

The Intersection of Culture and Achievement Motivation

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Abstract

Achievement motivation is something that all members of the school community want to support in students, however few may recognize that it is influenced by culture. The very meaning of “achievement” is culturally variable, and the motives that students have for achieving may be quite different, depending upon their cultural background. The practices of schools tend to reflect the individualism of the dominant U.S. culture. Many students come from families that are more collectivistic. Elementary bilingual teachers used a cultural framework of individualism/collectivism to guide understanding and innovations related to achievement motivation. Examples illustrate cultural differences and how they can be bridged.

Key Words: achievement motivation, cultural differences, bridging cultures, individualism, collectivism, academic goals, social goals, schools, teachers’ practices, parents, Latino, action research, expectations

Introduction

Achievement motivation is an important contributor to students’ academic success (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996) and, hence, of interest to all stakeholders in the community of the school. It is well documented that cultural differences affect achievement motivation (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Kaplan, Karabenick, & DeGroot, 2009; Maehr & Yamaguchi, 2001; Otsuka & Smith, 2005; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). For that reason, parents and teachers may be

coming at the issue from very different perspectives because of cultural differences between home and school (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). We believe that if a school community truly wants to promote the success of all students, it must recognize how achievement motivation varies culturally within the population it serves.

School personnel need to learn from parents how students have been socialized at home to think about academic achievement. At the same time, they can also help parents understand the culture of the school and the kinds of expectations schools may have of their children. Such communication is key to forging continuities between home and school (Shor & Bernhard, 2003; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). In this article, we use a cultural framework (individualism/collectivism) to explain how Latino immigrant students' achievement motivation may be different from that of their mainstream American peers. We offer examples from elementary teachers' classroom-based research to illustrate how achievement motivation can be approached in a more culturally responsive way. Our findings come from Bridging Cultures,^{®1} a teacher collaborative action research project.

What Is Culture?

"Culture" is a contested construct: Nearly everyone believes it exists, but few can agree on exactly what it is and whether using research about culture to inform educational decisions is more helpful—leading to insights—or damaging—leading to stereotypes (Hollins, 1996). Nevertheless, faced with increasing student diversity and evidence that students from a given cultural background appear to share certain understandings and "powerfully motivating sources of their action[s]" (Strauss & Quinn, 1997, p. 3), many educators are paying attention to culture.

We characterize culture as a dynamic system of values, expectations, and associated practices that help organize people's daily lives and mediate their thoughts and actions. These values, expectations, and practices are learned in social contexts and are transmitted across generations, even as they are modified by people within a culture in interaction with people from other cultures and in the face of new needs (Greenfield, 2009). Cultures are not strictly bounded; that is, there is considerable overlap in the values, expectations, and practices of different cultures (Strauss & Quinn, 1997).

Approaches to Achievement Motivation

Achievement motivation theory has been primarily cognitive in nature, attributing the sources of motivation to individual goals (e.g., Ames, 1992;

Dweck, 1986; Stipek, 1998). Students are thought to have *task* goals (focused on improvement and mastery) and *ability* or *performance* goals (focused on showing their ability, particularly vis-à-vis other students; Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck, Lavigne, & Fantuzzo, 2008; McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997). "...[I]mplicit in both mastery and performance goals is a focus on individualism where priority is given to the goals of individuals" (McInerney et al., 1997, p. 208).

Since the early days of achievement motivation research, theorists have increasingly acknowledged the importance of social influences, such as peers, family, and community (e.g., Weiner, 1994). Some have identified social aspects of the classroom that affect motivation (e.g., Matos, Lens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009), including relationships with peers and teachers (Hudley & Daoud, 2008). Covington (2000) points out that social goals may motivate students: "Like academic goals, the pursuit of social goals can help organize, direct, and empower individuals to achieve more fully" (p. 178). Covington observes that students' desire to achieve for the sake of the group (a prosocial goal) is the basis for the success of cooperative learning. Covington concludes that prosocial goals affect achievement directly, as well as in combination with academic goals. Other social goals are to affiliate with or please others (Kaplan et al., 2009). Ryan and Deci (2000) include in their theoretical framework "relatedness," or social-emotional connection to other people, as a source of motivation. Social goals should not be trivialized as simply students' wanting to socialize. Such goals arise from basic, culture-based values. Conclusions about the relationship between social goals and achievement motivation drawn from research on dominant culture American students cannot safely be extended to other cultural groups.

Integrating a Cultural Perspective Into Achievement Motivation Theory

Although the field of achievement motivation has moved beyond a strictly individualistic perspective to recognizing the role of social factors, it has delved into the role of culture less deeply. The existing research that does address culture is largely with post-secondary students and often based in other countries. However, as the U.S. K–12 population has become more diverse, more attention is being given to cultural factors here (e.g., Hill & Torres, 2010; Kaplan et al., 2009; Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, 2010). Our research makes a special contribution in that it provides an organizing framework for understanding the findings of previous research and offers empirical examples of elementary teachers' innovations field-tested in their own classrooms.

Research on Achievement Motivation and Culture

It can be argued that culture figures in every factor that has been linked with achievement motivation (Singelis, 2000). In this section, we review studies that investigate varying cultural perspectives on the meaning of (a) achievement, (b) social goals and relationships, (c) education, (d) praise and criticism, and (e) peer and adult approval in relation to student motivation.

The Variable Value of “Achievement”

The perceived value of “achievement” itself varies culturally. For instance, it may be valued primarily for promoting future success (job, schooling), as in Western cultures, or for bringing honor to one’s family, as in Eastern cultures (Urdan, 2009). Fuligni (2001) found in his research that both Asian and Latin American adolescents had higher academic motivation than their European American peers, which he attributed to their “sense of obligation to the family” (p. 61). In addition, there are cultural differences in perceptions of what it takes to achieve—for example, effort versus ability (Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), listening versus participating in dialogue (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000), collaborating versus working individually (Salili, 2009).

Social Goals, Relationships, and Motivation

The importance ascribed to social relationships varies widely across cultures. Relationships are, no doubt, important within all cultures, but they play a relatively stronger role in collectivistic cultures (note: collectivism and its contrasting counterpart individualism are described below under “The Individualism/Collectivism Framework”). For instance, in collectivistic cultures like those of Japan and Mexico, achievement motivation is often correlated with social versus individual goals (cf., Urdan, 2009).

Positive relationships with peers have been cited as especially important for the engagement and success of immigrant Latino students (e.g., Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Likewise, caring relationships with teachers have been cited as particularly important for Latino students (Conchas, 2001; Gibson & Bejinez, 2002; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009). Research with ethnic “minority” students has shown that perceived teacher support is particularly important to keeping them engaged with school—literally in school, not dropping out (Hudley & Daoud, 2008). Hudley and Daoud (2008) found that low levels of teacher support (as reported by students) negatively affected low-socioeconomic status Latino students’ engagement (as reported by teachers). In fact, relationships with teachers were more strongly related to engagement than were peer relationships.

Guay, Senecal, Marsh, and Dowson (2005) studied immigrant and non-immigrant Turkish students in Belgium and found that in comparison to non-Turkish Belgians they tended to be higher in relatedness. Verkuyten, Thijs, and Canatan (2001) found that both Dutch adolescents and immigrant Turkish adolescents in the Netherlands exhibited individual achievement motivation; however, only the Turkish students also exhibited “family motivation,” a desire to achieve for the sake of the family (cf., Fuligni, 2001).

Research on immigrant and U.S.-born Latino immigrants found that not only academic competence but also school belonging and parent involvement were positively related to achievement motivation (Ibañez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla, 2004). Numerous other studies have pointed to “belonging” as an important factor in the school achievement of ethnic “minority” students (cf., Booker, 2006; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005; Kia-Keating, 2007; Osterman, 2000).

Culturally Differing Notions of “Education”

Research with both Latino students in the U.S. (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995) and Chinese students in China (Li, 2002) has shown that “education” is perceived as having a moral dimension in some cultures. Immigrant Latino American parents are likely to believe that *educación* is meant to foster a morally developed student and that one cannot be a good student without being a good person (Reese et al., 1995). Chinese parents are likely to communicate that education entails “moral striving” (Li, 2002, p. 248), and their children may feel guilt or shame if they are not motivated to learn. Likewise, American Indian families tend to believe that education must have a moral and ethical dimension (Trumbull, Nelson-Barber, & Mitchell, 2002). European American parents no doubt value their children’s moral development, but they are likely to see it as something that is supported in parallel with cognitive development, not intertwined with it (cf., Greenfield et al., 2000).

Culture and Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are fundamental constructs in conceptualizations of achievement motivation. “Extrinsic motivation” refers to engagement² generated by external forces, such as rewards or incentives (Hendlerlong & Lepper, 2002). “Intrinsic motivation” refers to the performance of activities for the sake of the pleasure or satisfaction inherent in the activity itself (Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 2001). Both forms of motivation could be thought of in terms of differing incentives. According to Slavin (2006), an intrinsic incentive is “[a]n aspect of an activity that people enjoy and therefore find motivating” (p. 334); an extrinsic incentive is “[a] reward that is external to the activity, such as recognition or a good grade” (p. 335). Much research

has shown that more often than not extrinsic rewards undermine intrinsic motivation (Cameron, Banko, & Pierce, 2001; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999).

Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations vary in relation to culture. “[I]nate psychological needs for competence and self-determination” are thought to underlie intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 2001, p. 3), however even the notion of “self-determination” is culture-bound. Some cultures are much more “self”-oriented than others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). And what counts as an extrinsic motivator, as well as how it is received and used, is also culturally variable (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008).

Cultural Differences in the Use of Criticism and Praise as Motivators

It is standard wisdom in the canon of Western child rearing that children should be praised in order to support development of their self-esteem and criticized very selectively. This value of praise is also widely espoused in teacher preparation programs (see popular educational psychology texts, such as Eggen & Kauchak, 2004; Woolfolk, 2004). But criticism and praise are also not viewed uniformly across cultures. Public praise may make some students feel uncomfortable because it singles them out from the group and, by implication, elevates them above their peers (Geary, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). Some students may be more motivated by critical feedback because their goal is to meet the expectations of their teachers and/or family (Heine et al., 2001). Heine and colleagues (2001) found that Japanese college students tended to be more self-critical and responsive to “failure feedback” than Canadian college students, who tended to discount negative feedback. Whereas Canadian students were “reluctant to conclude that they had performed worse than their average classmate, Japanese were hesitant to conclude that they had performed better” (p. 71). These findings bring into question the universality of the value of focusing on the positive aspects of students’ performance.

In a study by Geary (2001), a school counselor intern was tutoring a group of Latina students in English. “He constantly used praise in a manner that he felt would be motivating to the young women. However, one of his students mocked his praise and imitated his comments in a sing-song manner; ‘Good job,’ and then erupted into giggles” (personal communication, March 10, 2000, based on research reported in Geary, 2001, p. 112). In this example, praise that was intended to increase students’ achievement motivation had the unlikely result of eliciting mockery. Thus, it appeared to actually serve as a disincentive.

Differences in Construal of “Adult Approval” and “Peer Approval”

Cultural differences are evident in the meanings of “adult approval” and “peer approval.” As mentioned above, in many cultures academic achievement

is valued because it reflects well on the family, and helping one's peers to succeed reflects a fundamental value—not a personal psychological need to be accepted (Elliott & Bempechat, 2002; Kim & Choi, 1994; Trumbull et al., 2001; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). In such cases, “adult approval” and “peer approval” are better understood in terms of a set of values very different from those of the dominant U.S. culture, where academic achievement is quite clearly an individual matter and where social goals are usually interpreted as being in the service of the self (Reeve, 2006; Urdan & Maehr, 1995). In other words, the apparently same social goals may serve different purposes in different cultures.

The Bridging Cultures Project

Examples of the interaction of culture and motivation come from the Bridging Cultures Project, a longitudinal collaborative action research project. This work is fueled by theory and research and also contributes to both by its findings in regard to the academic motivation of younger students who share a particular cultural background. Not only our own examples but also those we have cited from the literature can be understood with reference to the organizing cultural framework of individualism and collectivism.

We offer a brief introduction to the project below (an extended description can be found in Trumbull et al., 2001). The goal of the project was to investigate whether teacher professional development on cultural theory and related research would result in changes in teachers' thinking and practice vis-à-vis their largely immigrant Latino students from rural or working class backgrounds.³

The project did not set out to examine impact on specific practices or student outcomes (e.g., achievement). The intention was to document closely over a period of several years whether and how teachers changed in whatever domains they identified or that became evident through interviews and observations. The Project research also focused on how the children in each teacher's classroom responded to any teacher innovations.

The Individualism/Collectivism Framework

Method

The Bridging Cultures Project introduced teachers to the cultural framework of individualism and collectivism via a series of professional development workshops and followed changes in teachers' thinking and practice over a period of more than five years. Two early parallel studies conducted by psychology students compared teacher–student and student–student relationships in a

Bridging Cultures classroom and a matched non-Bridging Cultures classroom (Correia-Chavez, 1999; Isaac, 1999). Other research spawned by the original project continues to the present (e.g., Greenfield, Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Espinoza, & Monterroza, 2011). The project's primary perspective is ethnographic, although a quasi-experimental design guided an intervention with teachers and some methods of data collection and analysis.

Individualism and Collectivism: Two Contrasting Systems of Values

Our research uses the framework of individualism–collectivism (I/C) (Greenfield, 1994; Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1989) as a tool for understanding differences between the culture of immigrant Latino students and the dominant culture, as represented in U.S. schools. The tasks of human development have been framed in terms of two fundamentally different cultural pathways: one individualistic and one collectivistic (Greenfield, 1994; Greenfield et al., 2006). Individualism emphasizes individual identity, independence, self-fulfillment, and standing out; collectivism emphasizes group identity, interdependence, social responsibility, and fitting in (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003). Individualism is associated with competition and self-assertion, whereas collectivism is associated with collaboration and respect for authority (e.g., teachers).

There is, of course, variation within any cultural group, and these generalizations represent idealized versions of value systems. In addition, societies change in response to new environmental conditions. For example, as societies become more urban, educated, and industrialized, they tend to move in the direction of individualistic values (Greenfield, 2009). Despite the dangers of oversimplification, these constructs (collectivism and individualism) have been shown to be extremely useful in crystallizing some fundamental differences that can explain the nature of certain cross-cultural conflicts in the classroom (e.g., Greenfield et al., 2000; Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008; Trumbull et al., 2001). Dominant U.S. culture (rooted in Western Europe and reflected in U.S. classrooms) is highly individualistic. On the other hand, the cultures of a great many non-dominant cultures in the U.S. are highly collectivistic (Hofstede, 2001). These cultural orientations play out somewhat differently in different cultural contexts. For example, the collectivism of Chinese culture is heavily influenced by Confucianism, which emphasizes early mastery of impulse control in preparation for later academic achievement (Ho, 1994), which is also strongly valued. Thus, “academic achievement motivation should be exceedingly strong” (Ho, 1994, p. 293) among Chinese children. The immigrant students from Mexico and Central America may not be socialized so strongly to academic achievement, in part because of lack of consistent educational op-

portunities afforded their parents. What they are likely to have in common with Chinese students and other Asian-culture students are the values of sharing with and caring for the group, great respect for elders (including teachers), and modesty about their own accomplishments (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000; Ho, 1994; Roosa et al., 2002).

Participants

Seven Spanish/English bilingual elementary teachers from the greater Los Angeles area, referred by colleagues or administrators who identified them as excellent educators, volunteered to participate. Four identified themselves as Latino and three as European American. Grades kindergarten through fifth were represented. Teachers' experience ranged from 5–21 years ($M = 12.7$ years) at the outset of the project. Teachers began as participants and evolved into teacher-researchers in the first year of the project. Four "staff" researchers conducted the study: a cross-cultural developmental psychologist (Patricia Greenfield), a Latina immigrant graduate student (Blanca Quiroz), an applied psycholinguist (Elise Trumbull), and an educational psychologist who is a teacher educator (Carrie Rothstein-Fisch).

Procedure

Phases of the Project

The Bridging Cultures Project developed in four phases. The first phase included three half-day workshops on cultural theory and research spread out over a period of four months. In the second phase, the seven teacher researchers and four staff researchers met every two or three months for four and a half years to discuss teachers' thinking and practice. Classroom observations and interviews took place during this phase as well. During the third phase, which continues, we (staff researchers and teacher researchers) have disseminated the findings of the project. The fourth phase involves ongoing collaborations with graduate students and teachers (including one of the Bridging Cultures teachers, Ms. Catherine Daley) to investigate a range of questions, including whether professional development on culture is useful with parents or with preschool teachers.

Pre- and Post-Assessments

To determine the teachers' orientation to problem solving based on individualistic or collectivistic perspectives, at the beginning of the first workshop they were given a pre-assessment consisting of four problem scenarios to be resolved (Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000). A parallel set of problem scenarios was administered at the end of the third workshop. Figures 1 and 2 below show scenario examples.

Figure 1. The Classroom Jobs Scenario (Pre-test)

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| It is the end of the school 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? |

Figure 2. The Dinner Scenario (Post-test)

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|---|
| Dennis is the first one home in the afternoon. when his mother gets home at 7, she finds that Dennis has not started cooking dinner yet. When she asks Dennis why he didn't get dinner started, Dennis says he wasn't hungry. |
| What do you think his mother should do? |

The Professional Development

Teachers were taught about the I/C framework and research based on it during a series of three half-day workshops that were videotaped and documented in field notes. They were encouraged to explore whether the framework could be used to understand their own cultures and the cultures of students and school—and if so, in what ways. The professional development was not prescriptive, that is, no suggestions were made as to what might constitute an improvement in classroom practice based on cultural knowledge. Hence, teachers could not “tell researchers what they wanted to hear.” Experimentation and innovation were left completely up to the teachers, and a “reflective practice” approach (Schön, 1983) was used to foster teachers’ development. They were introduced to ethnography as a tool for learning about their students’ cultural communities from parents and family as well as students themselves.

Ethnography is a research method used by anthropologists. In brief, it entails learning about a cultural group directly from members of that group and from direct observation. An ethnographic approach is non-judgmental, and when teachers engaged in ethnography, they suspended their role as experts, looking to parents and students as experts on their own culture. They became participant-observers in their own classrooms as they documented how students responded to various instructional and organizational strategies (Trumbull et al., 2001). This non-judgmental approach resulted in changes in perceptions, understanding, and educational practice (Trumbull, Greenfield, Rothstein-Fisch, & Maynard, 1999; Trumbull et al., 2001).

Videotape Documentation and Discourse Analysis

The professional development sessions and one follow-up meeting were videotaped. Discourse analysis of videotape transcripts documented changes in the ways teachers talked about “culture.”

Classroom Observations

In the two years following the workshops, all teachers were observed in their classrooms by staff researchers at least twice for two to four hours during each visit. The protocol for each observation was guided by teachers’ prior claims regarding changes in practices. For instance, if a teacher was focusing on increasing the involvement of parent volunteers and improving relationships with parents, we observed during times when parents would be in the classroom, asked the teacher for documentation of parent visits, and asked post-observation interview questions related to that topic. Observers met with each teacher to debrief immediately after the observation (typically during the teacher’s lunch or preparation time). Intensive interviews with each teacher were also conducted during phase two, organized around the topics of cross-cultural conflict and teachers’ changed practices.

Results

All of the teachers shifted dramatically from a very strong individualistic orientation (85% of responses) on the pre-assessment to one that was either much more collectivistic (50% of responses) or balanced in individualistic and collectivistic perspective (43% of responses) on the post-assessment (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, Quiroz, & Greenfield, 1997). Discourse analysis showed changes in teachers’ understanding of “culture,” including recognition that they themselves “had culture” and that their choices in the ways they designed their instruction reflected cultural perspectives (Trumbull et al., 1999).

The observations provided evidence of practices that the teachers actually used, corroborating their claims during interviews and group meetings of the ways that they were guided by an understanding of their students’ home cultures. Although we do not have data on these teachers’ practices prior to their involvement with Bridging Cultures, their reports of new practices and perceptions are in harmony with changes on the pre- and post-assessments of cultural knowledge and the changes in their discourse about culture documented in the videotapes. (For an expanded exploration of results, see Isaac, 1999; Trumbull, Diaz-Meza, & Hasan, 2000; Trumbull et al., 1999, 2001, 2002; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003.)

Examples from Bridging Cultures Classrooms Related to Achievement Motivation

Example 1: Reframing the Meaning of an External Motivator

The following example is drawn from a third-grade classroom in Southern California, serving an almost exclusively immigrant Latino population (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, Isaac, Daley, & Pérez, 2003). The teacher, Mrs. Amada Pérez, is a Mexican immigrant who came with her family to the United States as a young child. Our exposition weaves back and forth between Mrs. Pérez's thinking and practice and the children's behaviors.

During an observation in Pérez's class, a star chart was noticed. The chart documented how many multiplication math facts each third grade child had successfully memorized and could repeat in a specified time. Students' progress was tracked by the placement of metallic stars next to each child's name corresponding to his or her level of achievement. The chart appeared to be an individualistic way to motivate children to master their multiplication facts. The observer asked Mrs. Pérez about its use. She explained:

For many years I had known about having charts where children's names are up, and they collect stars when they pass different things, especially used in math....I went ahead and tried it, but I was never happy with it, and it wasn't always completed. For a while, I put it on the inside of the closet door. It was a struggle for me, but I didn't know why.⁴

Mrs. Pérez had learned about using the chart as an extrinsic motivator to prompt a desire in students to demonstrate individual achievement. But it did not seem to work in the way expected, and she struggled to figure out what to do with it. Mrs. Pérez continued, "I realized that it was based on extrinsic motivation, and I wanted intrinsic motivation. So as time passed, I just quit using the chart completely."

Retooling the Purpose and Use of the Star Chart

Originally, Mrs. Pérez's only frame of reference for understanding the lack of motivational value of the chart was the dimension of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. She did not have other frameworks for understanding what might influence children's motivation. Then, she encountered the cultural framework of individualism and collectivism in the Bridging Cultures Project and saw it as a source of understanding why the star chart may have bombed as a motivational tool. She observed:

Then years passed, and I went to Bridging Cultures. And I started learning another way of thinking, and I started learning about the success of

groups collectively....I decided to try bringing [the chart] out again, to use the power of the group to help everybody succeed.

Equipped with a new understanding of culture, and in particular the collectivism of her students, Mrs. Pérez reconceptualized the chart—from a means of encouraging students to earn more stars for themselves to a visual aid that stimulated and encouraged the children to think about achievement motivation as a group issue.

We all looked at the chart together and talked about it....The students asked, “Wouldn’t it be neat if it would be a solid block of stars and the whole chart was filled in?” and everybody said, “Yeah, yeah, that would be so neat.”

From the children’s collectivistic perspective, the chart seemed to be a potential motivator for group achievement rather than individual achievement. The children’s academic motivation was apparently tied to a social goal: whole-group success. Their concern was not the individual lines of stars for any one student, but the entire chart, representing the whole class.

To accomplish their shared goal, the students decided on a buddy system to support learning of their math facts. The more advanced students would help/tutor those still learning. When both tutor and tutee decided the tutee was ready, the student would sign up to be time-tested on his or her multiplication facts.

[During the testing process,] [t]hey were allowed to bring their buddy [or group] up for moral support. While the buddy watched—they weren’t allowed to say anything—the person being tested experienced success most of the time....Nobody tried to whisper the answer. They had tremendous self-control. When they passed, they hugged each other and gave words of encouragement.

The testing situation itself included several opportunities for a collectivistic approach to learning, but no one transgressed the rule of individual performance, once it was time for testing. According to Mrs. Pérez,

This went on until we achieved a 100% up to a certain point [on the chart]. The kids were ecstatic. They achieved a whole block of stars! A day of celebration—they were even more encouraged to go on. In third grade, they only have to go up to the 5’s. Many went to the 12s. All got to the 6’s...they went beyond the requirement. It was extremely exciting....How could I have not done that all these years? I didn’t have the clear knowledge of the framework of individualism and collectivism. I continue to use that.

A Seamless System

During a visit to Mrs. Pérez's classroom, the second author observed the individual testing and one more motivational component to the star chart. Students successful in their timed math facts rang a bell to signal the placing of a star on the group chart. The entire class stopped working, looked up, clapped to acknowledge another star on "their" chart, and seamlessly returned to their task. They did not appear to be distracted by the bell or to show a great deal of interest in the actual star that was going up on the chart; instead they seemed to recognize the child who had accomplished something meaningful.

Example 2: Another Case of Reframing an Individual Reward as a Group Reward

In another Bridging Cultures classroom, Mrs. Elvia Hernandez's combined class of K-1st-2nd-grade students, motivation took another turn toward the group. This time, the students' desire to share a tangible reward with each other superseded the appeal of an individual reward (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). On the basis of desirable behavior, students were able to earn fake money that could be used to purchase rewards. However, they preferred to pool their money rather than use it individually:

They always gave the money to the banker. When they purchased something, they thought about what they could buy to share. In the case of a coloring book, they wondered about ripping out the pages and thus turning the book into worksheets and not a book at all. (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008, p. 97)

Example 3: Offering a Social Reward Responsive to Cultural Values

Another example comes from the 4th-5th-grade classroom of Ms. Marie Altchech (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). Though she had used group rewards in the past, that practice took on new form and meaning as a result of her involvement with the Bridging Cultures Project. In one long-standing practice, table clusters of four students each were able to earn points for good behavior towards a reward of their choosing. Over time, Ms. Altchech had discovered that the most desired reward in her classroom was the opportunity to have lunch with her. She says,

I let them make the decision [about what would motivate them] and the students said "free time," or "art." Once I suggested maybe lunch with me, the children wanted that above all else. Eventually, they all earned the points to have lunch, so everyday I sit with different tables outside

during lunch, and I can see their table manners and chitchat. Now I don't need table points for any reason, I just enjoy listening to them during lunchtime.

In this case, the reward for good behavior or task completion was effective because the students successfully changed the reinforcement paradigm. First, the teacher rewarded the students with a special lunch with her—something more desirable than even free time or art. But then Mrs. Altchech's perspective shifted. First, she found that she enjoyed the special, unstructured time with the students. Second, she came to realize that the point system might not be necessary—that the opportunity to eat lunch with the teacher was the only reward students wanted and that a token economy used to buy and sell an array of rewards was superfluous.

Example 4: Selecting “Family” Topics as an Incentive to Engagement and Performance

Bridging Cultures teachers say that activities and materials that incorporate a focus on family are highly motivating to their students. Fourth-grade teacher Mr. Giancarlo Mercado selects stories from the basal reader that focus on family. “Las Mañanitas” is a story about a boy from a family of migrant workers. The boy always knows when the family is about to move, because dozens of cardboard boxes appear in their house. Mr. Mercado asked his students how many of them thought the boy should stay with friends if he could when his family moved, so that he could keep going to the same school and keep up academically and how many thought the boy should move and help his family. All 28 students raised their hands for the latter alternative. Mr. Mercado says that students were riveted by this story (Trumbull et al., 2000).

Mrs. Pérez noticed that when 3rd-grade students wrote about family experiences, they tended to write more than when asked to write about “what it's like to be a good friend” on the district-wide writing assessment. She says,

I suggested [at a faculty meeting] that their richest experiences were with their families. Many have been to Mexico or to a family event like a birthday or baptism. I drafted a question on the spot, and it got accepted [by the district]. “Write about an experience that you had with your family. Be sure to include who, what, where, when, and how.” [This was parallel to the structure of the district assessment's prompt.] We got a lot of production. Individual scores jumped—some from 4 to 17 points, demonstrating better language use, punctuation, capitals, vocabulary, and quotation marks. (Trumbull et al., 2000, p. 18)

Example 5: Competition vs. Collaboration: Contrasting a Bridging Cultures and Non-Bridging Cultures Classroom

Another example of students' collaboration comes from the classroom of 2nd-grade teacher Ms. Catherine Daley. In her classroom, during large- and small-group instructional activities, students were encouraged to help each other learn and show what they have learned. For instance, in preparing for annual district-wide tests, students worked together on practice test items. Ms. Daley explained:

We would put the question on the board or overhead and work on it as a group. Or just work out of one booklet—but always in a group. I still do this. I prefer to work my class in small or whole groups. Little by little we move away from the whole group as we get ready for the actual test. I make sure to explain to the students what changes are going to occur regarding group and individual work. (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003, p. 135)

Observed during such cooperative activities in Ms. Daley's classroom, students were clearly engaged; there was no misbehavior or need for Ms. Daley to reprimand students. The activity went with the "cultural flow," which is for the children to work together for group success. When it comes time for the formal test, Ms. Daley reminds the students that they cannot help each other—that this is a time to show what they can do independently.

Insights about effective (or ineffective) motivational practices came not only from the Bridging Cultures teachers but also from a comparison 2nd-grade classroom of primarily immigrant Latino students. A student of one of the Bridging Cultures researchers spent dozens of hours videotaping in this 2nd-grade classroom as part of the research for her senior honors thesis (Isaac, 1999). One event she captured and recounted at a Bridging Cultures meeting crystallized the contrast between a culturally aware approach to achievement motivation and one that is based on a set of dominant-culture values.

The teacher organizes students in two teams to compete with each other to solve addition problems on the blackboard. Children are lined up in two rows, many of them looking anxiously at each other. Even though the children are in teams, they are not allowed to help each other. Children (one from each team) take turns going to the blackboard; when friends nearby try to give encouragement or help with solving the problem, the teacher shushes them with the admonition that they need to show independently what they know. As each student team representative approaches the board, the children shout "Ooooh," indicative of the pressure this activity evoked. Some of the children position themselves as if praying. The two children at the board are actually competing

with each other without any help or support from their group members, which visibly results in stress. (Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003, p. 134)

The competitive framing of the task clearly does not result in the kind of engagement the teacher is most certainly seeking. Moreover, as Isaac (1999) reports, throughout the extended period of observation in this classroom, the teacher spent what seemed to be an inordinate amount of time managing the students' behavior. Her immigrant Latino students' natural inclinations to help each other were met constantly with admonitions to work independently. With an apparent view of learning as a strictly individual matter, the teacher did not perceive the possibilities of student collaboration, nor did she have a cultural framework for understanding the likely source of the students' behaviors or why some instructional activities might not be motivating for them (Isaac, 1999).

Discussion

To understand why a classroom practice or tool may be motivating or not, one needs to know something about the students involved. Social contextual factors such as geography, economics, ethnic/racial composition of the school, the culture of the school, teachers' perception of cultural differences, and school relations with parents undoubtedly affect motivation either directly or indirectly. Historical and structural realities also affect students' engagement with schooling and their achievement motivation. Immigrant Latino students like those in the Bridging Cultures study "often encounter ill-equipped learning environments, inadequate instructional materials, ineffective teachers, and defiant peer subcultures..." (Conchas, 2001, p. 475). Conversely, supportive high-level academic opportunities are associated with higher expectations on the part of such students (Conchas, 2001).

Here, we have focused on cultural values, expectations, and practices to which a child has been socialized at home as one source of differences in achievement motivation. In a sense, parents help to set their children on a developmental path that may or may not parallel the path established by the dominant culture (Greenfield, 1994; Greenfield et al., 2006). For a family from the dominant culture, this path maps to the largely individualistic and independent orientation of schools. However, for more collectivistic families who socialize their children to identify with their group, work together for the good of the many, and relate interdependently, there is an inherent conflict with the individualistic values implicit in the traditional U.S. schooling process.

Analyzing the Examples From the Bridging Cultures Classrooms

In Example 1, the retooling of the use of the star chart in Mrs. Perez's classroom is evidence of collectivistic students' orientation to "group" rather than "individual" and their tendency to reinterpret a motivational strategy in their own terms. Harry Triandis, a pioneer in cross-cultural psychology, notes, "People who have been raised in collective cultures tend to 'cognitively convert' situations into collective settings; people who have been raised in individualistic cultures tend to convert situations into individualistic settings" (Triandis, 1995, cited in Otsuka & Smith, 2005, p. 95). This seems to be exactly what these 3rd-graders were doing.

The use of the star chart (responsive to students' wanting a solid block of stars) as well as the buddy system for studying and support during testing show how social (group) goals merged with academic goals (see Covington, 2000, cited earlier). Being together as a group and working interdependently apparently fulfilled students' social goals (including positive relationships), but mastering subject matter seemed equally important to them (Covington, 2000). Why was the bell-ringing process important at all? Our interpretation is that students wanted to acknowledge their classmate's accomplishment because it contributed to the success of the whole group. The value of helping or of being helped is central throughout this example. First, children responded immediately to the need of a buddy for assistance. Second, they also wanted to help during the assessment phase, as moral supports; third, this inclination generalized to the whole table group. Their behavior is not surprising, given that children from working-class immigrant Latino families are typically expected to take on considerable responsibility by the age of seven to help younger siblings (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Yet, as potent as the helpfulness value is to these children, it is also evident that they knew and accepted what the rules of the school were—that helping with answers during the test was prohibited (Trumbull et al., 2003).

In both Example 1 (star chart) and Example 2 (students' pooling money), individual rewards were translated into group rewards or a reward that benefits a member of the group, as needed, rather than on the basis of individual merit. Teachers' awareness of the collectivistic culture of students permitted them to see the logic of the students' approach and to allow the changes to take place.

Students' behavior in these situations can also be construed as an outcome of a particular cultural form of childrearing in which social/ethical learning is seen as inseparable from cognitive/academic learning. In a study of immigrant Mexican and Central American parents, Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) found that many parents did not distinguish between education as *schooling*

and education as *upbringing*. One parent said, “The two things [formal study and moral rectitude] go hand in hand....It would be impossible to get to the university if one doesn’t have good behavior, if one isn’t taught to respect others...” (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995, p. 198).

Example 3 (in which students chose lunch with their teacher, Ms. Altchech, over other rewards) illustrates the value of student–teacher personal relationships. On many occasions, Bridging Cultures researchers had documented how Mrs. Altchech served as an academic advocate for her students—going to bat for them to gain access to academic opportunities, including placements in middle school following fifth grade. Yet, that role differed from the “personal relationship” role that grew as she came to examine more critically what kept her students engaged and connected to school.

Example 4 shows the power of linking instruction and assessment to students’ value of “family.” Mrs. Pérez’s suggested revision of a district writing assessment prompt showed that when school activities connect with students’ deep values, they may be more motivating and achievement may well be affected. Her innovation resulted in actual improvement in academic performance on the revised district writing assessment prompt. It is standard educational wisdom to make connections to students’ *interests* and to build on their *prior knowledge* during instruction (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999); however, the practices of Mrs. Pérez and Mr. Mercado reflect an understanding of how connecting to students’ deeply held *values* can be powerfully motivating. Example 5, a set of contrasting examples, is illustrative of not only what can go right when students’ cultural orientation is considered in the classroom but what can go wrong when it is not. Allowing students to help each other (Ms. Daley’s test prep activities, in this case) seems to tap into students’ natural inclinations—for a productive result. But framing an instructional activity for collectivistic students as competitive appears to backfire. It is worth noting that numerous researchers have come to the conclusion that a performance-oriented approach to motivation, which often takes the form of promoting competition, is not generally productive for *any* students (Brophy, 2005; Meece, Anderman, & Anderman, 2006).

Considerations for Teachers

Recognition of cultural discontinuities between home and school on the part of teachers and willingness to bridge them are conditions for reducing students’ sense of disconnection from school and for the enhancement of motivation (Warzon & Ginsburg-Block, 2008). Once teachers understand the social goals their students may have, based on the kinds of cultural values they have been socialized to embrace, they can organize activities to capitalize on

those goals and maximize students' achievement motivation. When students are allowed to transform reward systems to be more in line with their own values, they may be more likely to work toward learning goals.

Cultural factors do not *determine* achievement motivation, nor can students' motivation reliably be inferred from their group affiliation or even their behaviors. For example, recent research and theory related to African American students suggests a complex interaction among cultural values, racial identity, perceptions of opportunity to learn, teacher expectations, private vs. public identity, and gender (Cokley, Komarraju, King, Cunningham, & Muhammad, 2003; Graham, 1997). Culture is but one important part of the picture.

At least three other considerations must be highlighted. First, the cultural roots of achievement motivation for many students from non-dominant cultures are likely to be most evident in the early years of schooling, before they have become more deeply familiar with a new set of expectations and practices. By the time they are in secondary school, many students from non-dominant cultures have effectively become cultural "hybrids" (Andriessen, 2006). They have absorbed ways of functioning that reflect both their home culture and school culture; however, fundamental values (e.g., group vs. individual orientation) tend to persist throughout life (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994). If students are left torn between the cultural values of the school (that their parents may not understand) and the cultural values of their home (that their teachers and school staff may not understand), then disengagement from one or both systems—home and school—can occur (Hudley & Daoud, 2008; Warzon & Ginsburg-Block, 2008). Such disengagement may be avoidable if teachers recognize potential sources of conflict and make invisible cultural values (such as when it is appropriate to help and share and when it is not) explicit to young children early on in the educational process. As discussed earlier, relationships with teachers may continue to be important throughout their schooling years as deterrents to dropping out (Hudley & Daoud, 2008).

Second, we should caution that although we have presented individualism and collectivism as contrasting value systems, they are not two ends of a spectrum in terms of how they operate in people's lives. "What comes closer to the truth is that both collectivistic and individualistic tendencies co-exist" in any culture (Ho, 1994, p. 305).

A third consideration is germane to any group of students: What teachers assume to be necessary or useful extrinsic motivators may be neither necessary nor effective. Many teachers have been steeped in the remnants of a behaviorist paradigm, which emphasizes the relationship between tangible rewards and behavior. The examples recounted here (as well as previous research) seem to suggest that teachers need to be cautious in their assumptions about (a) the

need for tangible rewards, and (b) how they may or may not mediate achievement motivation.

Conclusion

If high academic achievement for all students is a goal, then achievement motivation theory must move beyond a cultural universalist stance to the recognition that cultural values influence students' social and academic goals. Rather than focusing only on students as the source of cultural difference, "[it] would be wise to turn our lens from the individual to the institution to understand the ways school culture can support achievement motivation among all students" (Hudley & Daoud, 2008, p. 191). The cultural variability one sees in orientation to achievement parallels cultural differences in what counts as school success. Cultures that socialize their children to put relatively greater emphasis on the group than the individual also often tend to have notions of success that integrate the social and moral dimensions with cognitive and academic dimensions of development. Social goals can best be understood in students' sociocultural contexts, as reflecting families' and communities' implicit validation of particular developmental pathways (Greenfield, 2009). In the case of the immigrant Latino students taught by Bridging Cultures teachers, the collectivistic values of group success, supported by cooperation and a general orientation to help others, were fundamental to students' social goals—and to what would motivate them to achieve in school.

Improving schooling for students from ethnolinguistic minority groups cannot be accomplished, we argue, without attention to how fundamental child development goals of such groups are understood. Attempts to systematically assess how motivation affects achievement or school satisfaction need to take into consideration students' cultures, the culture of schools, the relationship between the two, and how that relationship can be positively mediated by teachers' actions (Warzon & Ginsburg-Block, 2008).

Additional research that uses the individualism-collectivism framework in new contexts could shed light on the complex relationships among teacher practices, home practices, achievement motivation, culture, and many other contextual factors—at the levels of student, classroom, school, community, and society. Such research could be designed to answer such questions as, "What are some possible ways to increase student motivation and engagement, based on an understanding of students' home-culture values?" "What teacher (or peer) behaviors are associated with more/less student engagement in classroom activities, given students from particular backgrounds?" "In classrooms of multiple cultures, what strategies ensure that the achievement motivation of

all students is maximized?” “Is academic achievement, measured in a range of ways, improved by the use of culturally responsive motivation strategies?”

It is known that pro-social behaviors (such as helpfulness, sharing, kindness, and cooperation) are associated with higher achievement (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000, cited in Miles & Stipek, 2006; Ginsburg-Block et al., 2008; Miles & Stipek, 2006; Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). Hence, another research question worth investigating is, “Can more individualistic European Americans expand the degree to which they are motivated by contributing to the well-being of the group?” Some research suggests that indeed they can (Solomon et al., 2000). If the kinds of strategies teachers used and permitted their immigrant Latino students to use work for dominant culture students, so much the better. Such an outcome would not mean that a universalist approach to achievement motivation is appropriate for all students (i.e., business as usual). This has not worked in other areas, such as mathematics and science instruction, where Latino and African American students continue to lag behind their White peers on such national indicators as NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005, 2009). Yet, when instruction has made explicit links to minority students’ experience, it has proven to be engaging and successful in terms of academic achievement with both minority and majority students (e.g., Brenner, 1998; Lipka & Adams, 2004; Nelson-Barber & Lipka, 2008).

The framework of individualism/collectivism is a starting point for understanding basic cultural differences, but it is likely to be most useful in combination with other theoretical constructs from a range of disciplines. In this paper, we have drawn largely from literature in the fields of education, psychology, and anthropology. We have used a range of largely qualitative methods associated with these fields. However, sociology and sociolinguistics, among other fields, may also yield constructs and research tools that are useful in research on student achievement motivation. For example, discourse analysis (a sociolinguistic technique, Gee, 1996), is a powerful means of documenting not only changes in teachers’ thinking but also students’ variations in classroom participation within and across time frames during different kinds of activities (Trumbull et al., 1999).

Insights into student’s achievement motivation are more likely to emerge, we believe, from classroom-based efforts that depend more upon naturalistic observation and teacher and student interviews than experimental methods. At the very least, such multifaceted qualitative methods will complement more experimental approaches. In research on assessment, for instance, mixed methods (quantitative/experimental and qualitative/ethnographic) have yielded important understanding about not only middle-school students’ mathematics

performance, but also about their thought processes during the completion of educational tasks (Trumbull et al., 2002).

In the context of the continued achievement gap that separates dominant culture students from their non-dominant culture peers, it behooves achievement motivation researchers to persevere with efforts to deepen our understanding of what motivates students—in particular, efforts to examine how cultural differences and educational responses to them are associated with different patterns in achievement motivation as well as academic achievement.

Endnotes

¹ Bridging Cultures is a registered trademark of WestEd and four researchers, Patricia Greenfield, Carrie Rothstein-Fisch, Elise Trumbull, and Blanca Quiroz.

²According to Hudley and Daoud (2008), engagement is a “motivational construct that indexes the persistence and quality of students’ involvement in learning activities” (p. 191). They identify two components to engagement: behavior and affect. Behavior is what students do to stay involved with learning. Affect is the attitudes they hold toward “academic activities and achievement striving” (p. 191).

³The term “Latino” masks great economic, social, geographic, and historical diversity among a group that shares aspects of ethnic and linguistic identity (Roosa, Morgan-Lopez, Cree, & Specter, 2002).

⁴Quotations not attributed to a source are from field notes and teacher interviews.

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Trumbull and Rothstein-Fisch are two of the four core researchers on the Bridging Cultures Project®, a longitudinal action research project exploring how cultural values systems influence development, learning, and education (<http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/serv/94>).

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