# ✧ Chapter 1

## Linguistic Diversity and Academic Achievement

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Despite the increasing linguistic diversity among students attending U.S. schools, education reform proposals of the 1980s have been addressed to the "universal" student, who is assumed to be a fluent, native speaker of English with a European American cultural background. As documented in Chapter 2 of this volume, the differential effect of reforms on various student groups has seldom been considered. Nor have reforms been tailored to the specific needs of different groups.

This chapter focuses on *why* there has been such a poor record of achievement for large numbers of students from non-English language backgrounds, and what schools can do to foster these students' success.

## Reasons for Failure—Hopes for Success

While the reality of school failure for the majority of students from non-English language backgrounds is undeniable, the reasons for failure are less clear-cut. It is easier to demonstrate differential achievement among student groups than to account for it. The picture is also clouded by reports of superstars, students from non-English language backgrounds who, despite all odds, apparently succeed spectacularly.

Educational solutions depend on the definition of the problem; programs to counteract failure are always based on assumptions about the reasons for failure. Theories to explain differential achievement often conflict with each other, partly because educational success and failure, like other aspects of human behavior, are multiply determined. Several factors have been offered to explain the low academic achievement of these students, including:

- inadequate language services
- lack of access to standard curriculum
- cultural discontinuity
- outmoded instructional models
- inappropriate assessment and evaluation
- structural inequality
- insufficient student ability and motivation

## Language Services

### The Problem

The most obvious difference between students who are native English speakers and those from non-English language backgrounds is that the latter may lack sufficient proficiency in English to succeed in English-medium classes. It is not only common sense, but also a U.S. Supreme Court ruling (Lau v. Nichols, 1974) that such students require special assistance to help them overcome this obstacle.

But the Supreme Court did not mandate a specific remedy, and political arguments have hampered a comprehensive approach to developing language services (Padilla, Lindholm, Chen, Duran, Hakuta, Lambert, & Tucker, 1991). Proponents of bilingual education and those favoring English as a Second Language (ESL)

instruction argue over which approach is more effective in helping students develop proficiency in English.

In addition to this major philosophical disagreement, practical problems of access and assessment plague the delivery of language services to students with limited English proficiency (LEP):

- Schools may be overwhelmed by the number, diversity, and high turnover of students needing special language services; at some schools a majority of students are not proficient in English. The number of LEP students in California alone has nearly doubled in the past five years (California State Department of Education, 1992).
- Title VII bilingual education programs serve only 5–7 percent of eligible students; a quarter of LEP students receive no extra educational services, most receive insufficient English language instruction and little native language support, and many are inappropriately placed in special education classes (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 1990).
- Students may be receiving poor quality bilingual or ESL programs (Wong Fillmore & Valadez, 1986).
- Approximately three-quarters of LEP students receive most of their instruction from monolingual English-speaking teachers who lack special training in second language teaching (Ramirez, 1992).
- Students in good bilingual or ESL programs may be mainstreamed too early into regular English-medium classes; most students spend less than three years in these special programs, while experts estimate that children require at least 5–7 years to learn a second language (CCSSO, 1990).
- There are no nationally accepted criteria and procedures for identifying students with limited English proficiency (CCSSO, 1990).
- The progress of students in special language programs is not sufficiently monitored, and these programs are not well coordinated with the regular school program (CCSSO, 1990).
- Program evaluation is insufficient: "It appears that many more resources are being used to fund programs than to

find out whether the programs are actually effective" (Rumberger, quoted in Chavez, 1991, p. 41).

- Laudable goals may work at cross-purposes with each other. "Before desegregation, . . . eight of San Jose [CA] Unified's 40 schools had bilingual programs. Now, those same resources serve 19 schools" (Guido, 1992).

Bilingual or ESL programs are only as good as the teachers who staff them, and the supply of trained teachers falls far short of the need. Despite offering higher salaries for teachers with bilingual certification, California alone could use 20,000 more such teachers (National Forum, 1990). Half of the bilingual teachers employed by the San Jose (California) school district are not fully certified, and the district has not been able to spend all the money in its budget for bilingual aides because it cannot find enough people who read and write two languages (Guido, 1992). While Hispanic students constitute two-thirds of those with limited English proficiency, only 15 percent of bilingual teachers are Hispanic (Nieto, 1992).

## New Directions

The newer thinking about language development for students whose home language differs from the language of the school emphasizes two points: (1) learning a second language is difficult for children; and (2) language learning involves social-psychological as well as cognitive processes. (Part III of this volume explores these issues in depth.)

Contrary to popular belief, research (summarized in McLaughlin, 1992) has shown that young children do not learn a second language effortlessly, that they do not learn faster with more exposure to the new language, that their oral fluency outstrips their academic competence, and that they require many years to reach grade-level academic ability in the new language.

In practice, the most common special language programs available to students with limited English proficiency are ESL or structured immersion models, which offer minimal native language support. Bilingual programs vary widely, but most follow an early-exit model, which incorporates native language support for only the initial two or three years of elementary school. Late-exit and two-way bilingual models, which offer native language support throughout elementary school, are much less common.

In contrast, analyses of the sparse longitudinal research on bilingual learners have concluded that the more academic support students receive in their native language (in addition to high quality instruction in English), the higher their overall achievement as measured in English (Collier, 1992):

- In evaluating program models, it is important to measure language learning over the long term; short-term gains by students in ESL programs may not be sustained in later years (Collier, 1989b).
- Early-exit bilingual programs may offer no advantage over structured immersion programs, but late-exit bilingual programs may offer students the best chance of catching up with their native English-speaking peers (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991).
- Helping students develop their first language skills aids them in achieving competence in a second language (Hakuta, 1990).
- Continuing students' native language development through age 12 facilitates their acquisition of a second language, no matter when that language is introduced; discontinuing native language development before age 12 impedes competence in the second language (Collier, 1989b).
- Different approaches are required for students of different ages with different amounts of prior schooling in their native language; immigrant students under age 12 who have had at least two years of education in their native country reach average achievement levels in 5–7 years, but young children with no native language schooling and students older than 12 facing academically challenging subject matter in a second language may take as long as ten years to catch up (Collier, 1989b).

Instruction in their home language has several benefits for students. It prevents them from falling behind their peers in learning history, mathematics, science, and other subjects in the regular curriculum. It enables them to develop their native language competence so they can continue to communicate with their parents and build a foundation for adult fluency in two languages. And significantly, it does not retard—and may even accelerate—their acquisition of English (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey, 1991).

Students can succeed without native language instruction in school. For example, Caplan, Choy & Whitmore (1991) report that the children of the "Boat People" (refugees who escaped by boat from Vietnam) have attained remarkable success attending poor urban schools unlikely to offer exemplary bilingual programs. But the children's average achievement level is high only because of their superior scores in mathematics. Their scores on English language and reading tests are below average, and the students themselves cite language problems as a significant obstacle.

Caplan and colleagues do not report test scores by age of student, so it is impossible to confirm the findings of Collier discussed above. The Boat Children were studied after they had been in the United States for an average of only three and one-half years, so their long-term achievement is unknown. One of the most significant findings of the study is that children whose parents read to them, in Vietnamese or English, do better, indicating that academic-type support in the native language, whether at school or at home, may be a positive contributor to academic success.

The narrow focus on acquiring English fluency that has dominated the education of non-English language background students has aroused criticism from many quarters. Moll (1986) comments on the "overwhelming pressure to make students fluent in English at all costs. Learning English, not learning, has become the controlling goal of instruction for these students, even if it places the children at risk academically." The overriding assumption that learning English will lead to achievement has led educators to focus on teaching English and testing English proficiency. While Moll argues that this assumption impedes learning, Saville-Troike (1991) notes that it has also blinded us to more meaningful assessments of learning. Instead of asking how proficient a student's English is, perhaps we should be asking "what is really important to assess in regard to an LEP student's chances for succeeding in a regular English-medium classroom?" (p. 9). She advocates measuring achievement more directly, by testing content learning in the student's strongest language and by assessing predictors of academic success such as vocabulary development, rather than using English proficiency as a global proxy for achievement.

A second factor that has influenced thinking about language development for students learning a second language is a conception of language learning that goes beyond cognitive skill acquisition. This perspective views language as embedded in culture, and language learning as influenced by social and social-psychological forces (Snow, 1992). Farr (1986), in a discussion of the difficulty

many students from ethnic minority communities have in learning to write in standard English, concludes that the task has profound psychological and social implications: "It is certainly possible . . . that experience with reading and writing mainstream academic prose induces cultural, as well as linguistic changes in students" (p. 215). Farr also cites evidence from the studies of Labov and his associates that speakers of Black English Vernacular acquire standard English only when they "interact meaningfully and frequently with standard English speakers" (p. 214).

There is no ideal blueprint of a language program for students from non-English language backgrounds. Each choice involves a dilemma; bilingual programs usually segregate students from their native English-speaking peers, and ESL programs may push students to abandon their native language while not guaranteeing them academic success. One model that offers both native language support and integration with majority language peers is the two-way bilingual program. The few studies that have evaluated such programs have shown favorable academic and attitudinal results for all students (Collier, 1989a, 1992; Cabazon, Lambert, & Hall, 1993).

As a practical matter, the kind of program offered depends not only on the philosophy adopted, but also on the number of students from each language group in a school, the availability of trained bilingual and ESL teachers and aides, the extent of native language support that parents and the community are able to provide, the age of the students and their level of literacy in their native language, and many other factors.

Most critically, program design depends on the goal of education for students with limited English proficiency. Programs with a narrow focus on English acquisition are often undergirded with the assumption (contradicted by evidence) that speakers of other languages do not, and do not want to, learn English. The goal of education then becomes replacing the students' native language with English, instead of adding English to their linguistic repertoire (Cziko, 1992).

The most important understanding to emerge from these new directions is a different way of viewing these students. Instead of seeing them primarily as deficient in English, and attributing their academic failure to that deficiency, the new perspective emphasizes that, while limited English presents them with difficulty in achieving in traditional schools, they are as linguistically competent as all normal children. Given the proper assistance, they will learn English. But in order to succeed academically, they must not only learn English, but be able to learn *in* English.

## Access to Standard Curriculum

### The Problem

The success of students from non-English language backgrounds is hampered not only by their limited command of English, but also by the challenge of simultaneously learning academic material. These students must spend time studying English while their English-speaking peers are studying mathematics, science, history, and social studies. Even when English instruction is combined with academic subject matter, programs for these students are often guided by a less rigorous curriculum. Students who are not fluent in English may be barred from regular classes; instead they are tracked into "remedial" or "compensatory" classes where instruction proceeds at a slower pace.

The assumption underlying tracking is that students learn best in groups that are homogeneous in ability, and that this method of dividing students into classes allows for enriched instruction for advanced students and intensive "catch-up" activities for slower learners.

The reality is that the instruction provided to students in the "slow" classes is often boring and repetitive, and does not prepare them to progress faster. Students may be consigned to a low-ability track for their entire schooling on the basis of a single test score, receiving an inferior education instead of extra help.

Oakes (1985) traces the entrenched practice of tracking to the beginning of the century, when schools faced the challenge of educating massive numbers of immigrant children. The prevailing belief that racial and ethnic groups differed in their innate capacity for intellectual achievement resulted in a stratified system that offered "appropriate" education for groups of varying ability. Although such racist assumptions have softened, students from non-English language backgrounds and from racial and ethnic minority groups are still more likely to be assigned to low-ability and special education classes and less likely to be placed in classes for gifted children (McCarty First & Willshire Carrera, 1988).

American schools have more extensive tracking than countries whose students achieve higher scores in mathematics. In an international comparison (McKnight, Crosswhite, Dossey, Kifer, Swafford, Travers, & Coney, 1987), nearly half of the variation in mathematics achievement scores of American students was accounted for by differences between classes, while in France and

Canada, only one-eighth of the variation was due to class differences. In Japan, differences among classes accounted for almost none of the variation in students' scores.

Whether because of tracking or for other reasons, students from non-English language backgrounds (with the exception of Asian language background students) take fewer advanced courses in mathematics and science (*Numbers and Needs*, 1991). At the secondary level, students from non-English language backgrounds may take only ESL courses plus electives, non-college prep courses, or watered-down content courses. One study of 27 California secondary schools found that only 6 gave LEP students access to the full core curriculum; half of the schools offered few or no content area classes at all to these students (BW Assoc., 1992).

Immigrant students who first enter the American school system at the secondary level may not have enough years left in high school to master both English and the academic material required for graduation or college entrance (Collier, 1992). Some students who might be able to succeed in regular high school courses are prevented from enrolling in them because the school requires a certain level of English fluency; such students may make diligent efforts to escape from the "ESL ghetto," feeling that these special efforts to help them are actually stigmatizing them and impeding their academic progress.

## New Directions

New strategies have emerged to counter the problems created by programs with a compensatory emphasis and weak curricula. Some elementary schools have discarded the notion that low-achieving students benefit from simpler, slower instruction; instead they raise expectations and offer challenging material. The model of "accelerated schools" pioneered by Henry Levin and his colleagues (Levin & Hopfenberg, 1991) provides students from typically at-risk groups with the kind of enriching learning opportunities usually offered only to students in gifted programs, giving them a real chance to catch up.

This approach has also been successful in preparing low-achieving high school students from linguistic minority backgrounds for college. In the AVID "untracking" program, several high schools in San Diego, California, placed high-potential/low-performance students in college prep courses and gave them intensive support and assistance. Ninety-two percent of these students

went on to a two- or four-year college, compared to 54 percent of all students in the San Diego high school system (Mehan, Datnow, Bratton, Tellez, Friedlaender, & Ngo, 1992).

At the secondary level, educators are questioning whether students who are not proficient in English should have to sacrifice their chance to learn academic material for the sake of studying English. Schools assisted by the staff of the Technical Education Research Center (TERC) (Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992) have been successful in teaching science to Haitian students in their native language. Such programs value academic progress—in whatever language—more highly than competence in English. (Part IV of this volume explores new methods of teaching mathematics and science that emphasize linguistic and cognitive development and are compatible with this approach.)

## Cultural Factors

### The Problem

Another explanation for poor academic achievement is that students whose home language and culture differs significantly from that of the school find it difficult to succeed in the school environment. This thesis, which focuses on the mismatch between what students bring to, and find at, school, is explored in Part II of this book.

Children from different cultural backgrounds may learn and communicate differently. It has been suggested that children raised in European American families tend to have a field independent learning style (Witkin, 1962) that enables them to work well alone on analytic tasks and with abstract materials. In contrast, children raised in Mexican American, American Indian, or African American families tend to excel in field-dependent or field-sensitive (Ramirez & Casteneda, 1974) environments, where they can work in cooperation with others using materials with a social context.

If schools require individual competition and if the instruction is abstract rather than contextualized, students from cultures that emphasize cooperation over competition and prefer information in context may be at a disadvantage. Conversely, it has been suggested that the cultural congruence between the learning styles prevalent in some Asian societies and those emphasized in American schools accounts for the academic success of some Asian immigrant students (Stigler & Baranes, 1988–89; Caplan et al., 1991).

Conversational protocol, non-verbal behavior and gestures, and conventions of personal space and politeness differ greatly among cultures and may affect how students perceive and learn. When the majority of students from non-English language backgrounds are taught by teachers with European American backgrounds, the potential for misunderstanding is multiplied.

Students from immigrant families, who must adjust to a completely new language, culture, and school system, may also experience the anxiety, frustration, anger, and depression associated with culture shock (Adler, 1972; Foster, 1962). A nationwide project on immigrant children in U.S. schools (McCarty First & Willshire Carrera, 1988) "found culturally-based practices and behavior to be a major source of confusion and conflict for young immigrants" (p. 19).

Students from immigrant families who are adjusting to an alien language and curriculum rarely have assistance from a teacher who shares their own cultural and linguistic background. The growing diversity in the student population stands in stark contrast to the homogeneity of the teaching force. While one-third of students are from ethnic or racial minority groups, less than 10 percent of teachers come from these groups (McLaren, 1988). Of the new teachers in 1990, 93 percent are White (National Association of State Boards of Education [NASBE], no date).

Although it is logical to expect students to have academic problems if their home culture differs from the school culture, this conclusion is tempered by conflicting evidence. Overall, the dropout rates for Asian and Hispanic immigrants are extraordinarily high, as documented in the introduction to this book. However, some studies find immigrant groups achieving at higher than expected, and even higher than average rates.

One study (Matute-Bianchi, 1986) found that, among students from Spanish language backgrounds, recent immigrants and those who identified most strongly with their Mexican heritage were more successful in school than those with weaker emotional ties to the Mexican culture. Studies of Punjabi (Gibson, 1987) and Southeast Asian (Rumbaut & Ima, 1987; Caplan et al., 1991) immigrant students also found that academic success was correlated with maintenance of their culture of origin.

## New Directions

The conclusion to be drawn from these studies is not that immigrants can succeed without special help, for that contradicts what

we know about the majority of immigrants. Rather, these studies imply that cultural and linguistic assimilation are not prerequisites to educational success. They highlight the importance of cultural factors and the positive role they can play in educational achievement, and have led to a view that cultural differences can be educational resources instead of obstacles.

Caplan et al. (1991), who documented the unexpected success of the children of the Vietnamese refugee "boat people" in inner city schools, advocate that schools actively support and seek to strengthen the home cultures of their students in order to capitalize on the desire for success that parents from all cultures have for their children.

For students with limited English proficiency, their cultural "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1992) can effectively be used as a foundation for teaching. Moll reports on a teacher who used the expertise of her students' families in construction-related occupations to teach about the history of dwellings, professions involved in construction, and mathematical concepts used in building.

Schools can bridge the cultural gap between home and classroom by reaching out to parents in their native language, by using curricula that include peoples of various cultures, and by modifying instructional methods to accommodate the cultural backgrounds of students. These approaches are discussed in detail in Part II of this volume.

## Instruction

### The Problem

All students, but particularly those not fluent in English, may suffer from the kind of "traditional" instruction labelled the "recitation script" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), in which teachers spend the majority of class time explaining, discussing, and quizzing students on assigned textbook readings. Even in homogeneous classes of White, middle class students taught by a teacher from a similar background, this method may work for only a minority of students. Successful students in such an environment are likely to:

- be motivated to get good grades by competing with other students, despite the dullness of the material or tediousness of workbook exercises

- be able to learn best by reading silently, working individually and listening to lectures
- be able to extract information quickly and accurately from printed text
- be test-wise and teacher-wise, knowing the kinds of answers that tests and teachers consider exemplary
- be able to work quickly, especially on timed tests
- submerge their own interests and curiosity in favor of the learning priorities of the teacher and textbook
- know how to acquire and remember information and perform well in this environment automatically, without needing much explicit instruction in how to learn

## New Directions

Although "few reform reports have touched on the heart of the educational process, what is taught and how it is taught" (National Governors' Association, 1989, p. 1), most research on the education of students from non-English language backgrounds has focused on this area. In contrast to the assumptions underlying traditional teaching, it is now recognized that individuals have various learning styles and display different "intelligences" rather than there being a global cognitive ability (Gardner, 1983). As demonstrated in Chapter 5 of this volume, individual variation is compounded by language and cultural differences. Students whose reading and listening skills in English are not proficient may have difficulty learning in a class that delivers material only in these modes. Students whose cultural background encourages them to work with others may feel alienated by being required to work alone.

The only way to ensure that students with diverse learning styles have a real chance to learn is to offer a variety of teaching styles and learning environments in addition to the traditional whole class lecture/discussion.

- Cooperative learning assigns students to work collaboratively in small groups, allowing those whose English is not proficient to contribute their own strengths to a project. A review of 122 studies conducted between 1921 and 1981 (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981)

found that cooperative learning promoted higher achievement than competitive and individualistic learning experiences for all students, most particularly for the normally low achieving students.

- Mastery learning enables students to work at their own pace rather than being bored with a too-slow or frustrated with a too-fast lockstep curriculum. Given this time flexibility, students whose English is not proficient may nevertheless be able to learn the same material as others. Using a mastery learning approach enables about four-fifths of students to achieve at the same level as the upper one-fifth taught in the traditional manner by the same teacher (Bloom, 1981).
- Heterogeneous ability grouping allows advanced students to learn by teaching and by leading; it gives others a chance to learn from multiple "teachers." Studies of peer teaching have found that reading, mathematics, and self-concept scores increased for the students assisted and for the students doing the assisting (Richard-Amato, 1992).
- Multi-age grouping provides even more opportunities for individualizing the pace of learning and may capitalize on the strengths of sibling teaching common in some cultures.
- Experiential learning expands the range of learning modes beyond reading and listening. Students whose English is not proficient can still learn the material and simultaneously develop their English by using the language in context.

Re-designing teaching and learning for non-English language background students would mean incorporating opportunities for multiple learning modes into teaching. It would expand pedagogy beyond direct instruction to include active, student-directed learning, in which students and teachers are empowered as co-creators of the learning task.

This conception of pedagogy is based on a view of knowledge as constructed by the learner, rather than transmitted from expert to novice. The goal of teaching in this new view is not to impart information; rather it is to stimulate students' internal motivation and develop it into a lifelong drive to learn. The teacher's role in these innovative modes of instruction is as a coach or facilitator, an experienced and knowledgeable resource for students pursuing knowledge rather than the only source of that knowledge.

An additional departure from standard teaching methods would benefit students from non-English language backgrounds—making the implicit explicit. In addition to the factors already discussed, students from non-English language backgrounds may have difficulty in school because they lack familiarity with the "hidden curriculum" or "culture of the classroom." In a preliminary study of the effect of "untracking" classes on ethnic and linguistic minority students in San Diego public schools, Mehan et al. (1992) conclude that the success of the program is partly attributable to a support course that "explicitly teaches the implicit culture of the classroom and overtly exposes students to the hidden curriculum of the school" (p.32).

Along similar lines, Collins, Hawkins, & Carver (1991) advocate a "cognitive apprenticeship" approach for disadvantaged students, designed to teach not only subject matter but also strategies for approaching and solving problems and for learning new material.

Teachers can make their instruction more accessible to students not proficient in English by making simple alterations in the classroom and in the presentation of material:

- Non-verbal signs and cues can be used, such as a "speak no evil" monkey sign to indicate quiet areas, or a hat rack in the art center with as many painters caps as the number of students allowed to use the center at one time (Enright & McCloskey, 1992).
- Written text that contains cultural background information unfamiliar to immigrant students can be transformed into a visual presentation. For example, a history lesson on the first American colonies could be presented with a notated map of the east coast of the United States (Short, 1992).
- Lecture material can be restated in other ways, demonstrated visually, or recorded on tape for later review by students (Richard-Amato & Snow, 1992).

## Assessment and Evaluation

### The Problem

Students from non-English language backgrounds face their first assessment when the school must decide where to place them.

Many of these students are inappropriately placed in the wrong grade or type of class because they are not tested in their native language or because the extent and quality of their previous schooling is not taken into account.

Cognitive development in children is assumed to follow a universal sequence, but because this sequence was identified by European and European American researchers observing children from their own culture, Nieto (1992) questions whether our theories may be culture-bound. As a result, cultural differences in learning may be misinterpreted as cognitive delays. In many countries, including the United States, a disproportionate number of immigrant and language minority students are assigned to special education and vocational tracks (Cummins, 1984).

Once students from non-English language backgrounds have been placed, assessing their progress presents educators with a dilemma. Using standardized testing can have negative consequences, according to McCarty First & Willshire Carrera (1988) such as:

- Students may score poorly on tests because their English is limited; the exam tests their English rather than subject matter knowledge.
- Students who have not been instructed in their native language may be behind their age-mates in subject matter knowledge.
- Standardized tests contain cultural biases.
- Immigrant students may lack test-taking skills.

Recognizing these problems, many schools opt not to use standardized tests for students who are not proficient in English. But then such students are left outside the structure of accountability; educators and parents have no way to compare these students' progress against state or national norms.

Assessing student performance using standardized paper-and-pencil tests conflicts with a central tenet of reform advocates—that education should foster higher-order thinking and problem-solving abilities in a curriculum that integrates different skills and subjects. Standardized tests are designed not to provide feedback that will enhance instruction, but to sort students efficiently into tracks on the basis of supposed ability (Darling-Hammond, 1991).

Education reformers have advocated more meaningful methods of measuring authentic learning through student performance. Such assessments could include teachers' observations and notes, student portfolios, checklists and inventories, tests with open-ended questions, and student products (First, Kellogg, Almeida, & Gray, 1991). But Linn, Baker, & Dunbar (1991) caution that many of the assumptions about the benefits of performance-based assessment are unproven, that performance-based assessment is likely to widen the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups, and that such assessments are more susceptible to scorer bias than "objective" measures. Shavelson, Baxter, & Pine (1992) note that authentic assessments must be designed very carefully, and that poor quality assessment methods are likely to lead to poor quality teaching.

While standardized testing provides the means to compare students, it underestimates the achievement of students from non-English language backgrounds and often consigns them to compensatory programs. However, the relativity of performance-based testing means that such students may be held to lower standards than their peers.

## New Directions

Murphy (1991) comments that reforms of the past decade have paid more attention to school governance than to teaching and learning. Even reformers who focus on instruction and assessment have often emphasized *how* to teach and test and neglected *what* students should be learning. Reforming assessment measures for students from non-English language backgrounds would mean addressing the content of instruction and solving the dilemma of standard vs. meaningful measures described above. One attempt to tackle this problem head-on is the New Standards Project, a partnership between state education departments and researchers at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh and the National Center on Education and the Economy in Rochester, New York. With the collaboration of hundreds of teachers, this project is developing internationally comparable achievement standards and designing innovative assessment methods that can be adapted to local student characteristics.

The New Standards Project advocates that students be evaluated on their individual portfolios, which would include three types of assessments: (1) performance exams such as writing samples

that are administered and scored on a state, national or international basis; (2) common structured activities designed on a state or national basis but judged locally, similar to merit badges in scouting; and (3) tasks designed and evaluated in the local setting. This approach has the promise of combining comparability based on universal standards with the flexibility necessary to include students from diverse backgrounds while also responding to community priorities.

Underlying this and other attempts to reform assessment is a rethinking of the purpose of assessment itself. The new directions in assessment are guided by the following:

- Assessment is inseparable from instruction, both because teachers always teach with the test in mind and because the type of assessment used depends on one's definition and goal of education.
- Assessment has traditionally been used for accountability; it should also be used as pedagogy. Assessment tasks can teach as well as test, and can be used as feedback to help teachers plan their instruction.
- Assessment has traditionally measured what an individual person can demonstrate he knows, unaided, at a particular point in time. When assessment is used for teaching, the task may allow for collaboration, provide for feedback from peers and teacher, and give students the opportunity to revise, improve, and present their best work for judgment.
- The assessment of diverse students is best accomplished through a diversity in assessment, involving multiple definitions of competence and evaluation methods.
- Reform in assessment stresses tasks that are authentic and meaningful, and require reflection, analysis, and discussion.

The assessment activities designed by the New Standards Project incorporate many of these principles. Tasks given to elementary school students include the following: "Your class will be getting a 30-gallon aquarium. You will plan which fish to buy. You will have $25 to spend." Teachers usually provide information about the characteristics and cost of different fish species, or may require students to do the research necessary to respond. Students are asked to analyze, plan, calculate, and present their ideas in

writing. Such a task has authenticity; a class may actually have to decide a similar question. It involves the students in an active learning process by which the teacher can also gain insight into their achievement in math and writing skills.

Other innovative methods of assessment can measure students' progress in the learning process more sensitively than standardized tests. For example, Dalton Miller Jones and colleagues (1993) have laid out a sequence that beginning readers follow, based on analyses of reading errors. Using this sequence, teachers can pinpoint students' progress and design appropriate instruction, something they can do much less effectively on the basis of student scores on standardized reading comprehension tests.

## Structural Factors

### The Problem

The factors discussed above focus on the within-school variables of curriculum and instruction. But the education of children from non-English language backgrounds is also affected by conditions in society. Many of these students are subject to the ills of poverty, substandard schools, and low expectations for success.

There is a significant overlap between economic status and language difference; more than 90 percent of students from non-English speaking homes in 1984 met official poverty guidelines (Garcia, in press). Overall poverty rates increased for children during the past decade, with a heavier impact falling on children from minority groups. While one in three young children in the United States are poor, three in five minority children are poor. Half of young African American children are poor, as are 40 percent of Hispanic children, compared to only 14 percent of non-Hispanic White children (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1992).

Living in poverty has several educational implications; children who are poor may be malnourished, may not have adequate health care, may live in substandard housing, may live in unsafe environments, are likely to have parents who have not progressed far in school, and are unlikely to have access to educational opportunities in the community such as preschools, libraries, music lessons and concerts, and after-school programs.

The school success of some groups of immigrant children, such as those from Cuba and some Asian countries, may be due in large

part to the high educational level of their parents, whatever their current economic status.

Schools serving linguistically different or diverse student populations require more money than the average school for English language teaching programs; programs, teachers, aides, and materials that use the students' native languages; and social and counseling services. Yet such schools, if located in poor neighborhoods, often receive less than schools with fewer needs. Money from federal programs targeted for children disadvantaged by society is often denied to students from non-English language backgrounds in the erroneous belief that they cannot receive services from multiple programs (CCSSO, 1991).

The great variation in per-pupil spending from state to state and among school districts within states (ranging from $2000 to $13,000 per pupil in Ohio, for example, according to Wayson, 1991) means that urban schools with the greatest need often get the least money.

Thus, students from non-English language backgrounds have a high probability of attending a substandard (Kozol, 1991) and segregated (Espinosa & Ochoa, 1986) school. Studies in California and Texas found that as the proportion of Hispanic students increased, per-pupil expenditures (Valencia, cited in Chavez, 1991) and average achievement scores (Espinosa & Ochoa, 1986) decreased. The result is that, by the third grade, 80 percent of Hispanic, 56 percent of American Indian, and 53 percent of Asian-American students attend schools that are at or below average in reading and mathematics scores. The same pattern persists through high school (Espinosa & Ochoa, 1986).

Schools serving poor students emphasize basic computation skills and neglect mathematical concepts and applications (Porter, Floden, Freeman, Schmidt, & Schwille, 1988), have less experienced teachers and inadequate resources (Darling-Hammond & Green, 1988), and tend to have low expectations of their students' ability to learn (Good & Biddle, 1988). As Espinosa and Ochoa conclude (1986, p. 95), "A student of above-average potential in a Hispanic neighborhood would be very likely to attend a school with less challenging classmates and lower than average expectations than a similar Anglo student. . . . This may well point to one of the key mechanisms by which educational inequality is perpetuated and by which talented students are denied the opportunity for equal preparation for college."