

Teaching Students as They Would Be Taught:

The Importance of Cultural Perspective



Christine Bennett

Differing world views and cultural expectations affect how teachers and students relate to one another.

The three schools you are about to visit are real. Although the names have been changed, the teachers and students you will meet are actual people, and the incidents have recently taken place. There is nothing unique or unusual about these classrooms, except to those of us who have been in one of the schools and become involved with the people described.

It is 2 p.m., beginning of the sixth-period class, and Warren Benson, a young teacher, looks around the room. Eight students are present out of 30.

"Where is everybody?" he demands. "They don't like your class," a girl volunteers. Three girls saunter in. Cora, who is playing a cassette recorder, bumps over to her desk in tune with the music. She lowers the volume. "Don't mark us

down late," she shouts. "We was right here, you mother f-----."

Benson, a first-year teacher who spent four years in the Navy between high school and college, had requested this school. Here you find students from poverty homes, students who can't read, students who hate school and teachers, students with drug problems, students waiting to drop out. Almost one-third of the students come from homes where one or both parents speak only Spanish.

For years, Warren's dream was to teach on an Indian reservation. He believed this school would be good preparation. Now after two months in the classroom, he has real doubts. Doubts about these kids. Doubts about himself.

Benson tells everyone to take out today's vocabulary words. "Aw, come on man, give us a

break," a student named Spark moans. Cora turns up the volume and croons, "Hey-ey-ey, bay-bee . . . ah wants to know-o-o-o . . ." Then, lowering the volume, she asks, "Mr. Benson, you got a pencil?" Another straggler walks in. "You late, boy," one student says. "So what, boy," the straggler answers. Benson asks for a definition of the first word, "tariff." No response. "Ricardo?" "What?" Ricardo asks, tuning in briefly. A few students busily leaf through the text, trying to locate the glossary.

Spark tells some nearby students his ancestors are Aztec Indians. "You an Indian?" Ricardo

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asks. "You got a tomahawk and all?" Benson defines tariff for Ricardo, who listens for a second, then throws a paper airplane across the room and hits a girl in the neck. "Ouch!" Benson continues. "Number two is Treaty of Guadalupe. Who can tell us what the Treaty of Guadalupe is?"

"Mr. Benson," Cora interrupts, "I got to go to the bathroom." Benson tells her, "No." "God-dammit, I got to go to the bathroom," she yells. "I'll give you a pass today," says Benson, "but this is the last time."

Benson tries to get back into the lesson. "Who can tell us what the Treaty of Guadalupe is?" "Ain't no word Treaty of Ha-wa-da-loop in here," shouts Spark. A blonde student sits silently in a corner chair, everyone else is talking. Cora returns to the classroom. She grabs Benson's hand and pats it. "You ain't mad, is you?" Benson ignores her. Then he shouts to make himself heard above the din of conversation. "Get quiet!" Benson slams his fist on the lectern. Then he glares at the students until he has their attention. "Okay. It's obvious that you haven't learned these words. Everybody take out a paper. I'm going to give you a vocabulary test."

Comments

Warren Benson's class typifies one of the most difficult and challenging teaching situations. Benson faces poorly skilled students, high absenteeism, and unruly classes—problems faced by teachers throughout the nation's schools.

Can anyone handle classes like Warren Benson's? We can begin by teaching others as they would be taught rather than as we would have others teach us. This means we must be able to cue into those characteristics that strongly affect the way a person learns. Some of these characteristics are accurately labeled individual differences, others are cultural differences or, preferably, cultural alternatives.

The case of Kevin Armstrong illustrates that it is often difficult to distinguish between individual and cultural characteristics, unless a teacher knows what to look for.

It is September 10, 2:15 p.m. The phone rings at the Armstrong home.

"Hello, Mrs. Armstrong?" a voice inquires. "This is Mrs. Dixon over at Wildwood Elementary School. Kevin's teacher. I . . ."

Mrs. Armstrong interrupts, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing is *wrong*," answers Mrs. Dixon. "I'm just calling to let you know that we've decided to put Kevin back in second grade. He just isn't ready for third-grade work."

Mrs. Armstrong is stunned. Prior to their move from Denver to a midwestern university town, Kevin had done superior work in a desegregated school that was considered good. Over half of the students were white. "What do you mean he isn't ready for third grade?" She asks coldly. "Teacher last year didn't say nothing about him having problems."

"Mrs. Armstrong," the voice tries to be reassuring, "what I'm suggesting is for Kevin's own good. He's way behind the other children in my class. He'll feel like a failure if he stays."

"How you think he'll feel if you put him back?" the mother snaps. "He been looking to third grade all summer long."

"I hoped you would understand that we want to do what's best for Kevin," responds Mrs. Dixon. "Would you like to come to the school and talk this over with the principal?"

"Comin'," answers Mrs. Armstrong. She hangs up and turns to face her husband.

Wildwood is considered by many to be the best elementary school in town. Standardized achievement tests are among the highest in the state, and the school boasts of many innovative academic programs. Except for a few who, like Kevin, live in a string of apartment buildings bordering the school district, most of the children come from wealthy homes. The parents are mostly professionals. A handful of black and Latino children attend the school, most of whom have been adopted by Anglo parents.

Mr. Peters, the principal, explains to Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong why he and Mrs. Dixon believe that Kevin would be better off in second grade. Mrs. Dixon, also present, remains silent.

"Kevin is too immature for third grade. Mrs. Dixon picked this up immediately. Physically he is small for his age, and his attention span is very short. During music class he is unable to sit still. He wiggles all over. In class he can't wait for his turn to speak, and in general he hasn't learned to control himself the way our other third graders do. And, of course, his reading, writing, and math skills are way below grade level."

"Can't you give him a chance? This is just the second day of school. Can't we get him some tutoring or something?" Mrs. Armstrong asks. "I read somewhere about some special programs for kids in the district who have problems."

"Some schools in the city do, but not us. We don't have enough students here who need them to justify the expense. If we keep Kevin in third grade, he'll be isolated from his classmates, working off by himself. That doesn't seem fair to Kevin."

"But still that's better than putting him back," counters Mrs. Armstrong. "We'll be going back to Denver in a year and a half."

Stating that it is against their best judgment, Mrs. Dixon and Mr. Peters agree to keep Kevin in the third-grade class on a trial basis.

Comments

Mrs. Dixon's conclusion that Kevin was not capable of third-grade work after less than two days of observation deserves questioning. She was aware of his geographical move. The adjust-

ment to a new home, new school, and new friends can be difficult for any child. The additional adjustments a black child must make to a setting such as Wildwood can be traumatic. According to black educator Geneva Gay, many children like Kevin are raised in a cultural environment that is significantly different from what predominates at school. For these black children so much energy is used up adjusting to the school's expectations of appropriate behavior that there is very little energy left for the business of learning.¹

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Marcia Patton is the twelve-year-old daughter of Mavis and Lew Patton, two politically active lawyers in a large midwestern city. Marcia is one of a first group of white children to attend Jefferson Junior High School, traditionally a school for inner-city blacks. Although most of the children in her neighborhood attend a high-powered prep school, Marcia's parents are sending her to Jefferson as a matter of principle.

Today is her second day at Jefferson. She clutches her books tightly to her chest as she enters Mrs. Samson's language arts class. Mrs. Samson, a black woman in her mid-forties, neatly dressed in a rose-colored suit, smiles as she greets Marcia. Then she steps into the hall to speak with several noisy students who are scrambling around the drinking fountain.

At that moment a group of five classmates

¹ Geneva Gay. "Cultural Conflict in the Classroom." Symposium sponsored by the Alachua County Teacher Center, Gainesville, Florida, January 30, 1975. (Videotape)

burst into the room. They slam their books down on the desk and crowd in around Marcia.

"You got pretty hair," offers Rheba as she handles one of Marcia's blonde braids. Marcia is tight-faced, her blue eyes unusually wide.

"You like it here?" quizzes Jackson, a big, muscular twelve-year-old who sits on Marcia's desk top.

"Yes, I - I guess so," whispers Marcia, her voice barely audible.

"C'mon, Rheba, let her hair alone," Jackson shouts as he swats the braid out of Rheba's hand and shoves her away from Marcia.

"Keep you hands offa me," yells Rheba, eyes flashing.

Marcia is pale and sitting erect. Her fingers press into the seat of her desk. Mrs. Samson re-enters, and the students find their places.

"Me and Marie, we take you to the cafeteria today at lunch," offers Rheba as she sits down next to Marcia.

That evening, in the secrecy of her bedroom, Marcia writes a letter to Miss Bryant, her teacher last year.

"When I first walked in, I saw all these dark faces and for the first time I felt so white. There was nothing but laughing, noisy, dark-skinned faces. My heart was beating so fast I thought I would drop dead for sure. I guess a lot of them won't like me. Still, most of the kids are real nice to me. But even so, I'm scared. Everyone is so loud, and sometimes they get so close I can hardly breathe.

"The teachers are real nice to me but I wish Mrs. Samson wouldn't call on me so much. We use the book we used in your class last year, and lots of the kids can't read it. . . .

"I've been there over a week now and was feeling better until today. A horrible thing happened and I can't tell anybody but you. I went to the bathroom after lunch, and two girls I don't know told me to give them all my money or they would hurt me. I gave them twelve dollars, all I had. They said they'd slash my face if I told anybody. I'm afraid to go back."

Comments

Marcia's situation, that of being one of a few white students in a predominantly black school,

is a reversal of what many black, Latino, Asian, and native American children often face. Her situation is complicated by the fact that her parents are using her to act in accordance with their belief in school desegregation. "Liberal" white parents are frequently criticized for not sending their children to inner-city schools.

Students like Marcia need a good deal of emotional support. Marcia is afraid of disappointing her parents; she confuses her fears and anxieties about her classmates with being "racist" and, thus, is unable to confide in her parents.

While most of the black students are willing to accept Marcia and try to make her feel welcome, there are some who will use her to take out their anger and frustration. As a symbol of "white oppression," Marcia's safety may be endangered.

These classroom examples illustrate that teachers' efforts to respond to the individual and cultural characteristics of learners must be broad in scope. We are not concerned only with inner-city schools or settings where the deck is stacked against racial and ethnic minorities. We are concerned about any classroom where students are not achieving because of personal and/or cultural characteristics that conflict with what predominates in a school or classroom. Is there a classroom in existence that does not merit this concern? The following may clarify what is happening in classrooms similar to those just described.

The Importance of World View

World view refers to the way a cultural group perceives people and events. While individual idiosyncrasies do exist, it is also true that the people who share common dialects and primary experiences learn to see "reality" in the same ways. They develop similar styles of cognition; similar processes of perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, judging, and reasoning; as well as similar values, assumptions, ideas, beliefs, and modes of thought.² What we see as good or bad depends on whether or not it supports our view of reality.

² Alfred J. Kraemer. "A Cultural Self-Awareness Approach to Improving Intercultural Communication Skills." ERIC ED 079213, April 1973.

The world view concept was illustrated by an Anglo-American student of speech and communications who related the following two experiences, one with a Hopi Indian, the other with Trukee islanders.³

"Look at those clouds!" I exclaimed one afternoon. "We'll probably have rain later today."

"What clouds?" my Hopi companion asked.

"Right there!" I responded in amazement, pointing to obvious puffs of white and gray.

"All I see is the sky."

"You mean you really don't see those clouds?"

"There's nothing there but sky."

Several months later, this same student was in the opposite situation with a group of Trukee fishermen.

"I thought we were lost. There had been no sign of land for hours. My companions tried to reassure me that we weren't lost at all. They read the wave patterns like I'd use a map. All I could see were waves. Even when they pointed to specific signs, I couldn't see anything. Here we were looking at the same body of water. It felt strange to know that I simply could not perceive what they actually saw."⁴

In the words of Tulsı Saral:

"It is thus apparent that there is not absolute reality, nor is there a universally valid way of perceiving, cognizing, and/or thinking. Each world view has different underlying assumptions. Our normal state of consciousness is not something natural or given, nor is it universal across cultures. It is simply a specialized tool, a complex structure for coping with our environment."⁵

The definition of world view used here is roughly equivalent to Triandis' meaning in "subjective culture." Triandis defines "culture" as the humanmade part of the environment, while "subjective culture" refers to the way a cultural group perceives its environment, including stereotypes, role perceptions, norms, attitudes, values, and perceived relationships between events and behaviors.⁶

Different world views or cultural orientations often lead to mutual misperceptions, hostility, or conflict. For example, the American pro-

fessor and his wife, visiting Thailand for the first time, were greeted with inquiries about their weights and salaries. The Japanese businessman terminated dealings with an insensitive American because the American, not wishing to waste time or pry, initiated business discussions without the customary inquiries about family and other personal matters.

Evidence indicates that the same process of misperception that operates between members of different nations who are unaware of each other's world view also operates in many of our schools and classrooms. The "Panther Prowl," an annual homecoming assembly at a high school in central Florida, illustrates this misperception and cultural conflict. Two different musical groups had been hired to perform at the assembly, one black and one white. When the black musicians began to perform, blacks in the audience responded by clapping, stomping, singing, and dancing. The black performers kept cool, interacted with the black audience, and were clearly enjoying it. White students became very upset, demanded quiet, and many finally walked out. Black students, in turn, felt the whites were being purposefully rude and unresponsive to the black performers. Later that evening, several interracial fights broke out on the campus.

According to anthropologist Roger Abrahams, what happened at the Panther Prowl is an example of the different performance traditions in black and Anglo cultures. The Anglo-European tradition places a virtuoso performer "on a pedestal." The audience is passive recipient, and appreciation is expressed with applause at acceptable times. For many black Americans, however, the

³ Milton Bennett. "Culture and Changing Realities." Society of Intercultural Education Training and Research (SIETAR). Pre-Conference Workshop. Third Annual SIETAR Conference, Chicago, February 25, 1977.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Tulsı B. Saral. "Consciousness Theory and Intercultural Communication." Paper presented at the International Communication Association, Portland, Oregon, April 14-17, 1976.

⁶ Harry C. Triandis. "Culture Training Cognitive Complexity and Interpersonal Attitudes." In: Richard W. Brislin, Stephen Bachner, and Walter J. Lonner, editors. *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Learning*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975.

essence of the performance is an active interchange between performer and audience. Great performers, including public speakers and ministers, are those who keep their "cool" while getting their audience "hot."⁷

Students' Cultural Alternatives

Often we are unaware of, or fearful of recognizing, our students' cultural alternatives. Yet even the most sensitive and dedicated teachers can be frustrated in their attempts to reach individual learners if they are unaware of how their own cultural orientations cause learning difficulties for some children. For example, by treating Kevin the same as his classmates, Mrs. Dixon is probably stacking the deck against him. Mrs. Dixon is fearful of probing into Kevin's blackness and dismisses that fact as irrelevant. She is unable to recognize Kevin's special needs because she fears this may be racist.

Obviously it is impossible for us to fully understand the cultural orientations of all the students we will find in our classrooms. Nevertheless, there are at least two common components of any cultural orientation that we can cue into: preferred mode of communication (both verbal and nonverbal) and preferred mode of participation.

The greater the differences between the world view of teacher and students, the more likely it is that students' and teachers' preferred ways of communicating and participating are different. Those teachers who are unaware of their pupils' needs and preferences force the learner to do most of the adjusting. Those pupils who can't make the adjustment can't learn much in the classroom.

Studies examining the core values of Spanish-speaking communities and native Americans of the Southwest have identified areas of cultural conflict with the Anglo-American world view. These include priorities such as:

1. Harmony with nature rather than "controlling" or "harnessing" nature;
2. Sharing rather than "saving" the basic necessities of life (also sharing praise and blame);
3. Present time orientation rather than future time orientation (Time is a continuum. It is im-

portant to live each day as it comes. There is no strong orientation to "tomorrow." Patience rather than "action" is stressed, and there is a lack of concern for time schedules.);

4. Nonscientific rather than scientific explanations;
5. Noncompetitive behavior rather than aggressive competition;
6. Group identity rather than individuality.⁸

In the cases of Anglo-Americans, Latinos, and native Americans, the existence of different languages makes the coexistence of distinct cultures within our national boundaries apparent. The many similarities between Anglo and black culture, though, often prevent the recognition and acceptance of some distinct cultural characteristics. For instance, black English is often perceived as "slang" or poor quality standard English. Thus, when we examine how alternative world views result in classroom conflict, it seems appropriate to focus on blacks and mainstream whites.

Participation and Communication in the Classroom: Black and White Preferences

1. *Cooperation and Competition.* Most academic activities are based upon competition and individual achievement. Therefore, many Anglo middle-class children learn best working on their own, sometimes with the help of an adult. Most learn to expect and accept, and some to need and thrive on this competitive structure. Tests in school are nearly always individual rather than group exercises. Whole systems of instruction are individualized (programmed texts, learning labs, computer-assisted instruction, and independent study projects). We motivate students with classroom games modeled after competitive sports and quiz shows (for example, baseball and *Jeopardy*). We reward individual achievement with gold stars, "happy face" stamps, and privileges.

⁷ Roger D. Abrahams. "Cultural Conflict in the Classroom." Symposium sponsored by the Alachua County Teacher Center, Gainesville, Florida, January 30, 1975. (Videotape)

⁸ Robert W. Young. *English as a Second Language for Navajos*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: Albuquerque Area Office-Navajo Area Office Division of Education, 1968.

Within the black world view, these preferences are reversed: competition and individual excellence in play and cooperation in work situations. Gay and Abrahams suggest that the preference for cooperation in work may develop "because so much of the transmission of knowledge and the customs of street culture takes place within peer groups [and thus] the black student is prone to seek the aid and assistance of his classmates at least as frequently as he does the teacher's."⁹ What is nearly always interpreted by teachers as cheating, copying, or frivolous socializing may in fact be the child's natural inclination to seek help from a peer (borrowing a pencil or talking after a test has begun).

2. *The Speaker-Listener Relationship.* The typical mainstream mode is for the teacher to talk and students to listen. Students are passive recipients. And indeed, research indicates that teachers do over 75 percent of the talking in classrooms. The cardinal rule is that students must raise their hands and may not speak until given permission. One must never interrupt another who is speaking, especially the teacher.

This may sound like good classroom management, and often it is, especially for middle-class children. In many middle-class homes, adult questioning of children is common practice. Parents enjoy that kind of interaction and often use it to develop the child's ability to speak. Thus, the child is not confused when adults in school continue the process. For many black children, however, question and answer elicitation may be wrongly interpreted as hostile because it occurs most frequently in black homes when the adult is angry at the child.

What about students who learn best in a more informal setting that encourages an active interchange between the speaker and the audience? Think back to the Panther Prowl and the different participation styles of blacks and whites in the audience. Communication expert Jack Daniels shows how for many blacks communication and participation involve the whole self in a simultaneous interaction of intellect, intuition, and sensuality.¹⁰ Since communication and participation are central to learning, it appears that children coming to school with the black world view learn best in settings encouraging a simultaneous response of thought, feeling, and move-

ment. Silence and "sitting still" are often a sign that the black child is bored.

In the mainstream culture, on the other hand, intellectual, emotional, and physical responses are easily separated. Messages become distinct from people in the form of memos, and ideas are analyzed in their written form only. Individuals such as lawyers sometimes argue viewpoints they do not believe. In some cultures, these are impossibilities.¹¹ Children of this world view can be comfortable in the classroom role of passive recipient. They can learn to be "rational" and to remove emotions and feelings from decisions. Many are unable to concentrate in a more active, "noisy" environment.

3. *Written Versus Oral/Aural Tradition.* Mainstream culture emphasizes visual learning through the written word. In Euro-American tradition, "seeing is believing," and it is commonly accepted that the highest levels of thinking are possible only for humans who can reflect upon thoughts recorded on the written page. No equivalent to the African griots, those living/singing encyclopedias, exists in mainstream culture.

Many blacks, as well as other microcultural people, have grown up in an oral tradition. Herskovits claims this orientation is a carry-over from Africa. For example, traditional Africa boasted of elaborate communication systems using drums, singing, and dance rituals. From the time blacks first arrived in this country, music and the spoken word have been at the heart of the black experience.¹² Their oral/aural tradition thrives in the New World. The classroom implications of the oral/aural tradition are easily illustrated. A geography teacher in California discovered that her students, mostly black or Latino males labeled

⁹ Geneva Gay and Roger D. Abrahams. "Black Culture in the Classroom." In: Roger D. Abrahams and Rudolph C. Troike, editors. *Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976.

¹⁰ Jack Daniels et al. "Teaching Afro-American Communication." ERIC ED 082247, November 1972.

¹¹ Milton Bennett, *op. cit.*

¹² Melville I. Herskovits. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969. See also: Charles Keil. *Urban Blues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966; and Leroi Jones. *Blues People*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1963.

remedial, scored considerably higher on tests when she read the questions provided in written form. Another teacher, working with black and Latino eighth graders in Texas, found that their comprehension of a U.S. history text was better if they listened to a tape of the text while reading it. Her Anglo pupils preferred to read without hearing the tape.

4. *The Uses of Words: Communication Versus Manipulation.* Both blacks and whites use words to communicate and to manipulate or gain power over others. The mainstream mode is usually to find meaning in the words themselves. How accurately a message is interpreted depends upon the similarity of the meanings senders and receivers attach to the words. Among blacks, however, words often become power devices, and the style of delivery is as important as the words expressed.

Within both cultures, whether one becomes a leader or a follower depends upon the ability to influence and control others. Control and influence in the white community usually accompany wealth. Among blacks, for whom wealth is more difficult to obtain, adeptness with words and skill at "performance" lead to power and influence. Abrahams and Gay have clearly identified some critical classroom implications:

Language in the largest sense plays a fundamental role in the process of survival in ghetto neighborhoods, in addition to being the basis of acquiring leadership, status, and success. The popularly held belief that it takes brute physical strength to survive in the ghetto is a myth. It may help one endure temporarily, but fists alone are not the answer to survival. Survival is based on one's versatility and adeptness

in the use of words. The man-of-words is the one who becomes the hero to ghetto youth. Consider the current conditions and compile a profile of spokesmen of ghetto action groups. These persons in the spotlight are dynamic speakers whose jobs are frequently dependent on the effective use of words, such as lawyers and ministers. Verbal ability can make the difference between having or not having food to eat, a place to live, clothes to wear, being accepted or rejected by one's peers, and being personally and emotionally secure or risking a complete loss of ego. . . . Teachers make their mistakes by looking at individual words or phrases as proof that the children are limited in their verbal abilities. For example, they fail to understand that what they choose to call profanity and coarse four letter words may be used as tools to indicate importance and emphasis. Street people are not inclined to use words for the mere sake of using them. They are used for their performance qualities.

To understand the relationship that exists between herself and her students, and the students' classroom behavior, the middle-class teacher needs to realize that her older black students use a variety of verbal techniques, and that they use these techniques to discover her strengths and weaknesses, to find out where she stands on issues ranging from how "hip" she is to racial attitudes, and to locate her breaking point. Once these are discovered they help the student to exert some control over the situation.

Because street culture is an oral culture, and is dependent largely upon the spoken word for its perpetuation and transmission, its language is very colorful, creative, and adaptive. It is in a constant state of flux and new words are always being invented. Further, new slang words are constantly created as a way of maintaining an in-group relationship and of excluding outsiders. Thus, there emerges something of a secret code that only in-group members completely understand. It is used by students and others in street culture to convey messages to each other about the "enemy," even in his presence. Of course, some of these terms have been picked up by white "hipsters,"

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but often the meaning is changed because of the different cultural perspective.¹³

5. *Standard English.* The almost exclusive use of standard English in our nation's schools is a blatant example of mainstream orientation. We are not debating whether or not we accept the position that all school children should develop enough skill in standard English to make its use a functional option. We are examining the cultural conflict many children experience in schools that ignore or repress the language they have lived with since birth. According to Benitez:

All the pre-primers available on the market assume a level of development in oral languages that the Mexican American child has not reached at the beginning of first grade. Phonologically speaking he neither hears nor discriminates certain sounds. Accustomed as he is to hearing Spanish mostly at home, he hears Spanish in the classroom instead of English and tries to decode accordingly. The result is frustration and awareness that he is failing at something [while] the other children are succeeding.¹⁴

The truth of Benitez's remarks is usually accepted when referring to Latino, native American, and Asian American children—children whose first language is not English. Rarely, however, is it recognized that standard English may create similar learning problems for black children.

A group of elementary teachers in a rural school in central Florida noted that, as early as first grade, they could see white students moving ahead of blacks in reading. Until they listened to tapes of the black students speaking, they were oblivious to the distinct black dialect. They then realized that asking these children to learn to read available materials was like asking whites to begin reading Old English.

Teaching others as they would be taught becomes more difficult to achieve when teachers and students have alternative world views. It's a challenge to find out "how learners would be taught" when we don't understand their language, when we misinterpret their behavior, when our "tried and true" methods of diagnosing and motivating don't work. It is imperative that we meet this challenge once we identify the potential drop-outs, failures, and nonachievers.

There is no evidence that Puerto Rican, black, native American, or Mexican American

children are inferior in their abilities to learn. There is evidence, however, that the cultural orientation of these children differs from that which predominates in schools. To date, most of our schools remain monocultural despite the fact that we live in a polycultural society.

As we examine classes like those taught by Warren Benson, and as we try to help students like Kevin and Marcia, we must allow for conflicting world views. We can become sensitive to the modes of participation and communication preferred by some students, and we can note whether the teacher is providing for these preferences. This is part of what is involved in teaching others as they would be taught.

¹³ Roger D. Abrahams and Geneva Gay. "Talking Black in the Classroom." In: Roger D. Abrahams and Rudolph C. Troike, editors. *Language and Cultural Diversity in American Education*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

¹⁴ Mario Benitez. "A Blueprint for the Education of the Mexican American." ERIC ED 076294, March 1973, p. 7.



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LETTERS

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acceptance, and must now move to the third stage of affirmation. If we are ever to reflect the pluralistic society in which we live in our daily curriculum, this must be done.

I hope that the grades given to our schools by Grant will improve in the not so far away future. It really was a disgrace.

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