CHAPTER 7

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE MACROSYSTEM

Macrosystems represent broad, structurally related considerations, such as politics, social stratification, and economic distribution, as well as culture and history. In chapter 7, we have included two theoretical perspectives that lay out how processes at the macrosystem level can influence interactions at all other levels of a developing person's ecology. In Thomas Weisner's description of ecocultural theory, we learn how family routines are often constructed within the bounds of cultural dispositions and the availability of resources such as time, money, and social support. These routines can be facilitating or debilitating to children's well-being, depending on the extent to which they are supported within a given society or culture. Cynthia García Coll and Celina Chatman-Nelson describe cultural and structural processes that can directly influence parents' and children's perceptions of and interactions with institutions outside of the family context, focusing on the case of ethnic minority families, where issues of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, as well as a lack of cultural validation, can seriously interfere with families' strivings for their children's academic success.

ECOCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Thomas S. Weisner

Every cultural community provides developmental pathways for children within some ecological-cultural (ecocultural) context. *Developmental pathways* refers to the different kinds of activities, organized by families and local communities, in which that child could or will engage during development. We have an intuitive sense of this concept of pathways through life in our own life experiences. There are life paths we have engaged with that took us somewhere and paths we did not take that others have taken. Those paths had emotional meanings for us, practical consequences with costs and benefits, and important people and experiences. Furthermore, the paths were specific—they were in a particular local community, place, and time. Think back over the path that has led you to becoming an educator, for instance, or taking classes in education. In our society, there are institutions, public investments in schools and education, beliefs about being a teacher, job conditions, and

careers that you took to arrive at this course. There are also, of course, personal attributes, family characteristics, and financial resources that play a role. In addition to your own unique decisions and circumstances, you engaged these institutions and benefited from investments in education and so forth—you traversed a path.

Now imagine a child in your mind's eye. When given this mental exercise, most think of that child as an individual, typically floating alone. But instead we should think of that child somewhere on earth—in some particular, local sociocultural community. The child has a family context, a neighborhood, social relationships, resources, and so forth. When we think of a child, we should also be thinking of the ecocultural context *around* that child. Where is that child in your mind's eye? Can you imagine a child in rural Kenya; a small town in Mexico or Indonesia; Taipai, Taiwan; a slum in a South African city; a high-poverty neighborhood in your own community—or the thousands of places children live and go to school? Of course these places have differing paths for children. Now put that child and that place in motion over developmental time through the lifespan. Imagine the pathways the child would engage. Those paths consist of everyday activities and practices with their associated participants, goals, tasks, material resources, and feelings. The ecocultural approach emphasizes the importance of the child's and family's surrounding social and cultural environment as it is experienced in everyday routines (Weisner, 2002).

Certain features of the ecocultural context seem to be particularly important for children's development around the world. Some features influence children and families through economics and demography, such as subsistence and work cycles of the family and community, health and demographic characteristics, and threats to safety. Others shape children's pathways through the social organization of daily routines: the nature of the division of labor by age and sex; or children's tasks and work, including domestic, child care, and school work. Still other features influence the social roles and groups and how they are organized: roles of fathers and older siblings, children's play and play groups, or roles of women and girls in the community and supports for them. Still other features capture the influences of the wider world: the varied sources of cultural influence and information available and the extent of community heterogeneity in models of care and child activities (Weisner, 1984).

The point of view in **ecocultural theory** is that children's daily routines and activities along life pathways are the most important influences on their development. Another way to sharpen this claim is to ask yourself this: If you could do one thing to influence the life of that infant or very young child you had in your mind's eye a moment ago, what would it be? Most students think of things like this: love the child, feed and shelter the child, provide rich stimulation, touch and hold the child, talk a lot to the child, or provide money and other resources. All of these are important for a child's development, of course. But the most important thing you could do might well be to decide where on earth that child is going to grow up. Placing that child somewhere would shape a great deal, though of course not everything—because there is no one thing that determines a child's life. Nonetheless, the educational pathways and literacy experiences of that community, among other influences, would matter deeply.

Children's development can be understood as a project of families, parents, communities, and children themselves to achieve goals and find meaning in some cultural community. Families and communities try to provide opportunities for children to achieve valorized

cultural and community goals. To do so, they organize daily routines and activities with the resources at their disposal, often under very challenging conditions (Weisner, 2005).

Children's developmental pathways are made up of **cultural activities** that are organized into their daily routines. One can metaphorically think of a child's pathway as made up of these activities, like the stepping stones of a path. We move through these activities each day. Because this is where children, parents, and teachers experience and live out ecocultural influences, the daily routine of activities is a useful way to focus on how culture and context influence development. It is a very specific, setting-based way to think about such influences. In the United States, for example, children's daily routines and cultural activities might include the morning wake-up routine, driving to school, the classroom activity schedule, an afterschool program, dinnertime, watching television, cruising the mall, doing homework, domestic chores, bedtime, visiting relatives, and so forth. In addition to their explicit purposes, these cultural activities also have purposes and meanings that may be less apparent. For example, cooking dinner with one's best friend gets dinner on the table, but it may well include the goals of sociability, planning the future, and entertainment as well.

Cultural activities have five important components: (a) tasks; (b) cultural goals; (c) motives and emotional experiences of those present in the activity, including how engaged a person is in the activity; (d) people who participate in it and the relationships between them; and (e) the typical scripts or rules for how to do the activity—the norms and range of variation in the ways to do an activity in a community (Weisner, 1998). The activities of everyday life are somewhat repetitive, and they are filled with explicit and implicit messages about what families and communities believe are important and what they want children to learn and become. This is one source of their power to influence development.

There are a variety of ways to conceptualize the cultural ecology of human development. They all share a focus on the power of contexts and setting to shape development. Urie Bronfenbrenner, in his ecology systems theory (1989), offered a well-known model. He conceptualized widening circles around a child at the center. Each circle represents an increasingly distal (though powerful) influence on the child: the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems of ecological influence. Culture, for example, is far out in the macrosystem. The school and the family are in the microsystem. The ecocultural model differs from Bronfenbrenner's in several ways. The cultural and institutional ecology is not far out from the child; it is a part of every activity and setting the child is in. The unit of analysis consists of the settings and practices of children and adults in that community that engage the child each day, not separate systems and institutions increasingly far from the child and his or her everyday activities. The features of activities are specified (tasks, resources, scripts, etc.), and the influence of each should be a central part of our theory and how we use the theory. The ecocultural approach is much closer to the settings, activities, and practices each of us is very familiar with and lives within every day. The intervention implications are clear: Alter the appropriate setting and activity features of your classroom, school, community, or family—and ecocultural theory expects behavior to change.

The Cultural Project of Development

Healthy development is signified by the child's growing capacity for competent, innovative participation in cultural life. Children acquire specific domains of cultural competence and

cultural knowledge. For example, children learn rules for greeting, playing with peers, enacting gender roles, or doing domestic tasks. Developmentally, children build on their early learning experiences in the family and with primary caretakers. Development toward cultural competence and well-being occurs when children actively participate and practice within the domains of the culture that are valued by the family or community and in which the child previously could not participate or could do so only with special assistance and scaffolding (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Along with the development of cultural competence, increasingly complex and elaborate schemas for organizing cultural knowledge develop in the mind. Many psychological processes organize how such cultural knowledge is acquired: how it is perceived, experienced, felt, memorized, forgotten, and repressed, as part of human activities (D'Andrade, 1992; Shore, 1996; Weisner, 1996). The mind and its mental processes do not develop in isolation; they are embedded within daily routines in a specific local cultural community.

Hence, socialization is far from a straightforward process of "faxing" information from parents or schools into the child's mind! There is always discontinuity between cultural patterns found in everyday activities and individual development. Children acquire cultural knowledge through relationships with parents and close kin in the midst of emotional attachments and conflicts with them. Furthermore, the cultural knowledge represented to children is ambiguous, inconsistent, and filled with conflicting desires and ambivalences (Nuckolls, 1993). For example, parents may give children leeway in making decisions about peers but discourage friendships with peers whom they perceive as bad influences on their child. As children go to school they acquire new knowledge and behaviors that may conflict with the cultural knowledge embedded in the habits of the home. Children simultaneously desire, resist, and transform cultural knowledge along the way to becoming unique individuals (Weisner, 1998).

Developmental Outcomes

One of the most important outcomes of child development is **well-being**, which can be described as the ability to successfully, resiliently, and innovatively participate in the routines and activities deemed significant by a cultural community. *Well-being* also refers to the state of mind and feelings produced by participation in routines and activities, such as positive emotions, the internal psychological state of feeling effective, and a sense of satisfaction with oneself in the world as a valued person.

A child's well-being depends heavily on his or her active participation in a daily routine of activities that are sustainable, meaningful, and congruent. A *sustainable* daily routine is fitted to a local ecology, meaning that it is appropriate to the family resource base and the resources and constraints available in the cultural community. Sustainable routines also are stable and predictable for children. A *meaningful* routine has moral and cultural significance and value for family members and fits with cultural expectations for a morally appropriate pathway for children and families. A *congruent* routine balances the competing needs and goals of different family members and is not overly focused on any one member to the substantial detriment of another. Congruence recognizes that children and parents are in relationships of competition for scarce resources as well as in relationships of cooperation, continuity, and intimate affection. Excessive conflict in a child's life does not generally promote well-being.

These features of daily routines—sustainability, meaning, and congruence—matter to children's well-being. But typically they are not captured in traditional research studies of children's development and well-being. Instead, research studies on children and families tend to measure characteristics that are drawn from Western cultural norms and expectations. For example, characteristics related to children's development that are frequently examined include independence and autonomy, verbal and literacy skills, IQ, social adjustment, or secure attachment. It can be problematic when research relies solely on these types of measures to indicate children's positive development and well-being, because these characteristics may not be relevant to other cultural communities that emphasize different developmental goals for children. They certainly are useful for many purposes, but none captures the overall context of a child's pathway and how that context matters for well-being. Thus, ecocultural theory suggests that outcome measures should go beyond traditional developmental measures and incorporate a more holistic view of successful child development. Ideally, such outcome assessments would attend to children's daily routines and the well-being they experience through participating in them (see Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes, & Moore, 2003).

Middle Childhood as an Ecocultural Project

Middle childhood is a period of important developmental advances that establish growing competency for the tasks of adulthood. Middle childhood, or the juvenile maturational stage of human development, begins around age 6 (first grade) and ends as the child begins puberty (roughly 12 or 13, or sixth to seventh grades). This period is characterized by executive/regulatory control of behavior and emotion, cognitive complexity in social understanding, and enormous gains in acquiring cultural knowledge. It is no accident that this is when primary school begins. These tasks of adulthood and information acquired during this period vary according to the ecocultural context. For example, a central issue in U.S. families with school-aged children is the gradual shift away from direct parental control of the child's behavior as children spend more time in activity settings at school and with their peers. Children gradually move from coregulated activities with parents and siblings to those that are self- and peer-regulated. Parents retain overall managerial influence, but children are increasingly capable of directing their own activities for long periods of the day (see "Social Executive Functioning," chap. 3). Children enter new and strange settings (e.g., schools, places of worship, sports teams) and select their friends with some degree of parental or teacher monitoring. Such friendships in the United States usually involve the creation of new, personal, and independent alliances.

In many non-Western cultures, the context of that developmental task is different. Children gradually move from being under the caretaking responsibility of older children and other nonparental members of the household (e.g., grandparents) to becoming responsible caretakers who are in charge of younger siblings and cousins. Children aged 6 to 12 take on increasingly important family roles, including those relating to child care, as well as attending school and participating in peer groups. Parents have managerial and disciplinary roles, but child care is more diffused and shared. Because children live in kin-based groupings, there are few activity settings in which other children who are strangers are present. The sibling caretaking pattern has as its goal to produce an interdependent,

responsible child, rather than an independent, self-directed, highly individuated child. Of course these distinctions are relative, because children everywhere experience both kinds of situations to some degree, but the contrasting cultural patterns are significant.

Conclusion

Ecocultural theory and its long tradition of emphasizing cultural influences on development highlights the diversity of cultural responses in the service of a common goal of families and schools everywhere: to provide a daily routine of life that is sustainable, meaningful, and congruent for children and families. Well-being is a useful and holistic perspective from which to evaluate and understand children's development across diverse communities, because it requires understanding community goals and perspectives and does not predetermine the content or contexts that will have meaning in that community. A cultural approach to development can offer schools an expanded and more inclusive definition of what constitutes successful development. It provides a framework to use in understanding cultural continuities and discontinuities across children's home, school, and community contexts.

Implications for Educators

Create and support sustainable, meaningful, and congruent daily routines and activities for children to promote their positive development and well-being. This implies that teachers and service providers should develop greater awareness of cultural continuities and discontinuities among children's multiple environments. It also suggests that it could be useful to think of the school and classroom as a cultural activity in itself. Classroom life is a small-scale community that is important for children, and it has a set of scripts, beliefs, and practices. Its activities can be analyzed just like nonschool activities. Change in classroom communities and activities, including changing how teachers teach, can be difficult, and one reason for this is that daily routines have their own local rules and logics that have to be taken into account (Gallimore, 1996).

Become familiar with children's daily home lives—how their day is organized, with whom and where they spend time, and how this time is spent. Children bring their prior scripts and expectations into the classroom, as well as learn new ones. Teachers and service providers can be cognizant of the continuity and discontinuity that exists among family, community, and school values and expectations. By developing awareness of potential cultural conflicts between home and school, teachers and service providers can consider how they may affect children's school and achievement-related behaviors. They can then create plans to address these challenges by selectively changing some classroom activities to produce a better fit.

Ideally, children will go to the same classroom every day and can expect a fairly predictable mix of activities—reading, writing, experimenting, and so forth. However, when schools are overcrowded, unpredictable classroom arrangements can make sustainable routines difficult (e.g., rotating classrooms, trailers, schedule changes).

Provide daily routines that are congruent, in which there is a balance between each individual child and the class as a whole. This can be achieved through small-group work, whole-class

instruction, and utilizing parent volunteers for one-on-one work with children who need additional assistance.

Ensure that daily practices and values are meaningful to children and their families. This might be achieved through classroom management practices wherein the values of sharing, respect for property of others, taking turns, and following teacher instructions can be encouraged. Can you bring children's daily routines into your classroom activities in a positive way? Can you use favorite family, community, church, or peer activities to tie to literacy and reading lessons? If children from minority or immigrant groups have family obligations and responsibilities, can these be brought into classroom engagement and success as well?

Be aware of how culture may shape parental expectations of children as they get older. A family may, for example, emphasize a child's contributions to the household (e.g., child care, income, household chores) more than the child's spending time with friends.

Develop greater awareness of how one's own practices and expectations of children (at the individual and institutional level) reflect one's own cultural background. For example, classrooms can emphasize individual competition or group cooperation to varying degrees, reflecting teachers' and schools' conventional practices. If children are familiar with helping, even eager to help, with classroom tasks, can this be encouraged? If children learn from other children and are cared for by them at home, can they gain from tutoring by other children or working in groups?

ETHNIC AND RACIAL DIVERSITY

Cynthia García Coll and Celina Chatman-Nelson

Parenting is a very rewarding yet often challenging life task. Parents—whether biologically or otherwise appointed—are typically the primary caregivers of children from infancy into late adolescence. Parents are responsible for fulfilling children's basic needs, such as food and shelter, as well as shaping psychosocial attributes, such as personality characteristics and beliefs and values. Moreover, as children mature and begin to interact more frequently with institutions beyond the family, parents must consider these other socializing agents in ensuring their children's continued well-being and positive development (see "Social Executive Functioning," chap. 3). Ideally, such activities contribute to children's development into independent, well-functioning adults. These processes can be compromised in family situations where cultural and structural obstacles prevail.

Theoretical Issues

Ecocultural theories in child development describe children's development as occurring within a dynamic system of daily routines that are embedded, simultaneously, in several interacting contexts (see "Ecocultural Understanding," this chapter). These social and

cultural contexts include the physical environment as well as the outlets available within the community for families and children to carry out their various roles. Thus, parents' socialization of children can be constrained or facilitated by schools and other community contexts to the extent that there is congruence between the beliefs, values, and behaviors reinforced within each. Similarly, theories in developmental psychology posit that community contexts such as neighborhoods and schools, as well as the cultural predispositions shared among the mainstream, interact with family demographics and can constrain or facilitate parents' influences on children (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

In their integrative model for studying developmental competencies among ethnic minority children (see Figure 7.1), García Coll and colleagues (1996) argued that researchers must consider both those sources of variation uniquely salient to populations of color and more generalized sources of variation. They posited that social position factors—or demographic markers used to stratify populations within a society—predispose children to particular developmental pathways, as mediated through social disadvantage mechanisms such as racism and discrimination. The resulting spatial and social segregation, in turn, subjects children to environments that either promote or inhibit their positive development, including schools and neighborhoods. The unique set of goals, values, and attitudes that is created in response to these environments—or the adaptive culture—shapes children's experiences and ultimately requires a specific set of competencies that may differ from those required for mainstream notions of success. In the following section, we describe in greater detail some of the specific mechanisms that can create disadvantages, as explained in this model.

Cultural Considerations in the Development of Ethnic and Racial Minority Children

Despite the lack of attention to culture, historically, in theories regarding children's development, many cultural processes play a significant role in children's development across contexts. **Culture** is an amorphous concept, but there remains some consensus across social science disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology that it refers, broadly, to a set of values, norms, beliefs, and symbols that define what is acceptable to a given society, are shared by and transmitted across members of that society, and dictate behavioral transactions within that society (e.g., Goodenough, 2003; Keesing, 1974; Peterson, 1979; Phinney, 1996). Here we focus on two specific cultural processes: cultural mismatch and acculturation. Although there is considerable overlap between these concepts, each plays a distinctive role in children's development.

Cultural Mismatch. **Cultural mismatch** occurs when parents' (and eventually children's) beliefs and values conflict with those held by other socializing agents, such as teachers and other school personnel. These conflicts range in scope from beliefs about how child development occurs to beliefs and values about what aspects of a child's development warrant special attention and even intervention (García Coll, Meyer, & Brillon, 1995). In such circumstances, parents may teach children behaviors and attitudes that may be adaptive in their home or neighborhood environment but not functional within the school (Garcia Coll & Magnuson, 2000). For example, in some countries it is not acceptable to question elders or persons with authority, such as teachers, a practice that is encouraged in many interactive

FIGURE 7.1   Developmental Competencies Among Ethnic Minority Children
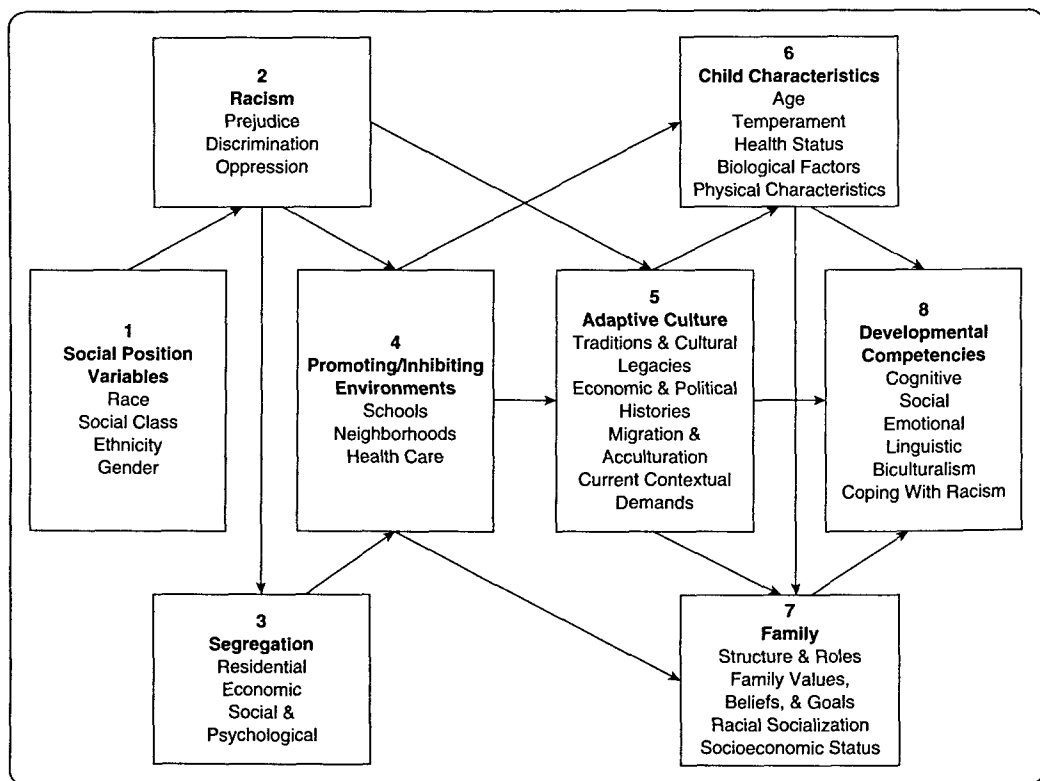
learning approaches currently endorsed in the United States. Likewise, within school contexts children may learn behaviors and attitudes that may be disruptive within the family. For example, a child who speaks a language other than English at home may have difficulty making friends in the neighborhood and at school; loss of the home language in favor of English, however, may strain the child's communication with family members who are not proficient in English. This example illustrates conflicts that can arise between children and parents when there is a cultural mismatch between the family and, for example, the school.

In some instances, cultural traditions upheld by the family are not only unrewarded outside of the family system, they are explicitly sanctioned by mainstream institutions. For example, in the early 1990s, a task force made up of parents, scholars, and various school personnel from throughout an Oakland, California, school district noted that African American students whose speech was based in African Language Systems (more colloquially and controversially referred to as Ebonics) were stigmatized and otherwise negatively perceived by teachers and school personnel (this argument was but one point included within a broader context of improving schooling for African American children). Some

scholars, parents, and educators believed that these biased perceptions lowered teachers' expectations of students who did not use standard English (even if they were capable) and perhaps contributed to their underachievement. The task force responded by recommending that teachers and other school personnel become familiar with Ebonics in order to better understand their students and support their learning. This recommendation was mired in national controversy, mostly because the approach still suggested that urban Black culture was somehow deficient and therefore responsible for Black students' underachievement. But our point here is that the task force acknowledged and tried to address the cultural mismatch between the school and its students and their families.

The concept of cultural mismatch is especially useful in understanding family engagement in schools. For example, in a recent study, García Coll and colleagues (2002) found that the relatively low engagement of Cambodian immigrant families as compared to those from Portugal and the Dominican Republic can be explained in part by factors related to the groups' different cultural orientations. Specifically, Cambodian families traditionally have viewed school and schooling as being the exclusive domain of teachers and educators (in traditional Cambodia, monks serve as teachers). Many traditional Cambodian parents believe it to be inappropriate and disrespectful for parents to interfere with schooling. In the United States, however, some forms of parental engagement in schools are not only rewarded but expected and predictive of positive academic achievement (e.g., Hara & Burke, 1998; Lopez, Sanchez, & Hamilton, 2000). For this reason, school success among children of traditionally oriented Cambodian parents may be compromised to the extent that these parents do not engage in the forms of engagement that are linked to student achievement in the United States.

Importantly, however, we know that families who value education and schooling support their children's achievement in other ways that have been shown to be effective beyond participation in school activities (Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001; Delgado-Gaitán, 1992, 1994; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978; Moll & Greenberg, 1992). Examples of other forms of effective family educational engagement include parents' communicating positive attitudes toward schooling and achievement and obtaining homework assistance for their children from members of an extended family network. Ethnic and racial minority parents typically hold high aspirations for their children's academic and vocational achievements and consistently convey this to their children (Huss-Keeler, 1997). Studies indicating that poor and minority parents with limited resources (e.g., income, education, psychological adjustment) are less involved in their children's education typically have been limited to traditional notions of engagement (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings and participation in school-sponsored activities; Griffith, 1998). The challenge for teachers and schools is to identify methods for acknowledging these forms of family educational engagement in ways that reward the students.

Acculturative Pressures. In the preceding Oakland example, cultural mismatch gave rise to issues of acculturation as well. **Acculturation** refers to a process whereby individuals, families, or whole communities adopt the practices, attitudes, and beliefs of a culture that is different from their own. The parents in Oakland experienced pressure (real or perceived) to negotiate a balance between the family culture and the push for their children's acculturation into the mainstream (e.g., Boykin & Toms, 1985; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). Acculturation provides one way of examining individual differences as a moderator

of cultural influences on development. Levels of acculturation vary greatly, even within families (as illustrated in the preceding example of the child who abandons the family's home language in favor of English). To the extent that acculturation levels are high, cultural mismatch will be less likely to play a role in children's development; however, highly acculturated individuals who are disconnected from their family's culture can also be at risk. *Biculturalism*—developing competencies in both cultures and being able to determine for which contexts and situations they are most appropriate (or accepted)—has been shown to lead to more favorable developmental outcomes (e.g., LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Bicultural competencies are especially important for students whose families straddle two or more cultures, such as in the case of transnational immigrant families.

Despite acculturative pressures and instances of cultural mismatch, culture as it is enacted within families can often be a resource in children's development. By most definitions within the social sciences, culture is bound to contexts, as it represents the set of dispositions accepted by a self-defined group of people as being most adaptable to their given environments (Goodenough, 2003; Keesing, 1974). It follows that parents will draw on those aspects of their culture that are most likely to enable their children to succeed in the areas they value, such as school. Moreover, instrumental competencies—those basic, universal skills that facilitate overall functioning within any context, such as cognitive and socioemotional skills—are valued across many cultures (García Coll & Magnuson, 2000). To the extent that these universal developmental skills are valued within a given culture, the teachings and practices of that culture are likely to be a developmental resource. For example, being able to solve problems is a universal skill that is likely valued among most cultures and linked to many positive outcomes.

Minority Status and Social Disadvantage

Besides instances of cultural mismatch, ethnic and racial minority families must also deal with more **structural barriers to resources**, both objective and perceived. For example, because such groups are overrepresented among the socioeconomic strata below the poverty level, ethnic and racial minority parents are more likely to experience economic strain and have limited access to resources (McLoyd, 1990; Ogbu, 1981). Even in the absence of such strain, such as among more socioeconomically advantaged families, ethnic and racial minority parents must consider other forms of **oppression** such as unfair treatment (discrimination), unfounded negative attitudes (prejudice), and unfavorable affective dispositions (racism) based on their racial or ethnic group membership (García Coll et al., 1996). These issues present additional domains of life for which ethnic and racial minority parents must prepare their children. Moreover, limited financial and psychosocial resources (such as psychological adjustment) have been linked to lower levels of traditional forms of parental engagement (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, PTA) among ethnic and racial minority families (Ascher, 1988).

Minority status, by definition, relegates families and children to disadvantaged social positions. The structural barriers and social biases just described derive from these social positions and require families to develop unique coping skills to protect themselves and their children from negative outcomes. But even if families become competent in their coping capacity, they must still deal with stressors not experienced by families in more advantaged

social positions. Thus, social position for ethnic and racial minority families can put them at risk for compromised well-being, including children's educational outcomes (García Coll et al., 1996).

Boykin and Toms's (1985) **triple quandary theory** of African American parental socialization captures the complex social and cultural dilemma faced by ethnic and racial minority families. Although the theory is specific to African Americans, it is logically applicable to other racial and ethnic minority groups. The theory posits that African American families must prepare their children in three general domains to ensure their successful development. First, they must socialize their children in terms of the cultural traditions, beliefs, and values held by African Americans as a group. Second, they must socialize their children in terms of the traditions, beliefs, and values that are rewarded by mainstream American institutions to ensure their success within those institutions. And third, they must prepare their children for potential encounters with stereotypes, racism, discrimination, and other like biases. This third quandary is particularly salient for African Americans, given this group's unique history of slavery in the United States. Socialization within this triple quandary can be a formidable task for a family system already coping with many sources of economic and social disadvantage, such as living in crime-ridden neighborhoods, attending schools with lower resources, and suffering many financial strains.

Conclusion

Cultural differences can greatly impact children's development. When cultural conflicts between families and schools persist, the rich ethnic backgrounds of minority students can create obstacles instead of being resources for development. Language differences, diverging views on parenting practices, and acculturation all potentially lead to uncomfortable inconsistencies for the children caught between cultures. Unresolved cultural conflicts and a lack of support or understanding from educators often restrict family engagement.

Implications for Educators

Understand the cultural, structural, economic, and historical bases of family engagement. Educators must consider both cultural and structural issues in addressing low levels of traditional parental engagement among some ethnic and racial minority families. Rather than inferring that minority parents are simply uninterested in their children's achievement, teachers and other school personnel should seek to understand the bases of parents' beliefs about their children's schooling and education and the many barriers to resources and knowledge that these families may experience (García Coll et al., 2002). All parents share educators' general goals of seeing children succeed educationally, but their daily demands or their lack of know-how may get in the way of translating these values into routines that are supportive of the development of school-specific skills. This basic assumption is prerequisite to understanding and supporting educational engagement among ethnic and racial minority families. Otherwise, any efforts to increase engagement among these families and in training school personnel in attempts to engage them will likely be misguided and misinformed. School efforts should focus on providing families with tools that fit within their existing routines and cultural frames in supporting their children's educational success.

Support family engagement beyond the school grounds. Likewise, educators must recognize and support forms of family engagement likely to occur among minority families outside of the school. In one study, Mexican-descent parents in California perceived their primary obligation in their children's educational experiences to be to instill in them a moral foundation. As long as their children were respectable and honest, they believed, they would be rewarded in school and would henceforth be successful academically (Cooper, Domínguez, & Rosas, 2005). These types of beliefs, together with the valuing of academic achievement, led parents to provide supports to their children in a variety of ways, short of their actual presence in and interaction with the school institution. For example, children reported being frequently reminded by their parents of the importance of school success and excused from their chores and other responsibilities so that they could complete homework and study assignments. Educators should actively engage families in sharing their own perspectives about how they support their children's achievement. In this way, educators learn more about students' family values and household routines and are better able to resolve family-school conflicts in ways that value the families' approach and support the students' success.

Attend to minority family socialization processes. Racial and ethnic minority parents face a triple quandary of socializing their children in at least two cultural systems (the family's ethnic culture and the mainstream) and preparing them to deal with racism and other biases. In cases of transnational immigrant families, there is the added demand of navigating between the new, hybridized, ethnic-American culture and the original culture in the home country. Depending on the specific strategies parents use, they may be able to equip their children with ample resources for buffering against both cultural mismatch and social devaluation. But not all parents are equally knowledgeable or experienced in managing this quandary. Some may be better able to prepare their children for participating in the mainstream culture, which can leave them unprepared for successful interactions with family members and peers from their ethnic group. Other parents may prepare children to participate in both the mainstream and the ethnic group culture but not to cope with potential experiences of racism or discrimination. Schools' attention to these issues could facilitate family educational engagement. For example, psychologist Beverly Tatum (1997) recommended that schools provide training to encourage and facilitate open dialogue on race and ethnicity among students, families, and personnel, especially discussions about prejudice and discrimination. Putting the issues on the table (by people who are knowledgeable and skilled to do this work), she argued, allows people to share their beliefs and even their fears as they pertain to race and ethnicity and, consequently, leads to opportunities for clarifying and correcting previously unaddressed misconceptions. By ignoring the demands presented by race, ethnicity, and minority status, schools can foster feelings of alienation among affected families and consequently decrease their interest and motivation in making home-school connections.