Just Schools
Pursuing Equality in
Societies of Difference

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IDENTITY MATTERS: ETHNICITY, RACE, AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

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A recent poll of Latinos, Asians, and African Americans in California finds that more than 80 percent of the parents of each ethnic group have the very highest educational aspirations for their children (New American Media 2006). These parents expect their children to complete college, and many expect them to complete both college and graduate school. In New York, nearly every student surveyed in an in-depth ethnographic study of African American and Latino students from low-income families agreed that "getting a good education is a practical road to success for a young (Black/Hispanic) person like me" (Carter 2005).

Despite a widely shared belief in the transforming effects of education and clear expectations of success, Latino American, African American, and American Indian students are dropping out of high school in crisis proportions. Nationwide, only half of minority students graduate from high school, let alone begin college (Orfield 2004). The hope of enabling all students to aspire to a college education and of providing them with an equal opportunity to fulfill their aspirations is colliding with the reality of schools in which race and ethnicity have become barriers to success. Many students experience their schools as unwelcoming and alienating spaces (Landsman and Lewis 2006; Olsen 1997). As expressed by one Filipina student, "So for us, school is just, you come to classes and you just sit there. And if you sit there long enough they give you a diploma. After a while you figure it out—you don't get anything and you don't give anything. The only ones who don't get it are the ESL kids. People tell us, we should be more like them, we should try hard, and we should study as hard as they do. I get so mad! They are so blind! They still believe. But sooner or later, they'll get it, too. We just don't matter" (Olsen 1997, 60).

That so many students are turned off and turning away from school is deeply troubling. The promise of equal opportunity at the heart of the American Dream now requires at least a high school diploma (Edley 2002; Guinier 2000). Why so many students do not complete high school or meet only minimal standards is

the center of persistent, heated debate: some observers fault teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond 2004) and the level of school funding (Oakes et al. 2000); others emphasize families, social class, insufficient cultural capital, or the students themselves (Lareau 2003; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 2003).

The Significance of Identity

One factor consistently linked to educational success across several decades of research in education and the social sciences is *identity*. The aspiration to stay in school and succeed in school requires developing a specific identity—in particular, an understanding of oneself as a student, learner, or achiever (Downey, Eccles, and Chatman 2005; Guay, Marsh, and Boivin 2003; Marsh 1990; Marsh et al. 2005; Steele 1997; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002; Wenger 1998; Wortham 2004; Zirkel 2007).

An identity as a student is critical to learning and achievement because it functions as an organizing and interpretive framework with a wide-ranging set of influences on a student's behavior at school. A student identity gives self-relevant meaning and value to one's actions in school, fosters motivation and persistence toward achievement goals, protects against the distractions posed by nonacademic activities, and buffers threats to one's view of the self as a capable, effective learner or achiever (Bandura 1997; Deci and Ryan 1985; Markus and Nurius 1986; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002; Valentine, DuBois, and Cooper 2004; Eccles and Wigfield 2002). Identity as a student is not a sufficient condition for achievement; it does not take the place of skill development, but it *is* a necessary condition for learning and skill development.

An identity as a student is not an inevitable or a natural consequence of going to school. This identity is more likely to develop, however, when students feel that they are welcomed, included, and belong (Foley and Moss 2000; Steele 1999; Walton and Cohen 2007). Despite the strong empirical foundation for the importance of identity in understanding behavior, identity is often a ready whipping boy in popular discourse. It is diminished as a middle class luxury or disdained as fostering divisive "identity politics" (Michaels 2007). In contrast, this chapter suggests that as communities learn to create public schools where more students feel they belong and can identify as students, equality of educational opportunity and ethnic and racial difference can coexist.

Identity cannot be classified as a structural factor like teacher preparation or class size, or as an individual factor like student effort or responsibility. Instead, an identity as a student is a set of actions that identifying as a student *and* on being identified as a student by others. A student identity then is the result of an ongoing blend of one's own thoughts and feelings about being a student in a particular school setting in combination with one's perceptions of the reactions of others in the school setting. It is not a fixed or stable entity and is very responsive to the social content.

Some students have the opportunity to develop an image of themselves as students in the context of others who share this image and who foster this student identity for them within the school. In this fortunate circumstance, many students will have the opportunity to develop an identity as a learner. Other students, however, often because of their ethnicity or race, will find the regard of others—a critical element of identity—to be missing, limiting, or devaluing, and they will not have the same opportunity to craft an effective identity as a learner. In this circumstance, many will fail to develop an identity as a student.

How to reconcile difference and equality at school is increasingly the concern of scholarship in education, social sciences, and the humanities. These studies demonstrate the importance of identity to school achievement, as well as why ethnicity and race are often critical to the process of developing a student identity. If students are to have an equal opportunity to identify with school, two types of differences need to be taken into account: *culturally derived differences*—often called cultural or ethnic differences—and *imposed status differences*—often called racial differences.

Culturally derived differences among students are differences in frameworks of meaning, value, and ways of living that derive through association with a particular ethnic group and are claimed and appreciated by those associated with that group. A second category of difference among students, imposed status differences, are differences in societal worth that derive from the evaluations and actions of those outside the group and are not claimed by those associated with the group. Both types of difference organize school life and academic outcomes; for many students, they are completely interwoven. Distinguishing culturally derived differences from imposed status differences matters because they vary in their sources and in their consequences, and they require different types of accommodations to realize the goal of providing equal opportunity for students to develop an identity as a learner.

The American Dream and the Social Constitution of Identity

Central to the American Dream is a set of ideas: that how things are today is not the way they have to be tomorrow, that where you come from does not matter, and that anyone willing to work hard and play by the rules can have a fair chance at a successful and happy life. The model of the person embedded in this ideology is that of an independent individual who is free from the constraints of history, other people, and social systems. This model derives from Enlightenment philosophy, is reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, and underpins the American legal and political systems (Hochschild 1995; Spindler and Spindler 1990). The person-as-inde-

pendent model, which is given life in a broad and influential net of social customs and institutions, is in direct tension, however, with the fact that people are not just autonomous, separate, biological entities; they are also relational, interdependent beings (Markus, Kitayama, and Heiman 1997). The liberal individualism that abstracts and separates the individual from society makes sense of the practices of a capitalist society (Augoustinos 1998; Hall 2005; Plaut and Markus 2005), but it can also obscure the ways in which individuality is a product of history, and requires the engagement of the context-specific ideas and practices of others. In fact, it is not possible to be a neutral, ahistorical, or asocial individual, or to achieve an identity of any type, without the contribution of others.

People everywhere live in social networks, groups, and communities. Their thoughts, feelings, and actions are interdependent with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. A significant evolutionary advantage of humans is that they enter a world replete with the ideas and products of those who have gone before them; they do not have to build the world anew (Tomasello 2001). People form bonds with others, help others, depend on others, compare themselves to others, learn from others, teach others, and experience themselves and the world through the images, ideas, representations, and language of others (Asch 1952; Bruner 1990; Geertz 1973; Shweder 2003). As a consequence, virtually all behavior is dependent on and requires others. Others—their thoughts, feelings, practices and products—make up the self and a person's set of identities.

To say that other people constitute the self is not, however, to say that other people determine the self. People *are* indeed individuals; they are intentional agents who can, if they wish, resist and contest the views of others. Yet since individuals are also members of groups—participants in communities where they are known to themselves and to others through significant social categories—they will necessarily be influenced by how others regard the social groups with which they are associated. Individuals are women, Texans, Muslims, African Americans, Europeans, Democrats, lawyers, artists, Ford factory workers, baby boomers, Christian Evangelists, and "blue state" dwellers. Such social identities are highly mutable and shuffled by context and circumstance. Though malleable and constantly changing in terms of their meanings and personal significance, these identities are not just labels. In any given circumstance, being seen by others in terms of these social categorizations can have real consequences for the individual (Thomas 1923).

Identities: You Can't Be a Self by Yourself

Identity in a given situation depends on lacing together how a person understands oneself with one's understandings of the reactions of others in that situation. Both of these sets of understandings—those of self and those of others (im-

mediate others, as well as implied or imagined others)—depend on the situation and are highly malleable (Markus, Steele, and Steele 2002; Steele et al. 2007).

As an example, imagine a student, Christina Lopez, a twelve-year-old in a social studies class. She is a Latina who now speaks fluent English. With respect to self-conceptions, Christina may like the class, like the teacher (at least compared to her teacher from last year), feel that she understands the day's lesson, and hope to become friends with the girl sitting next to her. She may also notice that on the teacher's desk is a book by someone who also has a Spanish-sounding name. With respect to others' conceptions, Christina may think the teacher likes her and notices she is paying attention, and that the girl in the next seat wants to be her friend. Christina at this moment is likely to be inclined toward school and may claim an identity as a student.

Alternatively, imagine Christina in the same classroom with a similar set of self-conceptions but with different ideas about the conceptions of others. Christina may find that the teacher does not notice her or call on her, even though she feels she has been paying careful attention, and the teacher does not talk to her before the class as she did some of the other girls. Christina may also perceive that the student in the next seat is becoming friends with another girl and does not seem interested in her. She may notice that there is a display on the board that shows people using maps in their everyday lives and that none of those people look like she does. Christina at this moment is likely to be less inclined toward school, and her identity at that moment (her working or active identity) may not include a sense of herself as a student.

Christina's active identity in the social studies class emerges as she selects and then weaves together perceptions of herself with her perceptions of others' views of her. Many factors influence the resulting identity pattern, including the person's own current and past perceptions of self and others. Yet the perceptions of others' views—those of family, friends, teachers, and society as a whole—are a major source of information about the self and are always part of an individual's identity. In another class period, Christina is likely to be weaving together a somewhat different set of self and other conceptions. Assuming Christina wants to belong to school, as most students do at least initially, whether Christina develops a durable identity as a student will depend on whether, across the many situations of school, she feels recognized and understood, and whether she experiences the regard of others as valuing and expanding of her possibilities. If Christina often feels unseen, feels like she does not belong, or experiences the regard of others as devaluing and limiting of her possibilities in this class and in others, she may begin to search for explanations and begin to worry that her ethnicity or race—her difference from the teacher or the other students—is the problem (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003). Studies of student experience in diverse classrooms find that such conceptions are possible even as well-intentioned teachers and school administrators believe they treat all their students alike

(Landsman and Lewis 2006; Lewis 2003). Whether or not ethnicity becomes a barrier to developing a student identity will depend on which conceptions Christina emphasizes, and on how she interprets and combines them. It will also depend on the views, expectations, and reactions of other students and teachers in the school with respect to race and ethnicity.

Race and Ethnicity: Why They Matter for Student Identities

In the United States, everyday life continues to be shaped by race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity predict health and wealth, as well as the quality of schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and medical care (Krysan and Lewis 2005; Massey and Denton 1992; Oliver and Shapiro 1997). Despite the hope expressed in the American Dream that who you are should not matter for success, in American schools—in ways that are increasingly well-researched and understood—who you are, or more particularly, who you aren't, does matter (Blau 2003; Kendall 1983; Lewis 2003; Moses 2002). Given the powerful association between race-ethnicity and success that is evident in so many domains of American life, how people see themselves and how others see them—that is, their identities—will include reference to the racial and ethnic groups with which they are associated. The recognition and the status accorded to these categorizations will thus influence individual identities in many significant settings of American life. This will be the case even if the individuals themselves choose not to claim particular racial or ethnic identities and wish to be understood as separate from them.

With increasing racial and ethnic diversity comes the awareness that schools are not, as typically assumed and taken for granted, neutral sites where any student has a chance to turn aspiration into successful reality. Instead, most schools have been designed, and are maintained, according to pervasive, historically derived European American normative understandings of what is good, valuable, and expected. These schools have not been explicitly designed to exclude or to foster inequality. Moreover, they are staffed by many who endeavor to provide the best education possible for all students. Yet they have evolved to promote particular ways of being in the world, and often reinforce a social organization that now systematically advantages the academic outcomes of some racial and ethnic groups over others.

While people associated with minority ethnic and racial groups are typically keenly aware of how race and ethnicity can influence their experiences with others and their own perspectives (McIntosh 1990; Tuan 1998; Waters 1992), those associated with the majority ethnic or racial groups often imagine that they do not have a racial identity. Their mainstream perspectives and

practices are experienced as normal, neutral, or human, and are not cast as "white" or as "European American" ways. They assume they are "nonethnic," or perhaps "postethnic," and that the classroom establishes a common ground. Yet, some students must travel much further than others, often without signposts, to reach this "common ground."

The Blindness of Color-Blindness

Ensuring that students feel they belong in school and ensuring that race and ethnicity are resources rather than barriers or sources of devaluation requires replacing the dominant colorblindness framework for thinking about difference. The independent model of the self, on which the concept of color-blindness is based, holds that where students come from, who their parents are, and their particular social affiliations and identifications are unimportant to the student or irrelevant to classroom activity. The color-blind model is widely endorsed in American society and is fostered and incorporated by the legal system (Plaut 2002).

Converging research programs confirm that a color-blind ethos, a focus on the individual "free" from the constraints of the social world, is the mainstream American view (Blau 2003; Krysan and Lewis 2005; Moses 2002; Plaut and Markus 2005; Steele et al. 2007). Concerned teachers underscore their beliefs in equality and describe their efforts to see beyond race and ethnicity (Markus, Steele, and Steele 2002). Laurie Olsen, in an in-depth, ethnographic study of one diverse high school on the West Coast where discussions of multiculturalism are a mainstay, notes that, though teachers are proud of the way their school reflects the demographics of the real world, they claim that these differences are superficial. "We have a lot of different kinds, but I don't see color. None of us really do, we just see all our students as the same. That's what is so wonderful about [this school]" (1997, 180). Susan Dodd and Miles Irving suggest that in illuminating the blindness of color-blindness, it is useful to ask teachers who express this sentiment the question, "Who do you treat these students the same as?" (2006).

As more educators turn away from an ethos of color-blindness and move toward the recognition and accommodation of difference, the questions of how culturally derived and imposed status differences can influence the construction of a student identity becomes significant (Foley, Levinson, and Hurtig 2000-2001). Culturally derived differences can be thought of as *horizontal differences*, or differences in meaning, values, and practices that need not establish a hierarchy among groups. Imposed status differences can be thought of as *vertical* differences that determine a hierarchy among groups. Culturally derived differences require that schools learn from their students and become more diverse and flexible in their educational practices. Imposed

status differences require that schools resist and undo current practices and policies that rank and exclude.

Culturally Derived Differences

Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, Patricia Greenfield, and Elise Trumbull quote a teacher who said,

> I wanted to understand my students better so I started studying Mexican culture. Then I realized that the children in my class came from many distinct regions, each with different histories and traditions. I just knew that I would never know enough. I had to give up trying. (1999, 1)

American classrooms are brimming with cultural differences, and it is easy to sympathize with teachers who despair over learning how to be appropriately sensitive to differences among students. Differences classified as *culturally derived differences* refer to ways of being that people recognize and claim as their own. Acknowledging these types of differences and deciding if and how to recognize and include them within the classroom will depend first, on being explicit about which models of education are currently animating the classroom or school (Fryberg and Markus 2007), and second, on observing and listening to students (Levinson and Holland 1996).

A classic definition by A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn states that culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns of historically derived and selected ideas and their embodiment in institutions, practices, and artifacts (1952; summarized in Adams and Markus 2004). Culture, then, is not about groups of people—the Japanese, the Americans, the whites, the Latinos—and thus it is not groups themselves that should be studied. Rather, the focus should be on the implicit and explicit patterns of meanings, practices, and artifacts that are distributed throughout the contexts in which people participate. To participate in any cultural world, people must incorporate relevant cultural models, meanings, and practices into their psychological processes (Fiske et al. 1998; Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003; Holland and Quinn 1987; Resnick 1994; Shweder 1991).

A focus on implicit and explicit meanings and practices and how they shape behavior is the signature of a cultural analysis, and such an analysis can be applied to any social category. Ethnicity refers to distinctions based on cultural practices, such as shared language, heritage, national origin, religion, or ways of being and living (Omi and Winant 1994). These are common and time-honored ways in which groups of people categorize themselves. Ethnicity is often an important source of identity and behavior. However, many schools and classrooms are so diverse with respect to ethnic background that

it is difficult to know what differences to note and how to appreciate them in a fair and pedagogically useful way.

Models of Self

Among the most important cultural ideas and practices for understanding identity are cultural models of the self. Ethnic groups differ in region of origin, history and language, and also in the answers they give to the questions, "Who am I?", "Who are we?", and "What does it mean to be a student or an educated person?" (Fryberg and Markus 2007; Greenfield and Cocking 1994; Levinson 2002; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Nisbett 2003; Shweder 1991, 2003; Triandis 1995). Awareness of the divergence in models of self provides an initial key to understanding and responding to differences in ways of knowing and learning as well as to the differences in ideas and practices of performance, success, and achievement that can be observed in a diverse American classroom (Banks, chapter 8, this volume; Ladson-Billings 2006).

In North America and in Northern Europe, a model of the self as independent is very pervasively distributed. This model is widely (although not universally) individually endorsed, and it also underpins the workings of many practices and institutions in these contexts. As noted earlier, it is this foundational model that underlies the very notion of color-blindness and the idea that race and ethnicity are superficial and can be transcended. This model places the focus on the achievement and success of the individual, emphasizing the importance of becoming "independent" from the influence of others and from the contingencies of the social world. Thinking is separated from feeling, mind is separated from body, and individuals are separated from their social context. Knowledge and its pursuit—often assumed to be the goal and currency of school—is an individual product unconnected to the arrangements of the social world (Greenfield and Cocking 1994; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Shweder and Bourne 1984). Notably, however, because it is impossible to live as an asocial individual or to achieve an identity without the contribution of others, the experience of independence is necessarily socially afforded and should be understood as a particular type of interdependence.

The model of self as independent is the implicit model for most teachers in mainstream American contexts and the model that underpins most teaching practice, but it is not the only model of how to be a person and how to relate to other people and the world. Another model that is very widely distributed in contexts outside of North America and Northern Europe (as well as in some working class European American contexts) is a model of self as interdependent. When a model of self as interdependent organizes the social life, as it does in much of the world—Central and South America, Africa, and South and East Asia—people understand and experience themselves

less as separate individuals and more as elements or parts of a larger, encompassing social unit.

According to an interdependent model of self, individual behavior necessarily involves an explicit awareness of others and adjusting one's behavior to that of others. Rather than separation from others, it is fitting in, being part of, and contributing to one's family or other relevant groups that explains behavior. Achievement and success are not autonomous activities, but are instead relational activities that require awareness of the student's relations with the teacher and with other students. Knowledge and its pursuit come through others and depend on an appropriate arrangement of the social world, including the student's relationship with the teacher and other students (Greenfield and Cocking 1994; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Shweder and Bourne 1984; Triandis 1995).

Schools reflect the models that are prevalent in their contexts. American schools, for example, are grounded in the independent model; almost all activities are scaffolded by this normative framework. Yet these foundational ideas and normative practices of how to be are rarely made explicit. Doing so is difficult because these ideas and practices are like water to fish or the air that people breathe: they are invisible except to those who have experienced other models.

Ethnicity is one important source of these models of self. For students who are engaged in contexts where the interdependent model organizes behavior, and where people have been tuned to be aware of and adjust to others, crafting an identity as a student in a context that fosters the independent model of self may be a challenge. Some students may experience a mismatch or a discontinuity in many school situations (Ladson-Billings 1994; Nelson-Barber 1999). This discontinuity can be associated with misunderstanding, discomfort, or feelings of isolation and rejection, and subsequently with low achievement and a lack of success (Jordan 1985). In culturally diverse classrooms, providing equal opportunity is a challenge. Treating all students equally requires culturally responsive teaching and acknowledging identities other than the mainstream identities that are typically acknowledged and incorporated in educational practices (Banks, chapter 8, this volume; Fryberg and Markus 2007). Examples from various ethnic contexts illustrate the types of culturally derived differences in ideas and practices that can influence the development of an effective student identity.

Asian American Ethnic Contexts

The most thoroughly researched differences in models of self are those between European Americans and East Asian Americans. These studies of how cultural contexts shape academic performance and achievement are useful

because students of East Asian backgrounds often perform comparatively well, and, especially among America's minority students, East Asians are least at risk for underperformance and dropping out.

Chinese Americans are the largest group of Asian-origin immigrants in the United States, and they have settled in diverse sociocultural contexts (Zhou 2006). Within this diversity, students of Chinese background in the United States often share an appreciation of and a commitment to a Confucian tradition. This begins with explicit attention to interdependence, which includes cultivating the social order, knowing one's place in the social order, and a general orientation toward meeting the expectations of others and being sensitive to the demands of the social situation (Hwang 1999; Tsai 2005). Many Chinese-immigrant parents believe that they are sacrificing for a better future for their children; children should work hard, show filial piety, and achieve at the highest level possible (Zhou 2006). Achievement is not understood as the result of an individual aspiration or goal; instead, it is an obligation to the family. To be a complete person, one must be formally schooled (Stevenson and Lee 1996).

Ruth Chao, in a study of Chinese American and European American mothers' beliefs about what is important for raising children, found that Chinese American mothers stressed the cultivation of a good relationship with the child, education for the child, respect for others, the child's ability to get along with others, self-reliance, and maintenance of Chinese culture (1993). The European American mothers, in contrast, stressed nurturing and building the child's individual self, which includes dealing with emotions and developing self-esteem, confidence, and independence. They also emphasized the creation of an environment that the child will experience as fun or enjoyable.

Many American classroom practices are designed to foster this independent model of self. Beginning at the preschool level, European American teachers arrange their classes and lessons to allow the student to have a great deal of choice in their activities during the school day. Through choice, students can manifest their individuality, express themselves, and become active agents in control of their own actions. Yet for students who organize their actions with interdependent models of self, however, opportunities for individual choice and preference expression may be relatively less gratifying or motivating. In a study focusing on the role of choice in performance, seven- to nine-year-old Asian Americans and European Americans were given a choice of which category of anagram puzzles they wanted to solve (Iyengar and Lepper 1999). The researchers then counted how many puzzles they solved correctly. The puzzles were equally difficult in all categories and differed only in their labels. These participants were compared with a group of students who solved anagram puzzles that their mothers chose for them. As American educators would predict, European American students solved the

most anagrams correctly when they chose the puzzle category themselves. In contrast, the Asian American children solved the most anagrams correctly when they solved anagrams their mothers chose for them.

For European American students, who are socialized with ideas of individuality and autonomy, having another person pick which type of puzzle to solve is an imposition, an act that threatens their freedom and their individuality. In contrast, for Asian American students, who are likely to have been exposed to ideas of fulfilling parental expectations and to honoring the family, they understood that their mothers were trying to guide them and support them when their mothers chose their category of anagrams to solve. They apparently did not feel that their individuality or freedom had been undermined. Parental expectations are experienced less as a set of constraints to be overcome on the route to independence and more as scaffolding provided as needed support and direction.

Given the cultural importance accorded to relationships, as well as to meeting expectations and adjusting oneself to the situation, some Asian American students may be particularly comfortable in structured academic situations. They may be somewhat less at home with classroom practices that are unstructured or that draw attention to the individual. In particular, activities that require talking or expressing themselves while others are watching, or those in which they are the center of attention, may be less attractive to those Asian American students who are tuned to maintaining their interdependence with others. In American classrooms, allowing students to have a "voice" is very important. In the Socratic tradition that is fostered in most American classrooms, asking students questions and encouraging them to express their ideas is a powerful aid to thinking and reasoning, and talking is closely related to thinking (Tweed and Lehman 2002; Wierzbicka 1994). In Confucian traditions, learning is less about questioning and doubting; it is more about listening and acquiring knowledge from exemplary others. From the time of ancient Chinese civilization, there has been a prevalent belief in East Asian cultural contexts that talking impairs higher-level thinking.

Heejung Kim conducted a problem-solving study comparing European American and Asian American students for whom English was their first language (2002). She asked whether talking out loud while solving a problem enhances, impairs, or does not affect problem solving. Asian Americans were asked to think aloud as they worked on a standardized reasoning test, and their performance was measured as an indication of how talking affected their thinking. Thinking aloud greatly impaired the performance of the Asian Americans, while it did not hinder the performance of the European Americans. In a study observing students in the classroom, Jacqueline Duncan and Delroy Paulhus found that Asian Canadians were much less likely to speak out during class than European Canadians. Asian Canadians are also much more likely to describe themselves as shy and to report difficulties with tuto-

rials where students are required to question and challenge the tutor (1998). Critical thinking is an element of the learning process in East Asian cultural contexts, but Daniel Pratt and colleagues suggest that it comes at the end of a four-stage process in which the student learns to memorize, understand, apply, and *then* to question or modify (Pratt, Kelly, and Wong 1999). When culturally constituted difference in expectations and approaches to learning go unmarked and all classroom activities foster the independent model of self, some students will be at a disadvantage in developing a student identity. These students might achieve less than they would otherwise.

Latino American Contexts

The model of the person as interdependent with others and responsive to the social context is also pervasive in many Latino American contexts, although there is still relatively little empirical research comparing Latino American and European American students. Mexican Americans account for over 60 percent of people of Hispanic origin in the United States. In Mexican American contexts, as in Chinese American contexts, knowing one's place in the social hierarchy is often emphasized; respect, deference, and obedience to elders is expected (Valdez 1996). Among peers, cooperation, solidarity, and similarity are more likely to be emphasized than difference or uniqueness (Wortham, Murillo, and Hamann 2002). Well-educated children are those who show respect, moral values, and, very significantly, loyalty to the family (Villenas 2002). It is the family and not the individual that is the foundational reality, and helping the family and extended family is expected (Diaz-Guerrero and Szalay 1991; Stanton-Salazar 1997).

In a recent study, Mexican Americans were just as likely as European American students to describe themselves as independent, but they were decidedly more likely to describe themselves as interdependent and connected to family (Mesquita et al. 2006). They were also more likely to report that it is difficult to be happy if someone in their family is sad. The European American notion that growing up means becoming autonomous and separating from expectations and constraints of family is a peculiar idea among Mexican American students. Maintaining such interdependence in the many American schools that require and foster independence is an ongoing challenge and a source of cultural conflict for many Mexican American students, teachers, and parents (Denner and Guzman 2006).

In Latino American contexts, warm and agreeable relations—a type of social harmony—among people in the family and in the world of work is a particularly valued end in itself (Triandis et al. 1984). In fact, good relations are often understood as a *part* of school and work settings, and not as separate from them. In one study, Mexican American and European American students viewed video clips of a tutoring session (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, and Ybarra

2000). In one session, the tutor focused only on the task. In the second session, the tutor blended attention to the task with a focus on establishing a warm relationship with the student. The European American students were decidedly more likely than Mexican American students to evaluate the task-focused session as likely to be successful, and also more likely to believe that increasing the socioemotional focus of the tutoring session would render it less successful.

In ways that are only beginning to be understood, the interdependence that characterizes Asian American and Latino American contexts is also the framework of learning and knowing (Irvine and York 2001; Nisbett 2003). Teachers serving large Latino-immigrant populations report a strong preference for such relational learning among their students (Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Trumbull 1999). As an example of relational learning, Carrie Rothstein-Fisch and colleagues recount a visit to a wetlands park in which a docent asked a class of Latino students what they knew about hummingbirds. As the students enthusiastically began to tell stories about themselves and their families' experiences with the birds, the docent became irritated and said, "No more stories." He apparently expected the students to evaluate the hummingbird in terms of its properties (for example, quick, efficient, wing structure), and in so doing separate the bird from its social context and from their own experiences with the hummingbird (Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Trumbull 1999). Expectations like these are common in European American contexts. Students from Latino American contexts, who emphasize relationships and interdependence among people and among objects and their contexts, may initially underperform on analytical tasks that require abstraction and decontextualization. When students are not responsive to the commitments of the independent model of self, teachers and other students might regard them negatively, potentially interfering with the development of a positive identity as a student.

American Indian Contexts

Interdependence in conjunction with independence is also a defining element of many American Indian contexts (Fryberg and Markus 2003; Tharp 1988). As with Latino Americans, even though American Indian ways of life have been a staple of anthropological observations for more than seventy years, there is not yet a sufficient empirical base on which to make many generalizations about culturally derived ways of knowing and learning. American anthropologists used their observations of American Indians to make a powerful case that culture and ethnicity were important because they delineated different ways of life, some of which were strikingly different from mainstream European American ones.

In American Indian contexts, caring and trusting relationships between teachers and students may be particularly critical to academic success

(Deyhle and Swisher 1997). This may be especially true in American college settings where the expectation of the student is to leave home and strike out on his or her own (Bellah et al. 1985). As in Latino American contexts, the idea that adulthood requires independence is not common. Instead, becoming a responsible and competent person is typically achieved "in" the family or community context. As a result, students may expect to form a relational bond with their teachers as a prerequisite for feeling responsible and comfortable in the new context (Suina and Smolkin 1994), and social support is often a strong predictor of academic persistence (Gloria and Kurpius 2001). William Tierney found, for example, that American Indian students "get lonely, go home, and we won't hear from them for a year or two." However, students with university mentors were more likely to make decisions to persist in school (1992, 101).

African American Contexts

African American contexts reflect a synthesis and a coevolution of both American and African ideas and practices, in the same way that Asian American contexts reflect some synthesis of American and Asian ideas and practices. Although there is a growing literature on African American families and parenting practices (Burlew et al. 1992; Hudley, Haight, and Miller 2003), which reveals an emphasis in African American contexts on giving back to the community and a moral imperative to help others, there has been much less direct examination of models of self and their implications for education and academic performance. African American contexts emphasize independence and self-expression (Jones 1999), but they also emphasize unity, egalitarianism, cooperative effort, and collective responsibility (Nobles 1991; Oyserman, Gant, and Ager 1995). Signithia Fordham suggests, in fact, that self-actualization in African American contexts is often directly tied to validation through others as well as to expressing qualities and characteristics that enhance the status of the group (1993). This type of interdependence may be a legacy of African notions of personhood or a continuing legacy of involuntary immigration, slavery, discrimination, and segregated living.

James Jones theorizes that African American contexts also differ from European American contexts in their emphasis on language and narrative as ways to express and identify the self and to gain control and respect in environments that are constrained, hostile, or at best indifferent (1999). Improvisation, he suggests, is a prevalent feature of African American contexts in both sports and music. It signals a type of creativity that emphasizes expressiveness and invention and that occurs under time pressure. Other scholars (Majors and Billson 1992; Morgan, in press) describe the "cool pose" or a focus on "keeping it real" as additional culturally sanctioned ways of exerting control over value and meaning in contexts where one's group is under-

valued or not recognized. Such hypotheses are intriguing and deserve empirical investigation with respect to their consequences for developing an identity as a student and for academic performance.

Culturally Derived Differences Shape Students

This brief review of some culturally derived differences among students provides examples of the multiple ways that ethnicity can shape students' understanding of self and how the world works. One similarity across all four contexts is the awareness of the self as relatively interdependent with others. Most American classroom practices foster only the independent model of self, with an emphasis on individual autonomy, standing out, separation from family, uniqueness, control, choice, success and feeling good about the self. This model can disadvantage those students who arrive at school with a more interdependent sense of self and the holistic cognitive tendencies that often track this model (Tharp 1988; Kitayama, Duffy, and Uchida 2007). Students who do not respond to praise, who do not stand out, or who do not easily express themselves may often be ignored. In subtle and complex ways that must be further explored, many teaching practices and materials that rely on abstraction and require an analytic approach may not be particularly effective for all students.

A great deal more research and classroom experimentation is required to understand how the middle class European American practices that currently undergird most schools can change so that they learn from, recognize, and accommodate practices that reflect other traditions (Riedel, chapter 5, this volume; Lindkvist, chapter 6, this volume). Yet on one point the empirical picture is clear: ethnic-specific cultural ideas and practices mediate students' experience at school; they cannot be left at the door when the student enters the classroom. What happens at school—how students are regarded by others—will influence whether they develop positive identities as valued and respected students. When teachers, students, and parents do not see and appreciate systematic culturally derived differences in how students may think about themselves, others, and the world, patterns of behavior that depart from what is assumed to be normal are likely to be stigmatized and cast as a problem. Students can feel discouraged and unwelcome at school. Particularly for students who do not have parents with college degrees who can buffer the negative effects of classroom experiences, the way that the people react to them at school is likely to have a deciding impact on whether or not students feel inclined toward school and will claim an identity as a student.

Imposed Status Differences

A cartoon in the San Jose *Mercury News* depicts two American Indians with feathers and loincloths standing on shore at Plymouth Rock greeting two Pil-

grims with tall hats and broad collars as they disembark from the Mayflower. One American Indian politely inquires of the musket-bearing Pilgrims, "Oh, by the way, you don't happen to have your guest-worker cards with you by any chance?" (May 1, 2006).

The cartoon's imagined encounter between America's "original" inhabitants and America's "original" settlers takes immediate aim at an immigrant nation's anxiety over current immigration from Mexico. Yet it also succeeds in underscoring the fact that America's struggles with the recognition of difference and inclusion are long standing. The humor rests with rethinking the dominant American historical narrative and imagining a different arrangement of power and status among America's ethnic groups. The cartoon also highlights the fact that America's current ethnic and racial hierarchy is the result of a historically rooted process in which one group of people became the standard for what is good or normal, and systematically imposed this standard to define other groups of people not only as different but as inferior.

Group differences that are associated with race in America involve a particular type of social constitution—what Laurence Thomas called *downward social constitution* (1992). Differences among students that can be classified as *imposed status differences* are very different from *culturally derived differences*. They are differences that result from the evaluations and actions of those outside the group and are not claimed by those within the group. *Race*, similar to *culture*, indexes a pattern of ideas and practices used to represent and structure the social world (Omi and Winant 1994). However, the term *race* is used whenever distinctive group characteristics, whatever their assumed source, are used to establish a hierarchy and to accord one group a higher status and another group a lower status (Fredrickson 2001). The differences marked by the term *race* derive not from valued and claimed differences in being and doing in the world, like culturally derived differences. Instead, these differences are tied to historical experience in which difference is imposed on one group of people by another, and that group is defined as the lesser or low-caste group (Ogbu 1985). This inequality is then institutionalized in policy and practice, and the people associated with this group are persistently treated as different. They are labeled as different both through this treatment and their reactions to this treatment. Imposed status differences might be imagined as group differences arrayed vertically, with the group that marks the differences assigning themselves the top rank and other groups to lower ranks.

When a group is racialized, the struggle is not for recognition or appreciation of a particular set of ideas and practices that differ from those of the mainstream, or how to integrate their own ideas of what is good and true with those of the mainstream. Instead, it is primarily a struggle against being *made* different and less than equal. All groups in the minority are likely to experi-

ence social and economic discrimination, stereotyping, and glass or bamboo ceilings. The difference between "ethnic" minority groups and "racial" minority groups rests with why they are assumed to be different, how and when they came to be different, and how extensive and thorough the practices are that maintain the difference.

Many approaches to multiculturalism and programs concerned with pluralism and inclusion conflate ethnic and racial differences. Yet this distinction is important to classroom practices and educational policy. Differences in academic achievement and the divergent patterns of interest and activity that result from the historically cumulative disadvantage of unequal status should not be accepted, recognized, or celebrated as culturally derived and endorsed differences in ways of knowing, thinking, and learning. Instead, their sources should be identified as imposed status differences, and they should be addressed and countered in these terms.

African Americans, for example, are not voluntary immigrants, and their history as a group includes not only extensive racially based exclusion and segregation, but it also includes slavery and a persistent denial of personhood, as well as the poverty, discrimination, and cumulative disadvantage that accompanied a lack of access to education and separation from the economic mainstream. Moreover, as a group, African Americans have been the recipients of a long and pervasive process of downward social constitution. Because of a given group identity, they have been exposed not only to some unwelcome evaluations, as can be the case for any minority group, but also to a continuous concert of negative representations, historical narratives, treatments, interactions, perceptions, expectations, and affective reactions that limit and devalue their status (Thomas 1992; Markus, Steele, and Steele 2002). These representations perpetuate the idea that African Americans are inferior—particularly intellectually inferior—and also that African American men and boys are to be feared.

When imposed status differences are conflated with culturally derived differences, racialized groups are viewed only as ethnic groups. Differences in behavior—for example, in performance—are likely to be explained primarily in terms of cultural models, group norms, values, or practices, and not in terms of differences in educational opportunities, including the likelihood of attending inferior underfunded schools, and inadequately prepared teachers. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant note, the typical question is: "After all, Jews and Japanese Americans did well in inferior schools, so why can't other groups? . . . It is the European immigrant analogy applied to all without reservation" (1994, 21). Despite the pervasive individual and institutionalized racism that Jewish and Japanese Americans have encountered, and still encounter in some settings, this racism is different from the experience of African Americans. It does not include the persisting expectation that they are incapable of doing what school is most

about—that is, being a student, thinking, learning, and using one's mind to succeed.

For those associated with a racialized group, negotiating a positive identity as a student in many mainstream academic settings is a particularly challenging task. In the face of downward social constitution, much of the regard of those outside the in-group will devalue the person or limit potential with respect to intellectual or academic ability (Markus, Steele, and Steele 2002; Steele 1997). For example, countering the view that the task of achievement for African American students is no different from that of any other group, Theresa Perry contends that African American students face a distinctive, unrecognized dilemma (2003). African American students must answer questions such as, "How can I commit myself to do work that is predicated on a belief in the power of the mind, when African American intellectual inferiority is so much a part of the taken-for-granted notions of the larger society that individuals in and out of school, even good and well-intentioned people, individuals who purport to be acting on my behalf, routinely register doubts about my intellectual competence?" (2003, 4–5).

The task of high achievement for African Americans, as well as for other racialized groups, is constantly challenging because they must always be on alert for and contend with diminishing assumptions and ascriptions tied to their group identity (Perry 2003; Steele 2003). Of course, students, in weaving an identity as a student, do not have to incorporate these downwardly constituting views. Students can be acutely aware of the views of others, but they need not mirror them; they can ignore them, resist them, and contest them (Crocker et al. 1994; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001). Still, in many situations the downwardly constituting views of others are persistently there and are a reality of life in many settings. These representations form a background against which people answer the questions, "Who am I?" and "What is possible for me?" (Markus and Nurius 1986). The views of others can have a wide range of consequences, and their targets must contend with them, even as they learn to actively and effectively avoid them (Du Bois 1903/1989).

Over the last two decades, Claude Steele and colleagues (Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002; Steele 1997; Steele and Aronson 1995) have developed and validated the powerful theory of stereotype threat. The research undergirding this theory directly reveals how the views of others can have detrimental effects on students' academic performance, even for those students who are very well prepared with good grades from good schools. The theory of stereotype threat suggests that in relevant academic situations, students who are associated with negatively stereotyped groups worry that they might "be judged or treated in terms of the stereotype or that they might do something that would inadvertently confirm it" (Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002, 389).

In multiple experimental situations exploring stereotype threat theory, researchers find that the test performance of African American college students is in fact depressed by being negatively stereotyped. These studies compare black and white students matched for ability level. To invoke the stereotype, the experimenters mention to half the students before taking the test (a difficult section of the General Record Examinations) that the test is a measure of verbal ability. This instruction works to make the stereotype directly relevant to the student's performance on the test. For the other half of the students, nothing is said about the test being diagnostic of ability; instead students are told that the experimenters are trying to determine how problems are solved. Black students perform significantly less well than whites when they understand that the test is diagnostic of their ability. Yet, there is no difference between black and white students in the "nondiagnostic" condition. Importantly, studies show that students do not need to believe the stereotype or to have internalized it themselves. The stereotype influences whether a person can maintain an identity as a competent student at that moment, which is a necessary element for achievement. When the threat is present, performance is depressed; when the threat is lifted from the situation, performance improves.

Notably, the stereotypes associated with race and ethnicity do not have to be overtly negative to have a negative impact on identity and achievement as a student. A set of studies examining the impact of common representations of American Indians on the identities of American Indians found that being exposed to popular media images of Pocahontas or sports teams mascots such as Chief Wahoo of the Cleveland Indians baseball team was associated with depressed self-esteem, depressed collective efficacy, and fewer achievement-related possible selves (Fryberg et al. 2007). Notably these media images were not typically regarded as negative, even by American Indians. Moreover, European American students exposed to these same stereotypic images of American Indians reported elevated self-esteem and more achievement-related possible selves (Fryberg et al. 2007). Apparently, however, these representations remind American Indian students that they are seen only in a limited range of ways, and are not recognized as students or as future professionals, such as teachers, lawyers, or doctors.

Reconciling Difference and Equality in the Classroom

Nearly all parents and their students value education and believe it is linked to achievement. The picture from social science and education research is clear: those who achieve are those who develop effective identities as students, learners, and achievers. Identities develop from an intertwining of how students think and feel about themselves with their perceptions of how others

react to them at school. Schools are arguably the most important source of others' regard with respect to achievement. What students will select from their perceptions of others' reactions—what they will emphasize, what they will ignore—cannot be precisely forecast. Yet if teachers and staff are intentional in valuing and learning about their students' lived experience, and are deliberate in countering devaluing and limiting images and practices within the school, they can increase the likelihood that students will claim a student identity and that others will confer this identity on them.

Promoting more positive student identities requires creating schools that are what Dorothy Steele and her colleagues call "identity safe" (Murphy, Steele, and Gross 2007; Markus, Steele, and Steele 2002; Steele et al. 2007; Steele 2003). This is a state in which both horizontal and vertical differences are recognized. Students are understood and appreciated for the various culturally derived models and perspectives they bring to school, and they are also protected from various race-linked representations, expectations, and reactions, which are limiting, devaluing, and alienating. Designing an identity-safe school environment requires attention to the potential for ethnic and racial differences—their sources, their consequences, and the practices by which they are maintained.

Contemplating such measures can induce the frustration of the teacher quoted earlier, yet recent studies suggest that big improvements in achievement may accompany relatively small interventions. In one impressive set of studies (Cohen et al. 2006), black and white middle school students were randomly assigned to an intervention group or a control group. Students in the intervention group were asked to identify what mattered to them most (the choices included family, art, religion, athletics, and others), and then to write a paragraph explaining why. Those in the control group were asked to select something that didn't matter to them and explain in a paragraph why it might matter to someone else. Geoffrey Cohen and colleagues suggested that the writing task helped foster a sense of identity and gave students an opportunity in the school setting to present who they were. In each year of the experiment, the black students who wrote about what was important to them scored better (about one-third of a letter grade) than those in the control group. No such effect was observed for the white students, who presumably felt relatively more at home at school.

Summarizing across a large number of studies and theories, a number of generalizations can be made about what is necessary for understanding and accommodating difference and for fostering effective student identities.

Everybody's Ethnic

Most common school practices have been developed for and validated by students from mainstream or European American contexts. In multiple ways that are not always easy to see, these practices are not culture neutral, race

neutral, or nonsubstantive; instead they reflect and foster mainstream understandings and perspectives. As Pierre Bourdieu explained, "An educational system that puts into practice an implicit pedagogic action requiring initial familiarity with the dominant culture, and which proceeds by imperceptible familiarization, offers information and training which can only be received and acquired by subjects supported by the systems of predispositions which is the condition for the success of the transmission and inculcation of the culture" (1970, 3).

Students with middle class European American backgrounds have a clear advantage because the world of education and schooling is laid out according to blueprints that reflect European Americans' values, assumptions, and ways of being. These students bring with them an independent model of self that is a reasonable fit for most classroom practices, which are designed to develop a self that is separate from others and in control of one's own actions. They have a significant advantage in terms of cultural and, of course, linguistic capital. For students who are not white, race and ethnicity are an ever-present reality of social life, always salient in schooling practices even if they are never mentioned. More than 70 percent of teachers in American classrooms are white, middle class, and female (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education 1999). Many teach students whose lived experiences and perspectives, especially with respect to race and ethnicity, are very different from their own, but these differences are seldom made explicit. In fact, educators often worry that drawing attention to these differences would be, at best, divisive and, at worst, immoral.

A useful exercise for educators, as well as for students, is to answer the question, "Who Am I?", and then to share these answers with class members. Those associated with ethnic and racial minority groups will be much more likely to mention their ethnic and cultural groups than will European American students (Oyserman and Harrison 1998). European Americans most often describe themselves as autonomous individuals defined by personal attributes and seldom mention their race or ethnicity. Because the ideas and practices of their own ethnic group are built into the school and the larger society, they go unnoticed by those associated with the group (Alba 1990; Tuan 1998; Waters 1992). Such an exercise can be a window into the types of automatic advantages that a European American background confers for developing a student identity.

Defining Ethnicity and Race

A critical first step in acknowledging how race and ethnicity shape identity is to communicate new evidence-based definitions of culture, ethnicity, and race. Many educators worry about discussing race because they are concerned that even acknowledging ethnicity is to be a racist or to engage in

stereotyping. Such concerns are tied to the pervasive view that race and ethnicity are essences or attributes of people that are internal, personal, or biologically based (Adams and Markus 2004; Gutierrez and Rogoff 2003; Omi and Winant 1994).

The problem with attending to differences in the classroom rests with what it is that people assume to be the source of these differences. When race and ethnicity are understood as patterns of ideas and practices that people engage in rather than essences or attributes of people, and race is understood as a set of historically derived understandings that have been used to structure social and power relations among people rather than something fixed in the person, it should be easier to attend to cultural and racial differences and how they influence behavior.

Moreover, teachers should now acknowledge to all students, not only minority students, that despite the ideology of the American Dream, the playing field is not yet level or fair. They should explain that there exists an often antagonistic relationship between students of color and society and should explain why (Ladson-Billings 2006). These lessons require teaching or reteaching American history and the realization that America's narrative of itself as an inclusive immigrant nation developed alongside a powerful set of exclusions (Foner 1998; Adams 2008). Such lessons require specific and developmentally appropriate conversations about race and ethnicity and how they work, as well as an understanding that forging positive and valued identities is an intergroup project.

Creating Diverse Cultures of Learning and Institutionalizing High Expectations

A variety of programs and interventions reveal that students' achievement and dropout rates are reduced when teachers demonstrate knowledge, understanding, and respect for students' contexts and background, and when they find ways to let students and others in their environments see them as students, learners, or achievers (Garrison-Wade and Lewis 2004; Steele 1999; Steele et al. 2007). For example, a recent comprehensive study of elementary school classrooms found that a trio of factors termed *identity safety practices*—including the use of diversity as a resource (rather than a color-blind approach), expressing high expectancies for all students, and cultivating positive student-teacher relationships—was linked to higher standardized test performance, greater liking for school, and a sense of personal identity safety in the classroom (Steele et al. 2007).

Experimental studies with college students find that performance among minority students can be improved by explicitly removing stereotype threat from classroom situations and by linking ethnicity with valued classroom membership and academic achievement (Cohen et al. 2006; Davies, Spencer,

and Steele 2005; Walton and Cohen 2007). This research suggests that schools can work against identity threat by promoting cross-group friendships, fostering high expectations for success, and providing success-affirming role models. Such findings suggest that schools can intentionally design contexts that help students master the cultural capital, skills, and strategies they need to become achievers and maintain identities as achievers. Theresa Perry notes that such contexts should be constructed to be directly relevant to the students, drawing from the "cultural formations" of the students and their communities (2003).

An important first step in displaying this respect and understanding is to incorporate diverse materials that reflect traditionally underrepresented ethnic and racial groups. In a society where being young and black (or Latino, Filipino, or American Indian) *and* an academic achiever are almost never linked, the school's role is particularly powerful and significant (Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2003). Far from being color-blind and mute, schools should provide evidence, ideas, and images of minority achievement.

While not every ethnic group can be used in examples or included in discussions or assignments, teachers can convey the idea that there are a variety of ways to think about the self, about others, and about the world, and that these ways deserve recognition and respect. Teachers can encourage students to collaborate across group differences, to be slow to judge, and to ask questions about each other's background and experiences to expand their knowledge and awareness of differences in lived experience (Aronson 2003; Geertz 2001; Gurin et al. 2007).

The take-away point is that different social locations in the world (for example, being in the majority or minority) are associated with different experiences and understandings which can give rise to significant differences in perspective and ways of being in the world. In modeling and communicating this idea, teachers can expand the range of their teaching practices. For example, they can focus on dialogue and conversation as well as lecture; they can focus on collaborative problem solving as well as on individual instruction.

While acknowledging the potential for different approaches to knowing and learning, it is critical not to assume that a particular approach or model will be appropriate for understanding a particular student without knowledge of a student's background, interests, and experience. A student with a Latino name may be third- or fourth-generation Latino American and may have very little contact with ideas and practices commonly associated with Latino contexts. While it is likely that race will be a significant factor in student identity in a racially stratified society, this is not universally the case. Without pigeonholing students and expecting that certain students will behave in certain ways, teachers can, however, engage students in their curricular planning and become aware of different models so that they can experiment when usual approaches do not seem to be working.

Countering Inequality-Maintaining Practices

Schools use a variety of ideas and practices that systematically divide and rank students. Most of these are so pervasive and fully institutionalized that they can be difficult to see. One powerful mechanism of downward social constitution comes with the explanations that are commonly given for student underachievement. Public and private conversations about the performance gap are now part of daily life. When students do not do well in school, the typical question is whether these students lack the capacity to do well, whether they are unwilling to work, or both. Given the pervasive independent model of the self that locates the sources of action in the self, as well as notions of minority-group intellectual inferiority that are still very prevalent in America (Tormala and Deaux 2006; Perry 2003), these seem to be the right questions to ask. Yet the most obvious and empirically well-supported explanation for the performance gap is not a capacity gap, but instead a wide and growing opportunity gap (Krysan and Lewis 2005). Based on readily available data, there are questions that should be asked but seldom are: do underperforming students have equal opportunities to identify as learners and to perform and achieve? Do they have equally high-quality schools, course materials, and teachers with equally high expectations for their success? Are they exposed to equally positive role models and other self-relevant representations of achievement? Are their school settings equally welcoming and do they promote equally positive recognition and regard from others?

Minority students who have succeeded are often used as examples to support the claim that the only barrier to fulfilling the American Dream is a lack of individual motivation or effort. The narrative of the single individual succeeding against the odds fits the culturally prevalent independent model of self very well. Thus the details of the positive supportive scaffolding that is often somewhere present in the lives of these exemplary cases are seldom emphasized (Plaut and Markus 2005). A major responsibility of an academic setting that hopes to foster effective student identities is to intervene and help students learn to intervene in the many everyday marginalizing conversations that simply assume that some students are less able, are lazy, or are uncaring. Such conversations ignore the wide variety of factors that are potentially at play in underperformance. Gloria Ladson-Billings summarizes the problem with the usual framing of underperformance through a story about a grandmother in the rural South who was perplexed by the discussion of why students were underperforming (Ladson-Billings 1994). The grandmother explained that in her experience of many years of farming, when the corn didn't grow, no one asked what was wrong with the corn.

A second powerful mechanism of downward social constitution is academic tracking. If American society was not organized by race and ethnicity,

and there were no barriers to upward mobility linked to race and ethnicity, one would expect that students from all races and ethnicities would be represented proportionally in all categories of achievement from lowest to highest. Yet, in much of the country, students are tracked according to their level of achievement from their kindergarten days, and almost everywhere, a clear racial divide is evident. Students in the high-performing groups—the students called "smart" and "motivated"—are likely to be white and, in some places, Asian, and to have parents who went to college. Students in low-performing groups—the students "who don't care about school or about their futures"—are more likely to be black and Latino students. As Laurie Olsen says, it takes amazing denial not to see that "the skin color and language background of the student is closely correlated with the chances of being among those who do cross the stage [to graduate]" (1997, 187). Not being surprised by this correlation means that people have convinced themselves that differences in capacity, effort, or in the individual choices that students make must be at work in this relationship. The discourse of differential capacity then fuels the practice of tracking, and the practice of tracking further promotes the discourse of differential capacity.

Challenging the practice and value of tracking, especially in the early grades before years of tracking have indeed created differential educational experiences for students, is critical to changing the patterns of others' regard that are necessary for an effective student identity. When a strong correlation exists between the level of the course and the race or ethnicity of its students, teachers may find themselves relying on race and ethnicity to make decisions about class assignments. At the high school level, Jeannie Oakes and Gretchen Guiton find, for example, that black and Latino students who have similar grades and test scores to white students are less likely to be tracked into the Advanced Placement classes that are linked to college admissions (1995). Tracking works directly against the intent to produce an environment that uncouples the link between minority status and underachievement. Many studies now suggest that de-tracking does not harm the students who are doing well and helps those who doing less well (Darling-Hammond 2004; Gorski and EdChange.org 1995-2006). In the event that some grouping is unavoidable, efforts should be made to create countervailing groups that do not confound minority status with academic skills or achievement (Markus, Steele, and Steele 2002).

Conclusion: Equality Requires Attention to Difference

Despite high expectations for achievement, the ethnic and racial education gap in America is dramatic and growing. The gap has multiple complex sources, and closing it will require sustained individual and collective effort

amid distracting polemical struggles over who is at fault and who is responsible. Sustained research from many fields over several decades now supports the conclusion that one necessary condition for school achievement is identity as a student. Such an identity organizes and sustains achievement-related behavior. An identity as a student is not, however, solely an individual phenomenon; it is intimately bound up with the reactions of others in the school setting. If a student feels like those described in the earlier quotation, "we just don't matter," the chances of identifying as a student are low.

To claim identities as students, young people must feel that they matter, and that they are recognized, understood, and included. Many mainstream or majority students attend schools where others—students, teachers, and administrators—share and foster their image of themselves as students. The identity as a student seems to develop as a natural consequence of going to school and wanting to achieve. Other students however, because of their ethnicity or race, will find that their own images of themselves as students are not shared and fostered, and that the regard of others is limiting or devaluing.

Public schools are the main vehicle for the education that is the basis of equal opportunity in America. In a society where race and ethnicity structure experience, schools have a special responsibility not to be blind, but instead to see the differences among young people that can significantly affect their chances of developing identities as students. Such recognition requires revealing and accommodating horizontal differences (that is, culturally derived differences in ways of teaching and learning), while simultaneously revealing and countering vertical differences (that is, historically imposed and maintained status differences among students). The enormous societal challenge of transforming schools cannot be underestimated. Yet when a community of educators shares a commitment to the importance of equal educational opportunity for students, many of the practices for giving recognition, for fostering a sense of belongingness, and for countering exclusion and inequality are not difficult to master or to implement. Small interventions can produce large effects. Most young people want to be students—to go to school and to become educated. A focus on identity and how to create spaces that foster a student identity is one promising route to providing the education necessary for pursuing the American Dream in a multiethnic, multiracial democracy.

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