

Home-school Connections in a Multicultural Society: Learning from and with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

by Maria Luiza Dantas & Patrick C. Manyak (Eds).

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A glance into how diverse families relate to their children's education and schooling and how they negotiate their roles offers valuable insights for understanding the wide range of dynamics operating both in their lives and in society at large. The edited book *Home-School Connections in a Multicultural Society: Learning from and with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families* embodies this notion by carefully examining diverse families' unique child rearing and parental engagement practices, and by presenting the ways in which these practices intersect with schools' expectations and educational endeavors. The editors Dantas and Manyak and authors of the chapters in the book assist the reader in understanding the larger socio-political issues influencing society and our everyday lives in the United States and Canada, and point out the need for nuanced conceptualizations of family engagement in our work to link families, schools, and communities. In discussions and implications of the research, the authors address the *whys* and *hows* of supporting families in their children's education by providing examples from disenfranchised groups such as African-American, Appalachian, Muslim Arab-Americans, immigrant Filipino, Chinese, Latino, Sudanese, and Vietnamese families with respect to their cultural diversity and particularly to family literacy practices.

Centered around the concept of cultural practices (Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003) and drawing on Vygotskian (1978) socio-cultural theoretical alignment with particular emphasis on theory of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), this book collectively lays out the challenges that schools are facing in family engagement efforts and also fulfills a need in the literature by offering powerful practical suggestions, as mentioned in the foreword by Sonia Nieto. Nieto (2010) calls the book "*a treasured resource for teachers who want to go beyond simplistic and static understandings of culture and truly connect with the families of their students in respectful and empowering ways*" (p. xii). The book, divided into fourteen chapters, includes an introductory chapter by editors that prepares the reader to meaningfully engage in the reading of following chapters. A concluding chapter by Ríos summarizes the book's overall arguments and situates those arguments in the current socio-political context of the United States with respect to anti-immigration discourse, immigration reforms and refugee policies, national language debates, and social justice issues.

In the brief introduction, Dantas and Manyak articulate how they value core orienting theoretical concepts as sources of promising practices and argue for the instrumental role of theory in helping us conceptualize meaningful research to help build bridges among educators, diverse families, and multicultural communities by familiarizing the reader with the common overarching themes (e.g., depth of difference, variations in family-school relations, deficit perspectives, recognizing and building on cultural resources) and orienting theoretical concepts (e.g., ethnographic, deficit, and sociocultural perspectives on learning; cultural practices; learning resources; literacy practices; and permeability) that are drawn on throughout the subsequent chap-

ters. In their discussion, Dantas and Manyak focus on language in talking about “culture” and “diversity”. This approach aligns with the other chapters of the book with their emphasis on literacy practices; however, the scope of the introduction would be enhanced by acknowledging the fact that the notion of cultural diversity, with its complex and nuanced intersections of social class, gender, ethnicity, and race, often operates beyond linguistic diversity.

The book is divided into two main sections titled *Home-School (Dis)connections* and *Curriculum Transformations: Learning with Families*; each section includes six chapters written by several different authors. While the chapters of the first section collectively demonstrate the rich and multifaceted nature of diverse families’ lives, and their funds-of-knowledge, the chapters in the second section focus more on non-traditional promising practices that support connecting diverse families and schools. The Curriculum Transformations section, in particular, adds richness to the valuable resources in similar texts that offer a bricolage of authentic parental engagement practices (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). This section also invites educators to engage in multicultural teaching by connecting to home literacies (Souto-Manning, 2013), to form active partnership with parents through genuine dialogues, storytelling and cultural memoirs (Allen, 2007), and to conceptualize diverse parents as equal partners who have the power to create community resources and ultimately build an inclusive school culture (Hong, 2011).

In the first section, in chapter 2 titled *Lost Boys, Cousins and Aunties*, Perry points to the need for an expanded conceptualization of family while exploring the meaning of family with Sudanese refugees by problematizing the traditional notions of the term and the way it limits our understanding of diverse meanings attached to *family*. Moreover, in chapter 3 titled *The Impact of Social Dynamics on Immigrant Children’s Language and Literacy Practices*, Li portrays the enculturation process, intergenerational issues, and differing literacy experiences in home and school by providing a glimpse into the diverse and distinctive nature of Filipino, Chinese, and Vietnamese families’ lives. Similarly to chapter 3, Schulz, in chapter 6 *Building Connections Between Homes and Schools*, shares four case studies from culturally different families, and shows in which ways their diverse home-literacy practices can align or clash with the school’s expectations. In chapter 4, *A Mother and Daughter Go to School*, Compton-Lily details the encouraging story of a single mother and her daughter, and their dedication to education. Likewise, in *Chapter 5, Discontinuities and Differences among Muslim-Arab Americans*, Sarroub emphasizes the need for employing interdisciplinary lenses in understanding both diverse families’ rich social and cultural resources and their challenges that are increased by the limiting stereotypic views at play in society. The first part of the book ends with Monzó’s chapter, *Fostering Academic Identities Among Latino Immigrant Students*, in which Latino parents’ particular cultural practices toward instilling a sense of positive academic identities in their children are unpacked.

Exemplifying the promising practices presented in the second part of the book, chapter eight, titled *Do You Hear What I Hear?*, sees Edwards and Turner present the parent story approach used by African-American parents, illustrating the complexities in their lives, and eliciting their struggles and dreams. Additional chapters envisioning new possibilities in home-school collaboration are Dantas and Coleman’s chapter 9 *Home Visits*, and Long and Volk’s chapter 10 titled *Networks of Support*, in which the authors highlight the important “others” in children’s out-of-school lives as teachers with whom they engage in sophisticated literacy learning experiences, and conceptualize children’s homes as learning spaces for teachers. Both in McIntyre’s

chapter 11, *Issues in Funds of Knowledge Teaching and Research*, and Yeager and Córdova's chapter 12, *How Knowledge Counts*, authors provide insights and practices in pushing us to consider the often unrecognized rich human resources in children's lives and the potential learning opportunities that could be developed by educators. The second section of the book ends with Botelho, Cohen, Leoni, Chow, and Sastri's Chapter 13, *Respecting Children's Cultural and Linguistic Knowledge*, in which they centralize pedagogies focused on multiliteracy as important tools to discover and draw upon children's home and community resources for building curricular connections.

A distinguishing feature of the book is one urban and two suburban teachers' commentaries. In the commentaries, teachers discuss the chapters in the book and how they, as teachers, move beyond incorporating children's cultural backgrounds only by using artifacts and commonly used thematic lesson plans, and how they integrate children's funds-of-knowledge, which results from both positive and challenging out-of-school experiences, into the curriculum.

The main goal of this book could be described as embracing socio-cultural (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) and ethnographic traditions (Gutiérrez and Rogoff, 2003; González, Moll, Amanti, 2005) in thinking about diverse families and linking these accessible theories to meaningful practices. In each chapter, the theoretical lens and the way it is embedded in the research process is clearly articulated and each chapter ends with several discussion, extension, and application questions that invite the reader to move beyond the focus of the particular chapter and to brainstorm ideas based on the reader's own experiences. The book mainly focuses on children in early childhood and elementary school and their families; however, the insights it provides are not age or grade level dependent. These characteristics suggest a broad audience, including researchers interested in non-traditional thinking about family engagement practices, educators who are working with diverse families, and novice researchers who are discovering the importance of employing theoretical and methodological perspectives that would enrich research with diverse families as free as possible of limiting assumptions and judgments.

All in all, this book is a timely one that provides an inclusive and realistic portrayal of American society within the context of family, school, and community relationships. Through offering snapshots of the multifaceted nature of families, and disrupting hegemonic notions of family and family engagement conceptualized from the perspectives of schools that position diverse parents as passive actors, this book illustrates the power of research studies that move stereotypes and deficit perspectives away from the center of inquiry without falling into the trap of viewing particular culturally and linguistically diverse groups as homogenous entities.

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