From Altered Perceptions to Altered Practice: Teachers Bridge Cultures in the Classroom

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Abstract

Immigrant students and their families sometimes experience conflict or alienation in U.S. schools owing to differences between the collectivistic values of home (focused on the well-being of the family and group) and the individualistic values of schools (focused on the well-being of individuals) that drive instructional practices and school policies. The research project discussed here explored whether professional development based on cultural theory and research could support experienced teachers in creating culturally responsive classrooms for their primarily Latino immigrant students. Seven experienced, bilingual Spanish–English teachers from Southern California participated in professional development based on theory and research related to the cultural concepts of individualism and collectivism. The professional development approach was nonprescriptive and engaged teachers in collaborative inquiry and problem-solving. As a result of the training, teachers' proposed solutions to classroom and home–school conflicts shifted from primarily individualistic solutions on pretests to more collectivistic solutions and solutions that integrated both cultural perspectives on posttests. Gains in teachers' understanding of and respect for both cultures led to a more mutual stance toward parents, altered classroom organization, improved classroom management, and stimulated the use of instructional practices that were more harmonious with the values of their students.

Key Words: individualism, collectivism, immigrants, bridging cultures, elementary schools, teachers, professional development, classroom practices

Introduction

Cross-cultural interactions—and misunderstandings resulting from them—occur in virtually all spheres of life in the United States because of a highly diverse population. Schools are a multicultural, multilinguistic arena rife with such interactions. Culturally responsive pedagogy, with an emphasis on social justice and curriculum meaningful to a diverse student body, has long been advocated as a response to this diversity (Banks, 2004; Gay, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). However, it has not usually addressed areas prone to cross-cultural conflict, such as classroom organization and management (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008), styles of interaction among students and teachers (Au & Jordan, 1981; Eriks-Brophy & Crago, 1993), and parent–school relationships (Durand, 2011; Trumbull et al., 2003; Valdés, 1996). Approaching these areas in culturally responsive terms requires delving beneath the surface of human behavior to the beliefs and cultural values that motivate the forms they take. Theory and research in the fields of anthropology, cross-cultural psychology, and sociolinguistics are most helpful in that task.

Individualism and Collectivism

Two major value systems, *individualism* and *collectivism,* underlie a huge range of behaviors in several realms of human activity (Greenfield, 1994/2014, 2009, 2016; Greenfield & Cocking, 1994/2014; Hofstede, 1980, 1983; Triandis, 1989). Table 1 summarizes the major differences between these two orientations to the world, the fundamental difference being the relative emphasis given to the rights and needs of the individual versus those of the group.

The dominant culture of the U.S. is extremely individualistic (Hofstede, 1980, 1983; Triandis, 1989). By contrast, most of the cultures of recent immigrants to the U.S., as well as the traditional cultures of the Indigenous peoples of the U.S., are extremely collectivistic (Suina & Smolkin, 1994; Trumbull et al., 2001). Because these two orientations motivate many beliefs and behaviors in so many realms, the effort to understand them is worthwhile and very productive. As Table 1 indicates, these orientations have implications for goals of childrearing, norms of communication, definitions of social roles, views of property, and conceptions of learning and schooling. However, individualistic or collectivistic leanings are dynamic. For example, in the U.S., immigrants' orientations tend to move towards greater individualism as they experience U.S. life over time (Greenfield, 2016).

Table 1. Features of Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism	Collectivism
Characteristic of dominant U.S. and classroom culture	*Characteristic of many immigrant cultures*
Fostering *independence* and individual success	Fostering *interdependence* and group success
Emphasizing rights and needs of the individual	Emphasizing rights and needs of the group (beginning with the family)
Emphasizing understanding of the physical world outside of social context	Emphasizing an understanding of the physical world as it enhances human relationships
Promoting self-expression, individual thinking, self-esteem	Promoting respect for authority/elders, group consensus, adherence to norms
Associated with private property	Associated with shared property
Associated with egalitarian relationships and role flexibility	Associated with hierarchical relationships and stable roles

Risks and Cautions

Categories are risky, particularly dichotomous categories that seem to suggest that people or whole societies can be described in all-or-nothing terms. All cultures exhibit a mix of individualism and collectivism (Oyserman & Sorensen, 2009; Triandis, 2018). Even people socialized in the dominant individualistic U.S. culture exhibit collectivistic beliefs and behaviors in some circumstances. For instance, in times of personal or community tragedy, people will come together to support each other, making sacrifices for the good of others. Likewise, members of collectivistic cultures recognize the accomplishments and needs of individuals (particularly as they contribute to the well-being of the group). Thus, ascribing the label "individualistic" or "collectivistic" to a society is more a matter of the relative emphasis placed on the interests of the community/family or the individual in that society. For example, when the needs of the individual are in competition with the needs of the group, in the dominant U.S. culture, the individual's needs may be prioritized over the group's needs. The reverse is likely to be the case in an immigrant Latino family, where group needs typically come before individual needs. Despite the limitations of any categorical system for describing human values, beliefs, and behaviors, we believe the framework is extremely useful. People—students, preservice teachers, in-service teachers from non-dominant cultures—who have experienced the conflicts explained by the framework come up to us at presentations and say, "You've explained my whole life."

The Bridging Cultures Project

Background

All human beings operate on the basis of systems of cultural values learned through interacting with others within their home communities. Although they guide virtually everything we do, these systems tend to remain implicit. The Bridging Cultures Project arose from empirical, classroom-based research using cultural theory from anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, which showed that conflicts and misunderstandings between U.S. teachers and Latino immigrant adults and children could be understood with reference to differences in cultural values systems (Greenfield et al., 2000/2003; Raeff et al., 2000/2003). (Note: Following usage in the community, we use "Latino" to refer to either mixed gender or to the male gender and "Latina" to refer to the female gender.)

The Project began as a collaboration among a regional educational laboratory (WestEd), a large university with a research emphasis (UCLA), the largest teacher education institution in California (California State University, Northridge), and seven bilingual public school teachers from Southern California. The purpose of the project was to explore whether learning about cultural theory and research on individualism and collectivism would help teachers to teach their immigrant Latino students more successfully. In Southern California school districts, immigrant students from Latin America often constitute the majority. In contrast to the dominant individualistic U.S. culture reflected in schools, their home cultures are generally very collectivistic.

This article presents but a small portion of the data collected from a multiyear project that has spawned a large and wide-ranging set of additional studies focused on the application of the individualism–collectivism framework to educational settings—from preschool (Zepeda et al., 2006) through university (Burgos-Cienfuegos et al., 2015; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2014; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2018).

This Study

As researchers, we were interested in learning whether teachers could translate the theory and research on individualism and collectivism into new perceptions, understandings, and practices vis-à-vis their largely immigrant Latino students. We expected that teachers would need to become aware of their own cultural values first and then of the cultural values of their students. The hope was that they would find the individualism–collectivism framework useful in identifying new ways to build cross-cultural bridges in the classroom. If they were able to do so, their successful innovations would provide a body of examples for other teachers.

Method

Participating Teachers

The participants were seven elementary school Spanish–English bilingual teachers serving predominantly immigrant Latino students. In terms of ethnicity, four of the teachers were Latino; three were European American. In terms of origin, two teachers were born in Mexico, one in Peru, and one in Germany; all had immigrated to the U.S. as young children. The other three teachers were born in the U.S.

Six females and one male teacher participated in the study. The teachers' grade assignments ranged from kindergarten to fifth grade, with every grade level represented by at least one teacher. The teachers were all experienced, with years of teaching service ranging from 5 to 21 years (mean = 12.7 years). Teachers were selected to participate on the basis of their interest in better serving Latino students. All seven started from a position of (a) wanting to understand their students' cultures better, (b) supporting bilingual education (arguably an indirect measure of attitude toward immigrants), and (c) having already invested considerable time in acquiring credentials that certified them to teach cross-culturally and bilingually. Hence, they were likely disposed to new ideas and changes in attitude. We knew, however, that ideas, research findings, and attitude changes alone would not necessarily lead to changes in the ways classrooms are structured and run (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Kagan, 1992; Richardson, 1994; Tikunoff & Ward, 1983).

Procedures and Approach

Four researchers from the three institutions mentioned designed a series of professional development workshops for teachers that would introduce them to the theoretical framework of individualism–collectivism and to research showing how broad cultural values influence childrearing and schooling. Three four-hour workshops were offered every other month on Saturday mornings over a period of four months.

In the first workshop, the researchers presented the concepts of individualism and collectivism and their research showing the conflict between teachers' more individualistic value system and Latino immigrant parents' more collectivistic one (Greenfield et al., 2000/2003; Raeff et al., 2000/2003). The teachers were then given a homework assignment to observe, between Workshop 1 and Workshop 2, instances in their respective elementary schools of conflict between family collectivism and school individualism and to come back to report on them in the next workshop. The teachers' observations were then discussed in Workshop 2. At the end of Workshop 2, the teachers were

given an assignment to carry out between Workshop 2 and Workshop 3. They were asked to make a change in their classroom or parent relations to bring practice more in harmony with the families' collectivistic value orientations. They were asked to report on and discuss these altered practices in the third and final workshop. Among the innovations teachers discussed was conferencing with parents in groups instead of individually, a practice that fit better with the collectivistic orientation we had uncovered in our prior research. We (two professional researchers and one teacher–researcher) then documented this development of the group conference and the research behind it in an article written for the education community (Quiroz et al., 1999/2003).

As can be seen from this sequence of training steps, the training goal was for researchers to take a reflective practice approach to professional development, recognizing that teachers were professionals capable of engaging in their own inquiry and problem-solving (Zeichner & Liston, 2013). Hence, the professional development was not prescriptive. Instead, it left open to teachers the opportunity to construct their own interpretation and application of the theory and research, participating as teacher–researchers.

Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires were used to assess teachers' relatively individualistic or collectivistic orientations to teaching and to parent values. Workshops were videotaped, and videotapes were analyzed to trace any changes in teachers' perceptions and reported changes in practice.

Questionnaires and Quantitative Analysis

Both pretest and posttest questionnaires featured four dilemma scenarios: two presenting a home-based personal relationship dilemma, and two presenting a classroom-based dilemma; different scenarios were used on pretest and posttest. Table 2 shows two of the four scenarios used on the pretest; Table 3 shows two of the four scenarios used on the posttest. The "Jobs" and "T-shirt" scenarios were selected for the pretest because we wanted to discuss the teachers' responses to these scenarios and compare them with earlier research results as part of the content of Workshop 1.

Table 2. Two of the Four Scenarios Used in Pretest Questionnaire

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">"T-Shirt"
Adam and Johnny each got $20 from their mother. Johnny buys a T-shirt. A week later Adam wants to wear Johnny's T-shirt, and Johnny says, "this is my T-shirt, and I bought it with my own money." Adam says, "but you're not using it now."

What do you think the mother should do?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Response example: "…Mother should leave it up to Johnny." It was coded as individualistic because it focuses on individual choice.</td><td>Response example: "Reinforce the principles of sharing…" It was coded as collectivistic because it stresses "sharing."</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2, continued

"Jobs" It is the end of the school day, and the class is cleaning up. Salvador isn't feeling well, and he asks Emanuel to help him with his job for the day, which is cleaning the blackboard. Emanuel isn't sure that he will have time to do both jobs. What do you think the teacher should do?	
Response example: "Ask other students in the class if they could help to accomplish the goal of having a clean classroom." It was coded as individualistic 1 because it does not require Emanuel to help Salvador and is based on "[accomplishing] the goal."	Response example: "…The teacher should give Emanuel the extra time he may need to finish both jobs." It was coded as collectivistic because it implies that the teacher expects Emanuel to help Salvador.

Table 3. Two of the Four Scenarios Used in Posttest Questionnaire

"Dinner" Dennis is the first one home in the afternoon. When his mother gets home at 7, she finds that Dennis has not started cooking dinner yet. When she asks Dennis why he didn't get dinner started, Dennis says he wasn't hungry. What do you think his mother should do?	
There was no response that received a code of individualistic because all participants answered somewhat collectivistically.	Response example: "Remind him of his responsibility/contribution to the family…" It was coded as collectivistic because it focuses on family.
"Talking" One of the fifth-grade classes has been learning about different kinds of art and artists before they go on a field trip to an art museum. The class is looking at some copies of famous paintings. The teacher tells the class that each student has to say, individually, which painting they think is worth the most. Ray doesn't understand what to do, and while the other students are making their decisions, Billy tries to explain it to him. The teacher notices that they are talking. What do you think the teacher should do?	
Response example: "…The teacher should allow the student to continues with his explanation because he may be able to present it more clearly than she did." It was coded as individualistic because it focuses on the ability of the student to explain.	Response example: "Acknowledge the value of Billy wanting to help Ray and allow him to continue." It was coded as collectivistic because it focuses on the value of "help."

On both the pre and posttests, the teachers first responded to the scenarios from their own personal perspectives. In line with the basic idea that culture is defined as what is shared in a group, we asked next about how a "typical" member of each cultural group would respond. Teachers were asked to role-play the part of a typical Latina mother and respond to each scenario as they thought a Latina mother would. Then they were asked to role-play the part of a typical European American mother and respond again to the same set of scenarios. We acknowledge that level of education, time in the U.S., and cultural awareness could certainly affect mothers' responses to the dilemmas; we also acknowledge that neither construct—Latino American nor European American—is monolithic. However, based on previous research and knowledge of the population served by participating teachers, we judged that teachers had likely formed implicit notions of broad differences between Latino American and European American mothers (e.g., Greenfield et al., 1996). We hypothesized that the workshops could make the teachers more aware of contrasting cultural perspectives on everyday situations.

A code book was constructed based on previous studies utilizing the same scenarios (Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013; Park et al., 2015; Raeff et al., 2000/2003). Two coders coded two sets of pretest data from nonparticipants and two sets of posttest data from study participants (30% of total available data). One coder was from an individualistic society, the other coder from a traditionally collectivistic society. They resolved discrepancies through discussion until they had reached consensus on the preferable code. On the basis of these discussions, the code book was elaborated upon for the subsequent reliability of coding. Interrater reliability was based on distinguishing three possible response categories: *collectivistic* (0), *individualistic* (1), and *mixture* (.5). The direction of the scale was arbitrary and did not reflect a value judgment that individualism was better than collectivism. Cohen's weighted kappa was used to compare the scores between the two coders. For both pretest and posttest scenario responses, results reached good agreement (pretest: $\kappa = .80$; posttest: $\kappa = .68$).

Chi-square tests (Preacher, 2001) were used to assess the teachers' change in values from pretest to posttest. Chi-square tests were also used to see whether their differentiation of Latino and European American values would increase as a result of the workshops. The time difference between the pre and posttest (which were part of the first and third workshops) was about three months.

Exit Survey

Completing the exit survey was the last thing teachers did at the end of Workshop 3. Teachers were asked to rate the workshops along several dimensions and to answer a number of open-ended questions, such as, "Will you use your knowledge of individualism and collectivism in your classroom? If so, how?"

Continuing Activities

After completion of the workshops, core researchers followed up on teachers' interpretation and application of theory and research through classroom observations and interviews, as well as through meetings of the group every other month for more than two and a half years. In these meetings, teacher–researchers discussed their classroom practices, and professional researchers facilitated conversations to deepen understanding of the applications of the framework.

Qualitative Analysis

The quotations of teachers reported in the paper are from transcriptions of the videotapes made during workshops, meeting notes, classroom observation notes, and interviews with teachers (both in person and via phone). Hence all quotations are based on oral material.

Results

Quantitative Findings: Dilemma Scenarios

Chi-square tests of statistical independence were used to examine changes from pretest to posttest in the participants' own perspectives on the dilemma scenarios, as well as changes in their ability to distinguish between the cultural perspectives of Latina and European American mothers. The participants' own perspectives were significantly different and more collectivistic on the posttest compared to their responses on the pretest, X^2 (df = 2, N = 56 responses) = 8.92, p = .012 (Table 4). Perhaps most meaningful, mixed responses, in the minority before the workshops, constituted the majority of teacher responses after the workshops (Table 4). That is, after three Bridging Cultures workshops, teachers favored a mix of individualistic and collectivistic strategies in order to resolve the dilemma scenarios. Their responses suggested that they had truly understood new ways to bridge between the two cultures.

Table 4. Changes in Teachers' Own Orientation to Problem Solving from Pretest to Posttest (number of responses)

Value Orientation	Pre-Assessment	Post-Assessment
Individualistic (I)	13	3
Collectivistic (C)	5	10
Both I and C	10	15
Total Responses	28	28

Note: This table is based on the responses of 7 teachers to 4 dilemma scenarios on the pretest and 4 different dilemma scenarios on the posttest, hence the totals of 28 responses. For both pretest and posttest, 2 scenarios were set in the home and 2 scenarios were set at school.

Even on the pretest, the teachers were able to distinguish between the cultural perspectives of Latina mothers and European American mothers. Overall, they responded that Latina mothers would resolve the scenario dilemmas collectivistically 64% of the time, whereas European American mothers would do so only 22% of the time. In reciprocal fashion, the teachers estimated that European American mothers would resolve the scenario dilemmas individualistically 67% of the time, whereas Latina mothers would do so only 25% of the time. A chi-square test showed that this differentiation of the two perspectives was statistically significant at both pretest (X^2 (df =2, No. of responses = 55 [1 missing response] = 10.83, $p = .0045$) and posttest (X^2 (df =2, No. of responses = 56) = 24.93, $p < .0000039$). The higher level of significance for posttest differentiation indicates that the teachers differentiated Latino and European American values more sharply after the workshops.

However, the main effect of the workshops was not in differentiating two ways of acting, but in understanding that each way of acting was culturally based. As will become clear in the qualitative analysis that follows, teachers initially felt that, in school, only individualistic practices had merit. However, a new appreciation of collectivism at school and in home–school relations developed in the course of the workshops. At the same time, value judgments concerning the two cultural perspectives decreased.

Qualitative Findings

The teachers' posttest responses suggest that they understood that "[a]ccommodating across cultures did not mean that [they] should move into the other culture" (Cronjé, 2011, p. 596) and become entirely collectivistic in their teaching. For example, when asked on the pretest what they would do when a sick student named Salvador asks a student named Emmanuel to help him with his classroom job (the "Jobs" scenario, Table 2), only one of the Bridging Cultures teachers thought that Emmanuel should automatically help Salvador. Five of the seven suggested finding a third person to help complete the task. Despite early collectivistic upbringing, three out of the four immigrant Latino teachers in our Bridging Cultures group had internalized the individualistic expectations of the school through their years of formal education and teacher training. They had a shocked "aha" reaction when they realized that their ideal solution to the dilemma was not shared with the overwhelming majority of Latina mothers interviewed in previous research, who emphasized Emmanuel's responsibility to help, no matter what the circumstances (Raeff et al., 2000/2003).

In sharp contrast, all seven of the teachers found a compromise solution for a similar dilemma on the posttest, incorporating both individualistic and

collectivistic elements. In particular, when asked what they would do when Ricky tells them that he needs to stay at home the next day to help take care of his brother because his mother is sick, all of the Bridging Cultures teachers thought that Ricky should be allowed to stay at home, and six of the seven also suggested giving him work to do at home, whereas the other teacher suggested negotiating with his mother on the importance of school.

The focus on individual academic needs and the method of negotiation represents an individualistic perspective, while allowing Ricky to stay at home and fulfill his responsibility to his family shows their respect and understanding of the needs of more collectivistic families. One teacher even commented that she was dealing with a similar situation at the time and that the scenario "happens all the time." Accordingly, the scenarios have significant, real-life relevance, and the Bridging Cultures program allowed the teachers to consider both individualistic and collectivistic perspectives when solving dilemmas in reality.

Exit Survey

All participants felt sure that they would use the workshop information in their practice. In an exit survey following the three Bridging Cultures workshops, one of the questions we asked was: "Will you use your knowledge of individualism and collectivism in your classroom? If so, how?" Table 5 lists teachers' responses. Their replies show that teachers were affected by the workshops and had already begun to think of many applications of their new learning. These responses prefigure the larger themes of change that would continue to emerge over the next several years through ongoing Bridging Cultures research and other research inspired by our findings:

- making classroom management and organization more collectivistic,
- relating to parents/families with greater understanding and mutuality, and
- structuring instruction to allow students to help each other more academically.

Table 5. Teachers' Exit Survey Responses

"I will use [knowledge of collectivism] in classroom management decisions and in my view and understanding of the parents' actions and views. Not to view parents as ignorant because they do not look at things my way."
"I will modify certain things such as: conferences, helpers, collaborative work, relationships between teachers, parents, aides, and administrators. Examining individualistic classroom policies or reexamining them."
"Every day I will be much more understanding and tolerant of my students' need to help each other and their families."
"I plan on reforming my class so that it can be more collectively friendly with the freedom of expressing individuality. My reading and math journal groups are going to be much more group."
"I want to use this knowledge in my classroom. I need further training in how. I do try to meet situations with openness and heart, but putting that desire into practice in the school setting is a challenge that needs support."
"I will think before I act or speak when dealing with conflict that may occur between students and also participate more from this perspective on a professional level at faculty meetings or just at lunch."

A Case of Teacher Change

To give a sense of the kind of change we observed in teachers and they observed in themselves, we present here extended segments of discourse from a European American kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Kathryn Eyler. (The names of all seven teachers are used with their permission; our goal was to credit their important contributions.) Her reflections are illustrative of the kind of changes in perception teachers exhibited vis-à-vis culture, how culture plays out in their classrooms and in relationships with parents, and the role of the teacher in bridging between students' cultures of home and the culture of school.

Mrs. Eyler, whose specialty is kindergarten, had more than 15 years of teaching experience at the beginning of the project. Mrs. Eyler came into the Bridging Cultures Project concerned that she would never be able to learn enough about her students' cultures to make a difference. She reported that she had finally given up trying to incorporate elements of their cultures in her instruction. Here, she reflects on her insights after participating in Bridging Cultures professional development:

> I've always been involved in progressive political things…and always thought that I was progressive.…But I did notice that…I do still view myself as this imparter of knowledge to the parents…and a lot of it is cultural, and I didn't realize that—like [the importance of parents'] "talking to children," "being the first teacher." This is my big thing I'm giving to

> these "uneducated" parents, and I never really realized that deep down inside that's what I thought: "Well, I don't blame them. It's just that they're not educated." And it really struck me [after the Bridging Cultures professional development] that…this that I am imparting to them is my culture, and I am imparting it as if it's the truth. "This is the way you raise children." "This is what you do." And "Don't you want your child to have success?" You know, I do this all in…I'm speaking in Spanish, and I think the parents like me, and I'm very friendly and open, but yet I'm still with this "They're uneducated, and I'm going to educate them."

Mrs. Eyler's insights led her to see her students and their parents in a new way, but they also led to new classroom practices. In the Bridging Cultures group of teachers and researchers, we talked about how the emphasis on responding to the needs of the group in collectivistic cultures leads to more spontaneous helping behaviors. Of course, the dominant culture supports helping as well. Children are encouraged to have classroom jobs, to help the teacher, and sometimes to help each other. However, other values tend to restrict the forms helping can take. Because of the emphasis on learning individual responsibility and taking care of oneself, a classroom job may be assigned to an individual and an individual's rights to perform that and only that job protected. A more collectivistic approach is to help whenever it is needed—whether you have another job to do or not. Mrs. Eyler noted:

> In my classroom I started being really conscious of the helpers, and instead of now even just kind of allowing it [helping], I'm encouraging it. And I really feel, I guess the word is it's "empowering" the kids. Because…I can just tell by the looks on their faces… It's just a much different atmosphere. It seems like a small thing, but in kindergarten it's a big thing.

Mrs. Eyler has extended this practice (allowing helping) to the academic area as well.

> The ones that don't have their homework…I want them to do their work at home. So, it is kind of like a punishment. I'd say, "Now you can't play at this time. The others get to [play]…and you have to sit and do your homework." But now I do have—and they wanna do it—other children [help]. Because a lot of times, if you don't do your homework at home with your mother, [it's because] you can't do your homework. So, somebody that's done the homework the night before can sit down with them and help them do the homework. I know it sounds obvious or simple, but it's different from what I was doing.

In response to a question about what was different about the Bridging Cultures professional development compared to other workshops or classes on multicultural education, Mrs. Eyler said:

> Why was this experience different to me? Because I know I've probably read things that had that title, and I had a really superficial understanding of what they meant. But it did not alter my way of being in the classroom—and this did. Everything I've ever gone to about culture was about their culture, and this is exactly [the] point: *I* have a culture, too, and it dictates what I do. It's not just, "Oh, well, the Latino parents do this and that because that is their culture." I do what I do because of my culture, and this is the first time that I really had an understanding of that, and not, you know, just thinking, "Well, yes, you read to your children, and that's a universal right idea." No, that's from my culture.

Perhaps the most powerful point this teacher is making in her reflections is that she now recognizes that her own actions and beliefs stem from a cultural perspective. It is not only her students who "have culture." This altered perception seems to translate to a remarkably different stance toward parents and an openness to different strategies for running her classroom.

Discussion

The Bridging Cultures Project is an example of translational research in the field of education: We have taken basic research and theory of culture and human development and applied it to professional development of elementary school teachers working with Latino immigrant families in Southern California; these families originate in Mexico and Central America (e.g., Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013). For example, we first learned that helping was a more important value for Latino immigrant parents than for their children's teachers in our research (Raeff et al., 2000/2003); in our first workshop we found out that this value difference was causing problems for the teachers: Children wanted to help each other with classroom tasks that were individually assigned. However, through the Bridging Cultures workshops, they became aware of the "problem" as a matter of culture, that two different value systems were at play. Based on this knowledge, they altered their classroom practices related to helping, each in their own way. For instance, one teacher expanded sign-up for each classroom task from one to two children. Another teacher just let as many help with each task as wanted to. With these changes, things went much more smoothly for teachers and students. Many more examples of translation from research to professional development and practice can be found in Rothstein-Fisch and Trumbull (2008).

Why Does Bridging Cultures Professional Development Work?

The ongoing Bridging Cultures research project, beyond the initial three workshops, was highly effective as professional development for the teachers. Teacher professional development is frequently unsuccessful in meeting the goal of effecting deep change in teachers' classroom practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). One reason is that school districts often do not have the resources to offer the kind of extended professional development that can prepare and sustain teachers for any complex or meaningful changes in their practice (Trumbull & Gerzon, 2013). Another reason is that professional development focused on practice, that is, activities of implementation, is not as powerful in maintaining teachers' engagement in a new practice or adjusting it to their own students' needs as a professional development that explores the rationale for engaging in a given practice (Trumbull et al., 2001). A third reason is that many professional development efforts do not provide for the kind of collaboration among teachers now thought to be essential to successful professional development (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Bridging Cultures addressed all of these issues in addition to the content related to research and theory about culture.

Economy and Generativity of the Framework

The framework of individualism–collectivism is both *economical* and *generative*. It is economical in that it has a limited number of powerful constructs that explain a lot of behavior. The framework of individualism–collectivism incorporates and explains the relations among many important cultural elements previously regarded as separate: intragroup relations (particularly responsibility to the family), attitudes toward authority, roles and role relations (e.g., according to sex, age), norms of communication, the value and use of objects, and attitudes toward discipline, among others. All of these have their expression in the classroom. The framework is generative in that it has the power to suggest many possible insights and interventions in several areas. The teachers in the project have not stopped coming up with new ideas and applications over a period of two decades.

Facilitating Teaching

Teachers say the framework makes teaching easier and decision-making more informed. Now, because they are tapping their students' natural ways of interacting and learning, teachers are more easily engaging their students. Now, based on their new insights, they are building on the cultural strengths of the children and their home cultures. In fact, teachers *were* using some of these culturally responsive strategies before Bridging Cultures came along; however,

now that they have a rationale (and have a clear name for them), they are persisting in them more wholeheartedly and looking for ways to expand on them.

Ongoing Collaboration

A key factor in the success of Bridging Cultures was undoubtedly the ongoing collaboration the project supported. Teachers had a group of experienced teaching colleagues and a cadre of experts on the framework to discuss their innovations with—conditions associated with successful professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The quality of their discussions was, no doubt, enhanced by their being a group of highly recommended, carefully selected professionals.

Here is where a distinction needs to be made between the expected power of professional development of this sort versus that of preservice education. While preservice educators have been enthusiastic about the framework and have produced reflections suggestive of changes in their perceptions, they have not had the same opportunities to test their learning against daily classroom experiences. Nor have they had the benefit of a professional community with whom to have such conversations as the Bridging Cultures teachers have had.

Latitude in Application

Another reason that teachers may readily apply the framework is that doing so does not mean they must abandon existing curriculum or instructional strategies they value. For example, a social action or critical pedagogical approach to teaching, in which teachers seek to empower students through development of skills and knowledge that have meaning for their lives (McLaren, 2015), is only strengthened by a stance of mutuality with parents and community. Multicultural curriculum that is taught in ways harmonious with students' ways of communicating and learning is likely to be all the more powerful.

Because the approach is nonprescriptive, teachers can apply the framework in ways that make sense in their classrooms. There is no recommended mix of individualism and collectivism offered to teachers, and although most innovations have been in the direction of more collectivism, teachers recognize that the point is not that individualism is bad and collectivism is good. Mrs. Eyler said, "I think that is a good point to bring out about culture…that…we're not saying collectivism is right, and individualism is wrong. We're just saying to recognize [that they're] different."

What Is to Be Lost or Gained?

When cultural differences are misunderstood or devalued, much stands to be lost. Losses are often very personal—people's sense of who they are, their relationships with families, a sense of belonging in school or in the larger society can all be damaged. Mrs. Amada Pérez, a Latina third grade teacher, commented:

> It's interesting, as a child…you begin to feel the conflict…and the difference between school and home. But what oftentimes starts to happen is you start believing that the one in the school is the right one and that your parents are…wrong—and then all sorts of conflict begins in the home because of it.

Moments later she said,

> I remember going through it [the conflict] as a child—as an immigrant child—and trying…to understand this system. And in my family, it ended up where the school was right, and the teachers were right, and their value became more important…and because of that many of my brothers just stopped communicating completely with my father, because he represented the bad, the wrong way, and that was hard.

Bridging Cultures has brought about a process of re-valuing their original cultures among the Latino teachers in the group. A sobering sense of the kinds of compromises they have had to make in order to survive and succeed in U.S. schools and society descended at various times on these particular teachers. The non-Latino teachers underwent their own process of realizing that despite all their good intentions and efforts to be culturally sensitive, they had another distance to go to get there, especially in recognizing that the ways of the school and the ways they acted were also cultural.

The potential losses are academic as well. When students do not fully engage in the classroom, when their parents cannot find ways of being part of the school community, or—worse—when classroom approaches virtually shut students or parents out, academic success is seriously jeopardized (Valdez et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2009).

The potential gains of teachers' expanded understanding of culture are great because of its effect on teachers' attitudes toward student behaviors such as helping and sharing and their more mutual stance towards families. When students have a sense of belonging in their own schools, they are far more likely to participate actively as learners and have a sense of academic self-efficacy (McMahon et al., 2009). Likewise, when parents feel that they belong, they are more likely to be involved in their children's schooling, something known to support student achievement (Walker et al., 2009). Mrs. Elvia Hernandez, a Latina K–1 Bridging Cultures teacher, designed extensive changes to her parent involvement practices to increase parents' sense of belonging in the classroom and school, with much success (Trumbull et al., 2003).

Implications

We believe that professional development like that of Bridging Cultures—development that goes beyond surface-level descriptions of culture to an

examination of core values—is a promising complement to many existing approaches to culturally responsive schooling. The lack of teachers of color who come from the backgrounds of significant numbers of students is a serious deficiency in our educational system. However, the solution to unresponsive schooling is not only to diversify the teaching workforce. Ethnic group membership is not always enough to ensure culturally responsive pedagogy for two reasons. First, explicit knowledge of the values of one's own culture and others' cultures is needed. Such knowledge tends to remain implicit, and teachers may not be able to recognize sources of home–school conflict and, thus, identify solutions. Second, teacher preparation and evaluation processes push even collectivistic teachers in the direction of the default individualistic approach to education. When teachers do use their cultural knowledge (often intuitively) to design culturally responsive instruction, they may be censured at evaluation time by administrators who do not recognize the appropriateness of their practices (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018; Nelson-Barber & Mitchell, 1992; Trumbull et al., 2001). However, when teachers have a strong rationale for their practices, they can educate their evaluators—something Bridging Cultures teachers have been able to do.

Limitations and Future Direction

This was a fairly intensive and long-term investment in a small, specially selected group of teachers by a group of researchers. Potential limitations in mounting similar projects are (a) difficulties in funding this kind of professional development, and (b) challenges in scaling it up to work for larger groups—such as all teachers in a school or district—not just a select few exceptional teachers. One answer to the funding issue lies in partnerships between schools and universities or other organizations capable of enabling such work. A partial answer to the scaling concern can be seen in the fact that five of the seven original teacher participants provided workshops and follow-up guidance to their colleagues. Thus, the professional development effectively functioned as a train-the-trainer approach, allowing for dissemination of the model and teachers' innovations. We would hope that the success of our model, documented here and in a number of other publications (e.g., Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008; Trumbull et al., 2001, 2003), will inspire fellow educators to seek collaborations that allow them to support such work and potentially scale the Bridging Cultures approach up to larger groups. Documentation of the effects of such projects will be an important contribution to the literature.

Conclusion

The innovations of these teachers have been documented in numerous publications and have served as a source of inspiration to other teachers in and

beyond their own districts. We believe the Bridging Cultures project is unusual in that a nonprescriptive teacher professional development effort based on cultural theory and research supported teacher innovation in virtually all aspects of schooling: instruction, assessment, classroom organization, classroom management, home–school relations, and parent involvement. By examining schooling through the perspective of broad cultural values, teachers came to see how every element of classroom and school life has cultural roots. From that point, it was a short step to applying that insight to evaluating and sometimes modifying practices in every realm of teaching in an effort to meet the needs of students and their families.

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Authors' Notes: The Bridging Cultures Project was initiated by Lead Author Trumbull when she was at WestEd and has been trademarked by that organization, which funded the workshops described in this article. Authors Greenfield, Quiroz, Rothstein-Fisch, and Trumbull developed and led the Bridging Cultures workshops. Author Trumbull documented Bridging Cultures workshops and meetings with copious notes, clarifying with participants statements attributed to them. She worked closely with Authors Rothstein-Fisch and Maynard to analyze teachers' language about their perceptions, attitudes, and practices with regard to relevance to the individualism–collectivism framework. She is principal author of this article and led the writing effort. Author Rothstein-Fisch conducted observations in all teachers' classrooms and did post-observation interviews as well as follow-up interviews with teachers. Her extensive notes are a great body of data on teacher change over time. She contributed to the writing of this article. Author Maynard supervised videotaping of the Bridging Cultures professional development workshops and led the process of linguistic analysis of teachers' language on some 12 hours of videotape. She contributed to the editing of this article. Author Greenfield, whose earlier research was the foundation for the research reported in this paper, guided the theoretical perspective of the research and quantitative data analysis, which she carried out and wrote up with Author Yuan. She has been instrumental in interpreting findings and editing the article. Author Quiroz developed the scenarios used in the pretest and posttest assessments.

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immigrant parents in classroom life and their children's education (Quiroz, Greenfield, & Alchech, 2003; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003).

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