to learn as the result of intentional instruction (Gearing and Sangree 1979). Learning what is deliberately taught can be seen as a form of political assent. Not learning can be seen as a form of political resistance.

Assent to the exercise of authority involves trust that its exercise will be benign. This involves a leap of faith—trust in the legitimacy of the authority and in the good intentions of those exercising it, trust that one's own identity will be maintained positively in relation to the authority, and trust that one's own interests will be advanced by compliance with the exercise of authority. In taking such a leap of faith one faces risk. If there is no risk, trust is unnecessary. (I should note here that I do not mean in this discussion to imply that the existential choices to be made are necessarily considered in reflective awareness. They may well be made intuitively. But however apprehended, a sense of trust entails a sense of risk.)

In pedagogy it is essential that the teacher and students establish and maintain trust in each other at the edge of risk (Howard van Ness, personal communication). To learn is to entertain risk, since learning involves moving just past the level of competence, what is already mastered, to the nearest region of incompetence, what has not yet been mastered. As learning takes place, the leading edge of the region of incompetence is continually moving. A useful analogy is that of riding a surfboard—in learning, one must lean forward into a constantly shifting relationship with the crest of the wave. In teacher/learner interaction, the learner places himself or herself at the edge of incompetence and is drawn slightly beyond it with the assistance of the teacher and/or other students. Vygotsky (1978:84–91) refers to this as the "zone of proximal development"—that region within which the learner can function with the assistance of another more competent partner. As the learner's bottom threshhold of competence rises (that level at which the learner can function unassisted) so does the top threshold (the level beyond which the student cannot function effectively even with the aid of a teacher). Thus the zone of proximal development can be thought of as constantly moving upward. However, as new learning takes place with a teacher, the student again engages risk because the student reenters the zone within which the student cannot function successfully alone. If the teacher is not trustworthy the student cannot count on effective assistance from the teacher; there is high risk of being revealed (to self and to others) as incompetent (see Shultz 1985). Risk is also involved for the teacher. If the teacher engages a student with the genuine intention to foster the student's learning and the student then fails to learn what the teacher intended, the teacher is revealed, at best, as less than consummately competent pedagogically.

Risk is exciting, yet dangerous. Both for the student and for the teacher, risk in the form of a potential threat to positive social identity

seems inherent in the process of learning. Consequently the legitimacy of the school and its teachers, affirmed at the existential level as trust by individual students, is essential if deliberate instruction is to succeed in its aims. School success must be earned by the school staff as well as the students in a process of political rhetoric by which the subordinates in the institution are persuaded to assent to the authority of the superordinates.

Legitimacy, trust, and interest are phenomena that are both institutional and existential. As institutional phenomena, they are located in the social structure and in patterns of role relationships that recur over long time spans and are differentially allocated according to access to monetary capital and cultural capital. But legitimacy, trust, and interest are also existential and emergent phenomena that are continually negotiated within the intimate circumstances and short time scale of everyday encounters between individual teachers, students, and parents. The institutional legitimacy of the school is affirmed existentially as trust in face-to-face encounters between school staff and students and their parents.[2]

Labor market inequity, as perceived by members of a domestic minority community, and conflictual teacher/student interaction that derives in part from culturally differing communicative styles can both be seen as impediments to the trust that constitutes an existential foundation for school legitimacy. It is appropriate therefore to look outside the school, into the local community and the broader social order, as well as inside the school, within classroom interaction, to identify the roots of educational failure or success, trust or mistrust, assent or dissent.

I want now to amend the previous discussion of the communication process explanation. We can apply the notion of resistance—withholding of assent—to the progressive development of conflict that occurs between teachers and some domestic minority students. In considering relationships between minority group cultures and student resistance in intercultural learning environments, we can make an important and useful distinction. This is the distinction between cultural boundaries and cultural borders.

Cultural boundaries can be thought of as behavioral evidence of culturally differing standards of appropriateness—in this instance, two subculturally differing ways of pronouncing final consonants. Boundaries—the manifest presence of cultural difference—are politically neutral phenomena; no difference in rights and obligations accrues to persons who act in either of the culturally differing ways. In situations of intergroup conflict, however, cultural boundaries can be treated as cultural borders, that is, the features of culture difference are no longer politically neutral phenomena; rights and obligations are allocated differently, depending on whether a person is revealed as possessing one kind of cultural knowledge rather than another.[3]

Different groups with different interests at stake can treat the existence of behaviorally similar items politically as opportunities for cultural boundary work or border work. This was dramatically apparent in my own early research on ethnic and racial cultural differences in communication style in the United States (Erickson 1975; Erickson and Shultz 1982). In detailed analysis of filmed interviews between college counselors or job interviewers and students or job applicants, it was apparent that sometimes subtle cultural differences in communication style made a big difference for rapport and understanding, and sometimes the cultural differences did not seem to impede rapport and understanding. In the absence of special positive motivation to communicate, cultural difference did seem to make interaction difficult. But this was not always true, and it varied from occasion to occasion for the same individual. Distinguishing between cultural boundaries and borders enables one to consider cultural difference as significant in intergroup relations without falling into the trap of a cultural determinist argument. As Bekker and I noted recently,

> cultural difference can be thought of as a risk factor in the school experience of students and teachers; it need not cause trouble but it usually provides opportunities for trouble. . . . Those opportunities can serve as resources for escalating conflict that might already exist for other reasons, such as conflict between social classes, genders, or races. [Erickson and Bekker 1986:175, 177]

To understand this rather abstract argument more fully let us turn to an instance of classroom research by Piestrup (1973). She studied desegregated first grade classrooms in which predominantly working-class black children were taught with predominantly middle-class white children. We will first look at a single point in time in the school year; a moment in a reading lesson. Then we will consider what Piestrup reports as patterns of resistance that developed across the course of the whole year.

We can consider an example from Piestrup's study of working-class black and middle-class white children and their teachers (Piestrup 1973:96–97). In this example of a first grade reading lesson, all the children are black. (CC in the transcript means *children reading aloud in chorus*):

1   T: All right, class, read that and remember your endings.

2   CC: "What did Little Duck see?" (final *t* of "what" deleted)

3   T: Wha_t.

4   CC: What (final *t* deleted, as in turn 2)

5   T: I still don't hear this sad little "*t*."

6   CC: "What did—What did—What—(final *t*'s deleted)

7	T:	What.
8	T&CC:	"What did Little Duck see?" (final *t* spoken)
9	T:	OK, very good.

By saying "What" (line 3) with special emphasis on the final /t/ the teacher has adopted a midcourse correction in order to emphasize and correct a particular detail of oral performance. In so doing the teacher departed from the aim of the initial question, which focused on the general content of the utterance being read. Fostering standard English pronunciation in reading aloud is one pedagogical aim, while fostering comprehension of the text being read is another pedagogical aim. What indeed was it that Little Duck saw? We don't know. If the transcription were to continue we could see whether or not the comprehension point got lost entirely as the teacher went on after having sidetracked the students for their nonstandard pronunciation style.

The teacher's emphasis on the final /t/ is not necessary in terms of the aim of teaching comprehension. We can infer that this is not just a matter of simple miscommunication—the teacher not understanding the children's answers. We can assume that he or she could hear the children saying "wha" (in turns 2 and 4) as standing for "what," with the final /t/ pronounced. Rather, we can see this as a deliberate lesson in pronunciation (in turn 1 the teacher said ". . . and remember your endings"). This was to make a special point of the cultural communication style of the black children and to do so in a negative way.

This cultural border work—making cultural communication style a negative phenomenon in the classroom—seems to have stimulated student resistance that was manifested linguistically. In some of the classrooms the teacher was white, in others the teacher was black. Piestrup monitored the speech style of the working-class black children across the whole school year. In those classrooms in which the teacher, whether black or white, negatively sanctioned the children's use of black English vernacular, by the end of the year the children spoke a more exaggerated form of that dialect than they had done at the beginning of the year. The opposite was true in the classrooms in which the teacher, whether black or white, did not negatively sanction the black English vernacular spoken by the black students. In those classrooms by the end of the year the black children were speaking in the classroom in ways that more closely approximated standard English than did their ways of speaking at the beginning of the year. Consider the implications of this. The culturally distinctive oral performance of working-class black children was initially present in both kinds of classrooms. In the latter kind of classroom the speech style of the students did not become an occasion for stigma and resistance. In the former kind of classroom, however, the use of black English vernacular became an occasion for stigmatizing border work by the teach-

ers and for resistance by the children. As that happened, and as the
year progressed, the speech style of the children became more and
more different from that of the teacher. This meant that cultural dif-
ference was increasing in a situation of cross-cultural contact. This is
an instance of a more general phenomenon—progressive cultural dif-
ferentiation across time as a means of symbolic distancing between
competing groups that are subsystems of a larger system. That phe-
nomenon has been called *complementary schismogenesis* by Bateson
(1975), who sees it as a basic process of culture change.[4]

By amending the sociolinguistic communication process explana-
tion for school failure and considering a case of a reading lesson, we
can see that cultural difference can, for a variety of reasons, be an in-
itial source of trouble between teachers and students. But apparently
the story does not stop there. What may have begun as simple mis-
interpretation of intent and literal meaning can develop across time
into entrenched, emotionally intense conflict between teacher and stu-
dent. The cycle can repeat from year to year during elementary school
(see McDermott and Gospodinoff 1979).

Teachers and students in such regressive relationships do not bond
with each other. Mutual trust is sacrificed. Over time the students be-
come increasingly alienated from school. It is no longer a matter of dif-
ference between teacher and student that derives from intergenera-
tionally transmitted communicative traditions. It is also a matter of cul-
tural invention as a medium of resistance in a situation of political con-
flict. As students grow older and experience repeated failure and
repeated negative encounters with teachers, they develop opposi-
tional cultural patterns as a symbol of their disaffiliation with what
they experience (not necessarily within full reflective awareness) as an
illegitimate and oppressive system. The more alienated the students
become, the less they persist in doing schoolwork. Thus they fall far-
ther and farther behind in academic achievement. The student be-
comes either actively resistant—seen as salient and incorrigible—or
passively resistant—fading into the woodwork as an anonymous well-
behaved, low-achieving student.

Bekker and I further observed:

> Why would it be a punishable offense for a young black man in an urban
> American high school to wear a black leather coat in the school hall-
> way? . . . If a principal can suspend an adolescent for wearing a leather
> coat, some kind of interactional process of evaluation is happening in which
> judgments of social identity change in negative directions. If students are
> dressing in such ways then perhaps the problem is not just a matter of cul-
> tural patterns that do not fit. Rather it would seem that struggle is going
> on—struggle that is mutually constructed by teachers and students who, as
> conflict escalates over time and their forebearance for one another runs out,
> become locked in regressive social relationships to which all parties in the
> local social system contribute, as in pathological interaction systems in fam-

ilies. McDermott and Tylbor (1983) use the term *collusion* when describing this cycle of progressively intense conflict. [Erickson and Bekker 1986:177]

Some of Ogbu's recent research suggests that by the time American black students are of high school age, cultural differentiation through resistance has developed to the point that a sharp distinction is made between "acting black" and "acting white." The political definition of school instruction as legitimate or illegitimate is caught up in this symbolic opposition.

In a recent chapter, Ogbu has noted this phenomenon, citing DeVos (1982) on the development of oppositional identity by domestic minority students. Ogbu observes that

minority students who adopt the school style in communication, interaction, or learning may be accused of "acting white." Even more serious a problem is that castelike minority students may define academic effort or success as a part of the white cultural frame of reference or white way of behavior. [1987b:268]

Ogbu refers here to research of Signithia Fordham (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). Her findings were reported recently on National Public Radio ("All Things Considered," 12 June 1987). Phyllis Crockett, an NPR reporter, interviewed two high-achieving black adolescents from the study:

Reporter: Black (high school) students who spend reasonable amounts of time studying and who speak Standard English can be accused by their peers of acting white. . . . This student, we'll call him Eric, attends an inner-city school in Washington, D.C.

Eric: People are afraid to show that they can speak grammatically correct English. When I do, my friends in my neighborhood will say "You nerd!" or "Talk English! Talk to us like we talk to you."

Reporter: High school students, like this student we'll call Paula, who take college prep courses, often are called "oreos"—like the cookie, black on the outside, white on the inside.

Paula: I've been *per se* called an oreo because black as I am and bright, everybody thinks I'm too proper and talk white . . . and people tend to *tease* me.

Notice that Eric's and Paula's peers focus on their speech style as a badge of group identity. Two points are especially relevant here—the subtlety of the cultural judgments involved and the process of oppositional identity maintenance that is revealed. As evidenced by their recorded speech while addressing the NPR reporter, Eric and Paula do not, in fact, speak fully Standard English. Their grammar is standard but in pronunciation, in voice pitch and stress patterns, and in word

choice (i.e., Paula's interpolation of a "fancy" term, *per se*), Eric's and Paula's speech is characteristic of nonstandard black English. Thus Eric's and Paula's peers are making a big issue of slight divergence from a cultural norm. Fine nuances of cultural performance are being attended to as salient, not large cultural differences, such as those between immigrant students and American students. These are secondary cultural differences, according to Ogbu's taxonomy (1982). The cultural differences are small, but they are not trivial as Ogbu has claimed (1987b) because they are not being treated as trivial by the actors themselves. On the contrary, Eric's and Paula's friends seem to be treating such cultural differences as a powerful political symbol.

The peers of the high-achieving students use strong sanctions to enforce a stringent cultural standard that symbolizes group membership. This is border maintenance work. It is significant that the students do not invoke the inequity of the labor market. They do not say, "You can't get a job in white America." Rather, their message is much more indirect. Their immediate focus is on the maintenance of oppositional identity within everyday life in school.

In the example of Eric and Paula, the vehemence of the exercise of sanctions and the focus on subtle features of cultural distinctiveness recall the earlier classroom example in which the teacher made a big issue of a final consonant ("What did Little Duck see?"). The first grade teacher was forcing working-class black children to speak Standard English. In mirror image, Eric's and Paula's working-class black adolescent friends are forcing them to speak nonstandard English. Identity definition is involved in both cases. It is the voice and locus of authority and definition that has changed; from the teacher's voice as an individual institutional officer doing border work on white culture to the students' voices doing collective and institutionally illegitimate border work on black culture.[5] In both examples culturally patterned speech performance becomes a symbolic medium within which a student is forced to take sides between "us" and "them."

The situation reported for American black students is reminiscent of the resistance to school achievement among working-class English high school males reported by Willis (1977). It is also reminiscent of a speculation by Scollon and Scollon (1981) that many Native American school students in Koyukon Athabascan villages of the Alaskan interior associate the acquisition of literacy with betrayal of ethnic identity. Since the students see so many members of their communities as nonliterate (including their parents), to learn to read and write fluently would seem metaphorically to be leaving the community and to be no longer Koyukon.

To summarize, consistent patterns of refusal to learn in school can be seen as a form of resistance to a stigmatized ethnic or social class identity that is being assigned by the school. Students can refuse to accept that negative identity by refusing to learn. Yet the sensitivity

and salience of stigmatized ethnic identity among teenagers who are members of domestic minority groups (and of working-class identity more generally) is not a phenomenon that derives exclusively from within a school. Students' school experiences may contribute to their need to resist acceptance of a stigmatized identity, but the sources of such an identity lie in part outside the school, in the conditions of access to the labor market and in the general assumptions of nonstigmatized members of society regarding the members of stigmatized groups.

This is why, within the perspective of resistance theory, both the communication process and the labor market explanations of school failure can be seen as complementary. Influences from outside the immediate school experience of students and teachers, including labor market opportunity as perceived by parents and other members of the minority community, are clearly important to consider, especially among older students for whom issues of future employment become more and more salient. But it is also important to consider the immediate school experience of students and teachers, including the culturally differing communication styles of students and teachers, especially as young children encounter school initially in the early grades and as they continue through high school. Perception of the labor market and cultural style difference both appear to be involved in the development by domestic minority students of oppositional identity in school.

I have argued that both the perceived labor market explantion and the communication process explanation when read literally have serious limitations. Each can be seen as at least implicitly determinist, leaving little room for human agency. Each has trouble accounting for certain kinds of school success. It is therefore appropriate to attach a coda considering some of the reasons why school success might happen with populations of students for whom such success seems demographically unlikely. Let us say that we wanted to try to transform school struggle from working at failure to something more productive. Where then might we look to start?

Coda

> If education can be no more than an epiphenomenon tied directly to the requirements of an economy, then little can be done within education itself. It is a totally determined institution. However, if schools (and people) are not passive mirrors of an economy, but instead are active agents in the processes of reproduction and contestation of dominant social relations, then understanding what they do and acting upon them becomes of no small moment. For if schools are part of a "contested terrain," . . . then the hard and continuous day-to-day struggle at the level of curriculum and teaching practice is part of these larger conflicts as well. The key is linking these day-to-day struggles within the school to other action for a more progressive society in that wider arena. [Apple and Weis 1983:22]