DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 153 FL 025 914

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TITLE Comparing Values in Education on the U.S.-Mexican Border, El Paso and Ciudad Juarez.
PUB DATE 1999-01-00
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Community Attitudes; Comparative Analysis; *Educational Attitudes; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Public Schools; Regional Characteristics; *School Role; *Social Values
IDENTIFIERS El Paso Independent School District TX; Mexico (Ciudad Juarez); *Mexico United States Border

ABSTRACT

A three-year study examined attitudes toward education and public schools through behaviors in elementary schools in two United States-Mexican border towns, El Paso (Texas) and Ciudad Juarez (Mexico). It looked at curricular civic rituals such as the flag salute, and more covert normative training found in classroom organization and management strategies. About 25 hours of material videotaped in the schools was condensed into about an hour, and the resulting video shown to students, teachers, principals, parents, and undergraduate and graduate students of education; responses were elicited. Both similarities and differences were found in national and cultural values in the two locations, particularly concerning treatment of relationships vs. time in the school setting, sociability vs. individualism, and nationalism vs. hegemony. The findings are illustrated with specific instances and individual comments. (Contains 27 references.) (MSE)

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COMPARING VALUES IN EDUCATION ON THE U.S.-MEXICAN BORDER, EL PASO AND CIUDAD JUÁREZ

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January, 1999

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Introduction

For both the U.S. and Mexico, public schooling has attempted to reinforce cultural and national values and create "good citizens." National values are transmitted or reflected through the curriculum both directly and indirectly. Reform movements that attempt to improve society through schooling, rarely alter the basic status quo, and often assume there is one culture that is preferable, socializing other cultures into the dominant one, whether it be Anglo culture in the U.S., mestizo culture in Mexico, or U.S. culture at the border.[1] What is called citizenship training often serves the purpose of fitting children into the national culture to become productive members of the larger society, supporting a system that, depending on their social class or ethnic group, may or may not benefit them economically or socially (Scott, 1990). Assimilation and the possibilities of teaching or reinforcing a dominant culture to both mainstream and non-mainstream children, for the purpose of both status quo and reform, are social constructions of education that often occur simultaneously. These varying constructions of education produce interesting contradictions and layers of meaning that can help us understand a school's role in creating or reinforcing national and cultural values, thus fitting children into adult life.[2]

[1]By Anglo, we mean Americans of European heritage. This term is used throughout the Southwest, where the term White is used more often in the Northeast. Mestizo is used in Mexico to indicate its mixed race heritage, Native American and European.

[2]See Levinson, Foley, and Holland (1996) for a discussion of the one national curriculum imposed on all communities (urban, rural, indigenous, etc.) in Mexico, with grave effects on those who are not urban, middle class, or mestizo.

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This article, based on a three year comparison study on the U.S.-Mexico border, illustrates some of the contradictory blending and separating of national and cultural values in a large metropolitan border area, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and El Paso, Texas.[3] This study looks at overt curricular civic rituals, such as the flag salute, and more covert normative training found in classroom organization and management strategies. While overt and covert training for national purposes are usually passively accepted by students and teachers, their inherent contradictions do not go unnoticed.

Looking at classrooms in the Juárez-El Paso border region, we found similarities and differences in national and cultural values in the two countries. While observing blends of U.S. and Mexican cultures, we also found attempts to keep the two cultures artificially separate (e.g., physically, through the border patrol, and academically, through classroom lessons on patriotism). It is common to hear Mexicans say that Juárez is too Americanized, while Americans usually describe El Paso as very Mexican. Yet the cities, based on a similar history and heritage, are interdependent and mutually influential.

This study looks at how cultural values are transmitted and reflected in primary education on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. On the surface, it appears that schooling reinforces cultural and national norms as defined by dominant governmental structures. Schooling based on a dominant culture, however, assumes for example, that all American (U.S.) students are Anglo, or that all Mexican students are mestizo. But looking deeper, we found variations and contradictions in values reinforced in schools (Levinson and Holland, 1996).[4] In particular, we look into apparent

[3]Both Susan Rippberger and Kathleen Staudt are advocates of bilingualism and see the border as one metropolitan area divided by an unnatural, politically constructed and imposed boundary. Both currently live on the border. Staudt has researched El Paso-Juárez border issues for over 20 years; Rippberger has traveled throughout Mexico, researching bilingual education and identity in south, central, and northern Mexico for over 25 years.

[4]The assumption that American culture is Anglo and Mexican culture is mestizo is not just a common misperception, it is often based on political motivations to assimilate students into one nationality, yet usually has the effect of isolating students.

contradictions in cultural assumptions, and what it means to live in a border area where the U.S. culture dominates in some instances, and Mexican culture dominates in others.

Schools socialize children for work and social life as adults in subtle ways. Such socialization, in many ways helps a government survive as a conservative entity, therefore their stake in schools is high. Civic activity in classrooms frequently illustrates dominant paradigms of race, class, gender, and nationalism (Butler, 1993; Scott, 1990; Kelley, 1996). In our observations, we noticed how teachers consciously and unconsciously, overtly and covertly teach these dominant paradigms, i.e., cultural and social expectations such as a work ethic for economic and military dominance worldwide (Vaughan, 1982; Foley, 1990), not necessarily for the self-realization of individual students. Several participants in our study expressed a similar cynicism with respect to both nations. A middle class Venezuelan civics teacher who saw the tape, commented, "Our governments really don't want our students to be critical thinkers, they want them to be passive and obedient."

Looking for sources and purposes of civic education, we video taped elementary classrooms, then showed the video to those in the video for their reactions.[5] Our viewers reactions helped us understand some of the complexities of civic training where binationalism, bilingualism, and multiculturalism are the norm.[6] This article describes our research in border schools, and how we observed values being taught both directly and indirectly. We include our purposes for the research, our methodological choice, as well as the observations and critiques of teachers, students, and school administrators on both sides of the border, who viewed our video. We explore some of the contradictions inherent in multicultural educational settings where one culture

[5]We want to acknowledge Tobin (1989) for his work with video ethnography, using viewers commentary on the video as a secondary source of rich ethnographic information.

[6]The U.S.-Mexico border, while largely Mexican American and Mexican, is quite diverse. The U.S. includes blends of Mexican, Mexican American, Anglo, Native American (Tigua), African American, and Asian American; Mexico includes mestizo, Native American (Rarámuri), Mennonite, and Chinese.

dominates politically and economically, yet not necessarily numerically and socially. We grouped these conflicting themes--(1) relationships and time, (2) sociability and individualism, and (3) nationalism and hegemony--to expose and understand better some of the commonly held assumptions of U.S. and Mexican cultures--often uni-dimensional constructions that set up simplistic and privileging dichotomies.

Context

Multicultural, bilingual education in a border area is prone to different definitions depending on which culture and language is perceived as having more economic status. Multiculturalism, especially as taught in school, is usually a romanticization of the 'other' (Geertz, 1996). Whether the 'other' is perceived as inferior or superior, both perceptions are more stereotypical than realistic. While both cities value bilingual education, in Juárez, English as a Second Language (ESL) is an enrichment program used to help all students gain an economic advantage. Originally ESL was taught in private schools or as after school courses, but now through a special state program ESL is offered at most schools as part of the curriculum. Ironically, Mexican Indian children who are monolingual Rarámuri speakers, and migrate from their rural communities to Juárez, cannot enroll in Juárez schools to learn Spanish because there are no bilingual indigenous classes or teachers. This provides an important example of status languages and cultures vs. non-status languages and cultures, where English in Juárez is valued above native Indian languages.

In the U.S., bilingual education is a compensatory program where ideally, students are provided academic instruction in their own language, and structured instruction in ESL until they are able to function in an all English learning environment.[7] More recently, some El Paso schools are promoting dual language

[7]See, for example, DeVillar (1994) for bilingual programs that are designed to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

programs as an enrichment for both English and Spanish speakers. In these classrooms, ideally, there is a mixture of English and Spanish dominant students, and both languages are used so that all students become bilingual. On the down side though, poorly implemented bilingual programs[8] can have the effect of segregating students, and often there is no consistency in a child's educational path as they may cross in and out of bilingual programs. In addition, recent English-only movements and anti-immigrant sentiment have reduced both equity and excellence in education for non-mainstream students.

There are always multiple cultures represented in any country, but usually one that is given official 'national' status (Scott, 1990), e.g., Anglo in the U.S. and mestizo in Mexico. Sherman (1997: xvi) explains nationalism in terms of "a devotion to the modern nation-state," used to enhance the nation's cultural and political status internationally. Implicit sanctions for following national mores, tend to support the national language and expectations regarding individualism, time, relationships, etc. This is the social capital in schools that is rewarded or punished as it supports or subverts national or cultural values (Wink, 1997). Supervision and punishment (Foucault, 1995) is often the means of training for conformity to the expectations of those in power. What is valued is a national mainstream unity by central leaders, supported by the educational system, and police and military force; non-mainstream groups that assume this type of power are usually labeled revolutionaries, or even bandits.

While many would try to keep Mexico and the U.S. cultures separate, the border is a unique blend of both. El Paso is approximately 80% Mexican American. Many from both cities cross the border on a regular basis for family gatherings, business, shopping and work. They create a large floating population of migrants who

[8]See, for example, Valdéz (1998) for research on current shortcomings in bilingual education programs.

live their lives on both sides of the border. A forth grade Juárez teacher, commented on a Social Science textbook that teaches national unity, represented symbolically by one flag, one language, one monetary system, saying, "That isn't true here; we see two flags every day, and use two systems of money [dollars and pesos]." Since the two cities are divided by only the space of a cemented-in river, crossing is fairly easy, and most carry both Mexican and U.S. currency.

The concept of national values is a murky concept, where opinion, privilege and ideology mingle. National values and cultural values may or may not overlap, depending on the context, and tend to be confused with etiquette, a related but distinct issue. Often national values are defined by conservative groups as politeness. The celebration of politeness, cleanliness, and punctuality, for example, privileges certain classes over others. Those with greater access to water, soap, washing machines or servants are able to stay cleaner; those with private transportation, more able to be punctual. Given these values, corrupt politicians or drug lords can be clean, punctual, and well dressed, therefore privileged, but don't necessarily present models of national or cultural values.

For the purpose of this study, we define values as broader--a more subtly transmitted national agenda, apparent in the curriculum, management and organization of classrooms, and relationships between and among teachers and students. Halstead (1996: 5) defines this type of value system, ". . . principles, fundamental convictions, ideals, . . . life stances which act as general guides to behavior or as points of reference . . . or action closely connected to personal integrity and personal identity."

Through our research, we found that teachers, administrators, students, and parents on both sides of the border had many of the same universal values, but that there is a general hierarchy of values uniquely ordered by each culture. Understanding the differently ordered hierarchy of values and their apparent contradictions, we hope to help teachers and administrators understand their own values and their students

better, so they may prepare lessons and policy that are more reflective and better able to serve the students in their schools.

We compared schools close to the border, with others farther from the border, some in areas with meager economic resources and opportunities, others in middle class areas. Although it is not easy to compare poor and middle class in the U.S. and Mexico, especially since the economic crisis of the 1980s and the peso devaluations, there are similarities in class disparity and relative class status on each side. We specifically chose schools that may be comparable in class, proximity to the border, while taking into account the different meanings of class and income within each nation. To add to the complexity, there are students, rich and poor, who spend time in both El Paso and Juárez schools, as their families move back and forth across the border.

In each city we saw major variations in classroom management, class size, degrees of space between teachers and students, and teaching styles, and have attempted to come up with some generalities to illustrate cultural differences we saw enacted in classrooms. For example, in Juárez, where schools have two shifts,[9] we visited both morning and afternoon classes. Morning classes often have children with greater academic preparation, more constant care at home, and usually a higher family income. Morning classes tended to be slightly more orderly and academic than the afternoon classes. In the U.S. as well, student preparation varied and some classrooms were more orderly, others more chaotic. However we found similarities in the administrators' and teachers' cultural responses to these contexts.

Some basic differences make comparison difficult, but not impossible. Mexico and the U.S. both have laws that obligate school aged children to attend school, however, truancy is policed in the U.S. and in Mexico, children do not have to go to

[9]The two school shifts, AM and PM, in elementary schools are completely separate, each with its own principal, faculty, staff, and students.

school. Currently the U.S. has a policy of "social promotion," promoting students to the next grade level whether they have mastered the required material or not. Mexico, by contrast, has a policy of keeping students in the same grade level until they have mastered the required plan of studies, regardless of the student's age.

Methodology

In an effort to understand national and cultural values better and the interplay of values between the U.S. and Mexico, we reject functionalist notions of consensus and expertise that support an established, but not always equitable status quo (Cherryholmes, 1988; Calvo Ponton, 1989; Pescador, 1989). We are drawn to a more critical, reflective perspective on schooling and social training. This perspective allows an examination of underlying assumptions, contradictions, and new possibilities in education. Our work is based on definitions of critical education found in readings such as Freire (1995), Spring (1995), Rendón and Hope (1996), and Nieto (1996), that celebrate individual differences, pluralist forms of democracy, and emancipatory educational practices. Such methodology lends itself to more qualitative methods where there is room for multiple voices and multiple perspectives on civics and schooling (Wolcott, 1994), as well as the illogical nature of culture, "No person's life or culture is, in the final analysis, logical (McCarthy-Brown, 1991:20)." We also recognize that culture, society, and tradition are continually changing (Geertz, 1973). Our perspective comes with a recognition of the complexity of schooling and its place in the socialization of children. Beyond describing current privilege-centered schooling and socialization, we explore underlying norms and expectations that underlie educational systems.

Methods

Following basic ethnographic methods, we got to know our schools, visiting frequently and engaging in conversation, supporting and developing a complementary support system with full collaboration from the university, public schools, and the administrative offices in both Juárez and El Paso. The binational nature of this study supplied us with rich experiences for interacting with Juárez colleagues. Living on the border, we were able to organized binational conferences, and visit each other's schools. We served on master's theses committees and spoke at graduate gatherings at the local Juárez university. Traveling for joint research projects with colleagues from Juárez gave us the opportunity for full commentary on our interpretation of the research. This collaborative effort is in its forth year and continues to develop.

Initially we filmed approximately 25 hours of videotapes in El Paso and Juárez schools, analyzing their content for national and cultural values promoted through schooling. We concentrated on primary schools, focusing on cultural, national, and border similarities. We edited the video to about one hour in length, to show to students, teachers, and school administrators so they could validate, negate, and comment on our interpretation of schooling and values. We also showed the video to a group of South American civics teachers (representing Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru, and Ecuador) who were in the U.S. for special program on civics and education. The participants from Mexico City and South America, though not local, were included because of their related interests and Latino and Anglo perspectives on the Americas.

We contrasted bilingual and monolingual primary classes in the U.S. with primary classes and ESL lessons in Juárez. We compared the daily flag salute in individual classrooms in the U.S. with the weekly school-wide honors to the flag in Mexico.[10] We showed classroom management and teaching styles in both cities. The

[10]In the U.S., the flag salute takes place in individual classrooms at the beginning of each day. It is sometimes followed by singing the national anthem. In Mexico, honors to the flag are much more elaborate. The whole school--students, faculty, administration, and staff meet each Monday morning in a central patio, where students line up by classroom. A uniformed, militaristic drill team brings in the

first edited version of the video with the original teacher and classroom sounds and voices was show to El Paso and Juárez students, and administrators. Later we added a voice-over narration (one version in English, another in Spanish) that we shared with each of the schools we visited, at binational educational conferences, and in local undergraduate and graduate university education classes.

Examining interpretations of the tape, we found critical thought, rejections and confirmations of stereotypes, and value judgments from all parties regarding curriculum, pedagogy, management, and underlying philosophical assumptions. For example, at one point in the tape, ESL students in Mexico were repeating after their teacher, "I have five yellow pencils." a U.S. teacher exclaimed, "Horrors, rote learning!" But the Mexican kids, viewing the same segment, repeated with the students on tape, "I have five yellow pencils," happily remembering their lesson.

General Responses to the Tape

We showed the tape in varying stages to different groups in the U.S. and Mexico: students, teachers, principals, and parents, undergraduate and graduate university classes in the education department at the local U.S. university, groups of teachers and university professors of pedagogy in Juárez. Many of those who viewed the tape had attended school in both Juárez and El Paso, so know first hand the differences in the two educational systems. Their responses helped us construct the themes of relationships, nationalism, and collectivity.

The different groups often had similar comments and responses. All noticed the disparity of resources of the two countries, but were able to get past that, realizing that the governments spend differently on education.[11] Each mentally compared differences

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flag, while the rest of the school stands at attention. Then follows the pledge, the national anthem, and general announcements.

[11]In Juárez, the government spends the equivalent of approximately $50.00 U.S. dollars per student per year. This amount includes teachers' salaries, as well as materials and school upkeep. Parents are asked

and similarities in the two systems. Those who were graduate students in both countries were more analytical of the teaching content and the teaching process. Those videotaped, teachers and students alike, tended to focus on themselves first. Teachers reacted to their own image or that of the classroom more critically, "Oh! I look so fat!" one said. Another commented, "Oh no, David isn't paying attention and I didn't even notice. Students and teachers alike interacted with the tape, answering questions posed by the teacher in the video, cheering for kids who got the "right answer," singing along with national anthems, reciting the pledge of allegiance, and making comments on the content of the video.

One of the first group we showed the video to, were students at Nicolas Bravo Primary School, a middle class area of Juárez. In attendance were the principal, a showcase English teacher, and about 15 fifth graders. On this occasion, the kids outnumbered the adults, so felt comfortable and asked most of the questions and made most of the comments. They watched with interest, especially when they came on the screen, smiling and calling out names as they recognized each other on tape.

They first noticed the obvious differences, such as resources, lack of uniforms on the U.S. side, them moved on to self-critique. Some of the questions they asked about the El Paso kids included, "Do they share desks like we do? What time do they get out of school? How big are the classes? Do they teach singing and music and P.E.? Do you have kindergartens attached to the schools like we do? Do they wear uniforms like we do? When asked what they thought about the U.S. students not wearing school uniforms, one fifth grade student said, that he thought uniforms were good--"how else can people identify where you come from or go to school."

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to contribute money at the beginning of each year for classroom supplies, and books are provided without extra cost from the national government. In the U.S., the yearly dollar amount spent is approximately $5,000.00 per student per year. Teachers in Juárez tend to make the equivalent of approximately $6,000.00 to 10,000.00 yearly; El Paso teachers, approximately $22,000.00 to 45,000.00.

The ESL teacher in the film did an immediate self-critique, noting that the kids were not responding to his lesson. He had been teaching them the words to "Tie a Yellow Ribbon" as part of their ESL lesson and he could see how little they knew. He was pleased to see, though, that as the kids watched themselves on the video, they sang along in English, proof that the lesson had come to fruition.

At some U.S. schools we showed the tape to teachers and the principal in the library, at others we went into individual classrooms where we had filmed. Kids from a U.S. bilingual first grade class intent on watching the film, interacted with the film. Their teacher, raised in Juárez, remembered the pledge and the national anthem, saying that Mexico has a more military anthem--but ours is more melodic. The classroom aid was amazed at the class size in Juárez. Many bilingual teachers and students in El Paso were originally from Juárez, so were delighted to see schools that they knew or even went to, exclaiming, "I went there!" They sang along with the national anthem or saluted the flag in fond memory.

Different conceptions of values regarding people, time, collectivity, and national uniqueness kept emerging from our observations. The concepts sometimes overlapped, and other times varied in significance depending on the context. The three themes, (1) relationships vs. time, (2) nationalism vs. hegemony , and (3) sociability vs. individualistic behavior, were reflected and valued in both countries, but tended to show collective expectations of each culture.

Relationships vs. Time

While both human relationships and notions of time are important to people in Juárez and El Paso, frequently they were ordered differently. In the U.S., time, punctuality, and clock driven agendas seem to take precedence over personal contact and human relations. Mexico, by contrast, while valuing both time and people, placed human relationships and a more organic flow of activities above time. This is not to

say that U.S. people are cold and non-supportive of each other, or to fortify the stereotype of Mexico and the "mañana syndrome" where time and punctuality are irrelevant, but it points to a preference either for interaction or efficiency.

We were surprised when we realized that in Juárez classrooms, there was rarely a clock on the wall, and kids rarely wore wrist watches; the teacher was usually the only one in the class with a watch. In only 2 or 3 elementary classrooms did we observe a clock on the wall, and this, brought in by the teacher as a decoration as much as a time piece. In El Paso, we noticed many children with watches, a clock in every classroom and often in the halls, as well as many lessons based on or around telling time, e.g., counting by fives, pie graphs, and estimating. The variation may have been partly due to resources, but was too common to be merely economic.

In Juárez schools, buzzers announcing class and recess time, are buzzed at approximate (rather than exact) times, when the principal feels it is appropriate. Teachers responded to bells by sending kids out to recess soon thereafter, as students bring their work to closure before running out to play. In the U.S., teachers usually follow a schedule based on distinct time frames. If buzzers are used, they are often on a timer set to go off at exact times, whether appropriate to the lesson or not. On many occasions, we have seen U.S. students throw their unfinished work in their desk and rush out to recess at the sound of the recess buzzer. Although Mexico's curriculum is centralized and prescribed,[12] teachers often deviate from the standard by taking the time they need develop a lesson. We saw very few calendars in Juárez classrooms, but primary teachers occasionally started assignments by having students write the date at the top of the page. U.S. primary teachers frequently start the day with a group discussion based on the calendar date, day, season, and sometimes weather.

[12]Public education throughout Mexico is follows one curriculum and uses one set of textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education.

Clocks, watches, and calendars are major icons in U.S. rooms and learning to use them is built into different lessons, such as math, science, social studies and lessons on telling time. Quiet and order were greatly valued in the U.S. as well as time on task. One El Paso teacher noted the concentration on time in the video, commenting, "We are so time-oriented," and others agreeing, parodied themselves in mock teacher voices, "You have 30 seconds to get back to your seat."

A South American teacher reflecting on the abundance of watches in U.S. classrooms, suggested that the educational process was more mechanical, and time was more organized, making robots out of children. Teachers, she said, were not looking at peek interests of kids, but the clock. Her analysis, she explained, built on different cultural notions of time (*temporalidad*) i.e., the difference between linear and cyclical notions of time, that determine practice in the two countries. She suggested that the use of time, space, and participation in Mexico is part of learning, recognizing that the basis of learning is within the student. On another level, the emphasis on schedules over people can be seen as training for adulthood in the U.S., with its focus on a work ethic and productivity.

Another example of the Mexican emphasis on people over schedules, is the latitude local level administrators have to make changes in daily routine, even in a highly centralized educational system. On one visit, where U.S. colleagues were to instruct students on the use of the internet (an activity which most likely would have happened after school in the U.S.), the principal shut down the whole school for the event. She then invited back about 40 or 50 of the best students and about 20 teachers, some borrowed from other schools to assist students and learn about the internet themselves. Our visits were always accompanied by formal refreshments and meals, as well as plenty of time for informal chatting among all participants.

In Juárez, when it comes down to time on task or human relationships, people are more important. For example, on several occasion in Juárez schools, we watched

as a the teacher spent her recess and part of class time talking with parents. On other occasions, teachers left their classes to introduce us to the principal or guide us around the school. Children often approached us during class to greet us, give us a hug, sit on our lap, or ask us to "say something in English," giggling when we did. Once we apologized to the teacher for disrupting her class, she said that it wasn't a problem, since the kids would find someone else to talk to if we weren't there. She allowed students to come up in the middle of the lesson to ask questions, get help with zippers, or get permission to go to the restroom. By contrast, children in the U.S. kids stay in their seats much more, and were more distant from the teacher, and us as visitors. Teachers from the U.S., Mexico, and South America all noticed that teachers in Mexico, and U.S. bilingual teachers of Mexican heritage showed more closeness and warmth toward their students.

Sociability vs. Individualism

Related to the people orientation of Juárez schools and the stricter sense of time and organization in U.S. schools is the concept of sociability, or a feeling of belonging, in contrast to individual behavior. When they taught, teachers in the U.S. directed lessons, interacting most often in teacher-student dyads. In Juárez, teachers also gave directive lessons, but interacted more with students, going from desk to desk to help groups of students. Students also tended to group themselves informally, helping, sharing ideas, space, and materials.

While U.S. culture is often considered to have a greater emphasis on individuality, schools require greater conformity in school. Students are always supervised, and are increasingly held accountable to state and national standardized tests. Interestingly, uniforms in Mexico were seen as symbol of belonging, rather than

conformity, while in the U.S., uniforms symbolize conformity more than group identity.[13]

In Juárez teachers tend to nurture a collectivity or community, but also allow more chaotic or independent behavior in the classroom. This often has the appearance of letting "kids be kids." Juárez teachers noticed that kids in the El Paso classes seemed more self-controlled; when the teacher leaves the room, students are quieter and stay seated. They related that in Juárez the kids get wild when the teacher is out of the room. Juárez teachers noticed that the teaching interaction was different in the U.S., that El Paso teachers were always supervising, kids were kept on task, and could not deviate from the lesson. The U.S. teachers noticed the difference too, many U.S. teachers thought the classes in Juárez were too noisy, "Shh!" one said, reacting to the background noise in the class. Teachers also asked what the lessons were all about in the Mexico classes. They were surprised that the kids in Juárez can walk up to the teacher during the class to "distract" her, in their words. Everyone, they said, seemed to be doing something different, "Is it a lesson?" a U.S. teacher asked. Regarding chaos, a graduate education student commented how the rooms in Juárez were noisy, but that it probably was "learning noise: kids working in groups, helping each other, discussing the project, to get the job done.

Classes are much bigger in Juárez, with an average of 30-35 students. El Paso averaged closer to 15 - 20 kids per room. Class size and meager resources in Juárez may contribute to the sociability of students where they share space, often three to a desk, working together in groups. However, large U.S. classes do not lend themselves to collective work in the same way. An El Paso teacher gasped at seeing the large classrooms in Juárez, "32 kids! and no helpers!?" Large classes have a tendency to reinforce the notion of social relationships, but contradict conformity, where kids move

[13]Uniforms are required for public schools in Mexico, but only recently have U.S. public schools been opting for uniforms.

about the class more freely. A U.S. graduate student who had gone to primary school in Juárez explained that you need to be social to survive in Mexico, to share space, materials, and ideas.

In the U.S. there is less student participation, teachers and students seemed comfortable with a more controlled atmosphere. With the greater sociability, teachers and students in Mexico seem more comfortable with grouping; several mentioned that in Mexico there was a very strong sense of grouping, that kids did it themselves, with out direction or control of the teacher. A student teacher added that on the U.S. side the students won't group unless the teacher structures it, and then resist sometimes. She mentioned that the students look to the teacher in the U.S. classes, that the teacher-student dyad is the norm, all the way to the university. Many noticed the control that the U.S. teachers had. They decide who succeeds, who does not, just based on their impressions and sometimes their prejudices.

Part of the apparent chaos or individualism, one Juárez teacher told me, is that she wants her students to like school. "There are no bad kids," she related, "Just some who have more trouble controlling themselves." This same teacher often warned students that if they didn't finish their work, they would not be able to go out for recess, and that if they didn't get their name on the "happy"[14] side of the chalkboard, they would not get a candy when they went home. These warnings were motivational rather than punitive measures, as they all went out to recess, work done or not, and they all received candy, happy face or not. She said she wanted them to go home with a good feeling about school. Classes that don't maintain at least 30 students are closed and the teacher has to look elsewhere for work.

[14]Often called "assertive discipline," this method of class management builds on behaviorism, rewarding good behavior symbolically by listing those who exhibit "good" behavior on the chalkboard under a caricature of a happy face.

Many were surprised at the sizes of the classes. Several students commented on the waste of supplies and materials in the U.S., and in contrast, the scarcity in Mexico. Mexican and South American teachers agreed that because of the economic crisis, "*de la nada, sacamos bastante*(we're very creative)." A U.S. graduate student, who attended primary school in Mexico mentioned that U.S. kids don't appreciate what they are getting, that if they had to pay for pencils, dittoes, etc. like the Mexican kids, they might appreciate them more.

While teachers in both cities are varied, many very warm and caring, others distant and caring, some not caring at all, most video viewers saw that the physical and emotional distance between students and teachers as closer in Juárez, (and sometimes in U.S. bilingual classes with Mexican American teachers). Mexican teachers use affectionate terms with their students, like daughter or son (hija/o), they touch more, and make requests more personal, e.g., "Put the date on the paper *for me*." One of the Juárez teachers noticed that the Mexican kids have confidence to go up to the teachers. Several others agreed, noting that Mexican kids feel much freer and more comfortable to approach the teachers. They noticed that U.S. teachers more often had a barrier that kids did not pass, indicating to them a greater distance between students and teachers.

Students in a graduate seminar on education at UTEP found the concept of personal space particularly interesting. One saw personal space as defined so precisely on the U.S. side because students need to fit in and be the piece of the machinery: to fit into your "place" in the world of jobs. Another added that the personal space resembled the cubicles of Dilbert and his office mates, where people are kept separate and isolated from one another for the purposes of capitalist productivity.

Lack of financial resources may contribute to the greater sense of community, collegiality, and creativity in Mexican classrooms. Children had to share more, help each other out with materials and ideas, and sit closer sharing desks. Teachers had to be more creative in order to provide students with meaningful, participatory lessons.

The greater creativity, sharing and independence can also appear to be chaotic, something noticed by many U.S. teachers.

Individual accountability, a uniquely U.S. concept is related to personal space. In Juárez schools, students are asked to be responsible for their work, but rarely are students singled out. For example, an ESL teacher walked around the room to check to see if everyone had finished her/his homework. He discreetly encouraged those who had, with "*muy bien*" and those who had not, with "that's a problem, without doing the homework, we can't progress." He then gave a mini lecture at the front of the class, without pointing out any individuals, talking about winners and losers, asking which they wanted to be, and they all shouted "winners!" He reminded them that teachers are not here to baby-sit or to chastise, but to help them learn, and help them enjoy learning.

The students' responsibility for her/his own learning is reflected in teachers' attitudes, too. Juárez teachers are not held responsible if students fail, as they are in the U.S. They see that there are many possible contributing factors to student failure: the child's failure to pay attention, a mental deficit, the parents lack of care and encouragement, etc.. Both countries have end of year centralized, standardized tests, but El Paso uses the tests to hold teachers and schools accountable for students' work. Mexican teachers see failure or success as more integrated and social, taking into account the child's ability and effort, her parents' encouragement, the social setting, and teacher's input.

Social collectivity was reflected in architecture as well as classroom organization, and in the physical organization of each classroom. One Juárez teacher noted that the school system reflects the culture in how classes are run, and how schools are set up. U.S. schools have very little informal central meeting places, although auditoriums and the principal's office, though often crowded, can serve as common ground. For recess, El Paso schools usually separate kids to side or rear

playground areas that are supervised by teachers or parents. Mexican schools have a patio, or central meeting place in the center of the school, which is also used as a playground.

Sociability and individuality are reflected in the flag ceremonies with Mexican ceremonies more collective--the whole schools turns out for a formal, militaristic flag ceremony. A first grade Juárez school teacher noticed how in a Juárez school, faculty and administration, and students, were more like a family, where everyone turns out together for the flag ceremony. She saw the U.S. flag salute as more solitary or individual. A U.S. education student noted that the U.S. flag ritual is very abstract, devoid of community or ceremony, and the Mexican flag ritual was holistic, with the whole school present and more ceremony.

Nationalism vs. Hegemony

A third interesting and tangled issue was the amount that each country influenced each other, and at the same time bought into and resisted their influence. Yet this type of hegemony is temporary, continuously constructed and reconstructed along power lines (Vaughan, 1997). Obvious examples include practicing each others' holidays and in mixing and borrowing language. Mexican cultural holidays like the Day of the Dead or the Virgin of Guadalupe Day have been experiencing a conscious resurgence in the last few decades in both cities. Until lately, Halloween had become very popular in Mexico, almost more popular than the Day of the Dead. Thanksgiving, another popular U.S. holiday, is also popular in Juárez. Mexican families, especially those with relatives in the U.S,. enjoy traditional Thanksgiving feasts.

We happened to be in a first grade class in December 12, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe when the teacher was talking about its cultural significance for Mexicans. The teacher pointed out how Matachin (traditional Indian) dancers were part of the

Virgin of Guadalupe Day celebration. She later told us that she tries to teach Mexican holidays, since there is such force to accept holidays borrowed from U.S. culture, like Halloween and Thanksgiving. Later on that day, as they planned a class Christmas celebration, the kids voted on party food. They suggested hot dogs, *hamburguesas*, pizza, and nachos, all U.S. in origin and transplanted to Mexico. Pizza won.

A related example is Three Kings Day, the 6th of January, once the traditional day of gift giving in Mexico. Now, many in Juárez celebrate both days, but give gifts on December 25th, like in the U.S. As in Juárez, many in El Paso, of Mexican heritage open presents on December 25th, but also celebrate Three Kings Day with the traditional *rosca*, a ring shaped sweet bread topped with candied fruit, and a tiny plastic doll representing Jesus baked inside. Many in Juárez lament that the U.S. holiday, Christmas, is taking over the traditional Three Kings Day in Juárez.

American English and Mexican Spanish affect each other in subtle ways, where words like *fensa* for fence (instead of *barandal*), or *yonke* for junkyard (instead of *chatarra*), as well as code switching, are frequent. While many Anglos are at least partially fluent in Spanish, others resent the fact that El Paso is a truly bilingual city. They have trouble understanding why U.S. employers require those they hire to be bilingual, or that Mariachi music is so popular.

Many businesses operate on both sides of the border, restaurants being the most obvious (e.g., Taco Tote, Cafe Dali, McDonald's, Peter Piper's Pizza). In El Paso, Mexican-Americans often identity with Mexican culture, and hang on to it, while at the same time they see themselves fully American. We noted far more murals depicting the Virgin of Guadalupe (known also as the Empress of Mexico) on El Paso walls than in Juárez. The image is revered as an important symbol that ties people to their Mexican heritage.

El Paso and Juárez teachers and administrators alike remarked how Mexicans are much more patriotic than in the U.S.. In Mexico, schools are named after national

military heroes and events much more than in the U.S. (e.g., Benito Juárez, Nicolas Bravo, *16 de septiembre*, *20 de noviembre*, etc.). U.S. graduate education students, too, noted that civic transmission seemed more formal in Mexico, there seemed to be more pride in expressing their nationalism. A state level administrator in Juárez asserted that Mexican civics taught by their flag ceremony was very important, not just a lesson in civics, but in order, organization, precision, and community. "It was a ritual," he said, "that was to be respected without question." "The U.S. flag salute, on the other hand," he commented, was "short, unorganized, more individual, and not very impressive."

Teachers viewing the video expressed the importance of helping students understand the meaning behind patriotic ceremonies. A first grade teacher from Juárez stressed the importance of students learning what the patriotic marches, anthems, pledges, and flags represent. One U.S. teacher had put the words of the national anthem on a poster to help children learn them. "I always have to teach the meaning of the song, 'ramparts', for instance, is very hard" another U.S. teacher remarked. El Paso school teachers saw Mexico's civic ceremonies as more formal and militaristic than in the U.S. Anglos and Mexican Americans in the U.S. both lamented that the U.S. schools do not teach as much patriotism as they should.

In Juárez, good citizenship refers to nationalistic behavior more often, a respect for the flag, the president, authority, knowing Mexico's history, etc. El Paso schools seem to value citizenship over nationalism. Teachers define good citizenship as "listening to teachers, no bad words, no fighting, following instructions, no tattling, and doing homework." An El Paso elementary school principal lectured students on being good citizens at school so they could be good citizens when grown up, saying that following the rules now, is like following laws later." A Canadian ESL teacher, currently working in Mexico City was particularly critical of one of the U.S. teachers who had a tight control over her class (who not incidentally was voted the teacher of

the year). He saw her as very rule-oriented (the lesson was on rules). He said that if she ccame to Mexico she would go crazy, she'd say, "Nobody's following the rules here!"

Conclusion

Cross cultural comparisons are not simple, but have layers of interpretations and impressions, particularly in a border region with fluid blending and crossing, yet divided by an imaginary political line, defined variously as a scar, an interface, a point of contact, and a point of separation. We find that schools are as much a microcosm of society itself, as a place where society is recreated. The mutual influences and interaction between schooling and society are more complex, yet schooling is one way to reinforce cultural and national values and as training for adulthood both in work and in social life.

While dominant culture influence educational systems, it is important to acknowledge and respond to the pluralism within educational settings. Particularly in El Paso, where 70 to 95 percent of the students are of Mexican heritage depending on the school. It can only enhance students' learning to respond to and include their unique cultural learning patterns. Understanding the interconnectedness between the two cites on many levels can help teachers in both cities to respond to their students educational needs, creating a curriculum, teaching style, and teacher training programs that acknowledge and appreciate the U.S.-Mexico solidarity.

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