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Kids in the Middle: How Children of Immigrants Negotiate Community Interactions for Their Families
Vikki S. Katz (2014). New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 192 pp, ISBN: 970-0-8135-6218-6

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Over the years, scholars have documented the work that children of immigrants engage in at home and in the community as language brokers. Children may place phone calls, schedule appointments, fill out applications, solicit social services, and stand in the middle communicating for parents, teachers, medical personnel, and other providers. These activities may be invisible to the outside world, but are critical in the establishment and survival of some immigrant families living in the U.S. In her recent book, *Kids in the Middle: How Children of Immigrants Negotiate Community Interactions for Their Families*, Vikki Katz offers an in-depth analysis of the language brokering activities of Latino children of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Katz, an associate professor of communication, examines how children develop and improve the strategies they use in assisting their families across various physical locations that parents and children come into contact with in their everyday life. In this four-year ethnographic study, Katz documents the experiences, struggles, and practices of Latino immigrant families living in the city that Katz calls Greater Crenshaw in California.

A central focus of the book is how children influence family interactions that take place in the home, at school, at healthcare facilities, and at social service institutions where families most often solicited services. Using a family system approach framework, Katz examines how the family unit influences brokering and how children and parents are able to individually and collectively learn from each other and develop strategies to understand their community. The Latino families Katz studied lived in a predominantly low-income and underserved community where access to resources and Spanish personnel were scarce and scattered. Katz points out that the dynamics of the institutions that families entered also influenced how effectively families were able to use the strategies they knew in order to achieve particular tasks and goals. Katz uncovers how children's activities as brokers contributed to families' engagement with local resources within the community. The narratives from children, family members, community

service providers, and teachers demonstrate how the activities enacted by child brokers often involved complex interactions and negotiations between parents and children, providers and children, and teachers and children. Katz is able to capture children's perspectives on their positionality and agency as language and cultural brokers and the implications brokering has on their personal goals and lives.

Between 2006 and 2009, Katz conducted a series of in-depth interviews with parents, children, and service providers and conducted extensive field observations at select locations. Using a randomized telephone survey of the local community, Katz identified 20 Latino parents and 22 children between the ages of 11 and 19 that met criteria for her study. Katz and her two bilingual research assistants conducted semi-structured interviews with the parents and children in their home. During the face to face interviews, that usually lasted between 45 to 120 minutes, the children and parents were interviewed separately in their preferred language. All parent interviews were conducted by Katz and one research assistant to ensure fidelity, since Katz was not a native Spanish speaker, and all but one child was interviewed in English. Despite Katz limited Spanish proficiency, she was able to build rapport through the aid of her bilingual research assistants who facilitated Spanish language interactions as she notes in the appendix.

Written for both the general audience and scholars, Katz traces children's language brokering activities across various community spaces. Katz makes the case for a family system approach that involves family dynamics and interactions revealing the various strategies that parents and children used in the home and community to communicate and obtain services. Katz vividly illustrates how children brokered for parents and for siblings at home, at local schools, at healthcare facilities, and at social service locations using children, parents, and service provider personal narratives. Katz is able to capture how within these spaces, brokering involved more than merely translating interactions with English-speaking providers, but it consisted of brokering cultural knowledge and norms of the U.S. (white, middle-class) mainstream—of which, Latino immigrant parents lacked knowledge of. Throughout her book, Katz highlights how children and immigrant parents worked together to acquire information from media sources, community members, and schools to effectively broker and engage with service providers and teachers in the community. She attempts to illustrate this through the various voices and actors involved in brokering activities children engaged in on a daily basis.

A central aspect of Katz book is her portrayal of children as active agents as they engaged in brokering activities, illustrating how children enacted their agency through language brokering within various social spaces. In particular, Katz examines how the immigrant bargain (Louie, 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) was a central aspect of brokering activities and motivation for the children of immigrants. Children who were the primary brokers in their family felt a sense of responsibility and honor in helping their parents through their brokering. For most children, brokering served as a form of repayment for parents' sacrifices as immigrants, while also acknowledging their parents' limited English skills and the language barrier imposed on their families. For the immigrant families in Katz's study, doing well in school was a way to fulfill the immigrant bargain; however, as she points out, most child brokers were not doing well in school. Katz documents how brokering placed a strain on children's education and academic success. She points out the negative consequences of brokering: low grades, increased absences, and negative perceptions from teachers. Katz emphasizes the constraints that brokering placed on children and their future, noting that the immigrant bargain is never fully obtained in the long-term.

Katz seems to view brokering as important for making local connections, and thus focuses on evaluating the impact of brokering activities on immigrant families' engagement with the community. Less emphasis is placed on how children develop their learning and bilingual competencies through language brokering. Katz seems to suggest that despite children's language brokering efforts, their language and learning was falling behind. She notes that most of the children in her study were either failing a class or exhibited limited language proficiency in English, Spanish, or both, raising questions about the effectiveness of their brokering. Children's capacity to translate was questioned by Katz since students were not performing well academically; however, she concludes that parents and children developed their Spanish and English through scaffolding activities when brokering, learning new concepts through the media or other resources. Marjorie Faulstich Orellana would disagree with Katz's view of children's development and learning; in her work, *Translating Childhoods: Immigrant Youth, Language and Culture* (2009), Orellana considers the role that translation work plays on children's learning and developmental process through a sociocultural theoretical framework. Although coming from different disciplines, both authors would agree that the efforts of these children should not go unrecognized, but should be identified and supported by teachers and service providers.

What sets Katz's study apart from Orellana's (2009) work, is that she brings light to children's, parents', and service providers' perspectives on language brokering and the role all three play in language brokering activities and in communicating to acquire resources.

For educators, understanding language brokering requires a deeper understanding of the process and the activities in which children engage. Katz presents teachers in her study as being ambivalent and unaware of the brokering activities children of immigrants enacted. She finds that teachers' presence in the lives of these children were neither overtly negative nor positive. Therefore, connections to teachers and other educational resources were limited. In her concluding chapter, Katz offers recommendations for providers to better assist Latino immigrant families as well as recommendations for educators. Katz suggests providing support and developing best practices to communicate with parents and interacting with child brokers. However, Katz fails to address how to better improve child brokers' educational attainment outcomes and academic success in the long-term. As educators, teachers are often times a direct source of support and resource for children of immigrants. Teachers should be more attuned to Latino children's sociocultural context of brokering activities outside of the classroom and how these activities may influence their learning. Teachers could take advantage of children's brokering activities by allowing students to bring in their knowledge as brokers into the classroom and further developing their language skills and learning. Educators can help improve children's skills as language brokers and help the children of immigrants fulfill the immigrant bargain.

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