Beyond Cultural Mismatch: Leveraging Home Language Practices for School Success

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Overview

- Ethnographies of everyday language practice
- The legacy of cultural mismatch theory
- Alternatives perspectives
- Implications for preschool education: practice, policy and research
Cultural mismatch theory

School underachievement can be explained by differences between home and school practices in non-dominant communities.
Ethnographies of everyday language practices

- Practices vary across communities, cultures, social classes, relationships and contexts

- Some forms better align with typical school discourse styles than others
Diverse differences

- Practices
  - Tasks/activities: what people do

- Participation structures
  - Who does what with whom
  - gendered and generational structures

- Discourse patterns
  - Who talks with whom in what ways

- Norms, beliefs, values, purposes

- Epistemological stances
  - What counts as knowledge/truth
Diverse ways with words

- Questioning (Heath, 1983)
- Teasing (Miller, 1986)
- Storytelling (Heath, 1983; Miller et al, 2005)
- Recitation practices in religious education (Baquedano-López, 2003)
- Varied forms of language play (Lee, 2007; Cintrón, 1997; Zentella, 1997)
- Translation/interpretation practices (Orellana et al, 2003)
- Forms of directives (Delpit, 1986; Ballenger, 1999)
- “Intent participation” and ways of attending (Rogoff et al, 2003)
What this research reveals

- All communities engage rich repertoires of linguistic practice

- All children are socialized both through and to language
  – (Ochs and Schiefflin, 1984)
But...

- Differences --> Deficits?
- What is assumed “normal”?
- What practices are seen/not seen?
Insert picture
- Insert
Miguel reads (in translation) to his brother

Le voy a leer un cuento a mi hermanito que se llama Roberto.

Se llama *A Catch of Jewels*.

Un manojo de joyas.

And other collective nouns.

Y otras, um, palabras.

*I’m going to read a story to my little brother (whose name is) Roberto.*

*It’s called A Catch of Jewels.*

*A handful of jewels.*

And other collective nouns. *And other, um, words.*
Miguel: a flock of sheeps
a flock of sheeps es como una familia de boreguitas y boreguitos

Roberto: Uh, sheep

Miguel: A flock of sheeps
A flock of sheeps is like a family of (female) sheeps and (male) sheeps.

Robert: Uh, sheep
More dangers of group comparisons

- Obscures within-group variation; encourages over-generalization
  - In qualitative research as well as in quantitative

- Treats cultural as static; ignores cultural change

- Tends to divorce culture from structures and contexts

- Creates problems for practice
  - How to “fix” presumed mismatches
Efforts to reconcile “mismatches”

- Change home practices
  - Family Literacy Programs
  - Parent Education Programs
Efforts to reconcile “mismatches”

- Change school practices
  - Kamahameha Project
    - Change participation structures and forms of talk (Au, 1980)
  - Cheche Konnen Project
    - Change student-teacher relationships and discourse patterns (Warren and Rosebery; Ballenger, 1992)
Challenges

- Home and school are structured around fundamentally different norms and values such that they can never really be aligned.

- And: It is not easy to change cultural practices.

- Further: What to do with diverse differences?
Alternatives to identifying “mismatches”

- Identify the full *repertoires of practice* (Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003) in which children participate

  - at home, in school, in church, on the playground, in stores, clinics, visits to home countries…

  - with parents, siblings, peers, friends, teachers, other relatives, neighbors…

  - over time, as their spheres of activity expand
Disontinuities and Continuities

- Identify *continuities* with school practices as well as discontinuities
- Consider how discontinuities are negotiated
- Focus on how environments can facilitate this negotiation
Discontinuities as *Generative*

- Make differences explicit to promote metalinguistic and metacultural awareness
  - Phonological, morphological, syntactical, writing conventions, cultural practices, epistemological stances…

- Create environments that promote and accommodate transcultural navigation
Expanding repertoires of practice

Rather than attempting to _align_ home and school, we can think about how to help _all_ children expand their repertoires of practice, acquiring additional “ways with words” and deploying their language skills flexibly as they move across contexts, situations, and relationships.
Cultural Modeling

- Treats home “funds of knowledge” (Moll and Greenberg, 1990) and everyday language practices as generative resources

- Identifies analogues with disciplinary modes of reasoning and/or school practices

- Identifies skills that can be transformed for use in school
Cultural Modeling Efforts

- Analogues between “signifying” and literary tropes in high school English classes

- Analogues between translation/interpretation work and school paraphrasing tasks
  – Orellana and Reynolds, 2008
Considerations for Preschool Education

- How can we support educators in identifying children’s linguistic repertoires of practice?

- What analogues can we identify between immigrant home literacy practices and preschool practices?

- How can we support educators in leveraging everyday language skills for the development of school-valued literacies...and in expanding children’s repertoires of practice?
Research needs

- Better connections between ethnographic (practice-focused) research and quantitative/developmental (outcomes-focused) research
  - Continuously rethink the categories name and the comparisons we set up
  - Develop ways to study the impact of practices on outcomes
    - E.g. Language Brokering --> Academic Achievement (Dorner, Orellana and Li-Grining, 2007)

- Ways of addressing culture in complex, deep and dynamic ways in both quantitative and qualitative research