FROM ROGOFF

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Orienting Concepts and Ways of Understanding the Cultural Nature of Human Development

Human development is a cultural process. As a biological species, humans are defined in terms of our cultural participation. We are prepared by both our cultural and biological heritage to use language and other cultural tools and to learn from each other. Using such means as language and literacy, we can collectively remember events that we have not personally experienced —becoming involved vicariously in other people's experience over many generations.

Being human involves constraints and possibilities stemming from long histories of human practices. At the same time, each generation continues to revise and adapt its human cultural and biological heritage in the face of current circumstances.

My aim in this book is to contribute to the understanding of cultural patterns of human development by examining the regularities that make sense of differences and similarities in communities' practices and traditions. In referring to cultural processes, I want to draw attention to the configurations of routine ways of doing things in any community's approach to living. I focus on people's participation in their communities' cultural practices and traditions, rather than equating culture with the nationality or ethnicity of individuals.

For understanding cultural aspects of human development, a primary goal of this book is to develop the stance that *people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of*

the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities—which also change.

To date, the study of human development has been based largely on research and theory coming from middle-class communities in Europe and North America. Such research and theory often have been assumed to generalize to all people. Indeed, many researchers make conclusions from work done in a single group in overly general terms, claiming that "*the child* does such-and-so" rather than "these children did such-and-so."

For example, a great deal of research has attempted to determine at what age one should expect "the child" to be capable of certain skills. For the most part, the claims have been generic regarding the age at which children enter a stage or should be capable of a certain skill.

A cultural approach notes that different cultural communities may expect children to engage in activities at vastly different times in childhood, and may regard "timetables" of development in other communities as surprising or even dangerous. Consider these questions of when children can begin to do certain things, and reports of cultural variations in when they do:

When does children's intellectual development permit them to be responsible for others? When can they be trusted to take care of an infant?

In middle-class U.S. families, children are often not regarded as capable of caring for themselves or tending another child until perhaps age 10 (or later in some regions). In the U.K., it is an offense to leave a child under age 14 years without adult supervision (Subbotsky, 1995). However, in many other communities around the world, children begin to take on responsibility for tending other children at ages 5–7 (Rogoff et al., 1975; see figure 1.1), and in some places even younger children begin to assume this responsibility. For example, among the Kwara'ae of Oceania,

> Three year olds are skilled workers in the gardens and household, excellent caregivers of their younger siblings, and accomplished at social interaction. Although young children also have time to play, many of the functions of play seem to be met by work. For both adults and children, work is accompanied by singing, joking, verbal play and entertaining conversation. Instead of playing with dolls, children care for real babies. In addition to working in the family gardens, young children have their own garden plots. The latter may seem like play, but by three or four years of age many children are taking produce they have grown themselves to the market to sell, thereby making a significant and valued contribution to the family

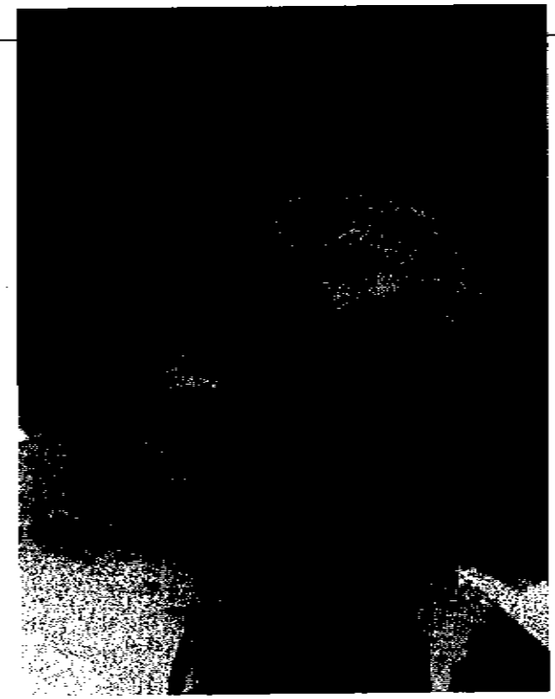


FIGURE 1.1
This 6-year-old Mayan (Guatemalan) girl is a skilled caregiver for her baby cousin.

When do children's judgment and coordination allow them to handle sharp knives safely?

Although U.S. middle-class adults often do not trust children below about age 5 with knives, among the Efe of the Democratic Republic of Congo, infants routinely use machetes safely (Wilkie, personal communication, 1989; see figure 1.2). Likewise, Fore (New Guinea) infants handle knives and fire safely by the time they are able to walk (Sorenson, 1979). Aka parents of Central Africa teach 8- to 10-month-old infants how to throw small spears and use small pointed digging sticks and miniature axes with sharp metal blades:

> Training for autonomy begins in infancy. Infants are allowed to crawl or walk to whatever they want in camp and allowed to use knives, machetes, digging sticks, and clay pots around camp. Only if an infant begins to crawl into a fire or hits another child do parents or others interfere with the infant's activity. It was not unusual, for instance, to see an eight month old with a six-inch knife chopping the branch frame of its family's house. By three or four years of age children can cook themselves a meal on the fire, and by ten years of age Aka children know enough subsistence skills to live in the forest alone if need be. (Hewlett, 1991, p. 34)

FIGURE 1.2
An Efe baby of 11 months skillfully cuts a fruit with a machete, under the watchful eye of a relative (in the Ituri Forest of the Democratic Republic of Congo).

So, at what age do children develop responsibility for others or sufficient skill and judgment to handle dangerous implements? "Ah! Of course, it depends," readers may say, after making some guesses based on their own cultural experience.

Indeed. It depends.

Variations in expectations for children make sense once we take into account different circumstances and traditions. They make sense in the context of differences in what is involved in preparing "a meal" or "tending" a baby, what sources of support and danger are common, who else is nearby, what the roles of local adults are and how they live, what institutions people use to organize their lives, and what goals the community has for development to mature functioning in those institutions and cultural practices.

Whether the activity is an everyday chore or participation in a test or a laboratory experiment, people's performance depends in large part on the circumstances that are routine in their community and on the cultural practices they are used to. What they do depends in important ways on the cultural meaning given to the events and the social and institutional supports provided in their communities for learning and carrying out specific roles

Cultural research has aided scholars in examining theories based on observations in European and European American communities for their applicability in other circumstances. Some of this work has provided crucial counterexamples demonstrating limitations or challenging basic assumptions of a theory that was assumed to apply to all people everywhere. Examples are Bronislaw Malinowski's (1927) research questioning the Oedipal complex in Sigmund Freud's theory and cross-cultural tests of cognitive development that led Jean Piaget to drop his claim that adolescents universally reach a "formal operational" stage of being able to systematically test hypotheses (1972; see Dasen & Heron, 1981).

The importance of understanding cultural processes has become clear in recent years. This has been spurred by demographic changes throughout North America and Europe, which bring everyone more in contact with cultural traditions differing from their own. Scholars now recognize that understanding cultural aspects of human development is important for resolving pressing practical problems as well as for progress in understanding the nature of human development in worldwide terms. Cultural research is necessary to move beyond overgeneralizations that assume that human development everywhere functions in the same ways as in researchers' own communities, and to be able to account for both similarities and differences across communities.

Understanding regularities in the cultural nature of human development is a primary aim of this book. Observations made in Bora Bora or Cincinnati can form interesting cultural portraits and reveal intriguing differences in custom, but more important, they can help us to discern regularities in the diverse patterns of human development in different communities.

Looking for Cultural Regularities

Beyond demonstrating that "culture matters," my aim in this book is to integrate the available ideas and research to contribute to a greater understanding of *how* culture matters in human development. What regularities can help us make sense of the cultural aspects of human development? To understand the processes that characterize the dynamic development of individual people as well as their changing cultural communities, we need to identify regularities that make sense of the variations across communities as well as the impressive commonalities across our human species. Although research on cultural aspects of human development is still relatively sparse, it is time to go beyond saying "It depends" to articulate patterns in the variations and similarities of cultural practices.

The process of looking across cultural traditions can help us become aware of cultural regularities in our own as well as other people's lives, no matter which communities are most familiar to us. Cultural research can help us understand cultural aspects of our own lives that we take for granted as natural, as well as those that surprise us elsewhere.

For example, the importance given to paying attention to chronological age and age of developmental achievements is unquestioned by many who study human development. However, questions about age of transitions are themselves based on a cultural perspective. They fit with cultural institutions that use elapsed time since birth as a measure of development.

One Set of Patterns: Children's Age-Grading and Segregation from Community Endeavors or Participation in Mature Activities

It was not until the last half of the 1800s in the United States and some other nations that age became a criterion for ordering lives, and this intensified in the early 1900s (Chudacoff, 1989). With the rise of industrialization and efforts to systematize human services such as education and medical care, age became a measure of development and a criterion for sorting people. Specialized institutions were designed around age groups. Developmental psychology and pediatrics began at this time, along with old-age institutions and age-graded schools.

Before then in the United States (and still, in many places), people rarely knew their age, and students advanced in their education as they learned. Both expert and popular writing in the United States rarely referred to specific ages, although of course infancy, childhood, and adulthood were distinguished. Over the past century and a half, the cultural concept of age and associated practices relying on age-grading have come to play a central, though often unnoticed role in ordering lives in some cultural communities —those of almost all contemporary readers of this book.

Age-grading accompanied the increasing segregation of children from the full range of activities in their community as school became compulsory and industrialization separated workplace from home. Instead of joining with the adult world, young children became more engaged in specialized child-focused institutions and practices, preparing children for later entry into the community.

I argue that child-focused settings and ways in which middle-class parents now interact with their children are closely connected with age-grading and segregation of children. Child-focused settings and middle-class child-rearing practices are also prominent in developmental psychology, connecting with ideas about stages of life, thinking and learning processes, motiva-

school, competition and cooperation. I examine these cultural regularities throughout this book, as they are crucial to understanding development in many communities.

An alternative pattern involves integration of children in the everyday activities of their communities. This pattern involves very different concepts and cultural practices in human development (Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003). The opportunities to observe and pitch in allow children to learn through keen attention to ongoing activities, rather than relying on lessons out of the context of using the knowledge and skills taught. In this pattern, children's relationships often involve multiparty collaboration in groups rather than interactions with one person at a time. I examine these and related regularities throughout this book.

Other Patterns

Because cultural research is still quite new, the work of figuring out what regularities can make sense of the similarities and variations across communities is not yet very far along. However, there are several other areas that appear to involve important regularities in cultural practices.

One set of regularities has to do with a pattern in which human relations are assumed to require hierarchical organization, with someone in charge who controls the others. An alternative pattern is more horizontal in structure, with individuals being responsible together to the group. In this pattern, individuals are not controlled by others—individual autonomy of decision making is respected—but individuals are also expected to coordinate with the group direction. As I discuss in later chapters, issues of cultural differences in sleeping arrangements, discipline, cooperation, gender roles, moral development, and forms of assistance in learning all connect with this set of patterns.

Other patterns have to do with strategies for managing survival. Infant and adult mortality issues, shortage or abundance of food and other resources, and settled living or nomadic life seem to connect with cultural similarities and variations in infant care and attachment, family roles, stages and goals of development, children's responsibilities, gender roles, cooperation and competition, and intellectual priorities.

I develop these suggestions of patterns of regularity and some others throughout the book. Although the search for regularities in cultural systems has barely begun, it has great promise for helping us understand the surprising as well as the taken-for-granted ways of cultural communities worldwide, including one's own.

To look for cultural patterns, it is important to examine how we can

think about the roles of cultural processes and individual development. In the first three chapters, I focus on how we can conceptualize the interrelated roles of individual and cultural processes. In the next section of this chapter, I introduce some important orienting concepts for how we can think about the roles of cultural processes in human development.

Orienting Concepts for Understanding Cultural Processes

The orienting concepts for understanding cultural processes that I develop in this book stem from the sociocultural (or cultural-historical) perspective. This approach has become prominent in recent decades in the study of how cultural practices relate to the development of ways of thinking, remembering, reasoning, and solving problems (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Lev Vygotsky, a leader of this approach from early in the twentieth century, pointed out that children in all communities are cultural participants, living in a particular community at a specific time in history. Vygotsky (1987) argued that rather than trying to "reveal the eternal child," the goal is to discover "the historical child."

Understanding development from a sociocultural-historical perspective requires examination of the cultural nature of everyday life. This includes studying people's use and transformation of cultural tools and technologies and their involvement in cultural traditions in the structures and institutions of family life and community practices.

A coherent understanding of the cultural, historical nature of human development is emerging from an interdisciplinary approach involving psychology, anthropology, history, sociolinguistics, education, sociology, and other fields. It builds on a variety of traditions of research, including participant observation of everyday life from an anthropological perspective, psychological research in naturalistic or constrained "laboratory" situations, historical accounts, and fine-grained analyses of videotaped events. Together, the research and scholarly traditions across fields are sparking a new conception of human development as a cultural process.

To understand regularities in the variations and similarities of cultural processes of human development across widespread communities it is important to examine how we think about cultural processes and their relation to individual development. What do we mean by cultural processes? How do people come to understand their own as well as others' cultural practices and traditions? How can we think about the ways that individuals both participate in and contribute to cultural processes? How do we approach understanding the relation among cultural communities and how cultural

This section outlines what I call *orienting concepts* for understanding cultural processes. These are concepts to guide thinking about how cultural processes contribute to human development.

The *overarching orienting concept* for understanding cultural processes is my version of the sociocultural-historical perspective:

> *Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change.*

This overarching orienting concept provides the basis for the other orienting concepts for understanding cultural processes:

Culture isn't just what other people do. It is common for people to think of themselves as having no culture ("Who, me? I don't have an accent") or to take for granted the circumstances of their historical period, unless they have contact with several cultural communities. Broad cultural experience gives us the opportunity to see the extent of cultural processes in everyday human activities and development, which relate to the technologies we use and our institutional and community values and traditions. The practices of researchers, students, journalists, and professors are cultural, as are the practices of oral historians, midwives, and shamans.

Understanding one's own cultural heritage, as well as other cultural communities, requires taking the perspective of people of contrasting backgrounds. The most difficult cultural processes to examine are the ones that are based on confident and unquestioned assumptions stemming from one's own community's practices. Cultural processes surround all of us and often involve subtle, tacit, taken-for-granted events and ways of doing things that require open eyes, ears, and minds to notice and understand. (Children are very alert to learning from these taken-for-granted ways of doing things.)

Cultural practices fit together and are connected. Each needs to be understood in relation to other aspects of the cultural approach. Cultural processes involve multifaceted relations among many aspects of community functioning; they are not just a collection of variables that operate independently. Rather, they vary together in patterned ways. Cultural processes have a coherence beyond "elements" such as economic resources, family size, modernization, and urbanization. It is impossible to reduce differences between communities to a single variable or two (or even a dozen or two); to do so would destroy the coherence among the constellations of features that make it useful to refer to cultural

processes. What is done one way in one community may be done another way in another community, with the same effect, and a practice done the same way in both communities may serve different ends. An understanding of how cultural practices fit together is essential.

Cultural communities continue to change, as do individuals. A community's history and relations with other communities are part of cultural processes. In addition, variations among members of communities are to be expected, because individuals connect in various ways with other communities and experiences. Variation across and within communities is a resource for humanity, allowing us to be prepared for varied and unknowable futures.

There is not likely to be One Best Way. Understanding different cultural practices does not require determining which *one* way is "right" (which does not mean that *all* ways are fine). With an understanding of what is done in different circumstances, we can be open to possibilities that do not necessarily exclude each other. Learning from other communities does not require giving up one's own ways. It does require suspending one's own assumptions temporarily to consider others and carefully separating efforts to understand cultural phenomena from efforts to judge their value. It is essential to make some guesses as to what the patterns are, while continually testing and open-mindedly revising one's guesses. *There is always more to learn.*

The rest of this chapter examines how we can move beyond the inevitable assumptions that we each bring from our own experience, to expand our understanding of human development to encompass other cultural approaches. This process involves building on local perspectives to develop more informed ideas about regular patterns, by:

- Moving beyond ethnocentrism to consider different perspectives
- Considering diverse goals of development
- Recognizing the value of the knowledge of both insiders and outsiders of specific cultural communities
- Systematically and open-mindedly revising our inevitably local understandings so that they become more encompassing

The next two chapters take up related questions of ways to conceive of the relation between individual and cultural processes, the relation of culture and biology (arguing that humans are biologically cultural), and how to think about participation in changing cultural communities.

The remaining chapters examine regularities in the cultural nature of such aspects of development as children's relations with other children and with parents, the development of thinking and remembering and reading skills, gender roles, and ways that communities arrange for children to learn. The research literature that I draw on in these chapters is wide-ranging, involving methods from psychology, anthropology, history, sociolinguistics, education, sociology, and related fields. The different research methods enhance each other, helping us gain broader and deeper views of the cultural nature of human development. In choosing which research to include, I emphasize investigations that appear to be based on some close involvement with everyday life in the communities studied, to facilitate understanding phenomena as they play out.

The book's concluding chapter focuses on the continually changing nature of cultural traditions as well as of people's involvement in and creation of them. The chapter focuses particularly on changes related to Western schooling—increasingly pervasive in the lives of children and adults worldwide—to examine dynamic cultural processes that build new ways as well as building on cultural traditions.

Moving Beyond Initial Assumptions

It would hardly be fish who discovered the existence of water.
—Kluckhohn, 1949, p. 11

Like the fish that is unaware of water until it has left the water, people often take their own community's ways of doing things for granted. Engaging with people whose practices differ from those of one's own community can make one aware of aspects of human functioning that are not noticeable until they are missing or differently arranged (LeVine, 1966). "The most valuable part of comparative work in another culture [is] the chance to be shaken by it, and the experience of struggling to understand it" (Goldberg, 1977, p. 239).

People who have immersed themselves in communities other than their own frequently experience "culture shock." Their new setting works in ways that conflict with what they have always assumed, and it may be unsettling to reflect on their own cultural ways as an option rather than the "natural" way. An essay on culture shock illustrates this notion by describing discoveries of assumptions by travelers from the Northern Hemisphere:

> Assumptions are the things you don't know you're making, which is why it is so disorienting the first time you take the plug out of a washbasin in Australia and see the water spiraling down the hole the other way around. The very laws of physics are telling you how far you are from home.
>
> In New Zealand even the telephone dials are numbered anticlockwise. This has nothing to do with the laws of physics—they just do it differently there. The shock is that it had never occurred to you that there was any other way of doing it. In fact, you had never even thought about it at all, and suddenly here it is—different. The ground slips. (Adams & Carwardine, 1990, p. 141)

Even without being *immersed* in another cultural system, comparisons of cultural ways may create discomfort among people who have never before considered the assumptions of their own cultural practices. Many individuals feel that their own community's ways are being questioned when they begin to learn about the diverse ways of other groups.

An indigenous American author pointed out that comparisons of cultural ways—necessary to achieve understanding of cultural processes—can be experienced as an uncomfortable challenge by people who are used to only one cultural system:

> Such contrasts and comparisons tend to polarize people, making them feel either attacked or excluded, because all of us tend to think of comparisons as judgmental. . . . Comparisons are inevitable and so too is the important cultural bias that all of us foster as part of our heritage. (Highwater, 1995, p. 214)

One of my aims in this book is to separate value judgments from understanding of the various ways that cultural processes function in human development. The need to avoid jumping to conclusions about the appropriateness of other people's ways has become quite clear in cultural research, and is the topic of the next section.

Suspending judgment is also often needed for understanding one's own cultural ways. People sometimes assume that respect for other ways implies criticism of or problems with their own familiar ways. Therefore, I want to stress that the aim is to understand the patterns of different cultural communities, *separating understanding of the patterns from judgments of their value.* If judgments of value are necessary, as they often are, they will thereby be much better informed if they are suspended long enough to gain some understanding of the patterns involved in one's own familiar ways as well as in the sometimes surprising ways of other communities.

Beyond Ethnocentrism and Deficit Models

People often view the practices of other communities as barbaric. They assume that their community's perspective on reality is the only proper or sensible or civilized one (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Campbell & LeVine, 1961; Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). For example, the ancient Greeks facilitated their own cultural identity by devaluing people with different languages, customs, and conceptions of human nature (Riegel, 1973). Indeed, the word *barbarous* derives from the Greek term for "foreign," "rude," and "ignorant" (Skeat, 1974; it is also the derivation of the name Barbara!). The term barbarian was applied to neighboring tribes who spoke languages unintelligible to the Greeks, who heard only "bar-bar" when they spoke:

> Beyond the civilizational core areas lay the lands of the barbarians, clad in skins, rude in manner, gluttonous, unpredictable, and aggressive in disposition, unwilling to submit to law, rule, and religious guidance . . . not quite human because they did not live in cities, where the only true and beautiful life could be lived, and because they appeared to lack articulate language. They were *barbaraphonoi*, bar-bar-speakers [Homer, *Iliad* 2.867], and in Aristotle's view this made them natural slaves and outcasts. (Wolf, 1994, p. 2)

To impose a value judgment from one's own community on the cultural practices of another—without understanding how those practices make sense in that community—is ethnocentric. *Ethnocentrism* involves making judgments that another cultural community's ways are immoral, unwise, or inappropriate based on one's own cultural background *without taking into account the meaning and circumstances of events in that community.* Another community's practices and beliefs are evaluated as inferior without considering their origins, meaning, and functions from the perspective of that community. It is a question of prejudging without appropriate knowledge.

For example, it is common to regard good parenting in terms deriving from the practices of one's own cultural community. Carolyn Edwards characterized contemporary middle-class North American child-rearing values (of parents and child-rearing experts) in the following terms:

> Hierarchy is anathema, bigger children emphatically should not be allowed to dominate smaller ones, verbal reasoning and negotiation should prevail, children should always be presented choices, and physical punishment is seen as the first step to child abuse. All of the ideas woven together represent a meaning system. (1994, p. 6)

Edwards pointed out that in other communities, not all components of this meaning system are found. If a Kenyan mother says, "Stop doing that or I will beat you," it does not mean the same thing as if the statement came from a middle-class European American mother. In an environment in which people need a certain physical and mental toughness to thrive (for heavy physical work, preparedness for warfare, long marches with cycles of hunger), the occasional use of physical discipline has a very different meaning than in an environment where physical comfort is often taken for granted. In contrast, a Kenyan mother would not consider withholding food from her children as punishment: "To her, what American mothers do (in the best interests of their children), namely, restrict children's food intake and deprive them of delicious, available, wanted food, would be terrible, unthinkable, the next thing to child abuse!" (pp. 6–7). Viewed from outside each system of meaning, both sets of practices might be judged as inappropriate, whereas from within each system they make sense.

From the 1700s, scholars have oscillated between the *deficit model*—that "savages" are without reason and social order—and a *romantic view* of the "noble savage" living in a harmonious natural state unspoiled by the constraints of society (Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). Both of these extremes treat people of cultural communities other than those of the observer as alien, to be reviled (or pitied) on the one hand, or to be wistfully revered on the other.

These models are still with us. An illustration of the deficit model appears in a report based on *one week* of fieldwork among the Yolngu, an Aboriginal community in Australia, which concluded:

> Humans can continue to exist at very low levels of cognitive development. All they have to do is reproduce. The Yolngu are, self evidently to me, not a terribly advanced group.
>
> But there is not much question that Euro-American culture is vastly superior in its flexibility, tolerance for variety, scientific thought and interest in emergent possibilities from *any* primitive society extant. (Hippler, quoted and critiqued by Reser, 1982, p. 403)

For many years, researchers have compared U.S. people of color with European American people using a deficit model in which European American skills and upbringing have been considered "normal." Variations in other communities have been considered aberrations or deficits, and intervention programs have been designed to compensate for the children's "cultural deprivation." (See discussions of these issues in Cole & Bruner, 1971; Cole & Means, 1981; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; García Coll, Lamberty, Jenkins, McAdoo, Crnic, Wasik, & García, 1996; Hays & Mindel, 1973; Rudolph, 1985; McShane & Berry, 1986; Moreno, 1991; Ogbu, 1982; Valentine, 1971.)

> Children and adolescents of color have often been portrayed as "problems" which we dissect and analyze using the purportedly objective and dispassionate tools of our trade. . . . With a white sample serving as the "control," [the research] proceeds to conducting comparative analyses. . . . Beginning with the assumption of a problem, we search for differences, which, when found, serve as proof that the problem exists. (Cauce & Gonzales, 1993, p. 8)

Separating Value Judgments from Explanations

To understand development, it is helpful to separate value judgments from observations of events. It is important to examine the meaning and function of events for the local cultural framework and goals, conscientiously avoiding the *arbitrary* imposition of one's own values on another group.

Interpreting the activity of people without regard for *their* meaning system and goals renders observations meaningless. We need to understand the coherence of what people from different communities *do*, rather than simply determining that some other group of people do *not* do what "we" do, or do not do it as well or in the way that we do it, or jumping to conclusions that their practices are barbaric.

Reducing ethnocentrism does not require avoidance of (informed) value judgments or efforts to make changes. It does not require us to give up our own ways to become like people in another community, nor imply a need to protect communities from change. If we can get beyond the idea that *one* way is necessarily best, we can consider the possibilities of other ways, seeking to understand how they work and respecting them in their time and place. This does not imply that *all* ways are fine—many community practices are objectionable. My point is that value judgments should be well informed.

Ordinary people are constantly making decisions that impact others; if they come from different communities it is essential for judgment *to be informed* by the meaning of people's actions within their own community's goals and practices. A tragic example of the consequences of ethnocentric misunderstanding—making uninformed judgments—is provided in an account of the medical ordeal of a Hmong child in California, when the assumptions and communication patterns of the U.S. health system were incompatible with those of the family and their familiar community (Fadiman, 1997). The unquestioned cultural assumptions of the health workers contributed to the deteriorating care of the child.

The diversity of cultural ways within a nation and around the world is a resource for the creativity and future of humanity. As with the importance of supporting species diversity for the continued adaptation of life to changing circumstances, the diversity of cultural ways is a resource protecting humanity from rigidity of practices that could jeopardize the species in the future (see Cajete, 1994). We are unable to foresee the issues that humanity must face in the future, so we cannot be certain that any one way of approaching human issues will continue to be effective. Within the practices and worldviews of different communities are ideas and practices that may be important for dealing with the challenges ahead. A uniform human culture would limit the possibilities for effectively addressing future needs. Just as the cure for some dread disease may lie in a concoction made with leaves in a rain forest, the knowledge and skills of a small community far away (or next door) may provide a solution to other ills of the present or future. Although bureaucracies are challenged by variety and comfortable with uniformity, life and learning rely on the presence of diverse improvisations.

Diverse Goals of Development

Key to moving beyond one's own system of assumptions is recognizing that goals of human development—what is regarded as mature or desirable—vary considerably according to the cultural traditions and circumstances of different communities.

Theories and research in human development commonly reveal an assumption that development proceeds (and should proceed) toward a unique desirable endpoint of maturity. Almost all of the well-known "grand theories" of development have specified a single developmental trajectory, moving toward a pinnacle that resembles the values of the theorist's own community or indeed of the theorist's own life course. For example, theorists who are extremely literate and have spent many years in school often regard literacy and Euro-American school ways of thinking and acting as central to the goals of successful development, and even as defining "higher" cultural evolution of whole societies.

Ideas of Linear Cultural Evolution

The idea that societies develop along a dimension from primitive to "us" [illegible] thinking regarding cultural processes. A clear example ap-

> Let a philosophic observer commence a journey from the savages of the Rocky Mountains, eastwardly towards our sea-coast. These he would observe in the earliest stage of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find those on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed our own semi-barbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advance of civilization, and so in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns. This, in fact, is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation to the present day. (Pearce, quoted in Adams, 1996, p. 41)

The assumption that societal evolution progresses toward increasing differentiation of social life—from the "backward" simplicity of "primitive" peoples—is the legacy of the intellectual thought of the late 1800s and early 1900s (Cole, 1996; Jahoda, 2000; Shore, 1996). For example, in 1877, cultural evolutionist Lewis Henry Morgan proposed seven stages of human progress: lower savagery, middle savagery, upper savagery, lower barbarism, middle barbarism, upper barbarism, and civilization. Societies were placed on the scale according to a variety of attributes. Especially important to his idea of the path to civilization were monogamy and the nuclear family, agriculture, and private property as the basis of economic and social organization (Adams, 1996).

The scholarly elaboration of the idea of linear cultural evolution occurred during the same era that the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and history arose, subdividing the topics of the broader inquiry. As Michael Cole (1996) noted, it was also the period in which large bureaucratic structures were growing to handle education (in schools) and economic activity (in factories and industrial organizations). Also during this time, European influence was at its peak in Africa, Asia, and South America; in North America, large influxes of immigrants from Europe inundated the growing cities, fleeing poverty in their homelands and joining rural Americans seeking the promises of U.S. cities.

The European-based system of formal "Western" schooling was seen as a key tool for civilizing those who had not yet "progressed to this stage." Politicians spoke of school as a way to hasten the evolutionary process (Adams, 1996). In the words of U.S. Commissioner of Education William Torrey Harris in the 1890s:

> But shall we say to the tribal people that they shall not come to these higher things unless they pass through all the intermediate stages, or can we teach them directly these higher things, and save them from

> the slow progress of the ages? In the light of Christian civilization we say there is a method of rapid progress. Education has become of great potency in our hands, and we believe that we can now vicariously save them very much that the white race has had to go through. Look at feudalism. Look at the village community stage. . . . We have had our tribulation with them. But we say to lower races: we can help you out of these things. We can help you avoid the imperfect stages that follow them on the way to our level. Give us your children and we will educate them in the Kindergarten and in the schools. We will give them letters, and make them acquainted with the printed page. (quoted in Adams, 1996, p. 43)

The assumption that societies develop along one dimension from primitive to advanced survived into the second half of the 1900s (Cole, 1996; see also Latouche, 1996). When, after World War II, the United Nations planned economic and political "development" for newly independent colonial empires, the goal was to make them more "developed" (in a unidirectional sense, like earlier attempts to make them more "civilized"). Formal schooling was a key tool. Schooling modeled on European or North American schools spread throughout the former colonial empires to "raise" people out of poverty and ignorance and bring them into "modern" ways.

Moving Beyond Assumptions of a Single Goal of Human Development

Assumptions based on one's own life about what is desirable for human development have been very difficult for researchers and theorists to detect because of their similarity of backgrounds (being, until recently, almost exclusively highly schooled men from Europe and North America). As Ulric Neisser pointed out, self-centered definitions of intelligence form the basis of intelligence tests:

> Academic people are among the stoutest defenders of the notion of intelligence . . . the tests seem so obviously valid to us who are members of the academic community. . . . There is no doubt that Academic Intelligence is really important for the kind of work that we do. We readily slip into believing that it is important for *every* kind of significant work. . . . Thus, academic people are in the position of having focused their professional activities around a particular personal quality, as instantiated in a certain set of skills. We have then gone on to *define* the quality in terms of this skill set, and ended by asserting that persons who lack these special skills are unintelligent al-

FIGURE 1.3
Eastern European Jewish teacher and young students examining a religious text.

Forays of researchers and theorists outside their own cultural communities and growing communication among individuals raised with more than one community's traditions have helped the field move beyond these ethnocentric assumptions. Research and theory now pay closer attention to the ways that distinct community goals relate to ideals for the development of children (see Super & Harkness, 1997).

For example, cultural research has drawn attention to variations in the relevance of literacy and preliteracy skills in different communities. In a community in which literacy is key to communication and economic success in adulthood, preschoolers may need to learn to distinguish between the colors and shapes of small ink marks. However, if literacy is not central in a community's practices, young children's skill in detecting variations in ink squiggles might have little import.

Similarly, if literacy serves important religious functions, adults may impress its importance on young children (see figure 1.3). For example, in Jewish communities of early twentieth-century Europe, a boy's first day at school involved a major ceremony that communicated the holiness and attractiveness of studying (Wozniak, 1993). The boy's father would carry him to school covered by a prayer shawl so that he would not see anything unholy along the way, and at school the rabbi would write the alphabet in honey on a slate while other adults showered the boy with candies, telling him that angels threw them down so that he would want to study.

School-like ways of speaking are valued in some communities but not others, and children become skilled in using the narrative style valued in their community (Minami & McCabe, 1995; Mistry, 1993a; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Wolf & Heath, 1992). For example, the narrative style used in "sharing time" (show-and-tell) by African American children often involves developing themes in connected episodes, whereas the narrative style used by European American children may employ tightly structured accounts centered on a single topic, which more closely resemble the literate styles that U.S. teachers aim to foster (Michaels & Cazden, 1986). When presented with narratives from which information regarding children's group membership was removed, European American adults judged the European American children's style as more skillful and indicating a greater chance of success in reading. In contrast, African American adults found the African American children's narratives to be better formed and indicating language skill and likelihood of success in reading. The adults' judgments reflected their appreciation of the children's use of shared cultural scripts that specify what is interesting to tell and how to structure it (Michaels & Cazden, 1986).

A focus on literacy or on the discourse styles promoted in schools may not hold such importance in some cultural settings, where it may be more important for young children to learn to attend to the nuances of weather patterns or of social cues of people around them, to use words cleverly to joust, or to understand the relation between human and supernatural events. The reply of the Indians of the Five Nations to an invitation in 1744 by the commissioners from Virginia to send boys to William and Mary College illustrates the differences in their goals:

> You who are wise must know, that different nations have different conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some experience of it: several of our young people were formerly brought up at the colleges of the northern provinces; they were instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us . . . [they were] ignorant of every means of living in the woods . . . neither fit for hunters, warriors, or counsellors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer . . . and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons, we will take great care of their education, instruct them in all we know, and make *men* of them. (quoted in Drake, 1834)

A more contemporary example of differences in goals comes from

cized the French use of toys to get infants to learn something for the future as tiring out the babies, and preferred to just let babies play without fatiguing them (Rabain Jamin, 1994). Part of their criticism also related to a concern that such focus on objects may lead to impoverished communication and isolation (in much the same way that a U.S. middle-class parent might express concern about the negative impact of video games). These African mothers seemed to prioritize social intelligence over technological intelligence (Rabain Jamin, 1994). They more often responded to their 10- to 15-month-old infants' social action and were less responsive to the infants' initiatives regarding objects than were French mothers. The African mothers often structured interaction with their infants around other people, whereas the French mothers often focused interaction on exploration of inanimate objects (see also Seymour, 1999). When interactions did focus on objects, the African mothers stressed the social functions of the objects, such as enhancement of social relationships through sharing, rather than object use or action schemes.

Prioritization of social relationships also occurs in Appalachian communities in the United States, where commitments to other people frequently take precedence over completion of schooling. When hard times arise for family members or neighbors, Appalachian youth often leave junior high or high school to help hold things together (Timm & Borman, 1997). Social solidarity is valued above individual accomplishment. The pull of kin and neighbors generally prevails, and has for generations.

In each community, human development is guided by local goals, which prioritize learning to function within the community's cultural institutions and technologies. Adults prioritize the adult roles and practices of their communities, or of the communities they foresee in the future, and the personal characteristics regarded as befitting mature roles (Ogbu, 1982). Of course, different groups may benefit from learning from each other, and often people participate in more than one cultural community—topics taken up later in this book.)

Although cultural variation in goals of development needs to be recognized, this does not mean that each community has a unique set of values and goals. There are regularities among the variations. My point is that the idea of a *single* desirable "outcome" of development needs to be discarded as ethnocentric.

Indeed, the idea of an "outcome" of development comes from a particular way of viewing childhood: as *preparation* for life. It may relate to the separation of children from the important activities of their community, which has occurred since industrialization in some societies (discussed in later chapters). The treatment of childhood as a time of preparation for life differs from ways of communities in which children *participate* in the local

mature activities, not segregated from adult life and placed in specialized preparatory settings such as schools.

To learn from and about communities other than our own, we need to go beyond the ethnocentric assumptions from which we each begin. Often, the first and most difficult step is to recognize that our original views are generally a function of our own cultural experience, rather than the only right or possible way. This can be an uncomfortable realization, because people sometimes assume that a respectful understanding of others' ways implies criticism of their own ways. A learning attitude, with suspended judgment of one's own as well as others' ways, is necessary for coming to understand how people both at home and elsewhere function in their local traditions and circumstances and for developing a general understanding of human development, with universal features built on local variations. The prospects of learning in cultural research are enhanced by communication between insiders and outsiders of particular communities, which I address in the next section.

Learning through Insider/Outsider Communication

To move our understanding of human development beyond assumptions and include the perspective of other communities, communication between community "insiders" and "outsiders" is essential. It is not a matter of which perspective is correct—both have an angle on the phenomena that helps to build understanding.

However, social science discussions often question whether the insider's or the outsider's perspective should be taken as representing the truth (see Clifford, 1988; LeVine, 1966). Arguments involve whether insiders or outsiders of particular communities have exclusive access to understanding, or whether the views of insiders or of outsiders are more trustworthy (Merton, 1972; Paul, 1953; Wilson, 1974).

Some have even argued that, given the variety of perspectives, there is no such thing as truth, so we should give up the effort to understand social life. But this view seems too pessimistic to me. If we adopted it, we would be paralyzed not only in social science research but in daily life, where such understanding is constantly required.

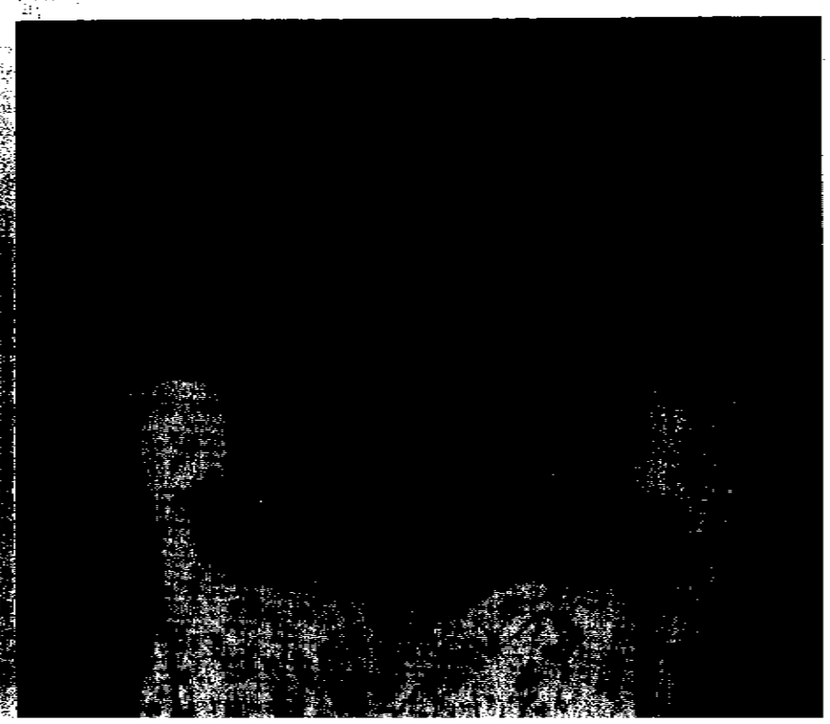
The argument that only members of a community have access to the real meaning of events in that community, so outsiders' opinions should be discarded, runs into difficulty when one notes the great variations in opinions among members of a community and the difficulties in determining who is qualified to represent the group. In addition, members of a com-

Furthermore, as I discuss more fully in Chapter 3, individuals often participate simultaneously in several different communities. Increasingly, the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred as people spend time in various communities (see Clifford, 1997; Walker, 2001). For example, people of Mexican descent living in what is now the United States are not entirely outsiders to European American communities; the practices and policies of the two communities interrelate. Similarly, an anthropologist who spends 10 or 50 years working in a community participates in some manner and gains some local understanding. Youngsters who grow up in a family with several cultural heritages, as is increasingly common, have some insider and some outsider understandings of each of their communities. Overlaps across communities also come from the media, daily contacts, and shared endeavors—collaborative, complementary, or contested (see figure 1.4).

Hence, it is often a simplification to refer to individuals as being "in" or

FIGURE 1.4

Leonor, Virginia, and Angelica Lozano (left to right), seated around the family's first television in their home, about 1953 (Mexican American). Photo and caption from Los Angeles Public Library.



"out" of particular communities; many communities do not have strict boundaries or homogeneity that clearly allow determination of what it takes to be "in" or "out" of them. (In Chapter 3, I argue that we need to go beyond thinking solely of *membership* in a single static group and instead focus on people's *participation* in cultural practices of dynamically related communities whose salience to participants may vary.)

To come to a greater understanding of human functioning, people familiar with different communities need to combine their varied observations. What is referred to as "truth" is simply our current agreement on what seems to be a useful way to understand things; it is always under revision. These revisions of understanding build on constructive exchanges between people with different perspectives. Progress in understanding, then, is a matter of continually attempting to make sense of the different perspectives, taking into account the backgrounds and positions of the viewers.

Differences in perspective are necessary for seeing and for understanding. Visual perception requires imperceptible movements of the eyes relative to the image. If the image moves in coordination with the eye movements, the resulting uniformity of position makes it so the image cannot be seen. Likewise, if we close one eye and thus lose the second viewpoint supplied by binocular vision, our depth perception is dramatically reduced. In the same way, both people with intense identification within a community (insiders) and those with little contact in a community (outsiders) run into difficulties in making and interpreting observations. However, working together, insiders and outsiders can contribute to a more edifying account than either perspective would allow by itself.

Outsiders' Position

In seeking to understand a community's practices, outsiders encounter difficulties due to people's reactions to their presence (fear, interest, politeness) as well as their own unfamiliarity with the local web of meaning of events. Outsiders are newcomers to the meaning system, with limited understanding of how practices fit together and how they have developed from prior events. At the same time, they are faced with the assumptions of community members who invariably attempt to figure out what the outsider's role is in the community, using their everyday categories of how to treat the newcomer.

The outsider's identity is not neutral; it allows access to only some situations and elicits specific reactions when the outsider is present. For example, among the Zinacantecos, a Mayan group in Mexico, Berry Brazelton (1977) noted fear of observers among both adults and infants in his study of infant development: "We were automatically endowed with 'the evil eye' . . . the effects of stranger anxiety in the baby were powerfully reinforced by his parents' constant anxiety about our presence. We were unable to relate to babies after nine months of age because the effect was so powerful" (p. 174).

On the other hand, an observer may elicit interest and hospitality, which may be more comfortable but also becomes a part of the events observed. Ruth Munroe and Lee Munroe (1971) reported that in Logoli households in Africa, as soon as an observer arrived to study everyday caregiving practices with infants, the infant was readied for display. The Logoli mothers were very cooperative, picking up their infants and bringing them to the observer for inspection. Under such circumstances, observations would have to be interpreted as an aspect of a public greeting. Similarly, Mary Ainsworth (1977) reported that she was categorized as a visitor among the Ganda of Uganda; the mothers insisted that she observe during the afternoon, a time generally allocated to leisure and entertaining visitors.

In a study in four different communities, parents varied in their perception of the purpose of a home visit interview and observation of mother-toddler interactions (Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, & Mosier, 1993). In some communities, parents saw it as a friendly visit of an acquaintance interested in child development and skills; in others, it was a pleasant social obligation to help the local schoolteacher or the researcher by answering questions or an opportunity to show off their children's skills and newest clothes. With humor in her voice, one Turkish woman asked the researcher, who had grown up locally but studied abroad, "This is an international contest . . . Isn't it?"

Issues of how to interpret observations are connected with restrictions in outsiders' access. For example:

> Among Hausa mothers, the custom is not to show affection for their infants in public. Now those psychologists who are concerned with nurturance and dependency will go astray on their frequency counts if they do not realize this. A casual [observer] is likely to witness only public interaction; only when much further inquiry is made is the absence of the event put into its proper perspective. (Price-Williams, 1975, p. 17)

There are only a few situations in which the presence of outside observers does not transform ongoing events into public ones: if the event is already public, if their presence is undetected, or if they are so familiar that their presence goes without note. Of course, their presence as a familiar member of a household would require interpretation in that light, just as the presence of other familiar people would be necessary to consider in interpreting the scene.

Insiders' Position

The issues faced by both insiders and outsiders have to do with the fact that people are always functioning in a sociocultural context. One's interpretation of the situation is necessarily that of a person from a particular time and constellation of background experiences. And if one's presence is detected in a situation, one is a participant. There is no escape from interpretation and social presentation.

Differences in how people act when they think they are being observed or not illustrate how the simple presence of an observer (or a video camera) influences behavior. For example, U.S. middle-class mothers varied their interactions with their toddlers when they thought they were being observed in a research study (video equipment was conspicuously running) versus when they thought they were simply waiting in an observation room (repairs were "being made" on the video equipment, but observers watched from behind a one-way mirror). The mothers' behavior when they thought they were being observed reflected middle-class U.S. concepts of "good mothering" (Graves & Glick, 1978). The amount of speech to their children doubled, and they used more indirect requests, engaged in more naming and action routines, and asked more questions than when they thought they were not being observed.

Insiders also may have limited access to situations on the basis of their social identity. For example, their family's standing in the community and their personal reputation are not matters that are easily suspended. When entering others' homes, insiders carry with them the roles that they and their family customarily play. It may be difficult for people of one gender to enter situations that are customary for the other gender without arousing suspicions. A person's marital status often makes a difference in the situations and manner in which he or she engages with other people. For example, it could be complicated for a local young man to interview a family if he used to be a suitor of one of the daughters in the family, or if the grandfather in the family long ago was accused of cheating the young man's grandfather out of some property. An insider, like an outsider, has far from a neutral position in the community.

In addition, an insider in a relatively homogeneous community is unlikely to have reflected on or even noticed phenomena that would be of interest to an outsider. As was mentioned in the section on ethnocentrism, people with experience in only one community often assume that the way things are done in their own community is the only reasonable way. This is such a deep assumption that we are often unaware of our own practices unless we have the opportunity to see that others do things differently. Even

tices, they still may interpret them in ways that fit with unquestioned assumptions:

> We rarely recognize the extent in which our conscious estimates of what is worthwhile and what is not, are due to standards of which we are not conscious at all. But in general it may be said that the things which we take for granted without inquiry or reflection are just the things which determine our conscious thinking and decide our conclusions. And these habitudes which lie below the level of reflection are just those which have been formed in the constant give and take of relationship with others. (Dewey, 1916, p. 22)

The next section examines how varying interpretations can be used and then modified in the effort to reach more satisfactory accounts of human development in different cultural communities. Understanding across cultural groups requires adopting

> a mode of encounter that I call learning for self-transformation: that is, to place oneself and the other in a privileged space of learning, where the desire [is] not just to acquire "information" or to "represent," but to recognize and welcome transformation in the inner self through the encounter. While Geertz claims that it's not necessary (or even possible) to adopt the other's world view in order to understand it . . . I also think that authentic understanding must be grounded in the sense of genuine humility that being a learner requires: the sense that what's going on with the other has, perhaps, some lessons for me. (Hoffman, 1997, p. 17)

Moving between Local and Global Understandings

Researchers working as outsiders to the community they are studying have grappled with how they can make inferences based on what they observe. (The concepts cultural researchers have developed are important for any research in which an investigator is attempting to make sense of people different from themselves, including work with people of an age or gender different from the researcher's.) The dilemma is that for research to be valuable, it needs both to reflect the phenomena from a perspective that makes sense locally and to go beyond simply presenting the details of a particular locale. The issue is one of effectively combining depth of understanding of the people and settings studied and going beyond the particularities to make a more general statement about the phenomena. Two approaches to move from local to more global understandings are discussed next. The first

distinguishes rounds of interpretation that seek open-minded improvement of understanding. The second considers the role of meaning in attempts to compare "similar" situations across communities.

Revising Understanding in Derived Etic Approaches

The process of carefully testing assumptions and open-mindedly revising one's understanding in the light of new information is essential for learning about cultural ways. The distinctions offered by John Berry (1969; 1999) among *emic*, *imposed etic*, and *derived etic* approaches to cultural research are useful for thinking about this process of revision.

In an *emic* approach, an investigator attempts to represent cultural insiders' perspective on a particular community, usually by means of extensive observation and participation in the activities of the community. Emic research produces in-depth analyses of one community and can often be useful as such.

The imposed and derived etic approaches attempt to generalize or compare beyond one group and differ in their sensitivity to emic information. The imposed etic approach can be seen as a preliminary step on the way to a more adequate derived etic understanding.

In an *imposed etic* approach, an investigator makes general statements about human functioning across communities based on imposing a culturally inappropriate understanding. This involves uncritically applying theory, assumptions, and measures from research or everyday life from the researcher's own community. The ideas and procedures are not sufficiently adapted to the community or phenomenon being studied, and although the researcher may "get data," the results are not interpreted in a way that is sufficiently congruent with the situation in the community being studied.

For example, an imposed etic approach could involve administering questionnaires, coding behavior, or testing people without considering the need to modify the procedures or their interpretation to fit the perspective of the research participants. An imposed etic approach proceeds without sufficient evidence that the phenomenon is being interpreted as the researcher assumes. Even when a researcher is interested in studying something that seems very concrete and involves very little inference (such as whether people are touching), some understanding of local practices and meanings is necessary to decide when and where to observe and how to interpret the behavior (for example, whether to consider touching as evidence of stimulation or sensitivity to an infant). Mary Ainsworth critiqued the use of preconceived variables in imposed etic research: "Let us not blind

ourselves to the unusual features of the unfamiliar society by limiting ourselves to variables or to procedures based on the familiar society—our own" (1977, p. 145).

In a *derived etic* approach, the researcher adapts ways of questioning, observing, and interpreting to fit the perspective of the participants. The resulting research is informed by emic approaches in each group studied and by seeking to understand the meaning of phenomena to the research participants.

Cultural researchers usually aspire to use both the emic and the derived etic approaches. They seek to understand the communities studied, adapt procedures and interpretations in light of what they learn, and modify theories to reflect the similarities and variations sensitively observed. The derived etic approach is essential to discerning cultural patterns in the variety of human practices and traditions.

It may be helpful to think of the starting point of any attempt to understand something new as stemming from an imposed etic approach. We all start with what we know already. If this is informed by emic observations accompanied by efforts to move beyond the starting assumptions, we may move closer to derived etic understanding. But derived etic understanding is a continually moving target: The new understanding becomes the current imposed etic understanding that forms the starting point of the next line of study, in a process of continual refinement and revision.

Because observations can never be freed from the observers' assumptions, interests, and perspective, some scholars conclude that there should be no attempt to understand cross-community regularities of phenomena. However, with sensitive observation and interpretation, we can come to a more satisfactory understanding of the phenomena that interest us, which can help guide our actions with each other. That this process of learning never ends is not a reason to avoid it.

Indeed, the process of trying to understand other people is essential for daily functioning as well as for scholarly work. The different perspectives brought to bear on interpreting phenomena by different observers are of interest in their own right, particularly now that research participants in many parts of the world contribute to the design and interpretation of research, not just responding to the questionnaires or tests of foreign visitors.

Research on issues of culture inherently requires an effort to examine the meaning of one system in terms of another. Some research is explicitly comparative across cultural communities. But even in emic research, in which the aim is to describe the ways of a cultural community in its own terms, a description that makes sense to people within the community needs to be stated in terms that also make sense outside the system. Often,

descriptions are in a language different from that of the community members, whether the shift is from one national language to another or from folk terms to academic terms. All languages refer to concepts of local importance in ways somewhat different from others, reflecting cultural concepts in the effort to communicate. Therefore, the issue of "translation"—and consideration of the meaning and comparability of situations and ideas across communities—is inescapable.

The Meaning of the "Same" Situation across Communities

An issue for any comparison or discussion across communities is the similarity of meaning or the comparability of the situations observed (Cole & Means, 1981). Simply ensuring that the same categories of people are present or the same instructions used does not ensure comparability, because the meaning of the particular cast of characters or instructions is likely to vary across communities.

For example, in collecting data with American and Micronesian caregivers and infants, researchers had a difficult choice. They could examine caregiver-infant interactions in the most prevalent social context in which caregivers and infants are found in each community: The American caregivers and children were usually alone with each other; the Micronesian caregivers and infants were usually in the presence of a group. Or they could hold social context constant in the two communities (Sostek et al., 1981). The researchers decided to observe in both circumstances and compare the findings; they found that the social context of their observations differentiated caregiver-infant interaction in each community.

Following identical procedures in two communities, such as limiting observations to times that mothers and infants are alone together, clearly does not ensure comparability of observations. Studies examining mother-infant interaction across communities need to reflect the varying prevalence of this situation. For example, several decades ago in a study in the United States, 92% of mothers usually or always cared for their infants, whereas in an East African agricultural society, 38% of mothers were the usual caregivers (Leiderman & Leiderman, 1974). A study that compared mother-child interactions in these two cultural communities would need to interpret the findings in the light of the different purposes and prevalence of mother-child interaction in each.

In addition to considering who is present, comparisons need to attend to what people are doing together, for what purposes, and how their activity fits with the practices and traditions of their community. Inevitably, the meaning of what is observed must be considered.

comparable in cross-cultural research, as the idea of comparability may assume that everything except the aspect of interest is held constant. In an evaluation of personality research, Rick Shweder (1979) concluded that situations cannot be comparable across cultural communities:

> To talk of personality differences one must observe behavior differences in equivalent situations. . . . The crucial question then becomes, How are we to decide that the differential responses we observe are in fact differential responses to an equivalent set of stimuli. . . . *With respect to which particular descriptive components must stimuli (situations, contexts, environments) be shown to be equivalent?* . . . A situation (environment, context, setting) is more than its physical properties as defined by an outside observer. . . . It is a situated activity defined in part by its goal *from the point of view of the actor.* "What any rational person would do under the circumstances" depends upon what the person is trying to accomplish. (pp. 282–284)

Shweder argued that because local norms for the appropriate means of reaching a goal must be written into the very definition of the behavioral situation, "two actors are in 'comparable' or 'equivalent' situations *only to the extent that they are members of the same culture!*" (p. 285).

Perhaps the most crucial issue in the question of comparability is deciding how to interpret what is observed. It cannot be assumed that the same behavior has identical meaning in different communities. For example, native Hawaiian children were observed to make fewer verbal requests for help than Caucasian children in Hawaiian classrooms (Gallimore, Boggs, & Jordan, 1974; cited in Price-Williams, 1975). However, before concluding that this group was making fewer requests for assistance, the researchers considered the possibility that the children made requests for assistance differently. Indeed, they discovered that the Hawaiian children were requesting assistance nonverbally: steadily watching the teacher from a distance or approaching, standing nearby, or briefly touching her. These nonverbal requests may be directly related to the cultural background of the children, in which verbal requests for help from adults are considered inappropriate but nonverbal requests are acceptable.

Identical behavior may have different connotations and functions in different communities (Frijda & Jahoda, 1966). Some researchers have proposed that phenomena be compared in terms of what people are trying to accomplish rather than in terms of specific behaviors. Robert Sears (1961) argued for distinguishing goals or motives (such as help seeking in the Hawaiian study) from instrumental means used to reach the goals (such as whether children request assistance verbally or nonverbally). In his view, although instrumental means vary across communities, goals themselves

may be considered transcultural. John Berry proposed that aspects of behavior be compared "only when they can be shown to be *functionally equivalent*, in the sense that the aspect of behavior in question is an attempted solution" to a recurrent problem shared by the different groups (1969, p. 122; see figure 1.5).

A focus on the function (or purpose or goal) of people's behavior facilitates understanding how different ways of doing things may be used to accomplish similar goals, or how similar ways of doing things may serve different goals. Although all cultural communities address issues that are common to human development worldwide, due to our specieswide cultural and biological heritage, different communities may apply similar means to different goals and different means to similar goals.

The next two chapters focus in more depth on how we can conceive of the cultural nature of human development. They examine the idea that human development is biologically cultural and discuss ways of thinking

FIGURE 1.5

John Collier and Malcolm Collier suggested that family mealtimes could provide a basis for comparisons that would help define relationships within families in different communities. The first picture shows an evening meal in a home in Vicos, Peru; the second shows supper in a Spanish American home in New Mexico; the third picture shows breakfast in the home of an advertising executive's family in Connecticut.

about similarities and differences across cultural communities in how people learn and develop. They discuss concepts to relate individual and cultural processes, expanding on the overarching orienting concept: that humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change.

2

Development as Transformation of Participation in Cultural Activities

Some decades ago, psychologists interested in how cultural processes contributed to human thinking were puzzled by what they observed. Their puzzlement came from trying to make sense of the everyday lives of the people they visited by using the prevailing concepts of human development and culture. Many of these researchers began to search for more useful ways to think about the relation of culture and individual functioning.

In this chapter, I discuss why then-current ideas of the relation between individual and cultural processes made these researchers' observations puzzling. A key issue was that "the individual" was assumed to be separate from the world, equipped with basic, general characteristics that might be secondarily "influenced" by culture. An accompanying problem was that "culture" was often thought of as a static collection of characteristics. After examining these assumptions, I discuss the cultural-historical theory that helped to resolve the researchers' puzzle, focusing on my own version of it. In my view, human development is a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities, which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations.

Together, Chapters 2 and 3 argue for conceiving of people and cultural communities as mutually creating each other. Chapter 2 focuses on concepts for relating cultural processes to the development of individuals. Chapter 3 addresses the companion issue of how we can think of cultural

communities as changing with the contributions of successive generations of people.

A Logical Puzzle for Researchers

North American and European cross-cultural psychologists of the 1960s and 1970s brought tests of children's cognitive development from the United States and Europe to foreign places. These tests were often derived from Jean Piaget's stage theory or were tests of classification, logic, and memory.

The aim was to use measures of thinking that bore little obvious relation to people's everyday lives, to examine their ability independent of their background experience. So researchers asked people to say whether quantities of water changed when poured into different-shaped beakers, to sort unfamiliar figures into categories, to solve logic problems that could only be solved with the stated premises rather than using real-world knowledge, and to remember lists of nonsense syllables or unrelated words.

The idea was that people's "true" competence, which was assumed to underlie their everyday performances, could be discerned using novel problems that no one had been taught how to solve. People's level of competence was regarded as a general personal characteristic underlying widely different aspects of their behavior without variation across situations. The tests sought to determine general stages of thinking or general ability to classify, think logically, and remember. Some individuals (or groups) were expected to be at "higher" stages or to have better classification, logical, and memory abilities—in general—than other people. Cross-cultural research was used to examine, under widely varying circumstances, what environmental factors produced greater "competence."

The puzzle was that the same people who performed poorly on the researchers' tests showed impressive skill in reasoning or remembering (or other cognitive skills that the tests were supposed to measure) outside of the test situation. For example, Michael Cole noted that in a community in which people had great difficulty with mathematical tests, great skill was apparent in the marketplace and other local settings: "On taxi-buses I was often outbargained by the cabbies, who seemed to have no difficulty calculating miles, road quality, quality of the car's tires, number of passengers, and distance" (1996, p. 74).

With the assumption that cognition is a general competence characterizing individuals across situations, such unevenness of performance was puzzling. To try to resolve the difference in apparent "ability" across situa-

more familiar, to find "truer" measures of underlying competence. Researchers also tried parceling competence into smaller "domains," such as biological knowledge and physical knowledge or verbal and nonverbal skills, so that the discrepancies across situations were not as great. (This remains an active approach in the field of cognitive development.)

Researchers also began to notice that although the tests were not supposed to relate to specific aspects of people's experience, there were links between performance on the tests and the extent of experience with Western schools and literacy. It was tempting to conclude that school or literacy makes people smarter, but the researchers' everyday observations challenged that interpretation. Instead, researchers such as Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole and their colleagues began to study the specific connections between performance on tests and experience in school. (In Chapter 7, on culture and thinking, I focus in more detail on this research and the findings.)

An Example: "We always speak only of what we see"

An example of a logical problem will serve to illustrate the connection between schooling and test performance. A common test of logical thinking is the syllogism, like those employed during the 1930s by Alexander Luria. In Luria's study, an interviewer presented the following syllogism to Central Asian adults varying in literacy and schooling:

> In the Far North, where there is snow, all bears are white. Novaya Zemlya is in the Far North and there is always snow there. What color are the bears there?

Luria reported that when asked to make inferences on the basis of the premises of syllogisms, literate interviewees solved the problems in the desired manner. However, many nonliterate interviewees did not. Here is the response of a nonliterate Central Asian peasant who did not treat the syllogism as though the premises constituted a logical relation allowing an inference:

> "We always speak only of what we see; we don't talk about what we haven't seen."
>
> [The interviewer probes:] But what do my words imply? [The syllogism is repeated.]
>
> "Well, it's like this: our tsar isn't like yours, and yours isn't like ours. Your words can be answered only by someone who was there, and if a person wasn't there he can't say anything on the basis of your words."

[The interviewer continues:] But on the basis of my words—in the North, where there is always snow, the bears are white, can you gather what kind of bears there are in Novaya Zemlya?

"If a man was sixty or eighty and had seen a white bear and had told about it, he could be believed, but I've never seen one and hence I can't say. That's my last word. Those who saw can tell, and those who didn't see can't say anything!" (At this point a younger man volunteered, "From your words it means that bears there are white.")

[Interviewer:] Well, which of you is right?

"What the cock knows how to do, he does. What I know, I say, and nothing beyond that!" (1976, pp. 108–109)

This peasant and the interviewer disagreed about what kind of evidence is acceptable as truth. The peasant insisted on firsthand knowledge, perhaps trusting the word of a reliable, experienced person. But the interviewer tried to induce the peasant to play a game involving examination of the truth value of the words alone. The nonliterate peasant argued that because he had not personally seen the event, he did not have adequate evidence, and implied that he did not think that the interviewer had adequate evidence either. When the schooled young man made a conclusion on the basis of the unverified premises stated in the problem, the nonliterate man implied that the younger man had no business jumping to conclusions.

Like this peasant, many other nonliterate interviewees refused to accept that the major premise is a "given" and protested that they "could only judge what they had seen" or "didn't want to lie." (This pattern has been replicated in other places by Cole, Gay, Glick, & Sharp, 1971; Fobih, 1979; Scribner, 1975, 1977; Sharp, Cole, & Lave, 1979; and Tulviste, 1991.) If nonliterate interviewees were not required to state the conclusion, but were asked instead to evaluate whether the hypothetical premises and a conclusion stated by the researcher fit logically, then they were willing to consider such problems as self-contained logical units (Cole et al., 1971).

The argument of the nonliterate peasant studied by Luria shows quite abstract reasoning regarding what one can use as evidence. Indeed, Luria noted that nonliterate people's reasoning and deduction followed the rules when dealing with immediate practical experience; they made excellent judgments and drew the implied conclusions. Their unwillingness to treat syllogisms as logical problems is not a failure to think hypothetically. An interviewee explained his reasoning for not answering a hypothetical question: "If you know a person, if a question comes up about him, you are able to answer" (Scribner, 1975, 1977). He reasoned hypothetically in denying the possibility of reasoning

Syllogisms represent a specialized language genre that becomes easier to handle with practice with this specialized form of problem (Scribner, 1977). In school, people may become familiar with this genre through experience with story problems in which the answer must be derived from the statements in the problem. Students are supposed not to question the truth of the premises but to answer on the basis of the stated "facts."

Being willing to accept a premise that one cannot verify, and reasoning from there, is characteristic of schooling and literacy. This commonly used test of logical "ability" thus reflects rather specific training in a language format that researchers are likely to take for granted, as highly schooled individuals themselves. The puzzles questioned assumptions of generality.

Researchers Questioning Assumptions

Cultural researchers sought alternative ways to think about the relationship of individual development and cultural processes. The assumption that the characteristics of both children and cultures were general seemed to be part of the problem.

The researchers became suspicious of the idea that children progress through monolithic, general stages of development. They noted that people's ways of thinking and of relating to other people are in fact not broadly applied in varying circumstances.

Researchers also noticed similar shortcomings in treating culture as a monolithic entity. The effect of being a "member of a culture" had been assumed to be uniform across both the members and the situations in which they functioned. For example, whole cultural groups were sometimes characterized as oral, complex, or interdependent (in different research traditions). When researchers saw that members of a community often differed from each other on such dimensions and that the dimensions seemed to apply more in some circumstances than others, this called into question the whole business of trying to discern the "essence" of a culture.

Currently, scholars think about the relation of individual development and cultural processes in a variety of ways that try to look more specifically at individual and cultural attributes. Our understanding has benefited from attempts to make more fine-grained analyses of individual characteristics, domains of thinking, and cultural attributes.

However, I believe that some of the problems that remain require rethinking our basic ideas about the relation between individuals and cultural communities. I argue against the still common approach of treating individuals as entities separate from cultural processes, existing independently of their cultural communities. Such approaches look for how "culture" exerts "influence" on the otherwise generic "child."

The remainder of this chapter focuses on how we can conceptualize human development as a cultural process in which all children develop as participants in their cultural communities. First I present several approaches that have been quite influential and helpful: the work of Mead, the Whitings, and Bronfenbrenner. Then I argue that we can solve some problems by discarding the often unspoken assumption that individual and culture are separate entities, with the characteristics of culture "influencing" the characteristics of individuals.

Many researchers, including myself, have found the cultural-historical theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky to be quite helpful, and in recent decades many scholars have built on his theory. Vygotsky's influential book *Mind in Society* (1978) was introduced to the English-speaking world by some of the same researchers (including Cole and Scribner) who struggled with the puzzle of people's varied performance on cognitive tests and everyday cognitive activities. Vygotsky's theory helped connect individuals' thinking with cultural traditions such as schooling and literacy.

In the last part of this chapter, I describe my approach, which builds on the prior work. I conceive of development as transformation of people's participation in ongoing sociocultural activities, which themselves change with the involvement of individuals in successive generations.

Concepts Relating Cultural and Individual Development

Margaret Mead's pioneering work demonstrated how passing moments of shared activity, which may or may not have explicit lessons for children, are the material of development. Her careful observations of filmed everyday events, long before the introduction of portable videotape technology, helped to reveal cultural aspects of individual acts and interactions. Several related lines of investigation have provided models to help researchers think about the relation of individual development and cultural processes.

Two key approaches, Whiting and Whiting's psycho-cultural model and Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, will serve the purpose of describing how the relationship has been conceptualized. Several other current approaches, including cultural-historical perspectives, build on the work of these pioneers. In this section, I describe some of the ideas offered by these models. They have provided key concepts and sparked pathbreaking research. However, I want to raise a concern that the ways the models have diagrammed the relation between the individual and the world lead us, perhaps [illegible] limiting view of individual and cultural processes—as

separate entities. My concern is relevant to most diagrams relating individual and cultural processes throughout the social sciences.

Whiting and Whiting's Psycho-Cultural Model

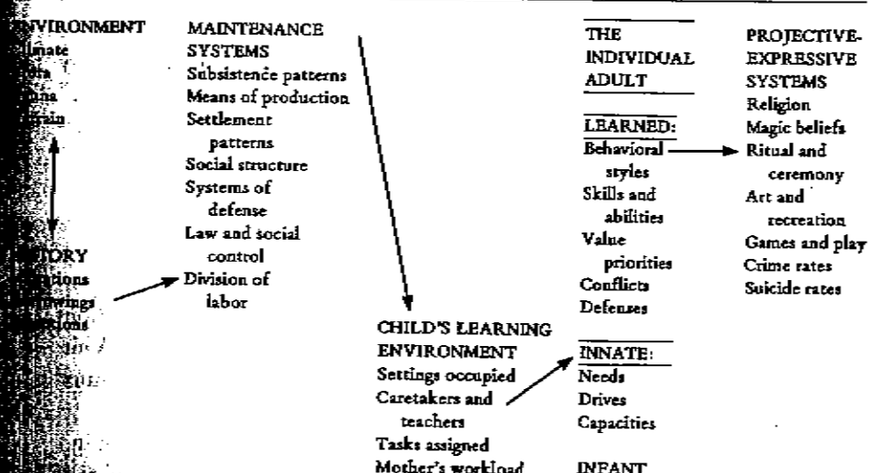
Beatrice Whiting and John Whiting (1975) provided a "psycho-cultural model" of the relations between the development of individuals and features of their immediate environments, social partners, and institutional and cultural systems and values. This perspective stresses that understanding human development requires detailed understanding of the situations in which people develop—the immediate situations as well as the less immediate cultural processes in which children and their partners (and their ancestors) participate.

The Whitings urged a deeper understanding of cultural processes than is often the case in studies that simply relate children's development to broad categories such as culture, social class, and gender. Beatrice Whiting (1976) pressed scholars to "unpackage" these variables rather than treating them as broad packages of unanalyzed "independent variables." She emphasized that the cast of characters and settings in which children act are extremely influential in determining their course of development.

Whiting and Whiting's model (see figure 2.1) presented human devel-

FIGURE 2.1

Whiting and Whiting's model for psycho-cultural research (1975).



opment as the product of a chain of social and cultural circumstances surrounding the child. The chain began with the environment (including the climate, flora and fauna, and terrain) and led to the history (including migrations, borrowings, and inventions). This in turn led to the group's maintenance systems (subsistence patterns, means of production, settlement patterns, social structure, systems of defense, law and social control, and division of labor). This led to the child's learning environment, which consisted of their routine settings, caretakers and teachers, tasks assigned, and mother's workload. Then the chain arrived at the individual, including the innate needs, drives, and capacities of the infant as well as learned behavioral styles, skills, value priorities, conflicts, and defenses.

The Whitings' model contained a set of assumptions regarding the underlying direction of causality, with arrows leading from the environment and history to the child's learning environment to the individual's development. Whiting and Whiting (1975) assumed that maintenance systems determine to a large extent the learning environment in which a child grows up, and the learning environment influences the child's behavior and development.

These assumptions provided Whiting and Whiting and their research team with a framework that allowed important advances in understanding culture and child development in their landmark *Six Cultures Study* (1975). Their focus on the child's learning environment produced key research findings in the study of the cultural aspects of human development. My own work has been heavily influenced by the Whitings' ideas, and their research can be seen throughout this book.

However, the form of their diagram carries implicit assumptions that tend to constrain how we think about the relation of individuals and cultural practices, in unintended ways. The categories composing the chain are treated as independent entities, and the arrows indicate that one entity causes the next. Thus individual and cultural processes are treated "as if" they exist independently of each other, with individual characteristics created by cultural characteristics.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective has also contributed important ideas and research on cultural aspects of human development. Bronfenbrenner's model takes a different form from that of Whiting and Whiting, but it raises similar questions about treating individual and cultural processes as separate entities.

Bronfenbrenner stressed the interactions of a changing organism in a changing environment. In his view, the environment is composed of one's

immediate settings as well as the social and cultural contexts of relations among different settings, such as home, school, and workplace. Bronfenbrenner was interested in specifying the properties and conditions of the social and physical environments that foster or undermine development within people's "ecological niches." He defined the ecology of human development as involving

> the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (1979, p. 21)

Although this definition states that the person and the settings are mutually involved, elsewhere individuals are treated as products of their immediate settings and "larger" contexts. Bronfenbrenner described his ecological system as being composed of concentric circles, like Russian nesting dolls in which a small figure nests inside a larger one inside a still larger one, and so on (see figure 2.2a).

Like the diagram in Figure 2.1 of categories connected by arrows, Bronfenbrenner's proposal of concentric circles carries the same implicit assumptions about the relation of individual and cultural processes: Individual and "larger" contexts are conceived as existing separately, definable independ-

FIGURE 2.2A

Bronfenbrenner likened his ecological system to Russian nesting dolls.

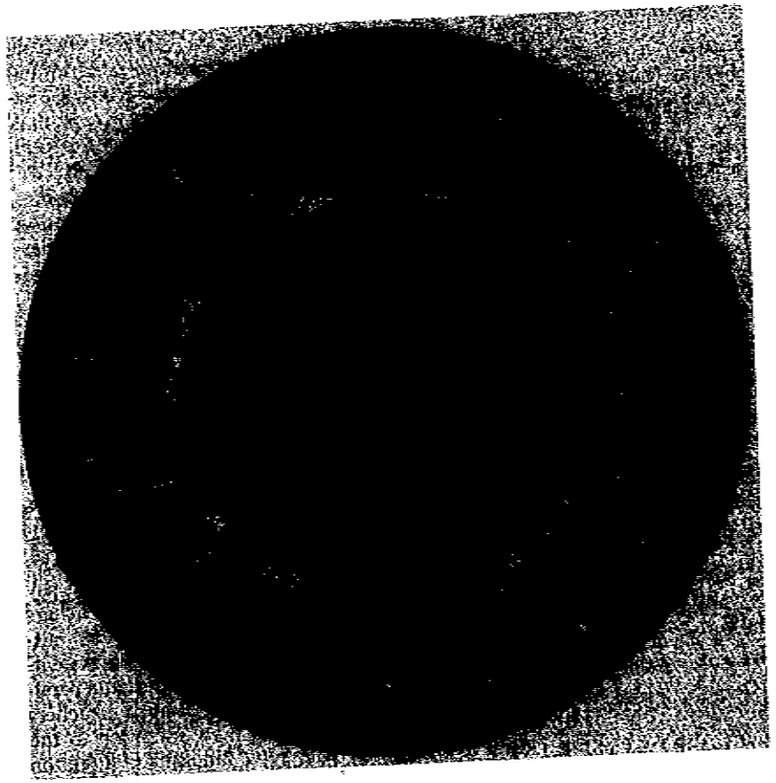


FIGURE 2.2B

Bronfenbrenner's nested ecological system as interpreted in Michael and Sheila Cole's 1996 textbook.

ently of each other, related in a hierarchical fashion as the "larger" contexts affect the "smaller" ones, which in turn affect the developing person.

In Bronfenbrenner's system, the smallest, central circle is closest to the individual's immediate experiences (see figure 2.2b). Outer circles refer to settings that exert an influence less directly (through their impact on others), without the individual's direct participation in them. The system is divided into four aspects of the ecology in which individuals function: microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. Although I am concerned with how the four systems relate, Bronfenbrenner's articulation of each of these systems is a valuable contribution:

Microsystems, according to Bronfenbrenner, are the individual's immediate experiences—the settings containing the child and others, such as home and school. One of the basic units at the level of microsystems is the dyad (that is, the pair); dyads in turn relate to larger interpersonal structures such as triads (three-person systems, such as mother-father-baby). Even in the most immediate settings, individuals and dyads are crucially dependent on third parties and larger groups.

Mesosystems, in Bronfenbrenner's approach, are the relations among the microsystems in which an individual is involved, for example, the complementary or conflicting practices of home and school. Mesosystems involve relations between and among systems—two or three or more in relation. Bronfenbrenner made the very important point that any one setting (such as the home) involves relations with others (such as school or a religious institution). He emphasized the overlaps and communication between settings and information in each setting about the other. The analysis of mesosystems gives importance to questions such as whether a young person enters a new situation (such as school or camp) alone or in the company of familiar companions, and whether the young person and companions have advance information about the new setting before they enter. Bronfenbrenner stressed the importance of ecological transitions as people shift roles or settings (for example, with the arrival of a new sibling, entry into school, graduating, finding a job, and marrying).

Exosystems relate the microsystems in which children are involved to settings in which children do not directly participate, such as parents' workplaces if children do not go there. Although children's immediate environments, in which they participate directly, are especially potent in influencing their development, Bronfenbrenner argued that settings that children do not experience directly are also very influential. He referred especially to the role of parents' work and the community's organization: Whether parents can perform effectively within the family depends on the demands, stresses, and supports of the workplace and extended family. The direct impact on children of parents' child-rearing roles is influenced by such indirect factors as flexibility of parents' work schedules, adequacy of child care arrangements, the help of friends and family, the quality of health and social services, and neighborhood safety. Aspects as removed as public policies affect all these factors and are part of the exosystem of human development.

Macrosystems are the ideology and organization of pervasive social institutions of the culture or subculture. Referring to macrosystems, Bronfenbrenner stated:

> Within any culture or subculture, settings of a given kind—such as homes, streets, or offices—tend to be very much alike, whereas be-

> tween cultures they are distinctly different. It is as if within each society or subculture there existed a blueprint for the organization of every type of setting. Furthermore, the blueprint can be changed, with the result that the structure of the settings in a society can become markedly altered and produce corresponding changes in behavior and development. (1979, p. 4)

Bronfenbrenner's approach makes several key contributions; in particular, it emphasizes studying the relations among the multiple settings in which children and their families are directly and indirectly involved. The idea of examining how children and families make transitions among their different ecological settings is also extremely important. Nonetheless, the separation into nested systems constrains ideas of the relations between individual and cultural processes.

Descendents

The ideas and research of the Whitings and Bronfenbrenner have provided very important guidance for the whole field of work on culture and human development. My own research and ideas are direct descendents from this family of work, intermarried with cultural-historical ideas.

Several other approaches, influenced by the ideas of the Whitings, Bronfenbrenner, and others, focus on *ecological niches* as a way of thinking about the relation of individuals and communities. Tom Weisner, Ron Gallimore, and Cathie Jordan (1988) emphasized important features of children's daily routines for understanding cultural influences:

> The personnel who are available and interacting with children
> The motivations of the people involved
> Cultural "scripts" used by people to guide the way they do things
> The type and frequency of tasks and activities in daily routines
> The cultural goals and beliefs of the people involved

Charles Super and Sara Harkness (1997) focused on the relations among children's dispositions and three subsystems of the developmental niche:

> The physical and social settings in which the child lives
> The culturally regulated customs of child care and child rearing
> The psychology of the caregivers (including parental beliefs regarding the nature and needs of children, goals for rearing, and shared understandings about effective rearing techniques)

Issues in Diagramming the Relation of Individual and Cultural Processes

In textbooks and scholarly treatises in a number of social science fields, the relation between individual and cultural processes is still commonly diagrammed using entities connected by arrows or contained in concentric circles (like figures 2.1 and 2.2).

These ways of sketching ideas are so familiar that social scientists may not question the assumptions they embody. Visual tools for communicating theoretical ideas constrain our ideas, often without our noticing the constraints. I think it is important to revise the diagrams to be able to represent the idea that cultural and personal processes create each other.

Boxes-and-arrows or nested-circles diagrams constrain our concepts by separating person and culture into stand-alone entities, with culture *influencing* the person (or, in some models, with the two entities interacting). Figures 2.1 and 2.2 portray the individual as separate from the environment (and therefore "subject" to its influences). The separation appears in the unidirectional causal chains between prior and later variables in the Whitings' model and in the hierarchical nesting of the inner system, dependent on those outside it, in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory.

Behavior (or thought) is often treated as the "outcome" of independent cultural variables. The "influence" of culture on individuals has frequently been studied by "measuring" some characteristics of culture (such as the complexity of social organization in the society) and some characteristics of individuals (such as personality characteristics or measures of intelligence), and then correlating them. This contrasts with approaches that examine the contributions of individuals and cultural practices as they function together in mutually defining processes.

Diagrams separating the individual and the world are so pervasive in the social sciences that we have difficulty finding other ways to represent our ideas. The Whitings and Bronfenbrenner may not themselves have been tightly wedded to the ideas that I suggest are implied by the forms of the diagrams. In a later work, Whiting and Edwards (1988) referred less to causal chains than in the 1975 work in examining associations between gender differences and the company children keep, though still with an aim of determining how settings influence individual development. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's nesting-doll image was accompanied by the statement that individuals and their settings are related through progressive, mutual accommodation.

Because I am interested in visual representations as tools for thought, I am seeking other ways to portray the mutual relationship of culture

and human development, avoiding the idea that either occurs alone (without the contributions of the other) or that one produces the other. After describing the ways that sociocultural-historical theory treats the relation of individual and cultural processes, I provide some diagrams to portray development as a process of changing participation in sociocultural activities.

Sociocultural-Historical Theory

Many researchers interested in culture and development found in the writings of Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues a theory that laid the groundwork to help integrate individual development in social, cultural, and historical context. In contrast to theories of development that focus on the individual and the social or cultural context as separate entities (adding or multiplying one and the other), the cultural-historical approach assumes that individual development must be understood in, and cannot be separated from, its social and cultural-historical context.[1] According to Vygotsky's theory, the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part.

Vygotsky focused on cognitive skills and their reliance on cultural inventions such as literacy, mathematics, mnemonic skills, and approaches to problem solving and reasoning (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). In this view, thinking involves learning to use symbolic and material cultural tools in ways that are specific to their use. This was exemplified by work demonstrating that experience with literacy promoted particular skills in its use, rather than promoting general cognitive advances (Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Vygotsky argued that children learn to use the tools for thinking provided by culture through their interactions with more skilled partners in the *zone of proximal development*. Through engaging with others in complex thinking that makes use of cultural tools of thought, children become able to carry out such thinking independently, transforming the cultural tools of thought to their own purposes. Interactions in the zone of proximal development allow children to participate in activities that would be impossible

[1]This approach is referred to interchangeably as the sociocultural, sociohistorical, or cultural-historical approach. Active scholarly work continues to examine and extend the early twentieth-century insights of Vygotsky, Luria, Leont'ev, and other Soviet scholars such as Bakhtin and Ilyenkov. See especially Bakhurst, 1995; Cole, 1995, 1996; Kozulin, 1990; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Wertsch, 1991, 1998.

for them alone, using cultural tools that themselves must be adapted to the specific activity at hand.

Cultural tools thus are both inherited and transformed by successive generations. Culture is not static; it is formed from the efforts of people working together, using and adapting material and symbolic tools provided by predecessors and in the process creating new ones.

Development over the life span is inherently involved with historical developments of both the species and cultural communities, developments that occur in everyday moment-by-moment learning opportunities. Development occurs in different time frames—at the pace of species change, community historical change, individual lifetimes, and individual learning moments (Scribner, 1985; Wertsch, 1985). These four developmental levels, at different grains of analysis, provide a helpful way of thinking about the mutually constituting nature of cultural and biological processes and the changing nature of culture, discussed in more depth in the next chapter.

Scholars are working on a coherent family of sociocultural-historical research programs and theories inspired by Vygotskian cultural-historical theory, along with related ideas emerging from several other theoretical traditions (see Goodnow, 1993; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). The theory of John Dewey (1916) also complements Vygotskian ideas and has helped a number of sociocultural scholars to further develop these ideas. In addition, work on communication in everyday lives in different communities has contributed important concepts for thinking about individual and cultural aspects of development (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Goodwin, 1990; Heath, 1983, 1989a, 1991; Mehan, 1979; Miller, 1982; Ochs, 1988, 1996; Rogoff et al., 1993; Schieffelin, 1991; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1986b).

The related proposals for sociocultural theory represent a general agreement that individual development constitutes and is constituted by social and cultural-historical activities and practices. In the emerging sociocultural perspective, culture is not an entity that *influences* individuals. Instead, people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people. Thus, individual and cultural processes are *mutually constituting* rather than defined separately from each other.[2]

[2]Related though heterogeneous sociocultural proposals include the work of Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1990, 1996; Engeström, 1990; Goodnow, 1990; Heath, 1983; Hutchins, 1991; John-Steiner, 1985; Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1983; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Ochs, 1988, 1996; Rogoff, 1990, 1998; Schieffelin, 1991; Scribner, 1985, 1997; Serpell, 1993; Shweder, 1991; Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, LeVine, Markus, & Miller, 1998; Valsiner, 1987, 1994, 1998; Wenger, 1999; Wertsch, 1991. (See also the journals *Mind, Culture, and Activity* and *Culture & Psychology*.) Although my version of the sociocultural perspective has a great deal in common with other versions, there are also important differences that are beyond the scope of this overview.

Development as Transformation of Participation in Sociocultural Activity

In my own work, I emphasize that human development is a process of *people's changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities.* People contribute to the processes involved in sociocultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices invented by others (Rogoff, 1990, 1998).

Rather than individual development being influenced by (and influencing) culture, from my perspective, people develop as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities that themselves develop with the involvement of people in successive generations. People of each generation, as they engage in sociocultural endeavors with other people, make use of and extend cultural tools and practices inherited from previous generations. As people develop through their shared use of cultural tools and practices, they simultaneously contribute to the transformation of cultural tools, practices, and institutions.

To clarify these ideas, I have been developing a series of images that aim to move beyond boxes-and-arrows and nested-circles ways of portraying cultural influences. In Figure 2.3a–g, I offer images of a sociocultural "transformation of participation perspective" in which personal, interpersonal, and cultural aspects of human activity are conceived as different analytic views of ongoing, mutually constituted processes.

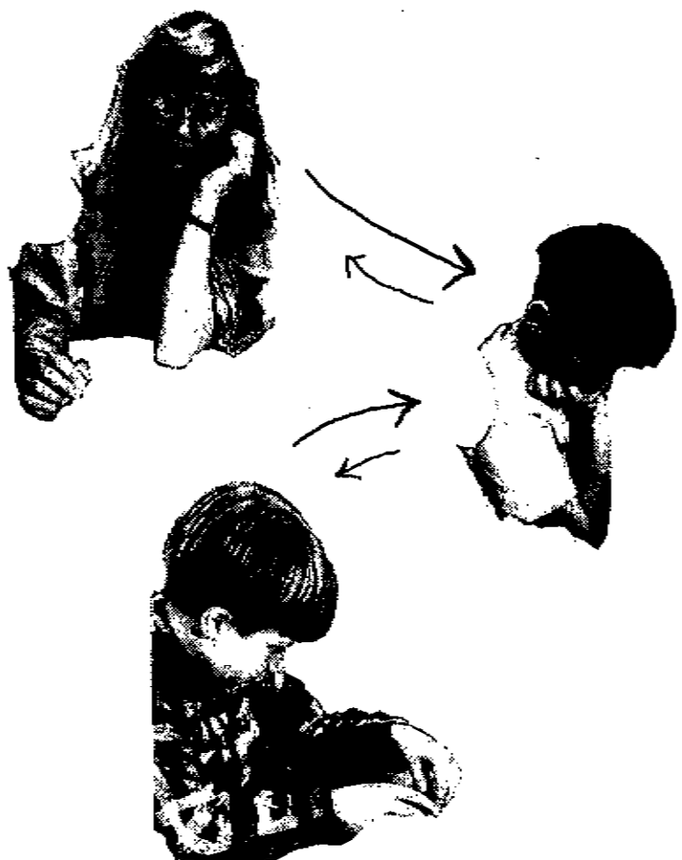
In the next chapter I discuss in more depth what I mean by cultural communities. For examining the images in Figure 2.3, it may be sufficient to note that in my view, cultural processes are not the same as membership in national or ethnic groups, and that individuals are often participants in more than one community's cultural practices, traditions, and institutions.

FIGURE 2.3a

This image portrays the object of study that has been traditional in developmental psychology: the *solitary individual.* Information about relations with other people and the purpose and setting of the activity is removed. When I ask people to guess what this child is doing, their speculations are hesitant and vague: "Thinking?" "Being punished?" "Reading?"

FIGURE 2.3B

Of course, the roles of other people—parents, peers, teachers, and so on—are recognized as relevant. This image portrays how social relations have often been investigated—by studying "the child" apart from other people, who are studied separately even when they are engaging in the same event. Then the "*social influences*" are examined through correlating the characteristics or actions of the separate entities.[3] (Sometimes, analyses include bidirectional arrows to try to include an effect of the active child on the other people.) When I ask people to make further guesses about what the child is doing, given information about "social influences," their hypotheses are not much more specific than for the solitary individual in Figure 2.3a.



[3]Vygotskian scholars complain that frequently Vygotsky's idea of the zone of proximal development is reduced to this sort of analysis of social influences, overlooking his emphasis on cultural processes.

FIGURE 2.3C

This figure, like the two previous, is based on the boxes-with-arrows diagrams of the relation of culture and human development. When "*cultural influences*" are added (represented by the book and the cupboard), the child remains separate from them, "subject" to the effects of cultural characteristics. The individual and the rest are taken apart from each other, analyzed without regard for what they are doing together in sociocultural activities. With this portrayal of "cultural influences" information, people's guesses about what this child is doing are still not very specific, though some become more certain that the child is reading.

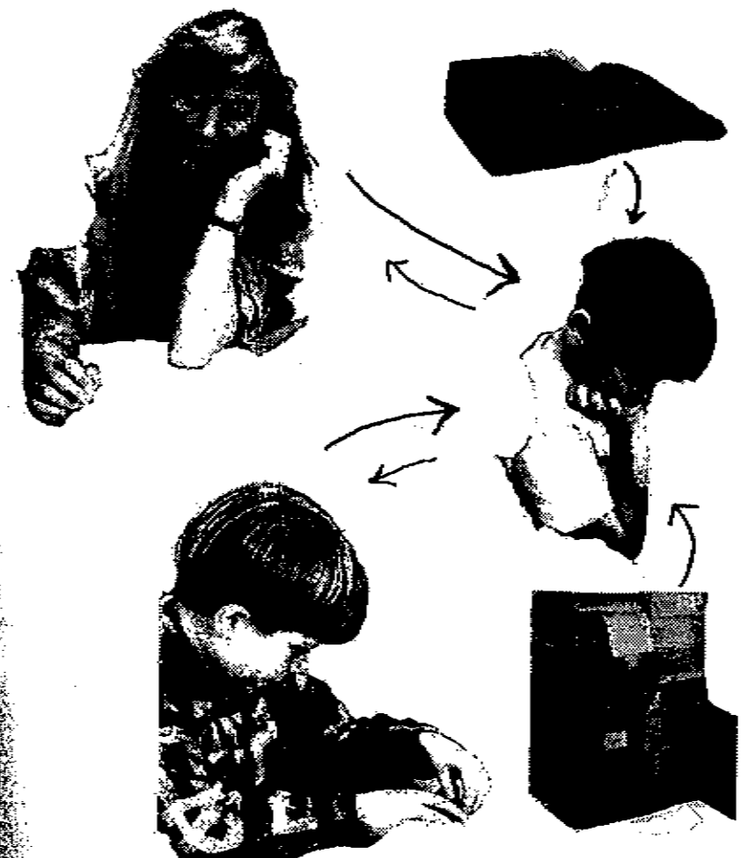


FIGURE 2.3D

This image focuses on the same child from the *transformation-of-participation perspective.* The child is foregrounded, with information about him as an *individual as the focus of analysis.* At the same time, interpersonal and cultural-institutional information is available in the background. A general sense of interpersonal and cultural-institutional information is necessary to understand what this child is doing, although it does not need to be attended to in the same detail as the child's efforts. When I show people this image, their guesses about what the child is doing become much more specific: "Playing a game . . . Oh, it's Scrabble . . . He's thinking about his next turn . . . It's in a classroom . . ."

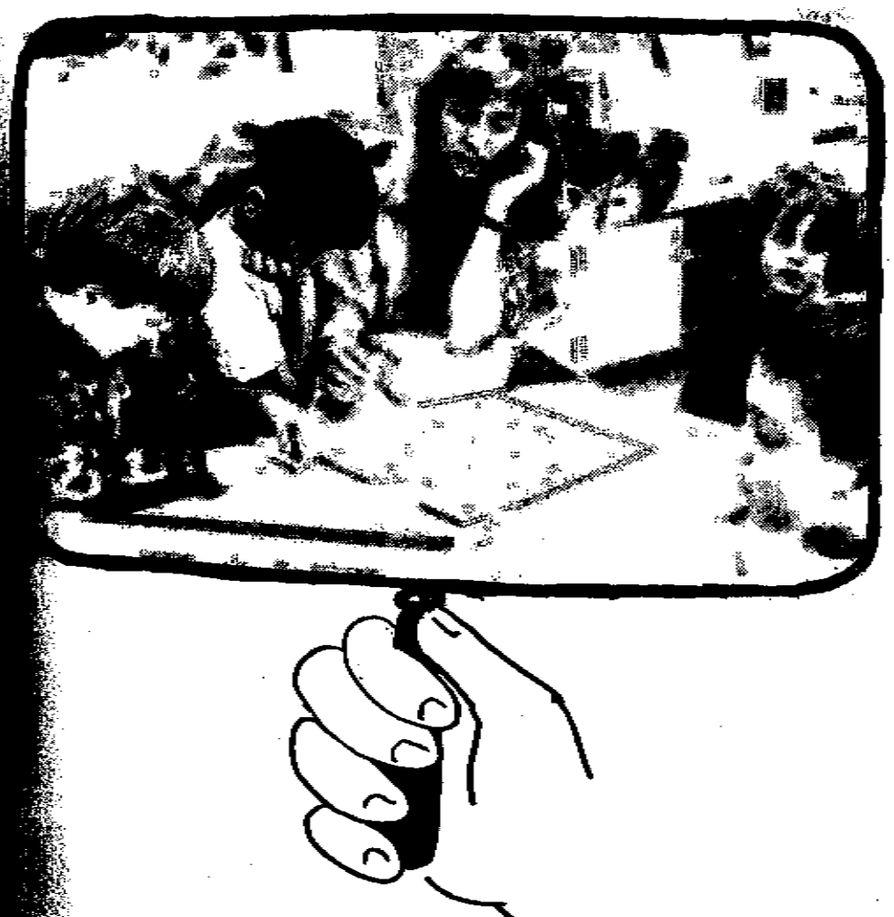


FIGURE 2.3E

If, instead of wanting to study the development of that particular child, we were interested in the relationships among that child and the people beside him, we could focus on what they are doing together. This would involve an *interpersonal focus of analysis*. We would be interested in knowing that the three people are playing Scrabble as a spelling activity organized by the adult; the adult is a parent volunteer helping this child check a word in the dictionary under her elbow while his classmate works on a word for his own next turn; and they are engaging in a friendly form of competition, helping each other as they play.

The fact that this is in a classroom setting matters, but we would not be analyzing in detail how such an activity fits with the culture of this school or this community (for that, see figure 2.3f). A general sense of individual and cultural information is important as background, to understand what the people are doing.

Together, the interpersonal, personal, and cultural-institutional aspects of the event constitute the activity. No aspect exists or can be studied in isolation from the others. An observer's relative focus on one or the other aspect can be changed, but they do not exist apart from each other. Analysis of interpersonal arrangements could not occur without background understanding of community processes (such as the historical and cultural roles and changing practices of schools and families). At the same time, analysis requires some attention to personal processes (such as efforts to learn through observation and participation in ongoing activities).

The hand holding the analytic lens is also important, indicating that we, as observers or researchers, construct the focus of analysis. *The focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine*—in the case of Figure 2.3e, the relationships among these three people. It is a particular view of the event and focuses on some information as more important to us, keeping other information less distinct, as background. It is usually necessary to foreground some aspects of phenomena and background others simply because no one can study everything at once. However, the distinctions between what is in the foreground and what is in the background lie in our analysis and are not assumed to be separate entities in reality. (In contrast, the boxes-and-arrows and nested-circles approaches often treat the diagrammed entities as existing separately in reality.)

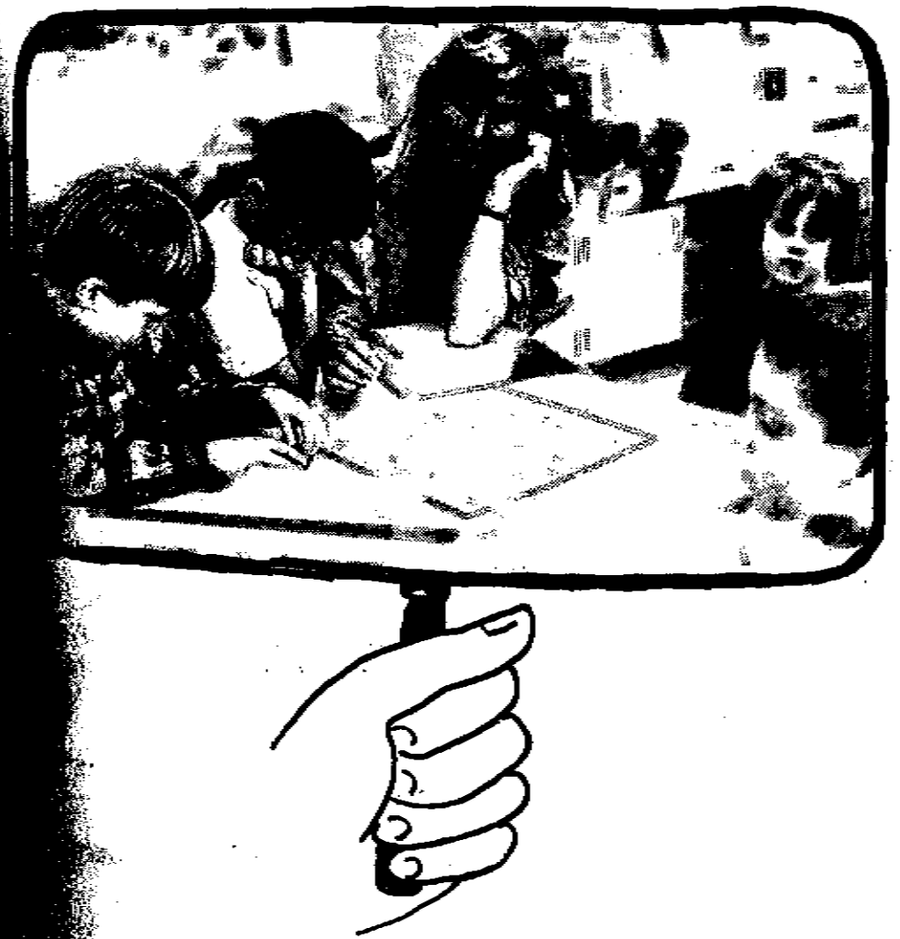


FIGURE 2.3F

Some studies (or some lines of investigation, or some disciplines) need a *cultural-institutional focus of analysis*, backgrounding the details regarding the particular people and their relations with each other. In this scene, we might be interested in studying such cultural-institutional processes as how this particular school has developed practices in which parent volunteers are routinely in the classroom, helping children learn by devising "fun educational" activities; how the community of this school revises its practices as new generations of families join in; and how the practices in this school connect with the culture and history of schooling in other innovative schools as well as in traditional schools and with national and educational policies (such an analysis is available in Rogoff, Goodman Turkanis, & Bartlett, 2001; Rogoff, 1994).

With the focus of Figure 2.3f, we see a glimpse of a moving picture involving the history of the activities and the transformations toward the future in which people and their communities engage.

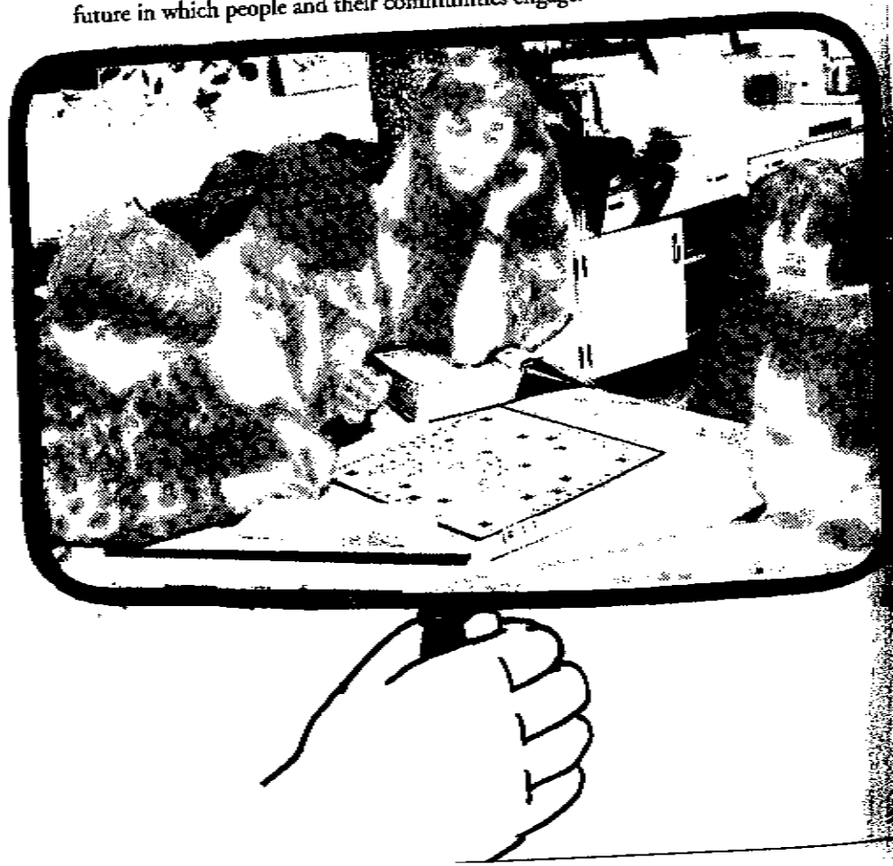
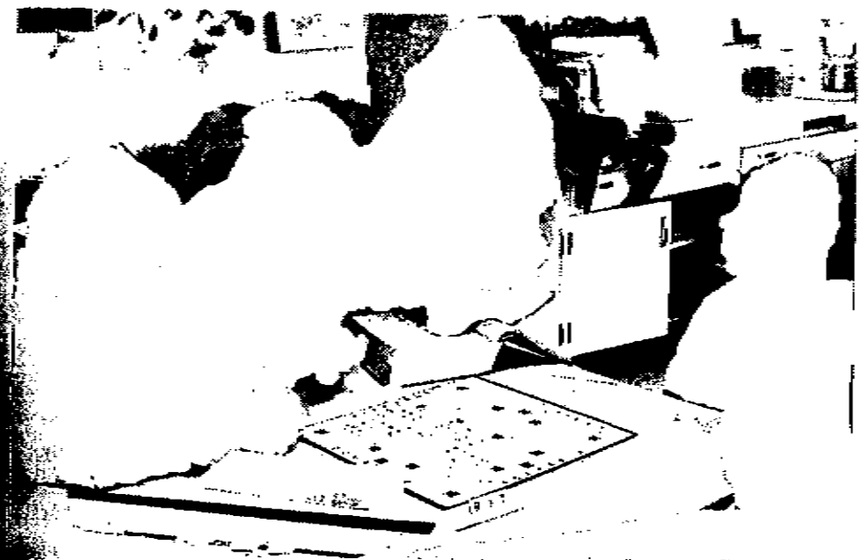


FIGURE 2.3G

This figure portrays a problem that sometimes occurs if researchers recognize the importance of culture but leave out the equally important role of *the people who constitute cultural activities*. This figure is as difficult to understand as Figure 2.3a. It does not make sense to try to study cultural processes without considering the contributions of the people involved, keeping them in the background of a focus on cultural, institutional community processes.



I believe that this approach will facilitate progress in coordinating information across studies and across disciplines to develop more complete understanding of the phenomena that interest us. Keeping our focus of analysis informed by background information makes it easier to align the understanding gained across studies or disciplines that employ different focuses. Instead of being competing ways to examine phenomena, each focus informs the others.

Although I concentrate in this book on questions of personal, interpersonal, and cultural processes, biological aspects of the activity shown in Figure 2.3d–f could be the focus of analysis in other related research. For example, studies could focus on neuronal, hormonal, or genetic processes, with personal, interpersonal, and cultural information in the background. In this way, biological, sociocultural, and individual aspects of human functioning can all be seen as contributing to the overall process, rather than as rivals, trying to cut each other out of the picture. (In the next chapter, I discuss the relation of biological and cultural processes.)

Key to my approach is an emphasis on the *processes* involved in human activity. The static nature of Figure 2.3d–f does not capture this well, however; the medium of the printed page constrains the representation of dynamic processes. If you can imagine the image as a glance at a moment in a moving picture, it would do more justice to the idea of the dynamic and mutually constituting nature of individual, interpersonal, and cultural-institutional processes.

The next chapter examines concepts for thinking about cultural processes. The ways that scholars and policymakers have often thought of culture are tied to the separation of individual and culture in the box-and-arrow or nesting-circles diagrams. Culture has been treated as an outside "influence" on individual characteristics, often thought of as providing a flavor to otherwise vanilla individuals. As I explain in the next chapter, from my transformation-of-participation view, all people participate in continually changing cultural communities. Individuals and generations shape practices, traditions, and institutions at the same time that they build on what they inherit in their moment in history.

3

Individuals, Generations, and Dynamic Cultural Communities

Each of us lives out our species nature only in a specific local manifestation . . . our cultural and historical peculiarity is an essential part of that nature.
—Shore, 1988, p. 19

Scholars and census takers alike struggle with how to think about the relation of individuals and cultural communities. This chapter focuses on how we can conceive of cultural processes and communities if we consider development to be a process of changing participation in dynamic cultural communities.

Two major challenges in trying to characterize people's cultural heritage are the focus of this chapter. The first challenge is moving beyond a pair of long-standing related dichotomies: cultural versus biological heritage and similarities versus differences. The second challenge is how to think of cultural processes as dynamic properties of overlapping human communities rather than treating culture as a static social address carried by individuals.

Humans Are Biologically Cultural

The well-known nature/nurture debate places culture and biology in opposition. Proponents argue that if something is cultural, it is not biological, and if something is biological, it is not cultural. In particular, psychologists have spent a long time trying to figure out what percentage of a person's characteristics is biological and what percentage is cultural or environmental. This artificial separation treats biology and culture as independent entities rather than viewing humans as biologically cultural.