

**CULTURE, STYLE  
AND THE  
EDUCATIVE PROCESS**



Second Edition

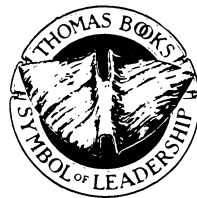
**CULTURE, STYLE  
and the  
EDUCATIVE PROCESS**

Making Schools Work  
for  
Racially Diverse Students

*Edited by*

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*To Oscar, Christina, Kenneth, Patti and Ronnie D.,  
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all the STREAM STARS who allowed me to practice these ideas.*



## PREFACE

An increasing amount of attention is being given to the fact that a large number of students of color are not performing to their maximum potential within the current school setting. Their rejection of and hostility toward school and all of its attendant practices has generated national concern because this country cannot survive if a large portion of its citizens are uneducated, unproductive and noncontributing. The societal and economic implications of such a situation are staggering.

In the examination of this problem, it has become increasingly clear that there are some rather significant differences in student/teacher perceptions of how one becomes educated. These differences seem to be more of a barrier to satisfactory performance than the lack of ability to which this phenomena is usually attributed. This perceptual incongruity leads students from the communities on which this book focuses to report that they believe that schools and teachers are not interested in teaching them, do not like them and do not want them to succeed. The students, as well as scholars and parents, believe that if the educational agents were serious about wanting them to do well, more effort would be made to promote changes in teacher behaviors, changes in the way class is conducted, changes in communication, changes in the way material is presented and changes in the curriculum and methods of assessment.

Although this book focuses on African-American, Mexican-American, American Indians and the Hmong from Southeast Asia because these populations seem to be experiencing the most difficulty, it should be noted that students in general are making similar demands because this generation has become much more visual, much more active, much more technologically based and much more people-oriented than previous generations. Therefore, as one reviews these articles, it is important to keep in mind that the suggestions made for the different racial groups can also have a profound impact on other students because this population cohort is becoming more similar in culture than different. In other

words, using these ideas can result in a much more enhanced and enriched classroom for **all** students.

The book is divided into three sections. The first provides a general idea about the cultural styles of the different racial groups. Please do not assume that these characteristics represent all of the people within particular populations. The purpose of this section is to give a sense of the uniqueness of the groups from their perspective as a way of providing some guidelines for observation similar to the identified developmental differences among children. Culture represents the perceptions and meanings attached to ideas as well as accepted behavior which students learn in their communities before they come to school. These characteristics and perceptions of the world are much more important and more representative of the students than their skin color.

The second section concentrates on learning styles with particular attention on how culture affects the way students acquire information. Particular attention is given to the concept of field-independence and field-dependence which is the most popular dimension of cognitive style under discussion. This concept represents a common understanding about how individuals approach reasoning, decision-making and problem solving differently. In other words, it defines an individual's preferred learning style. Educators who understand this dimension can better design instruction in ways which will help all students learn, particularly when their thinking style differs from the one promoted by the school.

The third section provides ideas and suggestions on how to address the differences in cultural orientation if changes in student motivation and attitude toward learning are to occur. Attention to culture facilitates the transformation of the psychological climate which teachers create for learning. This environment sets the stage for the development of student-teacher communication, for developing student self-esteem, and for promoting the belief that the students can succeed. Students who perceive themselves to be in an unfriendly milieu do not believe they have the support or opportunity to learn and are, therefore, unwilling to expend energy on processing the material. As stated by Goleman (1995) continual emotional distress [such as being in an alienating situation] can create deficits in a child's intellectual abilities and cripple their capacity to learn.

The basic premise of this book is: Educators can make a difference in academic performance of students of color if they accept their uniqueness,

develop activities which capitalize on the students' preferred styles while teaching them other strategies for learning, and ensure that they feel psychologically comfortable so that they will take the risk of engaging in new and different activities and exploring new ideas. Addressing culture and style is the key to making schools work for racially different students.

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- Howe, H., & Strauss, B.: *13th Gen: Abort, retry, ignore, fail?* New York, Vintage Books, 1993.



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Thanks also goes to Claudia Melear at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville whose work in African-American learning styles and science will soon become an important contribution to this area; to Carol Mitchell of the University of Nebraska-Omaha for her review; and to all of the educators who continue to use my work as a theoretical basis for their practice.





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**PART I**  
**CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF LEARNING**



# Chapter 1

## CULTURE: THE KEY TO ADAPTATION

BARBARA J. SHADE

**W**hat is culture? Culture, as Maehr (1974) points out, represents a group's preferred way of perceiving, judging, and organizing the ideas, situations, and events they encounter in their daily lives. It represents the rules or guidelines a set of individuals who share a common history or geographical setting use to mediate their interaction with their environment. As such, culture might involve adherence to a specific religious orientation, use of a certain language or style of communication, as well as preferences for various expressive methods to represent their perceptions of the world, i.e., in art, music, or dance. Culture also determines the guidelines individuals within groups use to select the specific information to which they attend as well as the interpretation given to that information. For Americans of color, culture takes on the added dimension of establishing guidelines for interacting with a society which does not value either their ethnicity, their history and heritage, or their language. Therefore, to truly understand culture, one must understand the process of adaptation.

### STYLE AND THE ADAPTATION PROCESS

Adaptation, according to some theorists, is viewed as the behavior which results from an individual's or group's ability to selectively meet the demands of a perceived environment (Allerhand, Weber, Haug, 1970). These scholars suggest that this process represents a two-way interaction between the person and the environment and that successful adaptation occurs when this interaction is accomplished with a limited amount of stress, anxiety, or without exceeding the psychological, financial, or other resources available (Coyne & Lazarus, 1980). The responses involved in making adaptation to the environment involves: the cognitive appraisal or interpretation of the information gleaned in the environment or situation; the affective processing or reappraisal of the situation