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ABSTRACT
        Sociocultural theory emphasizes the social nature of
learning and the cultural-historical contexts in which interactions take
place. Thus, teacher-student interactions and the relations that are fostered
through these contexts play an especially vital role in student achievement.
It has been argued that culturally responsive instruction can have a positive
impact on interactions between teachers and students. This paper explores the
effect of sociocultural factors on the relationships and interactions between
Latino students and 32 Latino teachers and paraeducators. Findings suggest
that knowledge of students' culture and communities, their primary language,
and the interactional styles with which they are familiar facilitates meeting
their academic and social needs. Findings also suggest that school roles
shape interactions, and that teachers and paraeducators focus on different
aspects of children's development. The term paraeducator is used to describe
school personnel hired to assist students directly in the classroom. It is
concluded that school contexts must afford diverse students opportunities to
utilize the resources they bring to the classroom by validating those
resources and creating learning contexts that tap into them. The idea is not
new, but putting it into practice has proved difficult. (Contains 37
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SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS IN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:
EXAMINING LATINO TEACHERS' AND PARAEDUCATORS' INTERACTIONS WITH LATINO STUDENTS

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Abstract

Sociocultural theory emphasizes the social nature of learning and the cultural-historical contexts in which interactions take place. Thus, teacher-student interactions and the relationships that are fostered through these contexts play an especially vital role in student achievement. It has been argued that culturally responsive instruction can have a positive impact on interactions between teachers and students. This paper explores the impact of sociocultural factors on the relationships and interactions between Latino students and 32 Latino teachers and paraeducators. Findings suggest that knowledge of students' culture and communities, their primary language, and the interactional styles with which they are familiar facilitates meeting their academic and social needs. Findings also suggest that school roles shape interactions, and that teachers and paraeducators focus on different aspects of children's development.

The term *paraeducator* is used throughout this paper to indicate school personnel hired to assist students directly in the classroom. Often, they are referred to as teaching assistants, teacher aids, paraprofessionals, or instructional aids.

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Introduction

Due to the work of Vygotsky (1978; 1987) and others (Rogoff, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1998), learning and development have begun to be conceptualized as sociocultural processes. This view emphasizes the social nature of learning and seeks answers to underachievement in the interactions that produce learning and in the contexts that effect those interactions. Teacher-student interactions and the relationships that are fostered through these interactions play an especially vital role in learning and academic achievement (Hartup, 1985; Pianta, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). Yet, evidence suggests that minority children experience teacher-student relationships that are less than supportive (AAUW, 1992; Heath, 1983; Phillips, 1972; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1973). Some researchers hypothesize that this is due in part to a lack of responsiveness to the experiences, interests, and needs of these students (Valenzuela, 1999; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994).

The study discussed in this report explored the impact of sociocultural factors on the relationships and interactions between Latino students and Latino teachers and paraeducators. Because the participants were fluent speakers of the students' primary language and were knowledgeable of the students' culture, we believed that they would interact with students in ways that reflected this shared background. We were also aware that the roles these two groups of educators played in school were different, and we sought to document what consequences these differences had on interactions and relationships with students.

This report begins with a brief discussion of sociocultural theory, framing the significance of student-teacher relationships. A brief description of the methodology follows. The bulk of the report examines and compares the ways these Latino paraeducators and teachers interacted with students in various contexts.

Interactions, Relationships, and Learning: A Sociocultural Approach

Sociocultural theory is founded on the notion that learning is socially mediated and rooted in specific cultural-historical contexts. Vygotsky (1978; 1987) argued that learning occurs as individuals engage in culturally-meaningful productive activity with the assistance of a more competent other. This presumes the task is completed in collaboration, "transforming participation," as the learner gains competence and the ability to take greater responsibility over the more cognitively-demanding parts of the task (Rogoff, 1995).

Further, Vygotsky contends that the learner must be participating at a level that produces learning and stimulates development. This "zone of proximal development" is the range between the level of difficulty at which the learner can perform independently and the highest level at which she can perform with assistance. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) point out that continuous assessment of the learner's performance is essential to ensure responsive assistance.

As learners move through the zone, they become more independent and are able to rely less on others for assistance. Central to this transformation is the development of the tools that mediate the higher mental functions of which only humans are capable. Mediation is dependent on a shared understanding of the tool, such as language, and an acceptance of the cultural values embedded in the tool (Wertsch, 1998).

Interactions between teachers and students take place within the context of relationships. Relationships develop through interactions between people that occur

over time and that continue based on previous interactions (Hartup, 1985). Hartup (1985) suggests that the knowledge of and commitment to another person that characterizes close relationships is what facilitates collaboration that is responsive to the learner. He further contends that the dialogue that takes place between people who know each other well and have an interest in joint participation is likely to be more effective in mediating the process by which regulation of cognitive functions becomes internalized by the learner. Other researchers have come to similar conclusions (Tizard, 1985).

Relationships are also built within larger social contexts. For example, teacher-student interactions and relationships are bound by the social organization of schools and classrooms (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Pianta (1999) proposes that broader contextual factors characteristic of schools, such as the formality of classroom instruction, limit the types of interactions that take place. He argues that the trust that is fostered between teachers and students while playing and talking outside of the typical classroom environment is key to student adjustment to school, affect toward the teacher, and engagement in school and academic tasks.

To a degree, Pianta's recommendations are in line with a different but related body of literature on developing "caring" relationships with students. Noddings (1984) suggests that caring involves recognizing that students have emotional and social needs as well as academic needs. Valenzuela (1999) has extended this theory to include the notion that caring for minority students involves recognizing their social position in society, being willing to discuss the issues that concern them, and validating the wealth of diverse knowledge they bring to the classroom, including their language and experiences.

Seeing students as "whole persons" reflects a strand of the research on funds of knowledge, which emphasizes the importance of understanding students' home and community resources and validating and building on these resources in instruction (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Moll, Amanti, Nett, & Gonzalez, 1992; Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1995). Funds of knowledge refers to the practical and intellectual knowledge found in household and community activity. It constitutes the collective knowledge found among social networks of households that function through the reciprocal exchange of resources (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Veléz-Ibáñez, 1988). This exchange, essential to household survival, is sustained through confianza (mutual trust), which is reestablished and confirmed through each reciprocal social transaction and produces relationships that are long lasting (Veléz-Ibáñez, 1988). Moll and Greenberg (1990) argue that it is through these relationships that development occurs, as children participate in activities with people they trust.

Research on teacher interactions with minority children has generally been consistent, documenting common use of the teacher recitation script (Mehan, 1979), low academic expectations (Ortíz, 1988), mediation through cultural tools with which minority children are unfamiliar (Heath, 1983), and a devaluation of the linguistic and intellectual resources of diverse students (Heath, 1983; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll et al., 1992). The relationships that evolve from these classroom interactions are not likely to produce contexts that support learning.

Yet, most of these studies have been based on teachers who have a limited knowledge of the culture and community of their students. In our study, the focus has been on Latino paraeducators and teachers working with Latino language minority students. We have sought to understand how these educators draw from their own linguistic, cultural, and community knowledge in interacting with students, and how

this impacts the relationships they develop with students and the contexts in which they teach.

Existing ethnographic studies on Latino families have been particularly useful in helping us to identify aspects of interactions related to the cultural and community-based knowledge of the Latino paraeducators and teachers. The Latino families that have been studied have been found to place a high value on the family unit, encouraging close physical proximity and frequent interaction (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Flores Newman, Romero, Arredondo, & Rodriguez, 1999; Valdez, 1996). Interactions among children within family contexts have been described as cooperative, with children often completing chores and homework activities together (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991).

Studies on interactional styles have documented the use of playfulness as a means of correcting students' behaviors and language use (Bhimji,1997), as well as the common use of *cariño* (caring) often displayed in addressing children as *mija/o*. Latino teachers have also been found to address children in this manner (McCollum, 1989).

Moll and his colleagues (Moll et al, 1992) have documented that the Latino families they studied in Arizona have conceptual knowledge in many areas including agriculture, alternative medicine, and construction. These researchers have worked with teachers to gain access to this knowledge and to create instruction that draws on these resources. Such efforts have been shown to be effective in engaging students and providing teachers with an expanded view of students' strengths (Gonzalez et al, 1995). Elsewhere, teachers working in a Latino community were encouraged to develop writing projects that drew on students' interests and experiences (Moll & Diaz, 1987). One teacher asked her students to do a report on bilingualism. The other asked students to write about the recent murder of their paraeducator. In both projects, student products were longer and more complex than what they generally produced.

In addition, some studies have shown that Latino children engage in hybrid language practices, often code-switching between English and Spanish, as well using both formal and informal registers in strategic ways to communicate and to create bonds with others who can participate in these hybrid practices. Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, Alvarez, & Chiu (1999) found that these hybrid interactions, when used to communicate through email in an after school computer club, produced superior written products. Others have documented how children negotiate between two languages and two cultures to broker for their families (Tse, 1995). Moll and Diaz (1987) have shown how the ability to draw on the primary language when discussing English texts can result in higher-level discussions and produce a more realistic assessment of students' text comprehension and analysis.

Although we do not believe that any ethnic group can be neatly described with respect to their values, practices, and experiences, these studies do provide some very general insight into what aspects of paraeducators' and teachers' interactions likely stem from their cultural and community knowledge and experiences. Our goal in this paper is to show how the Latino paraeducators and teachers we studied utilized this knowledge in their interactions with students and how the different roles they played resulted in different relationships with students.

Methods

The 2-year study took place in two large public elementary schools located in inner city environments in Southern California. Both schools serve low-income Latino language minority children. Participants were thirty-two Latino paraeducators, eight of whom had

secured positions as teachers within the past 3 years. Because of this distinction, we refer to the participants as paraeducators and teachers in order to compare how these different roles impact relations and interactions with students. It was our intent to study paraeducators, because they often live in the same communities in which they work and would be likely to have a knowledge of the students' culture. Also, having been hired as bilingual aides, we believed that they would be proficient in the students' primary language. It was our premise that these paraeducators would prove to be important resources for tapping into students' prior knowledge and providing cultural scaffolding. The data sources utilized in the study are explained below.

Classroom observations. Between eight and ten classroom observations were made of each participant working directly with students on literacy activities. The observations were conducted by doctoral students between March 1998 and February 1999. Lengths of observations averaged 45 minutes. Field notes were taken during these observations and expanded after leaving the site.

Informal conversations and observations. Weekly visits to the schools resulted in friendly relationships with the participants and led to many informal conversations and observations. These took place in school hallways, during recess, and sometimes over lunch in nearby restaurants. These conversations and observations were written up after leaving the site.

Interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant to maintain confidentially. Interviews explored teacher beliefs, school roles, the role of culture and language in learning, and student-teacher relationships. Interviews averaged around 3 hours with a focus on maintaining rapport.

Because some participants' comments indicated conflict between paraeducators and the classroom teachers with whom they worked, we decided to interview the classroom teachers as well. We interviewed at least one teacher with whom each participant had worked. Some of the teachers had worked with more than one of the 32 study participants; thus, twenty-five teachers were interviewed to compare perspectives and gain greater insight. One administrator at each site was also interviewed about the role of the paraeducator. Interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Structured classroom observation (ASOS). The Activity Setting Observation System (ASOS) (Tharp, Rivera, Youpa, Dalton, Guardino, & Lasky, 1998) was developed to analyze, quantify, and provide a thin description of activities. The ASOS uses specific theory-based categories to describe various features of activity settings, operationalized as the who, what, when, where, why, and how of any social setting. These categories include the following: a) joint productive activity, b) teacher/student dialogue, c) responsive assistance, d) contextualization, e) connected activity setting, f) modeling, g) student initiative or choice. The ASOS was conducted once with each paraeducator.

Acculturation measure. The acculturation rating scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II) (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) was developed to assess acculturation processes by measuring cultural orientation toward the Mexican culture and the Anglo culture. This measure was used to better understand whether interactions with students were related to paraeducators' levels of acculturation.

Data Analysis. This paper draws primarily from the field notes of classroom observations and informal conversations as well as from interview transcripts.

Although we do not report on the findings from the ASOS and the acculturation measure here, this data did serve to support our qualitative findings.

Analysis of field notes followed procedures outlined in Miles & Huberman (1994) and Glaser (1992). Each member of the team developed propositions at various stages of data collection that included their "best guesses." A preliminary case analysis of each paraeducator was developed by their usual observer. Finally, a "folk taxonomy" of what we called "sociocultural scaffolding" was developed.

Interview transcripts were coded by marking off chunks of discourse that were at first identified descriptively. Chunks that represented similar ideas were clustered into categories based on the themes they represented. As analysis proceeded, categories were modified and data was recoded. Field notes were then recoded, using the themes developed from the interviews, and interviews were also recoded based on the taxonomy developed from fieldnotes.

Familiar Contexts for Learning

Generally, the Latino teachers and paraeducators were found to interact with students in ways that resembled home and community-based interactions. Students were more at ease and often initiated interactions spontaneously with those teachers and paraeducators who used these interactional strategies. Sometimes, students' questions or comments related to the instructional activity in which they were engaged, but usually they talked about their out-of-school experiences and activities, revealing their funds of knowledge and providing brief glimpses of their capacity in out-of-school contexts.

However, these conversations were rarely pursued. This is not surprising given the lack of value that such knowledge is typically afforded in classroom contexts. Most often, these conversations took place outside of the classroom, during recess for example, when interaction was encouraged. The potential that these contexts provide for accessing students' funds of knowledge is critical, and the interactional behaviors that foster these opportunities are worth describing.

Demonstrating *cariño*

Cariño, an observable demonstration of affection commonly found in the Latino community, is characterized verbally through endearments such as *mijo/a* (my son/ daughter), *papito* (little daddy), *mi amor* (my love), and *mi reina* (my queen). It is expressed behaviorally through touch, proximity, and softened facial expressions. *Cariño* often serves to minimize the negative effects of correcting students' behaviors or academic errors. It is also used to encourage student participation in classroom activities, especially when students lack confidence.

> A boy who appears shy is called to fill in the weather chart. He clasps his hands looking down. The teacher puts her hands on his shoulders, and then the boy follows through, asking, *¿Cómo está el día hoy?* (How is the day today?)

All participants used *cariño* to some degree, but it was observed more often in paraeducators than in the teachers. This could be due to the formality of classroom contexts. For example, a teacher who used *cariño* only sparingly in the classroom displayed a very caring and close relationship with one student while viewing a performance in the auditorium. The student was observed whispering to the teacher, touching her shoulder, and threading his arm through hers, revealing a closeness that had not been observed in the classroom.

Relaxed instructional style

Classroom interactions with students took on features typical of informal conversations, like those found in home contexts. Students tended to speak out spontaneously, as is common when conversing with friends or family members. These comments were generally acknowledged without reprimands for not following school conventions of obtaining permission before speaking.

Students were rarely called on to respond without having first volunteered. When students were called on, it was typically to encourage participation in sharing ideas. Few paraeducators or teachers corrected students' academic mistakes in ways that embarrassed them. Indeed, academic and behavioral corrections were sometimes made in playful ways that the children were able to recognize as culturally-based and appreciate as verbal play. In one example, a paraeducator utilized this verbal play to remind the student to write his name on his work: Y ¿esto de quién es? De un fantasma? (And to whom does this belong? To a ghost?). The child smiled and immediately followed by writing his name. Similar forms of "teasing" as a means of correcting children were found in an ethnographic study of Mexican and Central American families (Bhimji, 1997). The younger paraeducators, in particular, indicated that they used this verbal play strategically to make students comfortable.

> I like to make it fun, because math could be very intimidating. I have a lot of eye contact with them. If they make a mistake, I make a joke about it. We laugh. It's not like you're going to die if you don't answer it right. So I give them that room to make mistakes and then they catch themselves and I say, "Good!" and I reinforce it. They love it. They feel comfortable to make mistakes.

Students were generally allowed to complete their independent work while talking with peers. Often, students were seen looking and commenting on others' work and sharing their own. Few teachers or paraeducators seemed to expect students to work silently or individually. A general emphasis on cooperation in the homes of Mexican-American families has been documented elsewhere (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991).

Paraeducators often engaged students in this informal talk while they assisted the students with their work. It was during these times that students engaged paraeducators in talk about their out-of-school experiences. In doing so, they were able to connect to paraeducators in more personal ways, as people rather than just teachers. Likewise, paraeducators gained knowledge about the children's lives outside of school.

> I have a girl that always tells me, "I've been to your house." It was where I used to live and she would pass by. There is that connection with her. She tells me about her brother, about her sister, about her mother, about her father. I let her share, but at a certain point I say, "I love that you share that with me, but let's leave it for later and let's start this now." Often, they try harder to get their work done in order to continue sharing.

While the same relaxed instructional strategies were used by teachers, they had fewer opportunities than the paraeducators to interact informally with students. Students, apparently aware of teachers' focus on the instructional task at hand, were rarely observed initiating off-task talk with them in the classroom.

Accepting students' ways of being

Paraeducators rarely raised their voices, used sarcasm, or in anyway embarrassed students. They were much more tolerant of student misbehaviors and dealt with them discretely, whispering their corrections. When students were corrected at greater length, they were pulled aside and spoken to out of earshot of other students. Public corrections, when needed, were brief and to the point. It was also rare for paraeducators to take away privileges from students for misbehavior. Instead, paraeducators tended to talk to students regarding their behavior and offered consejos (advice).

It was was more difficult for teachers who worked with large groups or tended to the whole class to correct students in sensitive ways. They often needed to correct students who were not working near them, making it a public correction from across the room. These corrections were usually quick and to the point, but they demonstrate the constraints of being responsible for the entire class rather than a small group and how this responsibility impacts student-teacher interactions. Teachers were also much more likely to place students in time out or take away privileges. As one teacher put it, "I am the bad one, because I have to be the one to enforce discipline."

Teachers and paraeducators commented that students always perceived the teacher as much more of an authority figure than the paraeducator. Many of the paraeducators felt that because of this students often feared teachers and chose to ask the paraeducators for assistance instead. Teachers made similar remarks and commented that their relationships with students had changed since becoming teachers.

Paraeducators were more flexible than teachers in allowing students to veer off task for a few minutes to pursue other concerns or to take time off from an activity when they complained of being tired. One paraeducator described her tendency to allow students to discuss their interests before getting on with the activity as "a mutual respect." For teachers, this was a luxury they did not feel they had. On the contrary, teachers were often observed limiting students' time on specific activities and rushing them to complete assignments.

Validating Student Resources and Instructional Needs

Latino teachers and paraeducators seemed particularly attuned to the needs of students. All identified Spanish as their primary language. Most indicated that they had grown up in working-class communities similar to that of their students. Many had lived or were, at the time of the study, living in the same community in which they worked. As a result, a number of the participants discussed the financial difficulties of the community, the lack of supervision for students whose families had to work late hours, and the obstacles families experienced in assisting their children with homework, especially when it was in English. This knowledge often led teachers to make instructional accommodations that took students' needs into account.

Incorporating students' knowledge in instruction

Participants were keenly aware of the importance of language proficiency for instruction. To varying degrees, both teachers and paraeducators utilized their primary language to make content comprehensible to students. In bilingual classrooms, instruction was offered primarily in Spanish. For classes that had transitioned into English instruction, the primary language was used to translate or provide an explanation. A few teachers code-switched continuously during instruction, drawing on both English and Spanish to create meaning. With these teachers, students were

allowed to use both codes as needed to express themselves; not once was a student reprimanded for doing so.

Once California's proposition 227 was implemented, use of the primary language was regulated. In many classrooms, it was allowed only for clarification purposes. In others, only the paraeducator was allowed to interact with students in Spanish. The impact of this mandate on classroom social relationships will likely be significant.

Paraeducators and teachers were also observed providing instruction that drew on students' personal or community experiences and knowledge. While this strategy was not always directly tied to comprehension or analysis of instructional content, it seemed to foster a sense of shared knowledge and understanding. Comments that brought to mind students' background knowledge produced enthusiastic participation from students. Teachers and particularly paraeducators seemed constrained by demands to teach skill-based lessons that offered few opportunities to employ students' prior knowledge. Interviews suggested that teachers were more aware of tying students background knowledge to instruction, whereas paraeducators had little understanding of how their knowledge of the culture and community could be directly tied to instructional purposes. Rather, paraeducators found cultural compatibility to be significant in providing students with an environment that was comfortable and familiar.

Wait time

Teachers and paraeducators sometimes waited longer than expected for students to respond to questions or to decode words while reading. Teachers and paraeducators often told the class to wait and give a student time to think. This was particularly important for English language learners performing in the second language, given that they might need to translate the information to the primary language, process it, and then translate again to the second language before offering a response.

In addition, paraeducators were frequently observed giving students more time to understand new concepts and skills, and repeating information on an individual basis for those students who seemed to be having difficulty. Indeed, it was typical for paraeducators to introduce the learning activity through direct instruction, model the individual activity to follow, and then proceed to interact with each student in their small group individually, assisting them in completing the product or learning the objective through a variety of means, including questioning. This allowed paraeducators the opportunity to closely assess and monitor student progress.

Teachers, conversely, had fewer opportunities to offer individual assistance. While paraeducators leading small groups had the benefit of focusing completely on the five or six students in their group, teachers leading small groups were still responsible for the entire class. When students engaged in individual activities within small groups led by the teacher, the teacher would take the opportunity to oversee the rest of the class, monitoring on-task behavior and sometimes making themselves available to answer questions from students working independently or in other groups.

Structuring for individual and community needs

Teachers recognized community constraints and structured classroom activities accordingly. For instance, a number of teachers indicated flexibility in regard to homework completion. One teacher mentioned that because students often lacked materials at home, she made sure to always send extra paper home for them to complete their homework. She allowed them to color these assignments in class the

following day. Another teacher scheduled in a half hour each morning to help students complete their homework assignments. A third teacher stayed after school to help students with their homework.

Paraeducators focused much more on meeting individual students' emotional and social needs. They suggested that they utilized informal talk strategically to gain information about students' personal lives, their families, and their out-of-school activities. Paraeducators' comments did not, however, suggest that they considered this information useful to the content of instruction. Few indicated that they shared this information with teachers.

Building *Confianza:* Mediating the Social and Emotional Needs of Students

Paraeducators seemed particularly concerned with the emotional and social welfare of students. They believed that it was important for children to have someone in the school they could trust and confide in, and that being Latino and speaking the same language was particularly salient in fostering a sense of *confianza*. While teachers were also aware of the difficulties students experienced and the need to offer them emotional support, their primary concern was to prepare students academically and that left little time for anything else.

The benefits of *confianza* were found in students' willingness to share their concerns or troubles with paraeducators and teachers. A number of paraeducators shared stories of students confiding their personal problems in them. While the paraeducators could not always assist the students with the issues they brought to them, the paraeducators felt it was important for the students to have someone with whom they could talk. For example, one such interaction involved a student who told the paraeducator that her father was in prison.

Paraeducators indicated that students sometimes just want to talk about what they are feeling and thinking, and that this allows some comfort. Teachers and paraeducators believed that knowing about their students was particularly important to understanding their academic performance, behavior, and motivation. Teachers were often informed about family problems as well, but their source of knowledge tended to be parents rather than students.

Shared experience

Having a sense of shared experience was thought to be key to the development of close relationships that fostered confianza. Latino paraeducators and teachers suggested that sharing common experiences allowed them to connect to students in meaningful ways. They believed that a special bond was created when students and teachers were able to interact in the primary language, regardless of the students' fluency in English. Typically, non-instructional talk between paraeducators and students was in Spanish. Non-Latino teachers working with Latino paraeducators also noted a special connection between students and paraeducators.

> You can sit down [with a student] and say in English, "How are you today?" but if you sit down with a boy or girl and you say, *"Mijita or mijito, cómo te va?"* defenses drop, and I feel the children are a bit more receptive just by changing the language.

Teachers and paraeducators talked about using personal disclosure as a means of establishing this sense of shared experience with students. They discussed sharing with students their own or their families' experiences living and growing up in similar

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communities. They felt that this allowed students to feel more comfortable with them and to develop greater confianza in them.

> I always tell the kids that I'm them 15 years ago. "You know, I'm just like you. I had the Payless shoes, the ripped jeans, and the ripped T-shirt, so don't tell me that [I'm] rich or different." I guess that's where the language comes in, because I talk English to them and its not meaningful. But if I can use words that dad uses or mom uses, maybe tell them stories about growing up, they say, "Wow, this guy really is just like me."

Paraeducators and teachers who went through the U.S. educational system often talked to students about the difficulties they faced learning English, or about their own parents not speaking English or not being able to help them with their homework. One teacher revealed that she tells her students how difficult learning English had been for her, and that at one time she had also been afraid of being laughed at for not pronouncing words correctly. She expressed her belief that this helps her students feel more comfortable about speaking English in the classroom. Clearly, it lets students know that if the teacher had difficulty learning English and now speaks it fluently, they too will be able to speak it fluently. Another teacher mentioned that she shares with her students how when she was their age she felt embarrassed that her parents did not speak English. She believes that sharing her experiences helps students cope with their own feelings. She commented that she tries to instill in students a pride in their culture.

> Relating to students' everyday experiences and interests is another way paraeducators create a sense of commonality with students. Often, these non-instructional talks between students and teachers, and especially between students and paraeducators, are in Spanish.

There's this boy in class that always comes to talk to me in Spanish. It is the only time he talks in Spanish, because the class is an English-only class and he talks about his family and what he did over the weekend. The other day he came as usual, and he started talking about the novelas (Spanish soap operas). We were having a good time and then this other student who doesn't speak Spanish came and I realized he did not understand us so I switched to English but then we had to change the topic and the connection seemed to be lost.

Reciprocal interactions

Paraeducators strongly believe that interacting with students "on their level" is an important way to establish confianza. They suggest that they try to relate to students as "friends" and foster more reciprocal types of interactions. "Listening to students" emerges as an important way to develop a close relationship with students. Paraeducators comment that teachers are often so busy meeting the academic demands of the whole class that they do not have the time to listen closely when students attempt to talk about non-instructional issues.

Particularly important to reciprocal interactions are contextual factors related to the activities in which paraeducators engage, as well as the environment in which these take place. Paraeducators are responsible for supervising the play area during students' recess time. There they interact with students in a less formal setting, which allows for greater flexibility. These interactions are often initiated by students. During this time, students have more control over their interactions with the school adult. Students can choose to interact or not, they have some choice in the content of the interaction, and they can take on the questioning role that is typically afforded the adult in the

classroom setting. This context also allows paraeducators and students to interact on an individual basis. This facilitates access to each other's activities and interests outside of school.

> I think a huge advantage is that we get to go out for recess, and it's no longer a structured classroom setting. Its more casual. You get to run around. Immediately we're no longer teacher-student. It's a good time to sit and talk. I always ask them, "What did you do last night?"

> We're out in the yard and students start talking to you about what they did at home. I try not to be like a teacher when we are out in the yard but like a friend. I think this helps, because they feel more comfortable with you and they are able to tell you if they don't understand.

> There are a couple of girls that, instead of wanting to play, they start asking me about my personal life. They're interested, and I don't have a problem disclosing some information, so I let them know where I am at, what I am doing, how many brothers I have and then they'll start sharing their information, I guess because I shared my information with them.

Teachers did not seem to have opportunities for these types of informal interactions with individual students. Few teachers spent time with students outside the classroom. One teacher recalled with nostalgia the interactions she had had with students when she was a paraeducator. As a teacher, her responsibilities are such that she has little time to spend with students informally. Rather, when teachers connect to students, sharing personal information, it is typically as a class and tied to an instructional goal.

> The teacher is so busy sometimes. They don't have time to talk to them individually, or they don't have time to really know what their needs are or what really interests them.

Academic Impact of Social Relationships

While cultural scaffolding strategies supported the development of personal relationships with students, allowing paraeducators access to students' out-of-school experiences and their interests, concerns, strengths, and instructional needs, we found that this knowledge was rarely used to enhance instruction or support academic growth. Knowledge paraeducators gained, often during informal interactions at recess, about students' household funds of knowledge was not strategically sought by paraeducators or teachers to enhance instruction, by linking new knowledge to students' prior knowledge. For example, when reading lessons dealt with issues that clearly offered opportunities for relating the content to students' personal and community experiences, paraeducators often missed those opportunities by merely connecting the topic to students' experiences but not using their knowledge to enhance students' comprehension, analysis, and evaluation of the text. The example below demonstrates a missed opportunity for enhancing the academic gains that are possible when students can relate material to their own personal experience. It also reveals the inability of the paraeducator to tie this knowledge closely to the text through comparisons and suggests that the missing link between tapping into students' funds of knowledge (through social relationships) and academic gains is instructional knowledge.

The paraeducator, an immigrant woman from El Salvador, told of a lesson during the formal interview in which the teacher, an Anglo man, had asked her to read a story. The

story was to serve as the basis for a series of reading and writing lessons. The paraeducator believed the story was too difficult for the students to understand in a second language, given that implementation of proposition 227 had begun only a few weeks earlier, thus restricting the use of Spanish in what had been a bilingual class. She also believed that the story would be of little interest to the students. She said that an initial reading of the story confirmed her beliefs; the children seemed disengaged and could not follow. She explained this to the teacher, and he allowed her to choose a book she felt to be more appropriate.

The paraeducator chose a book titled, The Wax Man, which is set on a farm, because it reminded her of the years she had spent on a farm as a child in El Salvador. She also chose the book, because many of the students or their families came from small rural towns. She thought the story would be of interest and familiar to the students. Our observations revealed that this was indeed the case, particularly for one boy in the group who, after the paraeducator asked the children to discuss the story, began to share his experiences. The following excerpt is taken from classroom fieldnotes.

Boy: You know what, I lived in a farm! I grew up there. Sometimes a chicken would disappear.

Paraeducator: What animals eat chicken?

Class: No answer

Paraeducator: Opossums... En Mexico los llaman tacuaches pero en Guatemala y en El Salvador los llaman taquazin.

Boy: And guess what, we catched one. And guess what we did, we ate it! They eat chicken so they taste sooooooo good!

Paraeducator: Do you think it was a true story?

Boy: Yes.

Boy 2: Things like that happen.

The story activates some of the boy's prior knowledge and experiences, but the paraeducator does not have the skill to draw more information from the child nor use his funds of knowledge to analyze the story. For example, the paraeducator could have posed open-ended questions. Instead, her questions required specific answers. She could have drawn the class back to the story, using the boy's knowledge of farm life to discuss why and how chickens "disappear," how that impacts the family income, and what measures families take to prevent this. She could have enhanced students' comprehension of the story by having them compare the story to urban life, the food chain, or factors that effect their daily lives.

This example underscores the need for teacher education that addresses the role funds of knowledge can play in instruction and the practical strategies that draw on this knowledge and connect it to the text for critical analysis.

It is worth noting that while an awareness of students' funds of knowledge and the instructional strategies that tap into this knowledge are fundamental to student achievement, the types of instructional activities that paraeducators engage in are generally low level and offer few opportunities for contextualization (Rueda & Monzo, 2000).

Furthermore, knowledge about students that paraeducators gained through social relationships with students would have been particularly relevant to teachers in making appropriate instructional decisions, such as developing units of study and lessons that draw on students' prior knowledge and interests. Unfortunately, paraeducators rarely shared this knowledge with teachers. Structural problems, such as power struggles between teachers and paraeducators, limited opportunities for collaboration (for further discussion of this finding, see Rueda & Monzó, 2000).

Because the focus of the present study was on instructional practice, not student achievement, we were not able to link specific paraeducator practices with individual student achievement. This is a noticeable gap in this area of research. However, there is good evidence from what is known about reading and literacy to suggest that factors such as funds of knowledge and appropriate instructional practices can optimize student growth and achievement.

Discussion

Findings indicate a number of sociocultural factors impacting social relationships. Familiarity with the culture and language of students allows Latino teachers and paraeducators to interact with students in ways that are familiar to them. This affords students the use of their own resources to negotiate within a linguistically- and culturally-different context.

Knowledge of students' language and experiences also gives teachers and paraeducators an avenue to relate to students as "one of them." With this shared knowledge, conversations can center on out-of-school activities, creating relationships that extended outside of school walls. Teachers and paraeducators' willingness to validate students' primary language and to a lesser degree their background knowledge and experiences helps to protect students from the negative messages they often receive about their culture and their community.

Teachers' and paraeducators' concern with issues that effect students' *educación*—in Spanish the term encompasses not only academic skills and knowledge, but morals and values as well—is evidence of the caring attitude that supports the development of close relationships, the caring attitude that the students in Valenzuela's (1999) study found missing in teachers. Teachers' and paraeducators' recognition of community constraints and needs allows them to structure classroom activities to support students' learning and social needs.

The different roles played by teachers and paraeducators in the school context have a significant impact on teacher-student interactions and the relationships that are developed. Teachers are constrained by the amount of time they can devote to individual students because of the demands of an entire class. Paraeducators tend to work with small groups of children, and their attention is focused solely on them. As a result, they interact with students on a more individual level and are able to better monitor their progress in specific tasks and to offer assistance that is responsive.

Paraeducators also interact with students in less formal ways. The reciprocity of interactions and the non-academic talk that takes place at recess are important factors in fostering close relationships built on confianza. These relationships provide paraeducators with key opportunities to gain access to students' funds of knowledge and to view or hear about their interests and capacities outside of school. Used strategically, these are opportunities to learn about children's resources and their potential to achieve in non-traditional ways.

While these different roles and the constraints of each account for some of the differences in interactions, beliefs appear to be another critical factor that determines the focus of teachers and paraeducators in interactions with students. Teachers are more focused on meeting the cognitive needs of students by increasing time on task and monitoring their academic growth. Paraeducators are more attuned to meeting the emotional and social needs of students, listening to their non-academic concerns and interests and interacting with them in ways that make them feel comfortable in the classroom.

Paraeducators believed that feeling comfortable in the classroom led to student motivation and increased help-seeking when needed. Indeed, paraeducators described the role of teachers in the school as that of a mother or family member and discussed the need to create a classroom environment that was similar to the home environment. Teachers on the other hand, were much more likely to describe the role of the teacher as one of being responsible for the academic growth of students, designing appropriate instructional support, and preparing students for the next grade level. This finding suggests that somewhere during their teacher preparation programs, the focus of concern for students is shifted from one that is primarily based on this broader conception of educación to one that is narrowly defined as academic learning. Converging these roles would require re-conceptualizing teaching as a practice concerned with children's development as whole persons with both academic and social needs and would lead to the restructuring of schools and classrooms in ways that enable both teachers and paraeducators to take part in the various aspects of children's development in school.

Conclusion

It is not our intention to suggest that Latino children should be taught only by Latino teachers, nor even that school learning contexts need necessarily resemble home learning contexts, although there is clear evidence that there is much that can be learned from less formal learning and teaching contexts (Rueda, Gallego, & Moll, in press). We do contend, however, that school contexts must afford diverse students opportunities to utilize the resources they bring into the classroom by validating those resources and creating learning contexts that tap into them. This idea is not a new one, but putting it into practice has been more difficult than expected, particularly with the nation's teaching force remaining primarily white and middle class. At most, schools acknowledge cultural differences through celebrations, food, and dance, clearly superficial practices that have little impact on student learning.

What we have described in this report comes closer to the inclusive practices that are needed for students to draw from their rich and extensive repertoire of resources to negotiate and create meaning from the new linguistic, cultural, and academic contexts they encounter in school. Creating these contexts is dependent on having a knowledge of students' cultural and community experiences, as well as their modes of interaction. Paraeducators, often members of the communities in which they teach, are key resources to this knowledge for teachers who come from cultural backgrounds that are different from their students. Unfortunately, there is evidence that paraeducators are rarely seen as resources for the professional development of teachers, nor are the cultural and community-based interaction strategies discussed in this report seen as key to enhancing academic achievement (Rueda & Monzó, 2000). Professional development is essential for teachers to begin to appreciate the significance of culture in learning.

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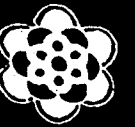
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