

Examining Community Cultural Wealth of Multicultural Liaisons and Their Leadership During COVID-19

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The phenomenon of linguistic brokering for families has long been a discursive area of study that has recently risen as an issue of equity in the field of family–school partnerships (Martinez et al., 2009; Orellana et al., 2011; Tse, 1996). That role has also evolved as the scholarship on family engagement suggests schools intentionally integrate family and community input instead of assimilating families to school-centric norms (Herrera et al., 2020; Ishimaru et al., 2016). In a partnership, families are provided with more opportunity to participate meaningfully in their children’s schooling, and multicultural liaisons—the individuals who broker for the families—are well positioned to mediate their needs and perspectives. Throughout this manuscript, we use the term *multicultural liaison* for school employees hired to work with multilingual families to emphasize the important cultural and linguistic brokering they perform.

In the last two years, our work with families with refugee experiences in two school districts in a Northeast city was stalled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools moved curricula to remote instruction, we witnessed an overwhelming shift that impacted families we had gotten to know through our study and the multicultural liaisons who faced greater responsibility to support the families in their communities. To understand the tensions affecting multicultural liaisons in these situations, we employed community cultural wealth (CCW), a model that Yosso (2005) developed based on Critical Race Theory (CRT), in a qualitative case study of five multicultural liaisons. Our purpose was to better understand how these multicultural liaisons negotiated these tensions, especially as inequities emerged during COVID-19. To understand their perspectives, we examined the following questions: In what ways do multicultural liaisons draw upon CCW to transform schooling for families with refugee experiences during a COVID-19 school year? Additionally, how might inequitable conditions motivate forms of leadership in the role of multicultural liaison?

We use Yosso’s CCW as a conceptual framework to examine the forms of cultural wealth the multicultural liaisons use to help families participate meaningfully in their children’s schooling. We first examine the major themes in the literature related to expectations and perceptions surrounding the work of multicultural liaisons. We propose Yosso’s CCW model to gain a more nuanced understanding of the discursive ways that multicultural liaisons, who come from diverse communities themselves, approach their work with refugee and immigrant populations, and can act as leaders within their school communities.

Literature Review

Examining Tensions Related to the Role of Multicultural Liaisons

There is a reservoir of research describing family engagement that centers on student achievement (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Expanding on this research are studies that focus on the role of partnership between families and schools (Grant et al., 2013; Haines et al., 2015). The importance of family–professional partnerships is particularly clear for families of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). Within the dynamics of a family–professional partnership, especially with families with



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linguistically diverse backgrounds, a multicultural liaison is a key individual who helps families negotiate and interpret the mainstream educational system (Tadesse, 2014). In general, multicultural liaisons offer a multitude of assistance to families, including interpreting, mentoring children in the classroom, and advising families about their health and employment needs (Howland et al., 2006; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Furthermore, multicultural liaisons engage school administrators and teachers to help them become more aware of the cultural and linguistic traditions, as well as community resources, that these families bring to the school (Shiffman, 2019). As the navigational and linguistic skills of the multicultural liaison have been prioritized in the literature, so too are the benign expectations (e.g., school-centric norms and values) that some scholars highlight surrounding these skills (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Yohani, 2013). The work of multicultural liaisons can be complicated if they also associate as members of that community. They are aware of the nuanced experiences of their communities, as well as the barriers families must overcome when interacting with the school system. At times, multicultural liaisons strive to help families navigate barriers they face themselves. In their work, Ishimaru and colleagues (2016) draw attention to families who continue to perceive their children's schools as unwelcoming and who feel their experiences and needs are neglected or dismissed. Citing Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003), Ishimaru et al. (2016) refer to the experiences of families from *nondominant* communities as "low income, immigrant/refugee, and other communities of color, who have been marginalized by dominant institutions, policies, and practices" (p. 3). We emphasize this definition to draw attention to the intersecting identities of refugee families and multicultural liaisons who experience complicated and ongoing migration experiences well after they settle in their host country, and who manage myriad competencies related to linguistic, networking, and resource-assembling skills that they draw upon from their own communities. The degree to which multicultural liaisons can highlight these differences as strengths, both in the families they assist and in themselves, depends on their own agency. Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone (2007) refer to their role as tenuous, as they encounter competing expectations between families and schools. How they choose to manage these competing responsibilities depends on how they navigate their roles as either potential tacit reproducers of the dominant culture or as leaders who partner with families in disrupting the structural inequities that keep their children from advancing in the school system.

Liaison Work as a Reflection of Redressing Inequity

It is important to remember that family interactions with schools in the United States have had a complicated history and continue to be challenged by structural inequities, especially for nondominant families. The education of Native American Indian children has been especially brutal (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), as has the schooling of Black and Brown children (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Although interactions between families and schools have been precarious, organic activism, family advocacy, and community leadership efforts seek to redress social inequity (Ishimaru, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). It is within this paradigm that multicultural liaisons can work with nondominant and linguistically diverse families to increase their belongingness in their children's schools and to uplift and center the experiences of these children and families in the school system.

In the literature, we point to conceptual models highlighting equity opportunities to counter the power dynamics that inherently exist in relationships of schooling and learning. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) concept of the institutional agent describes "an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority" (p. 1067) in an educational setting. Stanton-Salazar used this concept to describe the kinds of social and cultural capital and resources that contributed to the development and welfare in his study of youth empowerment. He describes a *bicultural network orientation* model that relies on the institutional agent and youth student working together to counter the assimilationist agenda or "culture of power" that preserves the status quo of middle class/affluent white normative values. Within this model, institutional agents hold a leadership role as they teach families and children to decode these ideological values and help them negotiate lives in multiple worlds while maintaining their sense of identity.

Conceptual Framework

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Resource Model

To acknowledge the tensions that multicultural liaisons experience, the tug and pull they negotiate between teaching families about the normative practices of schools and exposing them to potential inequities that are rooted in those practices, we use Yosso's (2005) CCW model for understanding the agency of multicultural liaisons in these educational conditions. Yosso's model takes a different stance from Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social reproduction and draws upon the tenets of CRT. Yosso defines CRT in education as a theoretical framework that challenges systemic racism and the ways that race is prevalent in educational structures and practices. Her definition "acknowledges the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 74). There are six forms of capital Yosso refers to as *cultural wealth*: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. Drawing upon the work of other scholars who have dedicated their careers to amplifying the discursive experiences of Communities of Color (Anzaldúa, 1987; Auerbach, 2001; Bartolomé, 1999; Gándara, 1995; Garcí & Baker, 1995; Moll et al., 1992; Solórzano, 1992; Valdés, 1996), Yosso describes these forms as dynamic and fluid rather than static and monolithic. She defines these forms in the following way:

Aspirational Capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers; *Linguistic Capital* includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style; *Familial Capital* refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition; *Social Capital* refers to networks of people and community resources; *Navigational Capital* refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions and *Resistant Capital* refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (2005, p. 80).

To examine the experiences of the multicultural liaisons in this study, who themselves have refugee and immigrant experiences, we use CCW to describe the different forms of capital they employ to mediate conversations about schooling and learning between families and schools. The cultural

wealth that emerges from these interactions is often overlapping, and in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, has become a powerful antidote to the inequity that the pandemic has unearthed for most families of low income and refugee status. It is within this context that we use CCW to address two questions: In what ways do multicultural liaisons draw upon community cultural wealth to transform schooling for families with refugee experiences during a COVID-19 school year? How might inequitable conditions motivate forms of leadership in the role of multicultural liaisons?

Study Overview

Background and History

This report, which takes an intensive look at the role of multicultural liaisons, is part of a larger, embedded, multiple case study project (Yin, 2017) aimed at broadly exploring the nuances of relationships between refugee families and their children's teachers in U.S. schools (Reyes et al., 2021). The larger study involved 32 families and their children, 36 teachers, five multicultural liaisons, and 11 administrators. Over two years, we interviewed families and students twice per year and multicultural liaisons and teachers once per year. We interviewed administrators once during the project. Interviewing multicultural liaisons (called home-school liaisons by the school districts) was key to understanding these relationships, and their important role as institutional agents who were community and school leaders, especially during the pandemic, compelled us to conduct the present study focused on them.

Multicultural Liaison Participants

The study involved interviews with five home school liaisons who were members of the language communities they served (Table 1). The liaisons mostly resettled in the Northeastern area because it was a refugee resettlement area. Many of the multicultural liaisons and their families either arrived from refugee camps in Nepal and Kenya, or fled from the Middle East. The languages they interpreted included Nepali, Mai-Mai, Somali, Lingala, Kirundi, French, Swahili, and Arabic.

During the first two years of our study, pre-COVID-19, we conducted two interviews in English with each of our multicultural liaisons that lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours. We wrote field notes and analytic memos immediately following these interviews. We also collected field notes and analytic memos and transcriptions from family interviews that featured multicultural liaisons. We also collected observation notes of the multicultural liaisons. The interviews were semi-structured and open ended. Since the study explored partnerships between families and

TABLE 1.
PARTICIPANTS

Name	Country of Origin	Education	Year of Arrival in U.S.	Languages interpreted
Mr. Mugisha	Rwanda	Partial university completion	2007	Kirundi, Swahili
Mr. Kumar	Bhutan	Teacher education degree	2013	Nepali
Mr. Ashok	Bhutan	Teacher education degree	2011	Nepali
Ms. Amirah	Iraq	Teacher education degree	2008	Arabic
Mr. Bondoko	Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)	Post-secondary degrees	2005	French, Swahili

schools, our questions related to their relationships with the families they worked with, their perception of their liaison work in their communities, their perceptions of U.S. schools, their own school backgrounds, and relational practices they perceived that would foster positive home–school partnerships. We had informal relationships with the multicultural liaisons, checking in with them periodically during this study to ask about the families.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we invited the multicultural liaisons to a focus group to share how they were faring in their communities. Four of the multicultural liaisons were present for this focus group, and we interviewed the fifth participant separately because she experienced a schedule conflict and could not attend the focus group. The purpose of the focus group and interview was twofold: to learn how families served by the multicultural liaisons were doing with remote education, and to understand how the multicultural liaisons' work had changed during the pandemic.

Employing CCW to Analyze our Data

We analyzed a total of 12 transcriptions from the two interviews for each multicultural liaison and the transcription from the final focus group and interview. Using qualitative software, we conducted two stages of initial coding as we examined the interview transcriptions noting general themes (Saldaña, 2019). We employed *in vivo* coding, focusing on participants' words and phrases. Afterwards, we discussed how we would group words and phrases together, creating a title for each broad category, which we transferred to a table. We reviewed these categories with the multicultural liaisons for member checking. Using the CCW model, we proceeded to assign the forms of cultural wealth that resonated most with each category. Afterwards, we shared the quotations that we highlighted based on the CCW model with the multicultural liaisons to ensure we understood the context in which they shared these stories. We used field notes and family and teacher interview transcriptions to contextualize the findings. The following section describes our findings.

Findings

We introduce the findings in two sections: “Clocking in and clocking out”: Familial, linguistic, navigational, and resistant forms of cultural wealth, and “I was one of the [Pandemic Emergency Team]”: Expanding on social forms of cultural wealth. In the following section, we unpack each theme, noting the fluidity of the forms of CCW and how they overlap, and include quotations from the multicultural liaisons that correspond to the forms of CCW. We argue that each form of cultural wealth was present in our findings to a degree, especially linguistic and navigational forms that the multicultural liaisons used to support the families. Our findings also expanded on forms of social cultural wealth to highlight the potential for reframing school interactions with families. We follow this section with a more succinct discussion of the themes and their significance to the way the multicultural liaisons' roles varied during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Clocking in and Clocking Out”: Familial, Linguistic, Navigational, and Resistant Forms of Cultural Wealth

How the multicultural liaisons prioritized their relationships with families and their children during the pandemic reflected the fluidity and interlocking nature of familial, linguistic, navigational, and resistant social wealth they drew upon in their interactions with families. The multicultural liaisons viewed trust and kinship as essential elements of working with families. When pushed to decide between assisting a family or keeping to their prescribed duties and work hours, they prioritized the families. There was tension around how the multicultural liaisons should mark their hours. One multicultural liaison described the idea of “clocking in and clocking out” or the time spent assisting parents that could be billed to the school district or employer versus what they did to help families that was not billable to the school. Participants spoke to the fragile web of trust and need to be responsive despite official hours of work. Especially with recently arrived families with refugee experiences, building trust is based on the history and cultural institutions that multicultural liaisons know about their communities (e.g., sharing migration stories, experiences of living in a refugee camp), and spending unrushed time with families is a critical component of maintaining trusting relationships.

This organic nature of relationship-building conflicted with the idea of multicultural liaisons needing to account for or “clock” specific activities they did with families. This was particularly difficult to distinguish during COVID-19, when much support occurred over the phone during hours convenient for families (e.g., weekends, evenings). Some of the multicultural liaisons, like Mr. Kumar, navigated a clocking in/clocking out system in his school district, which helped him become more aware of the activities he was doing throughout the day, but also how the school was compensating his time. He said,

We have a regular clocking in time, clocking out time. But during weekends we have weekend times, and also in the evenings, we have COVID code for clocking in and out. So, from different sources, they're getting money. So, we are paid differently.

Mr. Kumar realized that the time spent on the weekends would come from a different pool of resources. Other multicultural liaisons did not describe a similar process at their schools.

When we asked the multicultural liaisons how they managed to help families and students during COVID-19, it was clear that determining the priority of families' needs, how they should help them, and in what format they should provide that help became an ethical dilemma. Mr. Bondeko explained that the “kids [and families who] were traumatized in a process, a new process,” suggesting that families with refugee experiences who have experienced trauma in their home countries and then during their migration journeys to the U.S. were suddenly being re-traumatized during the pandemic. He described the “messiness” of supporting families with certain tasks that sometimes required the support of refugee and immigrant service providers when schools could not immediately address family needs (e.g., internet service, health services). During the pandemic, this overlap sometimes created tension for the multicultural liaisons as they drew on their navigational wealth to seek help from agencies that operated outside of the school. Mr. Bondeko described an expectation from his school district not to spend the school day searching for resources outside of his own institution. Mr. Bondeko resisted the notion of staying within the prescribed parameters of his position, instead defaulting to exploring ways to support his community. Justifying his actions, he said,

I remember we had this meeting back and forth. And, hey, as a school [employee], you're supposed to stay here. And we said, okay, if you are doing your job, those parents are not supposed to come to us. So, it means you are not properly doing good job.

Mr. Bondeko's display of passion reflected his earlier perception of finding himself and other multicultural liaisons “in the mix of trying to help the kid in the school,” while also navigating the overlapping boundaries of support from the school and community service providers and lack of clarity around which institution oversaw the delivery of which resources. Mr. Bondeko also described the tension around determining the most appropriate way to support his families. His school district strongly urged him not to enter families' homes during the pandemic. Providing families with internet service so their children could attend class remotely and access their homework was a point of contention for Mr. Bondeko. Resisting the school mandate, he visited with families in person to explain the steps for contacting the internet provider and enabling Wi-Fi access. He asked, “Where else would they find assistance?” This rhetorical question reflected the ethical quandary he faced, knowing that he could provide families with the linguistic and navigational skills to acquire internet access so their children could attend class online and not fall further behind. He approached the school policy for social distancing in a similar way. Risking infection and virus spreading, Mr. Bondeko evoked the absolute trust that families valued in their interactions with the multicultural liaisons. He said,

Who can come and say, hey, don't go in families' houses because you have to be careful with the virus and all that? You can talk on the phone, but there are things which you have to be in that house in order to solve it. And one of them, like you have new families, they don't have internet. What do you do? You have to go there and do it.

Trust with families meant prioritizing their needs during an emergency, and multicultural liaisons were keenly aware of the obstacles that some newcomer families encountered when they first

arrived in the U.S. since some of them had experienced similar journeys. For example, Mr. Mugisha described stories of families who would show up at school unexpectedly or would call him at home in the evenings or on weekends to seek advice or help with a problem that sometimes was not school-related. During COVID-19, these calls for help became even more intense, and the boundaries of the time on the “clock” became even blurrier. Yet the multicultural liaisons viewed their bond with families and their ability to help families with any of their needs as invaluable, something they perceived schools were not able to fully do for families without them. Therefore, when the multicultural liaisons were asked to clock in during COVID-19 like any regular school day, some felt they would lose the trust and respect with families they made such significant effort to nurture.

Some multicultural liaisons realized this way of clocking time did not recognize the human and economic toll it took for them to do their job thoughtfully with families. The reality of the pandemic compelled Mr. Bondeko and others to weigh more seriously whether their institutions valued their contributions to the school. Mr. Bondeko used his advocacy skills to join the state governor’s working taskforce for racial equity. He said, in a tone that underscored the complicated history he had with speaking up for equity issues related to refugee and immigrant communities and not feeling heard, “We produced three recommendations ... And I helped to write the chapter about liaisons.” Soon after, the multicultural liaisons received a pay increase, which Mr. Bondeko and the others attributed to federal emergency funds the school districts received during the pandemic. Mr. Kumar used the word “boss” as a term of respect when he described how Mr. Bondeko’s leadership motivated others to act on their own behalf. He said,

we [other multicultural liaisons] also started asking because he [Mr. Bondeko] started. Okay, so I think because of him and, also, we also put a little bit of our own effort ... I just like to thank him for doing that.

Mr. Kumar described how Mr. Bondeko’s actions and beliefs made him realize it was okay to “fight” for compensation that valued their unconditional support to families. Mr. Mugisha also appreciated his colleague’s leadership in speaking up for the multicultural liaisons, although he wished the schools could have recognized their work sooner. He said, “I think they understood that it was long overdue something needed to be done. Liaisons needed to be treated equally ... Everybody should be treated equitably.”

“I was one of the [Pandemic Emergency Team]”: Expanding on Social Forms of Cultural Wealth

During the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several opportunities for multicultural liaisons to engage social forms of cultural wealth, and in this section we describe opportunities to broaden this concept. The multicultural liaisons described the overwhelming transition from in-class to remote learning and the impact it had on their work with families and students. There was a great deal of pivoting to help families address both physical and mental health in addition to helping families access the curriculum for their children. Health quickly compounded the loss in children’s school instruction. The COVID-19 disease quickly spread across households of families that lacked health-safety guidelines in their languages, mobilizing forms of networking or social wealth for some of the multicultural liaisons. Mr. Kumar described how he was quickly invited to join school personnel and health providers who referred to themselves as the [Pandemic Emergency Team] to combat the spread of the disease. He said,

I was there every time with the city of [Harrison], with the school nurses, the superintendent of [Harrison]. We used to have COVID meetings every day ... and then we just tried to figure out what are the next steps we need to do. Either we supply food to the families, how to connect with them, or transportation for their children and their families ... to the testing center. We talk about how many people are positive and what are the planning and what other things are done so far ... So, a lot of initiatives [from] the city of [Harrison], school district superintendent, and the school nurses and I was also one of them.

Mr. Kumar elicited a sign of pride in being asked to join the [Pandemic Emergency Team], a leadership initiative, because key school personnel and school nurses were chosen to guide and put into place the health policies for the entire school district. Ms. Amira, who worked in the same school district, said the structure that the Pandemic Emergency Team put into place helped facilitate the contact tracing of the virus in the families who became ill and needed immediate assistance. Likewise, during the state vaccine rollout, the system enabled multicultural liaisons to assist families with scheduling appointments at vaccine clinics or testing centers. As a member of this networking team, Mr. Kumar utilized social wealth to guide other multicultural liaisons in his school district to support refugee families with their academic and health needs. Other multicultural liaisons described a different network that their schools developed to address the pandemic. Mr. Mugisha said his case was a bit “exceptional,” because when his school was dealing with COVID-19 he was quarantined in Rwanda and was unable to travel back to the U.S. for eight months. He said,

So, I was doing my work from there, which was another challenge because the internet service is not necessarily as fast as you may want. ... I mean, the structure that we had was always the same. ... We have a system that we use [that] we call [aid] desk tickets. So, we were getting the [aid] desk tickets from everybody. And it was a lot. So, we had to do more meetings than usual, like maybe a couple of meetings a week. So, I think we had our own structure as the multilingual liaison team. And I don't know, it was just too much work and without realizing that you're having a team and it was just overwhelming.

In contrast to the well-defined expectations Mr. Kumar was able to describe from the school pandemic emergency team, Mr. Mugisha navigated linguistic brokering from another country. The system that his school used required him to interpret and manage meetings as best he could with families and teachers from afar. He knew that the multicultural liaisons at his school district were working together, but he was isolated, and it was unclear to him how his school coordinated the work of the multicultural liaisons during the pandemic.

The pandemic highlighted the academic “waste” in learning that all the multicultural liaisons observed happening to all the children in the schools but especially to the children in their communities. Technology had always been an issue of equity, but suddenly the gap widened even more for students of families who were feeling already behind in their technology skills. Remote learning exacerbated the lack of school progress for all students in the schools, and while the multicultural liaisons used their navigational resources to direct the families to more sources, they noted limitations with helping some families address the social and emotional tensions in the home.

Families perceived more intergenerational stressors increasing with isolation for adolescent students with refugee and immigrant experiences. One participant described adolescents going into their room and not sharing with parents if they were attending remote classes or doing their homework. For example, Ms. Amira added that while the health measures improved in her community, she felt there was little that she, as a multicultural liaison, could do with the shortened instructional time as classes pivoted to remote delivery. She said, “They get kind of used to half a schedule for classes in the semester and they focus on just less homework, less activities.” Describing her work with mostly middle school Arabic-speaking students, Ms. Amira noted the sporadic interruptions with COVID-19 infection. A student would get ill and then classes would be temporarily placed online. A few days later, the students would come back to school, but then another student would get ill, or the teacher would get infected and would have to go home and find a substitute teacher. Students became accustomed to fragmented and shortened learning. Ms. Amira said,

I literally [was] myself facing a lot of challenges [with the] middle school age. Students deal with the school again. It's kind of they need someone to teach them again how to deal with the school, how to finish a full day [of] school.

Ms. Amira highlighted her role as the social conduit between her student and the sporadic school life. She perceived her role as restoring a semblance of stability to her student's life as they transitioned back and forth with remote learning.

A more somber consequence of COVID-19 was the deteriorating effect it had on the relationships between families and their adolescent children. Ms. Amira described one of the young Iraqi adolescents who “struggled with social contact,” and who needed more social and emotional bonding with a group of friends to counter the isolation he was feeling, something that she recognized was happening to many children. She recounted how his parents would contact her three to four times in one day for help managing their son or checking up with him in school.

Mr. Ashok described some of the families in his community who felt a lack of connection with their older children, which dwindled even more during the pandemic. He said,

I feel for them. They are so helpless. ... The parents cannot do anything. The child does not stay home, goes to a friend's home, sleeps over there, and goes to school or sometimes doesn't go to school from there. So, when I speak to the parent, the parent starts wondering, what can I do?

While the multicultural liaisons described similar stories of disengagement from some of the adolescent children they worked with, there were moments when they were inspired to think creatively about how to address what they perceived as threats to the fabric of family life in their communities.

Mr. Ashok wondered about the possibility of transforming the way schools could work with families/caregivers to address impossible situations tearing at the families. These possibilities related to drawing on social forms of wealth embedded in the community, and he suggested broadening the parent–school conference to include other family members or neighbors especially when seeking support to address adversity. For example, Mr. Ashok desired a more community-oriented way of holding school conferences. He said,

That is something that the school and the parents have to meet together, and I think [we] have to make a plan ... how the child can be helped. And also, it is important to talk with the other neighbors or the other community members who can help. If the parent cannot; at least, some of family friends, the relatives, they can help. But the thing is here that when we schedule a meeting, when parents and teachers meeting, something like that, the teacher wants to see only child's parents, only the dad or the mom. So, the others, because many of the other relatives, the friends, family friends, also not able to help.

Mr. Ashok referenced “here” to mean schools in the U.S., as opposed to the more community-based and collectivist approach that some of the families experienced in the refugee camp school where he taught as neighbors looked after each other's children.

Resource Opportunities and Tensions

Yosso's (2005) CCW model helped us understand the tensions (i.e., technology, language, school expectations, work hours, and responsibilities) the multicultural liaisons experienced while helping families and children manage the effects of limited resources and unpredictability during COVID-19. The data from our study specifically illuminated the experiences of a group of multicultural liaisons who themselves were from the refugee and immigrant communities for which they interpreted and, because of this bond, were compelled to do more for their communities. Findings from this study highlighted (a) the inconsistencies in the forms of cultural wealth that multicultural liaisons were able to draw upon during the pandemic because of the structural systems they worked in, (b) how multicultural liaisons recognized their leadership potential as they examined how to uplift their communities during the pandemic, and (c) the excessive demands on the personal time of some multicultural liaisons who began to question the degree to which the pandemic conditions exploited their labor.

During the pandemic, the multicultural liaisons utilized their familial, navigational, linguistic, resistant, and social forms of cultural wealth to help families. They described various approaches to mediating information from the school as some of the multicultural liaisons drew upon community resources as a strength. Additionally, COVID-19 pushed many to become more aware of the inequities that impacted low-income families who needed a cavalcade of support.

Navigating support for families requires that schools recognize the way bureaucracy impedes action for equity when interacting with families and children from nondominant communities (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Paris & Winn, 2014). Determining how to support refugee and immigrant families requires schools to heed the input of community leaders as a humanizing response for addressing obstacles families may encounter in the schools, and sometimes these leadership roles are assumed by multicultural liaisons. As evidenced in the reflections of some of the multicultural liaisons in this study, they were aware of their abilities to navigate the school system during the pandemic, use language skills to negotiate internet access, or leverage the social and health needs of refugee families when they were able to join a leadership team. As one of the multicultural liaisons rhetorically asked, where else could they find assistance or *who* else would be able to better assist the families than their multicultural liaison? Yohani (2013) and others (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000) also emphasized the importance for schools to advocate for additional support that sometimes extended beyond the classroom, suggesting the crucial role that the multicultural liaison could have in a family school partnership.

The participants in this study assumed leadership roles during this time as they responded to the needs of the families they served even when these needs did not fit into the timeframe and school rules. They taught families how to monitor their children's remote education at home, sought resources for food-insecure households and those with no internet, and joined leadership and advisory boards. They felt limited in their abilities to support families whose children began to withdraw from remote schooling and would not log on to do their work, and this was frustrating. They perceived that families felt disempowered to help their children adjust to remote learning because of their nascent understandings of U.S. schools. At the same time, the participants noted inclusive ways to partner with families during these emergencies, but they perceived these ideas as contrary to the established way of doing things at their schools. Nevertheless, they felt strongly that involving other community members was a more familiar way of countering adverse situations. According to Yosso (2005), drawing on social contacts can provide emotional support. Although the multicultural liaisons were not trained specifically to address health and mental issues, their presence and ability to draw upon forms of community cultural wealth provided a stabilizing force for the families.

Finally, multicultural liaisons themselves became more aware of personal inequities when it came to documenting their work and contributing to the schools. They experienced the responsibility they had for their communities, unable to stay within the parameters of their prescribed job responsibilities for helping families and subjecting themselves to the coronavirus infection in an effort to help families keep up with their children's schooling. Although they did not use the word exploitation, they began to associate their value with their salary, and some described how they felt overtaxed with school responsibilities even before the pandemic because they were already working intensively with the families and their children after school hours. School districts that received special pandemic funding used some of those resources to compensate the multicultural liaisons who worked evenings and weekends. The participants recognized the work of key members within their cadre of multicultural liaisons who marshalled efforts to speak on each other's behalf when it came to economic recognition for their demanding work. They described the tensions of advocating for families and working within the confines of their school role, while aspiring to uplift their communities in pursuit of equitable schooling for their children.

Implications for Practice and Research

There is great potential to transform the way schools collaborate with families in true partnerships (Ishimaru et al., 2016), and ensuring equity and access for all families requires leadership from diverse perspectives. Inequities that existed before the pandemic were exacerbated, therefore it is paramount that we act to improve equity. Multicultural liaisons have a tremendous amount of cultural wealth that positions them to be key players in the transformation of tired, bureaucratic educational systems to innovative, responsive educational systems, but the conditions within which they work can either nourish or stifle this wealth.

A strong implication from our findings is for schools to center the position of multicultural liaison, involving them in leadership decisions where their input can help transform schools into culturally responsive institutions (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). It also involves fostering professional autonomy (Marshall et al., 2012), providing compensation commensurate with their responsibilities, and providing professional development opportunities so they can stay abreast of pedagogical and systems changes. Furthermore, multicultural liaisons are “community connectors” (McKnight & Block, 2010, p. 132), meaning they “have the capacity to connect others in our current communities” (p. 132). McKnight and Block recommend forming a “Connector’s Table” in which community connectors “can become initiators of a new community culture as they consciously pursue the connective possibilities they envision” (p. 134). To center the role of multicultural liaison, the school district leadership may need to re-evaluate what equity means for the emotional and financial sustainability of the multicultural liaison, ensuring their work is valued appreciatively.

Another implication of this research is to strengthen the collaboration or partnership between families and caregivers and schools. A finding in this study was that many families rely on individuals who are not the biological family of the student; this is not new information (Yohani, 2013), yet our findings demonstrate that these school district policies are still limited. Allowing families to choose who is involved in a child’s education enables those caretakers to collaborate with the school and can help schools gain a more holistic view of the child. Furthermore, much work can be done to improve the relationships between schools and families (Georgis et al., 2014; Isik-Ercan, 2012, Tadesse, 2014; Yohani, 2013). Programs that bring together families and schools in more intentional and systematic ways are well-positioned to ameliorate inequitable practices that marginalize nondominant families.

Conclusion

In this study, we utilized a critical lens to examine the work of multicultural liaisons and the different forms of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) they used to support families through the leadership roles they assumed during the pandemic. We described the kinds of familial, navigational, linguistic, resistant, and social forms of cultural wealth participants engaged with schools and families. While multicultural liaisons were able to utilize and promote their cultural strengths, the degree to which they could amplify this work depended on their own positioning in the schools, and the potential integrated approaches schools had for partnering with families and schools.

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