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Self-concepts of Hispanic children in a bilingual/ bicultural reading program

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SELF-CONCEPTS OF HISPANIC CHILDREN
IN A
BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL READING PROGRAM

A Thesis

Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Psychology
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Jennifer Jean Anthony

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ABSTRACT

SELF-CONCEPTS OF HISPANIC CHILDREN IN A BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL READING PROGRAM

by Jennifer Jean Anthony

The current body of research is lacking in the study of the effects of bicultural/bilingual teaching modalities on the self-concepts of children. The present study examined the relationship between culturally sensitive education and the self-concepts of Hispanic children. Children in the study were read one of two books dealing with positive family role models, either an English book about an Anglo family, or an English and Spanish book about a Hispanic family. Both randomly assigned groups were then involved in a 5-minute discussion of how the story related to them personally, and were subsequently administered the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children, a non-verbal measurement of self-concepts. There was not a significant difference in self-concept between the two groups, failing to support the hypothesis that elevated self-concepts would result from being in a culturally sensitive reading program. It was concluded that the lack of significance might have been due to the limitations of just one session.

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Running head: SELF-CONCEPTS OF HISPANIC CHILDREN

Self-Concepts of Hispanic Children
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Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Program
Jennifer Jean Anthony
San Jose State University

Abstract

The current body of research is lacking in the study of the effects of bicultural/bilingual modalities on the self-concepts of children. The present study examined the relationship between culturally sensitive education and the self-concepts of Hispanic children. Children in the study were read one of two books dealing with positive family relationships, either an English book about an Anglo family, or an English and Spanish book about a Hispanic family. Both randomly assigned groups were then involved in a discussion of how the story related to them personally, and were subsequently administered the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children, a non-verbal measurement of self-concepts. There was not a significant difference in self-concept between the two groups, failing to support the hypothesis that elevated self-concepts would result from being in a culturally sensitive reading program. It was concluded that the lack of significance might have been due to the limitations of just one session.

Self-Concepts of Hispanic Children in a
Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Program

Educational systems must always take into consideration the special and unique needs of their children, which grows more challenging as the classroom becomes more diverse. The great influx of children of Hispanic origin dictates a need for teachers to be sensitive to these children's unique cultural needs. These Hispanic children are often under considerable pressure, as they are expected to adjust to a different culture, and, often, to learn and be educated in an entirely new language. Research has suggested that due to the pressures of being part of a minority group, these Hispanic children may develop a negative self-identity (Erikson, 1968) or even be at greater risk of mental disorder than their non-minority peers (Rogler, Malgady, & Rodriquez, 1989). Interventions such as Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Programs that will help these children cope and excel by emphasizing the positive aspects of their culture are therefore essential.

Much of the research has focused on the direct consequences of interventions on education (De La Garza & Medina, 1985; Saldate, Mishra, & Medina, 1985). This is of great value, as one recent report estimated a 58% dropout rate for Mexican-American students in the Western United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1990). De La Garza and Medina compared the academic achievements of Spanish-speaking Mexican-American children involved in an

English-only program to Mexican-American children involved in a transitional bilingual program. This study found that those children in the bilingual program were proficient in English, reading, and mathematics as compared to the nation's norms. The findings of this 3-year study seem to replicate those of a similar longitudinal study conducted by Saldate et al. (1985) in which children receiving bilingual instruction were shown to perform similarly well in English and Spanish.

Some researchers have focused on the effects of bicultural modalities on the anxiety and academic success of children, but studies involving Hispanic children are rare indeed. One of the few studies measuring this relationship involved Puerto Rican children in one of three groups: a "cuento therapy" group in which Puerto Rican, bilingual folkloric stories were read to the children by their mothers, an art/play therapy group with their mothers, or a non-intervention group with their mothers (Constantino, Malgady, & Rogler, 1986). In the cuento therapy group, 4 to 5 mother/child pairs participated in 20 weekly, 90-minute sessions with both a male and female therapist. In each session, two cuentos, or folklore stories, one with a girl as the main character, and the other with a boy as the main character, were read bilingually by the mothers while the children followed along. After each reading session, the therapists, the children, and the mothers all discussed the main ideas of the cuento, including the morals it suggested and the dominant behaviors and their consequences. At the end of the 20 week session, those children involved in the cuento therapy exhibited significantly

less trait anxiety on the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and higher scores on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) than those children in the non-intervention group or the art/play therapy group. Findings from this study highlight the possibility that bicultural modalities can positively affect both mental health and success in school.

Self-concept is defined as how a person views him or herself in a variety of situations. Martinez and Dukes (1987) found that self-concept can be divided into two separate domains: the private domain and the public domain. The private domain is seen as the satisfaction with one's self, whereas the public domain is defined as the satisfaction with one's intelligence. They argued that the levels of private and public self-concept vary across race, and, more specifically, that Hispanics exhibit higher levels of self-concept in the private domain and lower levels of self-concept in the public domain than non-minorities. This may be one contributing reason for the finding that academic achievement is lower and dropout rates are higher in language minorities than in minorities with an English language background (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

There has been little research on the effects of bilingual and bicultural modalities on the self-concepts of children and adolescents, which is surprising considering the importance such researchers as the McWhirters (1994) have relegated to self-concept. After extensive research with children, these researchers delineated self-concept and self-esteem as one of the "5 C's of competency," or those strengths that mark a

significant difference between low-risk and high-risk youth in a school setting. One rare study (Malgady, Rogler, & Constantino, 1990) of these effects used hero/heroine modeling as a preventative mental health intervention for Puerto Rican adolescents who had exhibited behavior problems. The hero/heroine modeling involved a series of 90-minute presentations and discussions of the biographies of achievement-oriented adult Puerto Rican role models. Each group was made up of 3 to 5 students, a schoolteacher, and a graduate psychology intern supervised by the researchers. The group first identified the stress and hardships endured by the role model of the week, and then discussed the coping strengths of the individual and how their behavior reflected ethnic pride and positive self-concepts. At the end of the sessions, there was a significant increase in both the ethnic identity and the self-concepts of those children involved as measured by the 80-item Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale for Children (Piers, 1969).

Given these previous findings of self-concept in Hispanics, there seems to be a need to increase Hispanic children's public self-concepts. One effective intervention might be an education modality that stresses the positive aspects of the child's private self-concept, which includes culture and language. In other words, the positive emphasis of their culture and language will help assuage any negative feelings that the children may be experiencing about their schooling or intelligence. In many educational systems, Hispanic children's negative self-concepts are only compounded by an educational

environment that they do not feel connected to in any way.

The present research used these assumptions as the basis for intervention. Hispanic children were involved in one of two groups, either one in which the children were read an English book about an Anglo family, or one in which they were read a bicultural/bilingual book about a Hispanic family. After the books were read, both reading groups were then involved in a brief discussion of how the stories related to them personally.

The self-concepts of the children were subsequently measured using the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children (Martinek & Zaichowsky, 1977), a non-verbal scale designed for first through eighth graders. The main hypothesis was that those children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would evidence higher levels of self-concept than those in the English-only Reading Group. The premise for this hypothesis was that the children would relate the positive aspects of their culture presented in the program to positive feelings about themselves. The secondary hypothesis was that within the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group, those children who spoke Spanish at home and at school would evidence higher levels of self-concept than those who spoke little or no Spanish, because they would relate more to the ideas and language of the book. A third hypothesis was that the self-concepts of the girls in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would be significantly higher than both the girls in the control group and the boys in either group, because the book was specifically about

the relationship between a young girl and her grandmother. Finally, those children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group were expected to have significantly higher public self-concepts than those children in the English-only Reading Group, because the children would connect the positive aspects of their culture to positive feelings about their intelligence.

Method

Participants

Forty-eight first-grade children were participants in the study, all of whom had written consent from their parents to participate. All of the children were of Hispanic origin, with varying degrees of Spanish usage, ranging from non-Spanish speaking, to Spanish-speaking only at home, to Spanish-speaking at home and at school, as measured by the children's self-reports. Due to the disproportionate number of Hispanic children in the school, there were 30 girls and only 18 boys in the study, and their ages ranged from 6 to 8 years old. An equal number of children spoke either no Spanish or Spanish just at home, but the majority of the children spoke Spanish at home and at school. These demographic variables are further outlined in Table 1.

Materials

One of two books were read to the children, both approved by three first grade teachers as appropriate for 6 to 8 year olds. The first book, Texas Star (Cole, 1990), was read in the English-only Reading Group. Texas Star is a book

Table 1
Demographic Variables of the Subjects

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	18	37.50
Female	30	62.50
Spanish Usage		
Non-Spanish Speaking	11	22.90
At Home Only	11	22.90
At Home and School	26	54.17
Age		
Six years old	21	43.75
Seven years old	26	54.17
Eight years old	1	2.08

n = 48

about the daily life of an Anglo family as they make a quilt in preparation for the winter. The children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group were read Abuela (Dorros, 1991), a book about the experiences, both real and imagined, between a young Hispanic girl and her grandmother. Both books are colorfully illustrated and are approximately the same length and size. None of the children was familiar with either one of the books.

The self-concepts of the children were assessed by the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children (1977), a non-verbal, culture-free measurement of self-concept for children in the first through eighth grade. Each of the 24 scored items and the one sample item presented the child with two pictures and asked the children to choose the picture which they felt was most reflective of them. The scale is broken down into five subscales: (1) satisfaction and happiness, (2) home and family relationships and circumstances, (3) ability in games, recreation, and sports, (4) behavioral, personal, and social characteristics in school, and (5) personality traits and emotional tendencies. A copy of these subscales can be found in the Appendix. Some of the 24 scale items are included in more than one scale. All of the scales include seven items except for the behavioral, personal and social characteristics in school subscale, which includes four items, and the personality traits and emotional tendencies subscale, which includes six items. The scale measures both the private and public domains as outlined by Martinez and Dukes as well. The private domain, or satisfaction with one's self, was measured by such items as self-concepts of physical appearance, height, and physical

ability, whereas the public domain, or satisfaction with one's intelligence, was measured by such items as self-concept of ability in school, reading ability, and the ability to do sensible things. The Martinek-Zaichowsky scale is reported to have good internal consistency for elementary age populations, as well as concurrent validity with the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (Piers, 1969), $r = .49$, as measured by a comparison of the two scales on a sample of 120 children, aged 6 to 10 years (Martinek & Zaichowsky, 1977). The scale is of great use with varying cultures and ethnicities, as it does not involve language.

Procedure

Children were randomly assigned to one of two groups, either the English-only Reading Group, or the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group. Each group contained 5 to 7 children to avoid distraction and to ensure that each child was paying attention. In each group, the children were read either one of the books and shown the colorful pictures as the book was being read. After the reading, each group discussed how the story related to them personally. The children were subsequently administered the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children (1977). The administrator explained that the scale was not a test, but was simply a measure of how they felt about themselves, and that they should answer according to "how they felt inside." The sample item was reviewed to ensure that each child understood how to complete the scale, and if the children had any questions about the meaning of any of the items, the

meaning was explained to them in an objective, straightforward manner. The booklets were collected from each child after the administrator had made sure that they were complete, and each child was rewarded with a surprise treat.

The booklets were scored in such a manner that positive responses, or responses that reflected positive self-concepts, received a score of one, and negative responses, or responses that reflected negative self-concepts, received a score of zero. The possible scores for each subject ranged from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 24.

Results

The means and standard deviations for both the experimental and control groups were first calculated. The mean of the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group was 22.63 and the mean of the English-only Reading Group was 21.17. These descriptive statistics can be found in Table 2.

The range for each of the self-concept items was subsequently calculated. Each item received both positive and negative scores, with the exception of one item. Item Four, which depicts the concept of "I have many friends" and asks the child to choose either a picture of a happy child having a birthday party with many friends present, or a distraught child having a birthday party with no one present, had absolutely no negative responses.

The means and standard deviations were also calculated for each of the subscales. The mean for the private subscale was 6.46 and the mean of the public subscale was 6.37.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Concept as a Function of Reading Group

Group	Sample Size	Mean	Standard Deviation
English-only	24	21.17	3.20
Bilingual/Bicultural	24	22.63	1.86

Both means were unquestionably high when it is taken into consideration that the maximum possible score was seven. The remaining subscales, such as the satisfaction and happiness subscale, $M = 6.44$, and the home, family relationships, and circumstances subscale, $M = 6.31$, were also high. A complete breakdown of the descriptive statistics for the subscales is shown in Table 3.

An analysis of variance was computed for self-concept as a function of reading group and was not found to be significant, $F(1,46) = 3.73$, $p > .05$. The lack of statistical significance of this test failed to support the primary hypothesis that the self-concepts of those children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would be significantly higher than those of the children in the English-only Reading Group.

A one-way analysis of variance was then calculated to examine self-concept as a function of reading group and level of Spanish use. No significant main effect was found for group, $F(1,42) = 1.70$, $p > .05$, nor for level of Spanish use, $F(2,42) = .54$, $p > .05$, which failed to support the hypothesis that the self-concepts of those Hispanic children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group who spoke the most Spanish would exhibit the highest levels of self-concept.

An additional one-way analysis of variance was run to examine self-concept as a function of reading group and gender. There was no significant main effect for group, $F(1,44) = 2.37$, $p > .05$, or for gender, $F(1,44) = 1.04$, $p > .05$, which failed to support the tertiary hypothesis that the self-concepts of those females in

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of the Self-Concept Subscales

Subscale	Maximum Possible Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
Satisfaction and Happiness	7	6.44	.94
Relationships	7	6.31	1.15
Ability	7	6.17	1.34
Characteristics	4	3.65	.67
Personality and Emotions	6	5.56	.82
Public	7	6.37	1.00
Private	7	6.46	.99

the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would be significantly higher than the rest of the children's self-concepts.

A final analysis of variance was executed to examine public self-concept as a function of reading group and was also not significant, $F(1,46) = 3.12, p > .05$.

This result failed to support the hypothesis that the public self-concepts of the children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would be significantly higher than those of the children in the English-only Reading Group.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the self-concepts of Hispanic children could be heightened by involving them in a culturally sensitive program, as was done in a previous study (Constantino, Malgady, & Rogler, 1986), which used "cuento therapy" as an effective means for inflating self-concept. It was expected that the children in the culturally sensitive program would connect the positive feelings inspired by the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Program to positive feelings about themselves.

The results of the study, which found no significant difference between the self-concepts of those children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group and those of the English-only Reading Group, did not support the primary hypothesis. This lack of effect for self-concept as a function of a culturally sensitive reading program could be accounted for by many different factors. The most glaring reason may have been the limitations of just one reading session. Some developmentalists (Coopersmith, 1967)

would argue that a heightened self-concept arises from a history of positive interactions with care-givers, and since this intervention was limited to one positive exchange, it could scarcely be considered a “history”. Children involved in previous studies such as that of Constantino, Malgady, and Rogler (1986) participated in 20 weekly, 90-minute sessions, giving them time to adjust to the administrators and the program, and thus creating a pattern of positive interactions.

Another possible explanation for the lack of significant effect may have been that most of the children's self-concepts were already very positive because of the high percentage of Hispanics in the school; out of approximately 140 first-grade children, 72 of the children were of Hispanic origin. The lack of effect might also be explained by the fact that just 48 of the 72 consent letters sent home to the parents were returned. Perhaps the self-concepts of the participating children were elevated because their parents were interested and involved, rather than apathetic.

An additional theory for the lack of significant effect might be accounted for by the phenomenon that Martin Orne (1962) termed the “good” subject effect. Orne suggested that the participant's perceptions of and involvement in an experiment were affected by subtle cues and hints from the situation or the researchers of how the participant should behave. In this study, some of the children may have marked the positive responses in their booklets because they believed that the positive responses were the “correct” responses, despite the clear instructions that they should mark how they

uniquely feel. Perhaps the children felt that they would suffer some sort of reprisal if they did not mark the positive responses. In fact, several participants were overheard remarking "This is easy" while filling out their booklets, implying that they felt that it was somewhat like a test, with right and wrong answers. It is altogether possible that some of the children could not relate to the pictures and so they marked the response that they felt the administrator wanted them to mark.

Both the hypothesis that self-concepts would be highest for the children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group who spoke Spanish at home and at school and the hypothesis that the self-concepts of the females in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would be the highest were not supported. Once again, this lack of support for the hypotheses could possibly be explained by the limitations of one reading session. It is possible that the boys would have had significantly lower self-concept scores if there had been a series of books involving only female characters. In the same manner, children who spoke no Spanish at all might have scored significantly lower than the children who speak Spanish at home and at school if there had been a series of books using many Spanish words that they did not understand, causing them to feel isolated and bored.

The fourth and final hypothesis, which theorized that the public self-concepts of the Hispanic children in the Bicultural/Bilingual Reading Group would be significantly higher than those of the children in the English-only Reading Group, was not validated

by this study. In both groups, the items that received the most negative responses were mostly related to physical ability and not public concept, such as item number six, “I am not a clumsy person” and item number 14, “I am not afraid of the water.”

Future research should involve a series of reading sessions in lieu of just one, which might elevate self-concepts as well as help the students feel more at ease with the administrator, and thus be more willing to mark how they truly feel. Researchers might increase the number of sessions by involving two matched classes in a study, only one of which receives culturally-sensitive education. At the end of the year, both classes could be administered the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children to examine if there was a significant difference in the self-concepts of the children in the two classes. Additional research might also employ a pre-test/post-test research design instead of randomized grouping to study if there would be a significant increase in individual subject's self-concepts as a result of culturally sensitive programs. It might also be worthwhile to compare the self-concepts of Hispanic children to children of other cultural backgrounds after they have been involved in such a program, to note if any of the non-Hispanic children's self-concepts might change as a result of being presented a reading program in a language and culture other than their own. Finally, other objective measures, such as The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale for Children (Piers, 1969) could be used in conjunction with the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale to obtain a more complete picture of the children's self-concepts.

Although the results of this study did not reach significance, there remain many positive implications. Even though it is entirely possible that some of the children may have been “faking good” in their responses, the overall mean of the children's self-concepts was quite high. These positive self-concepts are quite promising; they give us hope for the future of these children and security in the knowledge that long-term, culturally sensitive programs could only help them feel just that much better about themselves.

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Appendix

Subscales of the Martinek-Zaichowsky Self-Concept Scale for Children

- Scale 1 Satisfaction and Happiness
1. I have many friends
 2. I like the way that I look
 3. I am a happy person
 4. I am not a clumsy person
 5. I behave well in school
 6. I am a sharing person
 7. I do well in my school work
- Scale 2 Home and Family Relationships and Circumstances
1. I can do things without being told
 2. I am a sharing person
 3. I am seldom sick
 4. I can be trusted to do chores properly
 5. I behave well at home
 6. I am not a clumsy person
 7. I behave well at school
- Scale 3 Ability in Games, Recreation, and Sports
1. I am a tall person
 2. I have little trouble with puzzles
 3. I am unafraid of animals

Appendix (continued)

4. I am unafraid of the water
5. I am not a clumsy person
6. I am good in sports
7. I am a good reader

Scale 4 Behavioral, Personal, and Social Characteristics in School

1. My classmates like to play with me
2. I never do mean things to others
3. I behave well in school
4. I can be trusted to do chores properly
5. The teacher seldom gets angry with me

Scale 5 Personality Traits and Emotional Tendencies

1. I am a clean person
2. I seldom worry about my school work
3. The teacher seldom gets angry with me
4. I am a tidy person
5. I do sensible things
6. I never do mean things to others
7. I am a patient person