

Home-School Conflicts and Barriers to the Academic Achievement of Children of Latin American Immigrants

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of home-school conflicts in the educational failure of children of Latin American immigrants and examines how these conflicts have been framed and understood in the existing research literature. It argues that structural analyses of barriers to educational attainment alone fail to capture the multiplicity of forces that contribute to negative academic outcomes. Instead, understanding this phenomenon requires a fusion of structural and cultural analytic perspectives that take into account school-based factors such as pedagogical styles, policies, and norms and the ways in which students' cultures interact with these institutional arrangements. The author starts by reviewing some of the most serious structural barriers in the lives of children of Latin American immigrants: poverty, segregation, and limited English proficiency. Then, she examines key research on the factors associated with the poor educational outcomes of many of these students. A discussion of some of the major theoretical contributions to the study of educational stratification follows, and the author highlights and analyzes three important examples of home-school conflicts that affect immigrant student outcomes. The paper will close with suggestions for future research and education reforms, including a specific focus on increasing the role of schools in generating students' social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Children in immigrant families¹ are the fastest-growing sector of the school-age population in the United States. These youth account for twenty percent of all children in the United States, and it is projected that children of immigrants will represent twenty-five percent of the primary and secondary-school age population by 2010 (Fix & Capps, 2005; Hernandez, Denton & Macartney, 2007). The exponential growth in the size of the immigrant-origin student population in the United States has come at a time when earning at least a high school degree has never been more important for long-term personal and professional stability. While at the start of the twentieth century there were occupational avenues that allowed social mobility for people with minimal formal education, the current knowledge economy is largely closed to those who do not attain post-secondary credentials. Thus, schooling stands to play a more significant role in the lives and futures of immigrant-origin children today than

it has in any other moment in history.

Between fifty-five and sixty percent of children of immigrants enrolled in school in the United States today have geographic origins in Latin America (Hernandez et al., 2007). Latino² students, many of whom are children of immigrants, demonstrate some of the most alarming educational outcomes, including widespread school desertion, low levels of literacy, and poor college enrollment and completion rates (Lutz, 2007; MacDonald, 2004; Perreira, Harris & Lee, 2006; Swail, Cabrera & Lee, 2006). Low parental education, high levels of poverty, and limited English proficiency are some of the major barriers identified in these students' pathways to academic success (Capps et al., 2005; Gandara, 1995; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Institutional factors such as school culture, policies, and norms, which tend to correspond with middle-class forms of cultural capital and socialization in the United States, frequently interact with these structur-

al barriers to further disadvantage low-income children in immigrant families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valdes, 1996). These additional institutional and cultural challenges are often overlooked or their significance is minimized in analyses of Latino youth's school failure. This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by demonstrating the ways in which cultural clashes between home and school— one powerful symptom of the institutional arrangements that complicate ethnic and racial minority students' educational experiences— combine with existing structural forces to hinder the academic progress of poor children of Latin American immigrants.

The contemporary, post-1965 wave of immigration to the United States can best be characterized by the diversity in the newcomers' education levels, skills, and countries of origin. There has been a dramatic shift from earlier waves in the primary regions sending immigrants to this country. Until 1950, nearly ninety percent of all immigrants were European and

Canadian; today, more than fifty-five percent come from Latin America and the Caribbean (overwhelmingly from Mexico), and twenty-five percent come from Asia (Camarota, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, 2005). Current immigrants to the United States represent both the most highly skilled and highly educated and the lowest-skilled and least educated members of society. On one hand, the “new” immigrants, particularly from Asia, are more likely to have advanced degrees than the native-born population in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco, 2005). On the other, they possess some of the lowest education and income levels in the country, particularly the approximately twelve million undocumented immigrants (Camarota, 2007). According to the 2000 Current Population Survey, more than twenty-two percent of all immigrants in the United States had less than a ninth grade education, the majority of whom had come from Latin America and the Caribbean (Suárez-Orozco, 2005).

As would be expected given the range of educational and professional skill levels of the foreign-born population, the academic and labor market outcomes of children of immigrants in the United States are quite varied. Status attainment research has powerfully demonstrated the role of parental education and income in intergenerational transfer of privilege (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Jencks, 1972; Mare, 1981). In general, this pattern holds true for children in immigrant families where children of low-educated, poor immigrant parents have, on average, lower levels of educational attainment than those students of higher status backgrounds.³ According to a report from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP, 2006), compared to White, Black, and Asian children, Latino children are the least likely to have a parent who attended college, and, along with Black children, Latinos are more likely to be considered low income⁴ even when their parents have had some college education and are employed full-time (NCCP, 2006). Other studies have shown a marked increase in poverty levels among immigrant families over the course of the past thirty years

(Capps et al., 2005). It is not surprising, then, that students of Latin-American origin demonstrate some of the worst academic outcomes (Lutz, 2007; MacDonald, 2004; Perreira et al., 2006; Swail et al., 2004). In fact, statistics show that Latin American-origin students have the highest drop out rates of any major racial or ethnic group in U.S. schools, and those students who do make it to post-secondary education are overrepresented in two-year colleges (MacDonald, 2004; Swail et al., 2004). Identifying the factors that contribute to these disturbing educational trends is critical to interrupting this vicious cycle of poverty, inequality, and structural and cultural neglect.

This paper aims to advance current discussions of the challenges to Latin American immigrant children’s school success by exploring the role of home-school conflicts in their current educational failure. Using the issue of cultural discontinuity as an example, it will argue that a range of institutional factors interact with structural barriers such as poverty, segregation, and limited English proficiency to further disadvantage low-income Latin American immigrant students, and this powerful interaction between cultural and structural obstacles must be taken into consideration in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Given the multiplicity of forces at play when immigrant parents and students engage with schools, solely structural or cultural analyses are often inadequate to fully explain the complexity of these exchanges and their consequences. Instead, family-school relations and the accompanying clashes, misunderstandings, and moments of convergence must be viewed as the outcome of a series of mutually constitutive structural and cultural elements, and this analysis will pay special attention to scholars’ treatment of structural and cultural analyses of conflict and school failure.

This paper will begin with an overview of the most prevalent and serious structural barriers in the lives of children of Latin American immigrants: poverty, segregation, and limited English proficiency. It will also include a

discussion of some of the key factors associated with their low participation rates in post-secondary education: an important indicator of the failure of education systems to adequately prepare these students for success in the twenty-first century economy. Next, it will review some of the main theoretical contributions to the study of educational stratification and pay particular attention to the concepts of cultural capital, constitutive action, and constitutive rules. A discussion of the implications of internal school policies, practices, and culture for the academic experiences of low-income children of immigrants will follow, focusing on three of the major analytic points at which home-school conflicts and their consequences can be observed. Finally, the paper will close with a brief review of some of the explanations for immigrants’ academic achievement in the face of considerable barriers. Concluding remarks will include suggestions for next steps in the research and policy arenas as well as school reform proposals to better meet the needs of the growing population of children of immigrants in schools both in the United States and across the globe.

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN IN LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

The widespread educational failure of low-income children of Latin American immigrants in the United States is often attributed to the severe structural barriers that many of these students face: namely poverty, segregation, and limited English proficiency. Scholars have demonstrated the ways in which poverty can affect children’s mental and physical health, academic readiness, access to high quality education, and exposure to higher status peers, all of which have significant implications for student learning (Coleman et al., 1966; Guendelman et al., 2005; Rumberger & Palady, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2007). These structural issues continue to represent some of the most dramatic and intractable sources of disadvantage for poor and minority youth; however, they alone do

not tell the entire story. In response to the pervasive emphasis on structural forces that deprive children of equal educational opportunities, some scholars worked to open up “the black box of schooling” and identify the policies and practices within schools that contributed to negative outcomes. The resulting body of literature has shed new light on the ways in which certain students’ home cultures and the culture and expectations of schools come into conflict and have substantial ramifications for students’ emotional and academic development (Delpit, 1995; Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 2000; Heath, 1983; Ogbu, 1978, 1987, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). When these cultural elements are analyzed in conjunction with the existing structural factors, a full picture of the complex web of disadvantage develops. It is important to first review the major structural issues in order to lay the foundation for more nuanced analyses of cultural factors that complicate the education of immigrant-origin children.

Poverty

Poverty is one of the most critical problems facing immigrant families today, and it has significant implications for children’s educational outcomes. Poverty levels among immigrant families have grown substantially over the course of the past thirty years (Capps et al., 2005). In addition, poverty rates for children in immigrant families are considerably higher than for children in native-born families. U.S. Census data indicates that 21 percent of children with immigrant parents compared to 14 percent of children with U.S.-born parents live in poverty (cited in Shields & Behrman, 2004). Some researchers claim that the criterion of 200 percent of the official poverty threshold is a more accurate indicator of poverty, and according to this measure, 49 percent of children in immigrant families versus 34 percent of children with U.S.-born parents live in poverty (Shields & Behrman 2004). Furthermore, the National Center for Children in Poverty reports that Black and Latino children are disproportionately poor, with 34 percent of Black children and 29 percent of Latino children living

in poor families compared to 13 percent of Asian and 10 percent of White children (Fass & Cauthen, 2008).

The detrimental effects of poverty penetrate all areas of life. The children of immigrants in the U.S. are four times more likely than non-immigrant origin children to live in crowded housing conditions and three times more likely to be without health insurance (Gundelman et al., 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2007). Other risk factors frequently accompany situations of poverty such as living in single-parent families, residing in poorly-resourced and dangerous neighborhoods, and attending low quality schools (Wilson 1996). Furthermore, low-income children tend to be more vulnerable to psychological distress, which may cause difficulties concentrating and sleeping, anxiety, and depression that can negatively affect their academic performance (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2007). The lack of social, political, and economic support for poor families in the U.S.—particularly for non-citizen immigrants—serves to obstruct these children’s educational advancement. In a society often blinded by the myth of meritocracy, where people cling to romanticized and exaggerated stories of their families’ immigration successes (Foner, 2000), immigrant families today receive less support than ever to learn English or find employment and are increasingly denied access to federal public assistance programs such as food stamps, Medicaid, and welfare (Sheilds & Behrman, 2004). Until the crisis of poverty is adequately addressed in this country, significant achievement gains for children living in these circumstances—immigrant and non-immigrant children alike—will be incredibly difficult to realize.

Segregation

Residential segregation, which has been shown to be associated with both racial and class divisions (Conley, 1999; Massey & Denton, 1993), is source of significant disadvantage for immigrant-origin youth in the United States. In fact, many children of Latin American immigrants struggle against “triple segregation,” that is, segregation

by race, poverty, and language. Segregated and poor neighborhoods with diminishing employment opportunities, smaller tax bases, and lower per pupil allocations are more likely to have dysfunctional, under resourced schools with high concentrations of low-income students, less qualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, less rigorous curriculum, and an environment less conducive to educational achievement (Fine, 1991; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). According to a report from the Harvard Civil Rights Project, Black and Latino students are three times as likely as Whites to be in high poverty schools and twelve times as likely to be in schools in which almost everyone is poor. In addition, due to severe racial isolation, Black and Latino students attend predominantly minority schools in disproportionate numbers.

The consequences of school segregation transcend unequal resource allocation and penetrate multiple areas of students’ educational experiences. The effect of peers is one important aspect of this. Studies have shown that peers have a considerable effect on all students’ academic outcomes, and low-income students accrue additional benefits from attending schools with middle class peers (Coleman, 1966; Orfield and Lee, 2005; Schoefield, 1995). Furthermore, Rumberger and Palady (2005) contend that the average socioeconomic level of a student’s school has as much impact on her achievement as her own socioeconomic status. Therefore, the high concentration of children of Latin American immigrants in poor, low-quality schools has major implications for these students’ academic chances.

Limited English Proficiency

Limited English proficiency and the severe linguistic isolation that results from school segregation along racial and class lines are two additional, interconnected barriers that impede the educational progress of too many children in Latin American immigrant families. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are the fastest growing segment in U.S. public schools. Nationally, the figures grew from 2.1 million

LEP students during the 1990-91 school year to over four million in 2002-2003 (reported in Fix & Capps, 2005). That year, this subpopulation constituted eight percent of the entire k-12 student population in the United States. By the year 2000, the number of k-12 children speaking Spanish at home had reached seven million (Fix & Capps, 2005). Students' lack of English skills may mask their true cognitive abilities, and, as a result, many children of immigrants enroll or are tracked into the least demanding classes, classes that eventually exclude them from the courses they need for college preparation (Chamberlain, 2005; Gandara, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). In addition, high stakes tests such as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the Regents exams in New York, and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) set unreasonably short timeframes before LEP students are tested in English (Louie, 2005; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Given that mastery of academic English takes an estimated five to seven years (Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt, 2000), LEP students' frequently poor performance on standardized tests often does not accurately reflect their academic progress. Furthermore, the pressure on schools to demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" under federal *No Child Left Behind* requirements makes LEP students a liability for schools, and thus creates an incentive for them to encourage these students to drop out (Capps et al., 2005). Finally, the variable quality of many of the English-as-a-Second-Language programs currently implemented across the country, compounded by the limited supply of adequately trained teachers, constitutes a serious obstacle to LEP students' chances to get ahead in the U.S. education system (Gershberg, Danenberg, & Sánchez, 2004).

Limited English proficient students suffer additional academic consequences when they attend segregated schools with high concentrations of low-income and non-English speaking peers, and the phenomenon of linguistic segregation is widespread. Currently, almost two-thirds of students across the country attend schools in which less

than one percent of students are limited English proficient. However, almost fifty percent of LEP students attend schools in which thirty percent or more of the student population is classified as LEP (Fix & Ruiz de Velasco, 2001). This form of segregation deprives English language learners of exposure to English-speaking peers, a factor that has shown to be critically important for developing proficiency in academic language (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Furthermore, low-income, linguistic minority students miss out on important social capital generating opportunities such as developing relationships with native born peers and their parents who might help them learn more about the educational and college pathways in the United States. The increasingly intense degrees of school segregation nearly guarantee persistent educational challenges for children of immigrants and other disadvantaged students.

The so-called "achievement gap" continues to be forcefully perpetuated by the powerful social inequality apparent in the high poverty levels, poor school quality, and extreme school segregation found in the lives of many immigrant-origin youth. The lack of comprehensive governmental response or a social support system to address these problems constitutes one of the most egregious failures of the social contract. However, focusing solely on issues external to school operations misses an important piece of the puzzle. Introducing questions about school pedagogical practices, tracking and enrollment procedures, norms and expectations, and the ways in which school personnel interact with students and families is critical to broadening current assessments of the causes of educational problems today and widening the range of possible interventions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND LATINO STUDENT OUTCOMES

The issues of poverty, segregation, and limited English proficiency provide a basic foundation for understanding the structural sources of immigrant-origin students' educational disadvan-

tage in the United States today. These overarching issues help to frame these students' experiences in school and in society and elucidate their daily struggles. In many respects, these problems are quite similar to those experienced by immigrants at the turn of the century. What is different now, however, are the lifelong consequences of not completing high school and obtaining post-secondary credentials. As such, it is imperative to investigate the specific obstacles to the high school completion and college enrollment of children in Latin American immigrant families in order to effectively develop policy interventions, reforms, and strategies to address the needs of the students currently being failed by the education system. Structural analyses are an important first step, but to capture the full range of factors that contribute to these educational phenomena, they must be followed by examinations of the institutional and cultural arrangements within schools that are implicated in constructing barriers to academic success for certain student populations, many poor children of Latin American immigrants among them.

The Value of a High School Diploma

Over the course of the twentieth century, access to higher education has substantially expanded, most dramatically in the second half of the century. Consequently, the labor market demand for education beyond high school has markedly increased (Day & Newberger, 2002; Mare, 1981; Perna, 2005; Porter, 2002; Rowley & Hurtado, 2002; Rumberger, 1984; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). The premium on post-secondary credentials has translated into significant disparities in life-course earnings between those who obtain higher degrees and those who do not. In the United States, the average annual earnings of a person without a high school diploma are \$19,169 while the average college graduate earns \$51,554 if she has a Bachelor's degree and \$78,093 if she has an advanced degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Research has also shown that the benefits of completing college extend beyond the economic realm to include emotional

and moral development and improved health, citizenship behavior, family life, and consumer behavior (Perna, 2005; Rowley & Hurtado, 2002). While the advantages of earning a college degree are considerable, the consequences of dropping out of high school may be even more significant. A study by Wald and Martinez (2003) showed that high school dropouts were more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be unemployed for longer periods of time, and more likely to be incarcerated than people with high school degrees.

In the United States, the rates of high school completion for Hispanic students are strikingly low. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 2006, 5.8 percent of non-Hispanic Whites, 10.7 percent of Blacks, and 22.1 percent of Hispanics ages 16 to 24 had dropped out prior to completing high school (NCES, 2008). Although these data paint a dire picture of the state of Latino education in the United States, they have been questioned for exaggerating Latino drop out rates by including those people in the age range of interest (16-24), specifically Latin American and Caribbean immigrants, who were never enrolled in high school in the United States (Schmid, 2001). It is clear that a drop out problem exists and must be addressed; however, given that approximately half of first generation Latin American and Caribbean immigrants to the United States never enrolled in school in the United States (NCES, 2003), the figures reported by NCES are likely to be largely inflated.

Research conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center indicated that only sixty-six percent of Latino students in their sample enrolled and participated in postsecondary education compared to 74.5 percent of White students and 90 percent of Asian students. Although the data was not disaggregated by generation and therefore cannot speak specifically to the experiences of children of Latin American immigrants, the ultimate message of this and other studies of the educational outcomes of Latino students in the United States is clear: Latino students are struggling, and the education system is failing to meet their needs. The overrepresentation of Latino youth in two-year col-

leges and poor college completion rates are two other trends that give cause for serious concern. Understanding why Latin American immigrant-origin students do not make it to college in the first place, why so few of them persist in earning a degree, and what can be done to better support these students is essential in the face of this growing educational dilemma.

Transitioning to College

Given the demand for post-secondary credentials in the current global economy, it is more important than ever to identify and address the specific impediments to college enrollment. Scholars studying the college pipeline and the low rates of college enrollment and completion among Latino youth have identified a number of micro-level factors that interact with the larger structural issues to contribute to these outcomes. Using two large data sets—longitudinal data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) that tracked a cohort of eighth grade students in 1988 through eight years after scheduled high school graduation and data from the Postsecondary transcript study (PETS) that examined college transcripts from all postsecondary institutions these students attended between 1992 and 2000—Swail et al., (2004) analyzed students' achievement outcomes and identified key mediating factors. On every indicator relevant to college eligibility and enrollment--high school completion; participation in postsecondary education; enrollment in a four year college; enrollment in a two-year college; institutional selectivity; delayed postsecondary entry; attendance patterns, and postsecondary completion--Latino youth performed significantly worse than White students, the primary reference group. These findings are echoed by subsequent reports of the disparity in Latino youths' high school completion and college participation relative to White students (Lutz, 2007; MacDonald, 2004; Perreira et al., 2006).

The novelty of Swail et al.'s (2004) study was its illumination of the major variables at play in the complex process that results in low levels of

Latino post-secondary participation and completion. The authors cite family income; educational legacy (having a parent with some post-secondary education), educational aspirations, academic preparation, mathematics course-taking statistics, and "risk factors" (parents without a high school degree, low family income, siblings who have dropped out, being held back in school, changing schools, earning a GPA the equivalent of a C or less, and bearing children while in high school) as the main indicators that help to explain why, on average, Latino youth are significantly less likely to be eligible for college, to enroll in a four year institution, and to complete any post-secondary studies. These findings are significant, and many of the influential variables identified correspond directly with the structural barriers discussed at length above. However, the study focused predominantly on individual and family-level factors and did not consider the role of schools or other public institutions in promoting or combating these disturbing trends. For example, NELS data grouped students into three categories of college eligibility ("not qualified," "minimally qualified," and "qualified"), and, of the 1000 Latino students in the sample, 557 were considered "not qualified" for college and 166 "minimally qualified." This stands in stark contrast to the breakdown for the 1000 White students in the sample: 390 were categorized as "not qualified" and 136 "minimally qualified." The criteria used to assign students into each category were not provided, but the concentration of Latinos in the "not qualified" category should raise questions about what, beyond individual-level factors such as poverty, parental education, and family size may contribute to the disproportionate number of unqualified Latino youth. School quality, school segregation, school culture, and tracking mechanisms are just some of the institutional-level factors that may also contribute to these outcomes, but this as well as many other studies overlook them in their analysis.

The relationship between student background characteristics, institutional-level factors, structural barriers

to achievement, and educational attainment is highly complex and individuated. However, current research and policy-making tends to focus on individual-level characteristics and ignores the ways in which these different levels interact to support or hinder a child's progress. As a result, critical ingredients may be missing and proposed solutions respond to only part of the issue. To fully comprehend immigrant-origin students' educational experiences and barriers to achievement, the factors under consideration must be dramatically expanded. The complex ways in which immigrant families interact with schools and the often invisible obstacles they encounter is one area that must be probed more deeply. An analytic perspective that takes into account both cultural and structural factors implicated in low achievement levels stands to expand the frame and better represent the totality of this multifaceted phenomenon. Theoretical advances in the study of educational stratification helped pave the way for scholars to engage in substantive empirical work to identify the cultural conflicts that contribute to poor and minority students' difficult educational experiences. These theoretical contributions and their implications for understanding cultural factors in the negative schooling experiences and outcomes of children of Latin American immigrants will be discussed below.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDYING EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION, CULTURAL PRODUCTION & CONSTITUTIVE ACTION

Stratification research has long been faulted for its narrow focus on structural issues. Significant empirical and theoretical advances were made to the study of inequality when questions related to culture and cultural differences were introduced (Gandara, 1995; Gibson, 1988; Macleod, 1987; Valdes, 1995; Willis, 1977; Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Inserting culture into the equation has not always been positive, however, and cultural deficit explanations have had devastating effects on minority populations, includ-

ing the infamous "culture of poverty" hypothesis (see Delpit, 1995; Massey & Denton, 1993; Valencia & Black, 2002 for a longer discussion). Just as purely structural analyses often miss a large part of the picture, culture alone cannot fully explain divergences and disparities in outcomes, educational or other. In fact, attempts to rely solely on one or the other approach run the risk of leading to spurious conclusions with potentially harmful consequences.

Conflicts and misunderstandings between immigrant families and their children's schools and the ramifications of such are a prime example of that which may get overlooked or inaccurately evaluated when structural or cultural analyses alone rather than a combination of both are employed. The intense interactions between home and school may, in fact, be instrumental in the educational failure of many immigrant-origin youth, and they rarely reveal themselves in large quantitative studies or macro-level analyses of educational attainment. A considerable amount of scholarship has worked to identify sources of conflict and confusion, often through deep ethnography (Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1996). This research relies heavily on a long theoretical tradition of work on social and cultural reproduction, and it has made significant contributions to the field. At the same time, however, there are few examples in this body of literature that fully appreciate and account for the intricate relationship between structural and cultural factors; this may be due, in part, to the failure of the major theories to interrogate or attempt to explain this relationship. In order to respond to the prevailing educational crises of poor high school completion and low college participation rates of children of Latin American immigrants, the ways in which micro level cultural forces and conflicts intersect with larger structural issues must be thoroughly evaluated. When used together, theories of social reproduction, cultural production, and constitutive action are helpful in elucidating these links, with the concepts of constitutive action and rules perhaps offering the most concrete ways to identify and understand

the larger implications of quotidian, exclusionary school-based practices.

Scholars' attempts to make sense of consistent patterns of intergenerational status transfer and restricted mobility for working-class youth in a supposedly meritocratic society resulted in the development of new theories to explain the mechanisms by which social inequality is produced and reproduced. Bowles and Gintis (1976) articulated some of the earliest theories of social reproduction, arguing that a deliberate correspondence existed between the organization of work and the organization of schooling so that elites would be trained for positions of power and working-class students would be taught to conform to the social hierarchy and accept their social and professional locations at the bottom. While these scholars were criticized for being overly deterministic and exaggerating the degree to which the economy and schooling are integrated, Bowles and Gintis' theory of social reproduction made a lasting impression on educational stratification scholarship and has continued relevance today.

Through their introduction of the concept of cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) revolutionized the field of social reproduction by asserting that culture serves as a mediating factor in the complex relationship between the economy, the educational system, and individuals and identifying some of the key mechanisms through which intergenerational status transfer occurs. In their original conception, cultural capital referred to the elite resources, knowledge, skills, and experiences that confer social and economic advantages on those who possess them. Bourdieu (1977), using empirical evidence from school-based research in France, argued that school rules, norms, expectations, and even curriculum, were based on dominant forms of cultural capital that elite students acquire early through family socialization. Not all students have equal access to these arbitrary "instruments of knowledge," yet these instruments are made to appear universal and objective and are required for advancement in capitalist societies.

The introduction of cultural variables was a powerful addition to analyses of educational stratification. By depicting cultural practices as a reflection of broader structural forces, however, Bourdieu and Passeron were criticized for limiting the scope of culturally-based explanations (Apple, 1985; Giroux, 1983; Macleod, 1987; Willis, 1997). Through his intensive ethnographic work in a working-class school in England, Willis (1977) depicted the oppositional behavior of the “lads” he studied, and he afforded them a degree of agency that was missing in earlier studies of social reproduction. Rather than seeing cultural forms as a direct product of social structures, Willis argued that cultural attitudes and practices (“cultural production”), particularly those of oppressed groups, must be understood in terms of their own logic. This approach to studying inequality inspired a long line of scholars and dramatically reshaped the academic landscape (Macleod, 1987; Valenzuela, 1999).

The concepts of constitutive action and constitutive rules represent a final intervention into studies of educational inequality that made considerable headway in opening the “black box” of schooling. Mehan (1992) described constitutive action as “elaborate enactments of cultural conventions, institutional practices, and constitutive rules” (p.10) and constitutive rules as the rules that indicate rights and obligations and thus define and constrain the possibilities of human action. The constitutive rules are based on dominant norms and values in a society, and thus tend to disadvantage those people who do not conform to or meet these standards. Mehan et al. (1986) used these concepts in their work to understand the institutional arrangements and processes that produced special education assignments for certain students and not others.

Home-school conflicts based on cultural differences offer a unique site for exploring the nexus of structure and culture through the concept of constitutive action. According to Mehan (1992), “the importance of educators’ constitutive action for our understanding of social inequality is shown when educators determine whether students’

behavior counts for their placement in [college-bound or less rigorous] educational programs” (p.11). It is important to add that parents’ actions [or inaction] may also influence teachers’ perceptions and responses to students beyond students’ own behavior. Scholars have demonstrated the ways in which educators’ feelings toward and assessments of students are strongly influenced by both the students’ cultures as well as teachers’ interactions with parents (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Nakagawa, 2000; Valencia & Black, 2002). The framework of constitutive rules and constitutive action is instructive in helping to analyze the causes and consequences of home-school conflicts, and three examples of these conflicts that serve to disadvantage immigrant-origin youth will be discussed below.

HOME-SCHOOL CONFLICTS, CULTURAL CLASHES AND CULTURAL MISMATCH

Home-school conflicts, also known as cultural clashes and cultural mismatch, have been objects of psychological and anthropological inquiry for a number of years. Psychologists have investigated the effects of such clashes on child development, parent-child relationships, and academic outcomes (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 2000; Garcia-Coll et al., 1995; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Weisner, 1998), and anthropologists have studied the sources of conflict and their ramifications in different cultural and ethnic contexts (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Sociologists have also included this construct in their investigations of immigrant assimilation, mobility, and educational attainment (Bankston et al., 1997; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Zhou, 1997), and it has become an increasingly powerful and politicized issue in educational debates, particularly those surrounding questions of multiculturalism (D’Souza, 1995; Glazer, 1997; Nieto, 1991).

A growing body of literature on the educational consequences of home-school clashes for immigrant-origin youth builds on the earlier work of Ogbu (1978, 1987, 1991, 1993), Delpit (1995) and others (i.e. Valenzuela,

1999), who sought to explore the ways in which societal norms and schooling practices, particularly pedagogy and the relationships between students and teachers inside and outside of the classroom, serve to alienate and/or disadvantage minority students. Ogbu (1991) pointed to exclusionary forces in society (which are mirrored in public institutions such as schools) that reject those cultural characteristics of minority students (i.e. speech, dress) that differ from those of the dominant culture(s). He analyzed the adaptations and coping strategies of these youth in the face of discrimination and barriers to mobility, and he identified key differences in the experiences, challenges, and reactions of those students he called “immigrants” and those he termed “involuntary minorities.” Ogbu (1987, 1991) and others (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Matute-Bianchi, 1991) understand minority youth’s oppositional reactions as strategies of self-preservation in response to constant attacks on their cultural identities. This opposition often takes the form of resistance to authority, withdrawal or apathy in the classroom, and other behaviors that signal to teachers a lack of interest or commitment to education, and it may ultimately serve to hinder these students’ academic progress. Ogbu’s work set forth a framework for analysis of cultural clashes inside schools and laid the groundwork for important research that began to explore the specific policies and practices in schools that served to demean and devalue the cultures of minority students and impede their academic advancement (for examples of such research, see Delpit, 1995; Nieto, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999).

Parent Involvement as a Site of Cultural Clash

Since Ogbu’s foundational work, new empirical studies of home-school conflicts have brought to light the ways in which these conflicts and misunderstandings affect teachers’ perceptions of students and parents, parents’ ability to navigate school processes, interact with school personnel, support their children’s progress, and ul-

timately impact students' development and performance in school (Andre-Becheley, 2004; Auerbach, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 1992; Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Reese et al., 1995; Valdes, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Parents' lack of information about school policies, procedures, and expectations is one issue that has been shown to result in misunderstanding, lost opportunities, and negative assessments about parents' investment in their children's education (Andre-Becheley, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Lareau, 1989; Ramirez, 2003; Tornasky, Cutler & Lee, 2002; Valdes, 1995; Valencia & Black, 2002). The difference between the concept of education in the United States and *educación* in many Latin American cultures provides one poignant example of how culturally bound and normative ideas about appropriate behavior can create a type of home-school conflict and how it plays out for immigrant families. Valenzuela (1999) offers a succinct explanation of this difference:

Educación is a conceptually broader term than its English language cognate. It refers to the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning. Though inclusive of formal academic training, *educación* additionally refers to competence in the social world. (p.23)

A division of labor between the responsibilities of parents and those of teachers often follows from this wider conceptualizing of education in many Latin American immigrant families. In her studies of the way in which the importance of education is transmitted to children in Mexican immigrant families and how these immigrant parents become empowered to participate in schools, Delgado-Gaitan (1991, 1992) encountered many Mexican immigrant parents who felt that their primary role was to raise a respectful child, while the academic development belonged in the hands of the professional teacher. These parents rarely made requests of schools or intervened directly in school-based events, instead, they waited to receive direction from school. Her findings are echoed

in the work of other scholars researching Latin American immigrant parents' relationships to schooling in the U.S. (Reese et al., 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valdes, 1996). The consequences of this subtle form of conflict—that is, different normative conceptions about the suitable role of parents in their children's schooling—can be seen in the ways in which school personnel interpret and respond to parents' behavior (or, in this case, inaction), and how this affects a child's educational experience in the classroom or in the school.

Scholars have shown that active engagement in a child's classroom learning, frequent communication with teachers, and physical presence at school events are generally taken as signs of parent involvement and investment in their children's schooling in the United States (Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 1987, 2003). Parents who do not conform to these behavioral expectations are often assumed to care less about their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). In some cases, teachers and schools have responded to the lack of visible involvement on the part of some immigrant parents by reducing their sense of obligation to their children or concluding that these children cannot or do not deserve to be educated if their parents are not involved (Nakagawa, 2000). Although teachers' expectations of what constitute appropriate forms of parent involvement may not have been clearly articulated, the parents who fail to behave accordingly are sanctioned, and the consequences for these students can be tremendous.

School administrators' or teachers' failure to articulate school norms and behavioral expectations, such as appropriate forms of parent involvement or parents' and students' rights (e.g. to challenge special education assignments or to request additional academic support), constitutes more than just a cultural clash; in fact, this oversight functions as a powerful form of symbolic violence against students and families who may be less familiar with how schooling works in the United States and with the cultural assumptions and expectations embedded within school policies and procedures.. Many immi-

grant parents, especially low-income, poorly educated immigrants, lack basic information about the education system in their host country. Having been educated elsewhere, Latin American immigrants, for example, have different frames of reference for educational processes, policies, and norms. Their limited knowledge and experience with schooling in the United States compounds with existing structural barriers to accessing information such as the lack of translators at school functions, inflexible work schedules that conflict with school events, childcare issues, and transportation problems (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Trumbull et al., 2001). Furthermore, even when school-related information is provided, it may not be communicated in ways that make sense within immigrant parents' linguistic, cultural, and experiential framework (Trumbull et al., 2001). Understanding the educational challenges that low-income children of Latin American immigrants face in the United States requires a nuanced look at all areas of their experience, both inside and outside of the school building. This example of home-school conflict brings into sharp relief the way in which people's behaviors and thinking patterns are culturally bound and how people from non-dominant cultures may be at a disadvantage when they interact with institutions built around a culture different from their own.

Pedagogy and Culture Clash

Pedagogy is another, perhaps more significant, aspect of schooling that can be analyzed through the lenses of home-school conflicts and constitutive action. Pedagogy is not culturally-neutral; instead, certain forms of pedagogy correspond better to certain methods of socialization, communication, and value systems (Delpit 1995; Lareau 2003). In the United States, pedagogy often reflects the dominant, middle class forms of socialization (Chamberlain 2005; Heath 1983; Lareau 2003). As such, the pedagogical practices that teachers employ can be understood as sanctioned constitutive action (Mehan 1992; Mehan et al.,

1986).. Scholars across disciplines have scrutinized different teaching practices and children's responses to them based on their linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds to illuminate the existence of cultural and class-based bias (Chamberlain, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Lareau, 2003; Nieto, 1992; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). They have found that commonly used interrogative methods, communication styles, and teaching strategies (across subject areas) tend to mirror what goes on in the homes of many middle-class White children but stand in contrast to the ways in which many low-income and minority students are socialized (Delpit, 1995; Lareau, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). For example, Heath (1983) concludes that the language used in low-income homes did not prepare children for the type of language used in the classroom. Delpit (1995) argues that the non-authoritative communication style of many progressive White teachers sent mixed messages to Black students about the teacher's expectations. Finally, Stanton-Salazar (2001) describes the individualistic/competitive approach found in many U.S. classrooms as completely at odds with the collectivist value system of Mexican families. Forms of socialization, communication methods and value systems constitute cultural capital, and, in contemporary American schools, middle-class, Anglo forms of cultural capital are most highly valued. As such, low-income children of Latin American immigrants suffer in classrooms where their cultural forms are devalued, and they do not automatically possess the tools to effectively participate in learning in the same way as other students.

Assessment

The inherent inequality built into many forms of academic and psychological assessments has been a hotly debated topic for decades. Cultural and class-based biases built into tests of I.Q. and language proficiency, as well as many other assessments, has been widely evidenced (Chamberlain, 2005; Louie, 2005; Mehan et al., 1986; Noguera, 2003; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). Their continued and expanded

use, however, coupled with well-developed academic tracking systems that frequently place minority students in the least challenging courses and limit their college eligibility, contributes to the perpetuation of disparities in educational attainment. The current high stakes testing regime propelled by federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation is particularly punitive to language minority students who are required to be tested in English after only one year (Louie, 2005). Assessments and tracking are two of the most powerful engines of educational inequality today. Although they do not necessarily attack immigrant-origin students' cultures directly, these, like the other forms of home-school conflict mentioned above, function to put cultural minority students at a disadvantage by requiring knowledge and exposure to certain norms and expectations to which these students may not have access at home.

CONCLUSION

In the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, many low-income children of Latin American immigrants still manage to succeed in American schools that, in many ways, are designed to encourage their failure. Home-school conflicts and misunderstandings pervade these children's educational experiences, and they arrive at school with skills, cultural practices, and sensibilities that are frequently rejected or seriously devalued (Valenzuela 1999). How do some of these students manage to achieve when the dominant culture and institutional practices based on that culture work against them? Some scholars have argued that immigrant parents possess a greater degree of optimism than native-born parents, and this helps to motivate their children to achieve (Kao & Tienda, 1995). Others contend that children of immigrants feel additional pressure to succeed given the incredible sacrifices they have witnessed their parents make on their behalf (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Still others argue that there is a selectivity bias at play that can help to explain higher than expected levels of achievement (Chiswick, 1978; Feliciano, 2005; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996).

Research on the multiple forms of social capital generated within immigrant communities has perhaps made the most significant contribution to our understanding of immigrant achievement. By broadening the empirical and theoretical scope of studies of immigrant achievement, social capital offers a powerful analytic tool. Social capital within immigrant communities, also referred to as ethnic or community capital, has been shown to be generated in various arenas and through many different kinds of relationships (Bankston et al., 2002; Goyette & Conchas, 2002; Noguera, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Zhou & Bankston, 2002; Zhou & Kim, 2006). While scholars continue to reveal new sites and forms of social capital development within immigrant communities, the role of schools in producing and sustaining social capital is still largely unknown (Hannum & Fuller 2002). Exploring the nexus between schools and social capital, and social capital specifically as it relates to academic achievement, is one important way in which research can respond to the crisis of educational inequality.

Beyond increasing opportunities for immigrant-origin youth's social capital development, large-scale, systematic reforms of daily school practices are necessary in order to begin to address the long-term injustices waged against ethnic and cultural minority children in American schools. Teachers must embrace a more expansive conception of merit that acknowledges the skills and talents of youth that cannot be measured in standardized assessments. New forms of cultural capital that may not conform to dominant ideas of appropriate language, dress, and behavior must be recognized and valued in and out of school. Perhaps most importantly, better ways to connect students' families with their schools must be developed, because academic success today requires a coordinated effort among home and school resources. For any of these strategies to work, however, changes must occur on both cultural and structural levels. Reform efforts that fail to recognize and then dismantle the hegemony of one dominant culture that determines and is reinforced

by institutional structures are doomed to repeat these vicious cycles.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 The phrase “children in immigrant families” refers to both first generation (immigrant) children and second generation children (U.S.-born children of immigrant parents). In their research brief based on data from the 2000 U.S. Census, Hernandez, Denton, and Macartney (2007) included children with at least one foreign-born parent in their analysis of children in immigrant families. In this paper, the phrase “children in immigrant families” will be used interchangeably with “immigrant-origin children” to refer to first and second generation children of immigrants.
- 2 The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” are often used interchangeably in studies that include people who trace their origins to Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the Caribbean (Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2002). Most government agencies, including the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Education, use the term Hispanic in their survey materials and in public data. This author prefers the term Latino but will use the term Hispanic when referencing work that originally employed it. A sample of Latinos may include the third generation as well as first and second generation children of immigrants. In addition, the term Latino refers to Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans from the Caribbean as well as people from Latin America. Therefore, data on Latinos does not exclusively describe children of immigrants from Latin America— the population of interest to this paper— but rather encompasses a broader population. Many studies of educational outcomes group students into a single category (Latino/Hispanic) but rarely provide disaggregated data by generation or parents' country of origin; in spite of these limitations, those studies with valuable data on Latino students will be referenced in this paper.
- 3 While this is the general trend, some research has shown evidence of the ways in which the immigration experience can disrupt predicted mobility outcomes and intergeneration status transfer and has highlighted the complicated role that race and ethnicity play in this process (Bankston, Caldas & Zhou, 1997; Gandara, 1995; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ogbu, 1991).
- 4 Low income is defined in this report as twice the federal poverty level or \$40,000 for a family of four in 2006.

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