



Intercultural Capital

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What is it?

Pierre Bourdieu extended the concept of capital (financial assets) to cultural capital (knowledge and experience that serve as assets) and social capital (networks of relationships and influence), presenting both as ways status and success can be conveyed across generations. In keeping with this, intercultural capital includes intercultural experiences, skills, and competencies (i.e., fluency in several languages or time living in multiple countries). All of these forms are types of symbolic capital – manners of being, seeing, acting, thinking, and all provide resources for success beyond the more traditional forms of wealth.

Who uses the concept?

Interest in the concept transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries and domains of practice, encompassing, among others, the fields of education, communication, media, politics, sociology, psychology, and human rights. Greatest attention has been paid to the role intercultural capital plays in providing bilingual/bicultural students the capacity to successfully negotiate diverse racial and ethnic contexts.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Intercultural capital assumes the skills to interact successfully with cultural others, and these form a necessary prerequisite for intercultural dialogue. One implication of intercultural capital: bilingual/bicultural individuals who are otherwise not wealthy nonetheless should be understood to possess essential skills that – when duly recognized and valued by the respective sociocultural environment

– are likely to facilitate access to and success in the “global village”. Intercultural capital both depends on and influences opportunities for intercultural dialogue. It relies on interactions with previously unfamiliar customs, environments, people, or languages, whilst playing an important part in realizing such opportunities in the first place.

What work remains?

Important theoretical questions concern the relationship between different forms of intercultural capital, their respective transferability into other forms of capital, as well as the ways in which they are realized and realizable. Further investigations of the role of intercultural capital in more contexts would be valuable.

Resources

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- Richardson J. G., & Bourdieu P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.