the cultural curriculum that a minority child learns in the course of growing up in the community. This curriculum—minority adaptations, cultural model of schooling, and strategies—is taught to the child consciously and unconsciously through culturally patterned processes and techniques by agents responsible for the child's upbringing, including the family, peer groups, religious organizations, the mass media and role models. As the minority child gets older he or she may actively seek to acquire the adaptations, the cultural model, and educational strategies of the group. Thus, when the minority child comes to school, he or she comes with an emerging knowledge, set of attitudes, and strategies that can promote or discourage social adjustment and academic performance, depending on what the child encounters at school.

Conclusion

Both immigrant and involuntary minority children appear to experience difficulties learning to read and to compute as well as in social adjustment, at least initially. This has been documented in several

studies both in the United States and in other countries. The reason both groups of children experience initial difficulties is that they come from cultures that equip them with cognitive styles, interactional styles, learning styles, and so on that are different from those of the mainstream and the public schools. Furthermore, the contents of the school curriculum may be foreign to immigrant and involuntary minority children alike. However, what seems evident from a close and comparative analysis of available data is that immigrant minority children in the public schools in the United States do not manifest the kinds of attitudes and behaviors commonly found among involuntary minority children in the public schools.

On the basis of comparative analysis I suggest that the real issue in the school adjustment and academic performance of minority children is not whether the children possess a different language or dialect, a different cognitive style, a different style of interaction, a different communication style, or a different style of socialization or upbringing. Rather, the real issues are threefold: first, whether the children come from a segment of society where people have traditionally experienced unequal opportunity to use their education or school credentials in a socially and economically meaningful and rewarding manner; second, whether or not the relationship between the minorities and the dominant-group members who control the public schools has encouraged the minorities to perceive and define school learning as an instrument for replacing their cultural identity with the cultural identity of their "oppressors" without full reward or assimilation; and, third, whether or not the relationship between the minorities and the schools generates the trust that encourages the minorities to accept school rules and practices that enhance academic success.

Comparative work leads me to conclude at this point that involuntary minorities have persistent high rates of school failure and social adjustment problems because they have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries due to an oppositional cultural frame of reference and oppositional identity; there evolved a folk theory of getting ahead in which schooling competes with and may be adversely affected by other survival strategies; and their distrust of white people and skepticism make it harder for them to accept and follow school rules and standard practices that enhance academic success.