

PART I

---

PERSPECTIVES ON  
MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGY

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL



---

## CHAPTER 1

---

# Commentary # 1: What is Multicultural School Psychology?

THOMAS OAKLAND

Remember and help America remember that the fellowship of human beings is more important than the fellowship of race and class and gender in a democratic society. (p. 54)

Edelman, 1992

**T**HE UNITED STATES is a nation composed largely of immigrants or their ancestors. People from the more than 220 countries of the world reside temporarily or permanently here, and immigration continues. More than 15% of the present U.S. population entered the country within the last 10 years. Those born abroad retain some or most of the qualities found in their native cultures, whereas first- and second-generation U.S.-born individuals are likely to display some (but fewer) qualities associated with what often was called the old country.

### PERSPECTIVES THAT INFLUENCE MY COMMENTS

I was born and raised in a Midwestern industrial community in which most men had blue-collar jobs, most women were full-time housekeepers, and most students completed their education at the 12th grade. Most were White. The plurality traced their ancestry to southern Italy. My mother was educated to the 3rd grade and my father to the 11th.

I knew early in life that I wanted work that served children. My experiences providing social-work services in Philadelphia were brief yet taught me to look elsewhere to achieve this goal. My experiences as a middle-school teacher reinforced my belief of the value of education and led to personal frustration in not being able to reach the

students who most needed my assistance. My experiences as a university professor allowed me to engage in scholarship that addressed multicultural issues, especially those related to test use and development that serve children from diverse backgrounds well.

I began to travel and work internationally in 1977 and have not stopped. I have worked in about 40 countries and on all inhabited continents and have attempted to promote interests I believed would serve children from various cultures while serving as a Fulbright Scholar in Brazil, president of both the International School Psychology Association and the International Test Commission, and currently as president of the International Foundation for Children's Education. My exposure to literature from other countries is enhanced through service on editorial boards of scholarly journals in 10 countries. The receipt of the American Psychological Association's 2003 Award for Distinguished Contributions to the Advancement of Psychology Internationally underscores my international work.

#### THE UNITED STATES AS A MELTING POT

The United States and its institutions, especially those responsible for educating students, struggle with two divergent orientations: whether our nation is a melting pot or a fruit basket.

Those who view the country as a melting pot take refuge in the motto "e pluribus unum" (one out of many) found on the nation's great seal, and view the country as analogous to a healthy human body in which thousands of independent parts work in a coordinated and cooperative manner to sustain and advance life. They believe in developing a sense of community in order to feel part of a larger and important family whose members differ demographically yet are committed to shared values, interests, and opportunities. There is a sense that America lives in us as much as we live in America.

A country flourishes when it has a common language, values, traditions, and knowledge of its history. Those who view the United States as a melting pot emphasize the need for people to assimilate and thus to acquire mainstream values and to display mainstream behaviors. Values enumerated in the Bill of Rights often are thought to constitute those most important to our nation.

#### THE UNITED STATES AS A FRUIT BASKET

Those who view the country as a fruit basket favor the belief that society should accommodate personal and cultural differences. They take refuge in the motto on the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. . . ." They view strength in diversity of languages, religions, traditions, values, attitudes, and other cultural qualities. The view that diversity often is the precursor to a nation's strength and an incubator for its creativity was reflected in Mayor Rudy Giuliani's expression after the September 11, 2001, destruction of the World Trade Center, that New York City and the country are stronger because of their diversity.

Within the United States, schools and school personnel, including school psychologists, struggle with these two divergent orientations. A nation's schools typically have as their primary mission the inculcation of common values, knowledge, and behaviors that help prepare students for mainstream lifestyles. However, some are be-

ing asked or made to adhere to divergent values, knowledge, and behaviors that prepare students for a lifestyle more common to smaller and more distinct subgroups. These issues often are discussed in reference to multicultural education.

### THE MEANING OF THE TERM MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

An understanding of the term *multicultural school psychology* first requires an understanding of the terms *culture* and *environment*, and of the prefix *multi*. Definitions of *culture* and *multi* are not reliably established in the behavioral sciences and thus not well understood by professionals and the public. Thus, I will use definitions from linguistic authorities rather than those offered by behavioral science scholars.

#### MEANING OF CULTURE

The term *culture* refers to an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thought, language, action, and artifacts and depends on man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations (*Merriam-Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1980).

Qualities subsumed by the term *culture* generally refer to shared personal qualities that can be categorized in a three-tiered hierarchical model. Level 1 consists of shared biological and physical qualities (e.g., height, weight, skin color, inherited propensity for illnesses and physical problems, and other qualities that have a decided biological basis). Level 2 qualities consist of shared values, goals, beliefs, and attitudes. These qualities are likely to be influenced by traditions within one's ancestral cultures (and thus transmitted through genetic and family patterns) together with one's current environment and personal decisions. Level 3 qualities consist of preferences for foods and eating habits, dress, and language as well as methods for disciplining, educating, communicating, working, dating, marriage, and playing. Compared to Level 1 and Level 2 qualities, those associated with Level 3 are affected more strongly by personal choice, are more modifiable, and are often more superficial, yet often are seen as expressions of one's culture.

#### MEANING OF MULTI

The prefix *multi* means many, or more than two (*Merriam-Webster*, 1980). An understanding of *multi*, an adjectival component of the term *multicultural*, is aided by recognizing that most research on culture and multicultural topics comes from sociology and anthropology or uses research methods common to these disciplines. Most of this literature emphasizes behaviors that are affected by culture displayed within the context of environments, generally focuses on Level 2 and Level 3 qualities, emphasizes cultural differences more than similarities, and attends little to other determinants of behavior (e.g., biological or personal choice factors). Research methods generally are intent on describing group qualities and thus rely on measures of central tendency (e.g., means, medians) or qualitative methods.

In contrast, psychologists place greater emphasis on individual characteristics and variance. In fact, psychology's emphasis on individual differences (together with its related interests in within- and between-group differences) constitutes its most important contribution to the behavioral sciences. Psychology generally attempts to un-

derstand an individual as the product of biology, environments, and personal choices. The study of individual differences is less prominent and important in sociology and anthropology. Thus, the term *multicultural* may be used differently within psychology than other social sciences, given psychology's abiding commitment to describe and understand individual differences, often within environmental contexts.

Acknowledgment of individual differences does not imply everyone is an island, unique unto oneself. Instead, psychology typically views individual differences in reference to various arbitrary social conventions, including age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity (used here to refer to the county or countries of personal or ancestral origin), and social class. These and other social conventions reflect qualities approved within a social group that distinguish it from other social groups and may lead to feelings of superiority, inferiority, and prejudice. *Prejudice* occurs when groups have unequal status; when personal, one-on-one, and group interactions between group members do not occur; and when intergroup contacts are not supported by the external community (<http://www.decadeofbehavior.org>).

#### MEANING OF ENVIRONMENT

The term *environment* refers to the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community (*Merriam-Webster*, 1980). Thus, environment refers to the context within which cultural conditions are ignored, accepted, or extinguished. Persons are likely to live in various environments (e.g., home, school, neighborhood, work). Thus, the term *environment*, when used in its singular form, may be inaccurate and thus misleading.

#### MEANING OF MULTICULTURAL

Finally, the term *multicultural* refers to a confluence of three or more coexisting and un-integrated cultures (e.g., those that differ by age, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, or sexual orientation), each of which displays patterns of human behavior that include thought, language, action, and artifacts that may be somewhat unique to it and are sustained by members' capacity for and interest in learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.

The term *multicultural* describes environments within which culturally related qualities are displayed. The term does not apply to individuals; no child is multicultural. Moreover, the term *multicultural* is a misnomer in that it violates the definition of *culture* as being an integrated pattern of human behavior. Nevertheless, the term is used frequently and thus will be used in this chapter and throughout this handbook.

*Multiculturalism* assumes people construct reality through networks of social agreements that involve historical, cultural, and social experiences. All views or theories are valued, even if they are diametrically opposed. Reality is reflected through language, metaphors, and cultural symbols. Language systems allow for the expression of realities and truths beyond Western scientific tradition. Multiculturalism assumes behaviors can be understood only within the context in which they occur (Sue et al., 1998).

The following 10 qualities (Sue et al., 1998) have been offered as descriptions of multiculturalism:

1. It values cultural pluralism and rejects ethnocentrism and the characterization of the United States as a cultural mosaic.
2. It values inclusion, cooperation, and movement toward mutually shared goals.

3. It promotes social justice and equity.
4. It promotes the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic society.
5. It emphasizes the importance of using multiple perspectives to study multiple cultures.
6. It includes such demographic qualities as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age, and geographic origin.
7. It celebrates the contributions and achievements of the United States and other cultures.
8. It promotes change within individuals, organizations, and society.
9. It may involve tension and conflicts as to what constitutes reality.
10. It recognizes that equity in treatment should be rejected when it leads to equal access and opportunity.

Most of these qualities find acceptance in U.S. society, while some (e.g., that equity in treatment should be rejected when it leads to equal access and opportunity) are being challenged politically and legally as they are contrary to long-standing values and laws.

#### DEVELOPING CULTURAL AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Cultural awareness and understanding require one to understand similarities and differences between one's own culture and other cultures. Thus, this process begins by understanding critical elements of one's own culture. Although considerable differences exist in the American culture, Americans generally respect rules and laws, strive to correct injustice, communicate explicitly and directly, embrace egalitarianism, value time as linear and exact, believe they control their own destinies, and value work. Knowledge and display of common beliefs, goals, and values provides social cohesion and reduces tension (Katzko, 2002).

Cultural awareness and understanding also require an understanding of other cultures. This requirement assumes reliable and valid information on a culture that is stable, generally homogeneous, and with degrees of variance known. This information is not available for the largest immigrant groups entering the United States or for most of the subgroups that have lived in the United States for generations.

Thus, we lack reliable and valid data on qualities that constitute most of the native cultures from which students come or the cultures in which they currently live. However, educators are expected to know and respect cultural differences. This is not possible.

#### ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY THAT BROADEN PSYCHOLOGY OR EDUCATION, WITH RESPECT TO MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

Schools in the United States serve students of every class through the services of middle-class, largely White professionals. School psychologists form an important component in this professional service commitment. They, too, are largely (92%) White.

School psychology's contributions to efforts to educate the every-class child can be seen in various ways, including their preparing practitioners to serve the needs of children; their actual service to children; research and other forms of scholarship; materials and test development; and advocacy.

School psychologists work disproportionately with children from low-income and

minority families. They work with more children from culturally diverse backgrounds than any other psychologists. Their professional services constitute their most important contribution to education within a multicultural context.

Many programs that prepare school psychologists have structured their curricula to include a strong emphasis on multicultural issues. The American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists strongly encourage this emphasis through their program-accreditation processes. Many school psychology programs strive to recruit, nurture, and retain students and faculty from minority backgrounds.

School psychologists have contributed importantly to research and other forms of scholarship on multicultural issues, including the development of tests and of materials designed to help promote academic and social development, and serving as consultants to test companies and others in their efforts to develop intervention methods and technologies suitable for use with minority children. The contents of this handbook attest to these contributions.

School psychologists individually and through their professional associations work to promote knowledge and understanding of cultural issues. For example, the APA's *Resolution on Poverty and Socioeconomic Status* (2000) and its *Guidelines for Multicultural Education and Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change* (<http://www.apa.org/pi>) constitute policy for its members. In addition, these professional associations work with legislative leaders, first in forming and developing policy designed to serve all students, including those who differ culturally; and later in promulgating policy at state and national levels. Their advocacy also is found in testifying at legislative and judicial hearings.

## CRITICAL ISSUES FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

### ADHERENCE TO A SCIENTIST-PRACTITIONER MODEL

School psychology will continue to make important contributions to the education of children and youth within multicultural contexts by doing what it does best: conducting research and engaging in other forms of scholarship that address important issues and establishing practices based on this scholarship.

School psychology should be mindful of but avoid being caught up in social and political movements that often characterize multicultural education. Many multicultural issues provoke tension and conflict as to what constitutes reality and thus how children are best served. School psychology can make contributions and possibly allay tensions and conflicts by expressing its views based on well-established scholarship that addresses these. The following research issues are germane to this effort.

*Define Culture and Multicultural Empirically* Given a lack of agreement as to what constitutes *culture*, *multicultural*, and *multicultural education*, we are unable to define and discuss them meaningfully. Thus, research that defines and establishes the constructs of culture and later its multicultural dimensions is needed. Relatedly, tests that reliably and validly measure culture and cultural assimilation are needed. These efforts require a concept of culture highly saturated by Level 2 qualities together with those in Levels 1 and 3 as well as others not typically considered (e.g., economic independence, gender roles and functions, health and wellness, elevation from sea level, climate conditions) that have a discernable effect on behaviors.

*Recognize That No Culture Is Static* The U.S. culture changes continuously. Many Level 2 qualities (e.g., values, goals, beliefs, and attitudes) and Level 3 qualities (preferred foods, eating habits, dress, and language as well as methods for disciplining, educating, communicating, working, dating, marriage, and playing) that were in vogue in the 1980s seem dated when viewed 25 years later. Lifestyle differences during the last 25 years are apparent for persons who differ by age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and social class. Thus, efforts to hold on to the past are futile. Efforts that integrate the new with important traditional features best serve U.S. society and education.

*Help Define the Values That Should Guide Children's Educational and Psychological Development* The United States is blessed with many strong institutions, each contributing in its own way to our nation's value system. Schools, families, religious institutions, and the media generally have the strongest impact on molding children's development.

Efforts are needed to define and clarify both the unique and overlapping value structures of these institutions and other institutions as they affect children's development. Although school psychology is committed to children's development through its promotion of education, its involvement with families and with religious and other institutions also is needed to achieve its goals. Thus, scholarship that clearly enunciates values critical to children's development, followed by efforts to promulgate these values, are essential to our efforts to serve children.

*Recognize That Not All Behavior Is Due to Culture* An emphasis on cultural issues underscores the important effect that culture, displayed within environments, can have on behavior. However, an emphasis on cultural issues to the exclusion of other qualities (e.g., biology and personal choice) that affect behavior can have deleterious outcomes for children. Individuals rarely embody all qualities that characterize a dominant culture. In addition, teachers who focus strongly on multicultural issues may be inclined to overlook other qualities (e.g., academic aptitude and motivation) that influence a student's school behaviors.

An emphasis on multicultural qualities spotlights environmental qualities. Students' cognitive abilities generally are thought to be affected by school and family qualities. As reported by Coleman (1966) and others, differences in cognitive abilities between Blacks and Whites are due more to home than school environments. Children who attend schools in lower income as opposed to higher income areas are likely to enter school with smaller vocabularies and other academic prerequisites, to experience more domestic disruptions and disorder, to have parents who are less involved in school-related functions, and to be with peers who are less engaged academically and more inclined to watch TV, cut classes, and drop out of school. The belief that one can fix schools without fixing families is naive. Furthermore, methods that successfully engage families in promoting children's academic development have not been established (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002).

*Work Toward Establishing and Promoting a Common Set of Values* As noted previously, some suggest we cannot and should not establish common values. Considerable evidence challenges this viewpoint. Our nation's history, Constitution, statutes, and institutions reflect cultural qualities that have served the country and its people well.

As her firstborn son, Joshua, approached his 21st birthday, Marian Wright Edelman (1992) wrote a book for him and his brothers, Jonah and Ezra, as they were crossing the

threshold from adolescence to adulthood. Edelman, a woman of African American decent and president of the Children's Defense Fund, wanted to convey to her sons and others 20 lessons life had taught her. These lessons follow.

1. Remember and help America remember that the fellowship of human beings is more important than the fellowship of race and class and gender in a democratic society.
2. Set goals and work quietly and systematically toward them.
3. There is no free lunch. One must work for what one wants.
4. Assign yourself work when others haven't.
5. Don't be afraid of hard work or of teaching your children to work.
6. Never work just for money or power.
7. Don't be afraid of taking risks or of being criticized.
8. Forming families is serious business.
9. Assume parenting and family life seriously and insist others do so, too.
10. Remember that your wife is not your mother or your maid, but your partner and friend.
11. Be honest. Struggle to live what you say and preach.
12. Don't confuse style for substance, reputation for character.
13. Never give up.
14. Be a can-do, will-try person.
15. Be confident that you can make a difference.
16. Never stop learning.
17. Slow down and live.
18. Choose your friends carefully.
19. Live in the present; don't carry around unnecessary burdens.
20. Use your political and economic power for the good of community and others less fortunate.

People from almost all cultures are likely to see the value in these lessons. Our country can and should agree on a set of values that promote the ideals that foster personal and community goals. This view differs from those of multiculturalists who believe common values cannot and should not be established (Sue et al., 1998).

*Recognize Within-Group Variance* Psychology differs from other social sciences in its interest in individual, within-group, and between-group differences. Knowledge of within-group variance can provide information as to the degree to which values, goals, beliefs, attitudes, and other important cultural characteristics held by members of a group or subgroup are homogeneous as well as the extent to which other groups also hold these shared personal qualities. Attempts to attribute a set of cultural qualities as being unique to one group should be avoided given an absence of data as to the presence of these attributes in other groups.

*Avoid Political Correctness* Political correctness typically is advocated in an effort to display sensitivity and respect for others. However, political correctness has resulted in statements that overlook the truth, fail to recognize the source of problems, and thus misguide solutions to vexing problems.

Psychologists, including school psychologists, generally recognize the effect of age and social class on behavior. However, they generally are more reluctant to publicly recognize the effects of gender, race, and ethnicity on behavior. In addition, they are

inclined to avoid entering into discussions as to these possibilities and chastise others for doing so. Two examples follow.

A symposium on *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994) scheduled at an annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists was cancelled due to its controversial nature. It later was rescheduled. Additionally, many psychologists summarized criticized Arthur Jensen's pioneering scholarship on racial and social-class effects on intelligence. His goal was to better understand and define latent abilities in Hispanic and Black students. Many first rejected his findings as to the biological contributions to intelligence. He was branded a racist and required police protection at his home university (University of California–Berkeley) and at conventions. Scholars now generally accept his findings. Attempts by many psychologists and school psychologists to be politically correct for the sake of sensitivity have brought discredit to the discipline and its practice.

Liberal beliefs foster the view that behaviors largely are due to one's culture and generally reject the effects of biology and personal choices on behavior. This view is not in keeping with prevailing U.S. views or with scholarship that attributes the occurrence of personal difficulties to poor personal choice and lack of personal responsibility. The pervasive liberal zeitgeist in psychology decreases the ecological validity of psychologists' work and affects their contributions as researchers, policy advocates, clinicians, and educators (Redding, 2001). Psychology can continue to celebrate diversity, recognize the value of diverse beliefs, and strive to be inclusive. This is an American value, not one owned by liberals or conservatives.

*Include a Cross-National Focus, Not Only a Cross-Cultural Focus* Multicultural issues should be studied cross-nationally (i.e., in three or more countries), not only cross-culturally (i.e., among three or more groups within one country). Multicultural issues in education typically address issues important to students whose ancestors came from regions other than Europe (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa, Mexico, Central America, Asia). An understanding of effective methods to promote child development in these regions may enhance our ability to better promote development among students who trace their ancestral origins to these regions. Greater utilization of *autoplasmic methods* (i.e., the study of an indigenous population's own cultural frame of reference to understand its characteristics) may be helpful for this purpose. For example, efforts to better educate children of Mexican descent may benefit from knowledge of methods used by indigenous groups within Mexico to promote development.

## CHALLENGES IN ADDRESSING MULTICULTURAL CONCERNS: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE GROWTH

### PREPARE THE STUDENT FOR THE CULTURE IN WHICH HE OR SHE IS LIKELY TO LIVE

Goals for education must be based on foresight as to the lives persons can be expected to lead after completing school. Educational leaders, parents, and spokespersons for some groups often do not speak to this issue with a unified voice.

Some believe education should prepare students to live in minority communities. This goal may foster an emphasis on Ebonics for Blacks, or on native languages for others. Other aspects of the curriculum intended to promote an understanding of a group's racial or ethnic heritage and pride, and of the values and customs displayed somewhat uniquely in the group's country of origin or community, may be better promoted by other institutions within that community. Although all knowledge may be

helpful, such efforts do not directly prepare students who differ by race or ethnicity for success in a mainstream society—one of schools' most important missions.

Some believe education should prepare students to have a choice in deciding whether they live in a larger community (i.e., one that includes persons from various backgrounds) or in minority communities. Most educators and psychologists support an emphasis on the acquisition of language, academic knowledge, skills, and behaviors generally common to and favored by the larger community. In addition to this broader emphasis, parent and community resources also may be used to help prepare students to live in a subgroup.

#### DO NOT REIFY MULTICULTURALISM

Many persons were introduced to the importance of culture by reading *Growing Up in New Guinea*. Mead's (1942) fictionalized account of children being raised in a loving and sexually open society resonated well with many and contributed to a belief that all values are equally valid.

To some, multicultural issues have become a cause célèbre, with the associated goal to further promote a multicultural society in which the interests of the various subgroups take precedence over the interests of the majority. Opposition to those who hold the reins of political, social, and financial power is somewhat common. The belief that some groups deserve reparations for past deeds and the justification of payment to them of \$30 million is consistent with this theme.

Qualities common in some cultures may be unacceptable in others. Female circumcision; arranged marriages; automatic child custody to fathers; no voting rights and few other legal rights for women; child labor; the favoring of boys over girls; death to women who commit adultery; anti-intellectualism; and the debasing of achievement motivation and of the attainments of prominent figures (e.g., Colin Powell) in one's subgroup may reflect well-accepted values in some cultures or subgroups, but not in others. Most educators and psychologists do not subscribe to these values.

Dominant cultural characteristics must be understood within a framework of a society in which these characteristics may be justified by tradition, religion, and public support. Change agents may wish to transport certain cultural features found in other countries and remake the United States into the lands they left behind.

#### CONCLUSION

Our nation's struggle to find ways to uphold important values yet not to show disrespect for cultures and subgroups that hold different values was chronicled by de Tocqueville (1864) in the 1800s. This struggle is part of our historic fabric, and is one that will continue so long as people from various nations and diverse cultures seek refuge and opportunity in the United States.

#### REFERENCES

- Coleman, J. (1966). *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Education.
- Edelman, M. W. (1992). *The measure of our success*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Herrnstein, R. J., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve*. New York: The Free Press.
- Katzko, M. (2002). The rhetoric of psychological research and problems of unification in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 57(4), 262–270.

- Mattingly, D., Prislín, R., McKenzie, T., Rodríguez, J., & Kayzar, B. (2002). Evaluating evaluations: The case of parent involvement programs. *Review of Educational Research, 72*, 549–576.
- Mead, M. (1942). *Growing Up in New Guinea: A study of adolescence and sex in primitive societies*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.
- Merriam-Webster's new collegiate dictionary*. (1980). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.
- Redding, R. (2001). Sociopolitical diversity in psychology: The case for pluralism. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 205–215.
- Sue, D. W., Carter, R. T., Casas, J. M., Fouad, N. A., Ivey, A. E., Jensen, M., LaFromboise, et al. (1998). *Multicultural counseling competencies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tocqueville, A. de (1864). *De la démocratie en Amérique*. Cambridge, MA: Sever & Francis.