

Enhancing the Motivation of African American Students: An Achievement Goal Theory Perspective

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This article discusses implications of achievement goal theory on the achievement motivation of African American students in predominantly White school settings. Studies suggest that schools which emphasize task goals—the engagement in academic tasks for the purpose of learning and improving—are more conducive to Black students' academic success and well-being than are those that emphasize ego goals—engagement for the purpose of excelling and besting others. Seven dimensions of school culture provide a framework for promoting emphasis on task goals in ethnically heterogeneous schools: academic tasks, distribution of authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation practices, use of time, and social norms.

The debate concerning the desirable face of public education in the United States seems eternal. However, as social and political conditions change, so do the central dimensions around which this debate revolves. Today, as the 20th century begins, issues pertaining to the education of the nation's heterogeneous populations, the empowerment of marginal groups, and the notion of the school as a sociopolitical setting increasingly capture central roles in the arguments of politicians and educators. Some participants in this debate frame their arguments in economic terminology, others emphasize social justice, and yet others point to complex societal forces (Delpit, 1988; Giroux, 1992; Lynch, Modgil, & Modgil, 1992). The present article relies on a slightly different theoretical framework, one that complements our views on social and political issues and on the roles that schools can play in society. In it, we offer a vision of schooling that is informed by achievement motivation theories and research. We also propose strategies for realizing such a vision. Specifically, we focus on the possible implications of a prominent achievement motivation theory—achievement goal theory—for the schooling of Black students in predominantly White schools.

The translation of theory and research into recommendations for practice in particular settings is an important goal of the field of academic motivation. When such an effort is geared toward facilitating the motivation and learning as well as the empowerment and social mobilization of African American students, it highlights the important social concerns that should rightly guide research. However, social convictions and research findings should be complemented with attention to the unique characteristics of the setting in which change is being sought. The application of motivation theory to predominantly White schools with Black minority student populations might not be identical to its application in predominantly Black schools, yet each educational setting should be viewed

as an integral part of the sociopolitical milieu. Thus, we view this exploration as part of the process of searching for and defining a better vision for the nation's schools.

THE ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

When achievement is measured along traditional indicators such as grades, graduation rates, success on standardized tests, and dropout numbers, African American students do not seem to fare well when compared to their White counterparts (Allen, 1988; Entwisle & Alexander, 1988). This gap in performance has been apparent for decades, and many have attempted to explain its causes. Early theories of motivation dominant in the 1950s and 1960s emphasized stable personality traits such as needs and cognitive dispositions as the basis for achievement motivation and performance. These theories tended to explain the gap in performance in terms of a deficit model, which suggested that African American students as a group have low achievement motivation (McClelland, 1961). Researchers working within these theoretical frameworks sought to specify the deficient nature of African American students' motivation. Some portrayed African American culture and families as emphasizing needs other than achievement (McClelland, 1961). Others suggested that experience and circumstance fated African American students to rely on external attributions such as luck rather than on internal causes such as effort. (Battle & Rotter, 1963; Friend & Neale, 1972; Murray & Mednick, 1975). African American students were also perceived as having a lower sense of competence and therefore lower aspirations (Graham, 1994). In the long run, however, none of these assumptions received consistent support.

The fallacy of the argument concerning the presumed low need for achievement as a personality characteristic of African American students was apparent to everyone who watched these students in settings other than the school (Maehr, 1974). Reviews of the literature indicated that as far as locus of control, sense of competence, expectancies for success, and patterns of attributions for success and failure were concerned, Black students were similar to White students, and sometimes manifested a more adaptive pattern than did Whites (Graham, 1988, 1994). Indeed, the only consistent finding in studies comparing the motivational processes of African American and European American participants was that the former were more likely to maintain a *high* sense of competence after failure (Graham, 1994).

More recent attempts to explain differences in performance and achievement motivation between Black and White students rely less on acquired dispositions and more on situated cognitions (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Ford, 1993; Graham, 1988; Ogbu, 1992; Steele & Aronson, 1995). The social-cognitive approach attends to the meanings associated with such activities or contexts as, for example, what students understand school and learning in school to be, its purpose, and how success is defined and achieved (Maehr, 1984; Nicholls, 1984). This article uses one particular social-cognitive theory—achievement goal theory, as described by Ames (1992b), Anderman and Maehr (1994), Dweck (1985), and Nicholls (1984)—to explore and suggest characteristics of educational environments that may facilitate the motivation and performance of African American students in White schools.

ACHIEVEMENT GOAL THEORY

Achievement goal theory is concerned with the perception and pursuit of goals. However, it is concerned not merely with immediate objectives but also with the larger concept of what it means to pursue and succeed in school (Ames, 1992b; Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Kaplan & Maehr, 1997; Maehr & Midgley, 1991). Two types of purposes (or goals)

have received the most attention: task goals and ego goals (Nicholls, 1984). Researchers use different names for these goals. Task goals are sometimes called "learning goals" or "mastery goals," and ego goals are sometimes called "performance goals" or "ability goals" (Ames, 1992b; Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Dweck, 1986).

Task goals put the accent on learning, improvement, and mastery; while ego goals accentuate social comparison and evaluation. A large body of research suggests that when students understand school in terms of task goals—that is, when they perceive the school as emphasizing learning and improvement and subsequently pursue these purposes—they manifest different cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns than do students who understand school in terms of ego goals. In the latter instance, students perceive the school as emphasizing grades, high ability, and besting others (Ames & Archer, 1988; Kaplan & Midgley, in press; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Generally, task-oriented students are more likely than ego-oriented students to use adaptive cognitive and metacognitive strategies, to attribute success and failure to controllable causes, to cope adaptively with difficulty, and to experience positive affect when faced with a challenge. By contrast, ego-oriented students, particularly those with low perceived competence, typically manifest maladaptive patterns of behavior and emotion. They avoid challenge, manifest negative affect toward tasks and learning, and use self-handicapping strategies such as procrastinating and being disruptive in class (see Ames, 1992b; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kaplan & Maehr, 2000; Urdan, 1997).

Given the concern of achievement goal theory with the meaning of the task to the person, one might expect that this theory could and should provide a useful stimulant to, and framework for, the understanding of sociocultural variation in motivation. Along with proponents of motivation theory in general (Graham, 1994, 1995; Kaplan & Maehr, 2000; Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996), achievement goal theorists have primarily pursued other agendas. That penchant, however, is beginning to change, and significantly so. The theoretical and practical importance of achievement goal theory for understanding and successfully meeting sociocultural variation and addressing the challenges posed by the increasing diversity within U.S. society has recently been discussed at length (Arunkumar, 1998; Kaplan, 1998; Maehr, 1998).

A number of programs of research have begun to make the operationalization of achievement goal theory in diverse settings a high priority. Preliminary studies and results have already proved significant. Much of this research has focused on the generalizability of the relationship between achievement goals and students' attitudes and behavior across sociocultural groups. The findings have been consistent in that task goals are associated with positive orientations toward a task as well as with more adaptive behavior while engaging in the task. A recent study conducted in a predominantly White middle school found that, among African American students, perceptions of the school as emphasizing task goals were positively related to perceptions of high academic competence and negatively related to disruptive behavior (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). In contrast, perceptions of the school as emphasizing ego goals were negatively related to students' emotional well-being. The study further found that pursuit of task goals was positively related to enhanced well-being, perceived academic competence, positive affect in school, and academic performance; yet negatively related to disruptive behavior. Alternately, pursuit of ego goals was negatively related to the positive outcomes and positively related to disruptive behavior. Midgley, Arunkumar, and Urdan (1996) found that the pursuit of ego goals among African American students was related to the use of self-handicapping strategies—strategies that undermine success in school such as delaying studying for an examination until the last moment and that are meant to provide reasons for failure other than low ability.

Of related interest is a series of studies that considered: (a) the relationship between students' perceptions of their schools' emphasis on task and ego goals; and (b) students' sense of belonging, competence, self-esteem, and ultimately achievement (Arunkumar, 1999; Arunkumar & Bryant, 1998; Arunkumar & Maehr, 1999). In these three studies, the same path-analytic model was found to fit both European American and African American middle school students. The perception that school emphasizes task goals was positively associated with a sense of belonging by both White and Black students. This sense of belonging was also positively associated with self-esteem and with objective measures of school achievement. Arunkumar's 1999 study employed both quantitative and qualitative procedures to investigate the relationship between perceptions of school emphasis on task and ego goals and perceptions of home-school dissonance among minority children. Preliminary results from this study suggest that this dissonance decreases when minority students perceive school as emphasizing task goals. Thus, as these examples reveal, achievement goal theory is stimulating a range of studies that focus on the optimum contexts for learning. Tentative findings from this line of research suggest that an emphasis on task goals and a de-emphasis on ego goals would be desirable environmental characteristics for African American students' motivation and achievement.

Achievement Goals and Intergroup Relations

When considering the achievement motivation and performance of Black students in White schools, it is obvious that intergroup perceptions and relations play a central role. Fordham and Ogbu (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1992), for example, suggest that some African American students perceive succeeding in school as "acting White" and as being in opposition to the norms of their peer group. They further contend that this perception may result in underachievement among some African American students. Steele (1992) takes a very different direction in his research, yet he focuses similarly on the influence of social contexts on meaning, motivation, and achievement. He concludes that some African American students perceive evaluative situations as threatening because of the potential confirmation such situations might portend of negative stereotypes about their racial/ethnic group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Such a concern eventually leads to dis-identification from the academic domain and to underachievement, a conclusion shared by Osborne (1997). Both Steele's and Ogbu's perspectives highlight the detrimental role of negative intergroup perceptions and attitudes on motivation, achievement, and well-being.

The concern with intergroup relations in schools cannot be detached from intergroup perceptions and relations in society. When students belong to groups that have a long history of status differences and conflict such as Whites and Blacks in the United States, educational practices must be geared toward empowering and increasing the social mobility of students from the lower-status group. A harsh debate rages over the best way to create such social change in the classroom and ultimately in society at large. Whatever the approach taken, current educational practices cannot avoid, and indeed should explicitly address, topics such as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Giroux, 1992; Slavin & Cooper, in press). To achieve the motivational goals discussed above while confronting such topics, educators must create environments that are as facilitative as possible of positive intergroup relations among students.

We have earlier argued that an emphasis on task goals and a de-emphasis on ego goals may facilitate motivation as well as improve intergroup relations in culturally diverse classrooms (Kaplan, 1998; Maehr, 1998). Moreover, ego-oriented students may be less willing than task-oriented students to collaborate with others whom they perceive to

belong to a different group (Kaplan, Menda-Ben-Yakov, & Segal, 1999). The focus on social comparison and competition that so dominates ego-oriented environments may elicit attention to group membership, group status, and group stereotypes and thus contribute to feelings of threat that are directed toward other groups (Devine, 1995; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Tajfel, 1982; Vivian, Hewstone, & Brown, 1997). However, the pursuit of task goals alone, though not related to the rejection of collaboration with others, may not be enough to elicit a desire to collaborate. Thus, as Kaplan et al. (1999) suggest, task-oriented educational environments should be augmented with a strong emphasis on the benefits of intergroup collaboration—a point on which we will elaborate further in this article.

Only a start has been made in investigating this area. Nonetheless, it seems likely that an emphasis on task goals and de-emphasis on ego goals in school, in conjunction with an emphasis on environmental aspects that facilitate intergroup collaboration, may contribute to positive intergroup relations in school. The question that remains is, what practices should be adopted in order to construct a task-oriented educational environment?

Achievement Goals and Instructional Practice

An important feature of achievement goal theory is its focus on students' construction of meaning—that is, on students' perceptions and interpretations of the environment—rather than on any particular "objective" characteristics of the environment (Ames & Archer, 1988; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Maehr, 1984, 1991; Roeser et al., 1996; Ryan, Gheen, & Midgley, 1998). This focus highlights the importance of students' perspectives relative to specific instructional practices in determining students' motivation. It also implies that a flexible approach toward educational environments should be taken. Subsequently, those who make choices about practices and environmental characteristics that emphasize task goals and de-emphasize ego goals should consider the perspectives of the particular group of students in a school. This emphasis is based on the finding that a practice that is perceived as emphasizing learning and improvement by one group of students might not be perceived in the same way by a different group of students (Knight, 1992; Tharp, 1989; Waxman, 1989). Thus, whereas an emphasis on task goals and de-emphasis on ego goals may be conceived as generalizable desired goals, the specific characteristics of the school environment may differ from school to school and should be chosen in accordance with the particular characteristics of the student body in question.

THE RELEVANCE OF ACHIEVEMENT GOAL THEORY TO BLACK STUDENTS IN WHITE SCHOOLS

A mere glance at the relevant literature would suggest that traditional notions of schooling do not contribute to contemporary African American students' perceptions of school as a place where one pursues understanding, learning, and improvement. Pointing to the common characteristics of the modern African American learner, researchers typically highlight the mismatch between these characteristics and the passive, rigid, slow-paced, quiet, individualistic nature of educational activities that are prevalent in traditional schools. Shade (1994), for example, describes the typical African American student as highly socially active, with a tendency toward extroversion, and as more likely to interpret situations along social and interactive characteristics than along task requirements. She further contends that African American students are more likely to be learning-engaged in settings that offer intense, yet supportive and warm, social interactions. Shade also notes the preference of African American students for an intuitive, holistic-integrative thinking style that often stands in contrast to the logical-mathematical style required by most traditional academic tasks. She points out the irrelevance of the content of such tasks

to most African American students' lives and the misunderstanding and de-legitimizing by White teachers of Black students' common behavioral interactions and communication styles.

In recent years, educators have increasingly emphasized the importance of the match between instructional practices and students' cultural background for students' achievement (Hollins, King, & Hayman, 1994). However, insofar as culturally heterogeneous settings are concerned, it is dangerous to take an extreme attitude regarding the need to match educational environments to the "typical" characteristics of certain groups. Even in student bodies composed of a single ethnic group one finds diversity in thinking styles and preferred interaction and work styles (Irvine & York, 1995). For example, the African American student population is heterogeneous on many dimensions, even though most research, particularly that comparing Black and White students, ignores the possibility of intraethnic differences between students of different social classes (Graham, 1994), abilities (Ford, Winborne, & Harris, 1991), and genders (Osborne, 1997). Whereas the "typical" characteristics of the African American learner are important guides for determining the optimal educational environments for African American students, such environments should also be hospitable to the diversity that exists within this group.

Another reason for caution in adopting an extreme monocultural approach to constructing culturally sensitive educational environments is that this approach paves the path to an ideology of segregation. The aim should be to design educational environments that are respectful of diversity rather than to construct specialized schools for different ethnic groups. Interestingly, even when the typical characteristics of Black and White students are taken into consideration, constructing environments that are sensitive to both groups is quite possible. Indeed, many of the criticisms about traditional schooling noted above in relation to African American students—that is, its passive, individualist, impersonal, and irrelevant nature—have also been voiced by educators and researchers in reference to students generally, White students included (McCaslin & Good, 1992). Clearly, to facilitate students' perceptions of the learning environment as emphasizing task goals, teachers should become familiar with and incorporate into their learning activities cultural knowledge that is meaningful to students' lives. It is additionally important to establish warm, personal, and supportive relationships between teachers and students. Such relationships depend on the creation of flexible participation structures that legitimize different styles of interaction and use a variety of tasks that value and require the use of different competencies (Gardner, 1983). This should be accompanied, particularly in culturally heterogeneous settings, by an explicit emphasis on structured activities that promote positive intergroup perceptions and relations.

DIMENSIONS OF THE TASK-ORIENTED, ETHNICALLY HETEROGENEOUS CLASSROOM: THE TARGETS FRAMEWORK

To provide ideas about possible ways of creating task-oriented educational environments in schools where African American students constitute a minority, this article relies upon a conceptual framework of educational environments originally conceived by Epstein (1989) and developed further by Ames (1992a), Maehr and Midgley (1991, 1996), and Patrick et al. (1997). This framework identifies seven overlapping yet conceptually distinct dimensions of educational environments, which are identified by the acronym "TARGETS." The dimensions are: the academic Task, the Authority structure, Recognition of students, Grouping practices, Evaluation principles and methods, Time use, and Social interaction practices. As Maehr and Midgley (1991) note, practices in each of these dimensions should be considered at the classroom as well as at the school level. Moreover, they

should be evaluated in terms of the messages they send to students about the goals of schooling (Ames, 1990; Maehr & Midgely, 1996; see also Fuchs et al., 1997). Another key assumption of this perspective is that in order to achieve a task-oriented learning environment, the various environmental dimensions must work in concert. Unfortunately, if one of these dimensions is out of line with the others, the emphasis on task goals can be undermined. The following sections explore each of these dimensions and recommend practices that facilitate an emphasis on task goals and a de-emphasis on ego goals in heterogeneous classrooms comprised of African American and European American students.

The Academic Task

Perhaps the most important dimension in educational environments is the academic task itself. Ames (1992a) suggests several general principles in constructing academic tasks that can facilitate students' perceived emphasis on task goals. These include the following: (1) the tasks should be interesting and meaningful to students' experiences; (2) they should be diverse and novel; and (3) they should involve active participation, personal challenge, and control over mode of engagement and type of product.

Ames notes Schunk's (1989) ideas on the benefits of helping students to establish manageable short-term goals for the tasks presented to them. She also cites the work of Corno and Rohrkemper (1985), which focuses on the need to develop task strategies such as planning and monitoring work. All of these approaches are likely to teach the value of meaningful learning and de-emphasize social comparison, and they support the recommendations offered by Shade (1994) and Foster (1995) as contributing to African American students' engagement and performance.

Content, Products, and Participation Structure. Following Patrick et al. (1997), close attention should be paid to several aspects of the academic task—specifically, the content, products, and participation structure. The content of a task should be meaningful to students' interests and lives as well as reflective of their cultural heritage (Ames, 1992a). Familiarity with students' cultural backgrounds and lives should help teachers select topics of relevance to students. In heterogeneous student populations, this may mean providing a variety of tasks that allow students to choose from culturally mainstream and culturally specific topics. In the case of African American students, such topics might include the philosophies, accomplishments, and contributions of ancient and contemporary African cultures (Diop, 1967; Nobles, 1990). Teachers should use cultural institutions and community members as resources for topics and materials and as advisors for student projects such as those that involve students in researching and presenting oral histories of their families and communities (Olmedo, 1997). Further, teachers should assist students in incorporating their own choice of content into a task. Though these practices require increased flexibility on the part of teachers, they foster teachers' clearer perceptions of the importance of the material and the skills learned. They also help students see the relevance of school subjects and skills and apply them in new situations. Finally, tasks should involve content that is interdisciplinary. Questions guiding a learning activity that are bounded by a discipline tend to be narrow and less meaningful for many students. Choosing questions that are relevant to the lives of students and their communities demands that knowledge be drawn from many fields and contributes to the development of multiple competencies while simultaneously sending messages to students about the usefulness of learning (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

The products of academic tasks should, as much as possible, differ among students, thus allowing students to focus on the process of engaging in the construction of the

product rather than on comparing their performance with that of other students (Ames, 1992a; Patrick et al., 1997). Students should have the opportunity to receive feedback and engage in a process of improving their products, a practice that emphasizes learning from mistakes rather than being punished for them. Students should also have a choice among various types of products, including options for artifacts. Personal experience suggests that discussions with students about possible appropriate products can lead to a plethora of creative and usable, albeit sometimes eccentric, artifacts. Such usable products provide meaningful feedback to students about their performance and improvement.

Last, the participation structure of the ethnically heterogeneous classroom should be flexible and allow choice among various modes of participation (Au & Kawakami, 1994). Participation opportunities should be offered equally to all students in the class. As many tasks as possible should facilitate the creation of diverse participation structures such as working individually or collaboratively, involve active movement and production of artifacts, and allow social interaction among students, whether they work collaboratively or not. The familiarity of White teachers with Black students' culturally appropriate interaction styles is imperative for the legitimization of behaviors that are actually engagement-oriented but often mistaken for delinquency (Au & Kawakami, 1994). As Shade (1994) contends: "The primary objective [of instruction] should be the completion of the task, rather than the control of movement and social interaction" (p. 179-180). Students should be encouraged, and at times required, to participate in activities that call for different types of interaction behaviors. For example, whereas some activities should involve raising one's hand and speaking in turn, others should involve choral responses and active audience participation (Hollins, 1982; Hollins, Smiler, & Spencer, 1994).

Giving legitimacy to different types of participatory behavior does not suggest anarchy, however. Whereas many behaviors are legitimate, not all behaviors are legitimate at all times. It is our contention that, within a flexible participation structure, teachers should also emphasize the appropriateness of certain behaviors in different contexts. Thus, choral responses and active audience participation should be viewed as adequate for some tasks, whereas quiet individual work or group collaboration should be viewed as adequate for others. Obviously, tasks should be designed to allow equal and meaningful time for the different participation structures with which students in the class feel comfortable.

A critical issue in schools with culturally heterogeneous student bodies is the danger of negative intergroup relations that interfere with student learning and well-being. This is a particular concern in settings where heterogeneity parallels the status differences in society at large, as is the case in predominantly White schools with African American minority populations. In such settings, the content, product, and participation structure aspects of the academic tasks presented to all students should be designed to create more positive intergroup perceptions and relations and to emphasize the role of the school as a place for collaborating and learning rather than as a place where societal tensions and inequalities are reproduced. The construction and valuing of tasks that employ contents, products, and participation structure that are varied and that include African American cultural knowledge can be joined to other practices whose goal is to balance the status of the different groups involved. An important principle that supports achievement goal theory as well as theories concerned with intergroup relations suggests that competition and social comparison can be detrimental to positive intergroup attitudes and to motivation (Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kirkus, & Miller, 1992; Kaplan et al., 1999). Thus, teachers should encourage intergroup collaboration by supplementing the tasks mentioned above with tasks that require and use cooperative intergroup learning.

Authority Structure

The authority structure of the classroom or school should enable students to develop and practice ownership over their learning and over other classroom behavior. This involves the provision of opportunities that allow students to actively take initiative and make meaningful decisions with regard to learning and classroom life. Ames (1992a) contends that there are two components to authority in a task-oriented environment, wherein:

- (1) students have opportunities to assume leadership roles, make choices, and participate in decision making; and
- (2) students engage in developing the skills that help them take responsibility for their learning.

These two components suggest that teachers should involve students in decision making with regard to classroom behavior guidelines and the implications for noncompliance, in addition to allowing students to make decisions about their learning. The latter involves assuming responsibility for decisions related to the type and number of activities, learning and participation strategies, form of product and evaluation, and time issues such as planning one's schedule (Patrick et al., 1997).

Assuming responsibility for one's learning as well as participating in decision making about school/classroom rules and regulations require certain skills. In line with Vygotsky's (1978) notion of a zone of proximal development, the acquisition of skills can be promoted in the classroom through guided participation in these processes. Such modeling of strategies relative to decision making or learning has been emphasized by educators in general (Schunk, 1991) as well as by educators concerned with the schooling of African American students (Shade, 1994). Initially, these researchers point out, students' teachers and more experienced peers typically model decision making in the same way that they model specific learning strategies (Palincsar & Brown, 1984). However, as students become familiar with and proficient in decision making and different participation procedures, teachers can delegate responsibility for these aspects to students.

For the authority structure to emphasize task goals, decisions concerning activities and modes of participation must be meaningful to students. This is due to the necessarily flexible nature and diversity of the academic tasks involved. Yet, giving students' autonomy over their choice of tasks and modes of participation should be accompanied by efforts to familiarize and encourage them to use modes of participation and learning strategies that are different from those that they find easy. These efforts can be fostered by collaborative tasks that require use of a variety of strategies reflecting the strengths of students from the different groups in the class. This approach should be accompanied by the teacher's emphasis on the applicability and importance of the various behaviors.

Typically, students are willing to engage in unfamiliar and difficult modes of participation only when they are presented with nonthreatening environments in which failure and difficulty are perceived as challenges rather than risks to their status or perceived ability. In such settings, unfamiliar modes of behavior must not be viewed as oppositional to one's identity. Again, this requires the construction of tasks in which a diversity of skills representing knowledge of students from different groups can be meaningfully and effectively used and social comparison among students avoided.

Recognition

The ways in which recognition is achieved in the classroom and the types of behaviors and capabilities for which students are recognized send explicit and implicit messages about what is valued in the classroom. Too often, recognition for high performance

inadvertently emphasizes the value of high ability and limits the chances of many students to be recognized. In such settings, the common compensatory practice of looking for something positive to say about low-achieving students' work can often do more harm than good as the students realize the double standard and hierarchy of values and interprets such recognition as low teacher expectations for their performance (Weiner, Graham, Taylor, & Meyer, 1983). Ames (1992a) emphasizes the importance of devising a recognition system in which all students have equal opportunity to be recognized. She suggests that recognition should be given mainly for extra effort, improvement, academic daring, creativity, and achievement that are measured by an absolute rather than a normative standard such as mastering a specific skill. Providing equal opportunity for Black and White students to be recognized implies that recognition should not discriminate against different manifestations of the desired behaviors and achievements. For this to happen, however, teachers should be familiar with and able to legitimize those behaviors of students from different groups that encourage them to engage in classroom tasks.

Ames also recommends that recognition should be given in private rather than publicly so that students' focus will be on the behavior performed rather than the social implications of their behavior. Although this is an important guiding principle, in classrooms with students from groups that differ widely in status, some public recognition may be beneficial. For example, Cohen and Lotan (1997) note that public recognition of success of students from low-status groups may augment their self-confidence. It may further send a message to others about the value of competencies that may be different from those valued by mainstream populations and thus result in more equal perceived status between students of different groups. Cohen and Lotan additionally note that such recognition could also contribute to higher participation in cooperative learning activities of students who commonly take a "back seat" insofar as such activities are concerned. Thus, using public recognition sparingly while considering its social comparative implications is recommended.

Grouping

Grouping students is a common practice in many schools and takes place across and within classrooms. However, the various methods of grouping students can send very different messages about the values in the classroom and the goals of learning. Students can be grouped based on ability or, by contrast, on other characteristics such as interest. Student grouping can be done for the purpose of having students of different abilities work individually on tasks of different levels of difficulty, or for the purpose of having students collaborate or peer tutor. Whereas research results are somewhat inconsistent with regard to the effect of ability grouping on students' perceived competence, results are quite clear about the enhancing effect of this practice on students' ego goals (Anderman, Maehr, & Midgley, in press). Other concerns related to student grouping include the emergence of competition between groups over status. This, unfortunately, is often the case, whether groups are based on ability or not. Thus, in order to facilitate task goals, Ames (1992a) recommends providing many opportunities for cooperative learning and using heterogeneous groups for this purpose. She also recommends changing the membership of the groups often.

Various methods exist for structuring cooperative learning activities in ethnically heterogeneous classrooms (Slavin, 1990). Moreover, several guidelines have been identified as crucial in constructing tasks that facilitate successful intergroup collaboration (Cohen & Lotan, 1997; Hertz-Lazarowitz et al., 1992; Slavin, 1997; Triandis, 1997). One such guideline suggests establishing cues such as giving the group a name, giving members artifacts that identify them as belonging to the same group, and having an explicit joint

goal for the task, all of which help define the participants as belonging to a group that overrides their other memberships (Gaertner, Mann, Dovidio, Murrell, & Pomare, 1990). This could be done, for example, by constructing activities with a meaningful goal for students from multiple ethnic groups, such as lobbying for a social cause by writing letters to public figures or producing a video program and presenting it to class, school, or community audiences.

Another important guideline states that participants in a task should have equal status. This can be achieved, for example, by explicitly creating expectations for a variety of competencies and strengths among work-group members and requiring use of these competencies in the task, as well as by requiring the presentation and integration of perspectives of work-group members that come from different cultural backgrounds (Cohen & Lotan, 1997). Cohen and Lotan further recommend the practice of assigning a student from a low-status group to the role of facilitator as a way of raising the status of students from that group. Additionally, to maintain the interest of students and improve the experiences of collaboration, they recommend varying the length of collaboration from task to task. Collaborative activities should therefore include class period-length tasks as well as extended projects that go beyond the class period. Optimally, students should be able to meet or at least communicate over the phone or computer and work on the projects outside of class time.

Offering students a choice over the mode of participation involves allowing them to work individually or collaboratively. In most schools serving different ethnic groups, it is very unlikely that students would choose to collaborate across groups (Cooper & Williams, in press; Kaplan et al., 1999). Therefore, though we recommend providing such a choice, we also recommend requiring students to work collaboratively on certain tasks, emphasizing the benefits of working in pairs or groups and structuring the tasks in ways that reward cross-group collaboration. This reward, however, should not imply a higher grade or any other extrinsic incentive that might be detrimental to students' adoption of task goals. Rather, it should offer students the opportunity to engage in interesting and intrinsically rewarding cross-cultural experiences and cross-perspective explorations. Simultaneously, teachers should send strong messages concerning their support of such collaboration.

Evaluation

None of the above recommendations facilitate the adoption of task goals if students' evaluations do not reflect the value of cross-group collaboration and learning and if they do not involve experimenting with unfamiliar modes of participation and learning strategies. Evaluation practices should therefore be geared toward providing positive feedback to students when they engage in these behaviors rather than punishing them for not performing well when trying something new and different. Unfortunately, most evaluation systems prevalent in schools use normative standards and are geared toward evaluating ability-based performance. This makes very clear, and indeed emphasizes the value of, the hierarchy of ability in the classroom. It thus facilitates social comparison and ego goals, increases anxiety, and promotes group stereotypes and fear of confirming them (Steele & Aronson, 1995) as well as contributes to disengagement (Steele, 1992). Furthermore, normative evaluation that is based on ability highlights the significance of group membership and the different status of groups, therefore contributing to increased out-group rejection (Devine, 1995; Kaplan et al., 1999). Importantly, it is also inequitable as it discriminates among students on the basis of criteria over which they have no control. It thus promotes attributions of failure to stable and uncontrollable causes that are related

to low expectations for success and low achievement motivation. As a result, one of the most important recommendations for constructing a task-oriented evaluation system is to avoid using normative standards.

Similar to our suggestions with regard to recognition practices, evaluation that facilitates task goals should be constructed so as not to discriminate among students. It should be carefully geared toward measuring progress and improvement over past performance and based on specific and absolute standards. Further, it should reward those students who collaborate across groups. Rewarding intergroup collaboration—a value in itself—should not be evaluated separately, but rather should be an integral aspect of progressing toward the successful completion of a task and the mastering of academic material. Evaluative criteria should be compatible with the use of a variety of competencies and therefore should employ practices that reduce feelings of threat and reward academic venturesomeness as well as learning from one's mistakes.

Students should also receive opportunities to improve their performance and be evaluated using different procedures and methods (Ames, 1992a). Ames notes that students are likely to adopt task goals when evaluation is tied to their progress toward individual goals, when it takes into account participation and expenditure of effort, and when it provides positive feedback on use and mastering of strategies. She recommends administering evaluation privately, but more importantly she notes that when evaluation is based on progress toward personally relevant short-term goals, students can be involved in their own evaluation. Thus, rather than being perceived as a practice controlled by the teacher, evaluation becomes a meaningful procedure through which students learn about their progress. As Bulter and Nisan (1986) contend, when evaluation is conducted through task-relevant and specific comments rather than through grades or praise, students are more likely to maintain interest in the task and in the skills learned. They further assert that when evaluation is conducted privately, it is less likely to arouse concerns regarding social comparison and others' perceptions. Private evaluation may also allow students who are concerned about peer group acceptance to more successfully negotiate conflicting social and academic goals. However, a task goal environment, particularly one that is hospitable to diversity, should facilitate congruence between social and academic goals.

The above findings and arguments suggest that evaluation should not be a distinct aspect of classroom life and learning. Rather, it is preferable that evaluation be conducted within the academic tasks in which students engage and not by separate tests whose purpose is evaluation alone. The inclusion of evaluation within the tasks, combined with the recommendation that a variety of tasks be engaged, suggests that a diversity of evaluation methods must be considered. For instance, one type of evaluation could focus on a student's progress toward each short-term goal within a larger, longer project, while another could focus on an artifact or presentation that culminates the project. Additionally, a student's choice to work individually suggests a different form of evaluation than does that for a student working on the same content but choosing to do so in a group. Thus, evaluation should become an integral part of constructing various types of tasks and planning the various participation modes among which students can choose. Students should also participate in decision making about the standards for evaluation, in evaluating their own work and in providing feedback to others.

Time

Many schools, particularly secondary schools, operate under a rigid time structure with class periods lasting approximately 45 minutes. Schedules are influenced heavily by special activities such as band, sports, and team exercises as well as lunch breaks, which

occur at set times and are dependent on kitchen staff work hours (Maehr & Midgley, 1996). A rigid time structure in school usually requires students to start and finish tasks at the same time—a practice that highlights the relative speed of students' work. Time limits also foster anxiety among students who are concerned about being able to complete a task. Finally, a rigid time structure prevents engagement in creative tasks that may demand more time than a class period allows.

Recommendations calling for the provision of choice among various types of tasks and for allowing students to take responsibility for their learning demand a flexible time structure. Such structuring also facilitates a perceived emphasis on task goals. It implies that students will be allowed to start and finish tasks at different times, thereby avoiding rigid time limits in the completion of tasks and encouraging school authorities to work together to adjust the length of class periods and break times according to the types of tasks assigned. While not providing any time limits on students' work is not advisable, teachers should work with students on improving their scheduling skills and allotting sufficient time for the completion of tasks.

Social Interaction

The final environmental dimension concerns the social interaction norms that are negotiated and enforced in the school. Social interaction has been described as a neglected and poorly handled aspect of classroom life (Blumenfeld, 1992). However, its importance for motivation and learning is gaining recognition, as manifested in the rising popularity of cooperative learning (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Miller, 1992). Among African American students, Shade (1994) contends, social interaction is considered of primary importance. Though it is important in any educational environment, in culturally heterogeneous schools this dimension takes on special significance.

Patrick et al. (1997) divide the social interaction dimension into three reciprocally influenced aspects: teacher-student interactions, social responsibility, and student-student interactions. The teacher-student interaction refers to the support, caring, warmth, and sometimes even conflict that manifest in the interactional patterns arising between teachers and students. Whereas task-oriented environments require teachers to be supportive and caring, the presence of support and care does not mean that defined roles or limits are not established in task-oriented interactional contexts. Shade notes the importance for African American students of a warm and supportive environment in which teachers provide flexible but strong leadership. In her view, an important characteristic of teacher leadership concerns the construction of a structure based on clear expectations and norms. Other educators emphasize the benefit of an authoritative or democratic style of teaching (McCaslin & Good, 1992). This style emphasizes the reasoning behind the rules and regulations, and distributes authority over decision making about classroom rules as students acquire the relevant skills for participation in such decisions. These practices are associated with the internalization of regulations and norms and with a more self-reliant and positive attitude towards one's functioning in an environment.

Social responsibility refers to the nature of the negotiations that occur between teachers and students and among students themselves regarding students' citizenry in the classroom. It includes interactions pertaining to the rules and regulations of the classroom, the implications of noncompliance, the responsibility of students for the well-being of others in the class, and the management of interpersonal conflicts. In line with the recommendations mentioned above regarding the authority of students over aspects of their own behavior and learning, students are more likely to perceive an emphasis on task goals as positive when they feel ownership over norms and regulations. Modeling of negotiation skills and strategies, providing abundant explanations of the reasoning behind

rules and regulations, sharing decision-making power, and transferring responsibility for practicing and monitoring rules to students are likely to contribute to the internalization of norms and regulations and increase students' feelings of belonging to the class community.

The student-student interaction aspect involves those norms that are emphasized, negotiated, and enforced in the classroom and that concern appropriate types of interaction between students and the appropriate contexts for their practice. Shade (1994) recommends allowing as much social interaction among students as possible. Furthermore, she states that material and activities that focus students' attention on social skills and that build on students' cooperative abilities help African American students' performance. Educators who use the cooperative learning approach highlight the importance of recruiting the natural tendency of children for social interaction for the goals of education. However, in the context of predominantly White schools with a minority of African American students, norms of social interaction need to be carefully evaluated so as not to increase, and whenever possible to reduce, existing intergroup tensions.

Additional Dimensions: Power-sharing and Language

The practices recommended in the discussion of the various dimensions described above are all geared toward creating environments in which the status of students from different groups are held as equally as possible and in which the success of one student or group of students is not perceived as a threat to that of others. These environmental characteristics should also be maintained in establishing the terminology and norms used with regard to intergroup relations in the classroom community. Resultantly, teachers should consciously construct a context for the negotiation of social interaction norms that can help make explicit those issues that apply to their classes as well as relate the issues to social processes active in the larger society. The context itself should be governed by explicit norms first established by the teacher and later negotiated among all students. Teachers should carefully strive to maintain equality among the different parties that may present arguments in such negotiations. Although this poses a sometimes complicated task, the construction of a public sphere for discussing and deciding norms in a democratic manner is essential for a positive, task-oriented environment.

One important strategy in this respect involves the language relative to group memberships that teachers use in the classroom. As Reicher and Hopkins (1996) note, language has the power to establish situated and context-related identities. Thus, a White teacher who repeatedly refers to Blacks as "they" may communicate to students a distinction between herself or himself and people of African ancestry that might contribute to a feeling of exclusion among African American students. Language is a powerful tool that can help in constructing a context in which membership is defined by a common goal in a way that does not negate other memberships. This can be supported by: (a) emphasizing the common tasks and goals of the classroom and school community, which could and should involve issues of societal intergroup relations; (b) using a language of "we"-inclusiveness; and (c) allowing and respecting students' respectful expressions of their other memberships. The language that constructs and reconstructs classroom members as belonging to one group, whose particular character and boundaries are continuously negotiated by its members, may support feelings of belonging, positive intergroup collaboration, and motivation to learn.

A FINAL WORD

An important issue concerning the education of African American students is the danger of neglecting to provide a setting in which these students can learn the competen-

cies and strategies that are necessary for them to succeed in a mainstream, White-dominated society. Delpit (1988) strongly emphasizes the importance of this consideration in her criticisms of open education, arguing that such a purportedly humanistic approach actually increases inequality as it deprives African American students of the tools they need to succeed. One approach to teaching "White" strategies to African American students is manifested in the words of teachers interviewed by Foster (1995). These teachers claimed that they motivate their Black students to succeed academically and otherwise by stressing the students', and African Americans' generally, unequal situation and their subsequent need to compete with White students on the very skills in which the latter have stronger backgrounds. Though Foster hails this strategy as one that characterizes excellent African American teachers, she and the teachers she interviewed note that it is not appropriate for implementation in schools serving mixed, ethnically diverse groups of students. Indeed, such an approach may facilitate ego goals, and it may be particularly detrimental for African American students who believe that they simply cannot compete with their European American counterparts.

African American students, as well as White students, should be exposed to concepts such as stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, and they should be made aware of the difficulties that African Americans historically have faced and continue to face in U.S. society. Furthermore, such issues should be used in the classroom to provide meaningful topics for activities and guide academic tasks that could, for example, involve students in social action. Intergroup issues that are bound to arise in a heterogeneous classroom should provide a point of departure for raising awareness, discussing, negotiating, and collaborating in decision making about intergroup issues that prevail inside and outside of school. The difficult realities that African Americans presently face in the United States and the implications of those realities for the process of education, as well as to the decisions that guide the construction of students' learning environments, should be explicitly discussed (Giroux, 1992).

The approach that we have presented in this article supports schools that emphasize a variety of competencies, including those that currently are more necessary for success in mainstream culture as well as those that are especially valued within any given subculture. Indeed, as noted earlier, an emphasis on task goals should eventuate in different processes and products, including those that require the use of competencies in which African American students may have an edge over their European American counterparts. Within the task-focused environment, where learning for all is emphasized, this is to be expected and valued and can serve as a source of mutual enrichment. This is not to say that "everything goes" in such settings, but that all students and their potential contribution to their own and their classmates' learning are equally valued, and minimal competition may exist for making one's perspective heard. In task-oriented educational environments, African American students may stand a better chance of viewing mainstream competencies not with an oppositional eye, but rather as skills that are required in certain contexts. Emphasizing task goals in the classroom is likely to contribute to students' learning these strategies more out of interest and belief in their own competence than out of a need to compete with others who have an advantage. Indeed, the construction of learning environments wherein task goals are emphasized and intergroup collaboration is valued provides a context for constructive and critical sharing, even confrontation, of difficult topics such as prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. Such educational environments are conducive to the academic as well as the social goals facing public education in the United States and many other places in the world today.

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