Introduction

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The cross-cultural approach to the psychological study of human behavior was considered in the past to be a weak area methodologically and to deal with odd and exotic aspects of human behavior. Recently, as psychologists have ventured into other cultures with sound research methodology, appropriate theoretical backgrounds, and sensitivity to the cultures being studied, this area has been transformed into a legitimate and productive subarea of psychology. Evidence from other cultures has given support to some widely held psychological views, and has called others into serious question. Without the validation of our theories in other than the Western cultures from which most of the theories emanated, we will continue to have a restricted and potentially distorted view of the development of human behavior. The present papers illustrate some of the advances that have been made in cross-cultural research.

The topics of the papers are neither odd nor exotic, but deal with fundamental ques-

1 Earlier versions of the articles in this section were presented at a symposium given at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, Md, April 1987. tions about parental and other environmental influences on children's achievement in school.

What is the effect in a developing society of parental literacy on children's reading achievement, and how do parental attitudes influence what children believe about reading? How do city children differ from rural children in what they gain from attending school, and how do such factors as the quality of the home environment and parental teaching influence children's achievement? Do parents and teachers in societies where children have high levels of achievement start academic training earlier than in societies where achievement is less outstanding? Do cultural values and beliefs about factors such as human malleability influence children's academic achievement?

In all of the studies the children were enrolled in elementary school; thus, the focus is on early phases of academic achievement. The locales vary widely, from large cities in China, Japan, and the United States to villages in the highlands and jungles of Peru and in the Moroccan countryside. The materials and procedures used in all of the studies were constructed by persons familiar with the cultures involved and with the specific societies in mind. Another notable dif-

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ference between these studies and some of the earlier cross-cultural investigations is the size and representativeness of the samples of children and parents. Rather than include only small numbers of subjects, obtained with little concern for their representativeness, extensive efforts were made to obtain random samples of children residing in the villages and cities where the

studies were conducted. Three of the following papers are derived from several large research projects conducted by our research group at the University of Michigan. The fourth paper is based on a large longitudinal study that has its base at the University of Pennsylvania. We appreciate the opportunity to present these papers to a wider audience than was able to attend the SRCD symposium, and we are especially grateful to Irving Sigel for his interesting and useful comments about the papers.