Beyond Cultural Mismatch: Leveraging Home Language Practices for School Success

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana

Graduate School of Education and Information Studies,UCLA

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?

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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
  - Lee 1995; 1997; 2000; 2007

- 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