Research Issues.

Voices of Teachers and Students from Mexico and the United States[1]

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> All 10 [Mexican] mothers . . . believed that they had prepared their children well for school. They had taught them to be respectful, and they had taught them to behave. They did not know that other, more "American" mothers had also taught their children colors, letters, and numbers. They ... believed that letters, colors, and numbers were part of what their children would learn at school (Valdez, 1996, p. 148).

The Mexican mothers in the above passage live in the United States. In an ethnographic study of ten Mexican families living in a U.S.-Mexican border community, Valdez (1996) interviewed parents, children, teachers' aids, and teachers over a three-year period. She found numerous differences between the values and behaviors of the homes and those of the school. Mexican parents expected U.S. schools to be like the schools they had known or attended in Mexico and they were often surprised by the differences in what the schools did, what they expected of children, and what they expected of parents.

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Numerous studies have documented the failure of U.S. schools to successfully educate Mexican and Mexican American students (Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980; Carter & Segure, 1979; Orum, 1986). In 1990, the high school graduation rate for Mexican and Mexican American students was 54%, whereas for whites it was 81% (Carter & Wilson, 1993). The reasons for the 'leakage' of Mexican and Mexican American students from the 'educational pipeline' (de los Santos, 1984, p. 68) are complex and relate to the unique social, historical, economic, and educational situation of Mexican Americans[1]. Years ago, Ogbu (1978) argued that the United States had a caste-like system, and Losey (1997) maintains that this dual system continues in many ways today.

One explanation for the difficulties that many Mexican and other children have in U.S. schools may be the difference in the interaction patterns between the home and the school (Garcia & Carrasco, 1981; Heath; 1983; Jordan, 1981; Losey, 1997; Philips, 1972). This explanation has been termed the "cultural mismatch theory"(Valdez, 1996). Ogbu (1992), for example, argues that it is not the content of the school that is difficult for Mexicans and other non-mainstream dominant culture students, but the differences in style: cognitive style, interaction style, and learning style. He further argues that the things that children bring to school—their communities' cultural models or understandings of the 'social realities' and the educational strategies that they, their families, and their communities use or do not use in seeking education—are as important as within-school factors. One social reality is what students expect from school. In Valenzuela's (1999) study, the students expected education in the United States to be more like the Mexican concept of "educacion" which is based on respectful, caring relations that involve "sustained reciprocal relationships between teachers and students as the basis for learning." The students proposed that they be valued as whole people, "not as automatons" (p. 61).

Before reviewing the studies on Mexicans, it is necessary to say a few words about "culture." Recently, standard notions of culture have been called into question (e.g., Appadurai, 1996; Atkinson, 1999; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Atkinson refers to many past definitions of culture as a "received view" in which cultures are perceived as "relatively unchanging and homogeneous, and as all encompassing systems of rules or norms that substantially determine behavior" (p. 626). Such definitions do not take into account variation that exists within "cultures" (e.g., gender, status, ethnicity, power) or change that occurs due to internal and external forces. Therefore, when the term "Mexican" is used in the studies mentioned below, be conscious that the term is loosely and/or defined differently in each study and that a great deal of variation in meaning is possible.

A body of research has looked at factors relating to the success or failure of Mexican students in U.S. schools. One set of studies has looked at how Mexican

children learn at home. The Mexican mothers in Valdez' (1996) study prepared their children for school by teaching them to be respectful and to behave. They were taught "not be to disruptive, not to call attention to themselves, not to interrupt adult speech . . . ." (p. 147). The mothers in Laosa's (1981) and Losey' (1997) research used modeling as a primary teaching strategy.

Other studies have identified factors that may contribute to the success of Mexican students in U.S. schools. Possible factors include a collective or cooperative classroom structure over an individualistic competitive one (Delgato-Gaitan, 1987; Engelbrecht, 1983; Losey, 1997); a classroom that has almost a familial relationship between student and teacher (Losey, 1997); teachers who really care about Mexican students (Valenzuela (1999); teachers who do not cause students to lose face (Albert & Nelson, 1993); teachers who are concerned with all the students in the class (Albert & Nelson, 1993); and teachers who have high expectations of their students coupled with the belief that the students can achieve these high expectations (Chavez, 1997; Garcia, 1991; Romo & Falbo,1996; Tikunoff, 1983).

Factors that may hinder Mexican students' progress in school include a number of subtle teacher behaviors that distance the student from the teacher. Teachers often call on Mexican students less, praise them less, mispronounce their names, and avoid eye contact and physical closeness (Buriel, 1983; Losey, 1997). Mexican students in Valdez' (1996) study tended not to speak out loud, ask for the teacher's attention, volunteer, or call out answers. If they had a question, they approached "the person that most resembled a family member – the grandmother-like figure of the volunteer aid, and they whispered a question or remark" (p. 147). Differences in educational strategies may also be hindrances. An example of such a difference is presented in one case study (McClelland, 1997). A Mexican mother received a note from a teacher that she should have her son "checked." The mother was puzzled by this and said that in Mexico, if there was a problem with a child, the teacher and parent would talk to each other and would not bring in a third party.

Other factors that often affect Mexican students are leaving relatives and friends behind, difficult living conditions, feeling that other kids make fun of the way they speak, feeling the stress associated with acculturation, and not feeling accepted by others (Goodenow, 1992; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Kurtines & Miranda, 1980; Padilla, 1986).

The studies reviewed in this paper investigated Mexican children in U.S. schools. Little research has been published in English on Mexican students and teachers in Mexican schools and even fewer have compared Mexican and U.S. students' and teachers' perceptions of the roles and relationships between students and teachers.

The purpose of this study is to identify patterns of difference and similarity in the behaviors, expectations, and attitudes of Mexican and U.S. students and teachers.

METHODOLOGY

A variety of qualitative methods were used to collect information in an attempt to find patterns in the data. Methods of data collection included classroom observations in Mexico and the United States, questionnaires, and interviews. As with other qualitative research, the results cannot be generalized beyond the participants in this study; however, they do suggest differences that may help U.S. teachers understand the Mexican students in their classrooms.

Preliminary Procedure

In order to obtain data in the U.S., the researchers submitted a research proposal to the school system's research office. After permission was obtained, principals were contacted. If the principals gave their permission, then teachers, students, and parents were contacted. All students (and their parents) who participated in the study signed a statement of consent. A bilingual graduate research assistant distributed the letters explaining the project and the consent forms in Spanish to the students and parents. Often she visited the homes of the Mexican families in order to explain the project to the parents, get their signatures, and interview the children. She also conducted interviews at the schools, often during lunch hour. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

In Mexico the procedure was similar. To interview students and teachers from the public and private schools, the Mexican researchers received permission from the school principal and from students. To interview private school children, they also needed letters of consent from the parents.

Participants

United States

Students. Respondents met the following selection criteria. They were (a) in the fourth to eighth grade, (b) maintained a 3.0 grade point average, and (c) were in public schools in an urban area. In the United States, 20 native-English speaking (NES) students and 20 Mexican ESL students were interviewed; an additional 20 in each group completed a questionnaire. The NES students were interviewed in English by a native English speaker, and the Mexican students were interviewed in Spanish by a native Spanish speaker. The NES students completed

the questionnaire in English and the Mexican students in Spanish. All of the Mexican students had studied in Mexico for at least one year before coming to the United States. All students were in public schools in Atlanta, Georgia.

Teachers. Twenty NES content area teachers and 20 ESL teachers were also interviewed, and an additional 20 in each category completed the questionnaires. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed.

Mexico

Students. Respondents met the following selection criteria. They were (a) in the fourth to seventh grade and (b) were selected by teachers as "good" students. Twenty public school students and 20 private school students were interviewed in Spanish by native Spanish speakers and an additional 20 from each group (public and private) completed a questionnaire in Spanish. The audiotapes were transcribed into Spanish and also translated into English. Students were from Monterrey, Mexico.

Teachers. Twenty Mexican teachers were also interviewed, and an additional 20 completed the questionnaires; all in Spanish. Teacher interviews were also transcribed into Spanish and translated into English.

Thus, a total of 80 Mexican and U.S. students were interviewed and an additional 80 filled out questionnaires for a total of 160 students. In addition, 60 Mexican and U.S. teachers filled out questionnaires and 60 more were interviewed for a total of 120 teachers. Thus, data was generated from 280 participants.

Questionnaires and Interviews

The questionnaire and interview items were developed by the researchers based on observations of Mexican and U.S. classrooms and from cultural differences that had been identified in the literature. General questions (e.g., What are the characteristics of a good teacher?) were also asked. The student and teacher versions of the questionnaire were the same, as were the versions of the interview questions. Because this is a qualitative study, we were looking for in depth information. We did not, therefore, cut students and teachers off after they had finished answering the core of a question. We listened and tape recorded all that they said.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of 4 stages. In Stage 1, the audiotapes were transcribed so that the responses for each respondent were recorded. The questionnaire data were also recorded so that each participant's response to each item was listed consecutively; (i.e., all of each person's responses were recorded in the order that the questions were

asked). After this initial recording of the data, Stage 2 began. In Stage 2, we reconfigured the data so that all responses to item 1 were listed consecutively. For instance, all Mexican student responses to questionnaire item 1 were listed consecutively. In Stage 3, we recursively read through the responses to each question and let the data suggest the coding categories. Each question was different; the responses to each question were different; and thus, the coding categories for many questions were different. After we had agreed and defined the appropriate categories for a group of questions, two of the researchers independently coded the data. When they compared their coding, they discussed any discrepancies until a consensus was reached. Stage 4 consisted of counting the number of responses in each category and developing tables to determine what patterns emerged. If participants gave more than one type of response, all types were counted. Because we were primarily looking at differences between Mexico and the U.S. we focused on those responses that indicated the greatest differences.

RESULTS

Not all of our data showed distinctions between school experiences in Mexico and in the United States. In many of the interview and questionnaire items, both Mexican and U.S. students and teachers responded similarly. They did, however, respond differently to other items. One set of differences clusters around a central theme: What is the relationship of teachers to their students? The items that indicated the greatest differences and the richest data were items on 1) students drawing a picture of the teacher, 2) students disagreeing with the teacher, 3) students not doing homework, and 4) students and teachers kissing as a greeting.

Table 1: Categories and frequencies of <u>student</u> responses to <u>interview item</u> concerning what typical teachers would do if a student drew a funny picture of them and left it anonymously on their desks

Categories	U.S. Students	Mexican Public School Students	Mexican Private School Students	Mexican Students in the United States
Find out who did it and punish the individual (if found)	6	20	14	20
Punish whole class	9		3	5
Ignore or take as light-hearted joke	11		1	

Students drawing picture of teacher

In this interview item, students and teachers were asked, "What would a typical teacher do in the following situation: A student draws a funny picture of the teacher which exaggerates a part of his or her body, like the stomach or hair. The student leaves the picture on the teacher's desk with no name on it, and the teacher discovers it." As shown in Table 1, U.S. and Mexican students differed in their perceptions of how teachers would react in this situation. U.S. native English-speaking students were about evenly divided between students who believed that the teacher would ignore the picture or treat it in a light-hearted way and students who believed that the teacher would either punish the whole class or find out and punish the individual responsible for it.

One female U.S. student observed that good teachers recognize that students are going to make fun of them:

(1) A good teacher would probably just leave it alone because all kids are going to make fun of the teacher. They're the bad guy. (USNSF4)[1]

Another students claimed that it depended on the personality of the teacher:

(2) It depends if she has a sense of humor or not. A teacher like .... would get really mad and probably paste it up and ask who did it. But most teachers would kind of laugh it off. (USNSF8)

Yet another student proposed that the teacher's reaction depended on the nature of the picture:

(3) If it was a really funny drawing, they'd probably laugh. But they'd want to know who did it because it's making fun of someone. And they say, "This is a really funny drawing and I think you're a good artist, but this isn't art class." (USNSF10)

Some students reported that the teacher would punish the whole class if she couldn't find out who did it. For example, a male stated

(4) When the students come back in, she'd probably ask everyone, "What is this? Who did this?" And if she can't find an answer, she'll try to investigate or something. And she'll probably have some way of finding out who did it, like saying, "All right, everyone has a silent lunch if someone doesn't me tell who this is." Or "All right, we're going to have a test right now if someone doesn't tell me who did it." 'Cause someone probably saw someone doing it or putting it up there. (USNSM6)

Mexican students reported that they believed teachers would take it seriously. As shown in Table 1, public school students believe that the teacher would invariably find out who did it and punish that individual. Private school students largely agreed with this perception, although several noted that the teacher might not find out and would then punish the whole class. The serious treatment of the matter is illustrated by the following student comments, many of which indicate the student's punishment.

(5) Lo reporta a la dirección. Pues le llaman la atención y si no entiende, lo expulsan. (MXPBM5)
(She reports the child to the office. They talk to the child and if he doesn't really see that it was wrong, he is suspended.)

(6) Se enoja dice "¿Quién puso esto?" Y cuando encuentra quién fue, los castiga. Pararlos o dejarlos así, o decirles que ya no hagan eso o llevarlos a la dirección. (MXPBF11)
(She gets mad and asks who it was. When she finds out who it was, she punishes them. She has the student stand up for a while, or asks them not to do that again, or takes them to the office.)

(7) Le dice que nadie va al recreo hasta que digan quién fue. Cuando sabe quién fue, lo castiga con la detención. (MXPRM2)
(She says that no one is going to recess until they tell her who did it. When she finds out who it was, she punishes him with detention.)

None of the Mexican students believed that the teacher would laugh or take it as a joke.

The teachers' responses are consistent with those of the students. U.S. subject teachers and U.S. ESL teachers largely considered this kind of behavior or action to be of little or no consequence. As Table 2 illustrates, most said that they would either ignore the picture or make a joke of it.

Table 2: Categories and frequencies of teacher responses to interview item concerning what typical teachers would do if a student drew a funny picture of them and left it anonymously on their desks.

Categories	ESL teachers in U.S	Content teachers in U.S.	Mexican teachers in Mexico
Problem to be dealt with	3	3	16
Not a problem, (ignore or make a joke)	16	17	4
Publicly display the picture	11	8	
Issue of respect for teacher specifically mentioned	1	1	8
Use to teach moral lesson	2	1	4

Some ESL teachers noted that they would put the picture up and use it for a language lesson on adjectives or parts of the body. One ESL teacher quipped

(8) Oh, I'd probably just make a joke out of it. I might stick it up and say, "Thank you for the picture!" I'd just make a joke out of it. Say, "Yeah, you did a good job of drawing me." I wouldn't get upset about that. (USESLTF2)

A content teacher stated

(9) I hang them up as long as they're not obscene. I think it's funny. (USCTM19)

In contrast, the Mexican teachers considered the behavior to be a problem, and responded in a variety of ways. Most of the teachers said that they knew that they would be able to find out who did the drawing. About half of the teachers said they would find out who did the drawing and have a private talk with the child; three teachers said that they would have a talk with the child's parents. Some examples of a common response are:

(10) Pregunto ¿de quién es el dibujo? Ya sé que todos van a decir que no es de nadie, porque así suele suceder, pero ya conozco muy bien a los niños y ya sé que trabajo hace cada quien. Entonces le pregunto ¿Por qué hace eso? Porque eso ya es desorden y eso lo hacen por hacer desorden. Porque yo ya los conozco a todos y yo yá sé que trabajo hacen cada uno, los conozco muy bien. (MXTF13)

(I ask, whose drawing is this? I already know that everybody will say that it is not anybody's because that is what usually happens but I know all the children very well and I know the kind of work that each of them does. So then I ask the child, Why do you do that? Because this creates a disturbance and this is done to create a disturbance. Because I know all of them and I know the kind of work that each of them does. I know them very well.)

Among Mexican teachers another important issue arose throughout the responses—the issue of respect. Whether the teacher would speak with the individual child or with the whole class, respect was regularly mentioned.

(11) Bueno, no me ha sucedido eso nunca jamás. Pero pues ¿qué tanto se puede hacer?, llamarle la atención y decirles que no lo vuelvan a hacer, que no es correcto y es una falta de respecto para el maestro. Y que si yo los respeto a ellos pues ellos también deben que respetarme a mí. Porque yo no hago dibujos de ellos en el pizarrón, ni en ninguna parte, ni me burlo de ellos ni nada así que debe ser respeto mutuo. (MXTF6)

(That's never happened to me. But I would call their attention to it and tell them that it's wrong to do that and that it is a lack of respect for the teacher. And if I respect them, they have to respect me. Because I don't draw pictures of them, I don't make fun of them, so there should be mutual respect.)

(12) Si es anónimo ellos siempre saben quién fue. Preguntamos, ¿Quién lo hizo? ¿Por qué lo hiciste así?, ¿Por qué me dibujaste así? ¿Tú crees que es correcto? ¿Estás burlándote de tu maestra? ¿Te falta el respecto? ¿A ver qué pasó?.... y hablo con los papás a ver qué esta pasando. (MXTF14)

(If it's anonymous, they always know who did it. We ask, "Who did this? Why did you do this? Why did you draw me like this? Do you think it's right? You make fun of your teacher? You have no respect? [You want] to see what happens?" And I speak with the parents to see what's going on.)

These differences between Mexican and U.S. students' and teachers' responses to this situation suggest a fundamental difference in the role of the teacher. The Mexican responses suggest that the teacher is perceived as an authority who commands respect. The U.S. responses, on the other hand, indicate that such an affront to the teacher is more acceptable, more in the nature of a childish display that would be tolerated.

Students disagreeing with teacher

In this interview item, students were asked, "What would a typical teacher do in the following situation: A teacher says something that one of the students disagrees with. The student tells the teacher his/her point of view." The majority of U.S. students agreed that the teacher would either listen to and respect the student's opinion or utilize the disagreement for class discussion of the matter at hand, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Categories and frequencies of student responses to interview item concerning what typical teachers would do if a student disagreed with them

Categories	U.S. Students	Mexican Public School Students	Mexican Private School Students	Mexican Students in the U.S.
Teacher considers student's opinion	11		7	13
Teacher involves class in discussion	7		1	2
Teacher claims self as authority		15	9	

One female student noted that the quality of the student's comment would make a difference in how the teacher responded:

(12) If it is a good point of view and it's what they think, she would probably say, "Well, that's your point of view and that's good that you have that point of view." And if it's a good point of view, she would probably react to it, "Thank you, that's very important because I probably missed that," or something like that. But if it's funny or something like that, she'd probably react like, "Well, I'm not understanding what you're saying," or something like that. (USNSF3)

Some students reported that the teacher's response would depend on the topic being taught in class (e.g., English grammar vs. current events), and others noted that the response would depend upon the type of teacher:

(13) A strict teacher might not think it was funny and just say, "No, this is the way it is." A looser teacher would ask would ask and say, "Why do you think this?" Have a constructive discussion. (USNSF13)

In contrast to the U.S. students, almost all of the Mexican public school students believe that teachers, if challenged by a student, would present themselves as the authority. One student pointed out that it might be the students' fault that they did not understand and that the teacher would reprimand them:

(14) Pues estás platicando. Por eso es que no entiendes. (MXPBF8)
([She tells the student that] he or she was talking and that is why he/she doesn't understand.)

Another student explained that the teacher would assert her authority as teacher, telling students to do what she says:

(15) Le dice que ella es la maestra y que tiene que hacer lo que ella dice. (MXPBM9)
(She tells the student that she is the teacher and that the students have to do what the teacher says.)

The responses of the Mexican private school students were varied. Some students believed that the teacher would consider the dissenting students' points of view, whereas, others believed that they would not.

For example, one student said that the teacher would try to explain the matter better so that the student would not disagree:

(16) Ella le dice que va a tratar de mejorar cómo explicar. (MXPRM20)
(She tells the student that she will try to explain it better.)

In contrast, another suggested that the teacher would ask for the views of the other students:

(17) Ella les preguntaria a los otros estudiantes si están de acuerdo. (MXPRF8)
(She would ask the other students if they agree.)

Students' responses indicate a belief that U.S. public school teachers and Mexican public school teachers would react differently if a student disagreed with what they were saying. The U.S. students believed that a teacher would either listen and respect the student's opinion and/or involve the class in a discussion

about the particular point of disagreement. The Mexican public school students overwhelmingly agreed that teachers would claim themselves as authorities with the correct answer. The lack of consensus by the Mexican private school students may be related to the type of school. The private school was an English/Spanish bilingual school and some of the teachers and students may have been influenced U.S. trained teachers.

Students Not Doing Their Homework

In this interview item, teachers were asked, "If a student doesn't do his or her homework, what do you do?" As illustrated in Table 4, U.S. content area teachers were much more likely than Mexican teachers to be oriented toward rules or consequences that resulted from students not submitting their homework on time.

Table 4: Categories and frequencies of teacher responses to interview item concerning students not doing their homework

Categories	ESL teachers in U.S.	Content teachers in U.S.	Mexican teachers in Mexico
Rule orientation	5	13	3
Expectation that work would get done	2	4	13
Personal involvement with student	6	8	4
Personal involvement with parents	4	9	7
Give or deprive of treats	5	4	

Often the U.S. teachers would not accept the work if it were more than one day late. Examples of typical U.S. responses from content teachers are

(18) It depends on how frequently they are not doing their homework. I had a very simple system. In my grade book I'd have blocks of ten, and they knew it would be 10% of their grade. Periodically, I'd mark off whether they'd done their homework. They could check it at any point. I set it up so they knew there was a cost to not doing it. (USCTF17)

(19) I reinforce my policy about homework. I use a homework form that the kids sign saying that they realize they had homework and they chose not to do it and I keep it in the file. (USCTF6)

In contrast, most Mexican teachers expected the students to do the work. If students had not completed it at home then the teachers expected them to do it in school. The focus of the Mexican teachers was more on getting the work done some time rather than on time. Examples that illustrate this expectation are:

(20) Hay que motivarlos a que hagan la tarea. Hay que hacerles ver que es una obligación de ellos, que tienen que traer la tarea, y si no, en los ratos libres, hay que ponerlos a trabajar porque no terminaron su trabajo. (MXTF1)

(They have to be motivated to do the work. They need to know that it is their obligation to do it and they have to do it during their free time (recess) because they did not finish their work.)

(21) Le pido que lo hagan en el salón de clases. (MXTF19)

(I have them do it here in the classroom.)

Another difference between the U.S. and Mexican teachers relates to the use of treats. If students completed their homework, some U.S. teachers gave them treats such as candy, cupcakes, or prizes. If students did not complete their homework, teachers would withhold treats. For example, one U.S. teacher responded

(22) They get points for turning in their homework and at the end of the week they could turn in their points for prizes or something, you know, positive reinforcement. (USCTF5)

None of the Mexican teachers mentioned treats as a means of encouraging homework.

A related facet of the teacher's role in the relationship with students is the emphasis placed on the teacher's responsibility for seeing that students learn what they need to learn. Responses regarding a related question about students

making up missed work during absences showed very similar patterns. The U.S. content teachers placed much more emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to either make up the missed work or take the consequences of the absences. That is, the teacher may give the student the missed assignments, but would not offer supplemental support, instruction, or assistance to help the student catch up. Additionally, more U.S. content teachers than Mexican teachers expressed the sense that they would simply employ the official school policy in responding to the issues of absences.

By contrast, many of the Mexican teachers noted that they would go to some length to work with students to catch up and make up missed work. Such effort included meeting students during recess or after school to help them with missed work, coming to school on Saturday to give additional help, or even tutoring the student in the teacher's home. None of the Mexican teachers noted any use of official school policy.

For this question, U.S. ESL teachers were much more likely to utilize a response similar to that of the Mexican teachers; they worked with the kids to help them solve the problems that were keeping them from attending school. In addition, a significant number indicated a little understanding of Mexican culture, the importance of family and family responsibility, and the demands upon Mexican families who must journey back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico.

Our interpretation of these results places the teacher in Mexico in more of a parental role, one who is more deeply involved and invested in the children. The image that emerges from the Mexican teacher interviews is a teacher who cares very much about the students getting the work done and the knowledge gained. He/she lets the students know how much he/she cares by giving extra time to make sure that the work is caught up and that the student truly understands the lessons. We wonder if the U.S. subject teacher's emphasis on individual responsibility and on the "fairness" involved in "going by the book" to follow official school policy may be interpreted by students from Mexico as the teacher's lack of concern about their well-being, lack of caring about their educational development, and possibly even lack of belief in their abilities to learn. In other words, the teachers from Mexico seemed to consider the students their personal responsibility, almost as a parent would. The U.S. subject teachers seemed to be more content to leave the issue with the students to handle. The Mexican teachers seem more familial in their response, and the U.S. subject teachers seem more distant.

Students and Teachers Kissing While Greeting

In this questionnaire item, students and teachers were asked to respond to the question, "Write your associations to the following situation: Teachers and

students kissing when greeting." As shown in Table 5, it is more acceptable for Mexican teachers to kiss their students on the cheek when greeting than for U.S. teachers to do so. Example comments from the Mexican teachers include

(23) Pues sí, ya es uno, muestro de afecto para el niño. (MXTF3)
(It is a nice way to show affection to the students.)

(24) Le da confianza y le transmite afecto (cariño). (MXTF8)
(She is close to the student and gives affection.)

Table 5: Categories and frequencies of teacher responses to questionnaire item concerning teachers kissing students when greeting

Categories	ESL Teachers in the U.S.	Content Teachers in the U.S.	Mexican Teachers in Mexico
Acceptable	1	1	15
Depends on Circumstances	4	2	1
Not Acceptable	14	17	3

The data in Table 5 also show that both groups of U.S. teachers believe that kissing students when greeting is not acceptable in most cases. One ESL teacher claimed

(25) I don't think it's appropriate. Someone may interpret in the wrong way. (USESLTF4)

However, three ESL teachers concluded that it depended on the culture of the student and that a kiss on the cheek may be appropriate. The U.S. content teachers were strong in their views that it was not acceptable. A typical comment was

(26) Are you kidding? Always inappropriate. Inviting legal trouble and unemployed conditions. (USCTF9)

Student responses were similar to the teacher responses. As shown in Table 6, students attending Mexican private school were more likely than U.S. students to respond positively to teachers and students kissing (on the cheek) while greeting. Typical comments from Mexican private school students were

(27) Está bien. Es forma de mostrar afecto. (MXPRM18)
(It's fine. It's a way of showing affection.)

(28) La maestra es muy buena y quiere a sus alumnos. (MXPRSM7)
(The teacher is a very nice person and loves her students.)

Table 6: Categories and frequencies of student responses to questionnaire item concerning teachers and students kissing when greeting

Categories	U.S. Students	Mexican Public School Students	Mexican Private School Students
Acceptable	2		11
Depends on Circumstances	7	12	4
Not Acceptable	10	8	5

Most students from Mexican public schools noted that greetings of this type depended on the situation and gave specific examples of occasions when such greetings occurred. Occasions that were mentioned included birthdays, the last day of school, or the day before a school break. Several students noted that such greetings were common in the early elementary grades but not after that. Several U.S. students also provided situations in which a kiss might be used as a greeting, but their reasons differed from those of the Mexicans. For U.S. students, the relationship between the teacher and student was the determining factor, not the occasion. A representative U.S. student response is

(29) If you know the teacher personally, on the cheek, but otherwise gross. (USNSF19)

U.S. students were more likely to contend that such a greeting was not acceptable because of issues of sexual harassment. One student contended that kissing is a

(30) Reason for the teacher to be fired. (USNSM15)

This last element of the image of a teacher's role in teacher-student relationships—the manner of and degree to which teachers show their affection to

students, particularly by kissing—showed some overall differences between Mexican and U.S. responses. The students were less divided than the teachers on this issue. Most of the Mexican public and private school students found it acceptable or acceptable depending on circumstances, while less than half of U.S. native speaker students found it to be so. The teachers, however, were more divided on this issue. Most of Mexican public school teachers found this form of affection to be acceptable. By contrast, only a few of the U.S. teachers agreed that kissing was acceptable under certain circumstances. This set of data suggests that the ways that teachers show affection (and are allowed to show affection) may differ between Mexico and the United States.

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on cultural differences in the roles and relationships between Mexican and U.S. teachers and students as perceived by Mexican and U.S. teachers and students. Consistent with the work of Losey (1997) and Valdez (1996), our data suggest that Mexican students are accustomed to a school environment that includes teacher-student relationships that resemble the relationships of parents with their children. More specifically, the data suggest that a teacher in Mexico is more likely to be perceived as a relatively authoritative but loving parent, one who is personally responsible for the learning of the students. He/she is one who is more likely to be affectionate as well as personally involved in both discipline and problems that arise, such as absences and homework. Respect for the teacher is very important and is shown through maintenance of the teacher's dignity. These findings are consistent with the Mexican ideal of "educación," an ideal that places the teacher-student relationship as a cornerstone for all learning (Valenzuela, 1999).

U.S. teachers appear to be somewhat more willing to allow students not only to "get away with" some childish behaviors, but also to allow students room for individual failure and/or responsibility for their actions, such as turning in homework. This facet of the teacher-student relationship that values the individualism of personal responsibility may work against students who are more accustomed to the cooperative structure (Delgato-Gaitan, 1987a; Engelbrecht, 1983; Losey, 1997) and to teachers who consider it their personal responsibility to see that students get work done and learn the necessary content. The image of this teacher is more of the professional, albeit a caring one, who has a job to do. Certainly, restrictions such as state laws disallowing touch between teachers and students must have an impact upon how U.S. teachers express their affections, as well. And respect for the teacher must be shown in ways other than obeisance to authority.

The point here is not to criticize any teacher or group of teachers for their methods and approaches to teaching. The questions for consideration are more a matter of seeking to understand our students. If students are accustomed to teachers

in the parental, personally responsible, affectionate authority role, then how are they to interpret teachers whose style and approach offer a different role or image? If students from Mexico respond to a certain situation in a way that does not fit the U.S. teacher's expectations, might there be a source for the response that originates in their expectations of the teacher-student relationship?

As teachers, we have choices from a range of responses, all of which may be quite natural and "real" to us, quite authentic to the humans and teachers we know ourselves to be. The more we know about what kinds of experiences and expectations our students may bring with them to our classrooms, then the better informed our choices can be. So, for example, if we have reason to believe that some of our students may interpret our responses in a way that suggests we do not respect ourselves (such as how we respond to the "funny picture" drawn of the teacher), then we may choose to respond in another way, one that is within our range of personally authentic responses. We may also choose to extend that range by trying out other responses that may feel initially very easy or comfortable, but that may become so with time. Or if we believe that we are teaching the importance of individual responsibility (for homework or for making up work missed during an absence), but we have reason to believe that some students may interpret our actions as lack of caring, then we may find another, additional way to demonstrate our caring and concern for our students. Or we may create another new response that incorporates our students' experiences more fully.

Knowing that we have choices of responses or action at any given moment and that a variety of student interpretations is likely may seem daunting initially. However, part of the growth that we must do as teachers is to develop a deeper understanding of our students and of their lives, experiences, cultures, values, and expectations. Learning to embrace knowledge of cultures different from our own (while simultaneously avoiding stereotypes), learning to suspend assumptions about our students as we grow toward a deeper connection with them, learning to communicate caring and our teaching in a multiple of different ways—these subtle and powerful lessons (among others) constitute a pedagogical framework upon which our teacher-student relationship and the consequent success of our students – all of our students—may depend. These are the kinds of issues and questions upon which we hope our research sheds a few more lumens of discursive light.

Note: We would like to thank Elvia Campano, Vanessa Loggiodice, and John Bunting for helping to collect the data, to Maura Nicholson for her help in collating the data and careful editing, to Mayira Bunting for her meticulous help with the transcriptions, and to the many students and teachers who gave freely, and often enthusiastically, of their time in answering our questions. This research would not have been possible without an internal grant provided by the Research Office of Georgia State University and a release-time grant from Morehouse College.

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