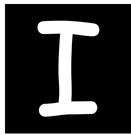
SECTION I

Seeing Our Students' Cultures With "New Eyes"

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

Marcel Proust, *A Remembrance of Things Past,* 1913–1927



f assessment is to serve all students equally well, we must begin to understand diversity in new ways. To that end, this section provides some insight into how some of the ingredients of diversity must be considered to ensure assessment equity. We propose a sociocultural approach to assessment, which takes into account individual student differences based on culture, language, gender, and other aspects of students' lives and identities. In this sociocultural approach, we believe, lies the best possibility for ensuring valid assessment outcomes.

The section focuses on culture and, to a much lesser extent, gender as sources of important difference. Of course, as the Introduction suggests, there are numerous other social and individual factors that could be addressed. Ethnicity is also an important part of a student's identity, but it is often differences in cultural values rather than ethnicity that cause conflicts with the dominant culture. In fact, students from many ethnic backgrounds experience similar *culture*-based conflicts in school. Given the space limitations in this document, the authors believe that an emphasis on culture is more productive for understanding where schooling goes wrong for many students.

Race is another extremely important factor in students' experience in schools and in society at large. In the sections on language and on avoiding bias in assessment, race is implicitly — if not explicitly — part of the conversation. While race has not been used here as a broad rubric for understanding how assessment can be made more equitable, the authors certainly recognize race as an element of diversity that affects how students are perceived, students' sense of belonging, and students' motivation. Race and ethnicity are not equivalent. Haitians and African Americans, for example, are both Black but belong to groups with different histories, geographical backgrounds, and languages. Nevertheless, they may share some underlying cultural values that influence how they experience schooling.

With regard to gender, at times it seems that one could characterize male and female differences as cultural differences. However, gender

differences themselves look different, depending on what culture one is observing. Boys and girls in any culture are socialized to behave in particular ways and take on different roles. Much of the gender research related to schooling that we are able to cite is based on studies of mainstream U.S. students. One of the things teachers need to learn about their students from various cultures is the kinds of expectations those cultures hold for boys versus girls. In this short publication, gender differences are not dealt with to the degree that they deserve. However, some examples from gender research are offered that can help us understand how the classroom may operate differently for boys and girls. The authors hope readers will take these examples as points of entry to the topic and continue to build their knowledge in this area beyond what is offered here.

We begin our exploration with a short classroom vignette that exemplifies the challenge teachers face on a daily basis in trying to understand the state of student learning:

VIGNETTE: HERMANA'S STORY

Ms. Day is reading her first-graders a story that, over the years, has captured the imagination of her students, Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are. *It's easy to tell that most of the class is eagerly involved. She can almost feel Sam's interest as he wiggles, frowns, and smiles along with the story. But one student, Hermana, sits quietly, eyes down.*

The young girl has recently moved to the United States from Palau, an island republic in the Pacific. Because Hermana is new to the classroom (and the country) and is rather quiet, Ms. Day has been trying to get a sense of how much classroom instruction and discussion the child understands. As the teacher reads aloud to the class, she wonders, "Is Hermana interested? Has she put herself into the story?"

But afterwards, when Ms. Day calls on Hermana and asks how she liked the story, the girl barely speaks. "Good," she says, so quietly that no one else can hear. When Ms. Day then asks how Hermana would feel if she were the boy in the story, Hermana simply looks

confused. The more questions the teacher asks, the less Hermana responds. Ms. Day feels frustrated and worried because she has no idea how much Hermana really understands.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Have you found yourself in a situation like this?
- What do you think was really happening here?
- What is this teacher trying to assess? Listening? Comprehension? Oral language? Other?
- What else might she try in her effort to informally assess Hermana, depending on her assessment purpose?
- Should she push Hermana harder?

Because Hermana barely responds to Ms. Day's direct questions, the teacher can't tell how much the girl understands. Several things might be going on here. In many more traditional cultures, children are expected to listen but not comment on stories, so it's possible that Hermana has never before been asked her opinion about a story. Similarly, she may have had no experience answering questions that require interpretation of a story, such as imagining herself to be one of the characters. In her home culture, children may not be asked for interpretations of a story's plot or character.

Another source of Hermana's reticence may lie in the teacher's individual questioning of her. Again, in more traditional cultures such as that of Palau, children are more likely to be questioned as a group, with several answering at once. In that classroom environment, a question requiring a one-word answer or a predicted phrase may elicit a choral response from virtually all children. The kind of one-to-one questioning so common to U.S. classrooms is rare or nonexistent, except where a school or set of teachers has adopted U.S.-style schooling. Thus, when Hermana is singled out by Ms. Day, the attention may make her feel uneasy. Finally, there is the possibility that Hermana feels uncomfortable because she is new in the classroom and doesn't know what is expected of her. In all likelihood, her discomfort is both situational and cultural.

It's sometimes impossible to know exactly what's going on with any given student, and it's risky to draw conclusions based solely on a student's cultural background. But, if teachers are to be effective, they must be able to figure out what their students actually know and are able to do. When they approach that challenge with some understanding of a student's culture — when they have developed a degree of cultural competence — they're likely to get more informative results than if, instead, they simply conclude that a student like Hermana, for example, is shy, nonverbal, or "slow."

Deepening Our Understanding of Diversity

How does one begin to develop cultural competence? The first step is recognizing that *everyone* has a culture, and almost every action has cultural underpinnings. It's something of a maxim in multicultural education that until you learn about your own culture you can't really understand other cultures. But doing so is not as easy as it might sound. Much about one's own culture seems so ordinary, so normal, that its cultural foundation is not readily recognized, let alone understood. Developing the ability to see what's going on in one's own culture has been described as "making the familiar strange." Anthropologist George Spindler, who coined that phrase (1988), said the hardest task for him wasn't documenting the practices and values of the other cultures he studied. Rather, it was documenting the cultural practices in a West Coast fifth-grade classroom.

To those who grew up in what has historically been the dominant culture of this country and whose schooling took place in a U.S. school, most classroom activity would probably just look "normal." It would be hard to see the cultural values underlying the ordinary instructional and management strategies of the teacher. Yet, in fact, even what may appear to be relatively unimportant classroom practices can be culturally influenced; for example, how teachers think about treating pencils, erasers, and other materials that have been purchased with school funds. In some cultures, they are treated as community property, while in most U.S. classrooms, they are distributed to students and treated as each child's personal property. Yet a teacher who has taught only in one culture or the other wouldn't likely recognize the treatment of classroom materials as a culture-based practice.

Becoming sensitive and knowledgeable educators able to meet the needs of diverse groups of students requires learning to recognize both the

dominant culture, which informs much of U.S. classroom practice, and nondominant cultures, in which large numbers of students have been raised. Especially important is understanding the potential internal conflicts that can arise for students when these cultures are at odds in the classroom. Developing a perspective on these potential culture clashes is a necessary process if we are to make instruction and assessment fair and effective for our students.

English language learners and immigrants are not the only students who may experience such conflicts. Extensive research shows that African American, American Indian, and Alaska Native, as well as White students from poor and/or rural settings, are not well served by our present instructional and assessment practices (Ball, 1997; Delpit, 1988; Deyhle, 1987; Estrin & Nelson-Barber, 1995; Heath, 1983; Hollins, 1996). Among the reasons are differences between the experience base children bring with them from home and what's demanded of them in school. For instance, Heath (1983) showed how children who had learned to tell stories with a beginning, middle, and end at home were more readily understood and positively evaluated by their teachers. A different pattern, based on another cultural tradition, was not accepted. Similarly, middle-class, mainstream children who typically come to school knowing the alphabet and how to spell their names fit in better with teachers' expectations (Valdés, 1996).

Differences between the forms and uses of language children learn in their home communities and those expected in the classroom can lead teachers to underestimate children. When teachers are unfamiliar with children's experience base or ways of using language, they are unlikely to understand how most effectively to instruct and assess these students. And if they don't understand — or even recognize — the inherent strengths of students' culturally based communication or behavior patterns, for example, teachers will be unable to help students draw on those strengths to become more successful learners.

Sometimes the beliefs, policies, and practices of those who design and run the schools unwittingly perpetuate unequal relationships between members of immigrant and other minority groups and those of the dominant culture. For example, the very mechanisms schools use to involve parents may actually prevent them from becoming involved. When school systems require parents to participate in individual parent-teacher conferences, they may inadvertently exclude some parents who are uncomfortable exposing their own lack of knowledge of the language or of how schools are run. Undereducated parents may find it difficult to participate actively in parent-teacher organizations; hence their perspectives will be missing from conversations about how to improve schooling for their children. Alternative ways of convening parents, such

as in small groups with opportunities for informal social exchanges, may bring in parents from heretofore unrepresented groups. Without conscious consideration of ways of involving parents, the same old methods for involving them will likely prevail, and those who know the “rules of engagement” are probably going to continue to dominate the conversation and any consequent decisionmaking.

Race, gender, language, ethnicity, family history, personal experience, socioeconomic status — all these, and more, factor into the education experience for both students and teacher. All have implications for how students approach learning and how teachers approach teaching, not to mention what teachers’ expectations are for individual students or groups of students. For example, on the basis of unconscious stereotypes, a teacher may wrongly assume cultural and experiential impoverishment on the basis of a student’s financial impoverishment or cultural difference. Such misperceptions are bound to interfere with effective teaching and assessment. The challenge, of course, is to be attuned to all those factors that make up the cultural foundation of an individual, whether teacher or student, while, at the same time, steering clear of stereotyping. *A caution*: While working to expand our knowledge of students’ cultures, we must take care not to stereotype the members of any particular group. Gaining insight into potential strengths and values that students may bring from their own culture is important. But the effort must be balanced by the recognition that, within any single culture, the beliefs and practices of individual members can greatly vary.

Assessment as a Cultural Phenomenon

Every culture has accepted ways of evaluating children’s development, and what’s acceptable can differ from one culture to another. For example, not all cultures engage in formal, on-demand assessment of children’s skills or learning. Thus, some immigrant students may need time to develop an understanding of the assessment they encounter in U.S. classrooms. The same may be true for American Indian students growing up in traditional communities where, generally speaking, they are not expected to perform any set of skills publicly until they know they are competent. In such communities, requiring them to do so would be asking them to risk ridicule (Deyhle, 1987; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989). Because of such culture-based differences, teachers must be prepared and willing to use a variety of assessment techniques and formats with their non-mainstream students, including informal observation along with a range of more formal measures. Assessment formats reflect particular ways of thinking, and a student’s home culture is a key factor in the degree to which certain formats can accurately assess his or her

progress. For instance, a true-false item calls for the kind of categorical thinking that some cultures actually teach their children to avoid.

Given the degree to which many teachers use direct questioning of students as a means of informal assessment, it helps to understand some of the cultural factors, as well as gender expectations, that may influence a student's manner of response. For example, a girl who has been raised in a home where females are expected to be deferential may hesitate to raise her hand, speak out in class, or even respond easily when directly questioned. A teacher who doesn't understand the possible roots of the girl's hesitancy could assume that she either doesn't know the answer or is uninterested in the lesson. In another example, many cultures teach children to give due deliberation to any question and respect to all feasible answers. In oral discourse, Japanese people will pause when asked a question because it is thought rude to rush into an answer before respectfully considering the query. To a teacher unaware of this, a slow-to-respond student may appear unsure of an answer, whereas the student may, in fact, simply be polite.

A Framework for Understanding Cultural Differences: Individualism and Collectivism

One broader way of thinking about cultural differences as they relate to education is to reflect on the degree to which people are raised with an orientation either to the group (e.g., family, community, classroom) or to the individual. It turns out that this basic value difference leads to a constellation of cultural features that can be the source of conflict in the classroom. A framework of individualism and collectivism to guide thinking about cultural differences is used here because it has proven to be very useful to a wide range of educators in understanding their students and themselves (Trumbull, Greenfield, Rothstein-Fisch, & Quiroz, in press).

Collectivistic cultures, such as American Indian and Alaska Native, Micronesian and Polynesian, those of Mexico and Central America, Asian and African cultures, are more oriented toward group success. In contrast, individualistic cultures, such as those of the United States, Western Europe, and Australia, emphasize individual success. The table below shows the principal features of individualism and collectivism. Although these orientations are presented here as dichotomous, in reality no person or group is completely individualistic or completely collectivistic. It is a matter of the relative emphasis on one or the other set of values.

Table 1: Individualism vs. Collectivism
(Adapted from Trumbull, Greenfield, Rothstein-Fisch, and Quiroz, in press)

Features of Individualism	Features of Collectivism
• Fostering independence and individual achievement	• Fostering interdependence and group success
• Emphasizing an understanding of the physical world through direct exposure to objects — often out of context	• Emphasizing an understanding of the physical world as it enhances human relationships
• Promoting self-expression, individual thinking, personal choice	• Promoting adherence to norms, respect for authority/elders, group consensus
• Associated with private property	• Associated with shared property
• Associated with egalitarian relationships and flexibility in roles (e.g., upward mobility)	• Associated with stable, hierarchical roles (dependent on gender, family background, age)

How do these orientations play out in education? Most basic, perhaps, a teacher's relative inclination toward individualism or collectivism influences expectations about everything from student behavior to how students learn. In fact, much of the research about learning styles, as well as other education research, "has as its ideological base, the primacy of the individual and individual differences. This perspective is consistent with Western views which elevate and celebrate individual strivings above collective ones" (Ladson-Billings, 1991). Not surprisingly, school culture tends to reflect this perspective. The degree to which students and their families either share this orientation or, conversely, have a more collectivistic approach to life affects much about their own views of schooling — and how likely they are to feel in sync with what's going on in the classroom.

The Rights of the Individual Versus the Needs of the Group

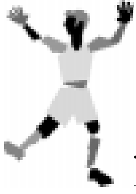
As we have already noted and will reiterate throughout this publication, no single set of values is shared by all members of any culture. The diversity within cultural groups is often as great as diversity across cultures. Even so, the *general* tendencies toward certain values from one culture to another can be remarkable. Consider the responses when, in a recent study by Quiroz and Greenfield (2000), the following classroom "problem" was posed to parents at two different schools:

VIGNETTE: THE JOB SCENARIO

It is the end of the school day, and the class is cleaning up. Salvador isn't feeling well, and he asks Emanuel to help him with his job for the day, which is cleaning the blackboard. Emanuel isn't sure that he will have time to do both jobs. What do you think the teacher should do?

One study site was a school with a primarily European American student population. There, the dominant response from parents was that the teacher should find a third person to do Salvador's job, presumably someone who had the time. This response reflects the more individualistic values of not infringing on others' rights, of protecting an individual's task assignment, and of maintaining an individual's choice — in this case, whether to help or not.

The second study site was a school serving a predominantly immigrant Latino population. There, the vast majority of parents — nearly 80 percent — said that Emanuel should help Salvador, a response reflecting an assumption that human beings are responsible for helping group members, for contributing to the unity and welfare of the group.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

So, how does the framework of individualism/collectivism help us understand these different response patterns? Well, the usual assumptions from an individualistic perspective would be: 1) each person has a task; 2) each person is responsible for that task and that task alone; 3) if someone needs help, he/she can ask for it, but no one is obligated to offer it — particularly if it interferes with his ability to do his own job. The assumptions from a collectivistic perspective would be: 1) tasks may be routinely done by a certain person, but there is no reason they can't be shared; 2) if someone needs help, you help, even if it inconveniences you. It's easy to see from this research example how a relative emphasis on the individual versus the group could lead to different solutions to numerous daily problems in classrooms.

These general collectivistic or individualistic orientations have important implications for how students learn, solve problems, and behave in school, as well as how their learning can most effectively be assessed. Many educators assume that all students would take a similar approach to the concepts of individual work and group responsibility. But students are influenced by how they look at the role of the individual and the group in society. In many cultures, parents teach their children to work together, to help each other. As educators, we must recognize that many students — including most immigrant populations, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and others — tend to be much more oriented toward the group than toward the individual. The degree of their concern for others extends to how competitive they may want to be academically — at least publicly. For them, individual performance is generally valued only to the degree it contributes to the group's well-being, whether that group is the family, the community, or their fellow students. As a result, in order not to embarrass or shame a peer, a student who knows the correct answer to a question may resist offering it after another student has answered incorrectly.

For such students, instruction or assessment that focuses tightly on individual progress or individual demonstration of learning is not always appropriate. Moreover, an overemphasis on individual assessment means

the teacher is not helping students draw on a major strength that many from group-oriented cultures bring to their schooling: the ability to work together. When designing assessments, we need to consider the collaborative strengths of students from collectivist cultures, as well as the likely preference of students from cultures that emphasize individual effort and responsibility. Assessments that play to both strengths give students opportunities to show what they know and can do, while also challenging them to stretch.

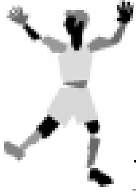
Catherine Daley is a teacher-researcher with the Bridging Cultures Project (described on page 25) and a second-grade teacher in Los Angeles. Her largely immigrant Latino students are encouraged to complete practice tests for the Stanford-9 Achievement Test together. Children discuss aloud with each other why a certain answer is better than another. Of course, when it is time to take the real test, she tells them the rules: tests must be completed individually with no help from anyone else. This approach might not work as well in a group of students socialized to individualistic norms.

Self-Expression Versus Respect for Authority

The following example, from the work of Greenfield, Raeff, and Quiroz (1996), shows how people — in this case a teacher and a parent — at different places on the collectivistic-individualistic continuum can sometimes perceive and respond to the same situation in very different ways:

VIGNETTE: CROSSED WIRES

A European American teacher enthusiastically reports to an immigrant Latino father that his daughter is "outstanding" — speaking out, expressing herself, taking an active role in class. But the father is distressed: he has taught his daughter not to stand out, to be quiet and respectful of the teacher, and to be considerate of other children. What does this mean, he wonders. Is his daughter failing to understand important expectations for behavior?



THINGS TO CONSIDER

The problem here is that the teacher and parent have very different ideas about what makes a good student, yet neither recognizes how different these ideas are. The teacher is reporting what she considers to be exemplary behavior that would make any parent proud. But a father who has taught his daughter not to “show off” or stand out from the group will be distressed by this behavior.

Parents in many cultures teach their children to be quiet and respectful as learners in school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Valdés, 1996). Given that, is it fair to evaluate these children on the basis of their ability to respond to questions individually in front of the class? Perhaps even competitively? It depends on the child, of course. The girl in the above example had clearly responded to the expectations of school rather than to those of her father, but this does not mean she experiences no conflict in doing so. Many students who had been raised similarly would understandably feel constrained in their ability to respond to such assessment methods. Students apparently respond in different ways to the conflicting demands of school and home. Some learn the norms of the school and become alienated from their families because they are not behaving in the expected ways. Some do not take to the norms of the school and may be judged less capable than they are but experience less conflict with their families. And some seem to become bi-cultural, balancing demands of home and school — observing the norms of each setting to the degree they are able. Of course, culturally aware teachers can help students to become bicultural.

The cultural difference we discuss here is not trivial, because much classroom assessment is informal, conducted through questioning or discussion. A typical teacher-student interaction in a U.S. classroom is one in which the teacher asks the questions, an individual student is called upon to respond, and, then, the teacher evaluates the response. While this may seem fair on the surface, it’s actually quite unfair to students who would respond better to nonconfrontational, group questioning. Those from cultures with different norms of communication may not be comfortable with this format. This problem has been documented by teachers working with American Indian students (Swisher

& Deyhle, 1992), with Alaska Native students (Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1993), and with Native Hawaiian students (Au & Kawakami, 1994).

Integrating Versus Separating the Cognitive and the Social

One of the contrasts between individualism and collectivism shown in Table 1 has to do with how the physical world is regarded. In collectivistic cultures, objects and other elements of the physical world are valued for the role they play in human relationships. For instance, a toy is an opportunity for sharing — for interacting with another person. When children learn about the physical world around them, it is generally in the context of a human relationship — in activity with a parent or other family member. They may never be asked by a parent to talk about objects or aspects of the physical world (like weather phenomena or plants or animals) independent of the social context in which they experienced them. If such children go to school in the United States, they are likely to encounter the alien expectation that they discuss and think about objects out of context — stripping the social meaning from their experiences and knowledge. Ideas, themselves, are often treated like objects to be manipulated out of context. For a person with collectivistic values, such a decontextualized approach to knowledge and learning may well seem oddly disconnected from real life. He or she will naturally tend to relate past knowledge in terms of social (particularly family) experiences and approach new learning in terms of its possible social meaning.

VIGNETTE: THE FIELD TRIP

An example of how children from a collectivistic culture may tend to integrate the social and the cognitive/ academic is illustrated in the following vignette from the classroom of an elementary teacher who has participated in the Bridging Cultures Project. That research-and-development project, involving seven Southern California teachers, investigates how knowledge of students' cultures can lead to better instruction and home-school relationships (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 1999).

Ms. Altchech's fourth-grade class is anticipating a field trip to the Ballona Wetlands Park near their Los Angeles school. In preparation, a wildlife docent from the park

has come to their classroom for a second time. When, during his first visit, the docent asked the students what they know about various animals they were likely to see on the trip, they routinely answered with stories about family-related animal experiences. On the second visit, the docent lets a couple more of these stories go by and then announces, "No more stories." Ms. Altchech knows that what the docent wants is a "scientific discussion," with no "extraneous" commentary. But her students are largely from immigrant Latino families, and their cultures do not always stress the separation of content knowledge from social experience. So she isn't surprised when the docent's next question is met with silence.

Later, after the docent has left, she invites her students to tell their stories. To help her students bridge between those stories and the science that will be helpful for their upcoming field trip, she models a way for them to think analytically about their stories, to extract science information from their personal experiences with birds and other animals. She constructs a T-chart on the board, with elements from the students' stories on the left. Then, she asks her students to help her identify the "scientific information" in their stories. For example, she uses a student's comment that "the hummingbird's wings moved so fast" to draw out information about the bird's metabolism and feeding habits. The result is that students are participating and the science lesson is being taught.

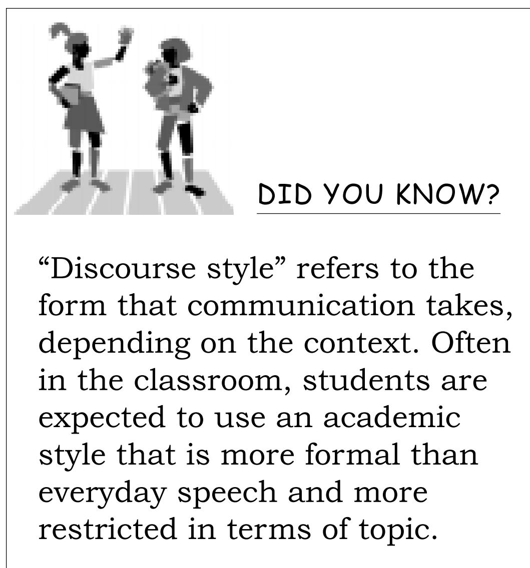
The following graphic organizer is adapted from the discussions in Ms. Altchech's classroom.

Table 2: T Chart Example

Story	Animal	Description	Habitat(s)
"I saw a hummingbird in my grandma's yard. The hummingbird's wings moved so fast…"	Ruby-throated hummingbird	Tiny (about 3 1/2 inches long); iridescent plumage and red throat; long, slender beak; wings beat rapidly; bird can hover in the air.	Marshlands and woodlands, North America
"I saw a dark blue bird when I was at the park with my brother…"	Stellar's Jay	About 8 inches long; blackish brown and dusky blue plumage.	Woodlands, North America

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Ms. Altchech's instructional strategy helps bridge the discourse style used by her immigrant Latino students and the discourse style required in most classrooms. With this strategy, she capitalizes on one of the children's strong cultural values: the value of family. This is evident in the fact that most students relate stories that involve trips or other family activities. So important is this cultural value to their students that, according to all seven Bridging Cultures teachers, any discussion, question, or other learning activity having to do with family engages students more than just about anything else.



DID YOU KNOW?

"Discourse style" refers to the form that communication takes, depending on the context. Often in the classroom, students are expected to use an academic style that is more formal than everyday speech and more restricted in terms of topic.

Ms. Altchech's approach can serve the needs of both instruction and assessment, assuming that she makes clear in her own mind what she is assessing and her criteria for what counts as "good" performance. In this,

it's typical of the ongoing informal assessment in which teachers engage as they teach (blurring the lines between instruction and assessment). She is most likely making mental notes of which students can contribute information for the chart; at the same time, because she knows that not all students are comfortable speaking out in a group, she will provide additional opportunities to assess their knowledge.

This approach could easily be translated to a formal assessment strategy. She could ask students to write a story themselves and then use a graphic organizer (like a matrix or simple chart) to record salient pieces of information. She could simply ask students to think about a time when they had experienced something and then organize certain concepts in a graphic organizer. By framing the question in this way (prompting students to connect to personal experience) rather than just going directly to a request for content knowledge, she is using a more culturally friendly strategy. By the way, graphic organizers can also be useful in helping English language learners, whose literacy skills are still developing, to express what they know.

The strategy used by Ms. Altchech is not particularly complex, but it requires some understanding of students' communication styles, as well as knowledge of strategies for bridging between different styles. For students whose home culture does not separate the cognitive from the social, it's not a matter of being *unable* to learn the rules of standard academic discourse; it's simply that they have learned a different discourse style, one that is valuable in its own right.

The Bits-and-Pieces Problem

A related conflict has to do with what teacher/researcher Vicky Dull has called "the bits-and-pieces problem" (Nelson-Barber & Dull, 1998). In school, students are often asked to talk or write about what they have learned in discrete content areas, such as math, science, and social studies. More rare is an integrated, cross-subject approach to content, with students asked about the big picture. Moreover, students are most often asked to respond with short, disconnected answers to narrow questions that are not related to each other in any apparent way. This arbitrary breakdown of continuous life experience and knowledge into discrete content areas and small doses is an alien concept to many. Such an instructional and assessment style is not harmonious with the ways of life in many traditional communities, including, for example, the Yup'ik of Alaska.

Dull uses berry picking to illustrate why this "bits-and-pieces" approach would seem so foreign to her students and to many others: "We go out in the fall and pick berries until the freezer is full or until it snows. If we picked berries the way teaching is done, there would not be enough to last a month — pick a cup here, pick a cup there. The same with hunting, fishing or any other task. In real life, we start a task and complete it rather than doing it in bits and pieces" (Nelson-Barber & Dull, 1998).

THINGS TO TRY

Write the vision or mission statement for your school. The following examples are two very different missions with different implications for students.

School 1. Our students will become independent, lifelong learners, creative problem solvers, self-confident risk takers, able to collaborate with others, as well as be capable in multiple dimensions.

School 2. We envision a deep and abiding respect for their culture, which leads them to care for one another and seek success for the family. We wish to nurture a deep sense of responsibility for the society in which they live — a commitment to caring for the environment; placing a priority on preserving and protecting it.… We wish this so our children, and our children's children, will have the capacity to cherish the past while being prepared for the future.

Your School Vision

What cultural values are implicit in your statement?

Are there words or phrases that might be misunderstood by people from different cultures? How could they be clarified or changed? Do they reflect not

just misunderstanding but an underlying disagreement over values? If so, how could common values that everyone can endorse be identified?

One option for checking common meaning is to invite a colleague from a different cultural background to review your changes for clarity and appropriateness. Do you share the same view of the meaning of the school vision? Bear in mind, however, that anyone who has been through many years of formal education in the United States (no matter what culture originally) has probably acquired mainstream values. A better exercise would be to ask a parent from a different cultural background to discuss it with you. A short exercise like this also points to the need to include people from different backgrounds at the beginning of the process of crafting mission statements for a school or district, not after the fact. Of course, *how* they are included can make a lot of difference in whether their voices will be heard.

Gender as a Source of Bias in Assessment

Although rarely raised in the same conversation as language, ethnicity, or, even, the broader issue of culture, gender should also be included in our thinking about diversity. As noted earlier, gender-specific expectations can vary greatly from one culture to another. When those held by a teacher are at odds with those of a student, it can impede learning. Thus, for teachers, it's important to keep in mind that their own gender-related expectations about students may not coincide with how students are expected to behave in their home cultures.

Even within the same culture, gender-related expectations can vary greatly, and they are often so deeply ingrained as to be imperceptible to those who have them. In some U.S. classrooms, for example, teachers tend to give more attention and reinforcement to boys than girls (AAUW, 1992). According to recent research, teachers are often unaware of this phenomenon until and unless they systematically monitor and assess their own practices (Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

Further complicating the gender issue is previous research noting differences in how girls and boys learn or perform, specifically for mathematical abilities, verbal abilities, and spatial abilities (Jacklin, 1989). These differences have declined and nearly disappeared in recent years. Although researchers have failed to identify a precise reason for this change, a host of factors other than true cognitive differences are most likely responsible. Consider again, for example, the fact that many teachers unconsciously tend to give more attention and reinforcement to boys than to girls.

On the other hand, boys are subject to teacher biases against certain kinds of behaviors (as are girls, when they behave like boys). Disproportionate numbers of boys get referred for special education on the basis of their activity level or what is perceived as aggression. This has resulted in a great over-representation of African American boys, in particular, in classes for emotionally disturbed students. Here is a case where culture and gender intersect. In African American culture generally, a higher activity level among boys is tolerated or even encouraged than within the dominant European American culture. So, when European American teachers and teachers socialized to European-American norms observe such an activity level, they may well interpret it with reference to their own values and determine that it is deviant. While this is not strictly an issue of assessment, it has to do with teachers' evaluations of students and the educational and life consequences that flow from these evaluations. Not incidentally, students' grades sometimes

suffer when teachers use behavior or comportment as one component of a grade. Most assessment specialists agree that behavior should be graded separately and that academic grades should reflect academic performance alone (e.g., Wiggins, 1998).

Like students from collectivistic cultures in general, girls tend to do better in instructional environments that promote cooperation and collaboration. Research suggests one reason there are fewer women in careers based on mathematics and science is that the "cultures" of such careers are so "masculine" (Eisenhart, Finkel, & Marion, 1996). Mainstream American culture has created stereotypical understandings of the roles of men and women. Masculinity has come to symbolize the orientation to pursue power and achievement over the empathic aspects of life, while femininity has come to symbolize the pursuit of quality of life over power and achievement (Garcia, 1998). Features of these cultures are undoubtedly already present in the high school and college courses that girls take. In addition, girls tend to do less well than boys (FairTest) on many high-stakes examinations (e.g., PSAT, SAT, ACT).

THINGS TO TRY

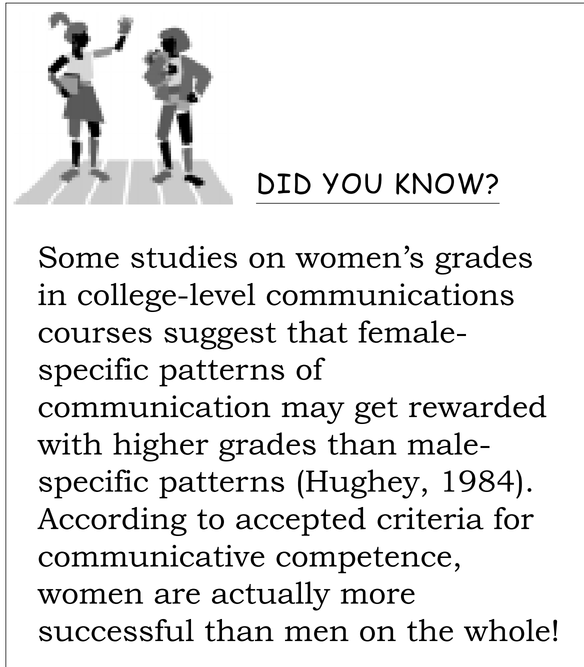
- Consider how you pair and group your students for most lessons and assessment opportunities.
- Plan some times for group work because girls often thrive in situations where they can work collaboratively.
- Also, plan times when girls can work in groups with other girls. This empowers girls to solve problems on their own and prevents situations where boys take over because they assume they have greater experience.
- List some other ways you can use class grouping to improve participation for all students.

Ideas to improve participation:

How could you determine whether a particular strategy has been successful for various students?

Motivational Barriers to School Success

Sometimes important impediments to school success go unrecognized in students. Theorists have suggested that because of different social histories, some students may find themselves in conflict with the mainstream agenda in the schools. For example, students whose cultures have been denigrated or whose ancestors were forcibly drawn into American citizenship (such as American Indians or African Americans) may experience extreme personal conflict over developing the language and academic habits of people they consciously or unconsciously think of as their "oppressors." Such feelings can interfere dramatically with motivation and, hence, performance. They may not trust that the "system" will do right by them (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Such students may, for example, stay out on "test day," because they believe that tests can only harm them. In a large high school in an urban district in California, administrators and teachers were troubled when more than half of their students didn't show up for state-mandated testing. Students explained that they could see nothing to gain and much to lose by participating. They believed that the tests weren't fair, that they would likely do poorly, and that the resulting scores would only be used to punish them and their school in some way.



Some studies on women's grades in college-level communications courses suggest that female-specific patterns of communication may get rewarded with higher grades than male-specific patterns (Hughey, 1984). According to accepted criteria for communicative competence, women are actually more successful than men on the whole!

Just as students must trust that the education system has their interests at heart, they must also trust in themselves. They must believe they have the ability to learn, be confident that their efforts can lead to success. Teachers must help students see initial failures as opportunities to learn and help them focus their efforts on attainable goals. We are not suggesting that "failure" be avoided or ignored. That view, notes motivation researcher Martin Covington (1998), "assumes that failure per se causes loss of esteem and self-respect. Quite the contrary, failure can act as a positive force so long as it is properly interpreted by the learner." He suggests that "rather than focusing on failure as the culprit, educators should arrange learning so that falling short of one's goals, which inevitably happens to everyone, will be interpreted in ways that promote the will to persist."

Covington's studies of student motivation confirm that students' beliefs about the causes of their success or failure deeply affect their future attainment. Students who attribute their successes to luck and their failures to lack of ability — forces outside their control — are often actually motivated to withdraw in order to avoid failure. On the other hand, students who see successes and failures as a natural part of the process of moving toward valued goals that they believe themselves capable of attaining are often motivated to greater effort. Once students understand the source of success or failure — that it is not just a matter of luck or, even, ability — they often begin to believe that they can control their own achievement. Teachers can take an important role in helping students both understand the importance of effort and the need to weather occasional failures.

Covington's research is a reminder that how students view assessment processes and results is at least partly under control of their teachers. Teachers' ability to recognize and build on student strengths in both instruction and assessment encourages students to see themselves as competent and capable of navigating the ups and downs on the journey to academic success. Offering students varied assessment tasks, as well as choices in the way they respond, is consistent with the characteristics of good assessment, and it allows students to draw on their strengths.

Related to motivation and effort is *interest*. Anastasi (1990) has written about how motivation, interest, and effort contribute to students' development of aptitudes and proficiency in particular areas. As a student (or anyone) chooses certain activities over others, particular skills get enhanced (to the exclusion of others). This seems to lead students to seek additional experiences that draw on these developing skills. It becomes the schools' job to identify the aptitudes or proficiencies that students have, build on those, and encourage the student to move into new arenas — to develop new aptitudes.

VIGNETTE: JOSEPH'S STORY

The following vignette shows how motivation can impact assessment.

Joseph is the most challenging student in the eighth grade. His sullen attitude and lack of motivation frustrate each of his teachers. He goes through each day

with his head down and his hands deep in his pockets, defying anyone who tries to reach him. He had moved to the small mid-western farming town midway through the previous year and clearly seemed to have a hard time fitting in. Other kids were scared of him, and he did not seem to have made any friends. His teachers guessed from his skin color that he was Hispanic or Native American, but they did not know if he was still learning English and had not been able to obtain much information from his family.

Assessment after assessment has shown Joseph to be at the lowest percentiles in both reading and math. He scored at a first-grade reading level on the state reading test, and his teachers wonder if he can read anything at all. They are considering a referral to special education.

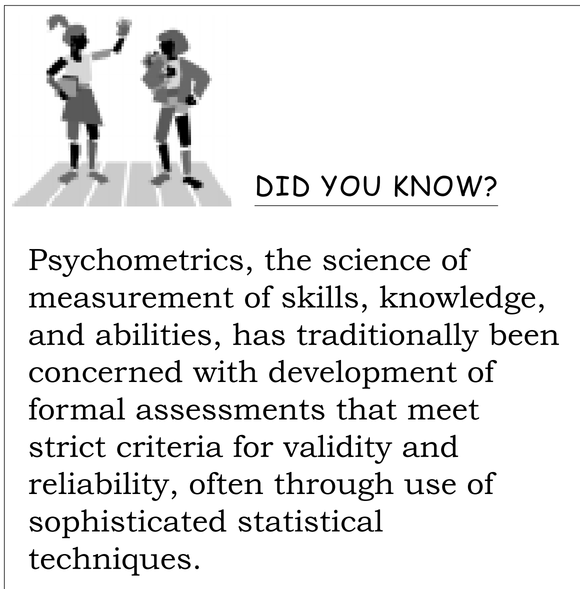
Finally, Ms. Watson, his language arts teacher, calls his old school in Oklahoma. When she speaks with Joseph's guidance counselor there, he has nothing but glowing remarks and claims that Joseph had been performing above average in all his subjects. He is very surprised to hear about Joseph's low grades and discipline problems, and he asks to speak to him. After Ms. Watson has put Joseph on the phone and starts to walk out of the room, she overhears him say, "Why should I do any work? The white man controls everything in this town, and I'll never have a future here. What's the point?"

THINGS TO CONSIDER

In this example, Joseph's motivation to learn is getting in the way of his performance. Even though he may be very capable, he has simply decided not to perform, which means that his assessment results are completely invalid. They do not show accurate information about his abilities. Joseph doesn't believe that his effort will be rewarded, and while he may have a basis for his beliefs, this attitude will not be productive for him.

A Sociocultural Approach to Assessment

As was said at the outset, this publication espouses a sociocultural approach to assessment — one that acknowledges the influence on teaching, learning, and assessing of culture, language, gender, and other social factors and aspects of student identity. A traditional psychometric assessment approach seeks to standardize conditions of administration and scoring in order to insure reliability, that is, the likelihood that equivalent assessments given to the same student will result in the same or similar performance and that, broadly speaking, scorers will score the same assessments similarly. Reliability is especially important when trying to compare students' performances. But validity — the assurance that the results of an assessment will accurately reflect students' learning — is as important as reliability. In fact, there is a strong tension between standardizing assessments so that they will be reliable and making them culturally valid by accounting for context. So, at times, the goals of a psychometric approach and the goals of a sociocultural approach to assessment seem to pull in different directions.



DID YOU KNOW?

Psychometrics, the science of measurement of skills, knowledge, and abilities, has traditionally been concerned with development of formal assessments that meet strict criteria for validity and reliability, often through use of sophisticated statistical techniques.

By context, we mean not only the classroom environment and the students' in-school experiences, but also sociocultural factors that influence learning and performance, such as students' backgrounds, home experiences, languages and dialects, and gender. It's precisely these things that a sociocultural approach to assessment takes into consideration. We don't propose that teachers ignore traditional psychometric methods. Rather, we encourage teachers and other assessment developers to consider sociocultural factors when designing or modifying assessments, when identifying an array of assessments to use with their students, and when evaluating students' performance on any assessment.

Table 3: Approaches to Testing

Traditional Psychometric Approach	Sociocultural Approach
• Emphasizes individual psychological processes (implication is that learning is an individual psychological event/ process)	• Emphasizes social aspects of learning — community, home, school (recognizing that an individual's ways of learning and demonstrating what has been learned are influenced by how he/she has been socialized)
• Controls for context effects by using items based on content most students are likely to know	• Contextualizes assessments (takes into consideration background differences)
• Strives for objectivity/reliability (as well as validity)	• Strives for validity, authenticity
• Often relies on decontextualized (sometimes unrelated) questions/ prompts/items	• Either embeds assessment in instruction or relies on an integrated set of questions that deal with a single topic
• Standardized administration to avoid influence of external factors on performance	• Administration varied to accommodate student differences
• Student performance understood without necessary reference to external factors (unless conditions of administration have been corrupted)	• Student performance evaluated/ understood in light of sociocultural information about the student, the school, the course of study
• Bias dealt with statistically, by adjusting scores to reflect factors that interfere with validity	• Bias dealt with in advance by evaluating appropriateness of tasks or items for given students; also may be dealt with while scoring student performances by score annotation; interpretation and use of assessment outcomes may be modified on the basis of understanding the student's background

Issues in Large-Scale Assessment

Large-scale standardized assessment is assessment conducted by states (and sometimes by national entities) to get a sense of how students are doing in comparison with peers across the state or nation. These assessments are mandated, so a teacher cannot simply opt her students out of participation in them (although there are procedures that parents can invoke to pull their children out).

It is not practical for developers of large-scale assessments to take into account every student's or even every district's context. That would mean an inordinate number of assessments and a lack of comparability across them (meaning that their scores could not be aggregated or compared). Nor can the administration and scoring of large-scale assessment be modified extensively without diminishing a test's reliability. But, because these assessments are not directly related to what students have learned and are not adapted to students' learning and communication styles, they may not provide accurate information about students.

Large-scale assessments are typically based on traditional psychometrics, whether they are norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. Even so-called "alternative" large-scale assessments, such as the statewide portfolios used in Vermont and elsewhere, adhere to psychometric principles and do not factor context into design, administration, or scoring. There *is* a trend now within the psychometric community to look for ways to make assessments fairer for English language learners and others. Most efforts to date have focused on accommodation, or the provision of a range of supports during administration (extended-time or untimed administration, re-phrased instructions, availability of dictionaries or calculators). But some psychometricians are seeking greater changes that would affect the whole way tests are developed (e.g., Solano-Flores, Trumbull, & Nelson-Barber, 2000).

There are many reasons to be concerned about the lack of validity of large-scale standardized tests for English language learners and students who are not from the mainstream. One is that decisions, such as college eligibility, are made at least in part on the basis of these tests. This is distressing, when research suggests that these tests predict that minority students will do worse than they actually do in college. For instance, the ACT (American College Testing) test is not a good predictor of college success for many minority students (Myers & Pyles, 1992; Rodriguez, 1996). They often do better than the tests predict. There are similar concerns for girls. Although men outscore women on the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test), which is intended to predict first-year college grades, women actually get better college grades (including when matched for courses at similar universities) (Neill, 1997a).

VIGNETTE: MARIA'S STORY

In junior high, Maria was an honors student. However, when it came to taking the CTBS (California Test of Basic Skills), Maria wasn't very successful, and on the basis of this test, she was excluded from advanced classes in high school. Of greatest consequence, she felt, was the fact that she was tracked into lower-level mathematics classes rather than those that her peers with the same track record were entering — and that she had hoped to enter. Maria continued to get good grades, but her confidence was damaged by the school's judgment that she wasn't capable of succeeding in the more advanced math classes. Finally, she had the opportunity to take a math test on which she performed well, and she was then permitted to move into a better math class, where she also did well. But when it came to the SATs, Maria again had difficulty performing at a level high enough to qualify her for the schools she was interested in.

When Maria reached community college, she was required to take a series of placement tests. She scored poorly on the literacy test and was placed in a remedial class. This was a shock to her. She had done well in English in high school, loved literature and writing, and knew she could succeed in a regular freshman English class. Refusing to accept the test's assessment of her ability, she insisted on taking the regular English course. Maria's persistence paid off. To make a long story short, she eventually graduated with a Ph.D. from a prestigious California university and has a thriving research career.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

As you may have guessed, Maria's first language was not English. To this day, she considers English her second language and herself a learner of English. Despite her obviously

strong intellect and motivation to achieve, she believes her vocabulary is still not equivalent to that of a native speaker. When Maria was a student, her language status could be expected to have an effect on test performance, particularly a timed test normed on students unlike her. However, it is important that we not assume that language differences, such as Maria's, are necessarily a deficit. Maria is now a gifted writer who expresses herself well in both English and Spanish.

What if Maria's school had looked at other indicators of Maria's ability (e.g., her grades, her teachers' judgments)? Given her desire, what would have been lost by allowing her to try the advanced mathematics course? Finally, what might have happened to a student who didn't have Maria's perseverance and confidence to question what the test scores meant about her abilities?

In Maria's case, her own convictions led her to challenge other people's judgments about her capabilities. But there was little she could do to challenge her SAT scores. While clearly not predictive of her abilities, they nonetheless limited her choices for higher education.

Concerns for fairness in assessment should lead to careful examination of the effects of tests and other assessment practices on students, including potentially flawed predictions about their future success and foreclosure of opportunities they might otherwise be able to take great advantage of. Because test scores and grades can narrow students' subsequent opportunities, students should be given the benefit of the doubt in cases where clear decisions about their achievement or ability cannot be made.

While classroom teachers cannot always choose whether or how to administer certain tests, such as state-mandated assessments, they control how they evaluate the results, the weight they give to them, and how they talk about those results with students and their parents. In doing so, it's important to keep in mind that if the backgrounds of their students differ markedly from those of the hypothetical students in the minds of the test developers, their students' performance cannot be considered a valid index of ability or learning.

Classroom teachers who have been educated in a traditional psychometric paradigm often attempt to design assessments that follow patterns and principles they observe in large-scale, standardized assessment. They may create sets of unrelated questions, standardize

their administration, and develop scoring schemes to produce a "normal curve," as do developers of large-scale tests (especially norm-referenced tests). Although these practices are grounded in teachers' efforts to be fair and objective, they are neither necessary nor justifiable in classrooms of 25 or 30 students. Teachers actually have great control over the kind of assessments they use to inform day-to-day instructional decisions, to provide insight into student strengths, and to generate formative feedback for students during the learning process. It's here that a sociocultural approach to assessment is always most appropriate. In the coming chapters, we'll talk more specifically about how to choose, develop, or adapt assessments that accommodate the cultural diversity in today's classrooms.

Summary

Decisions about how to address equity challenges in assessment are easier to make in the abstract. Real-world situations are usually more complex than lists of principles and guidelines would suggest, and teachers often have to make on-the-spot interpretations of student behaviors.

This section provided an overview of the research in the areas of cultural diversity, as they relate to assessment. Some of the most important concerns for ensuring equitable assessment for all students include an indepth understanding of the difference between individualist and collectivist cultures, the unique issues surrounding gender, motivation, and what it means to have a sociocultural approach to assessment. As has been stated, a sociocultural approach to assessment offers the best possibility for ensuring valid assessment outcomes. In the next section, the discussion of the key issues and findings continues, this time with a focus on linguistic diversity, recognizing that culture and language are intertwined, and any division of the two is artificial.