Leading with the Heart: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of the Latino Cultural Model

of *Educación*

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Abstract

This case study examined the Latino cultural model of *educación* as it is instantiated in the Costa Rican system of schooling. The purpose of the analysis was to inform non-Latino North American teachers of the model in the light of the increasing number of students in the schools from Latino and immigrant backgrounds. The analysis is framed by sociocultural theories of learning and by Noddings' culture of caring theory (2002). The data was collected as part of a larger ethnography of literacy practice in and out of school in Costa Rica. Data for this analysis included: (a) classroom observations; (b) teacher interviews; (c) interviews with MEP personnel; (d) curriculum documents. Analysis included iterative coding of transcripts, documents, and field notes for evidence of the construct of *educación* and deeper understanding of its cultural roots. In addition to providing cross-cultural understanding for teachers dealing with increasingly multi-cultural student bodies, the author proposes further study of the value of incorporating a culture of care into North American schools for all students.

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of *Educación*

This purpose of this case study is to provide a cross-cultural perspective on

cultural orientations to education – orientations that influence pedagogy and learning by

teachers and students as members of their cultural communities (Mayring & von

Rhoeneck, 2003). Specifically, I focus on the cultural construct of *education* and one of

the primary ways in which that construction differs between Latino and Non-Latino

western cultures. One area of contrast is reflected in the relative role(s) played by the

cognitive and the affective dimensions of learning and teaching. We focus on this area.

Latino/a scholars point out that within the Latino construction of education, the

role of the affect is situated within a cultural frame that places learning and teaching

within the deeply-held belief that the primary role of education is to inculcate children

into shared values and the attitudes and behaviors that follow. Within this frame, the

family assumes the primary responsibility for *educación* (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba,

1991; Valdés 1996, Valenzuela, 1999).

Within non-Latino western cultures such as those of the United States, Canada,

Australia, and the United Kingdom, *education* is more synonymous with *schooling*.

There is a greater weight placed on the cognitive and the teaching and learning of skills

and strategies, content and concepts (Mayring, 2003; Nodding, 1992).

The need to continue the search for more effective education for underachieving

students motivates the choice of the focus on cross-cultural differences of constructions

of education. Western educational systems are increasingly decreasing (from an already

secondary position) emphasis on the non-cognitive dimensions of learning and teaching (see, for example, the websites of the U.S. Education Department for research and programs, www.ies.ed.gov, and www.ed.gov/programs). This is in striking contrast to the 'affective turn' (Mayring, 2003) taken by many educational psychologists in the last two decades (e.g. Pintrich, Marx & Boyle, 1993; Strike & Posner, 1992) who expanded early views of learning as physical 'cognitive change' (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gerzog, 1982) to include social and emotional aspects. These contexts were seen to support rational processes (Duit, 2000).

While this recent work has brought emotion, motivation, and social context back into the picture of teaching and learning, it has not located these dimensions outside of the classroom. By looking cross-culturally, it is possible to do so, and in the process provide greater depth and understanding to the differences in the experience of schooling by children from different cultural communities.

The data for this analysis come from an ethnographic study of community literacy practice and early literacy instruction in Costa Rica by I. I was aided in this analysis by her co-author and colleague from the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica. For ease of communication, we will use *I* when the subject of the sentence or clause is I and *Ingrid* when referring to the second author.

Theoretical Frames and Review of Research

This study is framed by a theory of learning, including language and literacy development, as always occurring within social and cultural contexts (Bakhtin, 1986; Bourdieu, 1991; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004; Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch,

1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Within this frame, learners, through social interaction, appropriate the values, beliefs, patterns of behavior, and abilities practiced by members of their cultural communities.

Nodding's (1992) frame of the Culture of Caring also informed this analysis. This theory asserts that schools and teachers should center students' learning on an ethic of caring, an ethic that nurtures and values relationships. Nodding positions her theory of caring within feminist theory in which 'natural caring' is assumed to be a feminine stance – nurture and care for the well-being and development of others – 'attentive love' as I has termed it (2002, p. 289). Natural caring is defined by Nodding as "a form of caring that does not require an ethical effort to motivate it (although it may require considerable physical and mental effort in responding to needs)" (Flinders, 2001, p. 211).

Nodding views education broadly as "a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation" (2002, p. 283). As such I places the nexus of caring and education in the home. From this I asserts that schools should employ, as much as possible, the sort of methods found in best homes to educate (2002). Nodding's vision of education from a caring perspective involves teachers demonstrating their authentic caring through relationships with students, relationships that include genuine dialogue as well as actions. It includes a stance of confirmation – affirmation and encouragement.

Within the socio-cognitive and sociocultural frames of learning, many researchers have turned to addressing the perpetual underachievement of marginalized learners in the U.S. and the world over through a cultural difference lens. Valenzuela (1999) raised these

issues in her study of the underachievement of Latino high school students in Texas, suggesting that culturally different perspectives on the role of the affective dimension in achievement contribute to the high drop out rate of Latino students in the U.S. Thus, I places part of the responsibility for this high drop-out rate on cultural differences between home and school for these students. I calls for more cross-cultural studies of learning and achievement to address issues of underachievement of children from linguistic and ethnic minority communities in the U.S.

Although many educators and educational researchers are aware of the need for comparative, cross-cultural research in light of the growing migration across national and cultural borders and its impact on schools and schooling, very little actually exists. (Crossley, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). This lack of research is particularly true within the field of literacy research, especially literacy research that looks across national borders. Within the U.S., we can find research that considers issues of cultural differences across home and school boundaries (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Delpit, 1988; Valenzuela, 1999). However, none of this research takes the exploration across national borders into the native communities from which the cultural constructions of education emanate. This study sought to address this gap.

Nodding's theory of caring has relevance for the study of underachievement of Latino students in U.S. schools, according to Valenzuela (1999). Nodding's placement of the center of education in the home resonates, writes Valenzuela, with the Latino conceptualization of *educación* which embodies the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation

for all other learning (1999). Among many Latino cultures, *educación* goes beyond the North American and European concept of *schooling* and, rather, is centered within the family. The family is considered primarily responsible for the *educación* of the children, and this education is about much more than cognitive skill and knowledge acquisition. It also includes – in fact is embedded within – the teaching and learning of values and morals. To be viewed as *mal educado* is to be considered rude, possessing no manners, and this lack of education reflects directly on the family with whom the responsibility lies for *educación* (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valdés, 1996). *Ser bien educado* (to be well-educated) within the Latino community includes values, morals, attitudes, and behaviors in addition to skills and knowledge.

Valenzuela (1999) calls upon both Nodding's theory of care in the schools as well as the Latino value of *educación* in her exploration of factors related to the chronic underachievement of Latino students in American schools. In her seminal study of U.S.-Mexican high school students and their teachers, reported in her book, *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela concluded that a significant factor in the high rate of school dropout and failure among Mexican American youth is related to the lack of authentic caring, as defined by Nodding, in the U.S. schools and their teachers -- a form of caring for which the students hold a cultural model as part of the Latino concept of *educación*. While the teachers in the high school demanded that students care about school before they would be able to teach them, the students argued that "they should be assessed, valued, and engaged as a whole people, not as automatons in baggy pants" (p. 61). In other words, the students demanded that the teachers should care about *them* before they

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would be expected to care about school and the learning that was offered. The students "articulate a vision of education that parallels the Mexican concept of *educación.* That is, they prefer a model of schooling premised on respectful, caring relations" (p. 61).

Few non-Latino educators in North America know about this cultural model of education within the Latino community. Among those, even fewer have a deep understanding of how it plays out within Latino families. Most discussions of this model consider only the home context, reasonably so given the centrality of the home in the concept. However, home and school are always culturally related, and it is clear that examining the ways that the cultural model of education that places caring and nurturing relationships at the forefront and that includes values, beliefs, and attitudes in the very definition will contribute greatly to increased understanding. Further, a deeper grasp of the instantiation of the concept will come from studying it in action within a cultural context for which it is native. We address this need within this study.

The strength of the *educación* construction within Latino countries is revealed by the absence of any research from those countries on the topic. In policy statements, curricula, and educational research, it is never mentioned explicitly. Rather, like all primary and deep cultural constructions, it is taken for granted and treated implicitly. Certainly, it is never treated as a variable that could be isolated and studied. Discussions of the data from which this case study evolved with native Costa Rican and Mexican colleagues resulted in initial expressions of incomprehension and then surprise. The incomprehension arose from the natives' failure to understand what the researcher had 'noticed' since they would never notice such things (having taken them for granted). The

surprise came when confronted with data that 'documented' the phenomenon and it was 'recognized.' In cultural ethnographic circles, this would be considered as instance of 'the fish learning to see the water' phenomenon (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Research Questions: The research questions for this analysis included: (a) How are the culturally-based ideals of *educación* and authentic caring reflected in the Costa Rican construction of schooling? (b) How are these values instantiated within the primary grade classrooms?

Method

The Larger Study: Literacy Practice and Early Literacy Instruction in Costa Rica

This analysis is based on a portion of the data collected for a larger study of literacy practice in Costa Rica. In collaboration with officials from the Ministry of Public Education in Costa Rica (*Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica (MEP))*, I conducted a six-month ethnography in Costa Rica, seeking to explore factors that may account for many of the difficulties that are experienced by poor and marginalized children in the Costa Rican Schools, particularly those of Nicaraguan immigrants – a focus suggested by the Costa Rican collaborators.

Within this, I explored interactions between the children's experiences with reading and writing in their lives outside of school – in their homes and communities – and those within their classrooms in one public school. For purposes of this presentation, I will describe the methods that relate directly to the case study rather than the methods that supported the larger study.

Site

The school for the study was located in an area near the capital city of San José. It was chosen through discussion with personnel from the Ministry of Public Education (*Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica (MEP))*. At the time of selection, this school had high numbers of Nicaraguan immigrants with the remainder of children predominantly coming from low-SES Costa Rican homes. The principal at the time of selection was well-known for her efforts to improve the lives and school success of the Nicaraguan children, and I was, thus, open to having an observer in the classrooms who was exploring ways to help the children. The school was located in a primarily middle-class neighborhood, and its student body majority of low-SES children reflected the relatively recent abandonment of the public schools by Costa Ricans who could afford private education for their children.

Observations were done in a kindergarten class (ages 4-5; class ratio of one teacher for 27 children); a first grade class (ages 6-7; class ratio of one teacher for 31 children); and a second grade class (ages 7-9; class ratio of one teacher for 35 children). None of the teachers had aides and all instruction was whole-class with no small-group work. At times, learning specialists would pull out special needs children from the first and second grade classes for specialized instruction and help. The first and second grade teachers followed a strict scope and sequence curriculum with little variation. The kindergarten teacher, as part of the pre-school department, approached instruction from a classical early childhood perspective with the focus on play and social and emotional development. Explicit teaching of early literacy or math skills was forbidden by the pre-school department of the ministry.

Data Collection and Data Sources

A total of 150 hours of observation total were carried out in the kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade classrooms in this one public school. In addition, I visited four other public schools for one day each to verify the typicality of the observations made in the focus school. Finally, to obtain a more complete picture of education in Costa Rica, I visited a private school in the Central Valley (home of the capital city and most of the industry and population of the country) to observe the instruction in pre-school through second grade. During all of the classroom observations, I noted the instructional routines and methodological approaches in all subject areas, particularly for literacy.

I visited each kinder, first-, and second- grade classroom at least one time per week for a duration of 2-4 hours each visit. During the observations, I sat in a desk and assumed a passive, non-participant stance. I noted all of the instructional activities and routines, capturing teacher and student language as well. I also noted all of the texts that were read or written within the instructional period as well as the texts that formed the environment of the classrooms. I was assisted in these observations by a Costa Rican research assistant who was obtaining her teaching certificate at one of the state universities. This assistant helped to translate when needed and she served as a source of insider information regarding what was happening in the classrooms. One of the goals of the study was to come to a deep understanding of the culture of schooling, instruction, and learning within the Costa Rican context, acting under the assumption that it would be

much different from that of North America and so would require much attention and cultural analysis for me as an outsider.

Following each observation, I transcribed my notes and constructed initial analytic notes and memos. It was during this phase of the data collection that I first noticed the striking ways that affective elements were woven into the daily instruction and interactions among teachers and students.

To provide essential context for the research questions relating to the larger study, I also interviewed MEP officials, teachers, community leaders, and officials of organizations devoted to working with children and immigrant children, in particular, in areas of schooling and human rights. In addition, I collected and analyzed MEP curriculum documents for preschool and first-second grades. In sum, data sources for this case study included (a) classroom observations; (b) teacher interviews; (c) interviews with MEP personnel; (d) curriculum documents.

Data Analysis

All of the field notes, interview transcripts, and scanned documents were entered into the *ATLAS.ti* (2007) qualitative software program. This program allows researchers to upload primary documents such as field notes, interview transcripts, scans of print materials, and photos and to conduct an iterative process of coding and analysis across them. Using the coding conventions for this program, the data were coded for classroom instances of affect employed by teachers and students and for explicit naming and evidence of values, beliefs, and attitudes in descriptions and enactments of literacy curricula and instruction. Themes were identified with constant comparative analysis

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and participant checks were conducted with teachers and with Ministry of Education officials to confirm emerging insights and findings.

Results

The cultural construction of *educación* (see definition above re Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; and Valdés, 1996), with its emphasis on the family as the primary site of learning and on values and morals taught and learned within respectful and caring relationship, was exemplified and revealed through the analysis of the data. I will first present the data relevant to this from each data source. Following, I will draw it together in a portrait of the ways that the cultural construction of *educación* permeates the educational system and classrooms of Costa Rica.

Curriculum Documents

During the course of this study, the Curriculum Development Division of the MEP was busy putting the finishing touches on a new overarching curriculum document on a theme that they termed *Transversalidad*. This document was intended to establish a vision with goals and plans for the Costa Rican schools for the coming decade. As a curriculum document, it was embedded within cultural constructions of education, and an analysis of the content revealed evidence of the construct of *educación*.

Transversalidad is a term that does not seem to have a direct translation into English. However, the essence of its meaning is in the envisioned connections between school and the world: its problems, its challenges, its realities that the students will face.

An important aspect of transversalidad "...is that it advocates processes that tend to promote, from within the classroom setting, the development of competencies for life" (Bustos, 2006, p. 2). These competencies include:

Knowledge: ...the set of concepts, facts or procedures that the individual must master in order to act in an efficient manner in the development of any given process.

Abilities: ...the mental processes that involve reflection and critical analysis, amongst others; the emotional component that allows the individual to identify and respond in a constructive way to personal and others emotions....communicative skills that lead to decision-making based on pertinent information ....

Values: ...those practices such as solidarity, equity, respect, honesty, and so forth, that in the frame of the personal and surrounding conditions, constitute a fundamental dimension of the individual.

Attitudes: ...the way in which the challenges of life are confronted.... (p. 30).

Of these four elements of transversalidad, three are focused on emotional abilities, values, and attitudes. Knowledge is included but it does not dominate.

Curricular Applications. An examination of the Ministry Programs of Study revealed the instantiation of this concept of transversalidad with its emphasis on values, emotions, and attitudes. For each content area, the documents lay out in table form the curricular objectives, contents, procedures, values and attitudes, and assessments. By

explicitly naming and according a place in the scope and sequence to values and attitudes, the Costa Rican educators assume (and ensure) the essential role of these dimensions in the education of their children.

An example of the contents of the Values and Attitudes columns for Reading and Writing (*Español* is the term that encompasses these topics in the Costa Rican curriculum) lists the following (Ministerio de Educación Pública, 2005): Confidence in the ability to produce written messages; Persistence in learning written expression; Creativity in the spontaneous written productions; Perseverance in the bettering of their writing; and Acceptance of criticism as a contribution from others to the betterment of their writing. Confidence, Persistence, Creativity, and Acceptance – all values and attitudes considered worth teaching along with content. From a non-Latino western educational psychology perspective, characteristics such as confidence, persistence, and acceptance are considered important affective components of motivation and self-regulation, a dimension of learning that has gained more prominence in learning theories (Gläser-Zikuda & Mayring, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997.

Interviews. The belief that emotions and feelings enable content learning is inherent within the concept of *educación,* as well. Within this model, the affective *must* precede the cognitive if learning is to occur. This belief was apparent in all of the interviews that were done with teachers and with ministry personnel. Few participants could articulate this explicitly (see previous discussion) but it was present in all of their discussions of teaching and learning. For example, when I was planning with Ingrid the many workshops with teachers to present the outcomes of the larger study, Ingrid always

insisted that these events start with a story, often with music, and often followed by a

prayer in order to emotionally engage the group. I, on the other hand, as cultural

construction of a non-Latino western culture, always wanted to start right off with

descriptions of the research questions and the methods! This dissonance and

misunderstandings occurred repeatedly until I 'got it,' helped to a great extent by

participating in numerous conferences and workshops planned by others.

Another striking exemplar of this belief arose as part of an interview with the

director of an NGO (non-governmental organization) devoted to improving the academic

performance of immigrant children in the country. As part of this interview the director

shared the publication *Educación Sin Fronteras* (Education Without Borders) (Contreras,

2004), a book published by the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of

International Organization for Migrants (OIM) and the Foundation Costa Rica-USA (CR-

USA) in partnership with the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica.

The OIM and CR-USA sponsor a program for migrant children in the schools

called *Mediación.* This program trains volunteer older students to work with young

migrant children to help them 'catch up' to their Costa Rican peers. In the description of

this tutoring model in the book, we can see the focus on the affective: "Mediación

stimulates the development of intelligence and the acquisition of abilities and strengths in

two dimensions: the affective-motivational and the cognitive (p. 85)." Contreras goes on

to explain:

From here is born a strong idea that has become one of the themes

of mediación: **Corazón + Bombillo = Mediación.** The "corazón (heart)"

represents the affective-motivational (the emotional intelligence, the psychosocial) and the "bombillo (light bulb)" represents the cognitive (rational intelligence, mind, knowledge). Both elements come together in pedagogical practice in order to give feeling/emotion to the mediación, in this order: *primero el corazón y luego la mente* (first the heart and then the mind) (p. 85).

In the Classrooms. How does this look on the ground, within individual classrooms? Many examples of the focus on values and attitudes were observed over the 5 months of classroom observation in kinder, grade 1, and grade 2. The value of spirituality was applied in this very Catholic country with the daily lesson in religion – Catholicism. In addition, each day was begun with a prayer that was led by the teacher, and this was repeated throughout the day whenever a new teacher came in to the class, e.g. the English teacher, the computer teacher, and so on. Further, the kindergarten children always said a prayer before eating their *merienda* – snack – together in a circle outside on the play yard.

In all of the classrooms, one could see, posted around the rooms, signs that teach or remind the children of the politeness values. The posters or signs in the kindergarten exhorted, for example:

- *Respetar al compañeros* (Respect your classmates)
- *Cuidar los juguetes del Kinder* (Take care of the toys)
- *Escuchar a los compañeros* (Listen to your classmates)

- *Lavantar la mano y esperar el turno* (Wash your hands and wait your turn)

- *Caminar en el aula* (Walk in the classroom)

- *Hacer fila para entrar y subirse al tobogán* (Make a line to come in and to climb up the slide)

- *Pedir permiso para ir al baño* (ask permission to go to the bathroom)

It is telling that these types of imperatives would be thought of as 'rules' in North American classrooms, but the research assistant and the teachers always referred to them as 'values' ("*los valores*").

Also emphasized by the teachers in their lessons and through signs posted on the walls were the 'politeness' terms that the children were expected to use: *Buenas días* (good morning), *Hasta mañana* (until tomorrow -- a polite way of leaving), *Hágame un favor* (Do me a favor), *Muchas gracias* (thank you), *con permiso* (excuse me), and so on.

Teachers were constantly observed 'teaching' values such as responsibility – at home and at school (and this went beyond just doing their school work. It included helping their mothers, cleaning their rooms, and so on). The value placed on solidarity and community revealed itself in the practice of encouraging the children to help each other with their school work – a practice specifically discouraged (and at time punished) in North American schools. Work time in the Costa Rican classrooms was very active and noisy as the children stood to cut their handouts and glue them into their notebooks, converse with their friends

who had wandered over, call out to the teacher and/or the class in general that they were finished ('*ya terminé!),* and walk around to see how the others were doing or to borrow pencils or glue. Teachers implicitly allowed them to help each other by ignoring the activity. This value was explicitly evident in the directions on many of the worksheets, "Help anyone who needs it."

The value of warmth and affection was apparent in the ways in which the teachers spoke to the children. Terms such as *"Mi amor"* and *"Mi corazón"* were woven throughout the teachers' responses to the children. These were often accompanied with big hugs or kisses (a real 'no-no' in the current North American context). Following is a partial list of '*palabras de cariño'* (caring words) used by the teachers, provided by the research assistant and the teachers:

- *Mi vida* (my life)

- *Mi corazón (my heart)*

- *Mi sol (my sun)*

- *Corazoncito o corazones* diminutive variations on 'heart)

- *Mi cielo* (my heaven)

- *Mi tesoro* (my treasure)

- *Chiquillos* (a respectful version of "little children")

- *Preciosa* (precious)

- *Mi amorcito* (a diminutive of "my love")

- *Mi cosita bella* (my sweet little thing)

- *Mamita (for a girl,*

- *Papito (for a boy)*

- *Bella/o* (pretty/beautiful)

- *Lindísimo* (so nice/so pretty).

Teachers employed these terms throughout the day, while children were lining up, misbehaving, doing their school work, delivering notes from home, taking exams, and so on. The terms were used as a matter of course and without conscious thought, as their use was an integral part of the model of teaching and learning that the teachers were operating within. Following are some examples of their use from the field notes (Note that school begins in Costa Rica in February of each year):

FN March 13, 2006; First Grade Classroom; Context: The children are practicing making the letter 'M' in their notebooks.

Kids start to work; T goes around and helps. T keeps calling kids 'mi vida' as she helps them. K says is a word of cariño – afectivo – You are my life. T also uses 'preciosa'.

FN March 24, 2006. First Grade Classroom; Context: The children are working on a mathematics worksheet. The afternoon teacher (the schools all have two shifts, and a fourth grade teacher teaches in the room in the afternoon) comes in to get supplies from the closet at the back of the room.

When another teacher comes in (she shares the room; 4th grade; gets material from the new cupboard in the back) she passes by students in the row and comments on their work: "Bonita!"; "Que linda!"

FN April 6, 2006. First Grade Classroom; Context: The children have just finished sharing their oral stories about a duckling that they made up as groups.

T gives lots of praise: Qué lindo! Qué lindo! And kids want to come up individually and tell stories. M gets up and tells his own duck story. So do others: they've been inspired! (e.g. an ugly duck turns into a beautiful duck – a girl (The Ugly Duckling?). We put the desks back.

FN May 9, 2006; Second Grade Classroom; Context: There is a substitute teacher (ST). The children are working on identifying words (i.e. working on 'what is a word') and cutting them out of newspaper pages that the substitute teacher brought in. She is circulating and helping them.

ST uses many tierno words, gestures, and intonations. e.g. mi amor, rubbing her hands over a boy's very short hair.

FN March 3, 2006. Kindergarten Classroom. Context: Students have just finished their 'center time' and have pulled together as a group in front of the teacher.

8:45: Back in the circle with the Centers cleaned up. T asks the kids what they did in the centers and they describe/share. In answer to a girl's question re whether they have computer today, T says "No, mi amor."
Finally, a field note from one of the kindergarten observations reveals the cultural nature of these behaviors through the need to switch languages:

FN April 21, 2006. Kindergarten Classroom. Context: The English

teacher (ET) has entered the classroom for one of the twice weekly

sessions of English instruction. There is a great deal of noise and activity,

making it difficult for her to be heard. Trying to bring about order, she

reverts to Spanish. I note:

When controlling in English she is not able to use words of cariño; the

kids only really respond to Spanish. E.g. "Get back!" Nothing; "Un

poquito de atrás, mis amores!" They move back.

The theme of caring and relationship was carried out, also, in the Kindergarten

class when the teacher invited the parents to write letters of affection to their children.

The entire back wall of the classroom was papered with these letters, and each child was

excited and proud to have his or her letter displayed. Here is the content of one of them:

Para (Name of Child).

Pienso en tí mi niña preciosa,	(I think of you my precious child,)
Iluminas mi existéncia.	(You illumine my existence).
Tú tenrura y delicadeza	(Your tenderness and delicacy)
son comparables con una flor.	(are comparable to a flower.)
Quien te Ama	(Who loves you)
Tu Mamí	(Your Mommy)

The children reflected, in their actions and talk, this environment of love and affection. They exhibited great warmth and tenderness toward their classmates, teachers, and other adults. There was lots of hugging, kissing, and concern for any sort of trouble such as illness, accident, emotional upset that may beset their classmates. This was as true for the boys as for the girls.

Discussion

This case study of the cultural construction of *educación* with its emphasis on the family as the site of teaching of values, attitudes, and behaviors through respectful and caring relationship was not intended to explore the efficacy of such instruction in the classroom as regards to learning. Rather, my intent was to provide a layered description of this construct and the ways in which it permeates curriculum and instruction in a country in which *educación* is a deeply embedded value. My assumed audience for this description is non-Latino/a western educators and teachers who may benefit from this cultural knowledge as they strive to understand their Latino/a students who are quickly becoming the majority in many areas of the U.S. and whose population is rapidly increasing in Canada (Espinosa, et al., 2007).

Case studies such as this one are not designed to answer such questions such as whether or not the use of affect in the classrooms such as that portrayed in this article increases cognitive learning. They do, however, provide insight into phenomena as it occurs within naturally occurring contexts and these insights have the promise of contributing to theory and greater understanding, in this case of teaching and learning within different cultural contexts (Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998). We can speculate,

however, on the role of cultural models of education held by students in classrooms that operate within different models, and I will do this later in this section.

Before I proceed, however, I wish to note some aspects of the research context of this particular study relevant to this issue. My research focus during my time in Costa Rica was on the experiences of the Nicaraguan immigrants in school. A significant element of this study, given my research interests up to this time, was on the cultural practices of literacy that were evident in the Nicaraguan immigrant community and the ways in which they aligned and did not align with those assumed by the schools. My data collection in the classrooms had two purposes: (1) to document the literacy practices in the classroom; and (2) to learn about the model of instruction in the Costa Rican schools so that I could contribute to the construction of new instructional activities that would be culturally congruent for the teachers and the Ministry. In sum, I was not focusing on the issue of the affective versus the cognitive in the classroom instruction. For this reason, while I have rich description of the ways that the construct of *educación* is instantiated within the Costa Rican primary classrooms, I do not have the data that would allow me to examine specifically how it relates to cognitive learning.

More Than Being Nice; Engaging the Heart.

Costa Rica's model for pedagogy and schooling clearly reflects the Latino cultural model for *educación*. Education for values, attitudes, and morals are considered as appropriate and needed in the schools as in the families. While the activities of the school are more explicitly focused on the acquisition of cognitive and technical skills and abilities than the home, nevertheless, this instruction is cradled in an environment of

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nurture and care in the service of respectful relationship – all elements of the culture of caring that Nodding asserts are the basis of all learning. In such an environment, home and school are seamlessly connected. In Costa Rica, educators, parents (including the Nicaraguan parents), teachers, and students all seem to agree on what education means and on the mutually supportive roles played by home and school. There is cultural congruence around the issue of education.

The meaning of the emphasis on the affective, including the terms of endearment, in the classrooms is complex. Clearly, the cultural meaning of *educación* goes far beyond, and deeper than, the behavior of 'being nice' to the students. It reflects the very essence of the respect and relationship that is implicated in the values, beliefs, and attitudes that drive the construct of *educación*. That this caring relationship is reminiscent of that between parent and child is no accident, given the assumption of the family as the primary source of education.

The evidence provided by the content of the official curriculum documents, the instantiated curriculum in the classrooms, and the relationships between the teachers and the students, specifically documented through speech acts, point to the ways that *educación* in the native Latino classroom embodies Noddings' (who also relies on Martin Buber (1958) for this) notion of confirmation as acts of affirming and encouraging the best in others (1998). One of Noddings' elements of caring in the classroom is dialogue (1998). The *palabras de cariño* in the Costa Rican classrooms illustrate one way that this is realized in the early grades. That this is a Latino construct, and not only unique to these classrooms in this Costa Rica is illustrated by the fact that Latino/a teachers in the U.S.

also use these 'caring words' with their students (Flora Rodriguez-Brown, personal communication, August 10, 2007). In Costa Rica, teacher training includes an explicit focus on the use of such terms to enhance relationship and learning in the classrooms (Karla Brenes, personal communication, February 27, 2006).

The data from one case study cannot be generalized, of course, to all classrooms. Nor am I, obviously, suggesting that simply teaching North American teachers to use *palabras de cariño* will change the achievement levels of Latino students in North America. This aspect of Costa Rican classrooms is deeply embedded in a complex cultural construction of home, family, and schooling. The central value of this analysis is to provide non-Latino/a North American teachers and teacher educators with a increased knowledge of a cultural model of education that is held by many Latino/a students and their parents who find themselves negotiating education within a different model.

It is important to acknowledge that cultural models run deep. Not only are they hard to see as 'models' by those who hold them, they are also sources of cultural conflict and difficulty when they run up against other models. Valenzuela (1999) concluded that the failure of Latino-American children in the U.S. schools may very well be related to the mismatch between the children's expectation, and need, for authentic caring and relationship and the school's expectation for the students to "care" about their learning and knowledge acquisition in the absence of such relationship. I would agree, acknowledging that learning in school is always a complex enterprise that reflects the synergistic action of many different factors such as teacher knowledge and training, student background, instructional strategies, and resources.

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Should Others Adopt this Model?

As stated earlier, the data and analysis for this case study do not allow for statements of generalizability. This is especially true when dealing with cultural models. However, we can speculate about some of the elements of the model of *educación* that might make sense within the more cognitive-focused model of schooling in North America. This type of speculation, after all, is one of the presumed benefits of cross-cultural research.

Research on the role of affect on cognitive learning. From an educational psychology perspective (which permeates the North American model of education), a great deal of research has demonstrated the effect of affective dimensions on learning in school. Mayring and von Rhoeneck (2003), in their edited book *Learning Emotions: The Influence of Affective Factors on Classroom Learning*, state three research-based reasons why it is worthwhile to study emotions: (1) Emotions influence the quality of learning and achievement of students; (2) Emotions are directly linked to students' sense of well-being and classroom environments will affect this sense; and (3) The quality of the social interactions in the classroom (the source of learning) and emotions form the basis for social interactions.

A review of the educational psychology research on the links between affect and cognition concludes that positive affect will enhance, and some ways allow, learning in the classroom. From this we can speculate that North American and other non-Latino models of education might benefit from taking a page from the model of *educación*, with its emphasis on positive values, attitudes, and relationships of care and respect.

Care and respect. Others from non-Latino backgrounds (in addition to Noddings) have also called for such a focus when considering the education of children in North American schools. As an example, Noblit and Rogers (1995) studied the ways that authentic caring played out in the classrooms of two African-American teachers in an urban elementary school in the U.S. Sixty-five percent of their students were African American and low-income. The authors concluded that

...although children may learn in the absence of caring, without the presence of a caring teacher these possibilities are greatly diminished. As a fourth-grader Candace remarked, "If a teacher doesn't care about you, it affects your mind. You feel like you're nobody, and it makes you want to drop out of school (p. 5).

Caring in the classrooms studied by Noblit and Rogers was realized in many of the same ways as in the Costa Rican classrooms. Respect and standards were also values that the teachers embodied, as exemplified in the students' reports that the teachers not only helped them with their work, they did not demean them for needing help. Further, the children also reported that the good teachers talked with them, bringing to mind again Noddings' caring component of dialogue. "Talk became the currency of caring; each opportunity to talk came to have a history and a future."

Finally, touching was often a part of the relationships that Noblit and Rogers observed. While the authors concede that touching is a politically sensitive topic in the North American context, they concluded that in the classrooms they observed touching was a sign of a relationship and not just an indication of the authority of an adult over a child.

I agree with Noblit and Rogers that the construction of caring as a value in North American schools is a goal worth considering, pursuit of which would include further research as well as deeper cultural analysis of constructs of education in the North American schools. This cross-cultural case study that sought to understand the Latino concept of *educación* through North American eyes will contribute to the understanding and knowledge that is needed to reach this goal.

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