

# **Cultural Values (Mis)Match in Two U.S. Elementary School Classrooms: Examining the Impact of Cultural Theory on Teaching Practice**

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## **Abstract**

This study documents patterns of cultural value conflict and harmony for Latino students in two relational domains—among the students themselves and between the students and their teachers—in two second grade classrooms in the Los Angeles area. One of the classrooms was led by a teacher who participated in a professional development program, the Bridging Cultures Project, based on cultural and social psychology research and theory, and one led by a teacher who did not. Invoking the cultural value spectrum of individualism–collectivism, the Bridging Cultures Project engaged Spanish–English bilingual elementary teachers in learning about individualistic values rooted in the design of instruction and behavioral management in U.S. classrooms and how they may differ from the relatively more collectivistic values of their students. Through this program, teachers became researchers themselves, experimenting with new approaches grounded in a collectivistic values paradigm. Discourse analysis revealed that, through her instructional methods, the Bridging Cultures teacher made her classroom activities and interactions relatively more collectivistic. By contrast, the non-Bridging Cultures teacher encouraged relatively more individualistic behaviors. This study demonstrates how explicit learning about cultural values can help a teacher design instruction in a way that reduces cultural value conflicts in the classroom.

**Key Words:** Latino cultural values, theory, individualism, collectivism, conflict, education, Bridging Cultures, elementary classrooms, teaching practices

## **Introduction**

Cultural differences can be the source of conflicts in the classroom. Culture—shared values, ways of knowing, and practices of a community (cf., Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Rogoff et al., 2017; Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005)—may not be recognized as a source of such conflicts because so much of culture is implicit in the ways people behave. Most people simply accept that the ways of thinking and behaving of their own group are the right ones, without recognizing the cultural underpinnings of those thoughts and behaviors. Therefore, the culture-based “funds of knowledge” that should serve as resources to students whose home culture differs from school culture often go unrecognized in the classroom (González et al., 2006; Lyutykh et al., 2016). In schools, as in most cultural contexts, students who do not conform to the behavioral norms of the classroom (sometimes unspoken) may be judged as misbehaving and punished for behaviors that are accepted or even promoted at home (Tyler et al., 2006). In fact, schooling is a cultural enterprise in which mainstream cultural values often predict teachers’ behavioral expectations of students, how classrooms are organized physically, and the structure of instruction (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008; Sarason, 1996; Spindler & Spindler, 1994; Weinstein et al., 2004).

### **The Challenge for Teachers**

Without cultural awareness, teachers may potentially undercut the social and academic success of their students whose families are not part of the dominant, mainstream culture by continuing to “reproduce the social structures of schooling, including assumptions embedded in models of teaching and learning, assessment, and management” (Calabrese Barton & Tan, 2020, p. 434). The “best practices” that teacher candidates learn align with the values of the dominant culture (Assaf et al., 2010) and may not be best suited to their nondominant culture students. Teachers from nondominant cultures with important intuitive cultural knowledge may unknowingly learn to suppress that knowledge because of their socialization within dominant culture (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018; Nelson-Barber & Dull, 1998; Trumbull et al., 2001).

### **Individualism and Collectivism**

The cultural values framework of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1989, 2018) has proven highly useful in helping teachers understand differences between the dominant U.S. culture and the cultures of many immigrant families (Trumbull et al., 2001). Whereas individualistically oriented societies emphasize the needs and rights of the individual, collectivistically oriented societies emphasize the well-being of the group. This framework of implicit cultural

values has been productively used to analyze cultural conflicts between individualistically oriented teachers and their collectivistically oriented Latino students and parents (Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013; Greenfield et al., 2000; Trumbull et al., 2003; Trumbull et al., 2001). It happens that the U.S. is the most individualistic country in the world; in sharp contrast, Mexico and Central American countries are among the most collectivistic (Triandis, 1989, 2018).

Individualism emphasizes independence and individual achievement as important goals in child development (Greenfield, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989, 2018) wherein self-expression and self-fulfillment are highly valued (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). In individualistic societies such as the U.S., the values of individual property and individual choice are also sacrosanct.

By contrast, collectivistic values are prevalent among many subcultures in the U.S., in which interdependence with and responsibility for persons in ascribed relationships, such as those in one's family, are prioritized (Greenfield, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989, 2018). Group achievement tends to be valued over individual achievement; property is more often shared than exclusively owned by an individual; the "self" is constructed with reference to the group; and choices are made with consideration for their effects on the group (family, classroom).

As humans, we take our ways of thinking and acting in the world for granted, and—unless they are pointed out to us—we are largely unaware of them as having a specific cultural basis. Accordingly, the values framework of individualism and collectivism, which helps explain so many cultural differences, can function as an interpretive lens through which we make explicit our evaluations of our own and others' behavior (Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998; Triandis, 2018).

### **Caveat**

The individualism–collectivism framework is, of course, merely a heuristic with inherent limitations for understanding differences in cultural values and related goals and behaviors. Any dichotomous system for describing human values and behavior has the potential for vast oversimplification. No society is entirely individualistic or collectivistic; rather, it is a matter of the relative emphasis placed on the individual or the group. As Singelis et al. (1995) note, "The defining attributes of cultures are best thought of as fluctuating pressures or tendencies, which may not be manifest in a particular individual or context" (p. 243). In addition, such a system for characterizing human values and behaviors risks suggesting that participation in or membership in a cultural group is deterministic, that is, that being part of that group dictates an individual's behavior. Of course, that is not true, either.

Cultures are dynamic (Strickland, 2012), sometimes changing in interaction with each other. In addition, ecological and economic situations affect cultural values, and those circumstances change over time (Greenfield, 2009). For instance, “Economic development facilitates a shift toward the free choice aspects of individualism...producing increasing emphasis on individual freedom-focused values” (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004, p. 5). Immigrants to the U.S., for instance, no matter how collectivistic their origins, tend to become more individualistic as they interact with U.S. people and institutions and become economically secure (Greenfield, 2009). Also, immigrants who come to the U.S. with high levels of education, greater financial resources, and urban backgrounds are more individualistic than immigrants who come with low levels of education (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2004).

### **Individualism in U.S. Schools**

U.S. schools tend to be highly individualistic. To begin with, learning is considered to be largely an individual process (Hollins, 2015), and assessing a student’s learning is nearly always an individual activity as well (see, e.g., Basterra et al., 2011). Students often have “their own” desks and “their own” books and materials (even though these actually belong to the school). If they bring pencils, pens, markers, and the like to the classroom, those are usually protected as private property (Greenfield et al., 1996). When the teacher asks questions during instruction, each student is expected to raise his or her hand and respond individually. Students’ work is most often completed independently, and their work products belong to them.

When cooperative learning groups are used, students are typically assigned roles and required to account for their individual contributions—or be marked down for failure to contribute as expected (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Whereas students may be allowed to help each other with some tasks, the teacher likely controls the way that may happen. For instance, a more advanced reader may be asked to sit with a less advanced reader and coach him or her for a specified task. In many classrooms, students may take turns doing classroom jobs, but, again, those are usually specified (clean the chalkboard, take attendance, manage the calendar, etc.) and each assigned to one student (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).

### **Cultural Difference in the Classroom and Potential Conflict**

When the cultural values of students and teachers are not consistent with one another, miscommunication and even outright refusal by students to participate in classroom interactions in the ways expected by teachers may result (Gutiérrez et al., 1995; Huang et al., 2012). The potential for misunderstanding

or conflict can extend to various areas of classroom practice. A teacher who insists that children work separately and chastises them for helping each other answer questions may present a conflict for children who have been socialized by family members to help others (Gratier et al., 2009; Greenfield et al., 1996). Likewise, a teacher's injunctions to "express your own opinion" or "ask questions" may not jibe with a parent's urging her child to listen and show respect to the teacher (Greenfield et al., 2000).

DeParle (2019) documents the sometimes-rocky sociocultural transition of a Filipino immigrant family to the U.S. Referring to the conflict between what fourth grader Lara was learning in school and implicitly learning at home, DeParle says, "Ms. Hailey was teaching the class to defend opinions—just the kind of exercise in independent thinking that made Rosalie [Lara's mother] nervous about the States" (DeParle, p. 296). In school, Lara was being rewarded for curiosity, but when she came home and started asking her mother questions, Rosalie dismissed her with a "tsss" (DeParle, p. 296). It is likely that neither Rosalie nor Ms. Hailey sensed that they might be working at cross-purposes based on differences in their implicit cultural values (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018).

If teachers do not have frameworks for thinking about the cultural sources of conflicts like the ones described, they are not likely to devise effective methods for anticipating or resolving such culture-based conflicts in school. They will continue to engage in what they have been taught are best practices or simply those they have observed through their own educational experiences, trying to inculcate in students their own ideas of the accepted ways of interacting in the classroom (Gutiérrez et al., 1995).

## **The Bridging Cultures Project**

In this section, we summarize the process and impact of the Bridging Cultures Project, which successfully used cross-cultural research and the cultural framework of individualism and collectivism to improve teachers' cultural awareness and culturally responsive practice in their classrooms and in the school community. The Bridging Cultures 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 [CSUN]), and seven Spanish–English bilingual public school teachers from Southern California. The goal of the research was to find out whether professional development related to cultural research and theory (the framework of individualism–collectivism) would affect teachers' understanding of cultural differences and, hence, the ways they designed instruction for their largely immigrant Latino students. Three videotaped four-hour workshops took place on Saturday mornings during a period

of three months; these were followed by ongoing meetings of the entire group approximately every two months during the school year for another four years.

Early in the Project, teachers themselves became researchers in their own schools and classrooms, reporting their observations and innovations at the semi-monthly meetings. The professional researchers observed in classrooms and organized all the documentation periodically for presentations and publications, often with the teacher–researchers’ participation. (See Trumbull et al., 2001 for further description of the initial research.) The Project has spawned countless research efforts by graduate students of participating professors at UCLA and CSUN. One of the participating teachers conducted related doctoral research (Mercado, 2015; Mercado & Trumbull, 2018).

Bridging Cultures professional development, which is still offered by West-Ed and CSUN as well as some of the original teacher–researchers, differs from much other professional development in that it is not prescriptive and engages teachers to make their own decisions about how to apply what they are learning. The goal is to find ways to bridge the cultures of home and school in order to ensure student engagement and achievement and not alienate children from their families in the process.

As recommended by Valdés (1996) and Hollins (2015), the Bridging Cultures approach focuses on cultural strengths, not deficits. Cultural differences are explored as simply that—*differences* in approaches to rearing and schooling young people. The individualism–collectivism framework is relatively easy to grasp and can be used to explain a wide range of human behavior arising from a predominant value orientation to either the individual or the group. It is also productive in spawning ideas for application. For example, the teacher–researchers successfully applied their new insights to student assessment (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003), classroom management (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008), parent involvement (Trumbull et al., 2003); subject-matter instruction (Trumbull et al., 2000); and the mentoring of immigrant teachers unfamiliar with American culture (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018).

### **A Look at Two Classrooms: One Bridging Cultures and One Non-Bridging Cultures**

This article presents one example of the project’s impact. It adds a natural experiment using ethnographic methods to the large body of observational and teacher-reported data collected over the years. Here, we compare teacher–student and student–student interactions in a second grade classroom led by one of the seven teachers who had gone through the Bridging Cultures professional development with such interactions in a second grade classroom led by a teacher who had not been part of the Bridging Cultures Project. This study

addresses the broad question: How might interactions between teachers and students and among students differ in a “Bridging Cultures classroom” versus a “non-Bridging Cultures classroom?” More specifically, would the Bridging Cultures classroom reflect greater acceptance of the children’s collectivistic values than the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, as seen in the kinds of interactions sanctioned by the two teachers? Would the Bridging Cultures classroom evince fewer conflicts that could be attributed to cultural differences between children’s collectivistic cultures and the dominant individualistic culture of the school? We realize that we cannot isolate any one factor as responsible for the qualitative differences we present here as findings; our goal is simply to describe those differences.

## Methods

### Participants

The teacher without Bridging Cultures training conducted her class in English. Her students were largely of immigrant Latino descent. The participants were 22 second grade students ( $M$  age = 7) and their teacher. The sample of children consisted of 12 girls, 9 boys, and one child with missing gender information. The teacher, Ms. Grey, was a European American female, who held a master’s degree and had taught for 22 years. Seventeen of the children were from Latino backgrounds, two were of Caucasian and Latino descent, one was African American, one was Filipino, and one was of unknown descent. In order to have a comparable participant sample in both classrooms, one that was in line with the goals of the research, only the Latino children were included in the dataset for this article. According to 17 demographic survey responses from parents in this classroom, 13 children were born in the U.S., while their parents were born abroad; one student was born abroad with his/her parents; and three children and their parents were both born in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> Nineteen parents provided information about language or languages spoken at home. Ten of the children spoke only Spanish at home, six of the children spoke both English and Spanish at home, and three children spoke only English at home.

The intervention classroom was also a second grade classroom, but it was bilingual, with instruction and conversation in both English and Spanish. It consisted of a teacher, Ms. Dawson, who took part in the Bridging Cultures Project and 41 students (18 girls, 23 boys;  $M$  age = 7), all of whom were of Latino descent. The teacher was a Latina female, the child of immigrants from Peru. She held a master’s degree and had taught for 7 years. Eighteen of the students were born in the U.S., while their parents were born abroad; six students were born abroad along with their parents; and two students and their



parents were both born in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> According to 26 demographic questionnaire responses received, 19 of the students spoke only Spanish at home, while the remaining seven students spoke both Spanish and English at home.

Different from the non-intervention class where students stayed with one teacher for all academic subjects, this class had students from four different classrooms alternating and sharing teachers according to academic subject and students' aptitude level in a given subject. This teacher taught the least advanced academic level for each activity period. Therefore, although there was a core group of students present in this classroom, the number of children fluctuated depending on the academic subject.

All participants were told that the researchers were studying naturally occurring classroom interactions among students and between the teacher and the students. Both the teachers and their students were given a monetary gift for participating in this study. All names of participants, both teachers and students, are pseudonyms. Because of fluctuations in the composition of the group for each subject in the Bridging Cultures classroom, some children could not be identified with pseudonyms; in those cases, they are simply identified as "boy" or "girl."

### **Procedures**

Five components comprised the procedures for this study: demographic questionnaires, ethnographic observations, videotaping, hypothetical scenarios for the teachers, and informal interviews of the teachers. The data were collected by Isaac and Correa-Chavez (see Authors' Notes at the article's end), who spent equal time in both classrooms. Both researchers were conversant in Spanish. Study procedures were approved by the UCLA Institutional Review Board. Procedures included assent forms in English and Spanish for the children and consent forms in both languages for the parents. Teachers were provided with their own consent forms in English.

#### *Demographic Questionnaires*

All parents were administered a demographic questionnaire that included questions regarding the language spoken in the home, the country of origin of the parents and children, and the level of education and occupations of the parents. Teachers were administered a demographic questionnaire with questions regarding their teaching experience, as well as questions similar to those that were posed to the parents.

#### *Ethnographic Observations*

The two researchers took over 50 hours of ethnographic fieldnotes during a two-month period as they observed in the classrooms. This extensive observation



and note-taking were done in order to ascertain those times throughout the academic day when potential episodes of cross-cultural conflict would be most salient in the classroom. The ethnographic observations in each classroom were then used to design the video sampling method and procedures. The video data provided a microscope through which the larger classroom dynamics could be more closely analyzed.

Another purpose of the ethnographic observations was to acquire an in-depth and authentic representation of classroom interactions. Each activity period throughout the school day was observed in both classrooms, and fieldnotes included observations of culturally relevant verbal expressions and physical behavior in the interactions between the teachers and the students as well as among the students.

Each researcher focused her field notes on a different aspect of the interaction. Isaac focused on peer interaction, Correa-Chavez on teacher–student interaction. The presence of the researchers in both the classrooms gradually became natural and expected by all members of both classrooms.

Because the Bridging Cultures teacher taught the children in the least advanced academic level for each activity period, the children who participated in this study from this classroom were all from the least advanced academic level group. In the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, children were separated by academic level only for language arts. In order to maximize comparability between the samples in the two classrooms, only children in the least advanced academic level for language arts in the video sample were used to analyze student–student conversation (though they were observed in instructional situations other than language arts).

#### *Videotaping, Transcription, and Reporting*

After the ethnographic observation portion of the study, interactions were videotaped by the same researchers who had taken all prior ethnographic fieldnotes. One part of the study focused on teacher–student relations. There, the teacher was the focal person in these segments, meaning that the camera followed her around as she worked with the students. The other part of the study focused on student–student relations. There, small groups of children were the focus, and the camera was trained on them. All video segments lasted the duration of the activity period; all videotaping for each classroom was conducted over a five-day period.

The non-Bridging Cultures classroom was observed to have certain situations in which cross-cultural conflict was more apparent. These instances often occurred during language arts, math, and social science instruction. Similar instructional activities were also observed in the Bridging Cultures classroom, where they seemed to involve less cultural conflict. It was these activities that

the researchers decided to videotape for teacher–student interaction. This video database included three segments at the beginning of the day, three language arts segments, one segment of math instruction, and one segment of social science instruction.

For the study of student–student interaction, children in both classrooms were videotaped while they were in desk groupings; these were during language arts, math, and science activity periods. The criteria for this video sample were that children were seated at a desk (1) without the teacher or teaching assistant present or expected to be present, (2) that remained intact (i.e., no desks were removed or added), and (3) had the most children of all groups that met the first two criteria (if there were two that met these criteria, one was randomly selected). No group was videotaped more than once in the same activity. In the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, there were two groups at the least advanced academic level for language arts; each group was videotaped once.

Both verbal and nonverbal behavior relevant to the constructs of interest were transcribed for analysis and reporting. The words in double parentheses represent nonverbal behaviors observed by the researchers in reviewing the videotapes. In the tradition of linguistic anthropology (e.g., Ochs, 2012), raw data are presented in the form of quotes. In this method, there is no coding or other type of data reduction. As a consequence, there was no need for interrater reliability to be established. Instead, readers see the raw data for themselves and can make their own judgments or interpretations.

The children and the teacher were instructed to behave as they would normally, so that the interactions captured would be natural ones. Because of the nontraditional structure of the Bridging Cultures classroom, only the least advanced reading and math groups were available to videotape. As explained, to make the groups more comparable, only the least advanced reading group was videotaped in the non-Bridging Cultures classroom. Other activities, such as the beginning of the day routine, involved all children in both of the classrooms, regardless of academic level. This routine was taped in both classrooms.

### *Hypothetical Scenarios*

Subsequent to the videotaping, teachers were asked to respond to hypothetical scenarios (see Appendix) that describe dilemmas occurring in the home or the classroom, and two possible ways—either individualistic or collectivistic—of solving the dilemma. These scenarios were administered to assess the teachers' awareness and acceptance of the values of individualism and collectivism. In response, the teacher had to choose from either an individualistic or collectivistic answer that was provided. The teacher was then asked if she could imagine why somebody else might choose the other answer. Responses to the scenarios helped researchers to understand each teacher's culturally

based expectations, so that these could be related to the teacher's actions in the classroom. We were also interested in finding out what kind of knowledge the teachers had about individualism and collectivism.

### *Teacher Interviews*

After videotaping was complete, the teachers participated in informal interviews with the researchers. Questions in the interview related to each teacher's ideology concerning how the children should relate to each other and how the classroom structure, both physical and organizational, promoted such behavior. The purpose of these questions was to get insight into some of the underlying cultural assumptions the teacher held about appropriate behavior for children. The following interview questions were used: (1) What do you believe your class's greatest strength is? (2) What do you believe is its greatest weakness? (3) Is there any particular reason that you structured your classroom the way you did? (4) What are your goals for the children? (5) What are your goals for the children's relations with each other?

### **Data Analysis**

We use questionnaires and interviews to link each teacher's way of interacting with her students to her educational philosophy expressed in her questionnaire and interview. The method owes much to Davis (2002).

The organizing framework—conflict between individualistic and collectivistic values—was derived from the conceptual analysis that had been developed and empirically instantiated in prior publications (e.g., Trumbull et al., 2001; Raeff et al., 2000; Suzuki et al., 2008). Certain concepts oriented the observation process. These included (1) helping behaviors related to academic or nonacademic activities; (2) individual achievement and individual role fulfillment; (3) sharing and individual property; (4) respect for authority; (5) modesty and self-promotion; (6) implicit and explicit modes of communication. This was the deductive element in the selection of material.

There was also an inductive aspect to the identification of three areas of conflict: Fieldnotes, videos, interviews, and questionnaires were reviewed to see how and whether the hypothesized conflict between individualistic and collectivistic values played out in the two classrooms. The three specific areas of conflict—individual versus group responsibility for learning, individual versus group classroom property, and orientation to the classroom as a set of individuals or as a group—were derived inductively from review of the videos and fieldnotes. They are related to but not identical with the concepts that oriented the ethnographic observations.

Note that neither the structure of our hypothetical scenarios, nor the use of classroom discourse as data, nor the inductive way in which domains of

value conflict were identified maps onto debates about the dimensionality of individualism and collectivism. Some (e.g., Fatehi et al., 2020) have suggested two types of individualism and collectivism based on the degree to which a society is egalitarian or hierarchical. These debates, which are based on analysis of responses to questionnaire items, also lose relevance to the present research because they are based exclusively on adult data and do not include children as participants.

## **Integrating and Interpreting the Data**

### **Individual vs. Group Responsibility Related to Classroom Learning**

#### *Non-Bridging Cultures Classroom*

One difference in cultural values that can result in conflict is that of independent versus collaborative learning as related to academic success. As revealed in her interviews and questionnaire answers, the teacher in this class, Ms. Grey, espouses the ideology that academic achievement is an individual matter and is the result of independent effort. This ideology manifests in classroom practice, where she encourages the students to complete tasks individually and to resist helping others. Children's helping behaviors do seem to frustrate and confuse the non-Bridging Cultures teacher. When asked about her class's greatest weakness during the interview, Ms. Grey said:

Even at this stage of the game, they [the students] still don't listen as well as I'd like them to....I don't know if they don't hear me or don't comprehend, but [next year] in the third grade they need to be more independent.

Ms. Grey did not notice something that had been a focus of the Bridging Cultures training: That the "problem" is not that children are not listening but that they have been taught through countless examples at home to be interdependent rather than independent (Alcalá et al., 2018). The following fieldnote observation exemplifies the teacher's value related to independent thinking and achievement and shows how this value becomes a point of conflict with her students. In the following instance, students Brent, Alex, and David are seated as a group on the classroom rug during reading time. Students in the least advanced group sometimes display difficulty reading, and other students are seen providing assistance by engaging in scaffolding behaviors.

Brent is asked to read aloud. He struggles with the words as he reads them aloud. In response to Brent's struggles, Alex reads along with him. Alex's attempts to help are perceptible, but not loud enough for the teacher to intervene. The following conversation occurs after Brent finishes reading:

Ms. G.: Brent, that was very good. Your reading is getting much better.

Brent: ((*smiles*))

Brent: Alex was helping me.

Ms. G.: Was Alex helping you? Do you want him to help you like that?  
Nooo.

Brent: ((*nods head as if to agree*))

Ms. G.: Alex, I know that you are trying to help, but please read to yourself.

David then tells Adrienne (the observer) what the word spells, replying “glad” in a soft voice, and then stating that “he has to do it by himself.” Brent then shows David his paper to seek clarification. David looks at Brent’s paper and says “bad, b-a-d,” in a quiet tone.

In this example, Brent responds to the teacher’s compliment on his reading by stating that he received assistance from another student. Such a response functions to undermine the recognition for achievement his teacher bestows on him. Later in the conversation, the teacher’s valuing of individual engagement in academic tasks becomes explicit, as she encourages Brent to not want that help from Alex and tells Alex not to assist, saying, “Please read to yourself.”

This scenario played out several times within the same reading lesson. As the lesson proceeded, Ms. Grey explained again that the students should refrain from helping, after witnessing it between two students, David and Brent. After David was asked to read aloud, Brent read along perceptibly at the moments when David appeared to get stuck. In response, the teacher tells Brent to be quiet and not to help David. Several minutes later, a similar incident occurs as a student reads along with the student who is instructed to read aloud.

These instances reveal an incongruence in expected versus actual behavior of the students that may be rooted in mismatched cultural values between teacher and students. Implicit in the teacher’s utterances is the ideology that academic achievement is valued when it originates from independent effort. By contrast, intrinsic to the students’ behavior is an orientation to the anticipation of the needs of their classmates. Achievement of the group, not the individual, is of primary importance (see Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003 for other instantiations of this value).

On occasion, Ms. Grey monitored students’ engagement in helping behaviors on classwork tasks as she directed a small group lesson. In a videotaped segment, she turns her gaze to a group of students not part of her small group. A student, Rena, is visibly oriented to another student through the way her body is positioned. The teacher states, “Rena, by yourself, please.” As the lesson proceeds, Rena visibly reorients her body to another student to perceptibly engage in assistance. In response, the teacher asserts, “Rena, do your own work, please.”

In the following episodes, which occurred during our classroom observation, the teacher makes her valuing of students' independent efforts explicit, while students engage in behaviors that facilitate the participation of their peers:

Ms. Grey is teaching a lesson how to tell time using the clock. During the lesson, the teacher moves the clock hands into different positions and asks the students to reveal the time that corresponds to the hand positions. Several of the students are whispering the answers to each other. The teacher then states, "I have heard people whispering, and I really don't like it because, why? They need to learn by themselves, and you really aren't helping them learn." Several students nod in agreement and repeat "they need to learn by themselves." As the lesson continues, the students continue to whisper the answers behind their hand or into the front of their raised shirt.

In this excerpt, we see students covertly engage in behaviors that allow their peers to readily answer the teacher's question. The teacher opposes this behavior, specifically signifying that this behavior precludes individual learning. Another illustration of the teacher's ideology related to individual learning is seen in the following observation, in which the teacher provides an anticipatory warning:

As the students began to read, the teacher announced, "I want everyone to read the stories to themselves. You should know what all the words are. These are words you can read yourself. You don't need help with that. Just read the words to yourself."

In the following example, the issue of helping Brent becomes contentious:

Brent asks Adrienne (the researcher) to help him read a word on his paper as part of a journal activity. David, who is sitting across from Brent at their work group, tells Adrienne that "nobody is supposed to help him." Brent displays a disappointed face.

### *Bridging Cultures Classroom*

To gain insight into Ms. Dawson's ideology concerning how students can best learn and achieve, one can examine her reflection on the way in which the Bridging Cultures Project influenced her perception of collaborative behavior as helping rather than cheating:

When I first started teaching at [this school], there was no cheating, nobody helps. "You are doing your own work, so I know what you are capable of doing." Nobody was capable of doing anything, so it seemed to me. I didn't even let them use that which makes them the best learners: each other. So, I got rid of the whole idea of cheating, except when

I introduce the tests...But aside from that, when we were learning how to take the tests, when we did those things, [I'd say], "Help each other, please. Help each other out" (quoted in Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008, p. 159).

From this passage, it is apparent that Ms. Dawson initially perceived students' helping behavior in a similar way to that of Ms. Grey—at the very least, as behavior that inhibits learning, and at its worst, as a form of cheating. But her idea of the role of helping changed once she developed a cultural perspective on that behavior through the Bridging Cultures professional development. She evidently began to perceive helping as an expression of social responsibility, a positive behavior. That then bolstered her promotion of children's helping each other, as seen in the passage below:

I want [the students] to have a sense of unity and group support, a sense that nobody succeeds if only one person has done so, and a sense of we are all responsible for each other...If a child negates him or herself in order to help another, I recognize it as a positive attribute. For example, if a child could easily step over a piece of paper, but it's their friend's and they bend down and pick it up and give it to him, or if they are playing and they see that someone else needs help with their work, they stop what they are doing and help their friend. I foster that, I encourage that, and I praise that.

Ms. Dawson's ideology is consistent with her classroom practices as well as with the students' natural behavior, resulting in few examples of conflict of values between the teacher and students. As documented in ethnographic observations, the teacher can often be seen encouraging the students to help each other with classwork exercises and generate solutions collaboratively.

In all the quoted discourse that follows, English translations are provided in brackets after the text in Spanish. The following excerpt from a video recording reveals Ms. Dawson's value of collective responsibility for learning. In this segment, she tells a student who needs help to first ask his classmates at his desk group. (The boy's verbal behavior was not captured on camera, as his voice was very low, and his back was to the camera):

Student: ((*inaudible*))

Ms. D.: *No sabes que hacer? Es la primera vez que estás sentado alla atras?* [You don't know what to do? Is this the first time you have sat back there?]

Student: ((*shakes head as if to say "no"; speaks inaudibly*))

Ms. D.: *Seguro?* [Are you sure?] *Has preguntado a los demas de tu grupo, y nadie te pudo decir?* [You've asked everybody in your group, and nobody



was able to tell you?] *Si yo voy alla y le pregunto a los demas me van a poder decir?* [If I go back there and ask everybody, are they going to be able to tell me?]

Student: ((*inaudible*))

Ms. D.: *Trata hombre, preguntale a tu grupo y después venid a mí si no sabes.* [Try man, ask your group, and then come to me if you don't know.]

Student: ((*inaudible*))

Ms. D.: *Okay, pero preguntale a Brenda. Ella esta casi ya terminado. Ella te puede ayudar si no sabes que hacer.* [Okay, but ask Brenda. She's almost done. She can help you if you don't know what to do.]

The students in this classroom frequently reflect the teacher's value of helping and social responsibility in their interactions with one another. The following example taken from ethnographic fieldnotes depicts the sense of social responsibility among the students as they take a practice test for the Stanford 9, a standardized exam in U.S. schools that assesses academic achievement:

The children are seated in groups and are reading the questions aloud at their own pace. At one table, four children are pointing to the test and discussing the correct answer. Ms. Dawson then leaves the classroom, saying "If you need help, help each other." A student doesn't know where to read and says this aloud. Two students walk over to this student to show him where the students are on the exam.

In this incident, the teacher makes her perspective on student help explicit as she says, "If you need help, help each other." The students' behavior corresponds to this directive: two students provide assistance to a student who has lost his place on a practice exam. She is clear, however, that helping is to prepare for the test, not to take it—thus she provides a potential cultural bridge to the basic individualistic assumption of schooling—that grades and scores are based on individual behavior.

The following videotape excerpt also reveals how students engage in behaviors that display social responsibility. Two students are completing a language arts exercise:

Student 1: *¿Te tocó copiar para acá?* [Did you have to copy this over here?]

Student 2: *De-be-rí-a ser ma-yú-scu-la.* [It shou-ld be ca-p-i-tal.] ((*while reading from classwork*))

Student 1: *¿Te salió mal?* [Did you do it wrong?]

Student 2: ((*nods head to respond affirmatively*))

Student 1: Ooh, bad, bad, bad.

Student 3: *No, corígelo, corígelo, Maria.* [No correct it, correct it, Maria.]

Student 2: *Ya estoy.* [I'm doing it.]

Student 3: *Corígelo. Tal vez sea algo mal.* [Correct it. Maybe something is wrong.]

In this example, we see that in uttering the directives to Maria, Student 3 displays concern for Student 2, specifically stating that she should correct her work (“No, correct it, correct it, Maria.”) and why she should do so (“Maybe something is wrong.”). In addition, we perceive Student 1’s concern in the way that he inquires into Maria’s work progress (“Did you do it wrong?”). Thus, the students’ behavior reflects their sense of responsibility for their classmates.

Ms. Dawson also encourages students to look over each other’s assignments. For example, in one instance that was video recorded, a student was observed to get the wrong answer on a practice test and needed assistance. The teacher told students to “check over each other’s work.” In response to students’ helping of other students, the teacher praised and thanked the students, through such utterances as, “*Qué buen amigo eres. Gracias.*” [“What a good friend you are. Thank you.”].

We note that occasionally students would complain that a student was cheating by looking at the classwork of another student. In response, the teacher reframed the behavior from “cheating” to “helping” by frequently asserting, “Cheating? They’re helping.” It is clear from these examples that the teacher perceives helping as a facilitator of learning, as a way to enhance the social support and unity of the classroom, and as harmonious with home culture values. It is interesting, though, that school has already socialized some of the children to the notion that helping can sometimes be considered “cheating.”

## **Individual vs. Group Property**

### *Non-Bridging Cultures Classroom*

The conflict in values that arose in this classroom was that of a collective sense of ownership of property by the students as opposed to an individual sense of property as espoused by the teacher. Ms. Grey’s ideology related to this cultural value is revealed in her response to one of the scenarios (see Appendix, Scenario 4). The scenario involved a conflict between two brothers—Adam and Johnny—related to sharing. Johnny wants to wear Adam’s T-shirt but Adam refuses, stating that he bought the shirt with his own money. In response to how the boys’ mother should respond, Ms. Grey agreed with the forced choice answer that “The mother should tell Adam that it’s Johnny’s T-shirt, and she

can't make Johnny let him wear it." She added that "I completely understand why Johnny does not want Adam to borrow it, and Adam needs to respect that decision." When asked if she could understand why the mother might tell the boys to share, Ms. Grey responded that "the mother should respect her son's feelings first." This scenario response by the teacher provides us with insight into the teacher's prioritizing individual over collective ownership of property and her inability to take a different cultural perspective.

Conflicts related to individual property could be found as related to students' supplies. At their individual desk space, students have their own pencils and crayons that are typically kept in zip-lock bags or crayon boxes. However, students often borrow crayons from each other, despite having their individual supplies. This practice is so common that it occurs without the students' asking the owner for permission to borrow, even when the owner is present at his or her desk.

Some of the students have special crayon boxes that they have brought from home. Brent, for example, has a fairly large supply of markers that he has brought from home, which he uses instead of the crayons that the others are supplied with by the school. Brent allows other students to use his markers liberally. The students typically do not ask Brent for permission before they borrow his markers; rather, they come to his desk, take one, and then bring it back when they are done using it. The teacher has instructed the students not to borrow items from other students without asking for permission.

During one of the research observations, the teacher questioned this collective practice, making sure that Brent genuinely felt that it was appropriate that many of the students were borrowing markers that were his property.

Brent and his friend are working together and sharing Brent's case of coloring utensils. Ms. Grey asks, "Brent, is it okay with you that everyone borrows like that?" Brent nods his head yes. Four or five children come to Brent's desk where the utensils are located and bring them to their own desks to use, and then return them to Brent. Brent announces, "I am being good to everybody."

In this example, Ms. Grey asks Brent if it is okay to share, implying that Brent maintains priority in deciding whether to share or not. Since Brent, as the owner of the markers, declared that he was okay with this practice, the teacher permitted it. At the end of the same day as Brent's pronouncement, Brent's red marker was missing. The teacher asked him to look for it, reminding him of the consequences of permitting classmates to use his markers.

The cultural value related to individual and collective property extends to abstract entities such as ideas. The researchers noted Ms. Grey explaining to a

student, “I think that is Alan’s idea, Brent, not yours.” Ms. Grey’s responses to the students’ behavior are ones consistent with an individualistic value of respect for a person’s property as an aspect of respect for its owner.

### *Bridging Cultures Classroom*

The Bridging Cultures classroom, in contrast, can be characterized as one in which the value of property as belonging to the group is emphasized. Placing less emphasis on personal property was identified by the Bridging Cultures teachers in their training as a possible way of creating a more culture-friendly classroom. In her interview, Ms. Dawson related an instance in which a student claimed the faculty chair—a chair that was visibly larger than the rest of the chairs in the classroom—as hers. When another student tried to sit in the chair, the student said, “No, this is my chair.” In response, the teacher recounted, “I took the chair away, and I said, ‘it’s everybody’s chair’...I am very anti-personal property. I make a point of telling them, “This is the school’s, or this is *our* property.”

In this classroom, students do not have their individual writing and coloring utensils. Instead, pencils are kept in one box at the front of the classroom, and students retrieve pencils from the box as needed. Similarly, the crayons are kept in gallon buckets at the side of the room and are typically shared by as many as five or six students at one time. In the following videorecorded excerpt, the students engage in sharing behavior without any accompanying verbal behavior:

Two boys are involved in a writing exercise. One boy needs to erase what he has written on his paper. He walks to another desk, picks up an eraser on this desk, where three students are working. Neither the student taking the eraser, nor the three students, speak to each other. The student returns to his desk to use the eraser.

This example suggests that in this classroom students use communal erasers, property that can be used between desks. It can be inferred that the students maintain a mutual expectation of valuing property as something belonging to a community.

Although students have assigned seats, they are permitted to change seats and do so on a regular basis. Ms. Dawson revealed in the interview that, although the students do have their own desks, she does not remember or keep track of the students’ seat assignments. She was observed referring to individual desk space using the deictic markers “here and there” rather than referring to the desk as one belonging to a particular student. This is seen in the following: “I want to see Silvia here,” as she points. “Roberto here, you’re over there, dude,” “and Dionisio here” and continued in this fashion with the remainder

of students. Notably, the researchers never observed students complaining or arguing about possession of desk space.

The researchers observed instances in which Ms. Dawson offers a student a writing utensil sitting in front of a different student who is currently not using it. She similarly requests that students share their writing utensils, as seen in the following utterances, which were typical: “Ezequiel deja que Ramón use tu borador, por favor.” [“Ezequiel, let Ramón borrow your eraser, please.”] and “Dionisio, deja que José use ese otro lapiz.” [“Dionisio, let José use that other pencil.”]. The teacher also reinforces the treatment of property as belonging to the group. On one occasion, she was observed saying, “If they didn’t share the clay, they would not be able to play with it.” And when a student complained about another student’s behaving in a possessive manner over paper, the teacher responded by saying, “Debra, comparten, comparten.” [“Debra, share, share.”].

Individual ownership is a pervasive value in schools and teacher training. Thus, on one occasion, the Bridging Cultures teacher had to undo an instruction given by a substitute teacher. The substitute teacher instructed students to put names on their textbooks so that they would know which one was theirs. When Ms. Dawson returned, the students asked for the book that corresponded to their name. In response, the Bridging Cultures teacher asserted to the class that “This is not good.” and that “It’s not correct to put your names in the books. I know it happened while I was gone, but it’s bad my friends. These are not your own.” Here, Ms. Dawson realigns classroom values with values that may be more consonant with those in the students’ homes.

### **Conceptualization of the Group: Cohesive Entity vs. a Collection of Individuals**

Creating a cohesive group, a classroom community that could work well together, was not a professed goal of the Bridging Cultures Project, but it is a widely supported educational goal (Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 1999). It is, therefore, not surprising to hear teachers report that they like and often encourage groupwork, as both teachers did. However, what they meant by “group” was very different. If one were to observe the physical layout of both the Bridging Cultures classroom and the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, the positioning of the desks would look somewhat similar. Both the teachers in this study structured their classroom so that the majority of the children would be sitting at tables, in small groups (mostly groups of about four). Both the teachers reported that they had structured their classrooms this way so that the students might sit in a group and be able to engage in groupwork at times. However, engagement in class activities differed between the classrooms based on the teachers’ distinct notions of “group.”

Two sets of examples from the videos showing how teaching and learning are structured in each classroom will be used to illustrate this point. The first is from the beginning-of-the-day activities; the second is from small-group work during language arts instruction. The whole-class-working-together approach seen in the Bridging Cultures classroom can be contrasted with individual roles during the pledge of allegiance and the beginning-of-the-day activity in the non-Bridging Cultures classroom.

*Beginning of the Day: Non-Bridging Cultures Classroom*

After all the beginning-of-the-day activities are complete, the flag salute monitor gets up out of her seat and walks over to the side of the room where Ms. Grey is usually standing. “Put your right hand over your heart, ready, begin,” the monitor says, and the class recites the pledge of allegiance.

After the pledge of allegiance is done, Ms. Grey walks over to the calendar, which is at the front of the room, and asks, “What day is it today?” Individual children raise their hands, and the teacher calls on one of them. “What day was it yesterday?” the teacher then asks the children. This pattern continues for a few minutes, with individual children raising their hands to answer each question.

*Beginning of the Day: Bridging Cultures Classroom*

After counting the number of days passed since the beginning of school, all the children get up and walk to the blackboard where one child takes the pointer and points to what is written on the board. Together the class reads, first in Spanish, “Hoy es Martes, 14 de Abril,” then in English, “Today is Tuesday, April 14.” Then they read the short-hand date in English “four-fourteen.” After they are done with the date, the whole class moves to where the flag is located. They stand underneath it and recite the pledge of allegiance and sing a brief song. The class then moves back to the rug, where the teacher joins them.

*Small Group Language Arts: Non-Bridging Cultures Classroom*

In a video clip, four children are seated in a small group at a table, and one child is sitting farther away at a desk. The children have just finished going over their spelling words for the day and are completing an assignment in which they have to write sentences about three of their favorite things. The children at the table work quietly, each of them writing about their favorite things. If they have a question about how to spell a word, they raise their hands, and the teacher answers their question. Ms. Grey stands by the children, looking over their work, making sure that no one looks over at anybody’s paper, and showing that she is available to answer any questions that the children might have. When she moves away, the children whisper quietly among themselves. Joseph

tells the other children about the horse that he has in Mexico, one of his favorite things. However, Ms. Grey hears him and calls out to him, “Joseph are you talking or working?” After this reminder, the children continue to work in silence.

### *Small Group Language Arts: Bridging Cultures Classroom*

In a video clip, five children are sitting around a desk with the teacher. As a group, they have just finished creating a brainstorm about a person the teacher admires, her mother. Each child is now creating their own brainstorm about a person that they admire, using the groups’ creation as a sort of guide. This brainstorm will later be used as support for writing an essay. One of the boys is writing about Spider-Man but does not know how to spell Spider-Man’s name. He announces his problem out loud. The teacher walks up to the board and asks if anyone knows how to spell the name. “S,” one of the boys yells out. “What kind of S?” the teacher asks. “Capital!” someone else yells. “Then P,” yells out one of the girls. “A, A” says another boy “No, no, I” says one of the girls. “Which is it?” asks the teacher; after thinking about it, the children decide on “I.” The children continue in this way for another 6 letters until, together, they have constructed both parts of the word “Spider-Man.”

## **Interpretation and Role of the Bridging Cultures Project**

Each of these teachers constructed groups in a way that was consonant with her own implicit definition of “group.” One simple contrast is in the ways the pledge of allegiance, a group activity itself, takes place: In the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, an individual child is asked to lead the group. In the Bridging Cultures classroom, the activity is initiated by the whole group. A similar contrast occurs in the activity of counting the number of days since school started.

This valuing of individual rewards and recognition in proportion to one’s contribution or achievement did not foster the same sort of solidarity among the students that was found in the Bridging Cultures classroom. In fact, sometimes it seemed as if the children actually delighted in others’ mistakes. During a videotaped math lesson, the non-Bridging Cultures classroom children played a game called “Around the World,” in which they would stand behind other children’s desks, trying to be the first to answer math questions posed by the teacher. The child who answered the question first moved to stand behind the next person’s desk, until they went “around the world” (from desk to desk around the classroom). There were two girls, Carlotta and Alma, who were regarded as particularly good at math, and whenever one of them would seem



to be getting many answers right, a listener would hear, “Oh, please,” “please,” “please” being whispered throughout the classroom. It seemed that most kids wanted the child who was doing well to lose in her next turn. When one of them finally lost, other children (usually not the one who had beaten them) would get up out of their seats and yell “YES!!” One possible interpretation is that the students were resisting the competitive aspect of the task that elevated individual performance above group success.

The Bridging Cultures teacher reported that in her classroom she actively tries to promote a more collectivistic type of group, where the children feel interconnected and responsible for each other. She attributes this change in her philosophy from a more individualistic approach to a collectivistic approach to the Bridging Cultures training. In her interview Ms. Dawson stated:

[After Bridging Cultures] I want them to be truly balanced in the love and respect of their own culture, which means that sense of unity and group support and nobody succeeds if only one person has done so, but a sense of “we are all responsible for each other”...I also want them to succeed for themselves because that is the success of the whole group.... If I can help you succeed, then you can help me succeed.

Her goals seemed to be working as far as this particular class was concerned. By working together and accepting a sense of responsibility for the group, the children not only helped each other academically, but also seemed to monitor each other's behavior, to make sure that the others succeed in a task. During videotaping of the language arts group in which the “Spider-Man” example occurred, one of the boys, Alejandro, became aware of the camera and the fact that he was being taped. Rather than continue working, he turned and faced the camera and began making faces and gestures. While this was going on, the teacher was present but looking over somebody else's paper. Anticipating that Alejandro might be scolded by the teacher if he continued, another student took on the responsibility to tell him, “Alejandro, eh, do your work!”

In contrast, Ms. Grey appears to have a strong concept of the children as individuals first and foremost. During our interview with her, whenever we would talk about the group as a whole, she would usually mention children specifically, as if they were somehow not a part of the larger group. This is consistent with a values framework that prioritizes the individual. Such a framework was also implicit in her answers to the hypothetical scenarios in which she revealed that it was important to her to reward individual children for their contributions to a project and for their individual achievement. She reported in response to the “Credit” scenario (Appendix, Scenario 6) that she could not understand how it would be possible to reward two children for

something in which only one child did the majority of the work, even if the two children involved were brothers, and the task that they were engaged in was cleaning the house.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, we have demonstrated numerous ways in which cultural values manifest themselves in concordant and discordant ways in the classroom relative to the particular domains of individual versus social responsibility regarding classwork, individual versus group property, and the conceptualization of the group as a cohesive entity or a collection of individuals. Conflicts arise in relation to the values of helping vs. individual responsibility and sharing vs. individual property. Through the documentation of interactions—both observed and videorecorded—we examined two classrooms, one in which the students' cultural values acquired at home matched those that the teacher invoked and the other in which the students' values acquired at home conflicted with those that the teacher displayed. We saw the interactional results of these phenomena—matching vs. mismatching—through relations among the students and between the students and teacher.

Fundamentally, these findings reveal the way in which classrooms serve as agents of cultural distillation—by both teachers *and* students. As we have seen, the students' interactions can be influenced by the expressed values of the teacher, and these values can have a negative impact on the children's relations when the teacher's values are dissonant with those of the children's values, as expressed in their classroom interactions (as in the non-Bridging Cultures classroom). By contrast, the students' interactions in the Bridging Cultures classroom were relatively harmonious, in part because—through the Bridging Cultures professional development—the teacher learned about values harmonious with the values her students expressed through their classroom interactions and decided to organize her instruction in concert with them. In the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, it became apparent that the children attempted to maintain the individualistic values of their teacher, but their behaviors betrayed the fact that they felt conflicted about embracing those values.

Students experience forces of cultural socialization in many domains of their lives, and the elementary school classroom is surely a significant source of such socialization. Through the examples shared here, we see (1) that teachers have the power to re-socialize their students: In the Bridging Cultures classroom, the children are re-socialized in accordance with the collectivistic values of the home, and (2) that children will change according to the values of the teacher: In the non-Bridging Cultures classroom, the children are re-socialized to the individualistic values of school. Therefore, the changes in the children in

the Bridging Cultures classroom may be merely ephemeral, extinguished when these children are taught by a different teacher in the future—one who is likely to uphold the individualistic values of the school. It bears recognizing that students will have to navigate between home and school behavioral demands over the course of their school careers.

As Bridging Cultures teacher–researchers have observed, to the degree that potential conflicting values can be made explicit to teachers, students, and parents, conflicts can be reduced—or at least understood (Trumbull et al., 2001). Later workshops with Latino immigrant parents in Los Angeles did exactly this; they made the contrasting value systems explicit. As the Bridging Cultures teachers had predicted, conflict was reduced and greater harmony between parents and teachers emerged (Esau et al., 2013).

Teachers who understand students' home cultures can seek to use instructional methods and classroom organizational patterns that draw on the cultural strengths of their students and, at times, socialize them to the individualistic expectations of U.S. schooling (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). They can explain to parents how to anticipate the culturally different expectations emanating from school so that they then have a say in how to help their children thrive in school (Esau et al., 2013).

Foundational to this study were our interviews with Latino immigrant parents in Los Angeles, their children, and teachers from their children's school (Raeff et al., 2000; Greenfield & Quiroz, 2013). Our findings of parent-teacher value differences in that research enabled us to anticipate and predict that, without the Bridging Cultures training, there would be cross-cultural value conflicts between children and teachers expressed in the classroom. However, we did not know how these conflicts would play out in real-time classroom interaction. We also did not know how our Bridging Cultures training would be reflected in real-time classroom interaction. This study provides the answers. If anything, the biggest lesson to teachers who have participated in the Bridging Cultures Project is to explore their own cultural assumptions and learn from parents what values are guiding the ways they rear their children. In that regard, we must remind readers that the individualism–collectivism framework is merely a starting point for thinking about cultural differences. It can get teachers thinking about how to learn about families' approaches to childrearing and schooling. But it is just a heuristic, a tool for prompting the important investigation teachers need to do in their own school contexts.

A question that arose from this research study is: How do children unconsciously become social mediators between the two value systems? That is, how do children negotiate the conflicts between their home values and their classroom values, and how is their behavior contingent upon whom they interact

with? Further analyses of our own extensive data might yield some answers to this question, but more research is, no doubt, needed. The term “bicultural” has been used to describe children who operate in or between two cultures (e.g., Romero & Roberts, 2003). Indeed, teachers also need bicultural competence if they are to successfully teach students from nondominant cultures (Darder, 2015), as this and other Bridging Cultures research demonstrate.

Having an awareness of distinct cultural value systems makes it easier for teachers to create practices that bridge the home and school cultures. By thinking about culture at a conscious level, a teacher is able to make instructional and managerial decisions that help students thrive and that are not undermining of families’ own goals for their children. Rather than wondering why some of their students “just don’t get it,” culturally savvy teachers can minimize unnecessary conflicts, create opportunities for their students to become readily engaged in classroom learning, and support them to function within both value systems. Some may observe that promoting a balance of collectivistic and individualistic values is desirable for the greater good of a society that could benefit from more emphasis on the well-being of the group.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup>These demographics were calculated based on the questionnaire data that was returned to the researcher. Researchers received information regarding immigrant status from 17 parents of 22 and information regarding language spoken in the home from 19 parents of 22 in the non-Bridging Cultures classroom; researchers received information regarding immigrant status and language spoken in the home from 26 parents of 41 in the Bridging Cultures classroom.

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### **Appendix. Home/School Hypothetical Scenarios (adapted from Greenfield et al., 1996)**

1. A class of fifth grade students is working on posters for an art class. Next week some teachers will come to select five posters for an art show. Then one poster will be chosen for a \$50 prize. Eric and Victor realize that they have some similar ideas for a really neat poster, and they want to work together.

What do you think the teacher should do?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The teacher should let Eric and Victor work together and explain to them that the prize will be for both of them.
- b. The teacher should explain to Eric and Victor that they have to work alone because there is only one prize.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

2. Theresa tells the teacher that she will probably be absent tomorrow because her mother is sick, and she has to stay home to help take care of her brother.

What do you think the teacher should do?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The teacher should tell Theresa that she understands, but that school is her most important responsibility, and her mother should find someone else to help out.
- b. The teacher tells Theresa that it is very kind of her to help her mother, and that she will give Theresa work for the next day so that she won't fall behind.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

3. Rebecca tells her mother that she got the highest grade in the class on her math test. She says she is really proud of herself for doing so well, and for doing the best in the class.

What do you think the mother should say?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The mother agrees with Rebecca and tells her that she is the best and that she is proud of her.
- b. The mother tells Rebecca not to get too conceited and doesn't she think that some of the kids in the class feel bad?

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

4. 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 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?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The mother should tell Johnny to let Adam borrow the T-shirt because he isn't wearing it.
- b. The mother should tell Adam that it's Johnny's T-shirt, and she can't make Johnny let him wear it.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

5. It is the end of the day, and the class is cleaning up. Denise isn't feeling well, and she asks Jasmine to help her with her job for the day, which is cleaning the blackboard. Jasmine isn't sure that she will have time to do both jobs.

What do you think the teacher should do?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The teacher should tell Jasmine to help Denise with the job.
- b. The teacher should tell the girls that Denise is responsible for her clean-up job.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

6. When Tony's and Louis' mother gets home, she finds that the house has been cleaned, and dinner is almost ready. She thanks them both for being so helpful. Tony says, "why are you thanking him; I'm the one who did most of the work."

What do you think the mother should do?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The mother should tell Tony that she is thankful he did more, but he shouldn't try to get more credit at Louis' expense.
- b. The mother should apologize for not giving Tony enough credit and she should thank Tony again, because if he is the one who did most of the work, he should get the recognition.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

7. 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 that the mother should do?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The mother should say, "Oh, I understand." And then she should get dinner started.
- b. The mother should tell Dennis that the rest of the family is tired and hungry when they get home, and would he please help her now.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

8. 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 is worth the most. Maria doesn't understand what to do, and while the other students are making their decisions, Cathy tries to explain it to her. The teacher notices that they are talking.

What do you think the teacher should do?

People might have different ideas about how to handle this situation. Which of these choices do you agree with the most?

- a. The teacher should tell Maria and Cathy to be quiet.
- b. The teacher should ask Maria and Cathy why they are talking, and once she finds out that Cathy is helping Maria, she should let her continue with the explanation.

Now can you imagine someone choosing the other answer? Why might they make that choice?

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