

## *Cultural Congruence in Instruction*

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### **Questions to Think About**

1. What should teachers understand about the home, community, and peer group values of students of diverse backgrounds?
2. How can teachers be helped to use knowledge of cultural differences to improve the quality of classroom instruction?
3. What can teachers do to create composite cultures in classrooms with students of different ethnic backgrounds?
4. How can preservice and inservice programs be broadened to provide teachers with information about culturally congruent instruction?

Research on cultural congruence in instruction offers a basis for understanding how schooling might be made more beneficial for students from diverse backgrounds. Studies of cultural congruence are based on the premise that school learning takes place in particular social contexts, often through teacher-student interactions. From the perspective of Vygotsky (1978) and other social constructivists, learning occurs when the student's performance is assisted by that of a more capable other, who may be a teacher or a peer. Learning takes place in the context of social relationships, and both learning and failure to learn are considered socially organized activities (McDermott 1987).

The overall hypothesis in research on cultural congruence is that students of diverse backgrounds often do poorly in school because of a mismatch between the culture of the school and the cul-

ture of the home. Students have less opportunity to learn when school lessons and other activities are conducted, or socially organized, in a manner inconsistent with the values and norms of their home culture. A related hypothesis is that students of diverse backgrounds will have better learning opportunities if classroom instruction is conducted in a manner congruent with the culture of the home. This type of instruction has also been termed *culturally compatible* instruction (Jordan 1985) and *culturally responsive* instruction (Erickson 1987).

Cultural congruence in instruction does not mean an attempt to replicate a home or community environment in the classroom. Research on cultural congruence recognizes that the home and school are different settings with different functions in students' lives. Culturally congruent educational practices incorporate features of the students' home culture but do not result in activities and environments identical to those of the home. For example, reading lessons with participation structures congruent with the culture of Native Hawaiian children are still clearly recognizable as school reading lessons (Au 1980).

Nor does cultural congruence in instruction necessarily entail changes in the purposes of education or the goals of schooling. As Singer (1988) notes, research exploring cultural congruence has to date adopted an "inherently moderate" position by accepting that the goals of schooling for students of diverse backgrounds are essentially the same as the goals for students of mainstream backgrounds, that is, to help them acquire the skills and knowledge needed for success in the larger society. However, cultural congruence in instruction need not be associated only with conventional school goals (for an example, see Lipka 1990).

It should be understood at the outset that the intent of this review is not to stereotype but to report the results of research that seem to have implications for improving the schooling of students of diverse backgrounds. The assumption has been made that the members of certain ethnic communities may have a preference for values and communication processes different from those of the mainstream. It should be understood that, in particular situations, individuals in these communities may refer to mainstream values and use mainstream communication processes. It should also be understood that members of these communities may vary greatly in occupation, educational background, and other indicators of social and economic status.

For the purposes of this review, studies of cultural congruence are organized into five categories:

- (1) research on dialect speakers,
- (2) research on participation structures,
- (3) research on narrative and questioning styles,
- (4) research with students who speak English as a second language (ESL students), and
- (5) research on peer groups.

This organizational scheme was developed for the purposes of highlighting certain themes in the literature and is by no means definitive. In fact, many of the studies could easily be placed in several different categories.

### **Research on Dialect Speakers**

Many students of diverse backgrounds are speakers of a non-mainstream variety of English, including dialects or creoles. For example, many African American children grow up speaking Black English or African American language, while many Native Hawaiian children grow up speaking Hawaiian Creole English. Thus, issues of language and dialect are often inseparable from issues of culture.

Labov (1966, 1970) conducted some of the first research on communication processes with African American students. He discovered that children's willingness to speak at length was a function of their social relationship with the person they were addressing, as well as of the topic and setting. Children said little in formal, test-like situations but used extensive, complex language in informal settings. Labov argued that schools tended to underestimate the language ability of many African American children, simply because they were speakers of a nonmainstream variety of English.

Piestrup (1973) identified six different styles being used by teachers in first grade classrooms. Students of teachers who used the Black Artful style participated enthusiastically in reading lessons and had the highest reading scores among the classes studied. The term Black Artful was used to describe a manner of teaching that incorporated use of Black English and a rhythmic form of verbal play. Black Artful teachers focused closely on children's learning to read, pressed hard for children to try their best, and held high expectations for their achievement. They encouraged children to speak and listened to their responses. They were aware of differences between the children's vocabulary and the vocabulary in reading materials, and addressed these differences to improve children's comprehension of the text.

According to Piestrup, teachers with some of the other styles had difficulty keeping their lessons focused on learning to read. They ran the risk of alienating children by subtly rejecting their speaking of Black English. Piestrup recommended that teachers involve children in learning to read in a way which builds on their lively patterns of speaking. This conclusion was reinforced by Boykin (1984), who argued that African American students should be taught to read with approaches sensitive to their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Collins (1988) suggested that teachers' differential treatment of students was associated with reading group placement, as well as with students' use of Black English. Collins found that the low reading group received more phonics drill than the other groups. The teacher frequently corrected the pronunciation of low group students, thus placing the emphasis in lessons on word identification rather than reading comprehension. Boykin's (1984) analysis of typical reading programs also pointed to the need for a more holistic, meaning-oriented approach to reading instruction for African American children.

Collins, like Labov and Robbins (1969), reached the conclusion that linguistic differences or interference at the level of phonology and syntax plays a relatively minor role in reading comprehension problems.

Instead, the more important causes of reading difficulties are the social conflicts in the classroom that are triggered by the symbolic meaning of BEV [Black English Vernacular] as an emblem of ethnic identity. (Collins 1988, p. 306)

In summary, research on speakers of nonmainstream varieties of English suggests that their performance may be enhanced in situations where teachers have the ability to recognize and build upon their strengths in language. The academic achievement of these students may be threatened in situations in which teachers have the mistaken assumption that student's language is somehow inferior.

### **Research on Participation Structures**

In classrooms where teacher-guided lessons occupy much of the instructional time, the teacher's role and relationship to the class is

critical in supporting students' learning. The studies to be reviewed in this section focus on ways that the teacher's ability to foster learning is affected by the structuring of interactions with students, and whether interactions are structured in a culturally congruent or incongruent manner.

Philips (1972) laid the groundwork for much research on cultural congruence in her study conducted on the Warm Springs Indian reservation. Philips attempted to account for teachers' observations that children were reluctant to speak in class, and that this reluctance increased as students got older. Philips explained the significance of this problem:

... if talk fails to occur, then the channel through which learning sessions are conducted is cut off, and the structure of classroom interaction that depends on dialogue between teacher and student breaks down and no longer functions as it is supposed to. Thus, while the question "Why don't Indian kids talk more in class?" is in a sense a very simple one, it is also a very basic one, and the lack of talk a problem that needs to be dealt with if Indian children are to learn what is taught in American schools. (p. 372)

In other words, school instruction, which occurs largely through verbal interactions, is hampered in the absence of an on-going dialogue between students and teacher.

Philips developed the concept of the *participant structure* (also referred to as *participation structure*), or structural arrangements for interaction. She identified participant structures in which students were reluctant to speak, and those in which they were much more verbal. Students experienced difficulty when the teacher closely controlled who would speak and when while she was interacting either with the whole class or with a small group, such as a reading group. They did not volunteer to answer and frequently refused to speak in front of the class or group.

Students were more comfortable in a participant structure in which they were working independently and could initiate interactions with the teacher, either by raising their hands or by going over to speak to the teacher at her desk. They also showed greater verbal participation in a structure that allowed them to work in small, student-run groups, indirectly supervised by the teacher.

Philips discovered that the reluctance of students to speak in certain classroom conditions could be traced to differences between the social conditions for verbal participation in the school versus the community. She identified differences in three areas.

First, in the classroom the teacher sets herself apart from the rest of the participants, the students, when she directs and plans activities. In community events students are accustomed to seeing the group work together as a whole. Thus, students tend to see themselves as within the same group, and the teacher as an outsider.

Second, the teacher sees herself as a leader with the role of issuing instructions. Similarly, she feels that the students' role is to comply with her instructions. In the community, however, students have learned that leadership is not based simply on holding a particular position and that individuals have the right to choose whom they will follow.

Third, classroom activities seldom include all students, while community activities are open to all who wish to participate. Also, the teacher determines the degree of students' participation, for example, in reciting in front of the class. In the community, individuals decide on the degree to which they will participate, having determined in private that they are capable of performing successfully.

In short, Philips demonstrated that students were more willing to speak in classroom situations that involved conditions similar to those in community social situations. In particular, Philips' highlighted the importance of the teacher considering students' rights to take the initiative to speak, when they had decided they could perform capably, and to organize themselves to accomplish tasks within a small group.

Mohatt and Erickson (1981; see also Erickson & Mohatt 1982) reported the results of research comparing the teaching approaches used by two first grade teachers working on the Odawa Indian Reserve. Teacher I was Indian and a member of the local community. Teacher II was a non-Indian who was teaching Indian children for the first time. The two teachers were found to have different styles, with that of Teacher I being much like that used in Odawa homes.

Teacher I's style was quite slow and deliberate. She exercised control over the class as a whole and did not single individual children out in front of the group. Rather, she dealt with individuals in intimate, private situations. She also invited children to respond by pausing for an average of 4.6 seconds before beginning to speak again herself.

Teacher II's style showed a more rapid pace. He attempted to keep control over all arenas of activity at the same time by issuing

directives to the whole class, to the small reading group, and to individuals. In other words, he did not meet in private conferences but called out directions to individual children from across the room. In comparison to Teacher I, his directives were more explicit and given more frequently. He waited for an average of only two seconds for children to answer before he filled in the silence.

Teacher II was gradually able to change his style, so that he began to spend more time working with small groups and individual children. However, he continued to turn the "teacher spotlight" on individual children by singling them out to answer and by calling out directives to them.

A substantial body of research provides evidence of differences in the communication processes favored by teachers and students from different Native American communities in North America. Findings similar to those discussed above are reported by Dumont (1972) in research in Cherokee and Sioux classrooms, by Lipka (1990) in a study of Yup'ik Eskimo classroom, and by Scollon and Scollon (1981), Van Ness (1981) and Barnhardt (1982) in research with Alaskan Athabaskans. The research suggests that students and teachers from these communities attach a greater importance to individual autonomy, self-determination, and a non-hierarchical style of leadership, than do their mainstream counterparts. The role of the teacher must be shaped by these values if students are to benefit fully during teacher-guided lessons.

Studies examining the role of the teacher have also been conducted in classrooms with Native Hawaiian students. Boggs (1980) identified a number of home speech events involving Hawaiian children five years and younger. He differentiated between two types of events: (1) those where parents or other adults engaged in entertaining infants or in verbal play with slightly older children, and (2) those used when the parent was upset, trying to deal with a problem situation, or punishing the child. According to Boggs, the children come to appreciate spontaneity and fun in speech events through the first kind of experience, labelled by one parent as "laughing it up with the kids." However, through the second kind, which can be called scolding events, they become extremely sensitive to cues that the adult wants only to hear a certain response. Boggs' work implies that Hawaiian children's home experience makes salient two basic categories for interactions with adults: very light hearted or very serious.

Discontinuity between home and school speech events were evident in classroom observations made by Boggs (1972).

When the teacher asked a question at least a dozen hands would generally shoot up and then, before anyone could be recognized to reply, several would blurt out the answer. When an individual did not have the floor he sometimes spoke confidently and sometimes shyly, but did not volunteer any information not called for. Often a child would gain recognition and then have nothing to say. Reports to the teacher on the behavior of other children meanwhile would interrupt any other communication. (p. 301)

Teachers found this situation upsetting because the children were violating mainstream rules for classroom recitation. Those who were supposed to be speaking were unresponsive, while those who should have been silent were brimming over with things to say. Boggs suggests that children nominated do not speak because they are reacting to adult authority in a dyadic relationship. Children who are not called upon persist in answering or tattling because of a presumed lessening of adult authority in a collective relationship. In effect, Hawaiian children's performance in classroom recitation may suffer because they inappropriately equate their roles in this event with their roles in scolding events and verbal play events, home speech events perceived in some ways to be analogous.

Other studies conducted with Hawaiian students point to the collaborative nature of home and community speech events, which contrast with the individual performance orientation of school speech events. Watson (1975) and Watson-Gegeo and Boggs (1977) examined closely Hawaiian children's behavior in a speech event called *talk story*. Watson (1975) briefly defines talk story as "a rambling personal experience narrative mixed with folk materials" (p. 54). Talk story is characterized by a high proportion of turns involving joint performance, or the cooperative production of responses by two or more children. Performance in collaboration with others is more highly valued than individual performance, and an audience of other children is likely to be more impressed by a speaker successful in drawing others into the conversation, than by one who keeps the floor to himself.

Within the framework provided by the work of Boggs, Watson-Gegeo, and others, researchers at the Kamehameha Elementary Education Program (KEEP) investigated ways that school reading instruction could be made more beneficial for Hawaiian children (Au et al. 1986). The emphasis in beginning reading instruction was changed from word identification to comprehension, and students were taught in small group lessons in which teachers engaged students in a highly interactive form of discussion.



In a study of cultural congruence in instruction, Au (1980) identified similarities to talk story in one of these reading discussion lessons, taught by a Hawaiian teacher to a group of young Hawaiian students. In most of the participation structures identified, the children were allowed to produce responses cooperatively. Slightly more than half the time in story discussion was spent in these talk story-like structures.

The teacher's exercise of authority seemed to be guided by two principles: breathing room and equal time. She gave the children breathing room by withholding criticism of their responses, except when they wandered from the topic of discussion. Answers given in Hawaiian Creole English, if appropriate in content, were always accepted. Most importantly, the teacher created breathing room by permitting and even encouraging the occurrence of talk story-like participation structures that allowed the children to produce responses cooperatively.

The second principle, equal time, was seen in the teacher's concern for the fair allocation of turns and speaking time within the group of children. Teacher nomination was used to ensure that children less successful in obtaining turns on their own were given a chance to speak. Equal time even seemed to apply to the distribution of speaking rights between teacher and children; the longest single utterance in the lesson was a student narrative, not a teacher lecture.

Au and Mason (1981, 1983) analyzed lessons given by two teachers to the same group of six Hawaiian students. The teachers were similar in degree of education and experience, but Teacher LC (low contact) previously had little contact with Hawaiian children, while Teacher HC (high contact) had worked successfully with Hawaiian children for five years. Consistent with their backgrounds, it was found that the two teachers managed interaction in their lessons very differently.

Teacher LC structured her lessons following the rules for conventional classroom recitation. The highest percentage of time in her lessons was spent in the exclusive rights structure, in which the teacher nominated a particular child as the sole speaker. Teacher LC never wished to permit more than one child to speak at a time.

The key characteristics of Teacher HC's lessons were quite different and consistent with the findings in the previous analysis of a talk story-like reading lesson. The largest proportion of time was spent in the open turn structure. During this structure the teacher did not assign speaking rights to any of the children. She posed a

question and the children then negotiated for speaking turns among themselves.

The exclusive rights structure was not a part of Teacher HC's lessons, just as the open turn structure was not a part of Teacher LC's lessons. Although Teacher HC called on different children, she never assigned a child exclusive speaking rights in a manner entirely preventing other children from engaging in joint performance with the main child speaker. However, while Teacher HC did not control the role and number of child speakers, she always controlled the topic of discussion.

Au and Mason examined the two teachers' lessons for differences in achievement-related student behavior. Students spoke an equal number of times in both teachers' lessons, but they gave a much higher number of reading-related responses in Teacher HC's lessons, showing that they were more focused on academic work. Idea units in the text were discussed at a much higher rate and children produced more logical inferences, indicating that talk story-like reading lessons stimulated a higher quality of involvement with and interest in text. Au and Mason concluded that, over time, participation in talk story-like reading lessons could result in improvements in Hawaiian children's learning to read.

In talk story-like reading lessons, cultural congruence is achieved when the teacher allows the children to collaborate in producing answers. The teacher's role centers on monitoring the flow of ideas and guiding the discussion, not on lecturing or dictating who will speak when.

In summary, research on participation structures points to the importance of conducting classroom lessons in a manner consistent with the values of students' home cultures. Depending on the particular group of students, teachers may need to consider departing from conventional classroom recitation in various ways. These departures include showing a greater respect for individual autonomy by not "spotlighting" individual children, and addressing questions to the group and permitting the students to collaborate in their responses. The general idea is for teachers to seek a balance of rights in participation structures, so that classroom lessons can be focused on academic content and not on issues of management.

### **Research on ESL Students**

Studies of students who speak a first language other than English suggest that cultural congruence may be achieved when the

teacher defines her social relationship to students in other than mainstream ways. Cazden, Carrasco, Maldonado-Guzman, and Erickson (1980) conducted research in primary classrooms in Chicago to investigate two issues. The first was whether the teachers, who were bilingual Chicanas, organized instruction and classroom management in culturally congruent ways. The second was whether Spanish and English were used by the children and teachers for different social interaction purposes.

The results suggested that the teachers interacted with the children in a manner consistent with Hispanic community definitions for social relations between adults and children. When speaking with the children, the teachers communicated *carino* (love or tenderness) by showing concern for the children's well-being and a knowledge of their families. The teachers also encouraged children to help one another. Children showed a great deal of skill in their teaching interactions with peers (Carrasco, Vera, & Cazden 1981).

The teachers and children did not appear to use Spanish and English for different social interaction purposes. Teachers showed features of *cariño* in their interactions with children regardless of the language used, and both languages were used in situations of peer helping.

McCollum (1989) compared whole class lessons taught by Mrs. Ortiz, a Spanish-speaking Puerto Rican teacher, to those taught by Mrs. Thomas, an English speaking Anglo American teacher, in their third grade classrooms. In general, Mrs. Thomas used the conventional classroom recitation pattern identified by Mehan (1979). She often called on individual students to respond and ignored student initiations.

The lessons taught by Mrs. Ortiz involved a give and take much more like that of everyday conversation. Mrs. Ortiz seemed to act to facilitate interaction rather than to control it closely. Instead of calling on individuals, Mrs. Ortiz frequently invited students to answer. She often acknowledged student initiations and seldom indicated that their topics were inappropriate, although in many instances students discussed information about their personal lives. Mrs. Ortiz allowed these digressions to go on for a while before steering students back to the lesson.

McCollum described learning as being accomplished in a reciprocal or dialogic manner in Mrs. Ortiz' classroom, as opposed to being transmitted in a unidirectional manner in Mrs. Thomas' classroom. She suggested that the pattern of conducting lessons in the Spanish speaking classroom reflected a different social relationship between the teacher and students. In Mrs. Ortiz' classroom the

teacher-student relationship included the sharing of personal information during lessons. There was less of a boundary between personal conversation and curriculum oriented conversation.

In summary, in mainstream classrooms the teacher's role is often assumed to require that he or she issue directives, emphasize individual performance, and maintain a strict boundary between personal conversation and lesson discussion. However, these assumptions may be in conflict with the values of certain communities. Research conducted in classrooms with Spanish speaking students suggests that the role of the teacher can be adjusted in ways that lead to cultural congruence in instruction, in terms of students' willingness to participate in lessons and in terms of improvements in students' learning.

Ramirez (1981) pointed to the importance of examining teachers' attitudes toward the speech of bilingual students. He describes a study of two teachers engaged in Spanish reading instruction. The first teacher focuses students' attention on understanding the text. This teacher allowed students to interpret the text and to give explanations in their dialect of Spanish. In contrast, the second teacher emphasized standard pronunciation rather than students' answers to comprehension questions. Ramirez suggested that an overemphasis on standard Spanish pronunciation rather than text comprehension could eventually result in lower rates of student participation and achievement.

The results of this study by Ramirez imply that negative attitudes toward students' language comes into play with both ESL students and dialect speakers. Students' language ability is downplayed and they are given inferior, low-level forms of instruction, due to their first languages (whether Spanish or a nonmainstream variety of English) being of a lower status than Standard American English.

Moll and Diaz (1987) looked at possibilities for reorganizing instruction to capitalize on the linguistic and intellectual strengths of Spanish speaking students. Their research was conducted in Latino working-class communities. The first study, which centered on reading lessons, took place with third and fourth grade students all labeled as limited-English speakers. The children spent part of the day with one teacher receiving instruction in Spanish, and the other part of the day with a second teacher, receiving instruction in English.

In the Spanish reading class, Moll and Diaz observed the pattern of differential treatment of reading groups reported by Collins

(1988), Allington (1983), and others. The instructional emphasis in the low group was on decoding, and in the high group on comprehension. The English reading teacher did not ask the children any comprehension questions, as the Spanish reading teacher did. In the English class the instructional emphasis for *all* reading groups was on decoding, indicating that the teacher was treating all the students as if they were poor readers. Moll and Diaz suggested that the problem stemmed from the children's reading aloud in English with an obvious Spanish accent. This apparently led the teacher to assume that the children lacked decoding skills and were in need of additional practice.

Moll and Diaz pointed to difficulties with the model of reading followed by both teachers. This model assumed a hierarchy of reading skills in which decoding precedes comprehension. The students who were good readers in Spanish had the best chance of becoming good readers in English. However, they were not encouraged to transfer their reading comprehension to the English class, because instruction was organized to emphasize only word identification.

To see whether transfer could be promoted, the researchers asked the English reading teacher to teach a lesson to the low group. Immediately following the lesson, one of the authors met with the children to ask them comprehension questions in Spanish. The children's responses indicated they understood the story. However, they had not been able to display this understanding in English. The authors devised a strategy of giving students "bilingual communicative support" for learning to read in English. This strategy involved teaching the children with texts appropriate for their grade level, asking the children to concentrate mainly on understanding what they were reading, and allowing the children and the adult to switch into Spanish as needed.

In summary, when students speak a nonmainstream variety of English or a first language other than English, teachers may lower their expectations for academic achievement and provide less effective forms of instruction. For example, in reading lessons teachers focus on decoding, pronunciation, or other low level skills, at the expense of reading comprehension. Successful teachers appear to be those who have respect for the language students bring from the home and community. They provide culturally congruent instruction by capitalizing upon students' existing language ability to meet school goals. For example, they enable students to use their knowledge of Spanish to learn to read English texts.

## **Research on Narrative and Questioning Styles**

Two lines of research have investigated how students and teachers may fail to interact successfully due to differences in styles of story telling or question asking at home and at school. Michaels (1980; Michaels & Collins 1984) studied narratives told by African American children during classroom sharing time. These children used a style of narrative linking different events together with a certain pattern of intonation. This style of narrative was not familiar to teachers from mainstream backgrounds and did not conform to their expectations for an acceptable recitation during sharing time. Because teachers perceived the children to be rambling, they used questions to clarify and focus their stories and even cut them off. Children who used this narrative style were allowed less time to participate in sharing time than those whose narratives conformed to the teachers' discourse framework. From the children's point of view, teachers were interrupting them and preventing them from finishing what they had to say. Needless to say, this was a frustrating situation for both students and teachers.

Heath (1983) compared the storytelling style used in Trackton, a working-class African American community, with the style favored in school. Trackton children entered school valuing a style of storytelling that relied on the context provided by a close network of family and friends. Storytellers evaluated the stories they told, and often two or more people collaborated in telling a story. In contrast, the form of storytelling favored in classrooms involved features such as audience evaluation of a story, adult shaping of a story through questioning, and individual performance.

Heath (1983, 1982) also looked at questioning styles at home and at school. Teachers reported that children seemed unable to answer even the simplest questions. Adults reported that children were reluctant to speak in school, sometimes because the teacher asked "dumb questions" for which she already knew the answers. Heath found that Trackton adults did not question children about the attributes of objects (e.g., "What color's this?"), a form of questioning commonly used by classroom teachers. In the view of Trackton residents, it did not make sense to "talk about things being about themselves." Instead, adults might solicit an analogy from the children by asking them: "What's that like?" Trackton children learned early on to identify similarities between objects, situations, scenes, and personalities. However, they were not required to account for similarities in terms of specific attributes.

Heath reports that teachers who learned of these differences were able to devise ways of addressing them. For example, they used actual photographs of community sites in social studies units and asked questions more like those that might be asked by a member of the community. Children listened to audiotapes of one another answering questions, and gradually became familiar with school questions and forms of responding. Teachers "talked about talk" in class, labeled the types of questions they asked, and encouraged the children to listen to the way their classmates asked questions.

In summary, teachers with mainstream backgrounds often expect students to be familiar with classroom styles of telling stories or answering questions in class. They are unaware that these styles may differ from those in the children's homes and communities. Having knowledge of these differences may enable teachers to make adjustments that allow students to participate successfully in lessons and to learn typical classroom norms for telling stories and answering questions.

### **Research on Peer Groups**

The final group of studies included in this review are investigations of the influence of peer groups. As Cazden (1988) points out, a classroom actually consists of two worlds: one created by the teacher's activities and formal lessons, and the other created by the activities and relationships within the peer group. The potential for students to support one another's learning often goes unrecognized in classrooms run according to mainstream norms that emphasize individual achievement as opposed to collaborative efforts.

Research with Hawaiian families revealed that children were often raised by multiple caretakers, particularly their siblings (Galimore, Boggs, & Jordan 1974). As a result, children became more accustomed to being helped by siblings and peers than by adults. Jordan (1985) discovered that children carried this pattern over to the classroom. They showed high rates of peer interaction, frequently offering help to peers or requesting assistance from them. Although the children were raised in a manner that favored working together, school norms were oriented toward individual performance. Not surprisingly, teachers tended to view instances of peer helping as a form of cheating and spent much time and energy trying to stop it.

Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp (1987) described a form of classroom organization that took advantage of the children's preference for peer helping. Rather than being seated in rows, children worked in small groups at learning centers. Children at a center were encouraged to help one another. While most of the class worked at centers, the teacher taught a reading lesson to a group of about six children. Children at centers, then, were only indirectly supervised by the teacher. This system had the dual advantage of permitting peer teaching and learning interactions and making it easier for teachers to stand back and let students learn in the manner most comfortable for them. It was similar to home settings in allowing children to have flexible access to other children and to influence the types of interactions that occurred (Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordan 1988).

In a follow-up study, Vogt et al. discovered that the practices found to be effective with Hawaiian children could not be transferred directly to classrooms with Navajo children in the Rough Rock community. For example, in classrooms with Hawaiian children, the learning center arrangement functioned best when boys and girls worked together in groups of four or five. At Rough Rock there was virtually no interaction among children in groups of this type. This lack of interaction was apparently due to the separation of the sexes in Navajo culture. Preliminary analyses indicated that children would engage in peer helping when they were organized in groups of two or three with children all of the same sex.

D'Amato (1988) described "acting," a process of resistance to teachers shown by Hawaiian children. "Acting" occurs when competitive classroom processes result in violations of peer group norms. According to D'Amato, contention in peer groups of Hawaiian children takes the form of rivalry. In rivalry, players try to show that they are as good as their peers in order to win their respect and affection. Peers work to maintain a delicate balance so that individuals can see themselves as roughly equal in status. Classroom contention, on the other hand, usually takes the form of competition. In competition players try to show that they are better than their peers. Also, because the situation is under the teacher's control, children cannot work to maintain a sense of equality among peers. When teachers create situations in which children can no longer maintain relationships of equality, children are likely to unite in resistance.

D'Amato found that both the KEEP system of learning centers and talk story-like reading lessons supported rivalry and reduced



the damaging effects of competition. With learning centers, children had a chance to prove themselves to their peers and to maintain relationships of equality. Since teachers supervised the centers only indirectly, they were not perceived to be violating peer group norms and so were less likely to be the targets of "acting."

D'Amato suggested that Hawaiian children's "acting" was their way of inviting the teacher to give them good reasons for cooperating in class. Because the children do not generally understand the long-term benefits of staying in school, reasons must reside in day-to-day classroom experiences. For example, in the KEEP program, activities are made interesting and meaningful to children's lives and conducted in culturally congruent ways, which children find agreeable.

According to Ogbu (1978), students from certain ethnic groups, termed castelike or involuntary minorities, resist school as a way of protesting their lack of social and economic opportunity and of maintaining their own cultural identity. In Ogbu's framework, "acting" by Hawaiian children would appear to be an example of this type of resistance.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) highlighted the conflict experienced by African American high school students who found they had to choose between being successful in school sanctioned ways and maintaining their cultural identity. Fordham and Ogbu proposed having students rely on one another to achieve academic success by creating peer networks based on the concept of *fictive kinship*. *Fictive kinship* refers to the close, family-like relationships among African Americans and their shared identity or collective sense of peoplehood as African Americans.

Case studies conducted by Fordham (1991) documented the personal price paid by successful high school students who experienced the burden of "acting white." Fordham also described two programs effective in promoting academic success through having African American students cooperate with, rather than compete against, one another. The important feature of these programs was that they embodied an approach Fordham labeled *group sanctioned learning*. The first program, for high school students, utilized class/team competitions.

In the second program, at the University of California at Berkeley, students were initially so focused on individual competition that they did not seek help when they needed it. Once involved in support groups, students were able to achieve at much higher levels in math and science courses. According to Fordham, the experiences

of students in this second program highlight the importance of school administrators promoting more collaborative forms of learning for African American adolescents, which involve them in peer support groups.

In summary, peer relationships and peer group norms may play an important part in classrooms with students of diverse backgrounds of all ages. For example, students may enter school with an orientation toward learning from peers rather than adults. Teachers may inadvertently work counter to peer group norms in ways that cause students to resist or oppose school activities. To improve students' chances for academic success, teachers must alter the organization of the classroom to build upon the positive aspects of peer relationships, such as students' willingness to help one another.

### **Conclusion**

D'Amato (1987) and Au and Kawakami (1991) argue for a view of culture that can deal with both regular, rule-governed activity and with inventive activity. This more dynamic view of culture helps to account for effective classrooms and programs in which students of diverse backgrounds and their teachers collaborate to create and maintain a community of learners. The composite culture that promotes academic learning is in some ways congruent with the values and communication processes of students' home cultures. However, studies of effective classrooms and programs show that achieving cultural congruence in instruction is not simply a matter of matching classroom participation structures or activity settings with those of the home, although home values and communication processes must be taken into consideration.

Many classrooms in the United States are multicultural settings, with students from a number of different ethnic groups. In these cases it is particularly important for educators to be aware of how a composite classroom culture can evolve, even given the variety in students' backgrounds. Au and Kawakami (1991) emphasize the importance of having flexible classroom arrangements that give teachers and students the time to experiment and collaborate on the development of a composite culture that can meet the learning requirements of all students.

In our judgment, these composite cultures cannot evolve in situations in which schools follow conventional, mainstream practices.

Typical practices that appear ineffective for students of diverse backgrounds are those that devalue the home language or dialect, rely too heavily on classroom recitation, fail to recognize community variations in styles of narration and questioning, and ignore peer group dynamics. Typical practices often result because teachers have underestimated students' abilities, which leads to a lowering of expectations and an emphasis on low-level skills rather than higher-level thinking.

Because teachers have a key role in the shaping of the classroom community, it is important for them to be informed about research on cultural congruence in instruction in general, and about research that might provide insight into the students in their classes in particular. Having this information can help teachers recognize and deal constructively with oppositional behaviors, such as students' refusal to answer or "acting," in a manner that results in positive outcomes for teachers and students alike.

Research suggests that culturally congruent styles of teaching can be learned. For example, teachers who are not Hawaiian can learn to conduct lessons using talk story-like participation structures (Au & Kawakami 1985). Teachers can and do benefit from having information about, and guidance in adapting to, students from diverse cultural backgrounds. As an ever-growing number of students of diverse backgrounds enter America's schools, it becomes clear that research on cultural congruence in instruction should have a central place in teacher education programs.