Academic Instrumental Knowledge: Deconstructing Cultural Capital Theory for Strategic Intervention Approaches

Robert Rueda and Lilia D. Monzó
University of Southern California

Angela Arzubiaga
Vanderbilt University

This paper explores the issue of social and cultural capital with immigrant students and their families. Drawing on a cultural-historical theoretical framework, the article focuses on that subset related to schooling that we term *academic instrumental knowledge (AIK)*. This article draws from two related projects involving ethnographic work at home and at school with Latino immigrant families to examine the nature of specific examples of how this knowledge is constructed and how it operates in the daily lives of these families. The article argues all families possess cultural and social capital, but it does not always map easily on to that valued by schools. Moreover, that while such knowledge appears to be critical to school success, intervention based on simple transmission of important school-related facts and knowledge, without reference to the specific sociocultural contexts in which these families live, will not be effective.

A common perception about academic success is that it is a function of ability. But ability to do what? An important aspect of schooling is that it sorts individual students based on their ability to conform to a prescribed set of practices and knowledge which fall beyond the realm of academic content specifically taught. This experience, their *cultural capital*, often determines their access to academic content and achievement (Apple, 1995; Bourdieu, 1998).

Cultural capital refers to having the knowledge and experience that results in behaviors and practices aligned to the values of those who are in a position to legitimize them. Parents who understand the knowledge and behaviors rewarded in schools may pass these onto their children and become advocates for their children's rights, for example, demanding placement in programs to which they are entitled and preparation that enhances college opportunities.

Immigrant families have little knowledge of our educational system and may not have extensive knowledge of the educational systems of their countries of origin (Portes, 1998; Valdes, 1996). It is not surprising then that the high value many immigrant families place on education rarely translates into success for their children (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). While the desire to succeed academically is often high among these families, this desire is not often matched by knowledge of how to achieve it.

A high educational priority is making accessible what we term here *academic instrumental knowledge (AIK)* to immigrant families. This school-specific knowledge can be seen as a specialized type of cultural capital. We have noted through our work that immigrant families express a desire for this type of information. However, we do not support approaches that seek to socialize families into the cultural values and practices considered "appropriate" by white middle-class standards and that are based on deficiency perspectives toward diverse children and families (Auerbach, 1989). Rather, we support approaches that make explicit the cultural basis of legitimized school practices and how these support structural inequalities and that encourage negotiation and the social construction of new hybrid practices that balance the diverse values, beliefs, resources and constraints of families with the structure of schooling.

We explore in this paper the types of information and knowledge to which AIK refers and how such information gets accessed and appropriated among immigrant families, grounding our discussion in examples from two studies of immigrant Latino families. Our goal is to discuss key features of effective programs aimed at families. We situate the cultural knowledge of immigrant families with an eye toward refining the work on social/cultural capital and providing a foundation for thinking about improving the life outcomes of immigrant families.

Cultural Capital:
A Theory of Structural Inequalities

Critical theories of education explain the roles schools play in society, showing their ability to both reproduce and transform society (Apple, 1995). Bourdieu (1998) has advanced a theory of social space that is relational and demarcates people's position in society according to the relative weight of capital (cultural, economic, etc) they possess. Capital is "the wealth out of which more wealth comes" (Kilbride, 2000: pg. 11). Although initially used by economists, sociologists have applied the concept of capital to other resources, namely social capital. Often the term social capital is used to refer to multiple sources of social resources as opposed to economic ones. However some authors have noted the importance between different forms of capital, including human, cultural, and social capital (Kilbride, 2000; Portes, 1998). In this more restrictive use, social capital refers to the networks of people who can provide other forms of capital, including economic and cultural capital (Portes, 1998, Stanton-Salazar, 2001). In this sense a person with an extensive network of friends, family, and other contacts may have greater social capital that someone who is predominantly isolated with few

people from whom to gain access to information, assistance, or other resources. However the quality of this network, that is the kinds of information and resources the network may have also has an important bearing on the extent to which the network is a source of capital. It may be that a network provides important resources in a particular area or context but less so in others.

Human capital refers to the knowledge or expertise that particular individuals have developed that allows them to gain greater human or other forms of capital. Under this definition, human capital would include particular knowledge and skills often discussed in terms of individual abilities, including things like language fluency and skills that could be marketed toward employment (for example, knowing how to build a house or having a nursing degree) (Kilbride, 2000). Bourdieu (1998) has advanced a theory of cultural capital that encompasses styles of interaction as well as the knowledge and skills that are products of an individual's position in a social space that is always relational to others. He argues that what some have referred to as individual skills are culturally produced and that the sorting of cultural capital is precisely legitimized by distinctions of ability that can never be separated from culture. Our understanding of educational issues leads us to agree with Bourdieu, that knowledge and skills are learned through participation in cultural activity (Rogoff, 1997, 2003). Thus, although some authors make the distinction between human and cultural capital, we see all knowledge and skills learned as an outcome of cultural interactions and embedded with culturally produced values and meanings. Thus in this work, we treat cultural capital as encompassing all that which is culturally learned, including values, beliefs, information, understandings, skills, and ways of engaging in particular practices.

Bourdieu (1998) points out that cultural capital, especially that which pans into schooling, is initially passed down by the family and that the sorting function of schooling further differentiates people with respect to capital, by giving more to those who have more capital and less to those with less. Ability grouping at the earliest grades is one way in which cultural capital becomes the bases by which further cultural capital is inequitably distributed through continued tracking practices.

The children whose families have been successful in the U.S. educational system have the social capital necessary to gain the cultural capital to succeed in schools. They will enter school with skills and practices that easily map into the expectations of teachers and they will be thought to possess greater ability and interest in school, which will increase the

likelihood that they will be tracked into the more advanced academic tracks available. In addition, their families will have knowledge of how to structure their children's education, what the characteristics of good schools are, and of what they can expect and demand of schools on behalf of their children.

In this work we deal with both cultural and social capital in the sense of the *what* which is learned and developed (cultural capital) and the *who* that provides these resources (social capital). Both are imminently important and we cannot really discuss the cultural capital or lack thereof of immigrant children and families without in one way or another addressing the people to whom these children and families may be able to turn to toward access the cultural capital of schooling. However, the purpose of this work is really to understand academic instrumental knowledge as a subset of cultural capital pertaining primarily to educational issues prevalent in the lives and educational outcomes of immigrant children. Thus, although we refer to the social capital of the immigrant families we have worked with, our major focus is on the kinds of cultural capital, specifically academic instrumental knowledge, that families need to success in the U.S. education system.

Cultural Capital and Immigrant Families

Many children of immigrants (particularly those from low SES backgrounds, speakers of languages other than English, etc.) are at a significant disadvantage with respect to culture and social capital given that their parents have little knowledge of how U.S. schools function, of the practices and behaviors rewarded by teachers and schools, and even of their rights with respect to educational issues. Furthermore, it is unlikely that immigrant families will develop close relationships with individuals who have this type of cultural capital. In discussing *the habitus*, Bourdieu (1998) points out that people within a particular social space and with a certain type and amount of capital develop particular tastes and ways of being which support engagement in activities that put them in contact primarily with others who share similar interests and generally fall within the same social space, making the transfer of cultural capital difficult.

Indeed the cultural capital that white middle class families have vis-à-vis the schools has proven elusive for many children and families from low-income, non-dominant groups. The extensive research on home-school discontinuities that exist for non-dominant group children, especially Black, American Indian, native Hawaiian, and Latino/Chicano children has shown the deep-seated nature of such discontinuities (for a review see Au & Kawakami, 1994). For example, much of this research is centered on forms of discourse, body movement and rhythm, cognitive styles, and language practices. These are practices that are developed through years of participation within specific cultural contexts, often learned from birth onward.

Although children can learn the social literacies of schools, this will likely take years of participation, years that may be filled with conflict as they are judged poorly from the onset, which may also preclude access to knowledge about the cultural expectations of the institution. Given this dilemma, many researchers have begun to study how to draw on the diverse knowledge and experience children bring to school as a means by which to facilitate academic content. However, this is also difficult as most teachers have little knowledge of the communities in which they teach. All of these issues must continue to be examined. In the present context, we are concerned with facilitating instrumental cultural practices and information about schooling to parents that may support them in making informed educational choices for their children. This is especially relevant for immigrant Latino families, whose knowledge of the school system in the U.S. is significantly less than that of groups who have more experience in this regard.

An important note is that although achievement among minority children is low, many have been able to succeed within the existing educational system even though they may have started out with very low levels of the cultural capital rewarded in schools. It may be that in some ways the capital that minority families pass down which allow their children to successfully engage in their communities, although not directly rewarded in schools, may mediate access to the cultural capital offered and rewarded in schools. For example, some research suggests that immigrant children tend to have a more positive outlook with respect to the outcomes they can expect from the educational system of this country than non-immigrants and that this results in practices aligned to teachers expectation and may be accordingly rewarded (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998; Suarez-Orozco, 1987). Other work suggests that the ability of families to structure children's experiences according to their beliefs results in greater academic success (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 1996). Our position is that the cultural capital of specific families must be acknowledged and utilized to create links that support the learning of some concrete practices and information that children need to succeed in schools.

A Sociocultural Perspective on Cultural Capital

We approach our understandings of cultural capital and knowledge construction from a

sociocultural or cultural-historical theoretical framework. That is, we view human cognition and behavior as embedded in collectively organized, artifact-mediated activity systems (Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1998). Based on this framework, we argue that cultural capital, AIK, and all existing knowledge of families is sociocultural in nature -meaning that it is socially transmitted and negotiated, embedded in specific sociocultural context or ecocultural niches, and is culturally-laden and political in nature-It can't be simply transmitted such as in a neutral course in "parenting practices" without reference to these complex factors.

This framework supports the view that immigrants do not arrive devoid of cultural capital. Rather, they have the cultural capital to effectively interact within familiar cultural contexts in which they have been successful (as defined by participants in those contexts). For example, some Latino immigrant families attach importance to gift giving and routinely engage in such reciprocal exchange practices (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). They know that to attend a birthday party without a gift would be considered inappropriate and could be interpreted as disinterest in maintaining close ties. The individual with sufficient cultural capital to understand these rules of exchange will solidify his/her relationships and possibly increase their capital.

However, in the contexts of schools, where the arbiters of the rules of interactions and rewarded cultural practices are teachers with different cultural assumptions and expectations, these same practices and experiences may go unrecognized, lose their worth, and perhaps even become negative capital (Portes, 1998). Although Bourdieu refers in his work only to the cultural practices of the dominant groups as cultural capital, he clearly points out that this becomes cultural capital only in their alignment to the preferences of those in power. But he makes it clear that worth is not inherent in any particular practice but is assigned and relational.

Immigrant parents often play peripheral roles in the school system. However developing a deep understanding of the cultural nature of schools and its practices, including the meanings of those practices and the identities associated with them, requires full participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For this to occur, the peripheral position from which immigrant parents interact with schools must begin to be moved in the direction that enhances their knowledge of the system, allows them greater participation, and legitimizes their voice in decision-making. A significant point is that participation involves developing the identities associated with such practices. Our system of schooling, its practices and the values and beliefs embedded in them, have been historically and socioculturally developed and thus validate the embedded notions that lead to cultural privilege. Thus, any program that seeks to encourage parents to develop greater understanding of the school system for immediate benefit to their children should beware that this increased knowledge not result in further ammunition for the role of cultural reproduction of schools. One mechanism is critical dialogue that reveals the cultural basis of school practices and how these serve to sort children into particular sectors of the economy, creating inequities of social, economic, and political power that are often defined by race, class, and gender.

Considering Family Contexts in Incorporating School Culture

A sociocultural perspective allows us to see that family values and their social, economic and political niches must be central in attempts to transmit knowledge and practices compatible with a different cultural context. Supporting parents in gaining a deep knowledge of the culture of schooling is difficult to operationalize into effective programs. It would require significant and extended participation in school-like contexts with similar structural constraints, an option that would be neither feasible nor appropriate for many of the low-income families who have little time at their disposal (Auerbach, 1989; Valdes, 1996). Moreover, such an approach may have undesirable secondary consequences such as negating or altering the particular world views of the families and children who bring their own diverse but valid ways of knowing and behaving. Of course new forms of cultural capital can be produced by conscientious teachers who negotiate the cultural demands of the classroom explicitly with students. While this is a desirable option, there is little indication that such a transformation is likely to happen anytime soon. Indeed trends seem to be digressing to old patterns based on deficiency perspectives (Valencia, 1997).

Our perspective is that schools ought to serve the needs of diverse communities in ways that validate and build on cultural differences. This additive approach requires a radical restructuring of schools, including teacher education on critical perspectives of culture and learning, a diverse teaching force, increased revenues for urban schools and communities, more adequate systems of accountability and testing, and strong community-school connections that allow the voices of parents and children to be heard in all aspects of school decision-making.

Although we advocate transforming schools in these ways and deconstructing normative cultural practices, we are clear about the long-term nature of this goal and recognize the more immediate need to

support the academic achievement of minority children who presently struggle to achieve in the existing system. In the next section we distinguish the knowledge and practices that may lead specifically to educational capital from the broader concept of cultural capital, which has proven elusive for most immigrant families. In the following section we discuss AIK as knowledge situated within communities that addresses specific needs in support of educational success.

Academic Instrumental Knowledge

In our previous work we have documented that access to AIK was related to children's reading engagement and achievement (Rueda, MacGillivray, Monzó, & Arzubiaga, 2001; Arzubiaga, Rueda, & Monzó, 2002). We defined "access to AIK" as knowing a person who had knowledge of the U.S. educational system and who families could turn to with questions about their children's progress or other school-related matters. However, in that work we did not address what it is that AIK specifically referred to, except to say that it was information about the educational system that would lead to increased capital with respect to schooling in the U.S. It would seem that this is the critical question in order to develop programs that effectively provide parents with access to AIK. However, as odd as it may seem to program developers, our argument is that AIK, as all cultural capital, is situated knowledge about the educational system. While we have a good sense of what types of information are important to understand to maximize potential success given existing educational research, we have little knowledge of how this information makes sense in the lives of particular communities and particular families. Thus it is our contention that programs must be developed with the specific needs, interests, concerns of the particular individuals who attend such programs and who together, along with the developers, are continually negotiating the information presented with their own sociocultural realities, experiences, beliefs, and values. In what follows, then we attempt to document what AIK refers to for the families that we have worked with in two projects involving ethnographic work at home and at school with Latino immigrant families. In what follows we draw on specific examples from our data and discuss the nature of AIK and how it assessed rather than to report comprehensively on specific findings. We begin with a brief understanding of the networks available to families with knowledge of the U.S. educational system or insights into their social capital.

Sources of Academic Instrumental Knowledge

Although parents had few sources of AIK, those who did depended on a family member who had had some schooling in this country, a friend of the family, or in rare cases a teacher with whom they had developed a strong relationship. Mothers who sought assistance from a particular teacher had developed a relationship with the teacher over a number of years and interacted with that teacher not only with respect to their children's education but often over other personal matters. In addition the relationships were reciprocal. Mothers knew a great deal about the personal lives of the teachers and others to whom they turned to for AIK.

Researchers also sometimes became sources of AIK but only selectively and under certain conditions. Furthermore, families judged the shared experience of the person who was providing AIK and this seemed often more important than their knowledge of schooling. For example, one mother seeking advice from Lilia (second author) with respect to language program placement, listened to her recommendation to place the child in a bilingual program and the research based reasons for this preference. This information was provided with a conscious effort to make the information accessible to her using non-technical terms. However the mother, after listening to Lilia and to her daughters' repeated request to be put into a bilingual program, recited her older son's recommendation for English immersion placement and took his advice instead, pointing out that she could teach her daughter Spanish at home. Her son's recommendation was based on the difficulty that he said he encountered having to transition to English at the fourth grade. However, it must be noted that this son was at the time a university student whose bilingual education had certainly not negatively impacted him and perhaps had been the reason for his academic success (Cummins, 1996). This mother was especially concerned over her child needing to learn English, but the cultural context of the school community was such that it engendered a fear of failure and stigma in a bilingual program. The school had been targeted by anti-bilingual education activists not long before this conversation took place and had received national attention resulting in a school culture that was predominantly in favor of English immersion. It must be noted that in other immigrant communities such as the one in which our follow up study takes place, families were very much in favor of bilingual education. Although many families were concerned that their children learn English, they did not see this as incompatible with bilingual instruction.

In sum, instrumental knowledge was most sought and incorporated by families when the person with whom they discussed the information was someone with whom they felt "confianza" (trust), when it addressed an immediate need or problem,

when the relationship was reciprocal, and when there was some shared history or experience that made their knowledge seem relevant to their lives. In addition, other socioeconomic and sociopolitical issues may impact whether academic instrumental knowledge is accepted even when the provider is a viable source

Toward Defining Academic Instrumental Knowledge

At the time of the previous study we focused on understanding the impact that access to knowledge about school might have on reading. Currently we are concerned with describing and developing the construct of academic instrumental knowledge by attempting to understand what types of knowledge parents may have been referring to when asked whether they had someone they could turn to regarding questions about schooling. This type of knowledge seemed not only relevant to their children's reading, but also seemed accessible to immigrant parents without them actually participating in the culture of schools to a significantly greater extent.

For this task we draw on the previous study that used ethnographic methods with twenty-one immigrant families (Rueda et al., 2001) and on a subsequent ethnography of eight urban Latino immigrant families taking place approximately two miles from the previous study site (Monzó, 2001). The families in both studies spoke primarily Spanish in the home and had similar income levels. In the first study, research assistants, including Lilia, interacted with families through home visits, participating in typical daily activities such as dinner and homework, and accompanying them to school meetings, clinics, etc. In the second study, a similar approach was used by Lilia. In the process of such activities, it was common for families to ask for knowledge about school given their knowledge of Lilia's previous teaching experience and her university student status. In addition, families often discussed their interactions with teachers and other school personnel as well as the practices, ideas, and values students learned at school that they were uncomfortable with (for a description of the study and methods see Monzó, 2001).

We ground our definition of the term academic instrumental knowledge in the context-specific types of knowledge that families have sought from Lilia and others but we also include the knowledge and practices (and the embedded values and beliefs) that we found to be absent among families but that we believe facilitate success in our educational system. We distinguish AIK from more general and global sets of cultural practices, beliefs, and attitudes that are also deeply rooted in the culture

of schools but that are more difficult to operationalize in intervention programs. We use it to refer to information about the educational system and practices that support achievement in school and that can be referenced in a critical dialogue that reveals the cultural nature of such practices. Such critical dialogue allows diverse groups to consider these new understandings as one way of thinking and doing, a way that indexes success in the U.S. but not necessarily as a standard by which the value of all practices should be measured. In distinguishing from more implicit knowledge that is learned through participation in culture, the practices claimed to be instrumental to success in U.S. schools can be set against the many constraints and affordances that impact individual families.

As discussed previously, our argument is that we cannot make a list of information and practices that parents need to learn to support their children's education and the move to create programs with this curriculum. Such an approach minimizes the situated nature of knowledge, the specific needs of particular families, and how the sociocultural experiences, values, and beliefs they hold interact with this information. Instead, we propose that AIK must be negotiated with the sociocultural experiences of particular individuals. Table 1 is a list contrasting three types of knowledge specific to the families we worked with that we have catalogued in our work: 1) knowledge about school that was directly sought by parents, 2) knowledge that was provided to parents but that was rejected once received, and 3) knowledge that has been shown to mediate success in schools but that was not evident from out interactions with families. As is evident from the table, there seems to be a pattern to the differences. These patterns are discussed below

Table 1. Types of Academic Instrumental Knowledge
[Note from Spring 2016 Executive Editor Constantin Schreiber: This table could not be retrieved when accessing the archives in 2016. Please contact the authors if you would like to take a look at this table.]

AIK Sought: Problems with Access

The type of knowledge about school that parents most often sought was informational and related to solving an immediate, short-term problem. However in many cases parents' appropriation and use of this knowledge seemed to be thwarted by the ways it was communicated by teachers or other school personnel and/or understood by parents. For example, after a meeting held for parents on language programs, Lilia visited a mother who had sat through the entire meeting at the very front of the room. Two

hours after this meeting the mother was not able to demonstrate understanding of what had been said. Although the meeting had been held in Spanish, the language used to explain the programs was technical and complex. In our work, we have provided what we believe to be explicit explanations to help parents distinguish between the various language programs available. However, this information continues to be elusive to many of the parents even after repeated explanations.

There have also been a few cases of more involved help-seeking that has supported the adoption of practices typically associated with middle-class parents. One example is of a mother who participated in the study with the hopes that her ninth grade daughter might be encouraged to develop an interest in pursuing a college education. Lilia discussed the practice of tracking and suggested that the girl become knowledgeable about courses required by universities.

The parents asked what specific courses. Upon hearing that foreign language was a requirement, the mother mentioned that her daughter had wanted to take French but had been put in a sewing course. Lilia explained that it often helped when parents made the requests. The mother, who spoke sufficient English, immediately followed up and made the request. Her daughter was placed on the waiting list for French class for the following semester.

Later when the girl's received a D in her report card in algebra, the mother decided to speak with the teacher. Lilia accompanied her. The teacher explained that the child did not seem to understand the material and that it was her responsibility to seek help. The mother encouraged her daughter to sign up for an after school tutorial. When her grades did not improve, again the mother decided to go to the school. Rather than take Lilia's suggestion that they speak to the teacher again to try and pinpoint what she did not understand, the mother decided that she wanted to speak with the counselor and ask that he change her daughter to another math class with a different teacher. She was afraid that the teacher would retaliate negatively toward her daughter for their continued attempts to speak with him

Accompanied by Lilia, they went to see the counselor who insisted the change could not be made. Lilia, who had been silently listening previously, intervened after noting the look of resignation in the mother's eyes, to tell the counselor, "but she is her mother and she has the right as such to ask that her child be moved if she is unhappy with the teacher." Noting the English fluency and assertiveness in Lilia's voice, the counselor quickly turned to look in the computer, said it needed to be "ok'd" by his boss,

immediately stepped out to speak with her, and returned a few minutes later and said he would do but that the girl should not discuss this with her friends.

For this mother, the AIK gained proved useful in advocating for her daughter. The girl's math grades improved to a C the following semester. Factors that may have increased accessibility to the AIK provided were the mother's knowledge of English and having some familiarity in engaging in dominant group contexts as she worked as a housekeeper in White middle and upper-middle class families. However, her lack of knowledge about parental rights or about the middle class practice of making requests at schools may have resulted in her leaving the counselor's office without having her requests met or insisting upon them. Lilia's intervention and ability to bridge for the mother was critical in this case.

AIK Rejected: Problem of Fit

In Table 1, the type of knowledge parents most often rejected was initially sought in the context of a broader problem for which numerous solutions may have applied. Lilia offered suggestions that seemed appropriate to her given her knowledge of the educational system, curriculum and typical classroom practices, the community, the parents' English needs, and other considerations. However, in some cases such suggestions proved inappropriate for particular families and were rejected as possible avenues to solving their problems. In one example of rejected AIK, another ninth grade girl who had recently arrived from El Salvador was being bussed to an all white public high school where she had been placed in the ESL track. She was receiving poor grades in many classes. She explained that in many of her ESL classes instruction was offered in English only and translations were only available if the students asked. In history, where she was receiving a "D", she said it was especially difficult as they had no text to review and the teacher lectured the entire time in English. Lilia pointed out that the student's English class should be focused on learning the language and that her understanding of the academic content of history should not be dependent on her knowledge of the second language. The mother asked in a manner set for action, "Y que puedo hacer?" (And what can I do?)

Lilia's response was to suggest a visit to the teacher to ask about the child's grades, to explain that the daughter was not understanding, and to enquire about the school ESL program and general policies in this regard. Lilia offered to accompany the mother who she had previously accompanied to numerous places to help her translate, as she did not speak English, including the immigration office. Lilia and the mother made plans to talk to the teacher the

following week. However on the day prior to going, the mother called Lilia to cancel because the daughter would be taking an exam that week and the mother preferred to wait and see how she might do. Months later, when the daughter received her report card, the girl was still getting a "D". We are still troubled by this decision and have suggested other options for the child. For example we have suggested reading some of the material in Spanish from the library, hoping that knowing it in Spanish might help her understand when the teacher speaks about it in English. However, this has not been a useful strategy because it has been difficult to find books on history in Spanish and because she does not have a clear idea of the topics that are being discussed in class. We have not pursued this issue further, as there are indications in the mother's interactions such as her tone of voice that suggest the mother is embarrassed about her decision. This example brings to the forefront many of the complex issues that surround the seemingly straightforward domain of instrumental knowledge. For theoretical and practical reasons, it is important to try to understand why this situation has gone unresolved.

This mother was very active in her children's schooling on a daily basis. It was common to see her helping them, sitting with them at the table as they did their homework in the evenings. The family used the library on occasion and at various times sought Lilia's assistance for transportation to the library or to lend them a dictionary. This was a mother whose 5th grade daughter was in various sports and who routinely watches her play, attended school assemblies, etc. But the ecocultural niche, which the family occupied, resulted in a clash with the efforts of Lilia to negotiate knowledge and practices that might result in greater success. One important factor is that the daughter was undocumented and the mother may have felt it was too risky to go and speak at the school about her daughter's language proficiency. This may have marked her as an obvious target for investigation regarding citizenship status or otherwise called undesired attention to her. Another potential factor is that the daughter attended a school that was predominantly Anglo and that was located in a distant suburban community. The mother may not have felt comfortable interacting in that community, and moreover had never had the opportunity to see the school.

The final column in Table 1 includes information that we believe to be important especially in terms of more general and long-term issues regarding eventual school success. It is possible that because the context for these issues is more general, focused on long term goals, ambiguous, or not connected to immediate problems,

there is no logical or existing space in the ecocultural niche to integrate the new information. The "problem" which this knowledge addresses is not immediately visible to the families.

Making AIK Accessible: Key Features for Effective Intervention Programs

As shown above some information initially sought by parents was rejected. That is, they listened and believed it was inappropriate for them or their particular case. Work by Mehan and colleagues on the issue of how to bolster the academic success of low-achieving high school students is relevant in this context (Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996). They describe the process of "untracking," an educational reform effort that has been successful in preparing students from low-income and linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds for college. Untracking provides all students with the same academically demanding curriculum while varying the amount of institutional support each student receives. Especially helpful are institutional "scaffolds" that teach the hidden curriculum of the school, forming a space for students to develop an academic identity and to build bridges between high school and college. Important for the academic success of African Americans and Latinos, untracking allows students to develop a reflective system of beliefs and a critical consciousness without sacrificing their neighborhood identities. This approach has been described as "accommodation without assimilation." It permits the development of a "hybrid" or "third space" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejada, 2000), where success can be gained by incorporating new knowledge in a way that transforms but allows for negotiation.

However, a critical aspect of increasing opportunities of minority youth is supporting similar understandings among parents so that they can structure their children's activities from early on and can develop with their children a mindset that is critically aware and positioned to make informed choices. The work of Delgado-Gaitan (2001) with COPLA, the Latino parent association which has made important strides in the schools of Carpintería, California, provides important insights into the process by which parents can learn not only about how the educational system works but also how to use this knowledge to support their children's education. Her work has shown that a process of collective decision-making, rooted in the needs and beliefs of the community, was most effective in creating an organization that has not only lasted over ten years but also become a strong voice in the schools. Specifically, instructive has been her analysis that "In empowerment moving forward,

learning, and growing don't always happen in a straight line; they often move in a spiral motion, moving forward, then slipping back…when we move forward again we take bigger steps…" (pg. 5) Based on lessons learned from these and other works as well as our own, we come away with some basic principals that seem particularly important in making AIK accessible and adaptable for families.

Programs Must Follow an Additive Approach

In contrast to what Mehan and his colleagues describe, many traditional approaches to intervention programs have followed a subtractive model, delineating the practices, values, beliefs that must be adopted in order to support academic achievement without regard to violating existing cultural norms. Authors who have looked closely at the lives of immigrants warn against this approach in that it may have detrimental affects to how they get along and survive within their own ethnic communities. For example, Valdes (1996) suggests that increased participation in school activities require time commitments that may require families to neglect their responsibilities to other members of their family networks from whom they receive important resources when needed. Researchers attempting to socialize parents into the specific literacy practices of schools have also found that such attempts did not result as expected (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Goldenberg, Reese, & Gallimore, 1992). Parents have their own notions of reading and these dominate the way they structure literacy practices in the home. More advantageous would be to find links between their own literacy related capital and the literacy expectations of schools and encourage negotiation of these practices.

In many cases constraints may require choices between one and another practice. In some cases new practices may be juxtaposed against existing practices that oppose the new ones and that are embedded with opposing values. Conflicts arise when particular identities and practices denigrate or conflict with other identities and the values embedded in them. We believe that this is the reason why often the knowledge gained within these intervention programs have little impact on the short term and are almost useless in the long term, as people find them to conflict with other values they hold and do not see ways in which to integrate or have these different and or opposing viewpoints coexist. An important task for intervention programs is to open these difficult issues up for discussion and to collaboratively develop not one but a variety of possible hybrid practices that take into account participants own beliefs and values, allowing each individual the opportunity to explore with others the issues they raise.

Social Critical Dialogue

Discussions about instrumental knowledge must reveal the cultural basis of such knowledge. Most parent education programs available treat the knowledge to be gleaned as if it were culture free and they are discussed as best practices without any exploration of other cultural practices that may have similar end results. Furthermore, the short term and political implications must be discussed so that parents can make informed choices for and with their children. A sociocultural perspective assumes that knowledge is socioculturally constructed and has deep sociocultural and historical roots. Freire (1982) argues that only through critical dialogue can social change be enacted. Programs that merely attempt to transmit the practices of white middle class families to others simply reproduce the structures of privilege in our society.

Mediators must have intimate knowledge of the cultural contexts of the community and of the school. These persons must be willing and able to engage participants in collective discussions about the knowledge they are being presented and the positive and negative ways in which it may impact their lives. In addition there must be a critical discussion of the role the sorting mechanism of schooling and the reproductive role it plays in maintaining the status quo as well as the possibilities if offers for transformation. Such discussions must be authentic with exploration of new ways of integrating the knowledge with their existing frames. Provider must be someone with whom they share some trust and a sense of shared interest and shared experience. They must also be able to create such trust among the group. This suggests that short-term programs are unlikely to have the desired impact of long term appropriation of AIK.

Information Must Be Meaningful

Parents must be intricately involved in defining the content of such programs. Although mediators may have their own thoughts about what types of knowledge parents may need, and although parents' lack of knowledge of educational institutions may result in not even knowing what question to ask, their existing understandings can still become a critical feature of programs. Discussions can ensue about why such knowledge is thought to be crucial and parents can make decisions about whether they agree or disagree with a particular perspective. In addition, our work suggests that simply listening and discussing issues is insufficient to make the connection to actual practice. An apprenticeship approach in which discussions suggest the implication of having such knowledge is crucially important for knowledge to be accessed. The work of Delgado-Gaitan suggests that parents who are

unfamiliar with the system often wish to have someone who can accompany them in their interactions with schools and that these people can lend support and mediate when necessary.

Negotiation, Appropriation, and Hybridity

Our work and that of others has shown that academic instrumental knowledge cannot be offered without a sensitive and thorough exploration of peoples' values, beliefs, resources, and constraints and how people balance these daily. Appropriation of new knowledge involves not merely learning it in ways that allows verbalization but actually putting such knowledge to use in ways that transform people's ways of seeing the world and their identities. This is especially necessary when values may be in conflict or when constraints and resources within the ecocultural niche are not compatible with the academic instrumental knowledge being discussed. Some have pointed out that the collective negotiation of the cultural contexts of schools and communities, including the values embedded in these can result in transformed knowledge. Such negotiation can also result in the creation of hybrids which can be better incorporated by families without creating undue stress on their lives, without denigrating their values and yet still provide a clear validation of their resources and cultural practices. Opportunities for such creative innovations must be available not only to groups but on an individual family basis which clearly calls for small groups and trust among all group participants.

Conclusion

In this paper we have drawn on a sociocultural perspective in order to situate the nature of cultural capital and argue that all groups have cultural capital in specific sociocultural contexts. Attempts to offer families' knowledge about the educational system (AIK) cannot be effective when they are embedded in deficiency perspectives or treated as a set of neutral facts to be learned. Our interest is in providing families with the opportunities afforded to those who have the knowledge to make informed choices that have positive impact on their children's educational success. We have attempted to distinguish between broader notions of cultural capital, which are difficult to operationalize to a set of more concrete practices and knowledge about the educational system which will enhance immigrant children's opportunities to academic success. With a perspective on learning as the process of developing identities which may transform people's ways of seeing and doing, we view critical dialogue as an imperative part of this process. We argue against the uncritical enculturation of families into dominant cultural systems and argue in favor of encouraging politically informed decisions, negotiating academic

instrumental knowledge within existing values and practices, creating hybrids, transforming knowledge, and permitting informed choice in the acceptance or rejection of cultural practices in the process of appropriating this.

References

Apple, M. (1995). *Education and Power. New York*: Routledge.

Arzubiaga, A., Rueda, R., & Monzó, L. D. (2002). Family matters related to the reading engagement of Latino children. Journal of Latinos and Education, 1, 231-243.

Au, K.H. & Kawakami, A.J. (1994). Cultural congruence in instruction. In E.R. Hollins, J.E. King, & W.C. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 5-23). State University of New York Press.

Auerbach, E.R. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review, 59*(2), 165-181.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Cummins, J. (1996). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society*. Ontario, CA: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (2001). *The power of community: Mobilizing for family an schooling*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Freire, P. (1982). *Pegagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.

Goldenberg, C. N., Reese, L., & Gallimore, R. (1992). Effects of school literacy materials on Latino children's home experiences and early reading achievement. *American Journal of Education, 100*, (497-536).

Goldenberg, C.N. & Gallimore, R. (1995). Immigrant Latino parents' values and beliefs about their children's education: Continuities and discontinuities across cultures and generations. In P. Pintrich & M. Maehr (Eds.), *Advances in Motivation and achievement, 9*, 183-227.

Gutiérrez, K., Baquedano-López, P., & Tejeda, C. (2000). Rethinking Diversity: Hybridity and Hybrid Language Practices in the Third Space. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 6*(4), 286-303.

Kilbride, K.M. (2000). *A review of the literature on the human, social and cultural capital of immigrant children and their families with implications for teacher education*. Access: http://www.ceris.metropolis.net/Virtual%20 Library/education/Kilbride2/kilbride2.html

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Mehan, H., Hubbard, L, & Villanueva, I. (1994). Forming academic identities: Accomodation without assimilation among involuntary minorities. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 25*(2), 91-117.

Mehan, H., Villanueva, I., Hubbard, L. & Lintz, A. (1996). *Constructing school success: The consequences of untracking low-achieving students.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Moll, L.C. & Greenberg, J.B. (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L.C. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and Education: Instructional Implications and Applications of Sociocultural Psychology* (319-348). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Monzó, Lilia D. (2001). *Children as knowledge brokers and agents of acculturation in Latino family contexts: A sociocultural approach*. Dissertation Proposal. Unpublished paper.

Ogbu, J.U. & Simmons, H.D. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: A cultural-ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 29*(2), 155-188.

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*, 1-24.

Portes, A. & Rumbaut, P. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Rogoff, B. (1997). Evaluating development in the process of participation: Theory, methods, and practice building on each other. In E. Amsel & K.A. Renninger (Eds.), Change and development: Issues of theory, method, and application.

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. London: Oxford University Press.

Rueda, R. MacGillivray, L., Monzó, L.D., Arzubiaga, A. (2001). Engaged reading: A multi-level approach to considering sociocultural factors with diverse learners. In D. McInerny & S. VanEtten (Eds.), *Research on sociocultural influences on motivation and learning* (pp. 233-264). Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Stanton-Salazar, R. (2001). *Manufacturing hope and despair: The school and kin support networks of U.S.-Mexican youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Suarez-Orozco, M. (1987). Becoming somebody: Central American immigrants in U.S. inner city schools. Antrhopology and Education Quarterly, 18, 287-299.

Valdes, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distance between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Valencia, R.R. (1997). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. London: Falmer Press.

Wertsch. (1998). Mind as action. New York: Oxford University Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *L. S. Vygotsky, Collected works* (Vol.1) (N. Minick, Trans.). New York: Plenum. (Original work published 1934)

Zhou, M. & Bankston III., C.L. (1998). *Growing up American: How Vietnamese children adapt to life in the United States*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

2003 Article Citation

Author Notes
Robert Rueda
University of Southern California
WPH 601, University Park Los Angeles, CA 90089-0031
rueda@usc.edu

Robert Rueda is professor of learning and instruction at the Rossier School of Education. His research focuses on sociocultural approaches to literacy learning and teaching among Latino and special education students.

Lilia D. Monzó
University of Southern California
2050 Fair Park Avenue #303, Los Angeles, CA 90041
monzo@usc.edu

Lilia D. Monzó is a doctoral student at the Rossier School of Education. Her research interests are with issues of culture and identity among Latino immigrant students.

Angela Arzubiaga
Vanderbilt University
1207 18th Avenue South Nashville, TN 37212
a.arzubiaga@vanderbilt.edu

Angela Arzubiaga is an Assistant Professor of Psychology in Education at Arizona State University. She obtained her Ph.D. in Education from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1998. She has been awarded the University of California President's Postdoctoral Fellowship and has been recognized as a Junior Scholar by the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD). Her research interests are in eco-cultural and sociocultural models to understand family life and home-institution connections.

2016 Article Citation

Rueda, R., Monzó, L. D., & Arzubiaga, A. (2003). Academic instrumental knowledge: Deconstructing cultural capital theory for strategic intervention approaches. *Current Issues in Education*, *6*(14). Retrieved from http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/1682

Current Issues in Education

Mary Lou Fulton College of Education
Arizona State University