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Psychosocial and sociocultural characteristics of Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students in the context of intercultural education in Costa Rica*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines problems and difficulties encountered by Nicaraguan migrant students in the Costa Rican educational system and contrasts their psychosocial and sociocultural well-being with their Costa Rican counterparts. The findings reveal not only the differences in educational outcomes between these cohorts, but also exposes the prevalence of psychosocial risk behaviours related to violence, bullying, death wishes and self-injury endured by Nicaraguan students. Importantly, there appears to be a large gap between the stated objectives and policies of the Costa Rican educational system to recognise and foster intercultural understanding and tolerance, and the actual educational results of Nicaraguan students. The conclusions drawn from these case studies single out the importance of closing the gap between the well-intended national educational policies and actual educational practices at the local level in order to promote equitable and social justice learning in Costa Rica and better the chances for integration of its Nicaraguan minority.

Introduction

This is the first study of its kind which compares attitudes and mindsets of young Nicaraguan migrants who attend Costa Rican elementary and secondary schools with their Costa Rican counterparts. The study also highlights their everyday in-school experiences as they attempt to integrate into Costa Rican society. The findings of this study are backed up by statistical data, case histories and

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*The Nicaraguan students in this sample represent what Ruben Rumbaut refers to as the 1.5 generation since they were born in Nicaragua, but are being schooled in Costa Rica. The conceptualisation of migrants from 'one point five generation' includes young migrants born in another country and brought into the host country when they were very young (Moreno Ródenas 2002).

student testimonials, to provide evidence of the extent to which human rights competencies required for an intercultural education in the Costa Rican curriculum are being fulfilled.

The article introduces the context of Costa Rica, the role of intercultural education in Costa Rica, the methodology used, and the quantitative results coupled with the testimonies which make up the qualitative data, and the analysis of documents supporting intercultural education and human rights for Costa Rica. In addition, a discussion follows with implications leading to the conclusions made.

Background

Costa Rica is a Central American country bordering Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the southeast. Its total area of 51,100 km², is bordered in the east by the Caribbean Sea and in the west by the Pacific Ocean. Spanish is the official language of its five million inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos [INEC, National Institute of Statistics and Census] 2011).

Costa Rica is considered one of the most stable countries of the Americas, with a vibrant democracy, high standard of living, and uniquely, no military, which was abolished in 1948. Costa Rican elementary education is free, paid by the state and obligatory since 1869, and for this reason, the country has one of the highest literacy rates in Latin America (94.9%). The Ministry of Education (MEP) is the official entity that guarantees the right to education, ensures the quality of educational programmes, and oversees the training of human resources and the development of the elementary and secondary school infrastructure. Likewise, the MEP promotes a policy of intercultural education, which has as its goal the integration of Costa Rican and migrant[1] students of different nationalities.

Migration to Costa Rica

Migration into Costa Rica is not a new phenomenon and has been taking place since the sixteenth century, when the first Spaniards arrived believing that gold lay beyond its shores and named it Costa Rica. In the agricultural economy of the late seventeenth century, more migrants arrived and were considered 'temporary guests' (Gatica 2011). The early nineteenth century saw the arrival of European migrants (British, German, Spanish, Belgian and Italian), many of whom were involved in coffee cultivation and processing and its export back to Europe. Subsequent migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came from Jamaica, as multi-national sugar cane and banana plantations were expanded on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast and needed a source of seasonal labour.

According to Segura (2016), Nicaragua has historically been the country responsible for the migration of three-quarters of all migrants that have come to Costa Rica. The Nicaragua-born population continues to be more representative in absolute and relative numbers than other migrant groups. The 2010 census

reported that the resident population in the country, born abroad, was 8 and 9% in 2011. The majority (75%) of these were Nicaraguans – appr. 300,000 persons. During the past 50 years, the flow of Nicaraguans into Costa Rica resulted from armed conflicts in Nicaragua, and later due to economic opportunities in an increasingly prosperous Costa Rica (see Cortés Ramos 2008):

- In the 1970's and 1980's migration was due to armed clashes between rebel groups (the FSLN), who overthrew the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in 1979 and the 'Contras', an armed group supported by the United States who wanted to overthrow the government of FSLN, known as the Sandinistas. The end of the hostilities was brokered by Costa Rican president Oscar Arias in 1987, but by that time many Nicaraguans had fled south to Costa Rica. In 1972, 10,000 persons migrated to Costa Rica following a devastating earthquake in Managua.
- As a result of natural disasters and armed conflicts, approximately 600,000 Nicaraguans were homeless and 150,000 were either refugees or in exile by 1979, out of a total population of just 2.8 million.
- In 1998, the catastrophe caused by Hurricane Mitch lead to large human losses and the devastation of many areas of Nicaragua (Estado de la Nación 2016; Zúñiga 2011) and more migrants flowed into Costa Rica.
- Even though political stability returned to Nicaragua, Nicaraguan females began to emigrate in order to escape the physical and psychological violence they were experiencing at home, and, as identified by Espinoza Palacios (2012), they came to Costa Rica with their children or dependents, often reuniting with family members already residing in Costa Rica.

According to Bonkiewicz (2006), the migration of Nicaraguans to Costa Rica is historically part of an economic and social push and pull, since Costa Rica has traditionally been seen as an attractive destination due to political stability and a better standard of living. Yet as Zúñiga (2011) notes, Nicaraguans migrating to Costa Rica have experienced more educational and socio-economic limitations compared to those who have arrived from other countries. Only 4.0% of those from Nicaragua had completed higher education and in 2011, 35.5% of the Nicaraguan migrant population in Costa Rica had not completed elementary school (INEC 2011). Four out of ten Nicaraguan migrants seeking work find jobs in the agricultural sector, while the rest start close to the bottom rungs of the Costa Rican economic ladder, working in construction, domestic services or as private security guards.

Migration is a complex and dynamic process that starts in a country of origin, and continues with the process of adaptation in a receiving country. First generation migrants try to maintain their culture of origin in the host country, while later generations are expected to be culturally better integrated in the new society (Moreno Ródenas 2002). Thus, experiences of the 1.5 generation may be quite different from the 2nd or 3rd generations. Nicaraguan youth face challenges

regarding their identity because they are socialised in two different arenas: the family and the host country. This group of 1.5 youngsters requires particular attention, since their chance of becoming integrated in the new culture is greater. Sevilla (1996) points out that when migrants have the opportunity to take on board the best elements of two societies, and when their cultural differences are strongly respected, this results in the most successful integration experiences.

The role of intercultural education in Costa Rican education

The concept of intercultural education has been an integral part of Costa Rican education policy for the past 30 years. In 1982, local, qualitative, ethnographic and participatory research was conducted in Costa Rica, generating a impetus for the implementation of intercultural education (Brenes et al. 2013). This first cultural and sociolinguistic approach emphasised bilingual education for minority groups. In 1997, the Higher Education Council approved the 'The educational processes of contextualisation for indigenous schools of Costa Rica' (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura [Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture] 1997).

However, it was not until 2003 that the MEP introduced intercultural education in the curriculum, based on universal principles drawn from human and constitutional rights and from national documents such as 'The Political Constitution of Costa Rica,'[2] 'The Childhood and Adolescence Code'[3]. In an effort to provide migrants with intercultural education, the Costa Rican educational system produced guidelines using a transversal axis for intercultural educational curriculum. The goals have been to overcome ethnocentrism and educate open minded and critical persons who can participate in the wealth provided by cultural diversity (Arnáiz Sánchez and De Haro Rodríguez 1996).

An intercultural curriculum should consider emotional and social benefits and not only cognitive ones, as it has traditionally occurred in educational practice (Campos Saborío 1991, 2005), A curriculum which only emphasises knowledge and is weak in content that develops social abilities does not help integrate migrant students into a host society. In this regard, issues such as sociability, self-esteem and moral education should be included in the curriculum. Self-esteem makes people feel empowered in relationships with others and helps prosocial behaviours (López and Ortiz 1999). Moral education gives a positive vision of the world, based on the values that support a society in which justice, human, political, economic and social rights prevail. Altruism and values such as respect for diversity and tolerance in education are learned in the family, educational institutions and the community. All these qualities are needed for a healthy coexistence among migrants and native students and are the hallmarks of Costa Rican intercultural educational policy and curriculum.

Methodology

Type of study

A mixed methodology was used in this study: quantitative techniques for descriptive purposes in the first stage, and qualitative methods to deepen the analysis of data captured by the quantitative results in the second stage. The psychosocial and sociocultural variables of migrants and Costa Rican schoolchildren were approached from two angles: (1) structural issues emanating from State policies towards migrants and (2) responses from the host receiving population. In addition, content analysis was conducted of documents dealing with human rights for democracy and peace from the Ministry of Education.

Sample

The study focuses on elementary schoolchildren and secondary youth, aged 6 to 22 years, attending elementary and secondary public schools (financed by the government), private schools (financed by parents and private capital) and subsidised educative centres (supported in part by the government). A randomly-selected, stratified sample was obtained in two stages. For each school, two groups were randomly selected and questionnaires were handed out to 40 students. A total of 2667 students from 40 elementary schools and 24 secondary schools in the seven provinces of the country were selected (see Figure 1):

Students from first to third grade ($n = 390$, 14.6%) were interviewed. The rest of the student population, fourth to sixth grades ($n = 1174$, 44.0%) and secondary schools ($n = 1103$, 41.4%) were given a self-administered questionnaire under the supervision of researchers.[4] The results are representative of the country and allow an analysis of the sociocultural and psychosocial factors of Costa Rican natives and Nicaraguan migrants enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in Costa Rica.

Government Documents

An analysis of government documents was conducted to investigate the extent to which intercultural education had been integrated into the political, legal and educational systems in Costa Rica. Theoretical principles and the content of intercultural education were examined and compared with the everyday experiences of students in elementary and secondary schools.

Many of the documents analysed were developed using a human rights framework. Among these are 'Experiencing Human Rights for Democracy and Peace', outlined in the document 'The Relaunching the Costa Rican Education' of the Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica (Ministerio de Educación Pública [Public Ministry of Education] 2003). This document served as basis to uncover other documents covering 2003–2015. Educational aims were explained in the Social Studies, Civics and Ethics of Basic and Diversified Education of Costa Rica programmes.
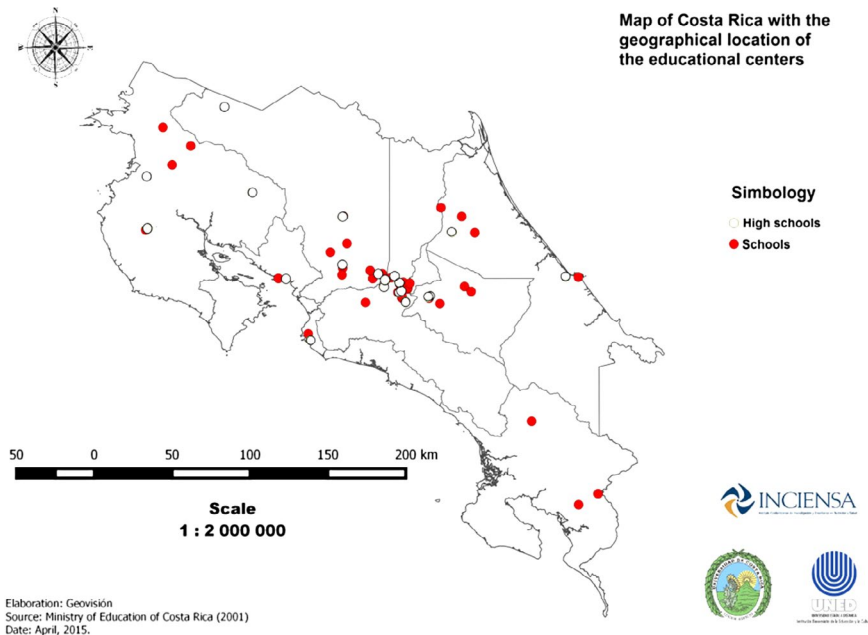
Figure 1. The geographical location of the elementary schools and high schools researched in Costa Rica.

The key policy document 'Transversality in the Costa Rican Educational Curriculum' published by the Ministry of Public Education (Ministerio de Educación Pública 2004)[5] focusing on intercultural education, was reviewed. This document singled out competencies for developing transversal skills and programmes to foster an environmental culture for sustainable development, integral sex education, health education, and advance democratic principles for peace and human rights. Based on these competencies ten programmes were developed to incorporate the concept of intercultural education, whose purpose was to enhance the training of Costa Rican students with the intercultural perspective and serve as a guide for the development of the social studies and civics programmes in the Costa Rican elementary and secondary education curriculum.

The following documents, published during the period 2003–2015, were also reviewed:

(1) 'Compendium of regulatory standards for curriculum development' (Ministerio de Educación Pública [Ministry of Public Education] 2009)[6]
(2) 'Education, the right of everyone' Ministry of Public Education, (Ministerio de Educación Pública, Ministerio de Gobernación y Policía, Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados [Ministry of the Government and Police, High Commission of the United Nations for Refugees] 2013),[7]

(3)   Political Constitution of Costa Rica, which emphasises the rights related to youth (Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia, Ley Nº 7739, Law on Children and Adolescents No. 7739).

(4)   'Action Education Plan for all- 2007–2015' (Plan de Acción Educativo para todos, 2007–2015)[8] published by the Ministerio de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education 2007)[9] defined the planning of educational activities and curriculum and set educational objectives in terms of attitudes and practices needed for student development. Among these attitudes are respect and appreciation for diversity (regardless of social, cultural and economic backgrounds), acceptance of otherness, and the right to peaceful disagreement and conflict management. Approaches referred to included the promotion of diversity and the planning of activities aimed at ending racism, sexism and xenophobia as well as the elimination of bullying. Negotiation, peaceful conflict management and multicultural dialogue were encouraged.

(5)   'Quality education centres as the axis of the Costa Rican Education' written in 2008 and published by the Ministerio de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education 2011),[10] in which the Ministry's Superior Council promulgated a framework of ethics and respect for cultural diversity that was to be an integral educational cornerstone for future generations of students in Costa Rica.

(6)   'Compendium of regulatory standards for curriculum development' (Ministerio de Educación Pública [Ministry of Public Education] 2009, 72) established mandatory guidelines pertaining to curriculum development. One section included intercultural education in relation to contextualisation and cultural relevance. Among the eleven principles presented was the dictum:

It is of primary importance to consider cultural diversity (ethnic, national and generational) in the planning of activities and intercultural dialogue as an instrument for generating a respectful appreciation of differences that truly promotes the cultural diversity in educational communities and classrooms across the country.

(7)   The Ministry of Public Education guidelines for curriculum in elementary and secondary schools (Ministerio de Educación Pública [Ministry of Public Education] 2011),[11] defined strategies for 2010–2014 which promoted curricular and extracurricular activities focusing on migration and intercultural issues.

(8)   'Education: a right for all' (Ministerio de Educación Pública, Ministerio de Gobernación y Policía, Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados [Ministry of Public Education, Ministry of the Government and Police, High Commission of the United Nations for Refugees] 2013)[12] identified rights for migrants and refugees in Costa Rican education, and set standards for access to education, enrolment, recognition of studies,

grants, student participation, prevention of discrimination, integration and coexistence.

(9) Articles 19 and 33 of the Political Constitution (1949), which state: 'Foreigners have the same individual and social rights as Costa Ricans that the constitution and laws establish' and 'Everyone is equal before the law and no discrimination should take place which is contrary to human dignity', respectively[13] (6 and 9).

(10) In 2015, the first article of the Political Constitution of Costa Rica was modified to consider Costa Rica as a multiethnic and multicultural nation. (Constitución Política de la República de Costa Rica [Political Constitution of the Republic of Costa Rica] 1949)[14].

(11) The Costa Rican Code for Children and Adolescents (1998) decreed that every child or adolescent who lives in Costa Rica has the right and obligation to receive an education, regardless of nationality, country of origin or ethnic group. Furthermore, article 69 of this Code states: 'It is forbidden to practice or promote, in the educational institutions all kinds of discrimination by gender, age, race or ethnic or national origin, socioeconomic status or any other that violates human dignity'[15] (25).

Findings

Psychosocial and sociocultural characteristics of the study population

A total of 2667 students participated in the study, of which 92.2% ($n = 2459$) were born in Costa Rica, 7.6% ($n = 202$) in Nicaragua, and a very small number ($n = 6$) in other countries. In this study, the results of the subset of 2661 students born in Costa Rica with Nicaraguan heritage, but schooled in Costa Rica, are presented. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample are found in Table 1.

The main family structures identified for Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students were: nuclear, matriarchal, and extended. Nicaraguans had a significantly higher proportion of extended families (21.3% vs. 14.2%; $p = 0.008$) while Costa Ricans were characterised by more nuclear families (39.6% vs. 48.7%; $p = 0.016$). Nicaraguans showed higher risk of abandoning their studies than Costa Ricans (17.8% vs. 8.8%; $p < 0.001$). In addition, class repetition and class failure were significantly higher for Nicaraguan than Costa Rican students (Table 2).

Indications of physical and verbal violence in elementary and secondary schools, and in the local community was similar for both groups of students. However, the possession of firearms and violence among neighbours was reported more often by Nicaraguans. For Nicaraguans, these experiences were consistent with the feelings of insecurity they felt at home, on elementary and secondary schools, and in the community. Costa Ricans reported a lower sense of insecurity in these environments ($p < 0.002$) (Table 3).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan migrant students.

| | Country of birth n (%) | | | |
Characteristics	Nicaragua	Costa Rica	p value (*)	Total sample n (%)
Gender				
Male	103 (51.0)	1173 (47.7)	0.407	1276 (48.0)
Female	99 (49.0)	1286 (52.3)	0.407	1385 (52.0)
Family structure				
Nuclear[a]	80 (39.6)	1197 (48.7)	0.016	1277 (48.0)
Matriarchal[b]	42 (20.8)	545 (22.2)	0.709	587 (22.1)
Extended[c]	43 (21.3)	248 (14.2)	0.008	391 (14.7)
Nuclear with stepfather[d]	25 (12.4)	236 (9.6)	0.245	261 (9.8)
Other structures[e]	12 (5.9)	133 (5.4)	0.889	145 (5.4)
Total	202(100.0)	2459 (100.0)	–	2661 (100.0)

[a]Father, mother and offspring of both parents.
[b]Mother as main provider.
[c]Family structures 1 or 2 with other family members or friends.
[d]Stepfather as main provider.
[e]Family structure is defined as extended with stepfather, nuclear with a stepmother, extended with a stepmother, patriarchal and students living with another person or in an institution.
*Significative if $p < 0.05$ (X^2 test).

Table 2. Determinants of performance-related and academic expectations for Costa Rican and Nicaraguan migrant students.

| | Country of birth n (% or $X \pm SD$) | | | Total sample n (% or $X \pm SD$) |
Characteristics	Nicaragua	Costa Rica	p value**	
Grade repetition	64 (31.7)	547 (22.2)	0.003	611 (23.0)
Over age (lag behind), years*	29 (2.66 ± 0.80)	151 (2.32 ± 0.66)	0.015	180 (2.49 ± 0.73)
Didn't want to continue to study	36 (17.8)	216 (8.8)	<0.001	252 (9.5)
Total	202 (100.0)	2459 (100.0)	–	2661 (100.0)

Notes: X = average for the variable; SD = standard deviation.
*A student was considered to lag behind when he or she had fallen back two or more years; **Significant if $p < 0.05$ (X^2 test for proportions and ANOVA for continuous variables).

More Nicaraguan students in the sample reported they were not happy or did not experience a sense of belonging in school, when speaking about their everyday experiences. These experiences could have influenced a sense of being rejected, since over 50% of Nicaraguans, compared to 8.7% of Costa Ricans reported this ($p < 0.001$) (Table 4). In comparison to Costa Rican students, Nicaraguan youth felt more rejected in the community (18.8% vs. 10.5%; $p < 0.001$). No less than 25% indicated they had contemplated suicide and 15.0% had engaged in self harm. Such results contrast with those of the Costa Rican students: 17.4 and 9.7%, respectively ($p < 0.05$) (Table 4).

Using logistic regression (data not shown in a table), the student profile of the Nicaraguan students shows that they were more likely to inflict harm on themselves, and were 3.5 times more likely to have contemplated suicide (OR = 3.578, 95% CI, 1.492–8.500). In addition, the logistic regression shows that they were 2.9 times more likely to have repeated an academic year (OR = 2.989, 95% CI, 1.259–7.000)

Table 3. Violence and perceptions of insecurity in homes, elementary and secondary schools, and communities for Costa Rican and Nicaraguan students.

Characteristics	Country of birth n (%)		p value**	Total sample n (%)
	Nicaragua	Costa Rica		
Violence in elementary and secondary schools:				
Friends make fun of students	53 (26.2)	618 (25.1)	0.793	671 (25.2)
Students beat up other students	30 (14.9)	444 (18.1)	0.296	474 (17.8)
Student has been beaten up	55 (27.2)	784 (31.9)	0.193	839 (31.5)
Students bring guns or other weapons to school (knife, etc.)*	16 (8.4)	104 (5.0)	0.055	120 (5.3)
Other violent situations:				
In the community at large	82 (40.6)	984 (40.0)	0.926	1066 (40.1)
In neighbours' homes (family violence)	62 (30.7)	622 (25.3)	0.109	684 (25.7)
Perception of insecurity:				
At home	20 (9.9)	108 (4.4)	<0.001	128 (4.8)
At elementary school/ secondary school	31 (15.3)	210 (8.5)	0.002	241 (9.1)
In the neighbourhood	48 (23.8)	462 (18.8)	0.101	510 (19.2)
Total	202 (100.0)	2459 (100.0)	–	2661 (100.0)

*This question was not asked of first to third grade (n = 390) students. Total n = 2271 (190 Nicaraguan and 2081 Costa Ricans youngsters); **Significant if p < 0.05 (X^2 test for proportions and ANOVA for continuous variables).

Table 4. The everyday experiences of Costa Rican and Nicaraguan migrant students in psychosocial risk situations.

Characteristics	Country of birth n (%)		p value**	Total sample n (%)
	Nicaragua	Costa Rica		
Does not feel happy in elementary/secondary school	29 (14.4)	226 (9.2)	0.022	255 (9.6)
Does not feel sense of belonging in school	29 (14.4)	208 (8.5)	0.007	237 (8.9)
Feelings of rejection:				
In elementary/secondary school	117 (57.9)	215 (8.7)	<0.001	332 (12.5)
In the community (neighbourhood)	38 (18.8)	259 (10.5)	<0.001	297 (11.2)
Contemplated suicide (*)	49 (25.8)	362 (17.4)	0.004	411 (18.1)
Intentional self-injury (*)	29 (15.3)	202 (9.7)	0.016	231 (10.2)
Total	202 (100.0)	2459 (100.0)	–	2661 (100.0)

*This question was not asked to the students from first to third grade (n = 390). Total n = 2271 (190 Nicaraguan and 2081 Costa Ricans youngsters); **Significant if p < 0.05 (X^2 test for proportions and ANOVA for continuous variables).

and 2.6 times more likely to have experienced physical abuse at the hands of other students (OR = 2.663, 95% CI, 1.100–6.400)

Furthermore, logistic regression (not shown in a table) also indicates Costa Rican students, and particularly those who were most likely to have experienced self harm, were 4.8 times more likely to indicate they had a death wish (OR = 4.868, 95% CI, 3.542–6.690), 2.0 times more likely to indicate they experienced feelings of rejection (OR = 2.049, 95% CI, 1.358–3.091), 1.8 times more likely to indicate they

had been a victim of peer physical abuse (OR = 1.895, 95% CI, 1.382–2.597); 1.9 times more likely to indicate they did not want to continue studying (OR = 1.882, 95% CI, 1.198–2.857) and 2.4 times more likely to indicate they felt unsafe in their own homes (OR = 2.404, 95% CI, 1.383–4.180). Having been the victim of physical violence, for both groups, is a predictor of self inflicted harm, according to the results of the study.

Testimonials from Nicaraguan migrant students

The following testimonials by Costa Rican and Nicaraguan youth, drawn from the qualitative data of the study, address some of the concerns regarding discrimination. They focus on the following question: 'Among the students in your school or high school, have you seen someone who is different?' ('Entre los alumnos en tu escuela o secundaria hay alguien que es diferente?').

A Costa Rican male secondary school student from Cartago expressed his feeling about Nicaraguans in the following way: 'He is from Nicaragua and he is black and a bit strange, but he is ok, and I am not racist'. ('El es de Nicaragua y es todo negro y un poco raro pero cae bien y no soy racista …'). Likewise, a Costa Rican female secondary school student from San José, expressed her notions about colour as: '… the color is because some are black, their way of talking can be identified because they are Nicaraguan or Colombians' ('… el color porque hay unos que son negritos, su forma de hablar porque hay unos que son nicaragüenses o colombianos …'). On the other hand, the sentiments expressed by Nicaraguans indicate their sense of rejection, such as this female Nicaraguan secondary school student who stated: 'It is just that my friends put me aside and I feel uncomfortable, … but that is not a motive to continue studying' ('Es solo que mis compañeros me azen a un lado y me siento incómoda … pero eso no será motivo para seguir estudiando').

A Nicaraguan male elementary school student of the province of Guanacaste, who grew up with grandparents in Nicaragua, and now lives in Costa Rica with his mother and stepfather and is known to have cultural problems and low self-esteem stated:

> 'I am afraid to say where I come from because I can be rejected or insulted and for those reasons I do not tell anyone where I come from' ('Me da miedo decir de donde bengo[16] por miedo a ser rechazado o que me insulten por eso trato de no decir de donde bengo').

Yet another expressed a sense of frustration: 'mm … my worry is that no one listens to me, I do not seem to matter. All say that I am a strange person and I don't mind. What I want to do is not to exist, ok, thanks!' ('mm … mi preocupación es que nadie me escucha, ah nadie le intereso!! Todos dicen que soy una persona rara a mi me da igual … !! Lo que quiero es dejar de existir ok gracias!!'). Likewise, a Nicaraguan male elementary student stated: ' I feel rejected by my peers' ('Siento rechaso de mis compañeros'). A testimonial by a young secondary school girl in the province of San José illustrates the type of desperation felt by many Nicaraguans.

She mentions that: 'I do not want to continue studying. I want to return to Nicaragua' ('No quiero seguir estudiando. Me quiero regresar a Nicaragua').

Discussion

Attempts to fulfil the educational objectives that the Ministry of Public Education uses to guide its delivery of quality educational programmes, have clearly fallen short. The educational objective that: 'The student is tolerant and accepts and understands that cultural, religious and ethnic differences must be recognised and respected to ensure democratic coexistence and promotion of the culture of peace' (Ministerio de Educación Pública [Ministry of Public Education] 2003, 13), is not translating well into the everyday experiences of children and adolescents. Feelings of rejection expressed by the Nicaraguan youth in schools and communities (58 and 19%, respectively) (Data shown in Table 4) seem to corroborate this.

The testimonies of the students show that cultural differences tend to be disrespected, and that mockery and exclusion of Nicaraguan migrants are commonplace. This behaviour does not reflect 'democratic coexistence and promotion of the culture of peace'.

With respect to the educational objective: 'The student practices actions, attitudes and behaviors directed to non-violence in schools, coexistence with the peer group, family and community, solving conflicts peacefully and expressing affection, tenderness and love' (Ministerio de Educación Pública [Public Ministry of Education] 2003, 8), the study shows that peaceful conflict resolution was lacking. In fact, conflict was dealt with through the use of firearms and knives, according to the youth. These violent behaviours were more common among Nicaraguan students than Costa Rican students, and could easily be linked to the insecurity and danger they felt in their homes and schools. Arríen (2013) indicates that because of their socio-historical context of war, Nicaraguans, 'socially accept' violence as a 'plausible pathway' to resolve conflicts, which in turn promotes the acquisition and possession of firearms. The violence and rejection that Nicaraguan youngsters mentioned in our study can also be connected to their references to suicide and self injury, more than Costa Ricans.

Based on the analysis of binary logistic regression models, we can conclude that Costa Rican and Nicaraguan students who had been physically assaulted by their peers, expressed suicidal tendencies and the desire to harm themselves. Deliberate self-harm is a product of existential conflict and in some of the Nicaraguan cases could have been related to alcohol or drug use, xenophobia and depression, which in turn can trigger suicidal tendencies (see e.g. MedlinePlus 2016). This behaviour often goes unnoticed, or is legitimised as part of the social reproduction that exists between those who possess hegemonic power and those who do not. Negative media coverage in Costa Rica stimulates this further and leads to xenophobic prejudices and behaviours towards Nicaraguan migrants (Franceschi 2007).

In addition to negative press reports, the Costa Rican government itself often cites the low educational levels of migrants, using statistics on migrant unemployment and crime. Highlighting the existing imbalance of power and identifying native Costa Ricans as privileged can lead to polarised views regarding migrants. In this perspective, migrant groups constitute a migrant underclass. They live in societies where they were not born or where their parents were not born, and are perceived as responsible for the many problems that arise in their host country – Costa Rica. For instance, when criminal incidents are covered in the press, the reaction tends to be: 'it had to be Nicaraguans or sons of Nicaraguan parents' (common expressions heard among Costa Rican citizens). At the same time, when a Costa Rican youth is a street thug, their parents, as 'ticos', are not blamed. Instead, this case is framed as a broader social problem.

Rodríguez Companioni and López (2009) point out that objective and subjective identity is a basic component of reality. As individuals create their culture, identity is constructed. Identity comes into existence when individuals are born, and such identity is transformed by interactions, values, rules, and interpretations as the individual becomes socialised into society. Social interaction helps the individual to self-identify, to recognise his or her own identity and accept his or her image. Xenophobia not only generalises nationality but is also expressed to disparage different ethnic groups based on skin colour, cultural, economic and social reasons. Costa Rica, in this respect, is no exception. The participation of Nicaraguan students in the Costa Rican educational system is replete with cases of rejection and non-acceptance. Some authors have concluded that students who are rejected tend to be those who have distinct cultural traits such as language, skin colour and clothing (Araya Madrigal and Hernández Carballo 2011). This is most evident in indigenous and Nicaraguan children who feel discriminated against and rejected by Costa Ricans.

In the everyday life of Costa Rican society, invisible and symbolic boundaries are established through jokes and 'kidding' around with respect to the ways that Nicaraguans speak, their accents. Insults, phrases and graffiti. Examples in the province of San José include graffiti in public spaces that launch insults such as: 'Fuera nicas', 'Muerte y fuera nicas', 'Nicas basura', (Out with you Nicaraguans, Death and out Nicaraguans, Filthy Nicaraguans). These are symbolic boundaries and invisible constructions, but promote power over migrants (Paniagua Arguedas 2006). Furthermore, these prejudicial behaviours can be regarded as forms of violence that, through direct or indirect means, spread negative images and sustain nationalist and ethnocentric ideologies which become legitimized and remain immune (Campos Zamora and Tristán Jiménez 2009).

A high percentage of Nicaraguans who participated in this study reported feeling rejected in school (58%) and in their neighbourhoods (19%). If these findings are an accurate reflection of reality, this is a serious indictment of the educational system. However, xenophobic attitudes among the majority population have been confirmed by other studies (Bonkiewicz 2006; De Regil 2009; Huhn 2009; Paniagua

Arguedas 2006, 2008; Sandoval García 2002). Paniagua Arguedas (2006) has revealed another form of violence that Nicaraguans are subjected to: ideological pressures that force them to hide their roots, avoid speaking out or expressing themselves for fear of being mocked. Sandoval García (2002, 2007) has added that discrimination of Nicaraguans has become part of the Costa Rican national identity, strengthening the sense of belonging to the nation. This is called 'costarriqueñidad'. Costa Rican identity is legitimised by selective characterisations (mythological past, geographic isolation, and representations of a comfortable white middle class that contrasts with Nicaraguans (nicas) who are seen as violent, dark skinned, and poor (Sandoval García 2002). There are also counter narratives. In a student paper, Nicaraguan migrants are referred to as *lost chinas* (common flowers in Costa Rica) in a field of roses. Nicaraguans come in search of a better world only to suffer injustice, racism and categorisation. The author comments that many end up stealing and doing 'bad' things, but that not all of them deserve to be judged negatively, nor do Costa Ricans deserve to be 'more' or to 'feel superior' (Sandoval García 2007, 208).

The results of this study highlight the pervasiveness of psychological violence, such as xenophobia and bullying, in the lives of young people with a Nicaraguan background. Policy documents on Intercultural Education have yet to solve such social problems. Schools should be sites where human relations are relatively harmonious, because youth and teachers are immersed in educational environments where inter-personal conflicts can be addressed and managed in a positive way. However, the reality is different. Violence among children and adolescents is common in classrooms. Intimidation and bullying are too often met with passive and indifferent attitudes among the onlookers. In this manner, the other students and sometimes the teachers become complicit. Although schools recognise the need to address stereotyping and prejudice, subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) biases persist because students with a Nicaraguan background are labelled as being poor, foreign and bad students. Conversely, these characterisations lead to feelings of superiority among native Costa Rican students. Some Nicaraguans are accepted and integrated as 'ticos', but the majority are not – they remain 'foreigners'.

To fulfil the intended aims of intercultural education, more is needed than a focus on purely cognitive aspects. Attitudes and values that encourage prosocial behaviour in the family, the community, the school and the classroom are also needed. According to López and Ortiz (1999), prosocial behaviours are related positively and significantly to school self-concept and academic self-efficacy. These encourage children and adolescents to perform better, relate to their peers more positively and achieve better academic results. Aggressive and antisocial behaviour that lead to underperformance or school failure are discouraged. The everyday violence experienced by Nicaraguan students in this study (Table 3) and their feelings of unhappiness, rejection, suicidal tendencies, and self harm are all factors that impact their low academic performance. Bullying further impacts their learning and damages their social relationships (Esplugues 2007). The fact that

32% of the students with a Nicaraguan background lag behind in their studies and that 18% leave school are cause for concern.

Ruiz Guevara (2010a, 2010b) has claimed that with respect to classroom practice, there is no differential treatment of Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students by teachers. In accordance with intercultural education guidelines, teachers are to *provide equity* to both cohorts as a strategy to address cultural diversity in the classroom. However, in planning classroom work, information on Nicaraguan literature, history, or migration history are not included and materials and work routines do not facilitate cultural exchange between Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students. Accordingly, there is little evidence of equal treatment of Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students. Nor are there educational criteria which address the cultural diversity among Nicaraguans. A true intercultural approach would require developing an ethical conscience and thinking about universal principles of culture within a new context. The focus would not only be to promote mutual respect, but to help both Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students become aware of the enrichment associated with each other's cultural diversity and similarities. Costa Rica needs to rethink how to better *integrate* Nicaraguan migrants into Costa Rican society and help provide them with the dignity they need to prosper in Costa Rica.

Conclusions

This first-of-its-kind study addressed psychosocial and sociocultural characteristics as determinants of risk behaviours such as violence, bullying, suicidal tendencies, and self harm among Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students in a representative national sample. The results point to a Costa Rican society where insecurity and violence are prevalent, a situation common in other Latin American countries, especially El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua[17]. Costa Rica, therefore, needs to critically consider the negative consequences of the results of this representative study and create and implement concrete culturally relevant educational policies that address these issues head on. A key result of action would be to improve the socio-economic development of the country.

The study also contributes to the knowledge gap of social science research, by citing reliable data on the impact of migration on children and adolescent migrants. Since studies of 1.5 generation Nicaraguans are limited, it is difficult to assess their needs and identify the serious psychological stress which they experience and which add to their invisibility, even though they are Costa Rican citizens. While diversity policies have been stipulated in the government's educational programmes and are well intended, they are not put into practice in elementary and secondary schools. This can be seen by the fact that in spite of increased migration from Nicaragua since the early 1970's, the country's educational platforms and curriculum have not impacted the educational and cultural needs of Nicaraguan students in different parts of Costa Rica (Gatica 2011).

The study indicates that violence in education is a reality, with serious consequences for the life and health of those experiencing it as well as in the society as a whole. Therefore, violence prevention in and outside of schools is not only relevant but critically important. The authors argue that alternatives to school violence can only be realised by initiating programmes which focus on positive behavioural changes by promoting mutual respect among all members of the community, student self-respect, and appreciation for diversity. As noted, the early development of empathetic sensitivity for adolescent boys and girls can result in positive prosocial behaviour, a process which begins with the family as the first socialising group, but continues into schools.

As also noted in the literature review of the Ministry of Education policy documents since 2003, intercultural education has been an integral part of the curriculum at all levels of the educational system. However, based on the findings, the impact of this curriculum has not been sufficient to sensitise Costa Rican students about xenophobia and has done little to reduce violent behaviours towards Nicaraguan migrant students. In order to be effective, intercultural education policies need to emphasise social cohesion and coexistence within heterogeneous environments, but the practice must also generate experiences that are based on protecting values for life, equality, cooperation and integration towards social learning (Lluch 2016). In addition to reducing violent behaviour, programmes must address school dropout rates, grade repetition, students who are too old for the grade level commensurate with their age, school environments, the economic and cultural contexts in which students, schools and high schools are located, and most importantly, teacher training.

Intercultural education is a fundamental element for social cohesion that benefits professionals, young migrants and Costa Rican students alike. It contributes to the creation of a future society that incorporates diversity as a natural component in a mutually respectful environment. Yet these advantages are not recognised or felt by certain sectors within Costa Rica, including teachers. This makes it difficult to implement a true intercultural education. The results of this study show the need to create intervention projects in multiethnic contexts as a priority that is directed towards vulnerable groups and improves their education. Training must be made available to the educational community, teachers and administrative staff, as well as parents and students, in order that they acquire knowledge, skills, and awareness about everyday racism, its facets and effects, considering that very often rejection and discrimination are not recognised when they occur inside and outside schools.

Given these concerns, the authors propose several solutions: (1) institutionalise intercultural education in a way that Nicaraguan and Costa Rican students develop a deeper understanding of each other's culture. (2) train teachers on issues of conflict resolution, stress reduction, and collaborative learning so that students can engage with each other. (3) link the curriculum within schools to policy documents that stipulate and acknowledge the diversity of students and their rights to education.

In principle, the findings of this study are a call to action, requiring teachers, administrators, educational professionals, as well as students and parents to be more aware of their own attitudes and behaviours towards immigration, and to recognise the harmful effects of exclusion that occurs in educational institutions. At the elementary and secondary school level, incidents of discrimination and racism need to be identified and discussed among teachers and students so that the positive aspects of migrants' contributions to Costa Rican society can be highlighted and acknowledged. On the one hand, all Costa Ricans must be sensitised to the experiences, difficulties and needs of migrants in the integration process and be made aware that heterogeneity is in their best interest too. This cultural synthesis can only be brought about by educational policies and activities reinforcing the notion that cultural diversity benefits the society as a whole and that the tenants of intercultural education should be the instruments that generate a respectful appreciation of the differences/similarities in schools, classrooms and the community at large.

Finally, the study shows that many Nicaraguan children in Costa Rica are *culturally integrated* in formal elementary and secondary education but socially excluded, resulting in low motivation for study and few aspirations or expectations for social mobility. The researchers argue that to be successful Nicaraguan children become chameleons, trying to adapt to the environments they inhabit but changing to the most advantageous physical appearance, often denying their own skin colour and guise as a foolproof way to avoid rejection. They need to be able to show their true colours.

Notes

1. While immigrant would normally be used, in order to align the term for European use, the term migrant is interchangeably used with immigrant.
2. Constitución Política de la República de Costa Rica (1949). Reforma Constitucional. 9305 de 24 de agosto de 2015. Political Constitution of the Republic of Costa Rica (1949) Constitutional Reform 9305, 24 August 2015 Accessed: http://www.cesdepu. com/nbdp/copol.htm
3. Ley No. 7739, de 6 de febrero, de Código de la Niñez y la Adolescencia de Costa Rica (La Gaceta No. 26 de 6 de febrero de 1998). Law No. 7739, of the 6th of February, the Costa Rican Code for Children and Adolescents (The Gazette No. 26, 6 February 1998).
4. This research was approved by the ethics committees of the institutions who collaborated in this study and by an interagency agreement. All children over 12 years of age read and signed the Consent Form to participate. Children under 12 years of age received permission from their parents to participate and at the same time completed Consent Forms conforming to minors.
5. Author's translation.
6. Author's translation.
7. Author's translation.
8. Author's translation.
9. Author's translation.

10. Author's translation.
11. Author's translation.
12. Author's translation.
13. Author's translation.
14. Author's translation.
15. Author's translation.
16. The testimonials are written as expressed by the youth, and in some cases are grammatically and orthographically incorrect, but are shown in the original.
17. Sustainable development with social, educational, economic and financial inclusion (CELAC 2015) has been discussed at the 'III Cumbre de la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños' in Costa Rica in January, 2015; and at the 'VII Cumbre de las Américas' on April 10 and 11, 2015, in Panama. The slogan of 'progress with equity' became the challenge for cooperation in the Americas. In both meetings, American presidents expressed deep concern about the high rates of violence, crime, unemployment, poverty, and natural disasters due to climate change and uncontrolled migration to Mexico from Central and South America.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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