

Schooling and the Construction of Identity Among Minority Students in Spain and the United States

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Based on a study of the special education placement process in a large city in the United States and two studies in different regions of Spain, the authors offer a comparative analysis of the relationship between professional beliefs and practices and the achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students. The data focus on African American and Hispanic students in the United States and on Gitano (Gypsy) and Moroccan students in Spain. Although professional attitudes in both countries revealed deficit views of CLD students, a key concern in Spain was professionals' assumption that students' cultural assimilation was a requirement for success. In the United States, deficit views, entwined with the entrenched categorical approach to school-based disabilities, contributed to ethnic disproportionality in special education. The studies illustrate how the hegemony of mainstream culture and language in schooling contributes to inappropriate academic and social exclusion for students from historically oppressed minority groups.

Keywords: *stereotyping; culture; ethnic identity; comparative cultural analysis; minority student achievement; special education; Spain; United States*

Interview with a teacher in Spain (Harry, 2005, unpublished data):

The Moroccans like to be together in their own group. Then for their part, the Spanish kids are not really interested in breaking this. But it comes from the Moroccans. For example, they talk with each other in their own language much more easily, keep their own customs, and so on. So it's not just the language, it's their ways too. . . . I think that perhaps because the Moroccan families don't have much education, they don't instill the desire to study, to earn a diploma.

The Gitanos are different from the Moroccans. The only thing the same is that they don't mix but it's not to do with the language because Spanish is their language. . . . The Gitano barrio . . . has a lot of conflict, drugs, and a lot of problems with integration . . . delinquency, threatening the teachers, stealing cars. . . . One theory is that the Gitanos

have a culture that doesn't envision the future so the emphasis is on the present, making money, spending it. . . . So there's no idea of studying for the future and neither do they integrate well. The Gitano barrio is a barrio with run-down houses, broken windows. . . . I'm not saying all Gitanos are like this. . . . But in Spain, the Gitanos have this kind of life. Although there are some Gitanos who go to the university—but a few. I think it's because of their environment, their families, the mother who protects the children by excusing, justifying everything they do. Like absenteeism. Or an example of a boy I caught with a knife—big like this—and I told the mother and she says “oh, it's my knife, it's not his. I gave it to him to sharpen for me and he forgot it in his pocket.” So obviously nothing is going to happen because the mother excuses everything.

[On the part of the Spanish kids] there is no great rejection. If anything there's some fear, because the

Gitanos are more aggressive. Also some admiration. They might want to be in [the Gitano] group because they're more respected by the others, they seem more powerful, so a group with a Gitano leader is the best. . . . The Gitanos are totally united. If a Gitano kid has a problem he's coming with his cousin to protect him. Even the teachers have a certain respect for them because if there's a problem the family will show up in 5 minutes ready to fight because we're Gitanos and you are "payos" and in half an hour there are 40 family members at your door waiting to see what's going on. And you might have to call the police. . . . And they don't have any faith in the law or the police so they develop their own rules and their own form of self-protection.

A Gitano child coming to school receives economic assistance—300 euros [per year], to buy books, materials. This is automatic. But they can also receive an award for schooling, and these are set aside exclusively for Gitanos. And then they can live in a very cheap apartment, or government housing, free or almost free, for Gitano families with problems. And of course they can attend a school near to their home absolutely free. So in principle they have all the same possibilities as anyone else. I have taught classes with Gitanos and non-Gitanos and they receive the same reports, everything the same with no type of discrimination. But they themselves isolate themselves, and see themselves as better than everyone else. They refer to everyone else as "los Payos." This is an insult, a negative term, like "Payo de mierda." So they see themselves as different to those "payos." It's like "we're Gitanos." So they spend their money on their gold chain [around their neck], or their nice cars or whatever!

So if I compare them [to the Moroccans], really, the Moroccans are not that rebellious. Compared to those others [Gitanos], they're good! They are obedient. If you tell them sit down, they do. But if you let them, they'll stop work, they'll ignore you, they'll get up, they'll start chatting . . . more than the others [in the class].

Interview with a teacher in the United States (Harry & Klingner, 2006, unpublished data):

If you'd ever been to the neighborhood at night you'd know . . . basically the whole community is hanging out all night . . . on street corners, engaged in the purchase of drugs, abusing alcohol, beating up one another, shooting at one another. . . . It's not about their color, it's about the value that they place on certain aspects of things. They don't put the same value on the same kinds of things. . . . And [school personnel] are petrified of parents. They don't know what to do. A street mamma can come in here . . . bobbing her head and waving her finger

and threatening to kill someone and they . . . just don't know how to come back at her. . . . They just don't want trouble with parents and they are prepared to retreat into the office and bar the door before they'll deal effectively with those kinds of issues. . . . [This] population doesn't have a long history of valuing education . . . or [maybe] a minority [of them] began valuing academic education but I would think that the results of 30 years of educational remediation and untold hundreds of millions of dollars have all amounted to no measurable increase in the academic performance of African American children. And I think that that is a reality that education is going to have to look at. As comfortable or uncomfortable as that reality may be.

[The Mexican kids] they're learning English, learning how to read and write, you know, a lot of these kids become discouraged. I find they are reading way below par. . . . You get children that come in from Mexico that just started school here and all of a sudden they are thrown into a totally different culture.

[In comparing Mexican migrant kids to African American kids] they are not sullen, they are not as angry, they are not as suspicious of the motive of everything around them . . . by comparison they are extremely sensitive, could burst into tears if the teacher was upset with them for any reason. . . . [Whereas] a tough Black kid, even a girl . . . wasn't gonna give you an inch . . . when she was angry she would never break, would never apologize.

On opposite sides of the Atlantic and just 2 years apart, the school personnel expressing the sentiments quoted above were speaking of four apparently very different groups: Mexican migrant students and African American students in the United States, and Moroccan migrant students and Gitano (Gypsy) students in Spain. Yet the similarities in their views are uncanny: Whereas the immigrant students are seen as docile but resistant to assimilation, the native-born minority students and their families are described with disdain and viewed as threatening and hostile. The speakers account for these differences in terms of cultural values: the families' not valuing education, or relying on extensive social welfare supports while showing minimal trust in societal authorities. In spite of a clear preference for the immigrant groups, both speakers also identified these learners as presenting serious challenges to the school system.

Using qualitative data from a study of the special education placement process in a large city in the United States and from two studies in two different regions of Spain, we compare similarities and differences in professional beliefs and practices and discuss

the relationship of these beliefs to student achievement. We argue that although the United States and Spain show much in common regarding both professionals' beliefs and minority achievement, the educational responses in terms of special education are quite different, yet both inadequate.

Special Education and Diversity in Spain and the United States

The idea for this study arose from the first author's experience of surprise upon embarking on a small research project in Spain in 2003. Coming from years of study (Harry & Klingner, 2006) of minority disproportionality in special education programs in the United States, and armed with a proposal to conduct research on the intersection between minorities and special education in a rural region in southwestern Spain, the researcher quickly discovered that she was asking the wrong question. In the school district being studied, there was in fact no overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in programs for students with special needs (the preferred terminology in Spain). Nor was disproportionality perceived as an issue nationally by colleagues in the field (C. Garcia Pastor, personal communication, January 15, 2003). There were, however, numerous challenges posed by the increasing presence of certain groups of immigrant students, whose cultural, linguistic, religious, and educational backgrounds differed dramatically from the expectations of the Spanish professorate. The provision of services to these students became the focus of the researcher's interest.

The groups of greatest concern were from North Africa, particularly Morocco. There were also students from South America and Eastern Europe. The latter, by all reports, presented no challenge for educators, because of the high levels of academic education they had received in their home countries and, according to many, because of European cultural commonalities. The South American students, although experiencing some cultural and educational challenges, were seen as generally adapting well because of a shared language and religion.

Conversations with Spanish colleagues and teachers introduced concerns about another CLD group, the Gitanos, or Spanish Gypsies, who were generally seen as not benefiting educationally from the compensatory benefits aimed at redressing generations of marginalization and poverty. Although the first author's study (Harry, 2005) did not include Gypsies, interactions

with the second author highlighted the issues of low achievement among that population. Specifically, research by Arnaiz, Berruezo, de Haro, and Martinez (2005) in southeastern Spain directly compared professional and peer group views of Moroccans, Gypsies, and mainstream Spanish students. The findings of these two studies in Spain resonated in some ways with the findings of Harry and Klingner's (2006) disproportionality study yet contrasted in other ways. We use the quotations at the beginning of this article as a point of intersection between the three studies.

The Research

All three studies were qualitative in method, on the basis of taped interviews, participant observation, and the examination of relevant documents. All three have been reported separately in part elsewhere but without the comparative focus offered in this article.

The U.S. study (Harry & Klingner, 2006) was a 3-year ethnographic investigation of the referral and placement processes for Black and Hispanic students in 12 elementary schools in a large urban school system. The schools were purposively selected to reflect a range across three criteria: ethnic population, free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) status, and rate of referral. Of the 12 schools, one had a high-socioeconomic status (SES) population, with only 17% of the students receiving FRL. The others ranged from 67% to 99% of students receiving FRL. On the basis of the assumption that the entire range of educational practices contributes to minority overrepresentation, the study's primary focus was on general education settings, with a secondary focus on special education settings. The study included 679 observations of a range of school settings and 278 interviews with school administrators, teachers, students, and parents, as well as the examination of relevant student records. The researchers noted numerous faults in the placement process, including poor initial instruction, unpredictable referral approaches, subjective assessment, and routine rather than thoughtful special education placement decisions. The arbitrary nature of the process made it impossible to assume that the assignment of disability labels was a meaningful interpretation of children's academic and behavioral difficulties. Throughout the study, we noted an explicitly expressed bias against African American families living in poverty.

The studies in Spain also focused on minority populations but with quite different concerns. Arnaiz et al. (2005) conducted a 3-year study in 14 elementary

schools in a southeastern region of Spain where 7.3% of the population were recent immigrants from Eastern Europe, South America, and North Africa. Of the latter group, the majority were Moroccan. The populations studied included the majority (Spanish) group (88.1%), North Africans (5.81%), and Gypsies (6.19%). The 14 schools were purposively selected to include districts with high concentrations of immigrant populations and also schools that reflected a range of years of experience with serving immigrant students. The study focused on the primary education system's response to the increasing student diversity and on the range of beliefs about these groups held by professionals, peers, and families. Interviews were conducted with the principal of each school, and 97 teachers, 75 students, and 22 families volunteered to participate. The researchers concluded that the school system's efforts to attend to diversity emphasized assimilation into Spanish language and culture, without attempting to be responsive to or build on the students' home cultures.

The third study was much more modest. Conducted by Harry (2005) over a period of 5 months, it focused on the nature of the services provided to immigrant students in a small, rural secondary school in southwestern Spain and on professionals' and students' views of these services. Invitations to participate were issued to all 42 teachers, all 8 special education students, and all 14 Moroccan students. Overall, data collection included semistructured, audiotaped interviews conducted in Spanish with 18 teachers, observations of the classrooms of 9 of these teachers, two informal conversations and two taped interviews with students in the special education classroom, audiotaped interviews conducted in Spanish with 4 Moroccan girls, and a 1-hour focus group discussion with 11 Moroccan students. The latter discussion was conducted in Arabic by a Moroccan historian. The findings regarding views of the immigrant students were very similar to those of Arnaiz et al. (2005), with the additional concern that teachers, in trying to implement a model of inclusion, experienced tremendous frustration because of the constraints of a fixed curriculum based on the traditional European canon.

Educators' Views of CLD Students in the United States and Spain

In comparing the views expressed by professionals in the United States and Spain, we identified some

strong similarities as well as some notable differences. First, however, an important detail: The immigrant groups on whom we focus in this article were the children of first-generation immigrants or temporary migrants of low SES, working in agriculture. The U.S. students were predominantly from Mexico, with lesser numbers from other Caribbean, Central American, and South American countries. In Spain, the students were from Morocco. We do not attempt to generalize the attitudes noted to other populations of quite different immigrant groups.

The main commonality across professionals' views of the African American and Spanish Gypsy students was that deficits in cultural attitudes and practices accounted for these groups' low achievement in schools. With regard to Hispanic and Moroccan immigrants, professionals' views tended to focus more on cultural difference rather than deficit. Their expectations for all groups' success were generally low, with little reflection on the possible role of the society or the education system in these students' achievement.

The U.S. Context

Across the interviews with school personnel, Harry and Klingner (2006) found a pervasive negative sentiment toward the families of African American children referred for special education.

Untested assumptions about families. It was true that many students came from neighborhoods marked by poverty and, often, crime. Nevertheless, our research found that school personnel's beliefs about individuals were frequently not informed by any firsthand knowledge of family situations. Rather, researchers' visits to homes indicated that school personnel were unaware of family strengths and derived their negative views from stereotypical assumptions about dysfunction in African American families living in poverty.

Our in-depth case studies indicated that professionals' negative perceptions of family functioning contributed to educational decisions that were not in the best interests of children. For example, a decision to place a boy on half-day suspension lasted for 5 months, allowing the child's already challenging behavior to deteriorate. Interviews with the school counselor and the mother indicated that the school administrators, knowing that the mother was a stay-at-home mother receiving welfare benefits, required her to pick up the child every day at 11 o'clock to make her "more responsible" for her child. In another case, an African American girl, referred by her first-grade teacher, was

found to have Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (EBD), without any consideration of the ill-managed classroom in which her behavior occurred. Additionally, observation of the child's evaluation provided ample evidence of the negative impact of the psychologist's expressed preconception that the child's family was "dysfunctional." This view was based on the knowledge that the child lived with her grandmother because her mother was incarcerated. The researchers' extended contact with this family over 3 years revealed a supportive, extended African American family. The child was immediately successful in a self-contained classroom for EBD taught by a strong teacher, who mainstreamed her in the third grade and had her placed in a gifted program in the fourth grade. All data on the case indicated that the diagnosis was inappropriate and that the child would likely have succeeded in a well-managed general education classroom.

SES and minority status. In the quotation at the beginning of this article, the American teacher's contrasting views of African American and Mexican students and their families were echoed by many interviewees in the study. One teacher, for example, described Hispanic students as "more motivated" and their parents as "more involved" and "more respectful." Another contrasted the "super innocence" of immigrant children in the fifth grade, "with their Barbies and their Pokemon cards," with African American second graders in an inner-city neighborhood who "knew about sex, drugs, guns."

Although on one hand, the apparent preference for immigrant families is reminiscent of Ogbu's (1987) thesis that immigrant minorities may experience less rejection than historically oppressed native minorities, professionals' perceptions of SES and family lifestyle offered a more nuanced interpretation. It seemed that comments comparing ethnic groups were often modified by perceptions of poverty and inner-city lifestyles. This was evident in the fact that professionals of both Hispanic and African American ethnicity frequently would express disdain for families of their own ethnic groups, if they believed that there was fragmented family structure, drug use, or incarceration of a family member.

The Spanish Context

Scholars have pointed to a deep philosophical conflict faced by modern educators in Spain (Benito Escolano, 2002). The nation's recent history of recovery from totalitarianism and return to democracy

culminated, in 1990, in an education law, *La Ley Orgánica General de Educación (LOGSE)* (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1990), that explicitly called for "attention to diversity" and specified the inclusion of those with ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and cognitive differences into the mainstream of the educational system. Benito Escolano (2002) stated that most teachers share the democratic values espoused by the law but struggle to reconcile the call for "attention to diversity" with traditional beliefs that define pedagogy as the inculcation of European academic knowledge and skills.

The studies by Arnaiz et al. (2005) and Harry (2005) both illustrated this conflict. With the traditional canon at the core of a fixed curriculum, professionals believed that the only way to include "outsiders" was to require a high level of linguistic and cultural assimilation. This view was reflected in two trends in the data from both studies: first, reluctance on the part of most Spanish school personnel to identify racial and cultural difference as a problem in schools, and second, a tendency to place the onus for adaptation on the minorities.

The color-blind perspective. The preference for a color-blind perspective was pervasive across the interviews in both studies. Arnaiz et al. (2005) reported that 71% of school administrators and 55% of teachers stated that they saw both Gypsy and Moroccan students as "just like the others" and accepted all equally well. This view was typified in the following statement: "My subject is the same for all my students. The reality is that they are the same as everyone else. Normally I make no distinctions among my students and neither do they, so differences disappear" (p. 10). Nevertheless, professionals in this study did identify specific problems associated with each group, notably, extreme absenteeism among the Gypsy students and difficulties with linguistic and cultural adaptation among the Moroccans. Even the most positive statements were accompanied by caveats concerning emerging social and instructional challenges, including the pace of instruction, social conflict, problems of adaptation and integration, a lack of contact between families and school, and language limitations.

Harry's (2005) findings, similar to those of Diaz-Aguado, Baraja, and Royo (1996), noted a pattern of much higher success among immigrant students from Eastern Europe. Teachers' main explanation of the success of these students focused on their superior academic preparation in their home countries and their ability to assimilate rapidly. This points to a

particular contrast with Moroccan students, who, according to Escandell (2002), find adaptation more difficult because they typically emigrate to Spain after puberty, with minimal formal schooling. A more cynical view of European students' success was offered by two teachers in Harry's study, who remarked that these students' success was further assisted by the fact that their racial identities were privileged by the society's preference for those who were *alto y rubio* (tall and blond). Such acknowledgement of racial preference was unusual and was offered with tongue in cheek. The only explicit assessment of this issue was offered by an ethics teacher in Harry's study:

A lot has to do with the government discourse on immigrants, the association of immigrants with problems, with delinquency. . . . You hear in the press language like "there's a new wave of immigrants" or "an invasion" of immigrants . . . and it's a very negative view. So the kids here pick this up from their homes and . . . the television. . . . But this applies mainly to certain immigrants—the general view of immigrants from Ukraine or Germany or Ecuador is not the same as the vision of Moroccan immigrants. (unpublished data)

A study by Barbadillo Grinan (1997) of changing beliefs regarding immigrants in Spain between the 1970s and the 1990s strongly supports the view expressed by this teacher.

The onus for adaptation belongs to minority students. Professionals identified the source of Moroccan students' difficulties as their lack of facility in Spanish as well as a preference for "self-marginalization." One teacher typified this view by saying, "The Moroccans are very fond of their own traditions. They integrate very little. . . . It's not just a matter of the level of the language, it's their cultural traditions, their beliefs." In a group-work exercise in a science class, another teacher, explaining that she allowed the students to choose their own groups, lamented that the Moroccans always seemed to choose each other. She did not seem to notice that the native Spanish students were also choosing "their own."

The Moroccan students offered a contrasting perspective. Expressing no wish to self-marginalize, they identified two problems: First, there was a generalized racism on the part of the Spanish community, often expressed in the use of the insulting term *moros* (Moors). Second, a mutual mistrust between the Moroccan and Spanish communities was exemplified in the statement

that Moroccan parents believed that Spanish girls were "whores," while Spanish parents believed that Moroccan boys were "thugs."

Although language learning was clearly an issue, this was exacerbated by the assumption that curricular objectives and instructional methods did not need to be adapted for CLD students. Teachers made great efforts to adapt materials to students' levels, providing lower level tasks to the Moroccan students, but did not adapt their goals or delivery of instruction in any way. Thus, Moroccan students who knew no Spanish were required to do the compulsory English courses, and even the music curriculum was seen as fixed, with no possibility of including other than the traditional European musical masterpieces. This model of inclusion reflected what Artiles (2003) has referred to as "First Space," or inclusion as physical placement. The dominant theme emerging from the study was a tremendous ambivalence, often expressed as "integration is very nice, but. . . ." The numerous caveats included teachers' lack of training for diversity, students' language differences, the low educational background of immigrant students, and their families' low valuing of education. One lone voice across the 18 interviewees explicitly rejected the "integration" philosophy. The music teacher, in a tone of great frustration, described his view as "politically incorrect" and exclaimed,

Man! I can't begin to teach an immigrant student about who Mozart was because, first of all, I don't think he's interested and furthermore—with all the reason in the world, because he has to be living here—this student needs to become integrated here, to learn, first the language and then to relate to the people here, and then if he wants to learn music or the general culture. . . . So I think that there should be specific classrooms, both for the immigrant students and for those students who don't have an adequate base or who have some [learning] difficulty. (Harry, 2005, p. 98)

The minority groups' responsibility for adaptation was equally strongly expressed in the study by Arnaiz et al. (2005). Concerns regarding Gypsy students' adaptation echoed a widely expressed theme found in the literature on this group: that Gypsy students and their families tend to resent and reject the mainstream culture and its requirements (Enguita, 1999). High rates of absenteeism were attributed to this factor. The words of the teacher quoted at the beginning of this article underscore this view, that the Gypsies "isolate themselves, and see themselves as better than

everyone else. They refer to everyone else as ‘los Payos’” (Harry, 2005).

A central focus of the work of Arnaiz et al. (2005) was to compare professional and peer-group attitudes toward Spanish natives, Gypsies, and North Africans, principally Moroccans. The researchers found that the majority Spanish group was the best accepted, while the most rejected were the Moroccans, followed closely by the Gypsies. The latter group was cited particularly for a pattern of absenteeism and noncompliant school behavior. Nevertheless, the researchers identified two main caveats regarding perceptions of Gypsy students: First, rejecting attitudes toward these students increased as their numbers in a school increased, suggesting that greater group cohesion increased the gap between them and their majority-group peers. Second, those Gypsy groups that experienced higher SES and better social neighborhood conditions suffered less rejection. Furthermore, because the Gypsy population is known for its talent in Spain’s traditional flamenco music, this was noted as a source of admiration from their peers.

The foregoing beliefs regarding Gypsy students are reminiscent of stereotypical views of African American students. In the study by Harry and Klingner (2006), variability in school behaviors according to social status was also commented on by teachers, as in the statement that the behavior of middle-class African American students was often better than that of their White peers. Furthermore, it is common knowledge in the United States that African American music has had extensive effects on mainstream music through jazz, the blues, and currently, the popularity of rap music among middle-class, White youth.

From Low Achievement to Disability

The findings of the studies reviewed above point to the complex challenges and responses experienced by two societies struggling to adjust their traditional assumptions about mainstream dominance to the demands of multicultural realities. Despite a range of efforts to modify their educational systems, the academic performance of these immigrant and native minorities in Spain and the United States are marked by low achievement. In the United States, low achievement moves many students toward that point on the spectrum that makes them, often inappropriately, likely candidates for special education and for more restrictive placements (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

In Spain, where the construct of disability is reserved mainly for biologically based impairments, academic failure more often moves minorities toward what is known as “compensatory education,” which provides vocational training and instruction in Spanish, mathematics, or any subject area in which students need help. Although there are currently no studies of the success of these programs, personal communication from the Ministry of Education and Science in Murcia region indicated that the success of immigrant students in these programs tends to depend most on their previous level of schooling in their home countries and that those who master Spanish are attaining good success in skilled trades.

Artiles (2003), summarizing the explanations for the low achievement of minorities, concluded that the two most common theories, poverty and cultural incongruity with school norms, do not adequately explain the phenomenon. Regarding the former, it is crucial to ask, What is it about poverty that leads to school failure? Studies that focus only on correlating indicators of poverty with educational outcomes (e.g., Blair & Scott, 2000) often fail to include the “structural correlates of poverty” (Artiles, 2003, p. 173), such as the low quality of the teaching force and other educational resources commonly noted in poor neighborhoods in the United States. Such correlates also include social processes, as illustrated by Knotek’s (2002) and Harry and Klingner’s (2006) detailed analyses of the discourse at placement conferences, at which untested assumptions about the ill effects of poverty led to decisions that negatively affected children’s educational careers. Regarding the idea of cultural incongruity, we ask how views that rely totally on assimilationist beliefs affect students’ response to schooling. Although acculturation to mainstream practices is a necessary adaptation for all minorities, we believe that is not the fact of mismatch in education that predicts failure but the refusal of school systems to build on children’s “funds of knowledge” (González & Moll, 2002).

Identity Construction and Student Achievement

To say that the rejection of students’ cultures contributes to low achievement is not to say that culture and society determine students’ reactions to inequity. As Cole (1996) has argued, culture itself is dynamic, not only in terms of history but in terms of the interaction between individuals and the presumed markers of their cultural and social class origins. Thus,

macrosocietal forces and individual agency interact to create human performance.

Using a unidimensional view of culture, the American teacher quoted at the beginning of this article viewed history in terms of the past 30 years of attempts at social and educational reform and placed the blame for minimal progress on a presumed cultural tradition by which African Americans devalue education. The history, however, is much more complex. Contrary to the teacher's view, from the great debate between Du Bois and Washington to recent studies of the role of education in African American communities prior to school integration (e.g., Siddle-Walker, 1996), the high value that African Americans traditionally placed on education is clear. What is also increasingly clear, however, is that deep-seated prejudices against representations of African American culture have provoked profound dilemmas of identity among these youth, dilemmas that may have varying results.

Ogbu (1987), proposing a theory of psychosocial development among native-born ("involuntary") minorities, framed his explanation of minority underachievement in macrosocial terms. He argued that the continued existence of a real job ceiling facing members of such groups reinforces their belief that the frustration they will experience will not be worth the emotional effort required to compete in the mainstream. Critics of Ogbu's argument (e.g., Trueba, 1988), have focused on the apparent determinism inherent in such a structural model and on the assumption of culture as a fixed trait.

Although we recognize the tremendous within-group variability brought about by numerous factors, including individual or family histories and SES, we believe that it is impossible to consider minority achievement without attention to the histories that created minority status. In the case of the minority groups that are the focus of this article, a powerful caveat of Ogbu's (1987) theory moves us beyond a simplistic view of voluntary or involuntary status and toward a more nuanced understanding of the lasting effects of history. Voluntary immigrants from countries that have experienced histories of domination by the host country may, in some respects, tend to be accorded or to acquire some of the characteristics of involuntary minority groups. Thus, although African Americans became minorities through forced migration and Spanish Gypsies became minorities through voluntary migration, their experience of centuries of marginalization in their host societies have brought them to similar points as citizens who speak the language of

the mainstream and are entitled to its rights and privileges, yet whose cultures continue to be devalued by education systems. Similarly, both the Mexican and the Moroccan migrants in our studies have emigrated voluntarily but come from histories of political, social, and economic domination by their host countries. As our studies showed, professionals also viewed these students' cultures as limitations to their success.

Attention to historical perspectives does not necessarily limit us to deterministic interpretations. To the contrary, as Spencer, Fegley, Harpalani, and Seaton (2004) showed, student behaviors are the outcomes of a combination of sociohistorical conditions and the students' responses to those conditions. These researchers presented a "phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory," which highlights the interaction between societal forces and individual agency. One reaction of many African American male youth is the development of a "hypermasculine" persona designed to combat the hostility they experience in their interactions with authority figures in the dominant society. Working against the value system of the school, this persona reinforces these students' marginalization. A similar pattern of resistance was illustrated by Ferguson's (2000) ethnography of the social construction of a "bad boy" identity among African American youngsters who reacted with resistance to the school's negative expectations, stereotyping, and unjust disciplinary practices.

The dynamic nature of social interaction is evident in conflicting findings by researchers studying high performing African American students. Steele's (1997) research with Black male college students concluded that perceptions that they were being negatively stereotyped actually depressed these students' academic performance. Fordham (1988) argued that successful high school students found it necessary to "act White" to be successful, whereas O'Connor (1997), in contrast, found that such students were able to incorporate African American cultural features into their performance of success.

In Spain, an emerging literature on the reaction of CLD students points to concerns regarding the development of an oppositional stance toward schooling among Gypsy populations, who have been described as responding to a long history of marginalization with "self-marginalization." Enguita's (1999) ethnographic study of Gypsy culture indicated that mainstream authorities perceive Gypsies as clinging to their traditional culture of itinerance, clan identity, and street trading, resisting assimilation to the standards

of formal training and education valued by the mainstream society. Through extensive interviews with Gypsy youth and their families, Enguita confirmed this resistance and attributed it to a profound distrust of societal and school authorities, as well as the perception that school success would require that students relinquish their culture and become *payos*. This echoes the “acting White” theory.

Studies of Moroccan students place the responsibility for their failure on their limited prior schooling and their late entry into the Spanish educational system. To date, we have not noted studies of identity issues, but studies of peer social acceptance reveal a clear preference for peers from European backgrounds, who also happen to be lighter skinned. Similar to the findings of Arnaiz et al. (2005), three studies (Cabala Lasteros, 2000; Cabrera Rodríguez, Espín López, Marin Gracia, & Rodríguez Lajo, 1997; Diaz-Aguado et al., 1996) found that majority students and/or teachers consistently ranked either Gypsies or Moroccans as the least accepted among a wide range of ethnic groups.

Conclusion

In both Spain and the United States, educational laws reflect social and political agendas. Our goal in this article has been to compare these societies’ beliefs and practices regarding minority students and special education. As Artiles and Dyson (2005) argued, “comparative analyses enable nations to engage in processes of knowledge transfer . . . to improve their educational systems” (p. 43). Our analysis indicates that we can indeed learn from such a comparison.

In the United States, the call for special education services received its impetus from the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century. Although the categorical framing of disabilities reflects the law’s attempt to ensure educational provisions for previously excluded students with disabilities, the sad irony has been that minorities have been disproportionately perceived as needing to be served in separate programs that have increased their isolation from the educational mainstream and limited their access to the kind of education valued by that mainstream. The National Academy of Sciences (Donovan & Cross, 2002) described the distinction between low achievement and high-incidence disabilities as an “artificial and variable” (p. 27) point on a continuum. Reauthorizations of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act have responded to these issues with demands for access to

the general education curriculum, the encouragement of alternative assessment methods, more meaningful parental involvement, and the stringent monitoring of minority disproportionality.

Historical agendas have been equally evident in Spain, where the development of educational law reflected the post-Franco commitment to democracy and equity (Benito Escolano, 2002). Calling for “attention to diversity,” LOGSE (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1990), using a noncategorical approach to mild learning or behavioral difficulties and a clearer delineation of the difference between cultural or linguistic versus cognitive difference, seemed to protect CLD students from inappropriate designation of disability. In Spain, low academic achievement intersects with compensatory education, which focuses on remedial education and preparation for skills and trades, delivered by general education teachers or specialists in specific skills. These programs reflect large percentages of minority and low-income youth.

Recent changes in Spain’s education law seem set to belie the relative flexibility that marked the implementation of LOGSE. In 2002, a backlash against the vision of LOGSE was passed by the conservative government in the form of a new “law of quality,” La Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 2002), which threatened to institute fixed “itineraries” of study for students from early adolescence. Although the advent of a socialist government in 2004 severely limited the implementation of that proposal, 2006 saw the introduction of La Ley Orgánica de Educación (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 2006), which, although still espousing a commitment to diversity, decreed the recognition of four categories of students displaying special needs: students with handicaps, CLD students, gifted students, and students with learning difficulties. Although the implementation of this law is yet unknown, this explicit categorization seems likely to promote the kind of confusion brought on by the system in the United States. Furthermore, the retention of the European canon of knowledge as the core of the curriculum promises continuing difficulty in schools’ ability to respond to the needs of CLD students. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of a category for CLD students indicates a continued awareness that cultural and linguistic difference does not constitute disability.

At the onset of the 21st century, it is clear that national destinies are intertwined as never before. What is to be the role of education in this? Several articles in this special issue show that in many developing

nations, the struggle for even a basic education remains an elusive goal. By contrast, in nations such as the United States and Spain, the universal provision of education is taken for granted, and specialized services are mandated for groups perceived to be at risk. We celebrate these accomplishments and the values they represent.

Nevertheless, our discussion in this article suggests that in the United States, the law may have become a double-edged sword, which, by insisting on a criterion of disability for the provision of specialized services to struggling students, results in a straight-jacketed version of special education. Those constraints are currently being further tightened by the national policy on high-stakes testing, reflecting the assumption that there is something wrong with children who do not attain specified benchmarks, despite these children's inadequate opportunity to be prepared for those benchmarks. The crucial point is that those benchmarks do not represent universal developmental norms. Rather, they represent the knowledge and skills gained by children whose homes and neighborhoods have prepared them in the language, discourse patterns, cognitive approaches, and social behaviors of the mainstream of the society. In other words, schooling is not culturally neutral. Rather, it is culturally responsive to the children of mainstream families. The challenge facing educators in this era of globalization is to learn to be culturally responsive to all children. Students who enter the educational system with different social and academic preparation are also "ready to learn." But where should their instruction begin? We believe that it should begin at the beginning, not at some point predetermined by public policy.

In Spain, we note that despite the law's greater flexibility in the provision of educational services for those perceived as "different," many educators interpret this as a call to change those who are different, to make them "the same as everyone else" (Arnaiz et al., 2005). As Rodriguez (1982) eloquently argued, this homogenizing approach works for some students. However, the high rates of failure among ethnic minorities in both Spain and the United States demonstrate that it is not true for the majority.

If educators cannot build on the "funds of knowledge" that children bring (González & Moll, 2002), birth certificate records will continue to provide adequate prediction of who will be successful (Blair & Scott, 2000). We believe that schooling is a powerful intervening variable that can reinforce or alter the

limitations of the circumstances into which children are born. McLaughlin, Artiles, and Pullin (2001) presented a persuasive portrait of the features of a "seamless" system of services, typified by flexibility in program design and in the allocation and use of school resources, along with whole-school reform. We agree with these authors that the conceptualization of special education must promote a view of knowledge as shared and evolving in response to the rich life histories of students and teachers, rather than as a "static body of knowledge" (p. 60).

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