

Intersections of Official Script and Learners' Script in *Third Space*: A Case Study on Latino Families in an After-School Computer Program

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Abstract: Drawing from sociocultural cognitive theory (Cole, 1996), this study explores the participant structures of an after-school Latino family computer program. The program was designed to strategically create flexible participation roles. The study uses discourse analysis and the concept of third space to show how Latino families used their funds of knowledge to become brokers for each other as they learned about basic computing practices for educational applications. In third space, where the curriculum script and the families counter-script intersect, what counts as knowledge is negotiated and co-constructed. The study is relevant in light of the increase in use of learning technologies within the new paradigm of constructivist pedagogies that emphasize a shift in foci from teaching to learning, from individuals to collectives, and from habitual to reflective practices.

Keywords: social cognition, discourse, diversity, learning environments

A sociocultural approach on learning places primacy on the social and language practices of learners. The approach is particularly useful in understanding the educational processes of ethnically and linguistically diverse communities whose difference has been historically seen as a deficit in educational institutions. Drawing from this theory, this study examines the participant structures of an after-school program to determine if and how they enabled Latino migrant families to use their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992) mediated by their language and social practices. The program designers had hoped that the participants, using these funds, would become brokers for each other as they learned about basic computing for educational applications. The program design was, after all, based on two inclusionary instructional design models, participatory curriculum (Auerbach, 1989) and project-based learning (Marx, et al., 1994), which directly address participant structures. Participant structures, or ways in which the parents and students interacted, were guided by norms that were co-developed by them and the facilitator. Those norms called for the participants to take an active role in deciding and reflecting upon the program's curriculum and the associated methods used to cover the curriculum.

The Migrant Education Technology (MET) Program is an annual program established by a Midwestern, urban public school district's bilingual education department. The main goal of the program is to provide access to basic computing and educational applications to migrant students and their families; and thus narrow the digital divide. In order to participate in the program, students have to be in good academic standing, as well as have good citizenship and attendance. The students' families are also required to participate in weekly two-hour sessions where they are introduced to basic computing and educational applications. For example, the families learn how to open, close, print, and save documents in Microsoft Word 97. Forty-four hours worth of audio- and video- tape data collected during the 1998-1999 school year was used for this study. That year, there were a total of 22 morning and evening two-hour weekly work-sessions and a total of twenty-three MET participating families involved. The analysis below, based on a transcript translated from Spanish into English, comes from an evening work-session that took place in the middle of that year in the presence of eight attending families.

To explore the participants structures in the MET program, the study uses critical discourse analysis (Luke, 1996) and draws from the concept of a third space where the official or curriculum script and the learner script converge in meaningful authentic ways (Gutierrez, Baquedo-López, Tejeda, & Rivera, 1999). The interaction has been characterized as a new sociocultural terrain in which what counts as knowledge is negotiated and co-created. The discourse analysis foregrounded below (a) focuses on the third space construct in terms of the curriculum content, the people doing the negotiating and co-creating of the content, as well as on the negotiation process, and (b) is representative of the participants' discourse and analysis of the study.

Mrs. Vallejo, a member of the morning group, joined the evening group on this occasion as she had missed several of the morning sessions. The facilitator asked Mrs. Vallejo to summarize what the morning group had been

discussing at the beginning of the program. This request or initiation by the facilitator and Mrs. Vallejo's response represent an official script, a normative pattern of interaction found in most classrooms. Mrs. Vallejo summarizes that in the morning group, five of the ten mothers had asked the facilitator for ways to improve their children's reading and writing. The facilitator had suggested to use word-processing programs like Storyweaver to practice writing and reading. In light of this suggestion, the question of which language, Spanish or English, to use to write the stories emerged. Mrs. Vallejo shared what the morning group had decided on this sub-question with the evening group, "Many persons said that it is better that they get taught English (at school) and in the home Spanish should be spoken to them." Mr. Villa, one of the parents, interjected, "How? Combine both languages?" To this Mrs. Vallejo answered, "Yes. Others said that it is better that they (the students) learn their language (in school)." Again Mr. Villa interjected, "Their language of origin?" Mrs. Vallejo confirmed and continued, "Yes. So that they learn their language and then English. Before, they (school officials) didn't do that. They (students) went in with Spanish and they (officials) demanded English." These exchanges by Mrs. Vallejo and Mr. Villa indicate an instance of third space because they challenge traditional roles in several ways. First, the curriculum content that Mrs. Vallejo shared was initiated by morning MET participants not the facilitator. Next, two learners, Mrs. Vallejo and Mr. Villa, not two program designers negotiate this content. Furthermore, the process of negotiation situates Mrs. Vallejo as a more knowledgeable other and Mr. Villa and the listeners as a less knowledgeable others. The process of negotiation and co-creation that emerged between Mrs. Vallejo and Mr. Villa is further characterized by the teacher-student interdependent relationship (Rogoff, 1990). For example, Mr. Villa positions Mrs. Vallejo as "teacher" by requesting that she clarify, "How? Combine both languages?" He also works as an active listener by contributing, "Their language of origin?" Lastly, Mr. Villa directly situates Mrs. Vallejo and the content she presents as official knowledge when he asks, "So, how should we (the evening group) do it?" To which Mrs. Vallejo responded, "We (morning group) wanted to write what we were going to do and do it." At this point, Mr. Villa asked, "Like a homework?" Mrs. Vallejo replied, "Yes. We put that responsibility on ourselves. And then we would come back and discuss it." In sum, we see that the content of this discussion was about the language practices of the Latino migrant families—whether to use Spanish or English at home and at school. Through the collaborative effort of Mrs. Vallejo and Mr. Villa, this content became the official script of the program. As such, the participants' funds of knowledge became central resources not deficits.

Although the intent of the MET program, to introduce the migrant families to basic computing and some educational applications, lent itself to particularly well to providing a space for their "script", the study does point to several important implications. In order for third space to emerge, a) participant structures must position learners in roles that are flexible and dynamic, b) instruction needs to be consciously local and contingent on the interests of the participants, and c) instructional activities need to be strategic, in that the teacher intentionally opens the floor for what will constitute the curriculum. Working towards third space is useful because it is respectful and responsive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of learners. It is also a useful approach in understanding how to effectively support learners to negotiate a multiplicity of discourses as opposed to simply transmitting to them an official or standard body of knowledge that is monolithic and monocultural.

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