CHAPTER

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Why the Need for This Book?

In 1977, barely a decade after the creation of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), Professor Thomas Oakland published *Psychological and Educational Assessment of Minority Children*. This groundbreaking edited text, developed for a school psychology audience, was the first of its kind to focus the field's attention on minority children and issues related to (what was referred to at that time) "non-discriminatory" psychoeducational assessment.

Although school psychologists are widely viewed as top specialists in the area of individual assessment for diagnosing pupils' psychoeducational problems, the field has pursued additional areas of expertise over the decades that extend beyond individual assessment for placement in special programs. In addition, the world has changed considerably in the 35 years since Prof. Oakland's text was first published. As one example, immigration—barely acknowledged 35 years ago—is an issue that has risen to the forefront of contemporary social, educational, and political discussions. Today, more and better research informs educational practice, generally, and school psychology practice, specifically, about minority children and schooling. Unfortunately, much of what is popularly promoted in school psychology today on these important issues remains stuck in the 1970s. A simple analogy illustrates the nature of this problem.

SCRIPTED KNOWLEDGE

Large commercial theme parks (e.g., Six Flags, DisneyWorld, SeaWorld) use elaborate transportation systems, such as ferry boats, chair lifts, monorails, and bus trams, to give customers a safe, structured, and controlled means of getting from point A to point B within the park. Such rides control how many persons can ride at one time, the speed at which the ride moves, and which areas of the park are covered. Typically, a company

tour guide points out carefully selected "areas of interest," about which park officials provide "canned," company-approved stories and descriptions.

Psychoeducational issues and problems involving racial/ethnic/language minority students are choreographed for school psychology audiences in much the same way. That is, the field invents its own terms (e.g., *cultural competence*), as well as its own definitions for them; frames multicultural problems in a prescribed manner that suits particular sociopolitical agendas (e.g., eradicating disproportionalities; promoting "social justice"); dictates how multicultural issues are to be framed, interpreted, and discussed; dictates the "correct" attitudes and feelings (e.g., "tolerance," "sensitivity") that audiences should have toward problems; and carefully arranges structural contingencies that determine how programs are to be rewarded or sanctioned for the extent to which multiculturalism ideology is infused into training.

In contemporary school psychology, multiculturalism ultimately boils down to an "everything-is-biased-against-CLD-children" message. This message has an intuitive appeal, as most students and professionals have a natural affinity for a professional identity that exposes injustices and "fights for the underdog." Although this message may have seemed new and fresh 35 years ago, it has grown increasingly more stale with each passing decade. This is because the field has the benefit of much more high-quality empirical research than it did 35 years ago, which includes clear evaluations of so-called "multicultural" remedies that have been tried (and most of which have failed) in the real world. When it comes to racial/ethnic conflicts in society, careful analyses have shown that there are no simplistic morality plays involving clear saints and clear villains. Hence, facile explanations for minority pupils' school problems that may have been persuasive decades ago are no longer persuasive to better informed researchers and scholars today.

Unfortunately, such insights have not permeated contemporary discussions of multicultural issues in school psychology. For all practical purposes, the field is figuratively held hostage by two primary messages on multicultural issues, which are as scripted and predictable as the rising and setting of the sun every 24 hours. First, racial/ethnic minority groups are viewed as "culturally exotic," which presumably requires nonminority school psychologists to learn about the odd cultural traits of different groups in order to be effective in serving them. Second, minority groups are seen as perpetual "victims" of racism, discrimination, and/or prejudice—which presumably lurks just beneath the surface of polite society, is expressed in countless subtle ways (e.g., "stereotype threat," "micro-aggressions"), and serves as the all-purpose explanation for most problems faced by minority groups in schools. The role of school psychologists, therefore, is to develop a zeal for "social justice"—which then prepares them to parachute into schools to rescue minority children from the harm that most assuredly awaits them at the hands of culturally insensitive educators.

The fundamental message of this book is that these ideas, no matter how appealing they may sound, *have nothing at all to do with actual practices that effectively help vulnerable minority children in schools*. Before discussing the material covered in this text, however, the principle of truth in advertising requires an initial discussion of what this book will *not* cover.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS NOT

There exist many outstanding texts for school psychologists that describe specific academic and behavioral interventions that are effective for helping children, youth, and families in school settings. With the exception of interventions that require non–English language modifications, no credible data-based psychological theory has demonstrated that such interventions cannot also be used with minority children. *First and foremost, minority children and their families are not kitchen appliances that come equipped with a "multicultural instruction manual" for proper care and service.* Hence, this book is not an inventory of scripted how-to recipes designed to magically work with nonwhite or non-English-speaking children. Contrary to current fashions, knowing the racial or ethnic status of students—by itself—provides no useful information on their school adjustment, academic performance, or how they are to be served when they experience problems in educational settings. The reality is that many minority students adjust well and achieve satisfactorily in schools, and many do not. Therefore, knowledge of minority status alone is not sufficient for problem solving. It is the *correlates* of racial/ethnic/language status, and *how these correlated variables interact*, that must be understood before school psychologists (and other school personnel) can appreciate how best to effectively serve vulnerable children in schools.

Second, although special education issues are discussed in various places within this text when necessary, the exclusive focus of this book is not on special education. Many texts attempt to marry special education with multiculturalism, but this hybrid often seems forced and artificial. Many school psychologists were initially motivated to enter the field because of its characterization as a profession that applies psychological knowledge to helping all children in schools. Only after entering the field as graduate students did many begin to realize how special education plays a dominant role in defining school psychology roles and functions. This text departs somewhat from this tradition by addressing problems of minority children throughout all levels of the education system, which is in keeping with a simple definition of the field as the application of psychology to education, defined broadly.

Third, many school psychology students and scholars who are interested in multicultural issues find themselves attracted to ideas and insights drawn from the specialty of counseling psychology. Counseling psychology, compared to other applied psychologies,

has a reputation for showcasing prolific writing from "academic superstars" who specialize in multiculturalism. Because school psychology does not produce this same degree of sustained scholarship on multicultural issues, it comes as little surprise that opinions in school psychology are often shaped by ideas that are vigorously promoted within counseling psychology.

This book departs substantially from this tradition, for the following reason: Fundamentally, counseling psychologists who specialize in multiculturalism often place an inordinate emphasis on the deleterious effects of real or imagined "racism" (e.g., see Sidebar 2.2), which in the final analysis reflects group grievance politics and sociopolitical advocacy more than it reflects objective, empirically supported research. Although school psychology roles and functions can overlap somewhat with the roles of school counselors, much in school psychology practice simply is not easily translatable from counseling psychology. This text, in contrast, adopts the view that a better and more empirically supportable understanding of how minority children are served in schools owes much more inspiration from the field of educational psychology than it does from counseling psychology.

CHAPTER CONTENT

Returning to the earlier commercial theme park analogy, the purpose of this book is to permit readers to disembark from the scripted tour and walk freely about the park, drawing one's own conclusions and exploring areas unhindered by "Do Not Enter" signs.

Multiculturalism ideology is currently the primary vehicle through which graduate students in school psychology (and other related applied professions) first learn about issues and problems of minority groups in schools. Toward this end, various facets of multiculturalism ideology are analyzed in detail in **Chapter 2**. Multiculturalism ideology so permeates preservice training that audiences are usually unaware that what are promoted as "truths" are little more than ideological talking points. Audiences simply assume that if their professional organizations or university trainers promote an idea, and repeat it often enough, then it must be true, and it has a prescriptive right not to be questioned or challenged. With rare exceptions (e.g., see Frisby, 2005a, 2005b), multiculturalism ideology is never treated as an object of scrutiny in its own right, nor is it ever examined directly in order to test the validity of its implicit assumptions. When this is done, *the irony is that multiculturalism ideology contributes next to nothing that informs school psychologists (and other school personnel) about practices that are found to actually help minority children in schools.*

Quack Multiculturalism is the name given to a particular brand of multiculturalism that promotes falsehoods and distortions, yet amazingly continues to be promoted as received wisdom in the field. The primary theme of the chapter is that multiculturalism is fundamentally a sociopolitical ideology. It is not—as many would presume—a science,

nor does it necessarily represent "best practices" for school psychologists. Quack Multiculturalism is not to be confused with research and practices that have been found to actually help minority children in schools, thus readers are encouraged to keep these two concepts separate.

Minority children are raised in a variety of home and neighborhood environments, some of which include the structure, nurturing, support, and freedom from chaos that is conducive to school learning, and many others that do not. Within every country on the face of the globe, social class is an extremely important scientific variable that has been shown to be empirically related to many social outcome variables. In most (but certainly not all) cases, social class supersedes race/ethnicity as a powerful predictor of schooling outcomes. Yet inexplicably, this variable receives almost no attention in the published literature in contemporary school psychology. The purpose of the material discussed in **Chapter 3** is to showcase the role of social class and home/neighborhood environments in contributing to social and educational outcomes for minority children.

Minority children are not homogeneous in the school settings in which they are educated, which is another variable that is all but ignored in Quack Multiculturalism. Even when home/family environments may not be ideal, variability in the educational philosophies, instructional practices, and curriculum offerings of schools play a crucial role in the quality of educational experiences that minority children receive. The material in **Chapter 4** discusses these important differences in the contexts for school learning, which can help readers better understand the proximal factors that influence psychoeducational outcomes for minority children.

To understand the relationship between classroom instruction and school learning, while pretending to ignore the role of general cognitive ability, is like trying to bake a cake without using flour. School psychologists, more than any other school professionals, should know that individual differences in cognitive ability is the one psychological variable that is most highly predictive of individual achievement in school and beyond. Because of the contentious politics surrounding this issue, however, school psychologists have largely ignored their professional responsibility to apply what research clearly indicates about the relationship of this important variable to instructional practices and school learning. The material in **Chapter 5** explicates these relationships.

School psychologists are also widely considered to possess (at least in principle) more measurement and testing expertise than most other school professionals. As testing and assessment experts, they should not be intimidated by claims that standardized testing is biased against minority groups who are native-born English speakers. The field has given an open forum to this claim in previous decades, which has produced no substantial evidence or valid arguments against the use of standardized testing in education. As shown in **Chapter 6**, however, there is still a role for school psychologists (and other school personnel) in helping minority children in the context of testing and assessment

practices in schools. Properly trained school psychologists are uniquely positioned to help schools in accessing and choosing the proper test accommodations for limited English speakers. School psychologists can lend their expertise to schools' efforts to help minority students prepare for, and perform to the best of their abilities on, classroom and schoolwide standardized tests.

Without a basic level of behavioral discipline, students cannot learn in schools. There is no magic formula for disciplining children differently as a function of their racial/ethnic group membership. However, when a critical mass of minority students with poor behavioral socialization skills are present in a school, fundamental structural changes in school organization and school policies are required. The material in **Chapter 7** has shown that good discipline and classroom management can occur in schools where the principal is freed from the kinds of bureaucratic constraints—present in most public schools—that make learning all but impossible.

The presence of organized youth gangs in schools with significantly large minority enrollments has a way of making a mockery of schools' best efforts to promote a safe and orderly academic environment. The serious problems caused by school crime and youth gangs focus discussions on what is most important: the physical safety of students, teachers, and staff. There is nothing overtly "multicultural" about what schools do to combat these problems, because most interventions adopted by schools involve basic protections for students whose learning and development is compromised by the presence of gangs, crime, and delinquency in schools. Most school psychology programs barely acknowledge this problem in discussions of multicultural issues. The material discussed in **Chapter 8** is designed to introduce school psychologists (and other school personnel) to this issue, and to show how schools can effectively respond to this difficult problem.

School districts enrolling large numbers of racial/ethnic minority and immigrant children find that they must devote considerable resources to within-district programs to combat vexing social problems (e.g., criminal activity, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, lack of services for immigrant newcomers) that undermine the ability of students to benefit from their educations. School psychology students may be quite surprised to discover that, rather than minority students being underserved in schools, many school districts are quite intentional and proactive in developing programs specifically targeted to combating these social problems. The material in **Chapter 9** provides a more in-depth discussion of exemplary programs for minority students in select districts around the country.

Chapters 2 through 9, when considered as a whole, generate specific guidelines, principles, and recommendations that need to be carefully considered if school psychology desires to move forward and become a key contributor to national discussions about improving psychoeducational outcomes for minority children. These ideas are

discussed at length in **Chapter 10**. This needed direction is two-pronged: (1) the field needs to seriously reconsider, and in some cases abandon, modes of thinking that have consistently proven to result in hopeless dead-ends; and (2) there are new directions to pursue that are more empirically sound, yet are linked more closely to the practices of schools that are successful in educating large numbers of minority children.

Many terms and concepts could have been defined and explained in greater detail, but this would have interrupted the flow of the text if these definitions were included in the chapters. The book concludes with a concise **Glossary**, where key terms are defined and explained in greater detail for readers.

Lastly, the book includes certain features to help readers navigate the text and locate sources more easily. The book makes extensive use of highlighted Sidebars, which are self-contained explanations or illustrations of key concepts that can be read separately from the main flow of the text. In an effort to keep current, a conscious effort was also made to include information sources and examples that can be accessed more easily from the Internet. At the end of most chapters, additional resources are given that supplement the main concepts discussed in the text.