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Spatiotemporal Fluidity and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the Latino Diaspora

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Abstract

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Comments

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ABSTRACT

Culturally relevant pedagogy uses students' home cultures as a resource, both to teach the standard curriculum more effectively and to develop students' pride in those home cultures. This article describes how culturally relevant pedagogy gets appropriated in practice by teachers and students. The second author designed and ran an ESL room for three years, as part of a pull-out bilingual education program for a small group of Latino high school students in rural New England. She organized this room to match the more fluid spatiotemporal boundaries around activities that she had observed in many Latino homes. Her innovations succeeded in making Latino students feel more at home, but she only sometimes managed both to help her Latino students master the standard curriculum and to reinforce their pride in their home culture. Other school personnel, and some of the Latino students themselves, often perceived these as mutually exclusive options: either the Latino students would learn the standard curriculum in standard ways, or they would participate in the "less academic" culturally relevant practices. The article draws two conclusions: first, in some cases teachers, students and policymakers may be faced with hard choices between the conflicting values embedded in mainstream schooling and in the students' home cultures; second, educational policy gets appropriated in varied ways in practice.

Culturally relevant pedagogy uses students' home cultures as a resource, in two ways. First, teachers draw on students' cultural beliefs and practices to teach the standard curriculum more effectively. Second, teachers incorporate students' cultural beliefs and practices into the classroom in order to develop students' knowledge of and pride in their home cultures. Many teachers accomplish both these goals in their classrooms (cf. the cases described in Freeman, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Rose, 1995; and the references in Osborne, 1996). But in some cases these two goals conflict. This article describes a case of culturally relevant pedagogy in which some students end up choosing between academic success and their home culture.

The case involves an interesting type of culturally relevant pedagogy developed by the second author. In her years living in Colombia, and in experiences with her own family, she noticed that many Latino homes have more fluid spatiotemporal boundaries around activities than Anglo homes typically allow. In many Latino homes, including ones that we visited in the community described in this article, people tend to participate in several activities at once. They move smoothly among chores, conversations, television, homework and other activities—not serially, but by competently participating in more than one activity at once. Many Anglo homes, and mainstream US institutions like schools, tend to discourage multiple simultaneous activities and to demand focus on one activity at a time. Noting this apparent mismatch between Latino and mainstream Anglo practices, and concerned to provide culturally relevant pedagogy for her Latino students, Margaret Contreras designed her ESL room to be more like a Latino home. She allowed multiple simultaneous activities, and she encouraged fluid boundaries between these activities. Her Latino students, and other Latinos who visited the room, reported that Margaret succeeded in making her classroom feel more like a Latino home.

Despite this success, however, most school staff and some Latino students did not react as Margaret had hoped. Staff appreciated Margaret's rapport with the Latino students, and they often drew on her cultural expertise. But in interviews they sharply distinguished between the culturally relevant "tutoring" that Margaret was doing and the "instruction" in academic subject matter that they were doing. They perceived Margaret's room as chaotic and undisciplined—as the kind of place that rigorous teaching and serious learning were unlikely to happen. Some Latino students, mostly girls, did manage both to succeed in school and to appreciate the aspects of their home culture embedded in Margaret's room. But many others, mostly boys, chose to identify completely with their home culture and to reject the mainstream Anglo values represented by the school. This latter group used Margaret's room as a Latino haven in the midst of the Anglo school, but not as a tool to help them succeed academically.

This article has two goals: to describe how an innovative type of culturally relevant pedagogy for Latino students was appropriated in practice; and to illustrate how the two goals of academic success and cultural empowerment can conflict, in complex ways, in some cases. The first section reviews theories of culturally relevant pedagogy and discusses how its two central goals might conflict. The second section describes the case of Margaret Contreras' ESL room and describes the phenomenon of fluid spatiotemporal boundaries. The third section describes how staff and students at the high school reacted to Margaret's innovations. The conclusion suggests two reasons why Margaret was unable in many cases to help students both succeed academically and preserve aspects of their home culture: first, she did not have sufficient power or institutional support to convince other school staff that her culturally relevant pedagogy might make sense; second, in this context there seem to be conflicts between the students' home culture and the values

embedded in mainstream schooling.

Culturally relevant pedagogy

US schools that serve linguistic and cultural minority students need culturally relevant pedagogy for at least two reasons. First, minority students—and especially US Latinos—more often drop out of school than students from mainstream backgrounds (Losey, 1995). When teachers incorporate minority languages and cultures into the classroom, minority students learn more academic content and are thus more likely to attain educational credentials that will open opportunities for them (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Genesee, 1987; Osborne, 1996). Allen and Boykin (1992), for instance, describe values and practices found in many African-American cultural settings. As one component of their argument, they claim that African-American homes often contain high sensory stimulation, with overlapping visual, verbal, musical, and kinaesthetic cues. Allen and Boykin show that classrooms which incorporate multiple channels into the learning of academic content—for instance, by encouraging students to listen to music and move while they are working on academic tasks—allow African-American students to learn more than they would have otherwise. This increases the chances that the African-American students will succeed in school.

Second, US schools need culturally relevant pedagogy because well-intentioned efforts to help minority students often inadvertently undermine students' home cultures. Most programs aimed at linguistic and cultural minority students intend for these students to *assimilate* to the mainstream values and practices represented by the school (Cummins, 1993; Freeman, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Most practitioners and policymakers do not intend to eliminate or

devalue students' home cultures. But, as Valdés (1996) clearly shows, interventions that aim to acknowledge cultural differences and help minority students "overcome" these differences often undermine students' cultural traditions. Valdés describes, for instance, programs that teach US Latino mothers how to raise their children "better." These programs have good intentions: to counteract the mismatch between the mainstream Anglo expectations found at school and the different cultural expectations found in most rural, working class Mexican homes. Valdés argues, however, that these programs presuppose Anglo models of child rearing based on individualistic values—values that conflict with the collectivist, family-oriented ones commonly found in rural Mexican culture. From an anthropological perspective, neither of these cultural perspectives is better or worse. But when authority figures from schools and agencies teach Latinos how to "improve" their child rearing, they undermine these Latinos' confidence in the value of their own culture.

For these two reasons—to facilitate minority students' academic success and to avoid undermining their home cultures—several theorists have recently developed comprehensive approaches to culturally relevant pedagogy (Cummins, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996).¹ Ladson-Billings provides a concise account, arguing that culturally relevant pedagogy should have three crucial aspects: minority students must experience academic success that is recognized by mainstream standards and institutions; they must maintain and develop both competence and pride in their home cultures; and they must learn to recognize and criticize exclusionary practices that hurt members of minority groups. Cummins (1993) and Osborne (1996) advocate similar approaches to culturally relevant pedagogy. As Cummins puts it, minority students should have a positive orientation toward both their own and the dominant

culture, and they must not perceive themselves as inferior because of their minority language and culture. Cummins and Osborne also agree with Ladson-Billings that culturally relevant pedagogy should actively counter the disempowerment that minority students face in the larger society, by explicitly teaching about the social processes that accomplish such disempowerment.

These advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy acknowledge that sometimes minority students choose between mainstream success and affirming their own cultural identities.

Ladson-Billings (1995) cites Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) claim that some African American students see academic success as "acting white" and feel that they must fail in school in order to affirm their identities as black people. While acknowledging that this happens, Ladson-Billings argues against "caste" explanations that present blacks as a monolithic group (e.g., Ogbu, 1987). Instead of seeing African-American students' disproportionate school failure as the inevitable result of structural factors—as if most black students must inevitably choose between academic success and cultural pride—she argues for heterogeneity and the possibility of transformation. Ladson-Billings supports her argument empirically, with ethnographic descriptions of classrooms in which culturally relevant pedagogy helps African-American students *both* succeed in school *and* embrace their home culture. She describes students who do not see school success as antithetical to their identities as African-Americans. Others have described similar successes accomplished with culturally relevant pedagogy among US Latino students (Freeman, 1996; Rose, 1995).

In arguing for structural complexity and the possibility of transformation among minority students, Ladson-Billings and other contemporary advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy move beyond a simple "difference" hypothesis in their explanations of disproportionate minority

school failure. The difference hypothesis explains disproportionate minority school failure by citing the unrecognized divergence in cultural styles and values between mainstream schools and minority communities (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970/1977; Michaels, 1981). On this account the gatekeepers who run schools assume that mainstream Anglo practices and values are naturally superior, and they unwittingly (and wrongly) interpret minority practices and values as evidence of academic deficits. Although this difference hypothesis has some truth, it has been criticized on two grounds. First, in recent years many have described *various* factors that likely contribute to disproportionate minority school failure, in addition to a mismatch in cultural values, and they have argued that single-factor explanations cannot suffice (e.g., Cummins, 1993; McDermott, 1987; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 1996; 1997).

Second, minority cultures are much more heterogeneous and minority students are much more hybrid than the difference hypothesis allows (Heath & McLaughlin, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In reality, most minority students and many teachers have varying degrees of competence in more than one set of cultural practices and values. The encounter between minority students and mainstream schooling is thus more complex than a simple conflict of monolithic cultural styles. It involves, instead, more subtle adjustment and negotiation among the multiple repertoires available to both teachers and students. Minority students *are* often unjustly stigmatized and disempowered in these school interactions, but we need more subtle tools than monolithic descriptions of cultural style in order to explain how this happens (for alternative tools see McDermott & Tylbor, 1995; Wortham, 1994). We must go beyond structural variables to examine what happens as minority students encounter educational policies in practice.

But if cultural differences are complex and fluid, and do not in themselves explain

disproportionate minority school failure, why do we need culturally relevant pedagogy? Allen and Boykin (1992), Cummins (1993), Ladson-Billings (1995) and others argue that students can benefit from the incorporation of their home cultures into schooling even though this will not eliminate all the disadvantages they face. Advocates of culturally relevant pedagogy agree that multiple factors impede minority students' school success, and they acknowledge that cultures are heterogeneous and that individuals are hybrid. (In fact, culturally relevant pedagogy intends to *foster* the hybrid cultural identities of linguistic and cultural minority students, because it emphasizes *both* competence in the mainstream curriculum *and* celebration of the home cultures). It is important, then, to distance culturally relevant pedagogy from the "difference" hypothesis. Contemporary advocates do not claim that culturally relevant pedagogy will by itself eliminate all the major factors that produce exclusion and disadvantage in our educational system. But they claim that it can nonetheless help in many cases.

As Freeman (1996), Levinson & Sutton (in press) and others remind us, however, we often find discrepancies between reforms as envisioned by educational policymakers and the realities of practice. This article examines a case of culturally relevant pedagogy, in order to see how this reform plays out in one particular context. In this case culturally relevant pedagogy worked for only some of the minority students being served. Other students faced an apparently exclusive choice between academic success and their home culture. In describing the cultural conflict that produced this exclusive choice and the academic failure of some of these students, we are *not* returning to a simple "difference" explanation for minority student failure. Instead, we will describe the complexity of students' responses to this instance of culturally relevant pedagogy, and thus we will illustrate how minority students respond in diverse ways to educational policy.

Fluidity in an ESL room

Havertown High² is in a small rural New England town far from any sizable Latino community. About 200 Latinos, mostly from Mexico or Southern Texas, live in Havertown. (Only 1% of US Latinos live in the Northeast, where they comprise 0.3% of the total population—cf. Saenz & Greenlees, 1996—but small diaspora communities like the one in Havertown are becoming increasingly common). Virtually all of the adults have come to work at a local meat processing plant. Turnover is very high, as families regularly leave town for other jobs or to return south. At any given time, about 50 Latino children are enrolled in the local schools (comprising about 2% of the total school population). Margaret Contreras worked at the high school for 3 years as a bilingual paraprofessional, where she designed and staffed an ESL room for the Latino students. All the Latino students in Havertown schools attend mainstream classes, but many are pulled out of one or two classes a day in order to work in the ESL room in that particular school. Each ESL room is staffed by a bilingual paraprofessional, and certified ESL teachers come to the rooms to offer formal classes for "limited English proficient" students. For logistical reasons, however, the certified teachers rarely used Margaret's room, so she made it available to all Latino students at the high school. The first author, together with two research assistants, observed Margaret's ESL room daily for two months and interviewed teachers and students, as part of a two year ethnographic study of the Havertown Latino community.

Latino adolescents have mixed feelings about life in Havertown. On arrival they usually suffer culture shock at being transplanted into a community so devoid of Latinos. Margaret spent many hours with new students—often in tears—who refused even to leave the ESL room for fear

of the unfamiliar, totally Anglo world of the school. The adolescents miss their Spanish-speaking friends, and Spanish language radio (although many families do have satellite dishes and watch the Spanish-language cable network Univisión). Due to the lack of friends, relatives and familiar activities they often find rural American life sterile and boring. The transience of Latino families also takes a toll. As reported by Stull, Broadway, and Erickson (1992), the turnover of workers in this sort of meatpacking job can be 6-8% a *month*. Turnover among Havertown Latinos approaches this at times. Even children from families resident for several years often speculate that they will be leaving soon, and this expectation disrupts their commitments to school and friends.

On the other hand, many adolescents and their parents appreciate the quality of the schools—which they consider far better than those in southern Texas or rural Mexico. Some parents remain at extremely difficult jobs so that their children can finish school in Havertown. Many adolescents and their parents also value the lack of drugs and gang violence. Students report that they feel safe in Havertown, and parents worry less about the bad influences their children might fall under. The primary reason for these Latinos' presence in Havertown, however, is work. As described comprehensively by Griffith and Kissam (1995), the employment prospects of many agricultural workers based in southern Texas have become less secure in recent years. These workers now value a *steady* job above all else, and they find that in Havertown. The jobs are exhausting, often dirty, and pay the minimum wage. But workers get steady work and ample overtime year-round, and there is no shortage of new workers interested in the jobs.

Finding Margaret Contreras' ESL room at Havertown High can be a challenge. You must go through the cafeteria and almost out the back door of the school, then enter the self-contained

special education room for seriously disabled students. Through this room, past the eager stares of the disabled students, you will find a small room that must have been designed as a large storage closet (measuring about 12 feet by 9 feet). As you enter, you will see Margaret's small desk and chair immediately on your right. On the far wall are a filing cabinet, a desk with a computer, a map of the world and many Spanish-language posters. Compressed against the two side walls are two or three other desks and chairs, one housing a combination TV-VCR, a bookcase filled with Spanish-language books and books on bilingual education, plus more posters and students' work. A prominent portion of the right hand wall contains a gallery of half a dozen hand-drawn pictures—each containing the nickname of a male Latino student and an artistic depiction. One says "El Tomate" in stylized letters, for instance, and has a picture of a humanoid tomato that is supposed to resemble Paco the ninth grader. Margaret refers to this art work as "legal graffiti." The boys take pride in their pictures, and they consider it a mark of friendship to be given a nickname and enshrined on the wall.

If you visit Margaret's room in the morning, and if you are a mainstream Anglo, this small space will contain a dizzying amount of activity. Margaret sits at her desk, filling out forms and intermittently answering questions from the three students in the room. Jesús Villalobos and his friend Paco Moreno have been released from their ninth grade math class, which is at the moment taking a test. They are doing worksheets that they must finish before taking the test themselves. They alternate between Spanish and English, and between a conversation about a recent fight and their math homework. Jesús occasionally turns to the back wall and teases Teresa Fuentes, who is sitting behind him writing a paper on the computer. She sometimes teases back, but more often she ignores him. One of the few African-American students in the school enters the room, greets

Margaret, and then remarks that no one saved a chair for him. He borrows one from the special education room, sits down beside Teresa, and proceeds to discuss the paper assignment that she is working on. At this point we have four students, one teacher, one ethnographer, two or three conversations and three different types of schoolwork going on in a little over 100 square feet of space.

On this day, Margaret had promised Jesús the opportunity to watch an educational video on the ancient Maya. Later in the period they turn on the VCR. Margaret continues with her paperwork, and Teresa continues with her paper, but both apparently attend to their work and the video simultaneously. Even more remarkable to the Anglo ethnographer (the first author), when he and Margaret begin a conversation in the corner the students manage to attend to that too. Teresa chimes in at exactly the right moment to contribute to the conversation, while still making progress on her paper and apparently learning something about the Maya. Toward the end of the movie other activities do stop for a few minutes, after Jesús remarks about one of the Mayan Indians that "his lips are like mine." Margaret uses this comment to start a discussion of "ethnic" appearance and its consequences, which becomes a discussion about how some Latino males have been getting stopped by local police recently.

In this brief description of Margaret's ESL room we can see all three central components of culturally relevant pedagogy, as defined by Ladson-Billings. Margaret supports and encourages the students' academic work, and Jesús, Paco and Teresa did get some academic work done during their time in the ESL room that morning. She encourages the students to speak Spanish and to learn about and take pride in their home cultures. And she helps them confront the exclusion and discrimination that they and their compatriots too often face in the US. But when

asked Margaret does not immediately identify herself as a "culturally relevant teacher." Instead, she often refers to herself as a "proud mother," and to the students as "*my students*." Her first goal in establishing this ESL room was to gain the students' confidence, such that they knew she cared about them regardless of how they behaved. And the students do treat her in many ways like a mother. Jesús, whose own mother is in Mexico several months out of the year, brings Margaret presents and is particularly affectionate on Mothers' Day. Other students confide in Margaret, sharing secrets that they tell no other adult.³

Margaret's maternal role is only one way in which her ESL room resembles a Latino home. Latino families are unusually close and highly value mutual support (Rothenberg, 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995; Valdés, 1996). Margaret has managed to establish a quasi-familial support group among most of the Latino students at the high school. By her third year in Havertown, when we did our ethnographic observations, most Latino students were interested in each others' lives and were willing to support each other academically and personally. More than half the Latino students in the high school would regularly gather in the ESL room during home-room period, in the fifteen minutes before school, to chat or help each other finish up homework. Once we saw a newcomer from Mexico, a young woman named Carmen who had been in the US only a couple of months and knew little English, dive right in and help another Latino with his English-language science homework when she recognized the concepts from her schooling in Mexico. Carmen also spearheaded a project to include the children of a Oaxacan family who had until then been isolated in the school and community. These children spoke Spanish as a second language, after their indigenous language, and also looked physically very different from most of the other Latinos. Carmen boosted their self-confidence by telling them

how Oaxacan artists had influenced Mexican art in an important way, and thus she managed to bring them more into the Latino group at Havertown High.

So Margaret's ESL room resembled a Latino family in at least three central ways. First, Margaret herself was maternal. She had high standards, but she cared for her students unconditionally. Second, she encouraged students to be close and supportive of one another. In her room other students were not seen as competition or as distractions, but as *resources* to help others both succeed academically and develop pride in their home cultures. Third, Margaret allowed more fluid spatiotemporal boundaries around activities. Students often participated in more than one activity, in the same place and at the same time. This third characteristic is perhaps the most striking, because of the contrast between the extreme spatiotemporal compartmentalization of activities in a typical school and the fluidity of Margaret's ESL room.

Based on her own experiences in Colombia, and with her Colombian husband and his family,⁴ Margaret had noticed more fluid spatiotemporal boundaries around activities in many Latino homes. People in such homes do not focus on one activity at a time, serially, but instead participate in several activities simultaneously. Margaret decided to make her ESL room more culturally relevant, by implementing this more fluid organization of activities there. In doing so, she was implementing an uncommon type of culturally relevant pedagogy. She went beyond curriculum materials that draw on Latino cultures, and beyond the use of Spanish, to incorporate a culturally familiar way of organizing time, space and student participation. She was thus following a more "ecological" view of education and development, in which teachers go beyond content and language and also recognize less explicit aspects of minority students' cultural practices (Azmitia, Cooper, García & Dunbar, 1996; Irvine, 1990; Rogoff, 1991).

Ethnographic work by the first author showed that Margaret's observations about spatiotemporal fluidity were accurate for the Havertown Latino community itself. A typical Anglo is overwhelmed by the level of noise and activity in the typical Havertown Latino home. The entire extended family, plus visitors, generally occupy the central area of the house—usually the kitchen and living room. Many activities often go on simultaneously, and in the same place: the TV is on; children are doing homework; more than one conversation is occurring, in person or on the phone; people transact business activities (selling things to visitors, filling out tax forms, etc.); some of the women are cooking; music is playing; neighbors are dropping by to borrow something or to chat; and family members are coming and going on various errands. Most amazing to the Anglo observer, people seem able to attend to several of these activities at once. While making progress on their homework or their tax forms, people chime in at exactly the right moment with some comment for the ongoing conversation. There is generally a feeling of warm togetherness in such a scene, which is readily extended to guests. Havertown Latinos report that they like this arrangement in the home, because it allows them to communicate and help each other with the various tasks, and because it makes them feel connected to the group. One adolescent was horrified when the first author asked why he didn't do homework alone in his room. He would feel alone and uncomfortable there, he said, and he would also be cut off from others' help and encouragement.

Other ethnographic work on Latinos has described a similar pattern of spatiotemporal fluidity. Vélez-Ibáñez (1993; 1996) calls it the "simultaneity" of activities in time and space. He reports that spatiotemporal boundaries between activities are generally more fluid among Latinos than among Anglos. Some other researchers refer to this pattern in passing. Vásquez,

Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon (1994), for instance, describe scenes from daily Mexican American home life that involve the TV blaring, children playing noisily, adults and older children engaged in academic or business tasks at the kitchen table. Gallimore and Goldenberg (1993) describe children moving from activity to activity among adults in Mexican-American homes. Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, and Perez-Stable (1987), among many others, describe the closeness among Latino family members that underlies the high spatial proximity between Latino family members.

Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü and Mosier (1993) provide an extensive and systematic description of simultaneous participation in multiple activities. They compare typical household organization and child-rearing practices among rural Indian, rural Guatemalan Mayan, middle class Turkish and middle class US families. The two middle class settings involve much more segregation of activities than the two rural settings. In the rural homes, many more activities go on at once—ranging from adult work to caregiving to socializing. And rural adults and children, especially the Guatemalan Mayans, often attend simultaneously to more than one activity, with each "uninterrupted by the other, with each line of attention maintained as smoothly as if there were no other focus" (Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü and Mosier, 1993:50). Remarkably, by 20 months of age the Guatemalan toddlers are significantly more likely to attend simultaneously to multiple activities than US adults.

No Havertown Latinos are Guatemalan Mayan, although there are a few Guatemalans who undoubtedly have some indigenous ancestry. But we seem to be observing in Havertown a similar pattern of multiple activities and simultaneous attention to the one Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü and Mosier observed in Guatemala (and to some extent in rural India). This spatiotemporal fluidity

most likely occurs among Mexican and Central American rural working classes in particular, and not among Latinos of all social classes. Rothenberg (1995) describes substantial differences between rural and urban Mexicans, and notes the often-cramped quarters of the rural working classes in Mexico which often force several activities into one space. (Note, however, that Vélez-Ibáñez (1993) suspects middle-class Mexican households also have more fluid spatiotemporal boundaries than Anglo ones, so this pattern is likely culturally as well as economically distributed). It is also important to note that Latinos do of course have some spatial and temporal differentiation in their activities. Eisenberg (1986), for instance, describes family members going outside on the stoop to relax and socialize after chores are done. More fluid boundaries also do not mean that Latinos tolerate constant interruptions. Valdés (1996) describes how respect for parents keeps children from interrupting their activities until the parents finish. We have observed such boundaries among Havertown Latinos too. We claim merely that the spatial and temporal boundaries between activities are *more* fluid among many rural, working class Latinos than among middle class US Anglos.

Mainstream Anglo homes have relatively firm spatial and temporal boundaries around activities, with an expectation that people will focus on one activity at a time: children often do homework separately in their rooms, until they are finished, and if they need help an adult goes to their room; people watch TV in the living room, and the TV will often go off when dinner or another activity commences; parents pay bills at a desk, in an office or study, etc. More research would be required to document the extent of this difference among various groups,⁵ but a difference in degree of spatiotemporal fluidity clearly exists between mainstream Anglos and the less Americanized working class Latino families in Havertown.

As a central component of her culturally relevant pedagogy, Margaret organized her ESL room in a more Latino way with respect to spatiotemporal fluidity. Most often she and the students participated in more than one activity simultaneously. Students could enter and leave the room at will, without regard for passes. There was deliberately no clock. While in the room students were expected to work on something, but they were allowed to wander off-topic for a while before going back to their task. The next section reports that, while Latino students appreciated Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy, Anglos often misunderstood it. Margaret successfully convinced some Anglos, like the first author, that fluid boundaries do not mean lack of substance—but just a different organization of it. Most Anglo school personnel, however, were not convinced of this.

Results of Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy

Margaret clearly succeeded in creating a Latino haven at Havertown High. One of our research assistants, who was raised in a Mexican family in Texas (and was feeling homesick while a student in New England), felt so at home in Margaret's room that she spent a hundred hours more than we had originally planned doing research at the school. She described the ESL room as a "home away from home." The Latino students also appreciated the warmth and communal feeling of Margaret's room. By Margaret's third year more than half of the Latino students at the high school could be found there every morning at 8 AM, and they often went out of their way to attend these gatherings. On one morning Paco arrived at this gathering rather disheveled and apparently exhausted. He reported that Jesús would not make it to school that day, because they had been out playing pool until 2 AM the night before. Someone asked him: "So what are you doing here." He

replied, apparently without irony: "Because I wanted to be here with Mrs. Contreras."

Most Anglo school staff, however, did not share the Latino students' appreciation of Margaret's work. Some of them complained that in her quasi-maternal closeness with the Latino students Margaret was "not professional." By this they meant that she inappropriately blurred the boundaries between school and home. Margaret visited the students at home sometimes, and she invited them to her home occasionally. A professional, according to other school staff, maintains distance from students, both in order to maintain authority as a representative of the institution and to avoid possible legal liability. On one occasion, our homesick research assistant ran into the conflict between this professional code of conduct and Margaret's more familial approach. She and an adolescent Latina had become close, and they were observed walking hand-in-hand on school grounds. School authorities immediately made it clear that this sort of physical contact with students was absolutely forbidden. From the assistant's perspective, Latina friends and relatives often hold hands as a way of feeling closer. But from the school's perspective, legitimate concerns about sexual harassment and legal liability require a no-touching policy. In this case our assistant simply stopped all such physical contact with students, without any serious damage to Margaret's efforts at culturally relevant pedagogy. But in other ways the school's negative reaction to Margaret's innovations revealed a more serious conflict of values that did undermine Margaret's efforts.

Because of its more fluid spatiotemporal activity boundaries, many Anglo school staff found Margaret's ESL room overwhelming and chaotic. With a few exceptions, most school staff interpreted the multiple activities and fluid boundaries in Margaret's room as evidence of sloppy academic work. As they conceived it, Margaret might be doing successful "mentoring," and

perhaps occasional "tutoring," but she did *not* do "instruction." Mere tutoring, as they conceived it, could be done in the midst of other activities, but academic instruction designed to cover a specified subject matter in a specified time cannot coexist with such distractions. From this perspective, students in Margaret's room seemed to be "hanging around," straying off task, and staff feared that "not much gets done there." (Many staff also did not like Margaret's disdain for hall passes). When asked by the first author to speculate about why Margaret's room operated the way it did, few staff mentioned cultural factors. Most attributed it to Margaret's personality, claiming that she was too "social" as a person. The one differing opinion came from a second-generation Italian American teacher, who said that his cultural heritage made him feel right at home in the simultaneous activities going on in Margaret's room.

So Margaret and the Anglo school staff had differing interpretations of activities in her ESL room. Margaret saw it as culturally relevant pedagogy. Most Anglos saw it as chaotic and unprofessional. This conflict had both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, Margaret managed to run the ESL room as she wanted for three years, but she then decided to leave Havertown High because of conflicts with the administration. She was a paraprofessional, and thus she had little power and very limited job security.⁶ Theoretically, the conflict between Margaret and the school illustrates how culturally relevant pedagogues can face a hard choice between academic success and instilling pride in students' home cultures. Anglo school staff, although perhaps less well-informed about Latino cultural patterns than they might have been, had a reasonable argument: given the way US schools are organized—with individual academic achievement the primary goal (not community-building), with standardized curricula and assessments, with discrete academic subject matters and compartmentalized academic

activities—Margaret's approach might not have been the best preparation for US school success.

We can treat this as an empirical question: did Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy help Latino students both succeed in school and develop pride in their home cultures, or did it impede their academic performance? Without doubt, her approach built a Latino community and developed students' pride in being Latino. By Margaret's last year the room had become a haven for virtually all the Latino students. Even those fluent in English and at the top of their class came to the room—to chat, to do their work, and to help others. One academically successful girl, who had sworn only a year earlier never to speak Spanish again, was willingly translating passages and tutoring other students in Spanish. Many students opened up enough to discuss sensitive topics like boyfriends and pregnancy with Margaret. The students also came to care for each other. Whenever someone was in trouble, many people were concerned about the problem and willing to help. So Margaret succeeded in building community and providing a culturally familiar space within the school.

This in itself had some positive effects on Latino students' academic performance: formerly disruptive students were less so; students skipped school less often; and students would attempt assignments in Margaret's room that they would not have bothered with otherwise. Nonetheless, it seems that Margaret's efforts did not substantially improve Latino students' academic performance. As the first author has described elsewhere (Wortham, in press), Havertown Latino adolescents divide into two groups with respect to school success: some (mostly girls) value school and do well, while others (mostly boys) do not value school and end up dropping out. Many Havertown Latino adolescents face the bind described by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) and others: they are caught between the more traditional Mexican values of

their parents and the mainstream US values they see in the media and among their Anglo peers. For complicated reasons, sketched in Wortham (in press), the Latina and Latino adolescents in Havertown adopt different adaptive strategies when faced with this conflict.⁷ Latinas behave like Ogbu's (1987) "voluntary" or "immigrant" minorities. While in school they adopt the school's values and work hard on academic tasks. At home they think of themselves as Mexican or Mexican American and share many of their parents' values. Latino male adolescents, however, behave more like Ogbu's "involuntary" or "caste" minorities. Both at home and in school they consider themselves Mexican, and they do not accommodate to the school's expectations. They expect to work in the trades or in manufacturing, like their fathers, and they do not see school success as necessary to this goal.⁸

This gender difference in attitudes toward school pre-dated Margaret's arrival, and it has lasted beyond her time in Havertown. In order to examine the impact of her culturally relevant pedagogy on the Latino students, then, we need to look at the two genders separately. The adolescent girls who were doing well in school before Margaret arrived continued to do well academically during her three years. Margaret was able to give some personal attention to particular students, and this probably helped some Latinas make it to college when they would not have, or encouraged them to go to better colleges than they would have. But she did not have a large academic impact on them. Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy influenced these Latinas primarily by developing pride in their home cultures. In school, some of them had been downplaying their Latino background. But Margaret helped them see academic success and being Latina as mutually compatible. Thus these girls accomplished two central goals of culturally relevant pedagogy—to succeed academically, by mainstream standards, and to develop pride in

their home cultures—but Margaret herself deserves credit only for the latter result.

With the boys, almost all of whom did not do well in school, Margaret also succeeded in developing their pride in being Latino. These boys had been proud of their Mexican heritage before Margaret's arrival, but she brought some official sanction to this pride. By valuing their home culture and by teaching them some of the accomplishments of Latino peoples, Margaret helped these boys resist the devaluation of their language and culture that too often occurs in mainstream US society. Despite her efforts, however, these boys did not succeed academically in school. Most came to see the school as less hostile, and they did improve their grades some. But most ended up failing one or several courses, and most have by now dropped out of high school. These boys could not reconcile their aspirations as rural, working class Mexican men—to be the head of their own household, to work hard in the trades or at physical labor and support a family, to remain close to their own extended family—with the expectations of the school that they will "better" themselves and move as individuals beyond their families and their home culture.

So Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy accomplished one of its goals for both groups of Latino students—to develop pride in their home cultures. The significance of this accomplishment became clear in the academic year following Margaret's departure, when the ESL room reverted to a more traditional style. The room is now used almost exclusively by LEP students, for formal instruction. Whereas before there might have been six or eight students in and out of the room during a given period, now we have observed no more than three. Student activities are much more spatially segregated now, with staff using a table in an adjoining room for students working on unrelated projects. There is no longer student work on the walls. There is also a new clock. LEP students and those who were formerly successful in school are doing about

as well as before. These students, however, report that "everyone misses Margaret." Even though current staff are effective instructors, these students miss the support and camaraderie of the old room. Tellingly, students no longer know much about what other Latinos in the school are doing. When asked how some other Latino student is doing, people often report that they "haven't seen her." We have also observed teasing among the Latino students—particularly the less successful calling the more successful "school-girl" and the like. Losing Margaret has been more difficult for the less academically successful but non-LEP students. These students report that they never go to the ESL room any more. Current staff try to motivate them with extrinsic reinforcements like grades, but these are in most cases not working. Current staff have good intentions, but because they are perceived as less supportive many students will not give them a chance.

Conclusions

Clearly something was lost when Margaret and her culturally relevant pedagogy left Havertown High. But we argue that the situation is not as simple as it may seem. Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy helped in some respects, but it did not help all the Latino students both succeed academically and develop pride in their home cultures. It may be that, with more power and institutional support, Margaret could have implemented her pedagogy more widely across the school and thereby could have helped more of the Latino students succeed academically.⁹ But we argue that Margaret also ran into the deep conflict between rural Mexican and mainstream US values described by Valdés (1996). Valdés reminds us that mainstream US schooling practices presuppose culturally specific values and assumptions, particularly an emphasis on *individual* accomplishments and the freedom to choose one's own life course that

academic credentials can bring. She describes how rural, working class Mexicans value reciprocity and loyalty to the family over individual glory, and how these more collective values lead some Mexicans and Mexican Americans to forego academic successes for the sake of maintaining their connections with others.

Valdés ends her book on what seems a painful note. She argues that we should not define "success" as only individual academic success. People like the Latino males in Havertown may be perfectly successful, by their standards, if they drop out of high school and remain loyal, contributing members of their families. Valdés argues, further, that we should not try to wipe out this alternative value system through well-intentioned efforts to help Latino students "succeed" by mainstream standards. (We call this ending "painful" because Valdés realizes that mainstream Anglo values will not easily co-exist with the more communal values she describes. In fact, due to larger social and economic forces, mainstream Anglo values seem to be spreading and undermining more communal values in various parts of the world). We are left, then, with a hard choice: to encourage the male Latino adolescents in Havertown to pursue academic success, as defined by the school, would seem to undermine their own cultural values; but to encourage them to reject mainstream schooling will close off many opportunities that they may not at this point fully understand.

Our discription of Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy has also shown, however, that educators face this hard choice with only some Latino students. The Latino adolescents did not encounter an either-or choice between home and host cultures, and they benefited from Margaret's culturally relevant pedagogy. The different adaptive strategies adopted by Latino and Latina adolescents led them to appropriate Margaret's educational strategy differently. Sometimes the

important differences between minority and mainstream US cultural values force minority students and their teachers to make hard choices. But sometimes minority students and their teachers can, through culturally relevant pedagogy, manage both academic success and cultural celebration. Whether academic success and home cultural values can co-exist in any given setting seems to depend on details of that setting and the people in it.

Notes

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¹In the terms often used to describe bilingual education, these theorists advocate an "additive" and not a transitional or assimilationist approach to linguistic and cultural minority students (Genesee, 1994; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Minority students should learn both their home language and culture and the mainstream language and culture. With such an additive approach to bilingual education, minority students learn the standard curriculum *better* than under transitional or assimilationist approaches (Bialystock, 1991; Dolson, 1985; Genesee, 1987; 1994).

²All names and many identifying details have been changed.

³One might expect that Margaret's maternal self-presentation would lead to lax discipline. But in fact she accomplishes discipline in a less institutional, more home-like way. Rothenberg (1995) and Valdés (1996) describe how working class Mexican children are often particularly concerned not to upset or disappoint their mothers. In many cases Margaret does not have to resort to extrinsic reinforcement like grades and detentions with her students, because they know she cares

and they do not want to let her down.

⁴Osborne (1996) reviews many ethnographic studies that show how non-minority teachers—with relevant knowledge and sufficient motivation—can teach culturally relevant pedagogy.

Margaret's own ethnic identity is hybrid. She was born a New England Anglo, not far from Havertown, but she considers herself partly Latina. She lived for several years in Colombia, where she met her husband. And she has four Latino children with him. She once remarked that, when she was pregnant with these children and exchanging blood with them, she herself became physically part Latina. Her pride in Latino cultures, and her ability to speak Spanish, were important to many of her students.

⁵Harvey (1996) and Postone (1993) argue that the typical Anglo conception of linear, segmented time and space—in which time and space form empty containers, into which activities are organized—has emerged only recently in capitalist societies. Society needed to compartmentalize time into measurable units when labor became a commodity and a measure of value. (Among medieval Europeans the "hour" was invented in the thirteenth century, and the "minute" became common only in the seventeenth—as capitalism was firmly taking hold—cf. LeGoff, 1980). The more fluid spatiotemporal organization that Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü and Mosier (1993) observed in rural Guatemala and India, and that we have observed among Havertown Latinos, is characteristic of people more insulated from the capitalism of the modern West. (Note, however, that Grossberg (1993) argues that the transition from modernism to postmodernism in the West might be bringing us back toward a more simultaneous, fluid

spatiotemporal organization).

⁶See Hamann (n.d.) for a discussion of bilingual paraprofessionals' roles in helping US Latino students. He describes how, like Margaret, paras are often able to advocate for Latino students and build strong relationships with them. He also describes how paras are institutionally marginal and often devalued in the educational system.

⁷Phelan, Davidson and Yu (1998) provide a taxonomy of adaptive strategies adolescents adopt when faced with different expectations at home, among peers and at school. In their terms, the Havertown Latinas "manage" the "incongruent" worlds of home and school, by accommodating to mainstream norms in school and retaining Mexican norms at home. The boys "resist" the incongruent world of the school and adopt identities that fit at home but not at school.

⁸Our research thus supports Calderón (1996), Tapia (1996), Valdés (1997) and others in pointing to the heterogeneity of US Latino identities. This minority group, at least, resists characterization as one monolithic socio-cultural type or another. Our results are particularly striking in this regard, as they show both "voluntary" and "involuntary" minority attitudes and behaviors *co-existing* within one very small community—and in some cases *within the same household*, with brothers and sisters adopting different stances.

⁹The more successful examples of culturally relevant pedagogy described by Freeman (1996), Ladson-Billings (1995) and Rose (1995) all occurred in schools and communities with a much

higher percentage of minority students. It may be that the low percentage of Latinos in Havertown makes culturally relevant pedagogy more difficult to sustain there, because the curriculum in entire classrooms or the whole school is unlikely to be modified to fit the culturally relevant mode, and because only a few staff will be familiar with the details of the relevant minority culture.

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