

Family Stories Matter: Critical Pedagogy of Storytelling in Elementary Classrooms

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Abstract

Culturally responsive educators advocate for a greater emphasis on family and student voices that invoke their lived experiences, cultural knowledge, ancestral wisdom, and supportive familial relationships. However, few educators know how to bring these stories directly to K–12 classrooms. Using a participatory action research methodology, I incorporated the counter-stories of students and families in an elementary school curriculum. As we practiced storytelling in family wisdom circles and in teacher meetings, I listened for epiphany moments that demonstrated how storytelling as an act of critical literacy requires “listening to witness.” As families, students, and teachers witnessed each other’s stories, they redefined power relationships in classrooms and the school at large. By redefining how curriculum and instruction efforts can fully engage parents and students in its creation and implementation, the findings have implications for antiracism education and unmasking the role of privilege and subtle forms of oppression.

Keywords: Counter-stories, Culturally sustaining curriculum, Witnessing, Family partnerships, Participatory activist research

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The voices of those most oppressed in society are essential to creating a reimagined narrative of and for students of color in schools and communities (Delgado, 1989; Delgado Bernal et al., 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Too many schools have failed to embrace the increased diversity in linguistic and cultural practices in American society and do not fully honor communities of color and their stories and practices. In fact, schools generally address English language learning through state policy, law, and processes that segregate rather than support (Valdés, 2020). As such, the mainstream educational system relies primarily on a Eurocentric curriculum and pedagogical approaches that elevate the dominant culture and devalue indigenous epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gay, 2018; Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Mills, 1997). History, too often taught from the perspective of the dominant racial group, centers the languages and cultures of that group in classrooms, which devalues the histories, languages, and cultures of people of color (Cruz, 2016; Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Rather, culturally sustained educators prepare students to navigate the dominant culture and ensure that curriculum and pedagogy are culturally sustaining and culturally responsive by centering the cultural experience of the students and families (Boykin, 2020). Culturally sustaining pedagogy fosters the linguistic and cultural pluralism that is representative of a democracy, recognizing that students learn best by incorporating a foundation in their historical and family cultures. This pedagogical approach incorporates youth voice and youth cultural practices and makes certain that youth have access to dominant culture competence (Paris, 2012). In this study, I worked with a team of educators to honor the stories of families and students as critical literacy touchstones. We reimagined the fifth-grade curriculum and pedagogy and are using what we learned to transfer the learning schoolwide.

To counteract dominant narratives, communities of color can engage in counter-storytelling, i.e., narratives of their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Stories help children and youth make sense of the historical moment in which they are living and support them to develop the resilience they need to resist the dominant narrative (Guajardo et al., 2016; Prieto & Villenas, 2016) and know

how to navigate in the larger society from a lens of strengths. The counter-stories are a way to connect to families and inform the curricular and pedagogical practices of teachers. Educators have a social and moral responsibility to bring the stories of all students into the curriculum and embody the critical literacy teaching pedagogies for social justice (Freire, 1970; Mahiri, 2008; Muhammad, 2018).

Participatory Action Research

I am the principal of an elementary school in northern California where I conducted a participatory action research (PAR) project and study as a doctoral student. I partnered with families, teachers, and students to interrupt the usual curricular and pedagogical practices. Together, we investigated how the curriculum could be more responsive to the lived experiences of students and families in the community. By utilizing the community learning exchange (CLE) (Guajardo et al., 2016) processes and protocols, we engaged family and student stories as an integral part of the curriculum and learning experiences for our students. Our purpose was to counteract the dominant narrative that students of color are deficient and unlikely to succeed, and we relied on the traditions of critical race theory and *testimonios* (Pérez Huber, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006). As an Afro-Latina principal, a turning point in our process was sharing my story as an immigrant to the United States. Growing up in a poor section of Caracas, Venezuela, I knew firsthand how communities of color often engage in counter-storytelling to share their dreams, hopes, and aspirations for their children. Telling my story supported others to be transparent and vulnerable. Throughout the project, we contested the negative stereotypes of people of color that prevail in society and curriculum by bringing the counter-stories of youth and families of color into classrooms (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A team of teachers, parents, and I co-designed a curriculum built on the strengths of communities of color through counter-stories of families and their vibrant cultural life. We built on this initial work to transfer the processes to the curriculum of the entire school.

In this article, I outline the overarching foundational frameworks that guided the study and continue to guide our work—critical race theory, critical race pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and CLEs. Through three cycles of PAR inquiry, we drew on families' assets to redesign the curriculum; learning together how the family and student stories become an intrinsic part of the curriculum and a learning experience for the teachers and students (Bell & Roberts 2010; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013; Pérez Huber, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Finally, as school leaders, teachers, parents, and students we incorporated those stories in K–12 classrooms to go beyond listening to fully witnessing stories of students and families.

Foundational Frameworks

Critical race theory researchers provide analytical and theoretical lenses for examining the history of deficit perceptions of students of color. As well, these lenses provide insight into the histories and experiences of students and families of color as strengths to be drawn and built upon in classrooms (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Emdin, 2016; Mills, 1997). Too often, the dominant group (European Americans) creates a one-sided story about communities of color. The single story portrays people of color as less intelligent and irresponsible while depicting white middle- and upper-class people and values as the norm (Yosso, 2006). Most troubling is that the Eurocentric U.S. history curriculum silences and distorts or dismisses the stories of communities of color (Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Loewen, 1995). The impact of the single stories on students of color are “too devastating to be tolerable” (Gay, 2018, p. 1).

In contrast, counter-narratives from the perspectives of people of color transgress oppression and give hope and resilience to marginalized communities. According to Delgado (1989), oppressed groups know that these stories are essential tools for liberation. He argues that reality is socially constructed by the exchange of stories about individual situations and that counter-narratives of subordinated groups can be used for self-preservation and addressing oppression. Counter-storytelling encompasses resisting the internalization of the negative images and stereotypes in society

and naming the history of the oppression. By engaging in this process, the storyteller moves away from internalizing negative images produced by the dominant groups and finds healing, mental health, and liberation. “Telling counter-stories brings people of color together and creates group solidarity” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2437). Yet, often, schools do not provide a safe space for telling counter-stories in ways that honor the heritage of families and youth cultural practices (Paris & Alim, 2014).

The stories of youth of color and their families are counter-narratives, *testimonios* or *pláticas* that are filled with expressions of hope, resilience, and aspiration; these stories offer portraits of family values and goals (Yosso, 2006). *Testimonios* offer stories that are often in the oral tradition of a community, but rarely written. To testify in many cultural traditions is to witness and to declare openly one’s personal moral code and faith in possibility. Guajardo and Guajardo (2013) name these stories *pláticas* or “an expressive cultural form shaped by listening, inquiry, storytelling, and story-making that is akin to a nuanced, multi-dimensional conversation from our parents” (p. 161). The stories, passed from generation to generation, are often told at the dinner table or family reunions (Guajardo et al., 2016; Pérez Huber, 2009), but not often in schools.

Critical pedagogy practices dismiss the single narratives imposed upon youth of color, interrogate the Eurocentric narratives in classrooms, and build on the strengths, gifts, and stories of students of color (Perry et al., 2004). For critical pedagogues, schools are not neutral spaces; they traditionally function as an arm of the government to maintain the domination of the oppressed (Freire, 1970; Gay, 2018; Jimenez, 2010; Khalifa, 2018; Lynn et al., 2013). According to Freire (1970) and hooks (1994), by systematically and intentionally using the tenets of critical pedagogy, teachers and school leaders can examine the role that schools play in the reproduction of inequities. Thus, a primary purpose of education is to transform the institution of schools and liberate the oppressed. By explicitly addressing race and power in the education of students, teachers can encourage educators to address controversial topics with an understanding of the endemic nature of racism of American society (Lynn et al., 2013). Educators can support students to understand the power dynamics in society and work toward relinquishing power in their classrooms by empowering the voices of students of color. Lastly, a critical pedagogy encourages educators to enact liberatory pedagogy by “advocating for justice and equity as a necessity” (Lynn et al., 2013, p. 620).

Culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally centered pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally sustaining pedagogy share a similar goal: make teaching and learning responsive to the needs and cultural backgrounds of students of color (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). First, authentic relationships between teacher and student are critical. Authentic relationships encompass adults caring for children “as students and as people” (Gay, 2018, p. 59), and building trust with students through acts of caring, listening, and by being more vulnerable and authentic with them. At its core authenticity is being able to share one’s identity. Through authentic interpersonal relationships, teachers empower students by turning their personal interests and strengths into opportunities for academic success (Valenzuela, 1999). Secondly, teachers encourage students in co-creating knowledge. By using culturally empowering praxis for teaching children and youth of color, teachers collectively design and implement an approach that incorporates the stories of students and families as a centerpiece for curriculum and instruction.

Using Research Processes that Mirror Beliefs

Using research methodologies that mirrored the project’s philosophical point of view and foundational frameworks was critical to the process in the school. I drew on the tenets of PAR as activist research (Hale, 2008, 2017; Herr & Anderson, 2014; lisahunter et al., 2013) and CLE axioms and processes (Guajardo et al., 2016). Activist action research relies on an explicit focus on social change, a community orientation, and fully engaging the participants in the implementation and the analysis of evidence. Researchers concentrate on “place-based problems through processes of collective learning and community capacity building” (lisahunter et al., 2013, p. 26). By adding activist to the action research methodology, I was better able to set up conditions for collaboration with others, engaging in dialogue to understand our reality, and bringing history and reflection to the research process with the goal of enacting change in our communities. The critical standard

of validity for activist research is its usefulness to the participants (Hale, 2008), and the evidence verifies that all members of the community responded positively to the process.

I was the lead researcher and participant observer in this project. I have been a principal for 22 years and this is my fifth year at the school. Originally from Venezuela, I am a second-language learner deeply committed to school experiences for children that include their cultural heritage. In collaboration with a group of parents, three fifth-grade teachers, a school counselor, and a community-based organization leader, I facilitated a PAR project in three successive cycles of inquiry over 18 months (September 2019 to December 2020). In the PAR project, I observed and documented the inquiry process and reflected on my role as an insider working with other insiders (Herr & Anderson, 2014). As an insider, in my role as principal and as a Black Latinx woman, I needed to be mindful of how I could reduce the influence of my position as supervisor in the decision-making process of the group.

As a result, the group adopted the activist research process as intrinsic part of how we continue to facilitate and conduct our inquiry at the school. Building on the work in the fifth-grade curriculum and pedagogy, we are guiding the shift to culturally sustaining curriculum and pedagogy for the entire school to decenter whiteness and center the curriculum on the lived experiences of students and their families (Paris, 2012).

Secondly, the CLE axioms and processes offer a methodology for collecting and analyzing evidence. The axioms state that learning is a dynamic social process; conversations are critical; the people closest to the issues are the best situated to address local concerns; crossing boundaries enriches educational processes; and hopes and change are built on the assets and dreams of locals and their communities (Guajardo et al., 2016). The processes of an exchange, which imply the crucial elements of interaction and reciprocity in the experience (Dewey, 1938), are grounded in developing a gracious and invitational space for participants. By ensuring that all community members participate, and the processes provide a space for sharing and learning across the typical boundaries of race, class, position, or perceived authority, we co-created a space for trusting, sharing, and learning.

I specifically addressed issues of race in the research project by focusing “on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color and view[ing] these experiences as sources of strength” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24); encouraging the use of cultural intuition—our own experiential knowledge in the analysis of data (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Perez Huber, 2009); and using accessible qualitative methods to analyze stories. “Cultural intuition allows [co-practitioner researchers and participants] to theorize and construct knowledge from their own lived experiences” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 648). I used a critical race lens in all aspects of the research project as we co-designed the curriculum and pedagogy. These lenses influenced how we were able to understand the realities that our students of color shared in their stories. The project’s use of storytelling as critical pedagogy brought the voices of families and students into classrooms and mirrors using stories to develop generative themes (Freire, 1970).

In the first PAR cycle, I invited families to a CLE and family wisdom circle with teachers and school leaders. That foundation of family stories was a critical factor in our journey. Teachers and I thought we knew families, but, indeed, we learned from their stories that we were undervaluing their roles—even as we were committed to critical pedagogy and nondominant curriculum and instruction. In the second cycle of inquiry, I recognized that teachers needed deep experiences to be able to fully engage the students. While teachers had strong relationships with students, interrupting the typical fifth-grade curriculum using family stories was new for them. I recognized that teachers needed to experience storytelling and authentic dialogue as participants before they engaged in the task of creating and implementing a curriculum of storytelling for their students. In other words, adult and student experiences needed to be symmetrical (Mehta & Fine, 2015). Thus, in the process of implementing the storytelling curriculum, I used a parallel process for teachers first, so they had the necessary experience before implementing the storytelling in classrooms. In spring 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers piloted one unit of the storytelling curriculum in the virtual fifth-grade classrooms. One student story, which I discuss in the findings, became a linchpin for supporting our efforts in the school and district context.

In the third PAR cycle, the Co-Participant Researchers (CPR) group built on that experience, and the fifth-grade teachers, with a new class of students, implemented the storytelling curriculum in their virtual classrooms. Students interviewed their parents and grandparents to write “I Come From a Place” poems, which produced narratives of their family hopes, aspirations, and resilience. Teachers had used these poems previously, but here students researched their family histories and wrote poems to share with the class. Families joined their children when they shared their poems, demonstrating a collective sense of pride in the families as the children shared and honored their ancestral knowledge. During the student presentations, parents encouraged their children as they publicly shared family stories.

Changing Relationships and Changing Curriculum

To learn from families of color, teachers and administrators needed to practice a different kind of listening. By using CLEs and protocols we created a gracious space for deeper listening from our parent community (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013; Hughes & Grace, 2010). Intertwined in the process of sharing each other’s stories in family wisdom circles, we were able to see each other differently: not as professionals and parents interacting in a school setting but as co-storytellers and listeners and eventually as witnesses of each other’s stories. The process humanized the experience for everyone and sustained relationships (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). As a result of the storytelling process, relationships among participants shifted from hierarchical to horizontal.

One student’s story coincided with the murder of George Floyd and became a powerful example in the activist PAR project. She wrote a response to the murder of George Floyd, and her story had a dramatic impact on the students, the school, and the district. Because of this story, we asked her to be the promotion speaker and share her story. Concurrently, the teacher contacted the district superintendent and Vox News about the stories of the students. Vox’s *Today, Explained* podcast (Hassenfeld & Pinkerton, 2020) invited her to cohost an entire episode about systemic racism and supported the animation of the story, “My Skin is Not a Threat,” (Scheltens, 2020) which has had nearly 600,000 views. The student, now in middle school, presented at the school district board meeting and the teachers, parents, and administrators presented to district teachers and administrators. Thus, the student story exemplifies how to: create a larger political space in the district to listen to the needs of Black students; support educators and district leadership to better understand what it means to partner authentically (these outcomes occur when participants engage in reflection to enact change [Quinn & Blank, 2021]; and provide an example outcome of how to fully enact culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy.

By redefining relationships as horizontal and reciprocal, we moved toward witnessing stories. Witnessing means listening to the stories with one’s heart and mind and suspending judgment or response. Because testimonios are publicly spoken statements that are proof of the existence of something that is often ignored—centering the stories on experiences of the students and families—they offered a public statement of how the teachers and leaders value families and students. Thus, even though I was conducting research, I was not extracting, but listening deeply for the epiphany moments that we could tether to a larger focus on storytelling as an act of critical literacy (Freire, 1970; Mahiri, 2008; McDonald, 1996; Velasco, 2009).

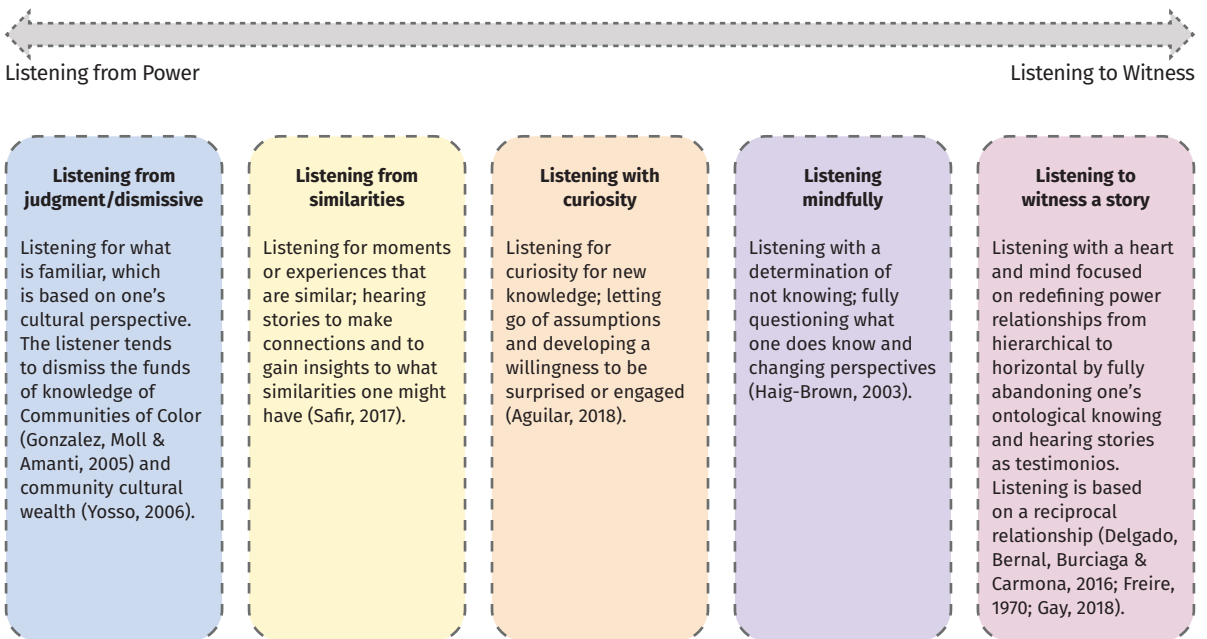
By using the stories to engage students in their schooling and as a curricular experience for reading and writing, we have stronger family engagement in the school and student engagement in the classroom. By drawing on the assets and redesigning the curriculum at the micro level, the people closest to the issue could express hopes and dreams for their children. In the process, we built a stronger community that is now sharing our learning with others who want to adapt this process to their contexts. The student story, of course, is but one example of why this work is important to the students and how the process changes the students’ experiences. By offering a safe space for students to speak their truths, we are modeling for them what school could look like if we engaged their stories.

Storytelling through *Testimonios*: The Path to Witnessing

The path to witnessing stories requires redefining power relationships in classrooms and in schools. To move from listening with judgement—when teachers assume power roles and fail to fully listen to the students—to listening with a sense of curiosity and determination to know differently requires that participants open their hearts and minds to diverse stories and a new way to teach. As a result, teachers redefine literacy (Gutiérrez, 2016). In the process of implementing the curriculum, the continuum of listening from judgement to witnessing a story became more apparent as a path from listening from power to listening to witness (Figure 1). On the judgment side of the continuum, the listener relies on a hierarchical power relationship, only hears what is familiar, and fails to recognize the funds of knowledge of communities of color. What I had come to understand at the end of the third cycle of inquiry is that power influences the ways participants listen to stories, and they oscillate along the listening continuum. To fully witness, the listener needs to engage in a horizontal relationship with the storyteller.

Figure 1

Storytelling through testimonios: The path to witnessing



Those listening from judgment tend to dismiss the funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth of people of color (Yosso, 2006) and concentrate on comparing the story to what they hear instead of listening with full attention. In *listening to witness*, the listener becomes open to redefining power relationships from hierarchical to horizontal; students, teachers, and administrators are simultaneously teachers and learners of each other's stories (Freire, 1970; Gay, 2018; Howard, 2016). Witnessing requires being vulnerable in the moment of sharing one's story (Guajardo et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). As a result, listening to witness breaks down the walls that separate schools from communities of color. Witnessing is what Gutiérrez (2016) calls the third space of cultural literacy, which adds to the physical and cognitive developmental learning space, and the second space of learning from peers in formal and informal learning spaces of school and home. This broadens the concept of learning to include socio-critical spaces for bringing students' socio-historical lives into the formal learning space of school. Witnessing entails being open to new knowledge and stories beyond one's experiences (Haig-Brown, 2003). The listener of the testimonio takes on

the responsibility for self-reflection with an open heart and mind to understand the story from the storyteller's point of view. If listeners and speakers are open to bear witness to each other's testimonios, they give a gift to the listener (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016). As a result of listening without judgement, participants experienced vulnerability and connectedness, and a different sense of community emerged. In this way, our collaborative definition of witnessing contributed to the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, critical race pedagogy, and critical literacy.

Critical pedagogy and critical literacy that involves listening to the stories and testimonios of students of color in classrooms can be enacted in different ways (Benmayor, 2016; Cervantes-Soon, 2016; Cruz, 2016; Jimenez, 2010). Muhammad's (2018, 2020) framework is present when we redefine literacy education as centering identity, offer new ways for students to be competent learners, and use story as text to surface power, oppression, and privilege. We also draw on history to inform current literacy practices and cultivate genius among our youth. By giving teachers parallel opportunities to learn so they could confidently facilitate dialogue and storytelling in student-student interactions, they acquired new ways to support student learning (Mehta & Fine, 2015). By taking time for the reflection necessary to act in new ways, we enact the principles of reflective inquiry to inform actions (Freire, 1970; lisahunter et al., 2013).

To move from listening with judgement to listening as witnesses requires deep reflection that leads to more conscious actions—Freire's (1970) *praxis*. If asking students of color for their familial stories becomes instrumental or graded assignments without developing a genuine interest in listening to each other's stories as witnesses, the process could have negative consequences. Students would experience story extraction instead of witnessing which would result in more harm to students of color who would feel that their experiences and cultural knowledge are not fully valued by educators (Khalifa, 2018; Prieto & Villenas, 2016). While listening as witness is central to the curricula for students of color, no matter what form a story or *testimonio* takes (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016), anyone deciding to use the processes has to be quite careful to scale up the practice in thoughtful ways (Morel et al., 2019).

Concurrently, the process of witnessing *testimonios* and stories is essential for educational experiences in general, not just for the critical pedagogy of storytelling. Education as a process of witnessing rather than merely hearing is a revolutionary concept. This kind of education requires educators and school leaders to engage in a process of reflection and action guided by strong feelings of love for students and communities. This is the kind of love that Rivera-McCutchen (2019) names the "armed love," which requires us to fight for social justice in ways that provide access to curricular and pedagogical experiences that enhance learning. This is the abolitionist teaching of Love (2019), who urges practitioners to work "toward something that is mutually beneficial and supportive to all parties involved" (p. 117). She prods us to become co-conspirators by interrogating "habits and practices that protect those systems" and by fostering the "interior work of silence, meditation, inner wisdom, and deep joy that is inextricably linked to the outer work of social change" (p. 118).

As teachers and school leaders break down walls and acknowledge that their stories of power are the other side of the coin of the stories of oppression, leaders need to embrace transformative leadership to disrupt traditional ways of being and doing schooling (Shields, 2010). To truly witness the stories of communities of color, educators need to be willing to unmask privilege and recognize that their power is the oppression of others. Only then can a community begin to heal from systemic oppression and see how stories become the foundation of an authentic community. By redefining the relationships with our students and parents, we created more equitable opportunities and outcomes for our students. As a result of our work, we were able to use effective engagement practices and diminish barriers to participation for immigrant families and families of color (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018).

We acted upon these beliefs and practices as activist researchers (Hale, 2017; lisahunter et al., 2013). By redefining relationships as horizontal and reciprocal, we became researchers of our experiences and then witnesses to the experiences in ways that supported more authenticity in the curriculum, deeper relationships, and student learning. By drawing on the assets of the students and the group at the micro level to design the curriculum, we leveraged the reciprocal, collective, and relational

family engagement (Ishimaru, 2020). In the process, we built a stronger community that is now using this process across the school and sharing our learning with the others in the district and other educators who want to adapt this process to their contexts.

Expanding Our Reach and Impact

As we considered how to incorporate what we learned more broadly and promoted the processes of the *testimonios* of the students and families of color, we continued to consider two questions:

- (1) How do we support teachers and school leaders to understand that student *testimonios* are a process of witnessing—meaning public listening and relating to the stories—that builds a stronger foundation for curriculum and pedagogy?
- (2) How do we inculcate storytelling and *testimonios* as a critical component of the curriculum and of a standard practice in community schools?

We believe that engaging the whole community in *testimonios* should be a foundational practice for community schools.

In creating community schools and schools that fully engage families and communities as partners, our moral imperative is to redefine relationships with our students and parents so that we can create more equitable opportunities and outcomes. The four pillars of community schools—integrated student supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative local leadership and practices—matter, and the activities that should occur to enact them are interdependent (Maier et al., 2017). This study focused on the pillars of family and community engagement and collaborative leadership to enact a comprehensive strategy for supporting student learning and building a strong instructional core, a key factor in community schools (Quinn & Blank, 2021). Further, the practice of using the community as text is fundamental to critical literacy. How we use stories, experiences, and cultural ways of knowing and doing as elements in redefining curriculum and instruction is an avenue for future practice-based research and action. The use of storytelling or *testimonios* is a way to cultivate bold voices on the margin that become the content and the pedagogy of a culturally sustaining curriculum (Gutierrez, 2021). The storytellers nourish trusting relationships, change the power dynamics in the school community, and co-create horizontal rather than hierarchical relationships—all factors that enhance academic and social-emotional outcomes for student learning and for community school success.

In this process, we created the space for the family and student voices by engaging in a PAR process that we continue to use in hosting schoolwide CLEs and working with grade-level teachers to adapt our processes to their curriculum and instruction. We are concurrently making inroads to how the district might enact its commitment to community schools. As discussed, the student's story, supported by teacher efforts to broaden the audience, brought recognition to the student, our teachers, the school, and to the district. As the district professes to be a community school district, we have opportunities to insert ourselves in the power structure to reframe how students and families connect to schools. Advocates in the district have experienced local and national community learning exchanges and can promote this process and a set of processes to facilitate others in becoming conveners and facilitators of community learning exchanges.

Conclusion

To begin the change, we need to invite parents and community members to work alongside educators to envision what it would be like if we re-created schools where the voices of students and families of color are a critical component of the community schools' model. If we want to form meaningful partnerships and inform our decision making, we can learn as educators and parents, if we listen to those closest to the issues. This is our invitation to community schools: use the authentic stories of the families and students as text for teaching and learning.

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