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The Ethnographic Approach to Intervention and Fundamental Change

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Ethnography, a branch of anthropology, seeks to describe the rules of social interaction in a particular setting through participant observation. The hallmarks of ethnographic methods are deep and rich descriptions of patterns of social interaction and an explication of the meanings those patterns hold for members of the culture under study. As Spradley puts it, "The central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view. . . . Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (1980, p. 3).

The high percentage of children—particularly minority children—who fail to learn to read and write is a problem that has been addressed by an increasing number of researchers through the use of ethnographic methods. The majority of these studies focus on the match or mismatch between the culture of the home and the culture of the school (Philips, 1983; Heath, 1983; Scollon and Scollon, 1981; Jordan, 1981; Erickson, 1975). A smaller number have focused on how implicit class or political stratification affects school and school-related interactions (McDermott and Gospodinoff, 1981; McDermott, Goldman, Varenne, in press; Ogbu, 1982). Despite the information

about school failure amassed by these researchers, however, both researchers and practitioners are questioning the degree to which this work has actually helped create the kind of change it wishes to bring about (Cazden, 1983; Kleinfeld, 1983).

This chapter joins in questioning the degree to which ethnographic study can contribute to altering the status quo of the systems under its scrutiny. We will do so by examining five widely cited and influential ethnographies. The first three of these ethnographies are from what one might call the tradition of basic or descriptive ethnographic research. They describe patterns of interaction that are linked to school failure. Of these three, two take a "cultural match" perspective (Philips, 1983; Erickson, 1975) and one a more political perspective (McDermott and Gospodinoff, 1981). Two questions will be asked of each of these three studies. First, to what degree do they meet the goals of ethnographic research, that is, completeness, accuracy, and the addition of useful knowledge? Second, do the studies contain information that will be useful for practitioners who wish to make the kinds of changes in their practice that these three ethnographers' work suggests they should make? As we shall see, these two questions are intertwined.

The remaining two studies are examples of the few ethnographic studies that have generated interventions designed to remedy the kinds of conditions described in the previously mentioned ethnographies (Jordan, 1981; Au and Jordan, 1981; Heath, 1982, 1983). These projects did much to reverse school failure. We will suggest, however, that although the changes that they recommended did address cultural conditions, the projects did not appear to establish contexts in which students and teachers could reflect on the institutional and interpersonal conditions that led to and maintained school failure in the first place. In the language of this volume, we will question whether the interventions asked practitioners to examine their theories-in-use about dealing with cultural differences.

Descriptive Ethnographic Research

Philips (1983) studied first- and sixth-grade American Indian children. She hypothesized a mismatch between the tacit

Indian cultural rules for face-to-face interaction (particularly while learning and teaching) and the tacit rules guiding face-to-face interaction in Anglo classrooms. She focused particularly on comparing cultural strategies for structuring attention and regulating turns for talking. Eye contact, pauses in conversation, gestures, and verbal turn taking are examples of the components of interaction that Philips analyzed. She hypothesized that it was the mismatch between the rules of interaction learned and practiced in the children's homes and those practiced in their classrooms that led to a high incidence of school failure of Indian children in Anglo classrooms.

McDermott and Gospodinoff (1981) studied a New York suburban first-grade class populated by children from a range of backgrounds: Italian and Jewish white children, Puerto Rican children, and black children. They hypothesized that there exist in the classroom tacit rules of interaction that, when followed, result in a paradox: a smoothly managed classroom whose very manageability is contingent on the creation of contexts that will secure the failure of minority children to learn to read. Drawing on a method of context analysis developed by Birdwhistell (1970), McDermott and Gospodinoff identified repetitive body posturings that characterized interaction in the lowest reading group, compared these with the patterns that occurred in the advanced reading group, and demonstrated how the series of positionings of the low group prevented them from staying on the task of reading, while the series of positionings of the high group supported the activity of learning to read.

Erickson (1975) studied interactions between guidance counselors and their junior college counselees. He hypothesized that the degree to which counselor and counselee perceived themselves to be alike strongly influenced the degree to which the student might receive advice, support, or special favors from the counselor. Erickson analyzed both verbal and nonverbal interaction to determine the degree to which counselors and counselees perceived themselves to be alike. He also collected data about the accuracy with which counselors and counselees read each other's implicit meanings. He found that it was not only similarity in race or ethnicity that predicted a smooth

interaction and special favors; the establishment of a "particularistic comembership," such as a shared interest in sports also often resulted in special treatment of the counselee by the counselor.

School failure is an issue about which all these researchers care deeply. Therefore we assume that they want their work to generate information that will enhance the ability of practitioners to alleviate school failure. In this, they strive to be as complete and as accurate as possible. It is the contention of this chapter, however, that these ethnographies share three features that put their accuracy, completeness, and usefulness at risk. All the ethnographers (1) make and hold inferences that are not tested with the participants (or if they are, it is not a process that is written about by the ethnographers); (2) they diagnose the problem incompletely; and (3) they offer structural and interpersonal prescriptions that are difficult to achieve.

Before we proceed with an analysis of these features, however, let us pause here and address the idea of usefulness. The focus of this book is on how to produce knowledge that can help alter the status quo. At first glance, then, this book would seem to ask the same question of research in general that Cazden asked of ethnographers in her 1983 presidential address to the Council on Education and Ethnography. I paraphrase here: "While we are quite proficient at adding to descriptions of how it is that educational problems such as school failure are maintained (that is, the status quo), isn't it true that we—the community of linguists and ethnographers—have explained educational failure without showing how it can be reversed?" (Cazden, 1983, p. 36). So far, Cazden's question and the question of this chapter are the same. Where they differ is in the factors that they single out as determinants of this failure to change the status quo.

Whereas Cazden defines the status quo as the continuing presence of school failure, we take a different view. We define the status quo as the set of interlocking consequences for learning and effectiveness in the world. These consequences result from the interactions of human beings using a Model I theory-in-use. Thus, when an action researcher sets out to diagnose a

problem such as school failure, he or she would be likely to focus on the reasoning embedded in the interactions (mostly verbal) that the participants have and on how that reasoning may undercut the participants' intentions, such as achieving equal opportunity for all students in the classroom and establishing learning environments that reduce or eradicate school failure. Thus the action scientist focuses on the individual and group reasoning that maintains the consequence of school failure. School failure is one kind of status quo; the reasoning and interactions that produce it and that keep the actors unaware of it constitute another. It is this second kind of status quo that we believe requires attention if the system is to solve the problem in such a way that it remains solved.

To illustrate: Both Philips and Erickson focus on cultural factors in their diagnosis of the causes of school failure. What they focus less on are the ways in which teachers and counselors reason about and handle these cultural differences. As Kleinfeld suggests, however, "the fundamental issue is not the existence of cultural differences in codes; these commonly occur in transcultural learning situations, but people commonly figure out ways of dealing with them. The fundamental issue is that some cultural groups in some circumstances decide that they do not want to acquire the attributes of the majority culture. If this is true, educators need from anthropologists a better understanding of how and why these cultural decisions are made, the meaning to children of what teachers ask them to do, and whether there are possibilities for reconciliation" (1983, p. 286).

This perspective reflects Kleinfeld's view that it is the workings of the "cultural decisions" that need looking into. We would, however, frame this inquiry somewhat differently, looking first not at cultural decisions so much as at the reasoning people use about how to handle differences in the classroom and how to handle the conflicts that result from these differences. Put another way, we would focus on the patterns of the interacting theories-in-use of teachers and students and look at how those patterns generated a culture for learning in the classroom. We would assert that it is only by altering this level of the

status quo that the individuals in the system can independently and permanently correct the consequence of school failure.

Limitations of Ethnographic Research

Now let us turn to an exploration of those features of ethnographic research that we believe reduces its contribution to altering the status quo. We will examine three separate research projects in three very different settings.

Ethnographers Make and Hold Untested Inferences. All ethnographers must impose meanings on their settings. The balance between discerning the meanings in the culture under study and organizing and transmitting those meanings in an attempt to describe the culture is a difficult one to maintain. If meanings are imposed on the participants' actions either too early or if the meanings are not checked with participants, then an ethnographer runs the risk of inaccurately or incompletely describing the phenomenon in which he or she is interested. Such a description also lowers the probability that it will be helpful to participants. It is the contention of this chapter that both McDermott and Gospodinoff and Erickson make and hold inferences in ways that may have these unintended consequences.

Specifically, they make inferences about the actors, guided by whatever theoretical perspective has helped them to frame their data. They do not publicly test these inferences (or the theories on which they are based) with the actors. If they do perform this kind of testing, they do not write about it and therefore presumably do not see it as an integral step in the research process. The inferences they make then become part of a causal theory that also apparently goes untested with the actors. They thus end up imposing meanings on participants that may not be accurate, and thereby reduce the probability of learning on the part of both reader and practitioner.

McDermott and Gospodinoff's analysis of one aspect of teacher behavior can serve as an example. They note that the teacher will often disrupt the low reading group (by yelling at, or getting up to discipline, someone outside the reading group) at the precise moment that the group has finally settled down

to begin reading. They then make a series of inferences to explain this: "By way of inference, it can be claimed that the teacher is uncomfortable with the bottom group once it is settled and ready for instruction. In terms of the readiness of some of the children to engage in reading activities, the teacher's response to the bottom group is quite understandable. It is easier to teach children how to read when they already know how to read. The top group does not present the headaches the bottom group does" (1981, p. 22).

They then assert that the teacher often leaves the group at key times because she is uncomfortable with the task of teaching the bottom group. This attribution may be correct, but it is primarily informed by a theory that helps the researchers to interpret the teacher's actions, namely, that it is far harder to teach the low group than the high group. The teacher herself has not given any data to indicate that she believes her discomfort is the reason why she walks away from the group. As far as we know, the researchers did not test this causal inference with the teacher to see whether or not she sees it as valid. They then build on this causal inference by linking the teacher's withdrawal to the children's failure to learn to read.

The fact that this chain of reasoning goes untested may make it quite difficult for the teacher to understand and alter her behavior. This is especially true given what McDermott and Gospodinoff are careful to point out, that the teacher's behavior may be counterproductive to the students' ability to learn to read but that this is by no means her intention. They describe the teacher as "an excellent teacher who cares deeply about the children. We all know that teaching a first grade is a difficult job, and this particular teacher is excellent under the circumstances" (1981, p. 228). The perspective of this book would suggest that the teacher's actions were tacit, highly skilled, and automatic. Furthermore, we too assume that she was unaware of her actions. But the question then becomes, How might research help her to become aware of her actions and their consequences?

McDermott and Gospodinoff suggest that the conditions for her behavior are set in the larger school and societal struc-

tures. This is very likely so, but these conditions cannot be changed through one teacher's insight into them. Conditions closer to the teacher's own province of control are internal ones, namely, the reasoning that led her to act as she did. Examples of such reasoning might be found in her reaction to the low reading group; how she dealt with a possible sense of failure; and whether she attributed failure to intentional behavior on the part of the group and felt annoyed or to innate lack of ability and felt guilty or hopeless. Any of these reactions might lead to the behavior that McDermott and Gospodinoff describe, but each would contain very different prescriptions for change in the teacher's reasoning. Thus the fact that the inferences made by McDermott and Gospodinoff are not tested with the teacher makes it impossible for the reader to get a complete picture of her experience of the low reading group and may make it difficult for her to learn from the description they present.

Untested inferences also appear in Erickson's work, despite the fact that he created opportunities for the participants to comment on their own behavior, as well as on that of the actor involved. Following is an excerpt from one of the interviews in which Erickson makes attributions about each actor's meanings that are not, to our knowledge, tested with the actors. The interview takes place between a Polish-American student and a guidance counselor (Erickson, 1975, pp. 48-49):

Counselor: [*Unsmiling and formal*] What did you get in your Biology 101 last semester?

Student: Whad' I get?

Counselor: What did you get for a grade?

Student: B.

Counselor: B?

Student: Yeah.

Counselor: How about Speech 101?

Student: Speech, ah . . . ah, I th—, I think, I didn't get that one.

Counselor: [*Looks straight at the student without smiling*] What do you mean you "didn't get it"?

Student: I got some incomplete.

Counselor: Ah . . . how come?

Student: Th— . . . then I, ah, ma— I did complete them. You know, then I made up the test . . . and then they give me tha— . . .

Counselor: Did you make up the tests?

Student: The grades . . . yes, I did.

Counselor: [*Looks down at the student's transcript*] You don't know all the grades you got, though.

Student: I didn't (unintelligible) and C.

Counselor: [*Looks at student without smiling*] You didn't fail anything?

Student: No. No fail.

Erickson comments on this interchange: "When the Polish-American student indicated confusion at the beginning of the exchange by responding to a question with a question, the counselor seemed to take that to mean that the student was not intelligent or attentive. From then on he challenged the student's answers even when they were not ambiguous. The resulting tone was unfriendly and at times intimidating. Also, because the student had trouble communicating, the counselor inferred incorrectly that he was having trouble academically" (1975, p. 49).

Here Erickson begins by inferring that because the boy answered a question with a question, the counselor evaluated the boy as "not intelligent or attentive." As far as we know, this is not a meaning that the counselor assigned to his own actions, and Erickson does not connect his inference to the counselor's words or actions. Therefore it is difficult to judge the accuracy of such an inference.

Second, he says that the counselor challenged the boy's

answers in an intimidating fashion. Again, this may be so, but it may also have been that the counselor was attempting to be straightforward in a difficult situation, or that the counselor was trying to stifle his own discomfort in such a situation. No data were collected about the meanings that the counselor imposed on the situation. As in the previous study, this diminishes the completeness of the description (and possibly its accuracy), as well as the probability that an actor who might be unintentionally doing harm could begin to learn how to reason and behave differently.

Although Erickson provided the opportunity for participants to comment on their actions, as far as we know he did not share his own inferences about the meanings of their actions. Nor does the data published indicate that he asked participants to be explicit about the inferences they made about themselves. Following is another interaction between counselor and student (Erickson, 1975, p. 54):

Counselor: As far as next semester. . . . Why don't you give some thought to what you'd like to take there. . . . [*leans forward*] Do you plan on continuing along this PE major?

Student: Yeah, I guess so. I might as well keep it up . . . my PE, and [*shifts in chair*] I wanna go into counseling, too, see . . . you know, to have two way . . . like equal balance.

Counselor: I see. Ah . . . What do you know about counseling?

Student: Nothing [*smiles, averts eyes, then looks up*].

Counselor: Okay.

Student: [*Shifts in chair, smiles and averts eyes*] I know you have to take psychology courses of some sort . . . and counseling.

Counselor: [*Leans back*] Well, [*student stops smiling, looks directly at counselor, and sits almost immobile while counselor talks and shifts in chair repeatedly*] it's this is a . . . it'll vary from different places to different places. . . But essentially what you need . . . First of all you're gonna need state certification

. . . state teacher certification [*goes on to give more information*].

Erickson played this videotape back separately for the counselor and student and asked them both to comment. The counselor said (1975, p. 55):

> Right now we both seem to be concentrating on giving information and putting it together . . . he's got aspirations for the future, PE and uh . . . uh, counseling . . . he's a little bit ahead of himself as far as the counseling . . . as the year progressed, I guess I got the question so often that it became one of my favorite topics an' I was ready to enumerate . . . essentially what he did was that he started me off on my information.

The student had a very different experience (1975, p. 55):

> Well . . . well, I couldn't really say, but I wasn't satisfied with what he wanted to push. . . . I guess he didn't think I was qualified, you know. That's the way he sounded to me. . . . This guy here seems like he was trying to knock me down in a way, you know. Trying to say no . . . I don't think you can handle anything besides PE. You know he just said it in general terms, he didn't go up and pow! like they would in the old days, you know. This way they just try to use a little more psychology . . . they sugarcoat it this way.

The counselor describes the student's aspiration to go into counseling as suggesting that he was "a little bit ahead of himself." From this, apparently, Erickson infers that the student heard the counselor's meaning correctly. Note, however, the wide discrepancy between the view that the student was "ahead of himself" and the view that the counselor was trying to "knock [him] down." Each interpretation seems plausible,

yet Erickson does not indicate how it is that he comes to see the student's imposition of meaning as the correct one. This issue is not, in Erickson's view, central to his thesis that miscommunication can occur: "Implicit messages--intended or not, read accurately or not--are important in the counseling situation" (1975, p. 55). We would agree, but would add that the intention behind these messages and the accuracy with which they are read should be of deep concern to the practitioner in the situation, particularly if he or she wishes to begin to alter the reasoning behind the behavior itself.

Erickson, like McDermott and Gospodinoff, does not attribute intentional discrimination to the counselors: "The counselors we studied were not trying to cheat their students or their schools; nor were they incompetent" (1975, p. 68). Yet if they were unaware of their behavior, the imposition of meanings rather than the discovery of them might inhibit the ability of these practitioners to learn.

Diagnoses of the Problem Are Incomplete. In this section we take a look at what ethnographers focus on when diagnosing the problem of school failure. At first glance it appears that in making a diagnosis the ethnographers considered here seek information in exactly the same domains as those that interest an action scientist. Philips, McDermott and Gospodinoff, and Erickson all seek to understand (1) action and the reasoning behind action and (2) patterns in social behavior. Moreover, they seek to understand these in a particular context.

Philips and Erickson, however, represent the majority of ethnographers of schooling in that they look at these elements in terms of cultural rules of interaction. They do not look at the reasoning that leads children and teachers to cope with cultural differences in particular ways. Recall, for instance, that Philips describes a series of actions--Indians listening and responding with certain kinds of eye contact and other metalinguistic cues. She makes inferences about the meaning of these actions. This could be put in the form of a theory-in-use proposition: "When I avert my eyes and do not directly respond, I am listening." Philips also describes the rules of paying attention in the mainstream classrooms: "When I want to show someone I am listen-

ing, I look them straight in the face and nod or respond directly." Both of these propositions, when acted out in their natural contexts, are effective ways of constructing the social relationship of "listening to someone."

Philips's diagnosis of the dynamics that lead Indian children into trouble in school has to do with the fact that the action propositions in the school culture do not match those of the home culture. Thus, Philips describes one level of a status quo, namely, that Indian children have rules for effective learning that white teachers do not share; white teachers are unaware of these rules and therefore downgrade Indian children who, as a result, fail in school. But she fails to explore another, deeper status quo: What is it that (1) keeps white teachers from finding out about Indian children's different ways of doing things, and (2) what leads them to distance themselves from responsibility by blaming the Indian children and failing them? We would assert that both the unawareness and the distancing from responsibility for error are typical Model I responses. Furthermore, we would assert that Philips's prescription that cultural rules for learning should be matched with classroom rules for learning is necessary but not sufficient to alter the status quo, for this response leaves the Model I values of teachers, administrators, and even students unchanged.

Philips and others may respond that it is all well and good to espouse this kind of change as a goal but that it is a complex enough task to make children literate; why complicate that task by making the social dynamics of the classroom an object of change? We would agree that creating conditions that will enable children who are failing in school to succeed is no trivial accomplishment. If, however, teachers and administrators can become more aware of their own responsibility for results like school failure, they may then come to act differently and thus reduce the problem. If teachers, administrators, and, for that matter, older children view themselves as centrally responsible for the situation, they may each become more internally committed to monitoring the institution and themselves. If teachers, administrators, and adolescent young people develop the skills to discuss threatening issues like racism, these

issues will be less likely to covertly influence classroom interaction and success. Finally, an awareness of how individuals in the system unintentionally maintain conditions for school failure may contribute to the system's capacity to deal more effectively with the next threatening issue it faces, if that awareness is combined with the development of new skills.

We do not know if the kinds of changes just described in fact took place in any of the classrooms studied by the three researchers. If these changes have been made, they have not, to our knowledge, been written about. Our prediction would be that these changes in status quo would not be generated by the knowledge that Philips, Erickson, and McDermott and Gospodinoff create.

Although Philips and Erickson represent the majority of ethnographers of schooling in taking a "cultural match" approach, McDermott and Gospodinoff represent an interesting exception. In our view their diagnosis is consistent with the one that an action scientist might make, for it reveals action propositions that get at the Model I dynamics that produce such consequences as low trust, escalating error, and high defensiveness. For instance, if McDermott and Gospodinoff (1981) were to publicly confirm their attributions about the teacher's inability to deal with the low reading group, they would probably arrive at the following theory-in-use proposition: "When the teacher becomes too frustrated with the group to work effectively with them, she seeks escape and acts as if she were not doing so." If enough of these propositions could be collected, a map of the teacher's reasoning and action about coping with difficult issues could be drawn and tested with the teacher. This kind of map, as we shall see in the chapters to come, can be an effective tool not only for understanding the individual status quo (that is, the theory-in-use) but also for altering it.

Thus, we have two kinds of features embedded in these researchers' diagnoses and prescriptions that may inhibit the ability to create knowledge that can alter the fundamental status quo. One feature has to do with the domain of the diagnosis: A diagnosis of cultural mismatch fails to get at the dynamics that maintain that mismatch, namely, Model I individual and

organizational theories of action. The other feature has to do with the way in which the diagnosis is used. In this case, despite giving a description of aspects of what we would call the Model I status quo, McDermott and Gospodinoff fail to generate prescriptions for change.

Prescriptions Are Difficult to Produce. All three researchers write about the implications of their work for school failure. All three have implicit and explicit prescriptions for the practitioners and the system in which they practice. They appear to be aware in varying degrees of how difficult their prescriptions are to produce. Let us begin with the implicit interpersonal prescriptions.

If teachers who are in the kinds of situations the three researchers describe care about their competence, they will, of course, want to avoid making the kinds of errors that Philips, Erickson, and McDermott and Gospodinoff suggest they unknowingly do make. They would be apt to discern in the findings of these studies implicit advice about how to interact and reason differently. Recall, for instance, that McDermott and Gospodinoff asserted that the teacher's withdrawal lessened the probability that the children would learn to read. Implicit in this analysis is advice for the teacher. If the consistent withdrawal of the teacher is counterproductive to the children's learning, then she should cease to withdraw. How useful is this advice? Note that it is not easy to stop behaving in ways that are both automatic and skillful. If McDermott and Gospodinoff's attribution about the teacher is correct (that she is frustrated by the task of teaching the lower group to read) and if she does *not* withdraw, she is faced with the task of dealing with her discomfort while trying to teach the children to read. Under these conditions, she may do more harm to the children by remaining in the group than by periodically escaping from it.

Perhaps this is not the only advice that can be inferred from this diagnosis. Assuming again that McDermott and Gospodinoff's inferences are correct, perhaps the teacher should be advised to learn new ways to teach reading so that she would not feel uncomfortable. But it may not be within the teacher's power to do so since this would involve going back to school or

experimenting on her own with new methods. Thus, if McDermott and Gospodinoff's inferences are correct, acting on the implicit advice embedded in them may do little to alleviate the problem. If they are incorrect, then the advice is irrelevant.

Again, recall Erickson's set of causal inferences about the counselor and student. Erickson inferred: (1) that it was the Polish-American boy's response to the counselor's question with another question that led the counselor to judge him as unintelligent or inattentive, (2) that it was the student's trouble communicating that led the counselor to believe the boy was having academic trouble, and (3) that it was the counselor's view of the student based on these two inferences that led him not to give the student any favors.

The following advice is implicit in these causal inferences. First, don't judge another as stupid if he seems not to respond to your question immediately. Second, don't assume that if someone has trouble communicating he is in academic trouble. Finally, don't withhold special favors on the basis of possibly unfounded evaluations of a student's way of communicating. In order to follow this advice, one would have to interrupt one's learned and automatic processes of making inferences and judgments about others. How realistic is this advice? Again, its application seems problematic.

There are two ways in which a person's automatic responses can be interrupted: He can do it himself or another can do it for him. If Erickson is correct, however, people reason so automatically and at such a tacit level that they are rarely aware of either the judgments that they make or the data on which they base those judgments. Without some kind of retraining it is extremely difficult to monitor and interrupt behavior of which a person is himself unaware.

These researchers are not blind to the difficulty of bringing about the kinds of changes suggested earlier, for they also make explicit interpersonal prescriptions. They are, however, almost entirely pessimistic about the possibility of change at the individual and interpersonal level. Erickson writes, "General consciousness raising about the effects of particularism on face-to-face interaction might be useful. This would not be skill

training but would make counselors, administrators, and students more aware of how they act toward and make judgments about students" (1975, p. 67). But he rejects the possibility that such training could make an appreciable difference: "The process by which particularistic attributes of social identity enter into interactions seems too complex to be performed reflectively, or stopped at will. Thus, training would probably need to be intensive and continuous (analogous to psychotherapy) and would be prohibitively expensive for a school. Training which fell short of this, in my opinion, would be just window dressing—conducting in-service training whose manifest aim is to change the status quo but whose latent function is to legitimize the organization and its standard operating procedures" (1975, p. 67).

Philips believes that the differences in attention structure she found may be physiological. She believes that the nonverbal nature of attention structures may be unchangeable because

> the nonverbal behavior involved in management of the body in social interaction is more fully learned at an earlier age than language, which may in turn be related to the earlier maturation of the parts of the brain that process nonverbal behavior. . . .
>
> Nonverbal patterns of behavior are clearly acquired through the socialization process, as evidenced by the changes in gestural patterns between one generation and another among immigrants in this country (Efron, 1941). But they are very slow to change among people who are socially segregated and do not have regular contact or identify with people who display nonverbal patterns that are different from their own [1983, p. 131].

Given this conclusion, it is not surprising that both Philips and Erickson turn to institutional and structural solutions for change. There are, however, problems with these sug-

gestions. Philips, for instance, recommends, "Above all, it is important that all of these agents of change be structurally linked with and responsive to the minority communities' goals for their children and their knowledge of what their children need in order to grow and learn" (1983, p. 135). Without any elaboration, however, it is difficult for a change agent to know what behaviors would be "structurally linked with and responsive to minority communities' goals for their children." Most well-meaning change agents already believe that they are pursuing worthwhile goals, which is why they can in good conscience remain in their jobs.

Both Erickson and Philips suggest that schools should create conditions under which minority children can be taught by people of their own culture, who will not be automatically puzzled by nonverbal and metacommunicative cues and who will have the same communicative rules as their students. "Hire more Third-World counselors" and "get more Indian teachers in the classroom" are two such prescriptions. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with the idea of having Indians teach Indians, but it is problematic as a prescription when it is posed as a solution to the blindness of whites. That is, such a solution would not require the guidance counselor in Erickson's study to take a look at the unintended impact he had on the student. Nor would it require the student to consider the possibility that the counselor had not consciously meant to send the negative meanings that the student interpreted him as sending.

An additional problem with this kind of advice is that there are no data to suggest that the same ways of coping with threatening problems, that is, distancing and blaming others, don't exist between people who have the same racial or ethnic background. Indeed, research by Argyris (1982) has shown that the Model I dynamics of mistrust and defensiveness in groups will occur regardless of race.

Although they do not share their colleagues' diagnosis of cultural differences, McDermott and Gospodinoff share their pessimism about change: "Unfortunately, even if we achieve some semblance of intellectual clarity on the subject, there is considerable question as to whether we will be able to stop our

own participation in the creation of borders without considerable change in the institutional demands with which we must deal in our everyday life. Many of our institutions certainly get in the way of maximizing the social and psychological potential of our children, and most of us do not have the foggiest notion of how to proceed in rectifying the situation" (1981, pp. 229–230).

In our view, fundamental interpersonal change is truly difficult to achieve. The conclusion that it would be impossible in these situations, however, remains untested. That is, neither McDermott and Gospodinoff, Philips, nor Erickson has written of situations in which they tested the assertion that the individual is incapable of changing. Philips, for instance, might have attempted to retrain teachers to notice and more accurately interpret a wider range of attention structures; McDermott and Gospodinoff might have helped the teacher and her children to become aware of their self-sealing patterns and to begin to alter those patterns. Erickson might have gotten counselor and counselee together to educate both about the impact of their nonverbal behavior on each other.

In other words, McDermott and Gospodinoff, Philips, and Erickson frame their description in the same way as Milgram did. All these researchers accurately and rigorously describe the world as it is, but assume that that world is unchangeable. They do not question or test this assumption but nevertheless base their prescriptions on it.

Here we would like to speculate upon a point Kleinfeld makes (1983, p. 286). She points out that much of the current ethnographic research has an unfortunate alienating effect on majority teachers because it implicitly labels them as "bad guys." But it is possible that the features discussed earlier—diagnoses that focus on cultural differences, inferences that go untested, implicit advice that is difficult to follow, and explicit advice that addresses domains out of the teachers' control ("change policy and/or society")—also contribute to a sense of alienation on the part of those who might most benefit from anthropology's "special ways of knowing about the relationship

of actions to their contexts and their meanings to participants" (Cazden, 1983, p. 38).

We have looked at three ethnographers whose attempt has been to accurately and completely describe a problem so that they can add to the store of useful knowledge. The accuracy of these descriptions was questioned because the inferences the researchers made went untested (as far as we know) with the participants in their ethnographies. The completeness of these ethnographies was also questioned because they focused on an aspect of the diagnosis that does not reach deeply enough into individual reasoning about relationships to address the question of what keeps human beings unaware of how they may be contributing to a problem.

Finally, the applicability of these ethnographies to the world of the practitioner was called into question. Here the researchers themselves express doubts about their ability to contribute to direct change. We also expressed pessimism, but for different reasons—the high level of abstraction of interpersonal and structural advice was identified as problematic in that it is by the researchers' own definitions difficult or impossible for their subjects to produce.

Applied Ethnographies

The question of whether or not ethnography can contribute significantly to altering the problems it describes is one that the field has begun to take up. Considerations of the possibility of collaborative research (Florio and Walsh, 1981) are now more frequent. In her previously mentioned presidential address to the Council on Education and Ethnography, Cazden expressed concern that ethnographic research has not produced knowledge that can help provide solutions to such problems as differential treatment of ethnic minorities in school. But she also identified two important exceptions: "Of all the ethnographic/linguistic research on problems in achieving 'mutual calibration and reciprocity' of the last ten to fifteen years, I know of only two clear examples that do go beyond the status

quo, two cases where ethnographers have not only described problems but stayed to collaborate with teachers in designs for change: Shirley Brice Heath's work in Appalachia and the Kamehameha Early Education Program (KEEP) in Hawaii" (1983, p. 35).

Both the examples Cazden cites would indeed appear to be exceptions to the kinds of studies we have been discussing. These are important exceptions in the sense that they created new educational contexts that in large part reversed school failure. This was done through interventions that created better matches between home and school culture. But Kleinfeld (1983, p. 286) calls for anthropologists to go beyond the "cultural conflict paradigm" and identify how decisions are made by minority children not to acquire aspects of the majority culture. She pleads for an examination of the reasoning behind these decisions and of what it is in the interactions between students and teachers that might lead to this decision—"What is the meaning to children of what teachers ask them to do" (1983, p. 286).

Our view is consistent with Kleinfeld's. We as action scientists wish to understand what kind of reasoning leads children, teachers, and administrators to interact in such a way that children fail to learn the requisite skills of schooling and the others fail to learn why this occurs. We think that one way to reverse this process is to ask actors to take a look at their individual theories-in-use about interacting, learning, and dealing with differences in a classroom. This kind of learning, whether on the individual or group level, is what we have called double-loop learning. A situation in which actors have come to learn in a double-loop way about the system they have created —its errors and successes—and have been able to alter the system as need be fulfills our definition of changing the status quo.

In what follows we will describe and examine the two ethnographically influenced interventions cited by Cazden as going beyond the status quo. We will look at the way the researchers framed or diagnosed the problem, as well as the nature of the changes implemented in the classrooms. We will look at

this last aspect particularly from the point of view of whether the changes could have led to double-loop changes.

Heath's Work in Appalachia. Heath lived and worked in a rural southern community for five years. She occupied multiple roles during that time—she worked as an ethnographer, as a consutant to the local school system, and as a university professor. She was guided in all this work by two requests from the people with whom she lived: first, that she find out why it was that so many of the poor children, white and black, failed in school and, second, that she use that information to help teachers raise their level of success.

Heath began this task by conducting extensive ethnographies of communication in the communities of Roadville, the rural white community, and Trackton, the rural black one. She also gathered information—more informally and with the help of others—about the middle-class towns surrounded by these communities (Heath, 1983). She discovered systematic differences between each community in the use of print, the rules of interaction around print, and the degree to which reading and writing were bound up with community members' identities. Perhaps underlying all these differences were different ways of talking and different ways of interacting within communities. She also discovered that, although some teachers seemed to be aware that there was something different about the Roadville and especially the Trackton children, they were unable to identify the differences.

Heath disseminated this information to teachers in her role as a teacher trainer and a consultant. Her interventions had two major components. One addressed the community members' unawareness of the different styles. The second addressed the problem of how to create contexts in which children would be likely to acquire literacy. Heath addressed the first problem in her role as university professor. As a teacher of teachers, she communicated the information she gathered in her research to teachers, thereby raising their consciousness as to the different rules about print that characterized the different communities whose children they would educate. Equally important, she

taught the teachers her own method for learning—that is, she taught them to be ethnographers in their own community, so that they would not have to be dependent exclusively upon Heath to function as a "translator." Thus, teachers began to study their own rules of interaction in their classrooms and in their homes.

The KEEP Intervention. The work of the researchers and educators of the KEEP program in Hawaii started as a result of the same kind of problem that initiated Heath's work: The minority children—in this case native Hawaiian children—were failing in school.

The researchers in this group began with the knowledge that the Hawaiian children were highly competent at functioning in their home culture but that, whatever competencies home life involved, they were probably significantly different from those required in school. The researchers felt that if they could identify the natural contexts in which children learn, they might be able to help educators create similar contexts in school. They called these "eliciting contexts" (Jordan, 1981, p. 16).

One of the most widely discussed contexts they created was based on an understanding of a common Hawaiian form of storytelling called *talk-story* (Watson-Gegeo and Boggs, 1977). In trying to bring this form into the classroom, teachers and researchers created a new structure for reading groups. This structure emphasized some of the features of the talk-story such as mutual participation, talking on a volunteer basis rather than in a rigid turn-taking order, and a different relationship between teacher and student, characterized by more "informality . . . overlapping speech and conarration" (Jordan, 1981, p. 18).

Double-Loop Change in Framing the Problem

The researchers in both projects detected a need for change on the level of cultural rules about communication and learning. Mismatches between intention and outcome were detected, not at an individual theory-in-use level but at a cultural theory-in-use level. In this respect their diagnoses were similar

to those of Erickson and Philips. Heath framed the problem as follows:

> Trackton children's "communicative competence" in responding to questions in their own community had very little positive transfer value to these classrooms.
>
> The learning of language uses in Trackton had not prepared children to cope with three major characteristics of the many questions used in classrooms. . . . in short, school questions were unfamiliar in their frequency, purposes, and in the domains of content knowledge and skills display they assumed on the part of students [1982, p. 123].

The problem as Heath saw it was not only to teach Trackton students the rules of classroom discourse but to teach teachers the rules that the Trackton children had learned about questioning. The teachers could then incorporate them into their classroom curriculum where it seemed appropriate, thus creating a familiar and more effective environment for Trackton children.

Similarly, Jordan frames the problem of school failure in Hawaiian children as one of cultural mismatch, and prescribes the creation of a better match in the classroom:

> Children from different cultures may have been socialized to go about the learning process in different ways and in response to different contexts.
>
> One of the reasons that children of many minority groups experience difficulty in school is that they have learned to learn in ways that differ from the ways in which their teachers have learned to teach [1981, p. 16].

She prescribes the following:

> The assumption [of Keep] is that the correct course, for both practical and ethical reasons, is

> not to attempt to change the children or their families to fit the schools, but rather to modify the schools in ways that will allow them to serve minority children more effectively.
>
> [What this position implies] is an effort to select from the wide spectrum of available teaching practices and curricula, those that are compatible with the culture of the client population in ways that contribute to effective education [1981, p. 16].

We believe that the kind of inquiry outlined here is close to double-loop inquiry. This is because it asks people to examine the tacit rules and values that guide their speech, and it does so with an eye toward altering these rules and values. We would argue, however, that if full-fledged double-loop learning is to occur, the culture of the school environment must be as much subject to reflection as is the home culture. Furthermore, we think that an integral part of the culture of a school includes the factors that inhibit or facilitate the ability of members of that culture to reflect on and alter the culture. This would include questioning the reasoning of teachers and administrators if that reasoning led them to (1) create dysfunctional conditions and/or policies in the first place; (2) to remain blind to the fact that the conditions or policies were dysfunctional; or to fail to effectively change the dysfunctionality if they recognized it. Put another way, the double-loop problem is not only to get children to achieve literacy. It is to create a situation in which failure to do so does not occur again. We believe the way to achieve this is to give people the skills to detect, discuss, and correct their errors at the behavioral, as well as the policy, level; in other words, to learn in a double-loop way.

Double-Loop Change in Resolving the Problem

One way to illustrate our assertion that the KEEP program did not create a fundamental change in the status quo is to take a look at the directly observable data of classroom and

school interaction. If we found discussion of previously undiscussable features of the school culture (such as making errors, feelings of failure, the meaning of negatively evaluating an entire group of children, and so on), or teachers confronting each other on their theories-in-use, or bilateral control of the classroom tasks—any of these would indicate that double-loop learning, or something very close to it, was going on. Unfortunately, there is not enough directly observable data on classroom interaction or teacher interaction around difficult issues for us to judge. With the data that does exist, however, we can make some inferences that lead us to believe that the kind of change in status quo addressed did not take place. How do we make such an inference?

In the KEEP program, teachers did learn to alter their behavior as well as their curriculum, but the behavioral changes that they made remained within Model I. Researchers found, for instance, that young children only felt comfortable "talking story" with adults who had a certain status. In order to successfully teach a reading lesson that incorporated talk-story, teachers had to achieve this status. This involved demonstrating "warmth and control." A teacher had to give a lot of praise and rewards, as well as openly express expectations and disapproval at slacking off: "Her clear expression of both approval and disapproval and her consistent and contingent dispensing of 'good things' in her control such as privileges, establish her in the role of a firm but friendly adult, one whose positive regard is actively sought" (Au and Jordan, 1981, p. 146).

Creating warmth and maintaining control are achieved in the KEEP classrooms partly through the use of positive behavior modification techniques. Teachers are taught to use behaviors of "praise, hugs, and the like," "positive statements to students, and so on" (Sloat, 1981b, p. 39). These behaviors may be new to teachers and the context they create for reading a more successful one, but the theory of action of behavior modification is Model I in that it leaves the teacher in unilateral control of the situation. This may be appropriate for five- to seven-year-olds. We do not expect teachers to create Model II children, but we are suggesting that teachers and administrators should

attempt to create a Model II learning system with each other (we would help them to gain skills that would allow them to reflect on how they dealt with each other, how the changes of the KEEP program impacted on them, how they facilitated or inhibited learning for each other, how they monitored the success of their system, and so forth). Heath and her students identify two features of Model I behavior in the questioning strategies used by teachers in their homes: the easing-in versus directive strategy dilemma of communication and the contradiction between espoused theory and theory-in-use. Neither of these issues appears to be central to the change effort, although we would assert that both are central to double-loop learning.

Easing-in and the Directive Approach. In examining their questioning patterns at home with children, some teachers discovered that many of their questions hid directives or reprimands. An example of a question whose pragmatic function is to direct someone to do or say something is, "That's a top. You've never seen one of those before, have you?" Heath explains that, with this kind of question, "the adult was not calling for a response from the child but making a declarative statement for the child: 'No, I've never seen one of those' " (1982, p. 112).

An example of a question whose true intent is to reprimand might be, "Stop it, Jamie, why don't you behave?" Again, Heath explains that "the latter part of this utterance extends the scolding power of the imperative and calls upon the child to *think* about a response to the question, but not to respond verbally to the condemnation" (1982, p. 112).

The reasoning behind these strategies appears to be consistent with the reasoning behind the easing-in strategy identified in Chapter Three. Remember that when an actor has information that she is hiding from another but wants that other to discover it, she eases in by asking questions that, if answered correctly by the recipient, will reveal to him what the asker wants him to know. Although the teachers' questions appear similar to those of students and managers described as Model I in this book, there are also two important differences. The first is that the information to be revealed has to do with issues that

are far more concrete than those dealt with by easing-in managers and therapists. The second is that the form of the questions is more forthright: "Stop it, Jamie, why don't you behave?" sends off a clearer message than "How do you think Mr. Y reacted to you?"

Despite these differences, however, it is our suspicion that these questions are examples of elementary easing-in questions and that they may help children come to recognize and use easing-in questions. This suspicion is strengthened by the reaction that two teachers experienced when they attempted an experiment. They decided to make the directives embedded in the questions explicit, that is, to say what they meant. In the framework of the theory of action, this means a shift from an easing-in strategy to a directive one. Interestingly, both teachers reported discomfort with this experiment: "They reported that they felt they did not involve their children when they used statements. They received no sense of interaction and felt they were 'preaching' to a third party; they could not be sure they were being heard" (Heath, 1982, p. 112).

Argyris (1982) has found that adults often express similar views when critiquing others who use a directive strategy in their daily interactions. Easing-in and directive strategies are two of the poles of Model I theories of action. Model I adults will probably not be able to produce a strategy outside of these categories. Much of the training for Model II has to do with reflecting on this dilemma and designing alternative strategies that do not produce consequences such as feeling inconsistent, "preachy," or controlling.

Heath makes no mention of whether there was discussion about alternatives to the questions or directives, such as the combination of advocacy with inquiry described in Argyris (1982). Thus, the experiment served to make teachers more aware of elements of their theory-in-use, but not to help them alter that theory. The focus of the change effort in the classroom is on widening the teacher's repertoire of questions, not altering the underlying values that guide the questions. Thus, we would predict that in the new curriculum the teachers will still oscillate between easing-in and directive strategies, but

will do so with a significantly wider repertoire of types of questions.

Contradiction Between Espoused Theory and Theory-in-Use. Heath comments that in the course of reflecting on their practice, the teachers came to see ways in which "their own behavior exemplified patterns which were sometimes contrary to their ideals and principles, or, at the very least, unexpected" (Heath, 1982, p. 126). Achieving and reflecting on these kinds of insights are central to the practice of action science, for they are the first steps toward change. For instance, Heath found that some of the teachers had an instinct that their failure to reach the black children had to do with the possibility that the children were learning rules of interaction at home that were not congruent with classroom interaction. They felt helpless, however, to seek out information that might back up their tentative diagnosis. Heath explains that "some teachers were aware of this paradox, but felt that since they did not know how language was taught in black communities and how it was used to make children aware of the world around them, they had no basis on which to rethink their views of the language socialization of black children. The teachers could only assume these children were taught language and cognitive skills in the same ways they used to teach their own children" (1982, p. 114).

Heath's way of helping these teachers out of their dilemma was to help them learn to become observers of themselves and others. Thus, as they became competent ethnographic researchers, they could find the data they needed to support their diagnosis. However, while this is a crucial skill, it is not sufficient for changing the status quo. What is also necessary is for the teachers to ask themselves such questions as, "Why did I continue to act on what I do not believe to be the case?" (That is, that black children are socialized into language use in the same way as white children.) "What prevented me from testing with the black children and/or parents whether my attributions about the way they learn language are correct?" "Why not ask the community to help me see where I may be making mistakes?"

Had these questions been explored, they might have led to discussions of the degree to which the teachers felt able to discuss these issues among each other as well as in the black

community. Thus, some data could have been generated that might have helped teachers reflect on how they deal with difficult issues like discrimination toward their students or feelings of failure in their teaching. If any such discussions took place among them, they were not written about and did not appear to be central to the intervention.

There are two other changes in the setting that might have facilitated double-loop learning had they been extended to reasoning about interpersonal relationships. The first such feature is the emphasis on the discussability of the experiments that the teachers were conducting. When they began to reflect on the different rules of language use, the teachers made much of this reflection explicit and available to the children. Thus, discussions in class of the different rules for speaking in each community became frequent: "Teachers and students came to talk openly about school being a place where people 'talked a lot about things being themselves.' Students caught onto the idea that this was a somewhat strange custom, but one which, if learned, led to success in school activities and, perhaps most important, did not threaten their ways of talking about things at home" (Heath, 1982, p. 125).

Examining the tacit rules that underlie behavior and that may affect learning and justice in organizations is a crucial step toward altering the status quo. Again, for the interventions to facilitate such a change, the reflection and discussion would have to be extended: It would be necessary to reflect on the degree to which Model I relationships, characterized by a win, don't lose mentality and unilateral control are altered or can be altered by these changes.

Teachers might also ask older students whether they were aware of the linguistic differences and, if so, what led them to remain silent about it. In this way teachers might learn what they are doing that unintentionally silences feedback from students. On their part, students might have to take a look at their assumptions about teachers' willingness to listen and to change. Thus they might have to come to examine their underlying assumptions about power and the degree to which they believe teachers (people in power) wish to change.

The second feature of Heath's intervention that is crucial

but still not sufficient is the inclusion of teachers in the data collection and change effort. In her role as a university professor, Heath was able to teach teachers how to do ethnography. The changes that were made in the classrooms were very much dependent on what each teacher found and how she decided to use her findings. Teachers were free to make whatever changes they deemed appropriate in their classrooms. Thus, Heath was able to create conditions in which teachers had a high degree of internal commitment.

The Appalachian and Hawaiian interventions helped to reverse one particular status quo that existed with Trackton children and native Hawaiian children. This was a highly complex and significant accomplishment. It served to reduce conditions of injustice in those particular settings, and, in Heath's case, for a particular period of time. (The classroom innovations ended with Heath's leaving and the advent of highly rigid state and federal education requirements.)

The changes made in the Appalachian and Hawaiian interventions are terribly important in their consequences for the children, for they learned to read, to write, and, in the case of Heath's intervention, they learned about cultural differences among their communities. But the problem of school failure represents a difficult and threatening one for educational practitioners, as well as for students, and perhaps a somewhat different challenge. The challenge for educational practitioners is to learn how to cope with threatening problems in such a way that they can establish a self-correcting, self-reflective system for the next problem they face. This is a tall order for a perhaps already overburdened group of people, whose problems may include funding cuts, unintentional or intentional racism, and vandalism. We believe, however, that action scientists, in direct collaboration with classroom practitioners, can bring about such changes. Part Three of this book outlines the complexities and challenges of learning the skills necessary for this task.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to look closely at the nature of three ethnographic descriptions of sources of school failure and how features of these descriptions may prevent them from being as useful as they might be in altering the

status quo. We also looked at two applied ethnographies and asked to what extent they might have helped the educational practitioners involved in them to learn in a double-loop manner. In the next chapter we examine more closely the kinds of constraints ethnographers and other social scientists may face—particularly from their own social science communities—in attempting to produce knowledge that can contribute to altering the status quo.