Metacognition and Passing: Strategic Interactions in the Lives of Students with Learning Disabilities

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A paradox appears in the lives of students with learning disabilities: on the one hand, they go to great lengths to avoid difficult tasks while trying to appear competent (i.e., they display many of the characteristics associated with people who are attempting to conceal a tarnished identity while "passing" as bona fide). On the other hand, they check, monitor, and evaluate their actions (i.e., they display many of the characteristics associated with "metacognition"). Our review of the case histories of students with learning disabilities leads us to conclude (1) that passing and metacognition are flip sides of the same conceptual coin—strategic interaction—because they both involve planning and awareness of action directed toward the accomplishment of a goal, and (2) that these notions are context-bound, not context-free, activities—because they make their appearance on some but not all occasions of interaction.

Similarities in cognitive activities across different types of problem-solving situations are suggested in the research findings of seemingly unrelated disciplines. For example, research conducted in two quite diverse fields—the sociology of identity formation and the psychology of learning—suggests that planning and awareness of one's actions is important for the successful accomplishment of problem-solving activity in a variety of contexts. On the one hand, sociologists and anthropologists who have studied people attempting to conceal one identity or assume another in real life situations talk about how people use contextual information to "pass," as though they had a bona fide identity (Goffman 1959, 1964; Garfinkel 1967; Edgerton 1967; Ramos 1979). On the other hand, psychologists who have studied people mastering complex bodies of knowledge in more constrained, experimental tasks talk about how experts' metacognitive awareness and strategies facilitate problem solving (Bateson 1962; Flavell and Wellman 1977; Campione and Brown 1977). Within the context of our own and others' work with students with learning disabilities, we have begun to consider the relationship between these very different approaches to thinking and acting.

Our primary goal in this paper is to unravel a paradox that appears in the lives of students with learning disabilities: on the one hand,

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these students have considerable difficulty with school tasks; on the other hand, their difficulties are not as apparent when they are outside of school. Information available from careful observations of learning disabled[1] (LD) students shows that they go to great lengths to avoid difficult tasks while trying to appear competent; that is, they display many characteristics associated with "passing."

There is another dimension to LD students' behavior. They check, monitor, and evaluate their actions; that is, they display the characteristics associated with "metacognition." The characteristics of LD students' action lead us to suggest that passing, a concept often associated with con artists, transvestites, and deviants who are trying to manage a tarnished identity, and metacognition, a concept associated with the highly sophisticated reasoning of experts mastering complex bodies of knowledge, are flip sides of the same coin—strategic interaction. Checking, monitoring, and evaluating that is organized in the pursuit of socially sanctioned goals is "metacognition," while the use of these same strategies to avoid sanctioned goals while attempting to proceed undetected is "passing."

A secondary goal of this paper is to reformulate the concepts of metacognition and passing to take into account the contextual variation in the behavior of students with learning disabilities. We have found that metacognition and passing are not general skills that are applied uniformly in all situations; rather, they are context-specific practices that make their appearance on some, but not all, occasions of interaction.

Our proposals are based on case histories of learning disabled students. Before presenting these case histories, we will briefly review the development of the concepts of passing and metacognition in the context of their respective fields.

Passing

Passing: Management and Improvisation. Goffman (1959) talked about the everyday task of maintaining an identity in terms of "passing" and "management" activities. Goffman employed a dramaturgical metaphor to describe identities as the managed presentation of appearances "on stage" before audiences. Later, Garfinkel (1967) extended Goffman's dramaturgical notions by modifying the concept of management. Garfinkel, like Goffman, found that people engage in elaborate scene-setting preparation in advance of "performances." He also discovered that such preparatory management practices did not account for the construction of staged identities. Therefore, Garfinkel found it necessary to add the notion of "improvisational" practices to Goffman's "management" practices. Combining Garfinkel's and Goffman's notions, then, we find that an identity is constructed from the set of advance, stage-setting management practices *and* spontaneous, on-stage improvisational practices.

Passing and the Denial of Mental Retardation. Edgerton (1967) described the actions of institutionalized but recently released mentally retarded patients in similar terms. Like people who are changing their sexual identity, recently released patients have a vested interest in protecting their true identity. Formerly institutionalized mentally retarded patients have a void or a gap in their socialization and experiences that needs to be filled or covered over. Edgerton reports that former patients went to great lengths to conceal their past identities and to artificially construct biographies. They collected and visibly displayed old letters and old magazines obtained from pawnshops to give the impression that they had a past biography, while they in fact had spent that time in institutions. In addition to these stage-setting or management practices, former mental patients relied on others' expectations of a taken-for-granted display of competence by trading on the essential indexicality of language when engaged in description or telling stories of past events. For example, they constructed phony jobs, employers "back East," etc., and talked in stereotypical terms of their past lives in order to conceal their past identities.

Passing and the Concealment of Illiteracy. Ramos (1973, 1979) has discussed the interactional strategies ("movidas") that low-income Mexican American families use to conceal illiteracy from outsiders. When problematic literacy situations could be anticipated, and hence managed, one such family called upon the services of benefactors (family friends, or Ramos) for tasks that required reading and writing. When it was not possible to anticipate these situations, other "movidas" were employed to conceal illiteracy. For example, when a welfare worker visited their home with a form to be signed, a family attempted to pass as literate by looking at the form for several minutes as if they were examining it carefully, passing it on as if it had been read, and signing it as if it had been read and approved. This improvised performance was enacted for the sole purpose of concealing the inability to read from the visitor, who was not aware of the family's illiteracy. This and other performances were convincing enough to the welfare department; they were never aware that members of the family were illiterate. As Ramos points out, however, there were unforeseen and negative consequences of the family's successful attempts at passing as literate. The family's files at the welfare office indicated that the family was "deviant and uncooperative" because of the failure to answer routine bureaucratic correspondence.

Summary. These studies imply that identities are dynamic, mutually constitutive relations between one's self and others. Edgerton's and Ramos's work suggests that mental retardation and literacy are constructed in social interaction. Particularly when identities are threatened, management and improvisational work enables people who perceive themselves to be at risk to shroud themselves in a "cloak of competence" (Edgerton 1967). Furthermore, people who are manag-

ing their identities in extraordinary situations seem to be doing *with awareness* what people in ordinary situations do *without awareness*.

Metacognition

Psychologists concerned with the development of thinking speak of the role of awareness in cognitive activity. Introspective knowledge about one's cognitive states and processes is called "metacognition," that is, thinking about thinking (Borkowski, Reid, and Kurtz 1984), or "knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them" (Flavell 1976:232). Metacognition includes predicting, checking, planning, asking questions, self-testing, and monitoring ongoing attempts to learn or solve problems (Flavell 1976).

The concept of metacognition has assumed an increasingly influential role in contemporary cognitive and developmental theory. Flavell (1976) was one of the first investigators to develop and popularize the early theoretical formulations of metacognition, although many others have refined and expanded the concept (Brown 1978, 1980). Recently Flavell (1979, 1981) has developed a theory of cognitive monitoring consisting of four components: actions, goals, metacognitive experiences, and metacognitive knowledge. Expert learners are presumed to select cognitive actions (e.g., rehearsal) in pursuit of certain learning goals (e.g., memorizing a spelling list), which lead to metacognitive experiences (e.g., "I don't know this very well"), which in turn refine the learner's store of megacognitive awareness about learning (e.g., "rehearsal is not the best way to learn lists of words for me").

As Brown (1980) has noted, the majority of empirical investigations have focused on metamemorial awareness and virtually all of this work has taken place in controlled experimental settings. (However, see Levine and Langness 1985, and Friedman, Krupski, Dawson, and Rosenberg 1977 for work in non-laboratory settings). In general, research in this area suggests that young children and children with learning problems are less efficient, strategic, and "planful" in approaching problems, a fact often traced to deficiencies in metacognitive awareness (Torgesen 1980).

Metacognition and Young Childrens' Awareness of Memory. An example of the deficiencies in metacognitive awareness exhibited by young children is found in an early study by Kruetzer, Leonard, and Flavell (1975). Eighty children from kindergarten through grade 5 were interviewed about their awareness of the influence of memory on success in various types of problems. Clear differences emerged between younger and older subjects. For instance, older children were more aware that memory ability varies over occasions or over types of things to be remembered. As another example, older children were more likely to recognize that the learner's activities or experiences between the point of learning and the point of testing may affect recall. This and many similar studies have demonstrated a clear developmental pro-

gression in the type of cognitive awareness commonly termed metacognition.

Metacognitive Awareness and the Recall Skills of Mentally Retarded Children. Brown and Campione (1977) examined problem-solving strategies for a free recall task with 70 educable mentally retarded children, divided into younger and older groups. On each trial, every subject was presented with two randomly selected lists, containing 12 colorful pictures selected from children's books. When each list was presented, the subjects were asked to study the items for 60 seconds and to name each item on the list. This procedure was repeated four times. After the first time that the subject attempted to recall the items on the list, each was able to select half of the items for further study during the periods that preceded subsequent recall attempts.

The results of the study showed that neither the older nor the younger subjects selected the items missed on earlier trials for further study. Although none of the subjects was very strategic in approaching this task, each was able to benefit from the later training on strategies to increase recall performance on this task. However, only the older subjects were able to maintain the trained strategies over time.

Metacognition and the Comprehension Monitoring of Students with Learning Disabilities. Children with learning disabilities are often characterized as passive and inactive learners (Torgesen and Kail 1980; Torgesen 1980, 1983). These characteristics are exemplified in a recent study by Bos and Filip (1984), who reported on the ability of learning disabled students to monitor their own comprehension of inconsistent and confusing passages of text. Twenty learning disabled and twenty average-achieving seventh-graders were given stories to read and answer questions on. Half were cued to look for text inconsistencies, while the other half were not. Students with learning disabilities who were not cued generally failed to monitor their comprehension and did not realize that the passages did not make sense. However, those who were cued to look for inconsistencies and to use comprehension monitoring strategies performed as well as the nonlabeled children. In contrast, the nonlabeled students performed equally well with or without cueing. Although the students with learning disabilities appeared to have monitoring strategies as part of their cognitive repertoire, they failed to access them spontaneously.

Summary. In general, the results of these and other studies suggest that awareness of one's own cognitive processes and products is important for the successful solution of a variety of academic and experimental problem-solving situations. More specifically, young children, mentally retarded students, and students with learning disabilities are characterized by deficits in metacognitive awareness and deficits in planful strategic behavior on these types of tasks.

The Passing and Metacognitive Behavior of LD Students

Children with learning disabilities have great difficulty learning to read, write, spell, or master basic mathematical skills, even though

they appear to have "normal intelligence." Despite agreement on this point, however, there is little consensus about any other aspect of learning disabilities. Recently, a number of research groups have arranged opportunities to carefully observe students with learning disabilities and "poor achieving" children in a variety of school and non-school settings. In the remainder of this paper, we examine how "learning disabled" students confront school-like tasks both in and out of school in order to explore the relationship we posit between passing and metacognition.

The Collaborative Construction of Ability and Disability

Hood, McDermott, and Cole (1980) describe the behavior of "Adam," a student who had been diagnosed, tested, and labeled as having a specific learning disability, in a number of situations. These situations included an "IQ Bee," a cooking club, and classroom activities.

In the "IQ Bee," the WISC-R intelligence test was administered as a competition among children by the research team. Since questions on this test were graduated, the first items were simple, while the last items were difficult for 10-year-olds. Adam's response to the increasing difficulty of the questions was noticeably different from the others on his team. As the questioning proceeded, he got more and more tense and upset, raising his hand less enthusiastically, sinking lower and lower into his chair, speaking in a whisper if at all. He missed a number of questions that others could answer. In short, his "disability" was manifested on a number of occasions during the IQ Bee. He got one particular question right, but the club leader had given him an easier question than the series dictated; thus, even his success was a failure. Everyone, including Adam, was aware of the special treatment he got.

But this "disability" was not simply an outward appearance of an underlying trait or the simple application of a label to a child by an evaluator. Hood and her colleagues point out that both his performance and his non-performance in the IQ Bee can be understood in terms of the "particular configuration of supports" that were given to him at different times by others. That is, Adam, his peers, and the club leader were all contributing to the construction of Adam's ability and disability.

Hood, McDermott, and Cole (1980) report similar "management and improvisation work" in Adam's intellectual performance in other situations. When there were few social resources available to help his intellectual performance, as on an *individualized* IQ test, he worked to put these supports back—by chatting with the tester, stalling for time, making jokes, and trying to elicit cues.

Cooking club situations caused him particular trouble because he had difficulty with reading. He managed to fend for his intellectual identity at such times by commandeering a compatriot to work with.

He would watch others, follow their lead, imitate their actions, all the while acting as if he were reading instructions. But there were some situations in which it was impossible for these social props to be put up. And there were some occasions in which other children actively contributed to the assembly of scenes displaying his inability to read. Hood, McDermott, and Cole (1980:162) describe a consequence of Adam's reading difficulty this way:

> One day Adam made green cranberry bread. Such a mistake is easily defended; to wit, "So we made a goddamn mistake. Anybody can make a mistake." But there are certain kinds of displays Adam cannot own up to. Everyone can make a mistake, but not everyone can get caught not knowing something as simple as how to read a recipe. Although Adam can read much of what he encounters in his assignments, he cannot afford to do it slowly or with obvious mistakes. On such occasions we see Adam feigning reading, in class or in club, while keeping a careful eye on a person he might depend on for a nonincriminating hand.

Adam, in effect, was working on two tasks at once: the management of his identity and the management of the intellectual task put to him. His "identity work" is particularly relevant and important on those occasions when he did not get the support needed from others. By disengaging from the interaction, including coming close to tears, Adam prompted others to root for him and arranged for simpler questions.

The Skills and Abilities of Dysphasic Children

Riel (1983) compared the problem-solving, social, and linguistic skills of dysphasic and linguistically normal elementary school age children on a number of tasks presented to the children on a microcomputer in a "mental gym." As might be expected, the dysphasic children performed lower than the linguistically normal children on many of the measures used. The nature of their performance, however, enabled Riel to present an alternative to the usual interpretation of the deflated performance of children with learning problems.

While the eight dysphasic children in Riel's study engaged in strategic behavior, including checking, planning, monitoring, revising, and evaluating activities, these strategies were not always directed at the goals in the problem-solving situations set up by the researcher. As often as not, they were directed at avoiding the tasks presented to them and to a more inclusive goal: managing the situation so as to appear as competent students. Riel says that the dysphasic children's attempts to pass as competent while avoiding situations that were likely to be problematic were at least partially responsible for their poor performance.

Strategies for Avoiding Failure. The dysphasic students were aware of their reading difficulties and they actively avoided situations that required reading. One way they did this was to claim to know how to

play games, thereby bypassing the instructional loop which required reading, and then seeking adult help when the game began. When they were told to go back through the computer instructions, they had various strategies for assuring the presence of the adult to help them through the instructions.

One such strategy was selecting a very difficult level of the computer task. Playing at a level that is so easy that everyone can do it or at a level that is so difficult that few can succeed provides very little information about the skill of the player. If one is uncertain about one's ability at a level that is described as easy, then a possible strategy for avoiding evaluation is to persist at the most difficult level. If one tries but does not succeed on the most difficult task, the failure is not necessarily attributed to lack of skill on the part of the player but can be seen as a reflection of the difficult nature of the task. If one persists at playing a high level game, he/she can always believe or assume that others believe that he can play successfully at the easier levels. Another strategy the dysphasic students sometimes used to avoid failure was to give up on the game as defined by the computer and redefine the goal of the game so that they were then successful at this newly defined game.

Strategies for Avoiding Peer Instructions. The dysphasic students used two different strategies for avoiding the teacher-student role relationship. The first was to claim to know how to play before the student teacher had provided sufficient instructions. In order to begin teaching, the teacher needs feedback from the learner on what is already known. The dysphasic students avoided the interactive work required in teaching and learning by claiming to know how to play. They seemed more interested in playing the game than in eliciting information from their peer. Like the adult, the peer teacher was seen as someone who could do the problem solving, making it unnecessary for the learner to figure out the goal of the game or why a given procedure should be followed.

The dysphasic students were also less likely to make effective use of peer help when it was offered. They challenged the student teacher's ability to teach before she had an opportunity to explain the game. In this case, the learner, set on not understanding, tried to establish adult help as the only way to learn the game. The student in the role of learner may not want to be in a situation where his peer can outperform him. By challenging the peer teacher's ability to teach, the student removes the focus of attention from his own ability (or inability) to learn the games and focuses on his peer's ability (or inability) to teach. Children who have been set apart from their peers as language- or learning-disabled are likely to have learned from experience not to acknowledge when and what they do not understand and how to restructure an event so that their performance is not the focus. It is likely that such revelations among their peers have often been more painful than productive (Hood, McDermott, and Cole 1980).

Strategies for Avoiding Language as a Form of Mediation. While the dysphasic students actively elicited adult help, they were not explicit in their calls for help. They did not isolate the source of their problem nor the kind of help that they needed. Instead, they tried to appropriate others to do the work for them. For example, they asked the adult to join them in playing the game, or show them how to play, without specifying what they did or did not understand. Since they were instructed to try to figure the game out themselves and only request help when they could not understand some part of the task, their general requests did not bring the kind of help that they wanted. In these situations, the adult either redirected them to the computer or to their peer teacher to figure the game out or tried to get them to be verbally explicit about their needs. Their way of avoiding this request was to continue playing, selectively ignoring the adult's questions. In these situations, they were less likely to respond to elicitations or to produce back-channeling signals which indicated that they were listening to what was being said. After their efforts to elicit adult help failed, they continued to play aimlessly, waiting for the adult to assess the problem and provide the solution, thereby rearranging the context so that, with the adult present, the need to solve problems vanished.

The dysphasic children had trouble using language to convey information and to share ideas with each other, as well. They did, however, have strategies for getting through situations without making their difficulties overt. An example from a session between Len and Bob demonstrates the use of such a strategy. In the first exposure to a computer game designed to teach estimation, Len expressed some reasonable but different interpretations of the game world presented. Bob gave no indication of his perceptions of the game. He neither agreed nor argued with anything Len asserted. Both students continued to initiate interaction while trying to learn how to play this game. Neither boy made any attempt during the game-playing phase to determine the other's interpretation of the game or to discuss how they might work together to figure out how to play the game. In checking students' understanding of the game, Riel asked a question that might have revealed Len's alternative interpretation. Bob quickly supplied a response that was consistent with the researcher's interpretation, suggesting that he held the conventional view of the game despite Len's constructions. While Len looked a little surprised by Bob's response and the approval he received, he did nothing to indicate that he had entertained an alternative account. By not challenging or making evident different interpretations at either time, the students are able to "pass" as having understood all along.

Further evidence of the management of identities combined with the management of an intellectual task is found in our own study of the work that students with learning disabilities do to avoid difficult tasks and to manage the situation so as to appear competent.

The Organization of Social Response to Minimize Special Difficulties with Literacy

We have had the opportunity to interact closely with "Miguel" (an 11-year-old boy born in Jalisco, Mexico) in both elicited and naturally occurring situations in an after-school school called Delf College. Our colleagues at the Laboratory for Comparative Human Cognition organized and conducted this study (LCHC 1982). We interacted with Miguel in order to examine the types of literacy events and activities he encountered in and out of school (cf. Anderson and Stokes 1982) and to see how the literacy encounters experienced by Miguel were socially negotiated.

Miguel has been identified as learning disabled by the school he attends because he scored well below expected on a variety of standardized school tests. His poor performance in school was matched by his poor performance in a cognitive screen administered by the research group (LCHC 1982). His test scores indicated that he was reading at the second-grade level; in many instances, he was reported to be off task, not to engage in strategic behavior in problem-solving situations, and not able to sustain attention on a given activity for an extended period of time.

The Unavoidability of Print. Reading activities were a central part of the after-school school that Miguel attended. The reading program was devised based on research conducted by Fillmore, Kay, and their associates at Berkeley. Their method is used to investigate the structure and interpretation of connected prose, utilizing a research interview that provides increasingly greater clues about the meaning and structure of selected bodies of text. In the adaptations that LCHC (1982) implemented, a reading text was segmented and distributed to the reading group. The overall goal of the activity was comprehension and not reading aloud or decoding, which had been the prior reading experiences of Delf College students.

During the year that we observed Miguel in the Delf College reading situation, he appeared to have mastered the organizational scheme of the lesson but continued to exhibit limited comprehension. He was aware of the appropriate slots in which his responses should be placed within the specialized organization of this type of lesson. Nevertheless, his utterances bore little relation to the text that was being considered at the moment. He also knew when the slips of paper should be passed out and even who should have the privilege of passing them out. In general, it can be said that he displayed knowledge of the appropriate interactional form but not of the correct academic content of these lessons (Mehan 1980).

An excerpt from a transcript of a reading session illustrates the nature of the organization of the reading activity as well as Miguel's typical behavior. The first two minutes of the group activity were spent in preparation, at which point the instructional portion of the lesson began.

1. Teacher: What are the two things that you need to do reading?
2. Miguel: Your eyes, your look, and your taste. (laughs)
3. Monica: The text and yourself.
4. Teacher: Something written . . . the text and yourself.
5. Miguel: (Jumps on the table around which the students are seated in order to grab at the pieces of text that the teacher has set in the middle of the table. He is joined by another student.)
6. Teacher: This is what we had started reading (as she begins to hand out the pieces of text to the students). That's what we started reading. And now . . . Okay, what you have to do then, when you're not being totally crazy, is you have to try to figure out what's going to be coming next.
7. Miguel: (Laughs while looking outside to the playground.) Somebody popped him on the head. (Taps the student next to him.) They're playing cone ball.
8. Teacher: (Addresses a student who has left the reading table.) Sarah, you can stand up but stay around the table like me . . . that's okay (as the student approaches) . . . stay around the table.
9. Miguel: (Interrupts the teacher at this point and again addresses the student next to him.)———(unintelligible) are playing cone ball (referring to the playground again) . . . they're playing cone ball. (Teacher signals him to be quiet.)
10. Teacher: What do you think's going to come next (referring to the text)? What it says so far . . . what it says so far is, the title of it is . . . (Miguel makes a loud noise here) "What is a bug?" (Teacher points to Miguel) I'm giving you a hint . . . now listen to the hint . . . "What is a bug in a computer program?" Then it says, "Error in line 40." When you see this message on a computer television screen, you know exactly where to look . . . (Teacher then looks to group for predictions about what will come next in the text.)
11. Student: (In the group) Because . . .?
12. Teacher: Not a bad idea . . .
13. Another student: At . . .?
14. Miguel: Wh——(as if to say "What," then changes) at . . .? (Miguel looks out on the playground while others in the group continue guessing.) Oh, that girl hits good.
15. Teacher: If someone was going around like this (cups her hand over her eyes as if looking for something) . . . Miguel
16. Student: Looking for something?
17. Teacher: What's the word after "look"?
18. Same student: "For it"?

19. Teacher:	(Hands the next pile of text segments to student to hand out, in recognition of the correct answer that he has just supplied. The teacher spends a few moments speaking with a student who has been playing with a small hand-held computer game. Meanwhile, Miguel rises from the table, puts on the backpack of one of the other students, and begins to act as if he is a model posing.) So when you see this message on a computer television screen, you know exactly where to look for the bug . . .
20. Miguel:	Oh, I know! (Jumping up from his seat with excitement.) In the computer, in the computer, in the computer . . .
21. Another student:	Program.
22. Teacher:	(Addresses Miguel, apparently not hearing the correct answer which has just been provided.) In any part of the computer?
23. Miguel:	Yeah . . . Type in, type in (provides his answer in an an excited voice).

Although this is only a small segment of one reading lesson, it illustrates more general patterns in Miguel's behavior. He employs a variety of strategies to keep reading as an activity off the floor. They include changing the subject (7, 9, 14), leaving the reading table (19), and looking outside to the playground (7, 14). In all fairness, it must be said that this type of activity is not exclusive to Miguel (or even to this group of students); however, the consistency and intensity of his diversionary activity differentiates him from students with less severe problems.

At the time that this lesson was taped, the students had been exposed to the reading group for approximately three months. A consistently emphasized principle from the beginning had been that one only needs a text and oneself to read. Despite three months of exposure, Miguel still does not provide the correct answer to the teacher's questions about the prerequisites for reading (see line 2).

Our observations of Miguel confirm the picture consistently projected in school records prior to our contacts with him. However, Miguel's difficulties were much less noticeable at home and in the community. While he clearly looked learning disabled at school, his learning problems were much less apparent out of school. One important reason for this difference was that Miguel simply avoided or attempted to minimize contact with situations involving print whenever possible. Another is that the out-of-school context was less constrained.

Passive Avoidance of Print. When Miguel was away from school, he was voluntarily involved with print only infrequently. He seemed to achieve this state of affairs by passive avoidance, arranging for reading not to occur if possible. For example, Miguel's older sister (labeled as a poor reader by her regular classroom teacher) read a good deal about two favorite television characters, Fonzie and Superman. In addition

to paperback books, she had an extensive collection of bubble gum cards which had different episodes from various Superman adventures; she delighted in reading these over and over. Miguel's older brother, who was also labeled as a poor reader, was also very interested in trying to read books about outer space. By contrast, Miguel rarely appeared to conceive of reading as a worthwhile or useful activity. Rather, it was an activity to be engaged in only with much adult prodding.

This attitude toward reading was made visible one day when Rueda and Miguel visited a bookstore. Miguel expressed surprise that anyone might go near books voluntarily or to an academic place without an academic assignment or business obligation. He was surprised when Rueda pointed out that the people in the bookstore were probably there just because they enjoyed reading.

Active Avoidance of Print. In addition to passive avoidance of reading, Miguel attempted more active avoidance in certain situations. For example, during one of Rueda's visits to his home on a Wednesday, Miguel mentioned several times that it would be good if Rueda could visit him the following Sunday, Rueda was somewhat puzzled by the specificity of this request. After some prodding, Miguel confessed that Sunday was the time scheduled for church classes. During the last class, arrangements were made for the class to do a play, and Miguel had been assigned a part which required him to read. He reasoned that if Rueda were to visit him on Sunday, he would be excused from the class and thereby be relieved of his reading duties. The number of times that he specifically mentioned reading suggests that participation in the play by itself was not the determining factor in attempting to avoid the class; reading a part in the play was.

Organizing Social Resources to Avoid Print. An additional reason why Miguel seemed competent out of school was the systematic way in which he used adults to accomplish certain tasks. On a number of occasions, Rueda had the opportunity to observe Miguel in situations in which reading might be useful in facilitating daily activities (e.g., shopping). A typical example of Miguel's attempts to deal with this problem occurred on a trip with Rueda and Miguel's brother to a large toy warehouse in order to purchase a small video game. This warehouse was enormous. The shelves were 15 feet tall. Miguel and Rueda therefore faced the problem of locating the desired game in a veritable ocean of similar games. Clearly, simple random searching was too time-consuming (which Miguel pointed out). However, a large sign on the wall indicated that all games were arranged alphabetically. Once the game was located, store personnel could be summoned to help remove the game from the shelves. Rueda pointed out to Miguel that the sign might give information about how to quickly find the game, but without reading it to him. Miguel's response was that this would be "too hard." Therefore, Rueda read the sign for him and explained that by using knowledge of the alphabet, they could probably quickly find the game. However, Miguel said that he would be right

back and ran to the far end of the store. In a few minutes, he returned with one of the stock clerks with him.

On another occasion, Rueda had taken Miguel to the local public library. Although it was relatively close to his home, Miguel had never before visited it. While locating books on coins and race cars, which interested Miguel, Rueda and Miguel discussed ways that the card catalogue could be used. However, instead of using the card catalog, an activity involving print, Miguel went to the head librarian and got her to help him find books on the desired topics.

Miguel's use of adults in the situations just described is reminiscent of Edgerton's (1967) reports of "benefactors" who were used by his mentally retarded subjects in successfully negotiating everyday tasks. Unlike the benefactors described by Edgerton, however, who tended to be the same person in each case, Miguel tended to appropriate the services of any available adult, stranger or not, who was competent in the task at hand.

Conclusions

Situational Variability in the Display of Learning Disability

The case studies that we have reviewed suggest that learning disabilities cannot be described solely as either an outward manifestation of an underlying trait or a label simply attached to a child by people in positions of instructional authority: they are actively constituted in social interaction with different people in different contexts (cf. Mercer 1973; Mehan, et al., 1985). These displays of behavior take on different significance in different situations.

Situational variability is a consistent finding about the lives of LD students. LD students' success in negotiating tasks, especially those involving reading, varies from one type of situation to another. In educational tests and during classroom lessons involving reading, LD students did not appear to be engaged in the academic tasks defined by the adults in charge of them. In activities taking place outside of school, however, their special difficulties with print were not readily apparent. Moreover, the particular difficulties of these students with learning disabilities in the academic arena were not due to an overall generalized cognitive deficit, for the students scored high on some standardized tests, sustained attention and learning in some learning situations, and strategically concealed problems with literacy tasks in out-of-school settings.

This situational variability in performance seems to arise because students with learning disabilities are working on two tasks at once: managing their identities and managing an intellectual task. They employ strategies directed at avoiding the task presented to them and managing the situation so as to appear competent: Adam called upon others to perform actions he could not while acting as if he were reading; Miguel avoided situations requiring him to read while appropri-

ating the services of available adults who were competent at the tasks at hand; Len and Bob tried to commandeer adults to do work for them, thereby reconfiguring situations so that the need to solve problems vanished. In short, these LD students exhibited all the behavior that has come to be associated with "passing."

Metacognition and Passing: Strategic Interaction

There is another dimension to the students' performance. The students with learning disabilities in these case studies were engaged in checking, planning, monitoring, revising, and evaluating during problematic situations, which are the same as the characteristics identified with "metacognition." So it seems that students with learning disabilities are employing elements of metacognition in their passing work.

While it can be said that forethought, planning, and some degree of strategic thinking are involved in the students' passing work, the students' strategies were not always directed toward the goals set up by the teacher or the researcher. As often as not, the strategies were directed at avoiding the tasks presented to them and directed toward managing the situation so as to appear more competent.

The relationship that LD students' strategic interaction has to socially sanctioned goals leads us to make some observations about the relationship between metacognition and passing. While the concepts come from very different research traditions and seem, on the surface, to be quite different phenomena, there are ways in which they are flip sides of the same coin; they both seem to index strategic interaction. In negotiating a tarnished identity, as well as when attempting to solve a memory task, one makes strategic choices among courses of action, contemplates the nature of the problem to be solved, considers the potential for the success of any given strategy, and monitors and adjusts strategic behavior based on the contextual information available. In essence, both metacognition and passing are ways of saying that people think about acting.

This is not to say that metacognition and passing are identical. The difference between using more capable peers or adults to increase one's problem-solving activities and using more capable adults or peers to help mask one's incompetence or ignorance seems to lie in the ways in which the pursuit of goals is organized. Checking, monitoring, evaluating, etc., organized in the pursuit of socially acceptable goals is metacognition. The same group of strategies organized to proceed undetected is passing.

To help clarify this point, we will reconsider some of the examples from the case studies we reviewed above. We found that Miguel's actions during microcomputer activities in the LCHC after-school class were productive. He mastered the computer tasks and was praised for his efforts by the teacher. In these situations, Miguel was oriented toward the goal of learning, employing words and sentences in pursuit

of that goal. Like the prisoner in Lifton's (1961) account of thought reform who admits his guilt in order to be released from prison, on this occasion Miguel was admitting his ignorance in order to be taught.

Now consider either Adam's performance in the IQ Bee or Len and Bob's performance in the mental gym. When called upon to read, the boys didn't consult the written record. They either sought help, cues, and hints from other people present or they appeared to disengage from the activity. It is not clear whether these students were oriented to the situationally appropriate goal of reading or had another goal: avoiding reading altogether or masking not being able to read. It is also not clear that either Miguel or Adam had chosen an appropriate means to achieve the reading goal or whether they had selected other means: relying on people for assistance in completing the task.

For both commonsense and theoretical reasons, Miguel's selection of both socially appropriate means and goals with the microcomputers would lead us to conclude that he is "learning" (or at least is oriented to the learning activity). However, we cannot reach the same conclusion about either Miguel's behavior in reading lessons when he is out of school or Adam's behavior in the IQ Bee or Len and Bob's behavior in the mental gym. Insofar as these students are calling upon situationally inappropriate means (people instead of print) to achieve goals and are oriented toward a situationally appropriate goal (masking inability instead of "trying" to read), we can talk about them as "passing" instead of "learning."

"Passing" (Goffman 1959, 1964; Garfinkel 1967; Edgerton 1967) has been discussed as managing a tarnished or tainted identity. For whatever reason (e.g., accident, politics, illegality), a person attempts to mask or cover up an incomplete, blemished, or stigmatized identity. But passing involves more than concealment (i.e., hiding the wound, blemish, or stigma). The actor who is passing attempts a piece of social legerdemain: attempting to conceal the stigma while, at the same time, trying to get through social situations without the stigma being revealed. It is this dual character—concealing a blemished identity while acting as if another identity were in place (which is a form of "secret apprenticeship")—that characterizes passing in general and the reading-related actions of children with learning disabilities in particular. At the same time Miguel, Adam, or the LD students were trying to figure out computer tasks, they were trying to conceal the fact that they couldn't read. Because the use of social resources is much more socially acceptable out of school, the problems of these children with functional reading tasks are hidden from view while their particular desired goals—for example, locating a toy in a store, getting a book from the library—were nevertheless successfully achieved.

A Reformulation of Metacognition and Passing

We have found the notions of metacognition and passing heuristic for our understanding of the paradox in the lives of students with

learning disabilities, that is, that they may experience success out of school but always experience difficulties in school. Despite the utility of these concepts, we had problems with their original formulations. As a result, we have suggestions for reformulating them to account for the nuances of strategic interaction.

One such problem concerns the domain in which passing and metacognition are said to apply. We get the impression from the literature on metacognition that "thinking about thinking" is important for learning in experimental and school-like problem-solving situations and that this skill seems to be a specialty of academically successful students. Children who have difficulty in school and psychological experiments seem to lack this skill. Likewise, one gets the impression from the literature on passing that "thinking about action" is important for concealing tarnished identities and that such skills are the specialty of "deviants," e.g., con artists, transvestites, and crooks. We have found that passing is not limited to deviants and that metacognitive skills are not the special province of bright students.

A second problem concerns the presumed uniformity or generality of these processes. Metacognition is discussed as a general problem-solving process, a skill that problem solvers employ with great regularity and uniformity. In a similar fashion, passing seems to be a full-time job. We are left with the impression that if people who are managing their tarnished identities stopped doing so or would not do it all the time, the charade would come to an abrupt halt. We have found that metacognition and passing are not general skills that are applied uniformly in all contexts, but are context-specific practices that make their appearance on some but not all occasions of interaction.

The view that metacognition and passing are general abilities applied evenly in all situations seems to derive from a confusion between routine or ordinary action and action that occurs under unusual circumstances. At one level of analysis, it can be said that most actions in everyday life are carried out automatically.[2] As Mead (1934) said, "Acts are made perfect in habit," that is, we carry out routines (Simon 1949), follow recipes (Schutz 1962), act out scripts (Shank and Abelson 1977; Goffman 1959). And we do so without thinking about it. However, there are those occasions when our recipes fail. James (1890) talked about these as times when action has been "blocked."

An extended disruption in routine occurs upon visits to a foreign culture, either as a "stranger" (Schutz 1962) or as an "observer" (see Bowen 1964). A shorter disruption can occur by wearing inverted lenses or experiencing life blindfolded (see Mehan and Wood 1975 for a review of "self breaching" studies). Both types of disruptions can have the same effect: bringing previously routine practices which operate out of awareness momentarily into awareness. At such times, we become quite aware of the practices that were previously automatic.

When a disruption, or a "breach" in a routine or a "script," occurs there are a number of courses of action available. One may decide to engage the assistance of more capable people, or one may attempt to

disengage from the activity in question, or one may attempt to complete some other activity, thereby covering up the fact that one is incapable of completing the present course of action.

Despite their frequency, it would be a mistake to consider such responses to breaches or disruptions in routines as a continuous fact of life, because so many actions in everyday life are carried out automatically. Therefore, the particular strategies that one adopts to deal with these special situations must be considered to be context-specific; they are only engaged when there is a block in a routine in a specific activity or context. In short, passing does not occur on a continuous basis in all situations; rather, it occurs intermittently, when routines are disrupted.

This context-specific view of learning problems is different from the view that the variability of children's behavior in school-like tasks is entirely a function of the contextual configurations in a given situation. Labov (1972), for example, has demonstrated that the cognitive skills of some children will often only be elicited in certain types of situations, often those consistent with the cultural experiences of the child as found in home or community settings. By contrast, our work suggests that students such as Miguel, Adam, Len, or Bob may be limited in their facility, for example in certain literacy activities, no matter what contextual supports or constraints are present. However, learning disabilities cannot be considered simply as external manifestations of diminished abilities in specific cognitive domains. Rather, in the face of blocked routine, social resources can sometimes be organized (especially in situations where constraints are not inflexibly specified) to facilitate the type of strategic interactions important to the construction of an identity as a competent person. (As we have previously noted, even considerably impaired mentally retarded persons *attempt* to actively construct and manage their identities, as Edgerton's (1967) work demonstrates, even though they may be less successful in achieving their goals.) Conversely, more constrained situations (such as lessons and testing situations) not only disrupt routines but may also limit the effectiveness of these context-specific passing practices, providing at least a partial account of the variability we have noted in our work with these students.

Notes

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1. The term "learning disability" is commonly used by educators to refer to students with normal intelligence who exhibit significant discrepancies between actual academic achievement and expected achievement based on measured intellectual ability. The label "learning disabled" is generally used to imply a permanent stable attribute. Although we use the term LD in the article for convenience, we prefer the expression "students with learning disabilities," which suggests an often temporary and variable situation, more in line with the arguments we develop in the article.

2. We say "at one level of analysis" here because, as investigators who examine carefully the details of mundane actions have shown (e.g., Schefflen 1972; Dore and McDermott 1982; Sacks et al. 1974), beneath the level of automatic action of procedural action of procedural knowledge (Rumelhart and Norman 1980) is a level of finely tuned synchronous supporting work.

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