PACE UNIVERSITY

Talking Transculturalization: Negotiating Youth LatinXX Identity

Sylvia M. Beato

Professor Michael Weinraub

Research Abstract

I began my research project with two goals: 1) to see whole-class discussions become increasingly more student-lead and respectful without my interference and 2) to track students' changing self-perceptions as LatinXs via exposure to texts, films and discussions on Argentinean and Cuban history, culture and identity.

My goal was not only to lubricate democratic and respectful conversation about LatinX ethnicity, history and culture in my classroom, but also to widen my students' understanding of their own LatinX identities. To do this, however, I had to invite them to leave the secure bubble of their individual niches of origin and venture out into a nebulous, undefined territory where speaking the same language or languages (there were times when English was used in our discussions to emphasize meaning or emotion) was the sole requirement.

While reading Robert Fecho's (2004) narrative of his experience teaching in northern Philadelphia, I was struck by something he mentioned about his contradictory feelings as both a teacher and product of working-class immigrants: "As if being unnerved by issues of race and language weren't enough, I also found myself wondering about the purpose of education in the first place. My working-class roots had ingrained two keys, if somewhat contrary, actions into my central nervous system. The first was that I needed to be proud of where I came from. The second was that one sure way to enable me to leave where I came from what through education. In subtle and not so subtle ways, my parents hammered those two somewhat competing ideas home. Don't forget where you came from, they urged, but make sure to use education to put you into a social position where you at least might be tempted to forget where you came from" (p. 20).

Similarly, I am trying to push by students not to forget where they came from, but use the freedom of the classroom to explore the possibility that maybe they could. It is only when we explore an ego-less sense of ourselves that we learn not only to commune with others compassionately, but also more strongly define our own individuality in the process.

My focal points were discussions on difficult and complex political and social developments in twentieth-century Latin America, namely Argentina and Cuba. I introduced two formats of discussions: the

first was an informal Roundtable where colloquialisms and Spanglish were allowed, the second was a formal Debate where only formal Spanish was allowed. I also gave two surveys that inquired about their origins and their thoughts on identity, our class culture, our school culture, and the material being studied. I moderated and observed their discussions while taking notes using a general observation sheet and then categorizing the discussion according to Colette Daiute and Hollie Jones' (2003) nine strategies of race and ethnicity discourse. Finally, we did a three-day wrap-up activity that consisted of completing a Reflection Sheet based on Patricia Enciso's (2003) text and watching a clip from an episode of *¿Que pasa, USA?* that touched on the theme of the multi-faceted LatinX identity.

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Focus Question(s)

My research question, as well as some secondary questions that stemmed from it, is:

o *How will specific texts, films and discussions based on Spanish-American history affect students' perceptions of the*

LatinX identity?

- How will students react to learning about pockets of LatinX identity that do not directly relate to them?

- How do students orally engage the topic of identity with one another?

- Can these discussions occur respectfully without teacher intervention?

Rationale

My interest in exposing my students to some of the many facets of the LatinX identity is borne namely out of teaching them for over a year and engaging in lessons that have allowed me to observe their perspectives as young LatinXs growing up in a multi-racial Bronx neighborhood.

I was raised in Miami, a primarily LatinX-populated city in southern Florida. As opposed to most other parts of the country, knowing Spanish in Miami is nearly a requirement if you wish to live and communicate comfortably with others. The term "minority" to refer to LatinXs is used, instead, to refer to Anglo-Americans. Differences in race or ethnicity were rarely, if ever, a point of contest of disruption in my schooling experience.

With a Dominican father, a Spaniard mother, and as the youngest of four siblings, I grew up speaking Spanish in a busy and bustling home. Luckily, for me, I arrived to the United States at the age of four. As opposed to other members of my family, I went through all the phases of public school manipulating the English language as well as any child who was born in the United States.

With this background, I experienced an interesting dance with my sense of identity. Factors such as skin color, accents (whether in Spanish or English) and style of dress sent strangers "guessing" about my origin depending on where I would travel. If I went to the Dominican Republic, people thought I was European. If I went to Spain, people thought I was Latin American. Yet I could pass as Anglo-

American or LatinX by simply switching the language in which I spoke, or even sometimes the intonation I used in English. Without even realizing it, I was already engaging in what Juan Guerra (2004) refers to as "transcultural repositioning", or the "skill that members of [the LatinX community] must self-consciously regulate and not simply enact intuitively if they wish to move back and forth with ease and comfort between and among different languages and dialects, different social classes, different cultural and artistic forms" (p. 8).

When I began teaching in New York in 2009, I was struck by yet another face of the American population in my LatinX adolescent students. I recognized that they lived in a much more racially mixed urban environment than what I experienced at their age. I also recognized that, due to their youth, they were experimenting with different hues of this watercolor we call the SELF. And yet, my students were distinctly set in their adherence to their specific nationalities. This struck me as odd and, at first, as a close-minded attitude I wanted them to change. My initial feeling was not unlike Guerra's articulation of the LatinX identity: "no single representational term has the power to portray a community as internally diverse and complex as ours" (p. 8.) As my research in engaging my students about this topic developed, so did my respect for their convictions.

Background and Context

I work at Kappa International High School, a Title 1 public school in the Bronx. Our school shares its space with five other high schools housed in the Theodore Roosevelt building across the street from Fordham University. This year will see its first class graduate, many of whom are students who took part in this research study. Two years ago, we received certification to administer the International Baccalaureate Program, a rigorous and internationally-based curriculum that culminates in globally assessed exams.

Last fall, I was hired to teach I.B. Ab Initio Spanish (for students with two years or less of the target language) and I.B. Spanish B (for students with five years or more of the target language). I was not "trained" (or taken formal classes on the assessments and curriculum) to teach I.B. Spanish until June of last year, and found that several other circumstances impeded our progress with the I.B. program during our first school year together. To begin, none of these students had ever taken any formal Spanish as a second language. They

had taken two years of either Chinese or Greek, and some had toyed with French. Given our neighborhood demographics, my first rosters consisted of mixed native-Spanish speakers and non-native Spanish speakers. As a first-year teacher struggling with classroom management, I additionally had to invent ways of differentiating a curriculum for classes of 25-30 adolescents who did not trust me and felt that I, too, would leave them as had so many of their other teachers.

Suffice to say, it was the hardest 6 months I have ever experienced. Hailing from sunny and tranquil Florida, I arrived in a boisterous and cold New York City armed with a suitcase and a dream. I did not know much about teaching nor about the city, but I was excited to learn. Language and literature were my passions, and I was ready and willing to make a difference at this similarly idealistic and international school.

Kappa was different than I expected, of course. As a new, growing school with one single principal acting as its entire administrative and disciplinary structure and a staff of thirty, young and generally inexperienced products of Teach for America and New York Teaching Fellow Programs, we are participants in a whimsical experiment in the heart of the Bronx. Organization and consistency are systems with which we struggle to maintain. There was, at the time, only one other foreign language teacher on our staff who taught French. The Chinese and Greek teachers both left before her.

I survived that first semester, happily, and I think I grew a lot as both a professional and an individual. It was then when I first started to notice the pockets or cliques that formed according to race in my classes. The macro groups were divided into LatinXs and African Americans. The micro groups consisted of African American, African Caribbean, Central American LatinX and Caribbean LatinXs. The atmosphere was not always negative, but certainly almost always tense. I experienced a number of arguments, disrespectful interactions, and open physical fighting usually stemming from comments, jokes and anecdotes based on stereotypes, labels and racial differences.

I did nothing to change the atmosphere in my classes as I was manically putting out fires, but the conversations and interactions I witnessed were disturbing. By the second semester, I begged the principle to cease her insistence on "scaffolding" in my classroom and grant me the opportunity to separate the students

according to their language background. Doing this, of course, allowed me to organize my lessons in logical levels and permitted the classroom to acquire a structure as well as see my management improve.

Surprisingly, the conflicts surrounding racial identity did not stop there. I witnessed similar kinds of cliques and groups form particularly in my native-Spanish classes. The disrespectful comments, inappropriate jokes, and occasional conflicts continued. I was certainly settling in my classroom management style and developing stronger relationships with my students, but these issues still bothered me.

When the opportunity to do research on a trend I witnessed in my teaching arose, I immediately jumped on the idea of identity as it was a frequent "wondering" of mine. Teaching standard Spanish was often met by students with the feeling that they knew Spanish so the need to learn grammar was obsolete. Furthermore, the students were convinced that the Spanish taught in my class was not a veritable Spanish, but an academic version that was not spoken in their homes or in their countries.

This resulted in divisive, often crippling refusals or dismissive attitudes in partaking in the exploration of LatinX history, psychology, literature and art. The Dominicans milled together, the Puerto Ricans shared inside jokes, the Mexicans kept to themselves, and the miscellaneous nationalities picked and chose their cliques. I found this frustrating not only because it created an unwelcoming, divided atmosphere in my classroom that interrupted the collegial tone I was trying to build, but I feared it would encourage the perpetual self-fulfilling prophesy of racism that always begin with these innocent acts of labeling.

The racial rifts in the class therefore made it difficult for true democratic conversations and exchanges to take place. The students did not listen to one another or allow for very many differences of opinions to surface. In my research, I sought to find strategies that would allow us to speak comfortably about race and other important issues concerning the LatinX identity, as well as push the envelope on the students' set ideas about their identity and expand it so that they can empathize and ultimately relate to other pockets of LatinX identity. Ideally, I wanted to engage my students in some version of conscious transcultural repositioning so that it would "open the door to different ways of seeing and thinking about increasingly fluid and hybridized world that is emerging around us. Moreover, [conscious transcultural repositioning] can help

[LatinXs] develop a better understanding of the society [LatinXs] are actively transforming through [their] sheer numbers and community practices. (Guerra, 2004, p. 8).

Literature Review

I. Adolescents and Identity

Tell me about your experience growing up and I will tell you about mine. Surely there will be differences – our parents, siblings, friends, enemies, crushes, heartbreaks, triumphs and failures. There will be key memories that will be private and very much ours – moments when the adult world dawned on us as a reality we enter slowly yet permanently. When did you discover the betrayal of the Tooth Fairy, the tangibility of death, the persistence of sex? Whenever it happened or whatever the circumstances, these moments happened to all of us. They marked our ascent from the sleepy shrouds of childhood into bright light of young adulthood.

Here we enter a world where we have the knowledge of the adults but we don't know quite what to make of it, and less of all what to make of ourselves as bearers of this knowledge. Do clothes matter? Do our friends? Our mannerisms? Our grades? When grown-ups tell you to "just be yourself", what do they mean?

Surely adolescence is one of the most important times in our individual development. We push back against others in order to define and re-define the boundaries of our developing selves. For young people still searching for the courage to stand up on their own, finding others with whom to identity as a group is often a secure transition. According to Marla Krinalovich (2006), "identity becomes more salient to adolescents as they interact with others from a variety of ethnic and minority groups. Through this process of interaction, the concept of ethnic identity becomes more and more important. Indeed, it is during this important time where individuals develop the capacity for abstract meaning and "can understand the meaning and permanency of their group membership" (p. 7).

The Unites States spans nearly four million miles and is home to over 300 million people, so how to LatinXs factor into its culture? With the immense variety and complex history that makes up the LatinX ethnicity, one is bound to find a variety of examples of "group mentality". According to Marcelo M. Suarez-

Orozco (as cited in Guerra, 2004) who has published an edited collection entitled *Crossings: Mexican Immigration in Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, the 'new immigrants' of the post-1965 era are in the process of transforming the demographic and cultural foundations of this country. In 1945, he notes, only 2.5 percent of the U.S. population was Hispanic. By 1995, that number had grown to 10.2 percent. Both the U.S. Census Bureau and immigration scholars currently project that by the year 2050, 23.5 percent of this country's population will be LatinX/a" (p. 9).

How does assimilation occur, or does it ever fully occur for any one culture? There are always stories told, languages or dialects spoken, dishes and food prepared, and holidays or traditions upheld that help keep cultural roots alive. That said, LatinXs are sometimes considered an ethnic group that refuses to assimilate completely due to the fact that "most LatinX subgroups in the United States are not isolated from their countries of origin […] regularly travel back to countries of origin when political conditions permit […] migrant to take advantage of technological advances to maintain contact" (Krinalovich, 2006, p. 7). This regular contact with their mother counties allow LatinXs to maintain important cultural practices while living in the United States. What begins to happen, interestingly, are examples of transcultural repositioning, or the phenomenon where individuals may conform to the American culture in certain situations and not in others based on their "perceptions regarding the instrumentality of particular behaviors in different contexts" (Krinalovich, 2006, p. 7).

For LatinX adolescents already going through the rites of passage from childhood into adulthood, the need to assert their cultural belonging can add a sense of security to their uncertainty.

II. The LatinX Identity

The term transculturation was originally coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1940. According to Ortiz, (as cited in Guerra, 2004), "the word transculturation better expressed the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss

or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of a new cultural phenomenon, which could be called neoculturaion" (p. 20).

LatinXs undergo differences processes of transcultural repositioning, as re-defined by Guerra, as they interact with different social spheres in their lives, including family, education, and professions. The vehicle of language acts as a power exchange for LatinXs depending on with whom they interact. Developing literacy in both English and Spanish is therefore very important, and in my content area, very central. As a teacher, I must struggle with the fact that Spanish exists in a subordinate position to English in the world, and yet is just as important or more important in maintaining the LatinX cultural identity. "If a positive ethnic identity is an important component of self-esteem, then the maintenance of language is an important symbolic element of cultural identity and is an important goal of culturally relevant pedagogy" (Krinalovich, 2006, p. 11).

I would have to admit that my students are not bilingual, although having them attain this reality is one of my many goals for them. I can say, however, that they are literate in both English and Spanish. This is an important distinction for two reasons. First, it means that they engage, whether consciously or not, in Guerra's (2004) definition of transcultural repositioning (introduced in the Rationale section of this paper). It also means that they are upholding the representation of their cultural roots by their individual culture's dialects, colloquialisms, and accents in their daily lives. Although this becomes troublesome when trying to teach them the importance of standard Spanish, there is also a sense of healthy self-esteem that emerges when Spanish is acknowledged as the target language of the cultural group to which one belongs. According to Krinalovich (2006), bilingualism is an important goal because LatinXs are "very aware of the [positive] personal value attached to each language, and how it affects the [negative] stereotypes of LatinXs more generally" (p. 11).

According to Bernando Ferdman, (as cited in Krinalovich, 2006), "becoming literate means developing mastery not only over processes, but also over the symbolic media of the culture – the ways in which cultural values, beliefs, and norms are represented. Being literate implies actively maintaining contact with the collective symbols and the process by which they are represented (p. 11). By reading this definition, we see that Ferdman does not define literacy as skills, but rather as behaviors that are seen as important in

certain cultures. This, in essence, is a part of the process of transcultural repositioning that I would not only like my students to become conscious of, but also to use positively to cross the boundaries that so often separate them from others both within and outside of the classroom.

III. Talking about Identity in the Classroom

Identity is often framed in a discourse of conflicts and power. This is certainly the case in my classroom, anyway, with its varied population of LatinX students. How should I respond as their teacher? Or is the *respectful* expression of identity, per se, the ultimate goal in our conversation?

Through our discussions, I wanted the students to explore the political and social reasons behind certain important historical events and the impact these had on the nation's citizens. We explored cultural phenomena that were specific of these two particular nations, and discussed how or if these experiences could be compared to our own or to those of our communities.

That said, the use of personal story-telling and anecdotes proved to be a very effective way to gently invite depth of reflection and engagement. "Whenever it seems appropriate, I share some of the personal experienced […] and ask my students to delve into their own personal experiences in ways that will encourage them to reflect on how the practice of transcultural repositions has played or can play itself out in their own lives" (Guerra, 2004, p. 19).

My hope is that throughout our discussions, the students' understanding of their own identity as well as other LatinX identities becomes richer and more complicated. Certainly, my students identify themselves as individuals who embody distinct cultures, but my ultimate goal is for these cultures to be shared with one another and, somehow, embodied as a larger group identity. Mary Louise Pratt (as cited in Fecho, 2004), identifies this as the "contact zone" of classrooms, noting how "[students'] understandings of a range of cultures and of themselves became more complicated, sophisticated and engaged. Dialogue across cultures came about through all of us engaging in dialogue that helped us to be sensitive to the differences and to understand the ways difference mattered, but also to identity what we shared across differences" (p. 136). I suspect that the use of Spanglish and codeswitching aided our comfort in this endeavor. Codeswitching, as

defined by Michelle Hall Kells (2004), "refers to the ability on the part of bilinguals to alternate between their linguistic codes in the same conversational event" (p. 27). Indeed, engaging in codeswitching "reduce[s] protective boundaries and relinquish caution about protecting one's social position and esteem" (Kells, 2004, p. 33). Ultimately, the goal was to reach a positive plateau of talking to one another calmly, respectfully and reflectively about issues that challenged my students' set perceptions about themselves and others who they believed were not like them.

Teaching this unit and organizing this research has made me aware of both the depth and boundaries of my limit of control. There is much that can be accomplished in the classroom, but I can only hope that these discussions, ideas and practices of openness echo outside our four walls. Essentially, I what I want for my students is to respectfully question the place they claim to be from and identity why, even if, this sense of self needs to be established in negative opposition to another's sense of self. Transcultural repositioning is a reality for most minorities, and becoming aware of the ways in which we "reposition" ourselves when we are in the presence of others can be very powerful. But it is important for us to remember that transculturation "is not a process we go through to feel connected and whole once and for all [not is it acceptable to] assume that our goal in the class is to read a social scene and adapt to it the way a chameleon Is genetically programmed to adapt to its physical environment…" (Guerra, 2004, p. 19). Rather, my goal through discussions is simply for my students to become more conscious of the moments, the mannerisms, and the attitudes they take on when they do this and the effect this has on others. Thinking more broadly about the LatinX identity might help to break down some of the discrimination, disrespect and violence that exists in our communities.

Research Design

The research studies I found on discussing complex issues of race and ethnicity in the classroom emphasized the importance of establishing atmospheres where differences of opinion were regulated with fairness, but without harnessing the comfort or flow of the students' natural thought-process. I thought it important, therefore, to allow a certain level of informality in some of our whole-class and small-group

discussions that included respectful use of colloquialisms and a mix of Spanish and English, if necessary to my students' expression. According to Kells (2004), "speakers use codeswitching for rhetorical or aesthetic effect, to display a range of emotions [. . .] codeswitching can be a safe choice, a leveler [. . .] codeswitching reminds us that there are no "pure" codes. Language is always a *mezcla*, a feast of shared and borrowed ingredients. Moreover, codeswitching, like literacy, is a way of reading the world" (pp. 35-36).

I was therefore flexible with the range of speech the students used for our Roundtable Discussions, but strict with the structure of exchange set in place for them. I established strict expectations (see Appendix A) where the speaker needed to be holding a koosh ball in order to speak. When another student wanted to participate, they needed to signal for the ball and receive it gently from the previous speaker. The only other requirement was that each student participate meaningfully twice during our discussion for a full grade.

We held four Roundtable discussions in total where I tallied (see Appendix B) each time that a student a) spoke out of turn (i.e.: did not hold the koosh ball), b) spoke disrespectfully to another student (i.e., cursing as well as directing mean words such as "shut-up", "you're stupid", or "that doesn't make any sense", etc, to another student).

Finally, I categorized my notes and observations according to Daiute & Jones' (2003) nine categories of race and ethnicity discourse. These nine categories are:

1) **Identifying:** explicitly using the terms *race* and *ethnicity* or similar forms of these words

2) **Contextualizing:** mentioning unkind acts or implications of racism such as class, environment, historic, or institutional without labeling them as injustices.

3) **Broadening:** a discourse strategy that mentions race and ethnicity via synonyms of difference such as saying "immigrant", "speaking a different dialect/language", etc.

4) **Practicing:** involves using language associated with a particular group without actually naming a group, such as saying "they think they're better that everybody else" to refer to someone who may be conceited.

5) **Empathizing**: focuses on psychosocial consequences of difference or discrimination, such as saying "that's unfair… sad… hard", etc.

6) **Universalizing**: amplifying the issues of difference to generalize them into broader human values of justice, love and equality.

7) **Distancing:** emphasizes the difference in an effort to self-justify or protect oneself from the blame or guilt of discrimination.

8) **Avoiding:** Outright denying the implications of race of ethnicity or simply skirting the discussion or race, ethnicity or discrimination in a context where it is an explicit theme.

9) **Personalizing:** The sharing of stories or anecdotes derived from personal experience.

Categorizing our exchanges allowed me to track the growth or lack of growth in our discussions about Spanish-American history, culture and the LatinX ethnicity.

I followed the same process with our two culminating debates (see Appendix C). The only difference was the structure of our activity and the register of Spanish that was used (formal speech). I divided the class into two teams, asked them to choose specific speakers for each side, and develop questions, arguments and delivery over the course of two class periods. Finally, we debated specific topics on Argentina and Cuba that concerned our area of study.

This unit was introduced with Book-End Surveys (see Appendix D) that inquired about the students' background, their opinions on the class, the school, and their comfort with the target language. Many of the questions on the survey were repeated so that I could compare what changes, if any, had taken place over the course of our study and our oral discussions.

Finally, I wrapped up the unit with a short wrap-up activity that consisted of analyzing a chart (see Appendix E) devised by Enciso (2003) entitled *Understanding and Fighting Discrimination* (p. 160). The students were asked to check off if they evidenced specific instances of discrimination as seen on a Reflection Sheet (see Appendix F) in their studies of Argentina and Cuba, and then to provide an example. I then asked them to do the same with our class. Finally, after showing them a sample of Enciso's (2003) chart with its examples, I asked them to re-do the same chart for our class. I created a pie chart comparing their answers for our class before and after going over Enciso's (2003) evidence together.

My hope is to explore the concept of identity from the point-of-view of "voiceless" LatinX individuals in Argentina and Cuba and to put ourselves in the figurative shoes of a citizen of either of these two countries. I hope that by exposing my students to these regimes where silence was required for survival, they will develop a sense of compassion for what they do not understand and cultivate a respectful and open approach to what they are unfamiliar with. I hope our research will highlight the importance of equality, open-mindedness and unity that will stem beyond our immediate classroom to encompass a larger sense of the LatinX identity, and ultimately of what it means to be an active, present participant in our communities.

Data

I. Discussions

In each discussion, whether Roundtable or Debate, I introduced protocols of expectation for how I wanted our conversations to develop (see Appendices A and C). As much as possible, I tried not to interfere and observed how the students listened and responded to one another. I was particularly focused on their use of disrespectful or offensive comments that touched on the ethnicity or race of another member of our class, but also took into account other disrespectful forms of speech such as "that doesn't make any sense," or "you would say something like that, you idiot," etc.

Figure 1 shows the number of times the protocols were broken over the course of six oral activities.

Figure 1
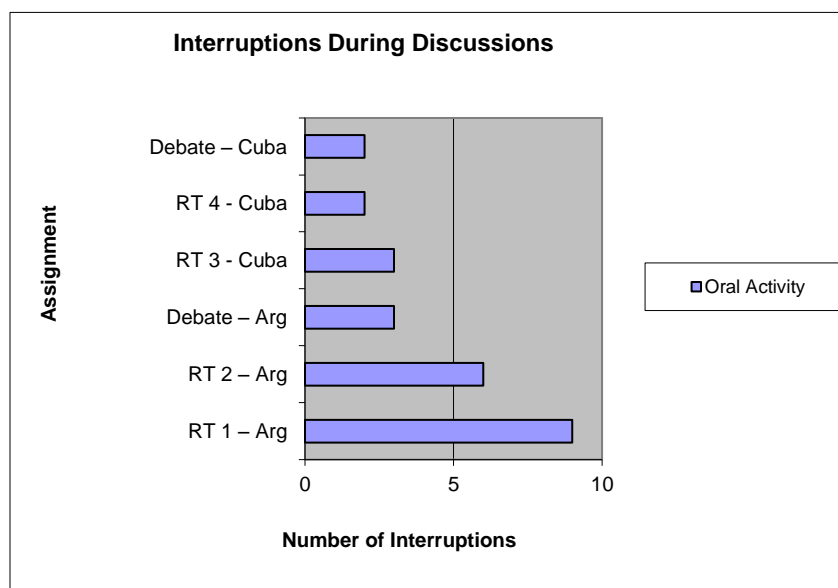
As we can see, there were a total number of 9 interruptions for our first Roundtable Discussion on Argentina. For our following Roundtable Discussion on Argentina, there were 6 interruptions. During our Debate, there were only 3. Similarly, on our first Roundtable Discussion on Cuba, there were again 3 interruptions. For our second, there were a mere 2. By the time we did our second Debate, there were again 2 interruptions.

What I did, then, was categorize the students' comment in general (not just their disruptions) according to my notes and observations according to Daiute & Jones' (2003) nine categories of race and ethnicity discourse (see Appendix H). I then added the number of instances these occurred across all the oral activities. **Figure 2** shows the results of these categorizations.

Figure 2

	Identifying	Contextualizing	Broadening	Practicing	Empathizing	Universalizing	Distancing	Avoiding	Person...
Roundtable 1 – Arg	3	4	0	0	9	8	1	1	
Roundtable 2 – Arg	5	7	1	2	11	6	2	1	
Debate – Arg	6	8	2	2	8	8	0	0	
Roundtable 3 - Cuba	8	7	2	2	7	9	2	0	
Roundtable 4 - Cuba	9	9	2	1	8	9	1	1	
Debate – Cuba	8	9	3	1	8	8	0	0	
Total:	39	44	10	8	51	48	6	3	2

Here, we see that the highest number of instances where comments or opinions were voiced using Daiute & Jones' (2003) nine categories of Race and Ethnicity Discourse were namely empathizing, universalizing, contextualizing and identifying. It seems like it was easy for the students to not only relate to the victims of oppression, whether social or ethnic, and clearly use labels such as "poor," "lower-class", "minority" or "Hispanic" when referring to these instances. The students were less able to distance or avoid these problems, and somewhat more able to practice these terms and broaden on them. We see that the category of personalizing additionally falls in the middle.

II. Identity

This part of my research was considerably more abstract, but I was essentially monitoring if and how students' ideas on their identity changed throughout this unit of study. When we began the unit, I presented Survey 1 (see Appendix D) in which I asked them about where they were from, where their parents were from, and their general feelings about respect or racial issues in our class and in our school. With these results, I chose some surveys with more thought-provoking answers and pulled those students aside for a one-on-one interview. Here, the students clarified or expanded upon their written answers, which allowed me to better understand their feelings about their identity and the concept of individual identity in general. I administered Survey 2 (see Appendix D) at the close of the unit which repeated most, although not all, of the questions from Survey 1.

I organized the questions in the following 3 groups: a) identity b) feeling safe and respected in class/school and c) Spanish class and language skills. On the first survey, there were 6 questions on identity, 13 on safety/respect in school and 7 on Spanish class and language skills. In the second survey, there were 5 questions on identity, 3 on safety/respect in school, and 14 on Spanish class. In total, 42 students took both surveys and I counted the assignment as a homework grade. The students' strongest responses were tallied and put into pie charts. In **Figure 3a** and **3b**, I have featured the results from the category of Nationality and Identity. In **Figures 4a** and **4b**, I have featured the results from the category of Safety/Respect at KAPPA. In **Figures 5a** and **5b**, I have featured the results from the category of Spanish class/language skills.

Figure 3a

a) Nationality and Identity:
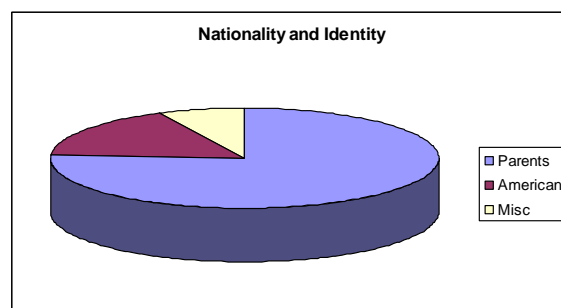
On Survey 1, Question 1 ALL ABOUT YOU
"When people ask you where you come from, what do you say?

77% identified with their parents' nationality
16% identified as American
7% were undecided or did not know

Nationality and Identity

Parents
American
Misc

Figure 3b

On Survey 2, Question 1 ALL ABOUT YOU
"Have your thought about being LatinX
or the LatinX identity changed over the past 1-2 years?"

2% said they felt their identity had changed
92% said they felt their identity had not changed
6% were undecided or did not know

Latino Identity (Change)

- Changed
- Not Changed
- Undecided (IDK)

Figure 4a
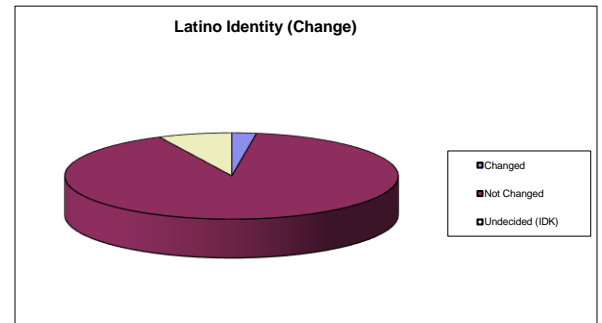
b) Safety and Respect in class/Kappa

On Survey 1, Question 6 ALL ABOUT KAPPA
"Do you think race is a problem in this class?"

33% noted lack of respect due to race as a serious problem
40% noted lack of respect due to race as a moderate problem
16% felt neutral about respect due to race in the school
11% felt that respect due to race was not a problem at school

Is Race a Problem?

- Serious Problem
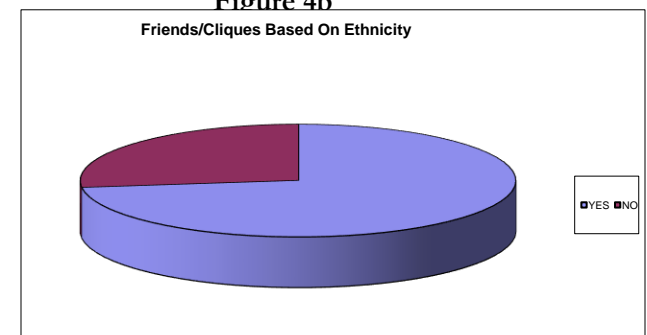- Moderate Problem
- Not a Problem
- Undecided/Don't Know
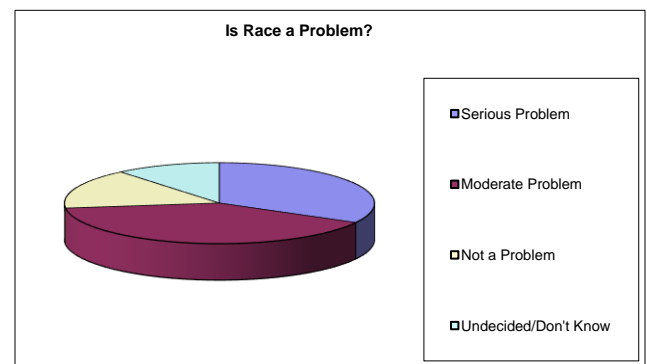
Figure 4b

On Survey 2, Question 3 ALL ABOUT MATERIAL
"People make friends based on ethnicities"

73% answered YES
27% answered NO

Friends/Cliques Based On Ethnicity

- YES
- NO

Figure 5a

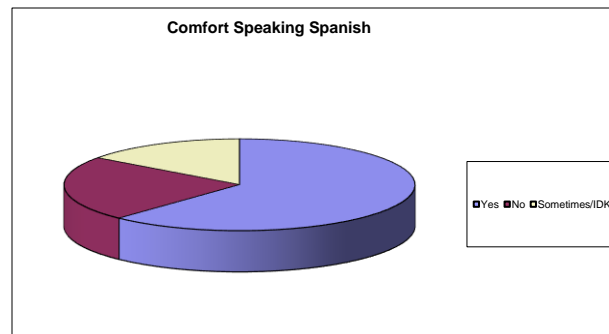### c) Language Skills/Spanish class

On Survey 1, Question 6 ALL ABOUT OUR CLASS:
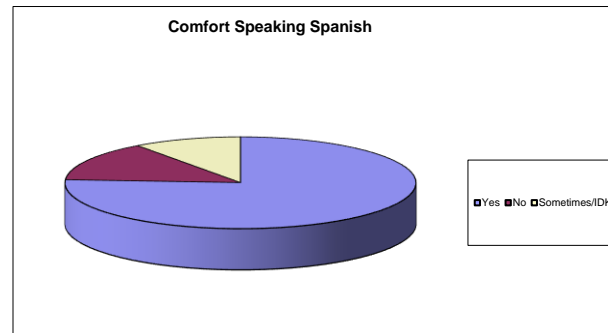"Speaking in Spanish holds me back from participating in class."

62% said YES
23% said NO
15% said sometimes or they didn't know

Comfort Speaking Spanish

☐Yes ☐No ☐Sometimes/IDK

Figure 5b

Comfort Speaking Spanish

☐Yes ☐No ☐Sometimes/IDK

On Survey 2, Question 5 ALL ABOUT OUR CLASS
"I feel comfortable raising my hand to share my ideas in class."

76% said YES
14% said NO
14% said sometimes or they didn't know

The very last activity we did was a three-day wrap up Reflection on our unit THE VALUE OF IDEAS. I had the students fill out a Reflection Sheet (Appendix F) that we went over as a class on the topics we studied in class. We went over the chart together on the board, and then I asked them to fill out the same chart, but this time think about our classroom culture when answering the questions. I was only able to get 36 students out of my standard 42 to fill out both sheets due to absences; I have therefore only tallied the total responses from those 36.

Most of the students denied the existence of racial or ethical discrimination in our class but, after seeing Enciso's (2003) chart presented to them on the next day, filled the chart out differently. We ended the day watching an episode of *¿Que Pasa, USA?* that comically deals with issues of multiple ethnicities within the LatinX identity.

The following chart, **Figure 6,** compares the responses of both Reflection Sheets.

Figure 6

Category	Yes/No – Sheet 1	Yes/No – Sheet 2
FEAR	Yes: 0% No: 98% Sometimes: 2%	Yes: 28% No: 50% Sometimes: 22%
ENVY	Yes: 17% No: 20% Sometimes: 63%	Yes: 33% No: 19% Sometimes: 48%
INTIMIDATION	Yes: 59% No: 15% Sometimes: 26%	Yes: 72% No: 7% Sometimes: 21%
HARASSMENT	Yes: 24% No: 12% Sometimes: 64%	Yes: 86% No: 2% Sometimes: 12%
DEHUMANIZATION	Yes: 2% No: 92% Sometimes: 6%	Yes: 41% No: 16% Sometimes: 43%

In **Figure 7** you will find a bar graph where I compiled all the "Sometimes" and "Yes" responses into one value and the "No" responses in another. The blue color refers to the first Reflection the students completed before having a discussion on and seeing Enciso's chart. The red color refers to the subsequent Reflection and their responses to this.

Figure 7
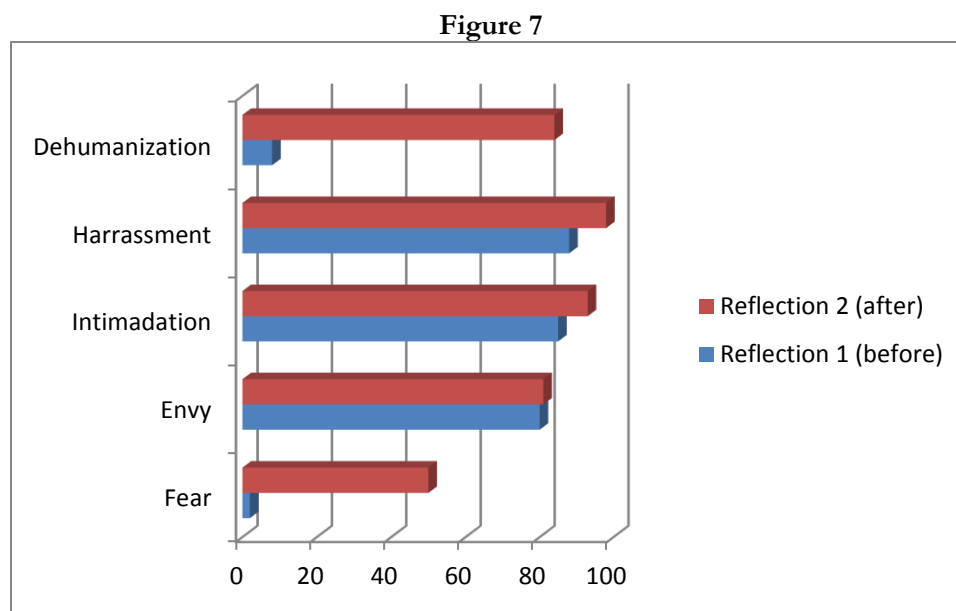
The most obvious result from this data is that the "Yes" or "Sometimes" responses to evidencing ethnic or racial discrimination in the class were much evident than the "No" responses even in the "before" responses. Another factor that stands out is that the responses to dehumanization and fear demonstrated the clearest discrepancy in the "before" and "after" responses.

Analysis

I. Discussions

I introduced very strict protocols and monitored the students, clipboard in hand, as they held their oral interactions; I think I was a successful "peace-keeping" referee and moderator to our exchanges. I tried not to interfere and observed how the students listened and responded to one another. Although I was particularly focused on their use of disrespectful or offensive comments that touched on the ethnicity or race of another member of our class, I also took into account other disrespectful forms of speech that sought to silence or shut out another class member.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the disruptions certainly lessened over a period of time because of these protocols. It is important to take into account that some interruptions were more serious than others. For example, calling another peer an offensive name or making a disrespectful comment would be more

problematic than speaking out of turn. Nonetheless, I think the importance of being aware of another person's ideas and respecting the time they need to finish them orally is a skill that most of my students lack and that adds to the level of tension that occurs in our classroom. In essence, the dwindling of interruptions of all kinds, even minimal ones, was a positive outcome in these activities.

What I then did was look at my notes and observations taken from their oral discussions and categorize the most notable opinions using Daiute & Jones' (2003) nine categories of race and ethnicity discourse (see Appendix H), In **Figure 2**, I categorized my notes on the students' comments and found that, for the most part, students are aware of concepts of discrimination, whether ethnic or psychological, as they occur in the classroom. But what was most interesting for me were the changes in their answers to dehumanization and fear in the Reflection 1 compared to the Reflection 2. It seems, when shown the chart with its examples, that the students were able to conceptualize and imagine these scenes or similar scenes being played out in our classroom.

II. Identity

As for the surveys on identity, class/school culture and class/language skills, I was able to find some interesting correlations in the before and after our unit study.

In **Figure 3a** and **Figure 3b**, we will find that the students' sense of identity did not seem to change in the least. If most students identified with their parents' country of origin in the first survey, this idea changed very little (if at all) by the time they answered the second survey six weeks later.

In **Figure 4a** and **Figure 4b**, I have featured the results from the strongest answers on Class and School Culture, which reflected that the students' ideas on race and ethnicities having a noticeable influence on their personal relationships changed little, if at all.

Lastly, **Figure 5a** and **Figure 5b** demonstrate one strong change in the students' comfort level in speaking Spanish in class. In Survey 1, at least 63% of students admitted they did not feel comfortable speaking out loud in class. However, on the second Survey, we see that 76% of my students felt comfortable raising their hand to speak in class. I like to think that the several times we help Roundtables and the "fun"

factor of Debates, as well as allowing the use of Spanglish or similar codeswitching to take place, took some pressure off of speaking Spanish in class.

Conclusions

I initially thought that the Book-End Introductory and Closing class surveys would reveal the richest data, but I discovered that my notes on our classroom discussions were much more revealing of the development of my students' respect for one another's difference. Although I do not think that my initial research question goal was achieved, which was essentially to change the way these adolescents think about their identity, I will have to admit that it was nonetheless a very rewarding experience. We were able to have democratic conversations about nebulous and complex topics. I was often able to sit back and watch as the students took the material into their own hands with very little intervention or interruption on my part. To quote Fecho's (2004), experience, "as is often the case in classrooms, much of significance was happening simultaneously. To start, teaching and learning roles were being sifted. For at least this moment, the traditional teacher role as the seat of authority and information giver, and the traditional student role as passive receiver of knowledge, had been put aside" (p. 55).

Our conversations also took on an interesting dimension when we introduced English as an acceptable register in which to express ourselves. This new codeswitching in the Spanish classroom allowed students to feel freedom, to be less shy, and to achieve a level of maturity in articulating complicated thoughts, opinions or ideas I frankly had never witnessed, before. Fecho (2004) shares this experiences with language in his own classroom narrating a similar experience, "we were all experiencing an understanding that language was open to inquiry and a multiplicity of perspectives [. . .] we were developing a sense that language use and impact could be described, that we could be describers, that the use and impact were open to a variety of descriptions, and that description rested somewhat within the control of the describer. We were evolving a sense that language was in process and that we were part of that process" (p. 55).

There is still room for a lot of growth and analysis, however, with regards to Spanish-American history, politics, and social issues, as well as issues of ethnic and racial discrimination in and out of the

classroom. I have humbly learned through my students that identity is really not something I can change. I cannot manipulate things as sacred and personal as conceptions of family, history and culture. The goal of having them say, for example, that they are "LatinX" instead of saying they are "Dominican" or "Puerto Rican" has slightly changed. In essence, they will always feel allegiance to the idea of being Dominican or Puerto Rican - and it is not really my place to challenge that as untrue. That said, I can still influence their idea of themselves in order to feel a union with communities outside of their own.

In the future, I would love to flesh this unit out into a year-long curriculum. I think, in the long run, it is more important to try and have them relate to and feel solidarity with other Spanish-speaking countries by learning about the struggles and challenges they have undergone. Ideally, my students would come to feel compassion by the issues these countries face and identify these struggles with some of the same their families have undergone in their respective countries.

That said, being passionately Dominican or Puerto Rican also means being LatinX. I think the only real way to do that is to continually expose them to issues and problems that plague Latin-America. If they become invested enough in these issues, they will ideally break down the barriers that exist between themselves and other nationalities so that when they walk out into the Bronx they might look at their neighbors and not feel fear, anger or rejection but instead, a sense of community. From there, they might extend this "open-mindedness" to issues like sexual orientation, religion or race.

For now, I will continue the oral activities using the same or similar protocols. I think the students became very invested in our discussions and enjoyed the freedom to engage topics of injustice, discrimination and conflict when there was such a high degree of diversity of opinions in the room.

Reflections on Process and Limitations

Although my data did reflect change in my students' ability to hold respectful whole-group discussions, I do not believe that the total impact of our research on Argentina and Cuba was much of a game-changer to their sense of identity. I also think that seven weeks of study is simply not enough time to fully engage in material that demonstrates the depth and complexity of the LatinX identity. Additionally, I see

how beneficial it may have been to introduce discussions on cultural, political and historical realities of the countries with which they identified, such as the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Honduras.

I think that a longer period of exposure to Spanish-American political and social history coupled with more constant data collection (ideally, an entire curriculum in a school year), would have given me a better indication on how these discussions, film clips and readings impact adolescent students' sense of their own LatinX identity.

In hindsight, I would have also designed an Observation Sheet that would have *included* Daitue & Jones' (2003) nine discourse strategies. This would have likely allowed me to immediately record instances of discrimination more accurately. I did my best to track and jot comments as they occurred, but it became occasionally problematic when I needed to stop, interfere or monitor that the protocols were being correctly followed. Some of our instances were likely lost in the transference of data from my Observation Sheet to the Discourse Strategies Tracker.

In addition, the use of Enciso's (2003) Discrimination Chart as a wrap-up activity felt like beating a dead horse. The students, although pleased to follow it up with a funny episode of *¿Que Pasa, USA?,* did not initially see the point of reflecting back on our classroom. The activity was a disorganized and irrelevant cap on a point I was desperately trying to make: "LatinXs come in all different shape and sizes, so stop fighting about it in class!" They seemed to have gotten that point, certainly, but what I really wanted to see were that the interventions I was using with them made this reality a constant awareness in their interactions. I don't think the activity was necessary, nor beneficial, for the research or the classroom, in the end. I would like to perhaps fashion it at the beginning of a unit, or even in the beginning or a school year, in the future.

Lastly, I think I would have liked to separate the study of Spanish-America more distinctly from racial and ethnic discrimination in or out of our classroom. This proved problematic for some students, who began to confuse the issues of ethnicity with politics, particularly when studying Cuba where there is much more African or Black influence. Perhaps next year, I will open the curriculum by presenting the themes of discrimination as a constant awareness point for our class, and from there study a series of Spanish-speaking countries where evidence of identity had to be bargained for a variety of political or social reasons.

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Appendix A: Roundtable Expectations

Nombre _____   Fecha _____
I.B. Spanish B – Profesora Beato   UNIDAD: VALOR DE LAS
IDEAS

Expectativas para las discusiones de Mesa Redonda

ANTES DE COMENZAR

Primero:
- Al entrar al aula, pongan las mesas en las esquinas y las sillas en forma redonda.

Segundo:
- Saquen cualquier parte del material necesario para su discusión de sus cuadernos.

Tercero:
- Siéntense con respeto hasta que comencemos nuestra discusión.

DURANTE LA DISCUSIÓN

Comportamiento:
- Estar en silencio si otro estudiante esta hablando.

- Mirar al estudiante que este hablando.

- Escuchar atentamente y con respeto.

Participación:
- Hablar por lo menos dos veces y no más de dos veces hasta que todos han hablado.

- Aportar dos comentarios que colaboren y ayuden a desarrollar la conversación.

- Hablar solamente cuando tengan la pelota *koosh*.

- Tirar la pelota *koosh* suavemente y con respeto a otro estudiante que quiera hablar.

- Señalar con la mano si desean hablar.

Appendix B: Observation Sheet

Profesora Beato – I.B. Spanish B/Pre-B   *Record Keeper/Observations*

Date _____   *Assignment*
_____

Incident Type	Scholars involved	Consequences/results
Name-calling		
Physical touching		
Interrupting/calling out		
Scoffing/laughing		
Talking to other scholars		
Putting head down		

Additional notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C: Debate Expectations

NORMAS PARA EL DEBATE DEL MARTES

¿Qué es un debate?

Un debate es una <u>técnica</u>, tradicionalmente de <u>comunicación oral</u>, donde se expone un <u>tema</u> y una problemática. Hay un moderador, unos representantes y un público que participa. No se aportan soluciones, sólo se exponen argumentos.

¿Cómo se organiza un debate?

- Tendrán que escoger un representante y tres altavoces que hablarán por su equipo.
-
- Tendrán que organizar TRES PREGUNTAS para hacerles al equipo contrario.
- Tendrán que pensar en TRES ARGUMENTOS POSIBLES para sus temas individuales.

¿Quién va a ser el moderador?

¡Yo! ¡La profesora Beato! Mi trabajo como moderadora será el siguiente:

- Poner en consideración el objetivo del tema.
- Anunciar el tema y ubicarlo dentro del proceso.
- Describir la actividad.
- Formular la primera pregunta y dar la palabra en orden a los participantes.
- Desempeñar durante la discusión el papel de moderador.
- Terminar el debate
- Realizar la evaluación

¿Cómo debo de prepararme para el debate?

Para desarrollar y llevar a buen término los ejercicios del debate, consideren los siguientes puntos:

- No se trata de imponer el punto de vista personal, sino de convencer usando la exposición, la argumentación y la contra-argumentación.
- Escuchar al otro antes de responder.
- Ponerse en el lugar del otro.
- Ser breve y concreto al hablar.
- Ser tolerante respecto a las diferencias.
- No hablar en exceso para así dejar intervenir a los demás, evitando la tendencia al monólogo y la monotonía.
- No burlarse de la intervención de nadie.
- Evitar los gritos para acallar al interlocutor.
- Hablar con seguridad y libertad, sin temor a la crítica.
- Acompañar las críticas con propuestas.
- Oír atentamente al interlocutor para responder en forma adecuada.
- Articular correctamente los sonidos, empleando un tono de voz adecuado a la situación concreta de entonación y al contenido del mensaje (interrogación, exclamación, sonidos indicativos de fin de enunciación, pausas, etc).

Appendix D: Surveys (1 and 2)

Nombre _____   Hoy es lunes, el 7 de marzo del 2011
I.B. Spanish B – Profesora Beato   Encuesta para la cultura de la clase

PLEASE READ BEFORE TAKING SURVEY:

Answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. You will not be graded on your performance on this activity, but I giving you HW credit for completing it. Please take it seriously.

The purpose of this survey is to help me make our class a more respectful space for group work and discussions. <u>NO PART</u> of this survey will be shared with any other members of this class. (And it's okay if you don't know the answer – just write "I don't know")! Thank you! I ***heart*** every single one of you!

<u>All about YOU</u>
#1-6: *fill in the blank to the best of your knowledge*
1. When people ask you where you come from, what do you say?

_____

2. Where is your father from?

_____

3. Where is your mother from?

_____

4. What is the capital(s) of that country or countries?

_____

5. Who is the current president(s) of that country or countries?

_____

6. Have you ever traveled to that country or countries? When?

_____

<u>All about SPANISH</u>:
#1-2:*(fill in the blank to the best of your knowledge*

1a. What skill* have you MOST IMPROVED while taking Spanish over this past year or last two years?
*(skills: writing, reading, speaking, or listening).

_____

1b. Can you specifically name one thing that you can do better now?
(spelling, verb conjugations, reading fluency, speaking fluency, etc).

_____

2a. What skill* have you LEAST IMPROVED while taking Spanish over this past year or last two years?
*(skills: writing, reading, speaking or listening)
_____

2b: Can you specifically name one thing that you still struggle with more than others?
(spelling, verb conjugations, reading fluency, speaking fluency, etc).

_____

All about OUR CLASS:
#1-6: *On a scale from 1-5, answer these questions:* *5: strongly agree or 1: strongly disagree*

1. I feel comfortable when I walk into the room.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel like my teacher respects my opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My teacher sometimes hurts my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel like the people who sit at my table respect me.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My classmates sometimes hurt my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel comfortable raising my hand to share my ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Speaking/reading in Spanish holds me back from participating	1	2	3	4	5

#1-3: *fill in the blank*
1a. If you could choose to work with any ONE scholar in this class on an essay in Spanish, who would it be? _____

1b. Why did you choose this person? _____

2. If you could choose TWO people to present a skit in Spanish, who would it be? _____ & _____

2b. Why did you choose these two people? _____

3a. If you could choose TWO people to go out on a Friday night, who would it be? _____ & _____

3b. Why did you choose these two people?_____

ALL ABOUT KAPPA:
#1-3: *On a scale from 1-5, answer these questions:* *5: strongly agree or 1: strongly disagree*

1. We talk too much about ethnicity or race issues in this class.	1	2	3	4	5
2. We talk too much about ethnicity or race issues in other classes.	1	2	3	4	5
3. People make friends or cliques based upon shared race or ethnicity.	1	2	3	4	5

#1-4: *Yes/No* and *fill in the blank*
1. Do you think race is a problem in this class? **(circle one)**   YES   or   NO

2. Do you think race is a problem at KAPPA?   **(circle one)**   YES   or   NO

3. What do you think is the BIGGEST obstacle to having respectful discussions in class? (In other words, what can be done differently in this class)?
_____

4. What do you think is the BIGGEST obstacle to having a respectful student body at KAPPA? (In other words, what can be done differently at your school)?
_____

Nombre _____   Hoy es jueves, el 14 de abril del 2011
I.B. Spanish B – Profesora Beato   Encuesta para la cultura de la clase

PLEASE READ BEFORE TAKING SURVEY:

This is a follow-up survey to the first survey we took as a class in the beginning of the semester.
Answer the following questions honestly and to the best of your ability. You will not be graded on your performance on this activity, but I giving you HW credit for completing it. **Please take it seriously.**

All about YOU
#1-4: *fill in the blank to the best of your knowledge*

1. Have your thoughts about being LatinX or the LatinX identity in general changed over the past 1-2 years?

_____

2. If you could travel anywhere in Latin America, where would you go? Why?

_____

3. Besides your country of origin, what country or countries would you still like to know about?

_____

4. What topics about your identity would you still like to learn about?

_____

All about SPANISH:
#1-3: *(fill in the blank to the best of your knowledge*

1. What unit or topic did you MOST enjoy learning about in Spanish? Why?

_____

_____

2. What unit or topic did you LEAST enjoy learning about in Spanish? Why?

_____

_____

3. What unit or topic did we NOT learn about that you would have liked to learn about?

_____

_____

All about OUR CLASS:
#1-6: *On a scale from 1-5, answer these questions: 5: strongly agree or 1: strongly disagree*

1. I enjoy reading out loud and group work.		1	2	3	4	5
2. I enjoy silent reading and independent work.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. I enjoy Roundtable Discussions.		1	2	3	4	5
3. I enjoy Debates.		1	2	3	4	5
4. I enjoy film/movie clips.		1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel comfortable raising my hand to share my ideas.		1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel like my peers listen to me and my ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	

ALL ABOUT MATERIAL:

#1-3: *On a scale from 1-5, answer these questions: 5: strongly agree or 1: strongly disagree*

1. We talk too much about ethnicity or race issues in this class.　　　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

2. We talk too much about ethnicity or race issues in other classes.　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

3. People make friends or cliques based upon shared race or ethnicity.　1　　2　　3　　4　　5

#1-6: *Yes/No* and *fill in the blank*

1. Did you enjoy the unit THE VALUE OF IDEAS? **(circle one)**　　　　YES　or　NO

2. Did you enjoy learning about Argentina and the "disappeared"? **(circle one)**　YES　or　NO

3. Did you enjoy learning about Cuba and Castro's regime? **(circle one)**　　YES　or　NO

4. Did this unit affect your idea of the LatinX community? **(circle one)**　YES　or　NO

5. What did you like MOST about learning in this unit?

_____

6. What did you like LEAST about learning in this unit?

_____

FREE WRITE:

What did you learn in your Independent Research Study project? Did this affect the way you think of the world? Of the community? Of the LatinX community? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix E: Understanding and Fighting Discrimination (Enciso, 2003, p. 160).

Appendix F: Reflection Sheet

Name _____   **El valor de las ideas**
Profesora Beato   I.B. Spanish B

<u>Reflection Sheet 1</u>

<u>On the outside:</u>
Did you witness any of the following in our studies of Chile, Argentina or Cuba? Please write your answer and provide an example.

Category	Yes/No	Example
FEAR		
ENVY		
INTIMIDATION		
HARASSMENT		
DEHUMANIZATION		

<u>On the inside:</u>
Did you or do you witness any of the following in our class? Please write your answer and provide an example.

Category	Yes/No	Example
FEAR		
ENVY		
INTIMIDATION		
HARASSMENT		
DEHUMANIZATION		

Name _____   **El valor de las ideas**
Profesora Beato   I.B. Spanish B

Reflection Sheet 2

And now… on the inside again

After looking at Figure 7.1 (Understanding and Fighting Discrimination), look at the same chart and think about our class. Did you answers change? What can we do to resist and fight discrimination according to the chart?

After looking at Figure 7.1 (Understanding and Fighting Discrimination)

Category	Yes/No	Example of discrimination	Example of resistance against discrimination
FEAR			
ENVY			
INTIMIDATION			
HARASSMENT			
DEHUMANIZATION			