Leadership for Racial Equity and Social Justice:
Engaging Families and Communities in Educational Research, Advocacy, and Change

ANIQUE SOPHIE TORRES CAIRE, 8TH GRADE

Voices in **Urban Education**

Articles seek to cover a wide range of disciplines with a strong emphasis on intersectional, interdisciplinary perspectives aimed at examining successes, problems, and questions in policy, advocacy, and teaching and learning practices in urban education. *VUE* pays particular attention to pieces that highlight the experiences, hopes, dreams, and concerns of historically underrepresented and vulnerable groups in education, along the lines of gender, race, sexual identity, dis/ability, language, ethnicity, religion, and indigenous or immigration status. As an open access journal, *VUE* aims to disseminate important, topical, relevant, and urgent research, thoughts, and commentary to a wide audience.

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Voices in **Urban Education**

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VUE

VOICES in URBAN EDUCATION

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Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (Part II): Toward Agency, Abolition, and Freedom

On Ruptures, Portals and Opportunities:
Advancing Educational Equity Amid Pandemic Divides

Dr. Rosa L. Rivera-McCutchen, Dr. Ann M. Ishimaru, and Dr. Sonya Douglass

Schools have not been the same since the COVID-19 pandemic forced educational administrators to close their doors in the spring of 2020. Educators worked feverishly to provide instruction virtually and ensure their students had access to food and medical care, all while juggling the fact that their very own families and communities were in crisis. Confusing public health messages exacerbated by the politicization of masks and vaccines and the continued assault on Black lives, civil rights, and democracy put school leaders in a particularly challenging situation. Racial inequities and inequalities became even worse amid what Darity, Hubbard, and Wright (2022) referred to as "the pandemic divide," reflecting the multiple impacts of COVID-19 on wealth, housing, employment, health, and of course, education (Douglass Horsford, et. al, 2021).

Many in the education community considered the opportunities these ruptures in the "normal" way of doing school afforded us. In her essay, "The Pandemic is a Portal" (2020), Arundhati Roy reminded us, "Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next." Educational theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021) made the case for a "hard reset" in education through a "post-pandemic pedagogy" that is more culturally centered and appropriate for students placed at risk based on their racial or socioeconomic status or background.Both Roy and Ladson-Billings underscore the importance of resisting the return to "normal."

Purpose of the Special Issue

This special issue is a reminder to all of us that we must resist that return. These contributions were first drafted during the middle of the pandemic, then revised as schools and the world began to open up. They continue to sit within a moment in time that is still fraught with uncertainty; and yet, the authors have offered reminders of what is possible, and urge us to consider the portals and opportunities that we want to embrace and cultivate. These pieces are windows into a moment that seems so long ago, but is still very much a part of where we still are today.

Taken together, these contributions offer lessons on what we might learn from centering families and communities and disrupting how we typically conceptualize school leadership. In the call, we asked for contributions that took up "the underexamined epistemologies of family and community members within the context of education, privileging their wisdom and ways of knowing as those nearest to the problem." Our hope with this special issue was to interrogate who gets to be considered a leader; if we are to broaden our framing to include community educators, organizers, and multicultural liaisons are leaders, what is the role of systems-based leaders with formal authority and titles? How might we consider them both in relation to each other? The articles in this issue offer examples and ways forward for both, even as they grapple with the complexities of transforming entrenched systems.

Another tension exists in what theories and knowledge sources we include and privilege in the academic tradition, versus what is excluded and whose work is erased. As we take up Critical Race Theory, Black Lives Matter, and community-engaged scholarship in this issue and beyond, it is essential that we center the experiences and perspectives of the historically disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed (Douglass Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2019). In the same vein, as many Indigenous scholars have reminded us, we must also expand our conceptualization of

what constitutes theory and knowledge production beyond the narrow forms recognized by the colonizing academy (Archibald, 2008). Young people and communities are drawing from their experiential, familial, and ancestral knowledges to revitalize and generate new practices and understandings about community care, educational justice and movement building in this particular moment and in their own contexts. The pieces in this issue invite us to acknowledge and honor that lived theory as well and to interrogate possibilities for teaching and learning from these expansive forms of scholarship, theory and leadership in our collective efforts to foster the education our students deserve.

bell hooks reminded us that "whenever we love justice and stand on the side of justice we refuse simplistic binaries. We refuse to allow either/or thinking to cloud our judgment. We embrace the logic of both/and." (hooks, 2003, p. 10). In the spirit of "both/and" Black feminist stances in the work of intersectional justice in education, we share this collection of research, commentaries, thought leadership and youth artwork. The authors, leaders and artists in this special issue offer us visions of the educational futures they are leading and realizing even now, ripe with complexities and potential, in this season of return and resistance.

Special Issue Editors' Note: The APA style guide traditionally dictates the conventions of language we adhere to in the field of education; however, style guides typically privilege white-normative standards that do not reflect the sociopolitical commitments of scholars who are working to disrupt those norms. To that end, we made an explicit editorial decision to honor the choices of each contributor with respect to capitalizing "white" and other writing choices that honors non-dominant language. We further want to highlight that while we (Women of Color) deliberated this decision, we want to acknowledge that People of Color often expend time and energy on these debates when White/white people are uninterested because it changes nothing in their material reality.

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CHLOE ENGLISH, 10TH GRADE

Commentaries
on Urban
Education

Through the Pandemic Portal:
Turning to Community to Cultivate a Relational Paradigm of Leadership

Dr. Ann M. Ishimaru,
Dr. Anthony Craig,
Dr. Constance Daw, and
Dr. William Jackson

Abstract

The global pandemic opened a portal for a different paradigm of educational leadership to emerge. Reaching beyond critique of the conventional, color-evasive leadership research and practice, we share how our leadership of a systems-focused preparation program turned to ancestral knowledges, relationality, and cultural practices embedded in Indigenous, Black and other communities of color to lead possible transformative futures with the youth and families owed a profound educational debt. The program shift enabled the practitioner leadership students to take up their leadership as a humanizing, liberatory practice that works toward familial relations with their students and families. We frame this journey "through the portal" and share excerpts from the public pedagogy of two students as they build from their own experiences as Black leaders who do not simply resist or fight unjust systems, but who also dream and live justice with young people and their families through education.

Through the Pandemic Portal: Turning to Community to Cultivate a Relational Paradigm of Leadership

Ann M. Ishimaru & Anthony Craig

On the surface, the Leadership for Learning (L4L) EdD program might be the last place you would expect as a site for reimagining white normative hierarchical power and systems in education and leadership. Housed in a research-intensive state institution of higher education (that prospered, like other universities, due to colonization, land theft, and enslavement) and structured in an executive leadership format, the L4L program prepares potential superintendents and other systems-focused leaders to take on influential positions in districts as well as regional and state educational agencies across Washington. Although L4L has long prided itself on continuous improvement and rigorous use of research to shape the knowledge, capacities, and practices of systems leaders, the program largely drew from the conventional body of research on leadership. In recent years, through the prompting of equity- and justice-minded students and faculty members, the program has been questioning the dominant assumptions about what and whose knowledge, practices, and outcomes matter for leadership and education.

In the context of COVID-19, the racial reckonings catalyzed by the killing of George Floyd, remote learning, and deep sociopolitical divides, and amid apocalyptic smoke from fires borne of global climate change, our tried-and-true standard curriculum offered few ways forward for addressing the realities our leaders were facing on the ground. These crises were manifestations of centuries of racial oppression and settler colonialism that the pandemic—and sometimes the institutional responses themselves—was exacerbating. The moment forced us, as the director and lead research faculty of the program, to contend with some deeply unsettling questions: How *does* a university-based preparation program support leaders to manage urgent crises in a way that disrupts the injustices that continue to accumulate a profound education debt to Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, Pacific Islander, and other intersectionally minoritized students (Ladson-Billings, 2006)? How *should* we prepare leaders for a system that needs to be fundamentally dismantled and re-engineered? And how might we take up such a daunting task from within a higher education system that, itself, constitutes a colonizing, heteropatriarchal, racist system?

Rather than working to fit the dominant research and white-normative practices of administrative management to the complexities of leading amid cascading historical inequities, we looked instead to the knowledge and practices of learning, well-being, dignity, and leadership that have existed since time immemorial (Smith, 2021). We sought to learn with and from Indigenous and ancestral knowledges,

the land, nondominant cultural practices, and the collective intellectual bounty of critical leaders and scholars, as well as that of our practitioner students (Khalifa, 2018; Simpson, 2014). Indigenous communities have long turned to stories as a way of theorizing about the world, our relations, and ourselves, as they embody deep understandings (e.g., epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies) about the nature of knowing and being, as well as how we should be in relation to each other, to other beings and land, and to the past, present, and future (Archibald, 2008; Bang et al., 2016).

Recognizing this, we invited students to engage in storywork-as-theory from these territories (Brayboy, 2005). Anthony invited his cousin, a Lushootseed language teacher, and her young daughter to share *Lifting the Sky,* a traditional Coast Salish story, with the leadership cohort. Because Indigenous theory in the form of story so often gets flattened into anthropological artifact or colonized as knowledge to own, we worked with students to situate the story as a source of wisdom that changes over time, that must be held and engaged by each listener, that requires relationality and collectivity in the sense-making and holding, and that becomes most powerful when we bring our full selves to the process. As explained by the Lushootseed Department of the Tulalip Tribes of Washington, *syəhub,* the Lushootseed word for story, is an oral tradition, a form of teaching and knowledge-sharing, and more:

> As we are taught, the *syəhub* is a cumulative unwritten tradition, not any one realization of it. It is also a cloud of possibilities with a particular but unstable center around a group of potentialities remembered and forgotten, realized and unrealized, constantly changing, known only fragmentarily by any one person or any one tribe or at any one time. It is a gyre of motifs, rhetorical strategies, characters, plots, teachings, commentary, names, formulas, places, histories, customs, songs, specialized knowledge, and much else. (Lushootseed Department website, Tulalip Tribes of Washington)

We introduced this story with some trepidation, knowing both the dangers of distortion that have generally accompanied such efforts as well as the possibilities of reinscribing colonization in the sharing of such deep theory with outsiders. However, this story is one that tribal communities have been intentional about sharing, an effort Anthony's own family has long been part of. Moreover, the "potentialities" of the learning and leadership we sought to engender, in tandem with the sheer weight of the manifesting moment, compelled us to move beyond fear as an organizing principle for our pedagogy. In the story, the sky is very low, and people are not able to walk upright because the sky presses down on them all. This became a fitting starting point for grappling with the oppressive weight of multiple pandemics, accumulating injustices, and an extended present wrought with so many devastating emotions.

As Indigenous storywork unfolds, the listeners and learners bring their own experiences, histories, and relations into the sense-making; our students' own experiences became texts that we "read" through the storywork to construct humanizing and relational leadership for the present. We invited our students to become fully themselves as leaders, not simply administrators with formal titles in a faceless hierarchical bureaucracy, but children and grandchildren of elders and ancestors who shaped dreams of us, parents and aunties, teachers and learners, holders of both trauma and joy (Cajete, 2016; hooks, 1991). In doing so, we began to reckon with deep histories of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, patriarchy, heterosexism, anti-Asian, anti-immigrant, and intersectional oppressions that shape not only the past but our ongoing present (Bell, 1980; Dumas, 2016; Patel, 2019; Wolfe, 2006). But we also remembered that communities of color have found ways to learn, grow, and thrive despite these dynamics for generations.

In *Lifting the Sky,* the people realized they needed a single word to use so they could lift together and push the sky up; that word was *yəhaw̓.* We asked our students to imagine and lead into futurities for themselves, their children, their students, and their communities; not the standardized outcomes and meritocratic escape dictated by formal educational systems, but dreams of freedom, of solidarities, and of collective thriving (Kelley, 2002; Love, 2019; Vizenor, 2008). These freedom dreams became our *yəhaw̓* as we struggled to work through complex, sometimes incommensurable, theories of change to realize those dreams (Tuck & Yang, 2018). Together, we began to cultivate a different paradigm of leadership.

As Arundhati Roy (2020) explained so powerfully, pandemics have historically been gateways that forced humans to break with the past and step into a new future. This pandemic, she argues, is no different, and the stakes have never been higher regarding the dangers of returning to "normality." With the support

of our students and the demands of the moment, we labored to step through the portal to imagine new possibilities for leading change in education (Roy, 2020). As an Indigenous Yakama man and a Japanese American woman, we recognized the dangers of enabling leadership premised on community, justice, and solidarity within a predominantly white institution (PWI). And yet, we also knew that we could not default to the individualistic, colonizing conception of leadership that has upheld the status quo for so long. Once we began to realize that stepping through the portal was our only path forward given the realities leaders were facing and our charge of cultivating their growth and learning, we also saw that we had centuries of community wisdom to learn from, a crew of powerful critical scholars and theorists at our back, and the brilliance of our own students to grow and build with.

The curricular, pedagogical, and ontological shifts we took up in our teaching and curriculum are ongoing and will be the focus of future writing, but the reflections and leadership practice of the cohort of leaders who stepped through the portal with us continue to light the way. They stand as a testament to the ongoing work of realizing leadership as a humanizing practice that both reckons with the deep harm wrought by systemic oppressions in schools and embodies Black, Indigenous, and other nondominant familial relations of repair and care even as we all struggle to lead within fundamentally unjust systems. We share excerpts from the leadership blogs written by two of the students in the cohort that graduated last spring, Dr. Constance Daw and Dr. William Jackson. Both are young Black principals in urban districts who were already equity-centered leaders when they began the program, but they first shared these snapshots of their leadership as part of a series of blogs created by the cohort as a means of acting collectively to lead a broader conversation among their peers and across the field of education. We share these two because they illustrate so powerfully the move to draw from community wisdom and futurities, even amid ongoing trauma and anti-Blackness, to realize a relational paradigm of leadership in everyday practice.

Some Skin Folk are Kinfolk: Seeking Survivance Together in Public Education and COVID-19 Pandemic

Constance Daw

I'm going to tell you a story.

This is a story about a family, a principal, and a school.

This is the story of a Black family navigating the unwieldy public education system.

This is the story of an African American family in Western Washington seeking to thrive despite many layers of systemic racism and COVID-19 and the leader partnering with them along the way.

I first met Wanda[1] at a local restaurant. Slender with long box braids and tan-brown skin, she was serving with a smile though she was tired, overworked, and underpaid. It was a joyous surprise to meet her again at Back to School Night during my first few days as principal of her children's elementary school. Seeing her gave me a strong feeling of responsibility as I felt our community connection through experience.

She gathered her three sons and pressed through the crowd toward me. Her eyes—hopeful yet guarded—appraised my brown skin, my voluminous textured hair, my wide, crinkly-eyed smile. Searching for care and commitment, she looked for my soul to give her sons a chance. Wanda introduced me to her boys, even the oldest son who had moved on to middle school. She said to them, "This is your new principal. She's going to look after you." And then to me, with a trembling yet clear voice "Aren't you?" To which I replied, "Yes, ma'am. I'll make sure your sons are well here." We held each other's gaze and I silently promised to partner with her in navigating this school that had held hardship for this family.

Wanda is a spiritual warrior. And so am I.

I had seen her youngest son on my first visit to the school. He was standing in the hallway noisily crying. He had no words for the teacher who stepped in the hallway to speak to him and offer him a granola bar. When his chuffing tears continued unabated, the teacher re-entered the classroom and left him in

the hallway. I wondered what could have possibly happened to cause this child to be so dysregulated. When I inquired of a staff member passing by, I was told that he regularly expressed himself this way. This third grader was regularly scream-crying in the hallway. So, when did he get to learn? I learned that this student is medically fragile and is severely impacted cognitively and physically when his blood sugar drops.

I prayed for that child. I could not let him go in my spirit.

Wanda was asking me if I would uphold the system that had her son despondent, dishonored, and alone in a hallway. She hoped for better from me, a young, Black woman with kind eyes, a member of her community, an advocate. I couldn't let her down. I had to change the school.

So, I took action. I centered critical race theory in my leadership practice, modeling and expecting culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms and throughout the campus. I shifted family engagement practices to elevate the status of students, parents, and community members in the school, even to the point of asking stakeholders at all levels to be key decision-makers for our school's strategic plan and operations. I prioritized a "whole-child" ethos that changed systems, everything from PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports) to MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports), from to recess to discipline practices. Through intentional moves that required staff to act with justice, engage with families as colleagues, and honor the efforts of students, community members, and themselves, I was told that the school was changing. Staff members said it, sometimes with smiles and sometimes with frowns, but when Wanda said it—with gravity and tears—I wept. But this education system reaches and snatches far beyond one school.

Wanda met with me one day to talk through an incident involving staff members, that happened to her eldest son in his middle school lunchroom. Her voice quaked as she asked me, "Is this what's supposed to happen?" "No," I responded, "but it often happens." During that conversation, Wanda shared with me that she is pursuing a career in education, "because I need to know what's really happening from the inside."

A few months later, her youngest son was denied his preferred meal in our cafeteria. The child came to my office, swiping angry tears from his eyes, and struggled to articulate his concern. "I can't eat this," he said, pointing to the turkey sandwich, apple, and soy milk on his Styrofoam tray. After speaking with the nutrition services operators, the child was still not given his preferred meal. I called Wanda. "I'm on my way," she said. What is it about food that is a sticking point for so many of us? Why is food used to control, punish, manipulate, or oppress? Why wasn't this sensitive child treated with gentleness?

Frustrated child.

Frustrated parent.

Frustrated principal.

There is a particular pressure experienced by school leaders to support the system, uphold the patriarchy and white supremacist hegemony, to maintain the prevailing logic that upholds a hierarchy that puts a disabled Black boy and his mother near the bottom of systemic regard. Add to that the pressure of being a young, Black, woman leader. A person who, without the title, would not fare well on that same hierarchy. How do I get the support of the staff when I take the side of the students and families, when I thwart the order that has guided decisions in this space?

I had to have a frank discussion with myself. I reminded myself why I am in my position in the first place. I reminded myself that people have prayed for me to be strong and courageous. I reminded myself that I made a promise to this family and to this community that I would support their children's well-being. I reminded myself that my responsibility is to lead my staff to their own generational well-being, even if they don't yet know what that looks like in the context of equity and justice. These are my people.

When our school closed because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Wanda was the first parent to reach out to me. It was four weeks into quarantine and Wanda's sons were thriving. She wrote:

> Our family has done a great deal of conversations surrounding the remote learning experience for students currently and we are considering maintaining this for both boys moving forward in the next school year. Could you direct me to the Washington State online schooling resource so I can get them ready for this transition? I want to make sure they will be continuing to the 5th grade and so forth.

> I will be privileged to assist them with assignments. I've witnessed tremendous growth since the remote learning has started. They are more focused and willing to do the assignments without frustration.

I learned from Wanda and many other parents of color that they were unwilling to send their children to school to battle the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism. These parents did not trust that a school system that would not give their child food would keep him safe from a life-threatening disease.

As a member of the school system, I felt ashamed and deeply humbled. There is no "enough" in the efforts toward educational equity. I had done a lot, but I had not yet done enough to allow this dedicated and critical parent to confidently leave her sons in the hands of my public school system.

As an advocate within the community, I felt gratified and deeply humbled. This dedicated and critical parent trusted me to help her navigate other waters of the public school system for the benefit of her sons. I have proven myself to be kinfolk.

So, I helped her and other parents understand their homeschooling options.

And my staffing model fluctuated due to enrollment changes.

I can accept the challenges of this system when I remember what I believe. I believe that the purpose of the public school system is to ensure generational well-being. If that means a family chooses to homeschool so the children can learn in a fully affirming environment, it is my purpose and responsibility to support that effort.

Wanda asked me if I would love her children. Loving them may mean letting them go today and persistently, determinedly shifting this public school system one day at a time so that it knows how to support and educate their family. Our lives are entwined in community and in futurity. That is what it means to be kin.

Equity-focused leadership is not race-neutral, nor is it race-determined. I share this story to provide a model that can be followed no matter the race of the leader or the community that leader serves. Equity-focused leadership requires that we are embedded in our communities and understand that the well-being of the least-advantaged is the well-being of the community as a whole. It is relational and honest. It requires that leaders engage ethically and transparently, even when their choices are unpopular. Equity-focused leadership is a grind, not a trend. Hiring a leader of color doesn't make the leadership equity focused.

I share this story so you can add to this work of generational well-being.

We have nothing to lose but our chains.

And may all the little children who are finna change the world say, "Ashe and Amen."

Black Futurity: From Probability to Possibility

William Jackson

> *Dear James: I have begun this letter five times and torn it up five times. I keep seeing your face, which is also the face of your father and my brother. Like him, you are tough, dark, vulnerable, moody—with a very definite tendency to sound truculent because you want no one to think you are soft.*
>
> *—James Baldwin*

"Good morning, gentlemen. How was our weekend?"

I always greet my mentees with terms such as, 'gentlemen', 'brothas', or 'Kings' to affirm their beauty and brilliance. When I ask, "How was our weekend?" I am seeking to center the collective identity we carry. Any success is "our" success, any failure is, thus, "our" failure. This collective identity, or sense of belonging, is something I have been creating for years in our Black male affinity mentorship.

This day I wanted to check in on our collective mental capacity. I began with, "How is our minds?" and I received the "I'm straight," "solid," and "coo." But one answer stood out to me, "I'm keeping it a buck, all of this isn't coo. I'm not doing well, Mr. Jackson. This past weekend was heavy…"

I knew exactly what he was referring to. There was a loss in our Brotherhood. A former member of our mentorship was shot and killed over the weekend. I asked our freshmen to hang tight, because we would not be focusing on them this morning. But I wanted them to feel what we were going to be experiencing: collective love and grief.

"Freshmen, I love you. Today, I am holding space for the seniors. We need to grieve our loss. See, we lost one of our Brothers in mentorship, and we have to hurt today. Let's check back in tomorrow, where we will share story." "We," "us," and "share story" all represent healthy approaches to working through pain, conflict, and building a healthy community. In this space, many shared their fear of being Black, living in the community, and not knowing when their time might be.

"Man, I am honestly at a loss of words, I am hurting right now being in this space, to be honest with you. How are y'all feeling?" I asked.

"I don't know, it hurts man. I really don't know what to say. I was just with him last week," one expressed.

"You know, he was a real one. He was turning things around, Mr. Jackson, working and trying to get things together," another replied.

"I know. I know. Check this, though. Let's hurt today, and let's continue to share this hurt. Just know I love you all, and I am blessed to be here with you. Let's plan how we will honor him," I expressed.

We shared our hurt, I checked in more personally with them, offering other resources for them that can help them grieve through this. But what they wanted was to be vulnerable, to be sad, to be human.

When I became assistant principal at an urban high school in 2016, I developed a deep bond with our Black students, and primarily our Black boys. As AP, many of my responsibilities surrounded discipline and supervision, and so early on, I observed and participated in the disproportionate discipline of our Black students. I took this personally. As a Black leader, I questioned why we were not developing deep relationships, bonds, and connections with our Black students. Since they were entering and exiting my office at such a high rate, I had an opportunity to meet their families, learn about their joys, their fears, what excites them, and even learn about their dreams. I then observed that disproportionate discipline was impacting African American students all throughout our district, region, state, and nation, impacting their sense of belonging, sense of self, and sense of academic identity. This hurt me, and I needed to do something about it.

While building bonds with our Black students in my office, I realized the methods for so called "safe schools" are very unsafe for our African American students, who are adultified and expected early on to

abide by rules, and oftentimes put in positions to be forced to apologize to those who harmed them in order to access learning, after much learning has been lost. One gross example of this is that upon re-entry from suspension, students, primarily Black students, have to sign behavior contracts as a strategy for intervention and so called "restoration." In fact, we have effectively created an unsafe environment for them to operate in, by first removing them from the learning environment, and then mandating their conduct for how they should re-enter. This guarantees that they will have lost their sense of belonging, academic identity, and feeling of connection to any meaningful relationship in school (Warren et al., 2022).

I took it personal that we would allow this all to occur. I noticed that others took it personal as well, just differently. I observed that many Black students are pushed out of the school, with zero tolerance hallway policies, zero tolerance behaviors between classes, zero tolerance classroom policies, all disguised as school safety. This law-and-order style forces students, and primarily Black students, further out, where they tend to drop out of school, and no longer exist as the school's problem. In my supervisory role, I found our most brilliant minds on the fringes.

This senior group has been with me for three years. All of them, at one point or another, had a series of run-ins with me, and I bonded with them and their families through these run-ins. Family meetings, re-entry conferences, or re-engagement meetings all served as opportunities to connect. But this wasn't enough. I became so fed up with seeing them in my office and losing learning that I created a mentorship and brought all of them in. Our school has a mentorship period, so I made sure to prioritize creating a mentorship period for myself, and placed the lowest academic performing, highest disciplined, and lowest attending students at the high school in my mentorship. The original goal was to create a space to focus on restoration, and community, but it became much more than that. They began making demands for how their learning should be, what they expected from their teachers, how they felt in the school, why they skipped class, and what pressures in life they experienced. In one distinct example, one student, who has straight As, with a disciplinary history, expressed to me, "I skip US history because it does not celebrate my Eritrean identity. I don't care for that credit." This pushed me to shift my approach to teaching and learning, by really focusing on how we are centering our student voices in our decision making. Primarily, how are we centering our Black student voices in our decision making?

Certain days, we shut everything down to check in on feelings around music, sports, politics, work, finances, with our check-ins always surrounding feelings, "How are y'all doing? But really, how are you doing, King?" I would check in during hallway walks, I would see them during classroom observations, give them a pound, and check in on what they were learning, how they were pushing their learning, and what questions they were asking their teachers. This type of bonding was life-giving for me, as it helped our Kings develop their identity, while also strengthening their voice and capacity to analyze and interpret the structure that surrounds them.

> Identity work for Black students must be done in critique of, and alongside efforts to change, structural practices that perpetuate racist violence and oppression … This foundational premise—that the problem does not reside in the Black students or with their decisions—must be made with unrelenting clarity, especially when the world so deafeningly says otherwise.
>
> —Givens et al., 2018

When I became the principal, I decided to keep my mentorship with this group of seniors and open it up to a group of freshmen. When the coronavirus pandemic began, we went to virtual learning, so I had to prioritize time to share love, care, and compassion in a remote setting. This was pretty simple to do with my group of seniors, and a bit challenging with the freshmen. In connecting with the freshmen, I reached out to our feeder middle schools and asked for a list of the highest referred and lowest academically performing Black boys who were enrolling at the high school. I then called their parents and guardians, asked about their learning experiences, and then shared that I have a mentorship with all Black boys focused on identity development, empowerment, and creating a sense of belonging and self. All the families shared worry about entering high school online, fears and concerns about how they had been treated in the past, and then excitement knowing they had a safe space to begin each day.

Every day I open our mentorship up with, "Watch your mind, body, and spirit. Make sure to get some fresh air. Spend time with your family," and every day I leave with, "We gotta guard our minds, guard our bodies, and guard our spirits. I love you. Peace, Kings." – honoring our collective identity in this space.

Since our seniors have developed agency, leadership, and have a strong sense of their own identity, I have focused on them mentoring our freshmen: teaching our seniors to shepherd the freshmen, as I shepherd them. As an example, when teaching about stepping into one's own identity and holding space, I sometimes open with, "What's the word, King" to my seniors, where they drop knowledge to the freshmen about learning, the system, school, and how to navigate it. As the freshmen watch me lead the seniors, they are happy and feel safe being led by the seniors.

"Man, y'all brothas need to make sure you are in class, because then you can come back and let them know what isn't working for you. If you aren't in class, you can't let them know what doesn't work for you," a gem by one of my seniors.

"Man, I learned a little later. Don't waste your time though," a senior lets one of the freshmen know.

"What should we do if we don't like how we are being responded to in class?" a freshman asks.

"Have you talked to the teacher about this?" a senior responds.

"Nah, I haven't. Shouldn't they know?" the freshman replies.

"Yea, but if you don't let them know, they will treat you any way. You gotta let them know what works for you, fam," the senior replies.

From Probabilities to Possibilities

Growing up, I was raised to be aware of my probabilities. The probability that I, as a Black man, would be shot and killed, or the probability that I, a Black man, would end up in jail, all before reaching adulthood. However, in this mentorship, I take a different stance. I have the opportunity to cast a whole new vision for our next generation. I am committed to teaching our Black youth to be excited about their possibilities.

Postlude

Ann Ishimaru & Anthony Craig

The pandemics are not over, and the sky continues to weigh down our young people, communities, and leaders. But we have continued to walk through the pandemic portal to grow the leadership of our students towards the *yɘhaʉ* of more liberatory futures, even as we grapple with new tensions and questions in that journey. For instance, our new cohort is composed predominantly of leaders of color, particularly women, with deep lived experiences of navigating racist systems even as they have sought to realize learning environments of dignity for their students. They bring whole worlds of community, relations, and ancestral knowledges to a predominantly white institutional space—but also damage and hurt from those systems. How do we help them heal and grow their leadership in the here-and-now as they encounter intransigent systems bent on reverting to the harmful status quo, or even on eliminating whole histories, experiences, and lifeworlds? How do we help justice-focused educators move beyond critiquing and calling out the system to doing the hard, simultaneous work of building with their students and families toward an otherwise? How might white educational leadership students with less first-hand experience of inequity build their muscle to live with and learn from the unfamiliar discomfort of not having their culture, norms, and understandings of the world centered in education? How do we support cisgender, heterosexual students and nondisabled leaders in reckoning with leading systems at the intersection of not only racism and settler colonialism but also patriarchy, heteronormativity, transphobia, and ableism (among others)? How do we help all these different leaders (and ourselves) *unlearn* the colonizing assumptions, logics, and leadership practices that persist in *all* of us who have been socialized, employed, and rewarded by these systems? How do we lead in ways that are truly answerable (as Leigh Patel would say) to young people, communities, lands, beings, knowledge, and learning? We don't have the answers, but we know we are not alone in the learning journey.

We see this growing collective of leadership stepping into a longer arc of history that extends far beyond the four walls of a given school, district, or system and beyond the formal role of superintendent or director. We join histories of Indigenous, Black, Latinx, Asian American and Pasifika brilliance and thriving despite colonizing trauma and institutionalized oppression. We live into a present of humanizing relations amidst

complex and contradictory systems. We dream and lead toward more beautiful and "solidarious" futures. Even now, these leaders are walking through the pandemic portal with their students, families, and communities, as Roy says, "ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it."

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Endnotes

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TEK-4:
Addressing Crisis and Conflict in Urban Indigenous Education

Dr. Hollie J. Mackey and
Dr. Cailen M. O'Shea

Abstract

In this thought piece, the authors address the growing and persistent challenges present in urban Indigenous education. Conversations between the researchers and Indigenous community members led to the connections and thought processes of how curriculum could serve as a lever to promote culturally responsive practices for Indigenous students' lived experiences while also helping school leaders understand the utility of promoting the funds of knowledge within their community. The authors garnered insight into urban Indigenous communities and present an integrated curriculum model that incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems and that speaks to Indigenous family and community concerns within the context of education with the concomitant goal of making learning more meaningful in urban education settings.

Keywords: Urban Indigenous education; community partnership; Traditional Ecological Knowledge; equitable instructional leadership; educational leadership

Introduction

Important conversations in American Indigenous education originate from shared laughter and collective intergenerational understanding among community members. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure we continue to carve meaningful educational pathways for Indigenous children. These pathways become more difficult to navigate as they cut across deeply embedded structural commitments within schools that affirm racial inequity and unjust schooling practices that render invisible the vast knowledge and cultural contributions of American Indian communities. Even more challenging is carving space in urban educational institutions where meeting the unique educational needs of American Indian students is not as well understood as it might be in rural communities near Native nations. We view these challenges as opportunities through which we can foster shared understanding between Indigenous communities and school leaders, thereby strengthening trust and shared commitments to urban Indigenous students.

The origins of this article are not easy to discern, nor would we be entirely accurate in naming ourselves as "thought leaders" regarding the ideas we present. Like all great thoughts, many hours of conversation and reflection with others helped develop our ideas about the role of school leaders to create and sustain relationships with Indigenous communities that honor and affirm Indigenous ways of knowing while acknowledging the role of colonization in contemporary society. We find ourselves in times of crisis with a global pandemic continuing to threaten Indigenous knowledge keepers, increased race-based tensions in schools resulting from national and local efforts to dismantle inequitable knowledge systems, and resistance from educational leaders to meaningfully incorporate Indigenous epistemologies into existing content and curriculum. We also find ourselves in a *crisis response* in collaboration with many others who, like us, have recognized the urgency of the time and have encouraged us to share our thoughts with a greater audience.

Our thoughts are guided in large part by a recommendation from an urban Indigenous nonprofit leader and community organizer who suggested that we "reinvent the enemy's language" (Harjo & Bird, 1997) in education. These authors eloquently inform us that while "it is through writing in the colonizers' languages that our lands have been stolen, children taken away … these colonizers' languages … now hand back emblems of our cultures" (pp. 21-22) when used to heal, regenerate, and create understanding about Indigenous knowledge. We applied this guidance to how we

think about culturally responsive curriculum in relation to Indigenous students' lived experiences. This thought article presents components of an integrated curriculum redesign model for K-12 education settings that incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems that speak to Indigenous family and community concerns about education with the concomitant goal of making learning more meaningful in urban education settings.

Community Context for Urban Indigenous Education

We turn our attention to the context for our attempt to reinvent the language of curriculum and student learning as an avenue for dismantling entrenched Western worldviews in school curricula. We had the opportunity to spend two days with urban Indigenous parents, educators, and community members as part of an Indian Education Summit held annually in North Dakota. The event was at the North Dakota state capitol building where less than one month prior, state legislators passed a law requiring school districts to teach about the histories of the five sovereign nations located within the state. The excitement was palpable among attendees, particularly those who had been working in urban Indian education programs to support students who were far removed from their Native communities. On the first day of the summit, a key topic of conversation for Indigenous participants was the long-running tensions between urban school district leaders and Indigenous parents and educators in their districts. These tensions centered on the lack of representation in content and curriculum, inattention to the COVID-19 pandemic, and disregard for parental and community input that school districts are required to obtain when accepting federal Indian education funds. Further race-based conflict started in urban districts where non-Indigenous community members and educators felt it was not necessary to implement the new North Dakota legislation mandating tribal histories be incorporated into the curriculum.

This paper's authors began the process of engaging with urban Indigenous parents and community members at the close of the Indian Education Summit through weekly meetings (that continue as of this writing) to gain a deeper understanding about how educational leaders might develop and sustain authentic relationships with them. We also learned how we, as educational leadership researchers, could contribute our knowledge to build bridges between urban school districts and Indigenous communities. Our thought partnership was deliberate to ensure that we could leverage the tools of Indigenous epistemology with non-Indigenous school practices to provide educational resources and instructional leadership materials to increase discussion and collaboration among all interested parties.

Attending to the "unique educational needs of American Indian students" does not fall solely within the purview of principles embedded in culturally responsive teaching, leading, or pedagogy. Unique to American Indian populations is the federal trust responsibility mandate written into legislation and funded through multiple federal programs, including the Every Student Succeeds Act, the Johnson–O'Malley Act, and Impact Aid. This mandate advances the work of incorporating Indigenous community funds of knowledge (e.g., Moll et al., 1992) by establishing parental advisory committees in urban school districts that apply for and accept these funds. Urban school district leaders rely on the urban Indigenous population for feedback because there are typically a wide range of Tribal nations represented in the district, making it difficult to represent individual nations. Federal American Indian education policy coupled with the new North Dakota legislation provided urban Indigenous community members the opportunity to hold accountable school leaders who disregard Indigenous knowledge systems and world views in the curricula.

Conflict and Crisis: Urban Indigenous Community Members Respond

The defining line between conflict and crisis related to the ongoing assimilation efforts through education tends to blur as we work with and learn from Indigenous community partners. Our thought partners nearest to the problem, including parents who are members of parents committees, view the legacy of American Indian education as an unresolved crisis resulting from colonization. Urban educational leaders have exacerbated this crisis through their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, as Indigenous community members living away from their home reservations often do not have access to their nation's emergency response measures.

However, conflict, as experienced by Indigenous families and communities, is more associated with the day-to-day inconveniences related to interactions within an inequitable system that refuses to acknowledge the effects this inequity has on Indigenous students' sense of identity and worth. Whether we attempt to draw a bright line distinction between conflict and crisis or not, the fact remains that urban Indigenous students have never been well served by public schools designed to privilege Western knowledge systems at the expense of diverse worldviews (Cajete, 1994; Sabzalian, 2019). In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the unrealized legacy of self-determination for Indigenous communities, is a catalyst for Indigenous parents, students, researchers, policymakers, and educators to come together to make the most of the moment to advance Indigenous knowledge systems into school curricula.

We next present components of a curriculum design that combines Traditional Ecological Knowledge with principles comprising four curriculum shifts for deeper student learning. We present this as a community-inclusive approach to integrate relevant, Indigenous epistemology into traditional curriculum models in urban schools serving American Indian students. Curriculum is a practical lever for this type of change as it is one of the voices associated with colonization. American compulsory education brings students together and attempts to educate them all uniformly in ways that were designed for one subpopulation. The messaging happens early and often for Indigenous students, and for this narrative to change so too must the curricula.

TEK-4: Community Engaged Curriculum Redesign

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is fundamental to community-engaged educational research that reflects Indigenous funds of knowledge (Adams et al., 2014). TEK centers the conversation around a wholistic understanding of our world and the valuable lessons passed from generation to generation from time immemorial. It privileges values associated with connectedness, place-based context, and communication, all of which demand that educational leaders move beyond the historically held sentiment that only teachers are disseminators of knowledge. School leaders are then situated as the bridge for schools and communities to develop stronger relationships and build on the funds of knowledge held within a community. Unique to TEK is the component of spiritual relatedness and the view that our innate sense of identity cannot be fractured to separate the mind, body, and spirit. Though there is no monolithic Indigenous identity or worldview, commonalities do exist among and across tribes. This is similar to Meyer's (2013) discussion of holographic epistemologies that outlines an Indigenous perspective, asserting:

> We communicate through our world view shaped within knowledge systems prioritized by the needs of people and the lessons of place … simplif[ying] indigenous [sic] epistemology … [to] principles and practices … used to design a (k)new understanding of the philosophy of knowledge inclusive of all three aspects of nature: physical, mental, and spiritual. (p. 94)

Given the critical positioning of educational leaders and the rapid pace of economic and societal change, the school-level learning outcomes for students must be dynamic and aligned with new, emergent realities that are context-situated and context-dependent (Seong, 2019). Addressing these needs is a significant enough challenge for educational leaders during ordinary times but has been even more so during a global pandemic. The focus for many educators, students, and families has not been on collaboration or connection between the school and the community but simply on surviving.

For some educators and community members, this pandemic has highlighted the importance of collaboration. Many relationships have grown from the need to communicate more with one another; however, these relationships have not typically bridged the broader Indigenous community with the school community. While many districts have made recent strides toward identifying what they believe a future-ready graduate looks like, centering around the 4 Cs of education (i.e., creativity,

collaboration, communication, and critical thinking), few have purposely looked at their instruction and the strengths within the urban Indigenous community to see how they can be intertwined to benefit students. TEK provides an additional set of principles to student curricular engagement that creates the conditions where Indigenous students can thrive rather than just survive.

We view crisis as opportunity. Ample space exists for educators to examine their own praxis and experiment with integrated knowledge models. For many, the role of the instructor has not deviated from the way they experienced it as a student. The teacher was the sage-on-the-stage disseminating knowledge to the compliant children sitting in neat rows. The divide between the school world and the outside world was so striking that seeing your teacher in the grocery store brought about chaos for many students. Today, many schools, out of necessity, have shifted this way of thinking to be more wholistic and connected. Subjects are less siloed, and assignments have more real-world and contextual implications. While this move to include more creativity and critical thinking is remarkable, the reality of who is making the decisions about what to teach and how students demonstrate proficiency remains the same. Topics are still taught using the same texts and the same factory-line model where context is almost irrelevant. The ubiquity of many of these resources is staggering. It is fascinating, and terrifying, to consider how many students are forced to read the same book and complete the same project across the country. For example, many students must read *Where the Red Fern Grows* to develop their reading comprehension even if they have no schema for fur trapping or hunting. Other times students have the choice of how to present their research, but the topic must be the Revolutionary War. Ever present are the decisions of others about what is appropriate for students to read and the banning of those texts or ideologies that are not in lock step with the conventional. We are interested in students who create, collaborate, communicate, and think critically, yet we force one way of knowing, often devoid of students' lived experiences, and reward compliance. We suggest that real-world context would be strengthened for all students by incorporating components of TEK derived from working with Indigenous communities to make contemporary educational settings meaningful.

The disconnect between the desired outcomes for students and what they are taught stems from a relevance gap in education. The relevance gap, as described by Perkins (2014), differs from the previous notion of an achievement gap as it asks not what are the students achieving, but what will it matter in their future lives? This focus on the student relevance highlights our work. Who is making the decisions about what is relevant? How is reading a book that has nothing to do with your passions or contexts relevant? What can educational leaders do to reconcile the glaring disconnect between what schools and the community deem relevant? Our urban Indigenous community partners extend these questions to a more community-specific focus. How will language and culture further erode in institutions privileging Western knowledge? How will public education prepare Indigenous students to engage in a parallel form of governance never taught in school? How does disregarding the sovereign status of Tribal nations prepare students for entrepreneurial or economic development activities with communities with vastly different legal structures for establishing businesses?

Four Shifts for Deeper Learning

Our thoughts and work have shown us that the most complicated questions have the simplest answers. If we want school to value context, connection, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration we need to change how we do school. We need to shift instruction away from the teacher being the sole giver of knowledge and follow a more Indigenous model by allowing students to engage authentically with the world around them while the teacher facilitates the learning. In their book *Different Schools for a Different World,* McLeod and Shareski (2018) outline four shifts in education: deeper thinking and learning; student agency and personalization; authentic work; and technology infusion. We assert that these shifts, coupled with TEK, will address many concerns related to instruction voiced by urban Indigenous communities.

These shifts act as a lever for our work. Deeper thinking and learning mean asking educators to move away from requiring lower-level thinking tasks such as factual recall and regurgitation to assignments that are more thought-provoking and rigorous. Student agency and personalization

asks educators to move away from teacher-controlled learning and allows students to make the decisions about what, why, and how they demonstrate their learning. Authentic work moves beyond siloed assignments that have students asking, "why do I need this stuff?" to providing students with real opportunities to engage with and contribute to the relevant location and national communities. Technology infusion allows students to connect globally to become stronger collaborators and communicators. Technology can help students engage with issues and concepts far beyond their local community as technology-infused instruction can be enhanced in ways simply not possible in years past.

The four shifts allow educators to leverage the voice of community. In an urban school district, it is often the case that educators see the curriculum as something rigid and incapable of change as it must be taught with fidelity. The four shifts allow educators to adhere to the standards they must cover while giving a voice to their students. This voice allows multiple perspectives and passions to be expressed within the curriculum in authentic ways. It moves beyond the teacher assigning a text that they assume will resonate with Indigenous students, to students taking the lead and sharing with the teacher and their classmates what they find influential. When all students are allowed to do this, culture and community are no longer juxtaposed lessons that happen in prescribed months, but a core component of how that classroom functions.

This shift is simply understanding that education standards are intentionally broad. Educators can make changes based on their students' interests and the funds of knowledge that exist in the community while adhering to their district curriculum. We are not saying *Where the Red Fern Grows* is not a useful text for many students, but allowing students to read Indigenous authors such as Cinnamon Kills First or Vine Deloria, Jr. is a small task from the teacher's perspective that can promote social justice through a more authentic understanding about the people and pasts of this country. If we really do value the 4 Cs of education, then we also must see the value in TEK, as the alignment between the two is tenable. Communication, collaboration, creativity, context, connectedness, and critical thinking are all highlighted within TEK. Educational leaders can then advocate for these shifts and allow more families and community members into the decision-making process.

Connecting TEK-4 with Urban Indigenous Community Concerns

At the core of TEK-4 is an understanding that relationships between educational leaders and members of the Indigenous community must be tended to at all times if educators expect the relationships to be sustained through crisis. The multiple crises of COVID-19, racial inequity, unjust schooling practices, and increased race-based conflict in school districts serving urban Indigenous families has become a catalyst for bringing the Indigenous community together to advance curricular changes incorporating Indigenous knowledge in ways previously unseen in most settings. Moreover, the global pandemic has exposed previously difficult to discern areas where schools must improve if they are going to meet the unique educational needs of Indigenous students.

We acknowledge that our proposed curriculum strategy for incorporating TEK into existing curricular shifts does not offer a practical "how-to" solution, nor is it our intention to do so. The diverse bodies of knowledge existing across the 574 federally recognized Tribes and more than 60 state recognized Tribes, most of whom attend public schools, makes it irresponsible to claim a one-size fits all model. More practically, the goal is to encourage school leaders to develop stronger relationships with urban Indigenous students and families to shift the messaging delivered to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across the country. Indigenous communities have long tried to assert traditional knowledge into school curriculum to better equip Indigenous students for a future that advances the goals of American Indian communities. When educational leaders attend to Indigenous education goals related to realizing increased self-determination for Tribal communities, meaningful collaboration across the local and school communities is not only possible, but far more likely to succeed.

A first step for many educational leaders is to listen. "Solution-itis" is an issue far too many educators suffer from where the work to find an answer supersedes the work to understand they "why" behind it. Educational leaders need to have conversations and dialogues where they recognize and

accept they do not have all the answers and knowledge. Seeking out guidance and direction only occurs when listening to understand instead of listening to solve.

The four shifts in this work are tools that can help educators transform their lessons to promote deeper learning. In our understanding, they go beyond lesson design. The shifts highlight the significance of autonomy and the perils of maintaining the status quo. At a time of mass exodus, students and educators are in vital need of support that is farther reaching than a test score or grade—it is the support for students' identity and fundamental worth. Educational leaders must then reflect upon the work they are doing and the messages, intended or unintended, they are delivering loudly to their communities. Similar to the work of Cajete (1994), reflection is a critical element and can even be seen as the fifth shift in this work. Leaders can reflect on how they respond to and address overt instances of racism, as well as how they respond to covert messaging expressed in the omittance of culture and community. From the deafening yell of students, families, and teachers, we then ask the principals who are given the space to maneuver within standards: Where do you stand? Are you willing to cultivate your relationships with teachers, students, and the broader urban Indigenous community? Or is it safer and easier to continue to fail urban Indigenous students when they need us the most?

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CONVERSATIONS
IN URBAN
EDUCATION

"It's important to talk about these issues":
The Need for Leaders to Establish Connections and Address Students' Experiences and Concerns

Dr. Elizabeth Gil

In late summer 2021, I had spoken with Sofia Díaz and her mother about their experiences with Sofia's transition from middle to high school during the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and ongoing racial injustice. As a follow-up to that conversation, I spoke again with Díaz, currently a high school sophomore, in January of 2022, after she had returned to in-person schooling for a semester. Here, she shares her experiences with racial and gender inequity over her first year and a half in her high school, as well as ways that she has established connections with others within her school and sought to support peers. In discussing ways that educators at her school have responded to racist incidents and conflict in her school, Díaz provides insights regarding how leaders can nurture relationships with students to promote students' sense of well-being.

I conducted several rounds of editing of the original conversation transcript for length while seeking to maintain the essence of Sofia's experiences and to focus on the parts of the discussion most relevant to the issue theme of leadership for racial equity and social justice. While the issue is not directly related to gender equity, this was clearly an important aspect of social justice for Díaz and one that points toward the intersectionality of ethnicity, race, and gender. Díaz's experiences and observations highlight the myriad issues students and families face and the need for leaders to consider their schools beyond a focus on academics to support students by increasing awareness of resources and developing coping skills. Díaz provides insights on how educational leaders and staff can build relationships, set a foundation for having meaningful discussions, and reach out to students and families to foster student well-being and safety. Díaz's story underscores the need for educators to explicitly discuss and address issues that arise to improve schooling experiences for students, especially those who continue to experience marginalization. Díaz's thoughts on incorporating student choice and recommendations for greater outreach to families reflect the importance of establishing dialogues and beginning with families (Ishimaru, 2019) and integrating learning about healing centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018) as an approach to address the collective trauma experienced over the last several years.

ELIZABETH GIL: To get us started, can you please state who you are?

SOFIA DIAZ: My name is Sofia Díaz. I am currently a 10th grader at [a Brooklyn] High School.

EG: I want to start with a little background. Last summer before your school year started, you and I had a chance to talk about your first year in high school, about transitioning to high school while attending school virtually, dealing with pandemic conditions, and grappling with the racial unrest and injustice that has been going on in the country. How would you summarize your first year of high school?

SD: Chaotic, specifically because I think we hadn't really figured out how to do remote learning just yet, and the teachers were struggling with how to connect to the students and how to teach [online]. I think it created a sort of disconnect in the sense that it was definitely harder for the teachers and administration to deal with different issues, like the bits of racism that I experienced and a little bit of the sexualization that happened. It was definitely hard, especially because there was so much happening everywhere. I had a few friends who went through similar situations like I did but didn't

AKINA CURLEY, 9TH GRADE

say anything because they didn't know if they would be taken seriously, or if it was something worth talking about, because it was online. So, yeah, it was definitely hard.

EG: Why do you think some students weren't sure if it was something worth talking about, whereas you found it was important to address with administration?

SD: Well, I was raised in a household in which my mother has always told me that if I am treated in a way that I find disrespectful, that I should talk about it, and she's always taught me how to address certain issues like this. I also feel I am a little bit more vocal. I do a lot of participating. I feel very strong about certain issues. Some of these friends are more shy and another part is they felt

that since it was online and it wasn't in person and had nothing to do with actual physical violence against them, that it wasn't worth talking about. I'm like, "Well, it is because you are upset by this and it's also not okay, for them to be displaying this type of behavior," especially for [this school] which was supposed to be such a diverse school. I was expecting more of a better approach to racial slurs and degrading of different races, in a sense.

EG: How has the transition been from the remote context last year to the in-person situation this year, especially being in the school building for the first time this school year?

SD: It's a little hard to explain because there's a couple of mixed emotions around it. Part of me is very happy that I'm back because I think that the connect is a lot easier to have with the teachers and the students. Being back in the building, I would say that people are a lot less bold as to what they were online last year. I still have experienced a couple of situations that have been handled by administration, but I would say wasn't the best way of handling it or reprimanding the other students involved. In terms of learning, I am feeling more challenged than I was last year. I feel like they're also adding a lot more work because they feel they have to compensate for last year through adding more rigorous material for the kids to do.

EG: Can you tell me about some of the experiences that you've had this year still, these racialized incidents and how they've been addressed?

SD: Within this school year there have been two incidents in the lunchroom. I was sitting with my friends and one of the boys from last year approached me and my friend. I decided, rather than engage him, because he was a lot bigger than me and I was a little scared, I got up from the table and I addressed one of the teachers in the lunchroom. That teacher pulled this student to the side and basically told him to leave us alone. It worked in the sense that he didn't come near us in the lunchroom again. However, there were moments in the hallways when we were switching classes, that if I were passing him, he pushed me a little, like he shoved me. I didn't say anything about those because I didn't know for sure it was targeted, or if it was accidental. I haven't seen him in the building since last, I'm going to say November. I am grateful that I'm not really seeing him or interacting with him.

EG: You mentioned that this year it's been a bit easier to connect to teachers and students and also told me when we spoke previously that in some ways, connection with teachers felt a little bit stronger due to teachers paying attention to students' emotional well-being. Is that something that has continued in the current school year?

SD: I want to preface by saying that I understand that, because it is still a pandemic, some teachers have their own circumstances at home and some of them haven't been in the building as much because they had to quarantine and everything. The connectivity is better in that we have more interaction when it comes to lessons, and it feels a lot easier to stay engaged. However, I would say that I only feel like I have one or two teachers that really do care about how I'm doing. The rest of them it feels like it's enough, like obligatory for them to ask every so often, "Oh, how are you?" but it doesn't really seem like they really care what the answer is.

EG: [Regarding] racial incidents that have happened nationally, are these conversations that are had in class? For example, more recently, the Ahmaud Arbery case was decided. Are those conversations happening in any classrooms or are those things that happen more informally with students?

SD: In my AP World History class, we have my teacher [who's] very big on associating what's going on in the real world into some of our lessons, because history has a way of repeating itself, right? So, we have definitely spoken about different national movements, not just racial equity, but also gender equality. He's been very big on talking about not only the Black Lives Matter movement; he did bring up the Arbery [case] a couple of times, as well as Breonna Taylor and other names that we now know, sadly, because of what happened to them. Other than that classroom, it seems like a subject that is avoided. My AP World History teacher has established a very, very good foundation in the sense that the first day of class, he was very clear that he was going to be bringing up stuff like

this, and that there was no tolerance for any kind of [disrespect]. He was very strong on that, and I think that's probably why it was a safe space to have those conversations in that classroom.

I would say that the other teachers have not done so. In [another] class, we brought up a question about whether or not we felt like the justice system, how they were treating Latinx people and minorities in the country fairly. There were certain students in the classroom snickering and saying things that I heard, and I know the teacher heard, about how we're actually more privileged than white people are, apparently, and that the justice system is and always has been fair to everybody. My teacher did not address it and we continued with lessons. In that regard, I did feel kind of angry. However, I didn't know how to voice that anger without sounding as though I was trying to start a fight. I thought that the best way to deal with it was to keep my mouth shut, especially because those kids in that class are upperclassmen and are very intimidating to me because they are also football players, and they are big, and I really don't want to accidentally be caught outside and have something happen. My other classes haven't touched the subjects.

My principal, however, I would say—this was a nice little moment for me—I have a mask that says, "Black Lives Matter," [that] I wear daily to school. You can say that I'm very loud about what I feel. I was in my algebra class and the principal walked in and was like, "Oh my God, I really like your mask." So, it was it was a good thing for me, because it felt like, "Okay, I know where the principal stands at the very least."

EG: So, even though that may sound like a small thing, it sounds like it had a big effect for you. It's a message to you, in a sense.

SD: It definitely did because I wasn't quite sure where she was on the spectrum in regards to the stuff that has been happening in the country, especially with the Black Lives Matter protests and everything that had happened last year. Even though our school has signs all over the place that says they don't tolerate hate of any kind, every school has that. You don't really know where the individual principal or staff member stands until you have certain conversations like that. That was a big part of why I feel a little bit safer at my school, because it told me that she views it as something that's important to talk about—that it's important that it's addressed. So, that also led to a couple of conversations that I've had with her one-on-one that have made me feel that if I do have an issue, and I find her, I think that it will definitely be handled, like I'm confident in her capability of handling things like that.

EG: I appreciate that you just brought up the principal, because one of the things, and again it doesn't only have to be the principal, how educational leaders can sustain authentic relationships with families and the communities in times like this, when there is crisis and conflict.

SD: I feel like the movements that are happening around the nation aren't really addressed as much as they should be in our classrooms, especially with the statistics of my school. I'm a Student Ambassador, so I know exactly the statistics of how many of each group of ethnicities there are in my school. We have a very big percentage of our population that are from different countries and that are of minority ethnicity. Specifically, I believe there's 71% of our student body is Latinx or African American and I think it's a bit of a disconnect for us when we are thinking about what we're seeing on the news. And we take that to school with us and it's not addressed; it feels like we're kind of alone in it, in a sense.

I think that's a big way to open up communication between staff members and students, which could lead to talking about other stuff like how the pandemic has affected us. It's a good segue. I think it's important to talk about these issues. In regards to checking in for the mental stability of the students and checking in with each other, my school has tried to incorporate social-emotional learning into lessons. However, it was one week in the beginning of the school year, like a mood meter and anonymous little things on Google classroom, filling out a form like, "What are you feeling?" Other than that, we haven't really done anything social-emotional learning-wise and it's important, especially because, even if you're not talking about how are the students doing in particular, you could always bring up something like, "We're going to do five minutes of medi-

tation," giving different ways for us to figure out how to cope, even if it's not us talking about it. I understand that there are certain students that sometimes don't want to really respond. Things to help about anxiety, about depression, it's important because, then at least, even if the kid doesn't feel like talking about it, they know that they have resources.

EG: As a Student Ambassador are these some conversations that you are having in terms of trying to have some more sustained SEL [social-emotional learning] support?

SD: As a Student Ambassador, we were having weekly meetings from September to November. But afterward they decided we were going to move to once-a-month meetings. Now that we meet once a month, it's kind of harder to get that out.

As a Student Ambassador, it does help when it comes to trying to figure out how to help certain students. I give tours, so when we have new students or we have people who are interested in our school, I let them know what's going on in the school and how everything's going. It has given me the opportunity to give out help to some specific students that I've toured around who have definitely not been in a good headspace. I was able to bring them to the guidance counselors I trust and know will definitely handle situations better so that they could feel a little bit of relief. We do have social workers at our school and therapists that are there 24-7, even throughout the summer, so if a student does bring it up to one of the guidance counselors, there is someone for them to talk to and it's free. So being a Student Ambassador has given me a little bit more power in the sense that I've helped individual students.

EG: You said that you direct people to particular guidance counselors. How do you know that those are the guidance counselors you want to direct students to?

SD: The Student Ambassadors' office is in the guidance office and through that I was able to establish connections to a couple of the guidance counselors. The more I learned about them, the more I felt like these are people who really care. Especially when we had our orientation for 10th graders and 9th graders before the school year started, I was also there because Student Ambassadors were helping out with the guidance counselors' workshops and giving a little bit of my experience with the school and the teachers and everything. I was also able to establish connections that way, and the more I learned about how they address situations, about how they deeply ask more questions if they feel like you're not okay. They led me through meditation before, and so it gives me confidence in those specific counselors that I have had interactions with—that I know that they they're going to address situations the way they need to be.

EG: It does sound like some of what you're talking about is authentic relationships that get formed. Is there a way that you see responses looking different when people do not have those relationships?

SD: Yes. I have a few friends who haven't established any sort of relationships with any of their teachers or the guidance counselors. I even mentioned, "Maybe you want to talk to a guidance counselor or a teacher about this." They're like, "No, no, no, no, I don't really know them like that. I'm not very comfortable." Some of the students don't talk and some of the teachers don't reach out. It could also be partly how people say [about] first impressions; there are some of our staff that I don't even talk to because they're just very cold. It makes it harder for students to feel like they want to approach those people. Very few feel authentically friendly and like authentically, "I'm here," "Hi, how are you?" Maybe they are nice, and they do want to know, but they're also not putting an effort to make it known if they are. It's just definitely each side has a little more work to do.

EG: You've mentioned different experiences where you see the authentic relationship and places where you don't see that established. What are some effective strategies and practices that you've seen used by school leaders to foster more family engagement, student engagement, community engagement, and collaboration?

SD: Within my school there have been a couple of different events, not only workshops, for mental health. We have had a couple of fun events, like we've done scavenger hunts and we have had after school Zoom meetings that were yoga sessions. I know the students that participated felt that was a great way for them to not only have more experience with the staff, but they also felt closer to some of the student body that they see on a daily basis that they didn't really know. Within the school days, there has been an announcement that my principal makes; it's another reason why I love her. She sometimes makes announcements randomly to thank the students and the teachers for their cooperation and letting them know that it truly does mean a lot that we're showing up.

The orientation that we did prior to the beginning of this school year, even though it was kind of stressful for the people who are running it, was very much worth it when the 9th graders and 10th graders seemed to be alleviated in their fears and a little bit of their anxiety about coming to school. Some of them got to meet their teachers before going to class. It was good that some of them established connections. There is a podcast we have at my school called "[School] Quick Talk," which is ran [sic] by our student body president and vice president who interview people on that podcast weekly. My friends have said that they talk about some really good issues that are happening within the school and they've talked to a couple of experts on how to deal with issues in the school. Thinking about it again, I need to reach out to the president, because maybe they could do a Quick Talk about social-emotional learning that should be added into the school.

EG: Have you seen different ways that the leadership has tried to connect with families? Were families involved in the orientation?

SD: The families were invited and were also toured around the school and given the rundown of how we were going to try to work this year. We have had family nights at the school. I think we've had one every month, some of them being movie nights, some of them being like a sip and paint. I've heard from a couple of friends [who attended a pumpkin painting event] that there wasn't really a very fun environment. If you want to have the student body and their families engaged in stuff like this, you definitely need to have engaging things that are going to make somebody like to come. There are ways to create events that are fun and also engaging and look nice, even on a budget. I have been thinking about if I should propose to the Student Ambassadors that we create a student committee that works on events like this, so that it also has student choice in it. So that there's more involvement and then students can add more, fix, tweak, whatever they think needs to be more engaging, more fun, more appropriate for our age group, maybe. And pertaining to some of the families, we can get some input for this, maybe siblings or parents of those who are on the student committee. It would probably rack up more people coming to these events and adding more of an actual community that's united.

EG: One of the things we had talked about when you and your mom and I had talked previously was that your mom did join the PTA. Do you know what her experience has been with that and how their interaction is with the leadership?

SD: My mother is the secretary of the PTA; she was voted [in]. The PTA is supposed to be raising money for the school's budgets and figuring out how they can beautify the school and add more to the school. My mom has been talking to me about what me and my friends think should be added to the school, what I thought we needed. A couple of the things I've told her are lockers, we could do with a fun event, we could do with like a nice dance or something.

EG: You don't have lockers?

SD: At my school we don't have lockers.

EG: So, you have to carry everything with you throughout the day, your jackets and everything?

SD: Yeah. And it's a pressing issue because it's kind of hard for students to lug textbooks, notebooks, and assignments that they have to do with a laptop, plus. So, my mom has been trying to figure out how the PTA could raise money for lockers. And she's been doing research and she's trying to find lockers that are cheap and figuring out how they would install them and stuff. My mom definitely wants to do more for my high school experience and for the kids at my school.

EG: Have they [the PTA] gotten involved in SEL or racial conversations or other conversations about the pandemic or anything like that?

SD: I feel that my mother has wanted to talk about certain issues that are pertaining to the pandemic, to students' mental health well-being, but she hasn't really had the space to talk about it. I do not know for sure if that's how she actually feels, but that's what I got.

EG: If you had to give advice to the leadership at your school, what additional advice would you give them for forming relationships with families at your school and continuing to make the school a better place?

SD: I think there needs to be more outreach to parents. We have PupilPath as a way for the teachers and parents to connect, also with the administrative staff, and there are emails that are sent out almost daily about coming tests and stuff like that. I think that that could be used also, maybe send out surveys like "What do you want to see done in your child's school?" "What do you want from us?" "How do you think we have been doing?" Schools across NYC, the most I've seen is a once-a-year thing they have to send out, that one survey and that's it. There could be more outreach specifically for this kind of issue, "We want to know what you think."

EG: Is there anything else that you want to add?

SD: Yes. I know we didn't talk much about gender equality issues, but I feel like it's a social justice issue. Within my school and I know schools across New York City, there have been incidents of girls feeling uncomfortable within the school environment. It doesn't make you feel good, and even though I'm somebody who prides myself on talking about situations like that, I haven't said anything to my school staff, specifically because I know that that student has power with the student body. And also, because when it comes to sexual harassment and assault issues, based on the stuff that I've heard from girls who have attempted to say something, it does not seem as though it has been addressed the way it should be. I have had a moment in the lunchroom and one of the upperclassmen—it seems like the upperclassmen boys think that they have the right to abuse the freshmen and sophomores because they're older—he had an entire group of friends with him who were all upperclassmen, all very tall. I've had several cases of upperclassmen approaching me, some of them getting handsy. And I feel powerless in this situation, which makes me feel even worse because I'm somebody who prides myself on bringing things like this to people's attention. I feel like I'm letting the other girls down, especially because I'm usually the one they turn to but, in this moment, I just feel like I don't.

EG: You're bringing up really important issues. Also, you talked about the SEL and coping; this could be another issue to address in that podcast as well. You made a point that you can talk about racial issues, and you've brought up racial issues, but this is not a place where you feel that you can speak in the same way.

SD: This isn't just my school. I have had friends call me because they needed me to be on the phone with them in case something happened because this boy was harassing them at school and is now following her home. I feel like there should be assemblies. We need to talk about consent. I think it's a big issue, because girls are being put into situations that are scary and traumatizing for them. I don't want to say that the boys haven't been put in situations like that either, but I haven't [heard].

EG: Thank you for sharing. I'm sorry that this is something that you even have to think about. Being from a different generation than you are, I would have the hope that we'd be doing better than we are.

SD: The excuse "boys will be boys" is still a thing.

EG: I agree with you, the assemblies [could be a way to address the issue] and also for the teachers to learn about how they can address these things because sometimes they don't know how either. There's also the physical intimidation factor you're talking about with these larger kids. You're right; it is another social justice issue—gender issues—and then not even to mention the racialized gender aspects.

SD: It's another thing, actually; it's a good thing that you bring it up because I, specifically, haven't had bad interactions with any of the upperclassmen that are of color. It is always Caucasians. Not to sound stereotypical, but it really seems like they know that they have more power. Not only because they are older than us, and because they're bigger than us, and because they're guys, but because in today's society, it's in our justice system too. It's very likely that the white male will be more believed than the minority female.

EG: Thank you again for your time. I appreciate your candor and sharing. The fact that you're giving these issues voice is important. By talking about it, you're giving folks a greater opportunity to have it on their radar and to be able to think about how we talk about these things and act on them so that schooling experiences can be better, not just for particular individual students but across the board. Like you said, this is a justice issue that needs to be addressed. Thank you for bringing your voice in and for adding this dimension to our conversation.

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"In the Shadow of the Happiest Place on Earth":
Schools as Community Institutions in Anaheim

Michael Matsuda,
Dr. Pedro Noguera, and
Dr. Jennifer Goldstein

*Jennifer Goldstein: It has been my great good fortune in this life to work, in different ways and at different times, with two extraordinary educators. I have known **Pedro Noguera,** now Dean of the Rossier School of Education at USC, for upwards of 30 years, since he was my undergraduate professor at UC Berkeley. I have known **Michael Matsuda,** Superintendent of the Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD), since we initiated a robust partnership for leadership preparation between our two institutions in 2018. In Hebrew, a shadchan is a matchmaker. When I read the call for this special issue of VUE, with its focus on schools as community institutions, I thought of them both. My role was mainly that of shadchan: I proposed the conversation to the two of them, and edited the published version into something comprehensible for a reader outside of the California context. Dean Noguera and Superintendent Matsuda had met before; on December 16, 2021, Noguera interviewed Matsuda via Zoom, and the district produced a transcript. That interview, edited for comprehension as well as flow, is provided below.*

Matsuda has served as the superintendent of AUHSD for eight years. It is a large, urban school district located in Orange County, not far from Disneyland. AUHSD is a majority minority school district that covers five cities, including Anaheim. The district enrolls over 29,000 students, and the families it serves speak about 45 different languages. It is a gateway community that serves large numbers of refugee immigrants. Demographically, the district is predominantly Latinx (65%), with another 20% of its students from Asian and Pacific Islander backgrounds. The overwhelming majority of students are from low-income households, with a substantial number (approximately 4,000) who lack stable housing.

Dean Noguera: Michael, can you tell me a little about your district that goes beyond the numbers?

Superintendent Matsuda: We are in the shadow of the happiest place on earth: Disneyland. It's hard for people to wrap their heads around the challenges we face because many people think of Orange County as a wealthy county, which it certainly is. But, in the central parts of the county—Santa Ana, Anaheim, Garden Grove—there is a lot of poverty. We are in Orange County, but we face a lot of similar challenges as you find in other urban areas.

Dean Noguera: Several years ago when I visited your district, you told me a story about taking some kids to visit one of the Japanese internment camps in Manzanar. I think one of your parents had been interned there. Can you share what it was like to take some of your students to the camps?

Superintendent Matsuda: Yes. It was the 75th anniversary of the internment. Thank you for remembering it. Roosevelt signed an executive order for Japanese Americans to be taken to internment camps during WWII. My mom was a freshman at Anaheim High School at that time. We brought a few busloads of kids up there and it was amazing. Most of the kids we brought were first-generation Latinx kids. And there were two boys who were looking at the barracks and the straw beds and taking note. One of the boys says, "Wow, this is really nice." And I turned around and said, "Excuse me?" And he says, "Mr. Matsuda, at least they had a bed to sleep in. My family sleeps on the floor of a garage."

I shared that story with our administrators. It was like, how far have we come? Which is not very far, right? If our kids are sleeping in worse conditions than the concentration camp.

Dean Noguera: Given that context, let's talk about family engagement. Many urban districts struggle with engaging families. What strategies and practices has your district been using to foster engagement and collaboration?

Superintendent Matsuda: Well, the partnerships we have created with parents and the community are key to how we do things. This comes naturally to both businesses and nonprofits, who tend to understand the importance of serving your clients well. We are extending this approach to how K-12 education is run. That is, rather than operating in a silo by focusing narrowly on our educational mission, we really reach out to the business community and higher ed to help us in fulfilling our goal of serving our community. That's been key to building trust with families because they rely on us. If we work closely with them and serve their students well, it builds trust and ultimately leads to better jobs for our students.

One of the things that we've done, Pedro, is that we've redefined the achievement gap. We don't focus so much on test scores, even though our test scores are rising. For us, it's really about increasing access to meaningful jobs. This is how we will break the cycle of poverty. It's what every civil rights leader was advocating for. I think somehow, we lost our way over the last several years. We got so accustomed to just looking at test scores as though that was what the achievement gap was all about. For us, it's about so much more. It's about access to purposeful and meaningful jobs for our community. That's how education lifts people out of poverty. We've been able to deliver on that promise and change the narrative in first-generation communities about education leading to higher incomes.

Dean Noguera: Can you talk in a little bit more detail about how you're doing that? You mentioned a moment ago that a lot of your families are recent immigrants. You also said that many of your students are from very disadvantaged homes, and some experience homelessness. How do you engage families who are under so much economic stress? How do you learn about what their aspirations are and their hopes are for their children?

Superintendent Matsuda: Well, it all comes down to trust. I think that we really leveraged the LCAP[1] in terms of this whole focus on community needs. By allowing the parents a voice in the decision-making process, and by prioritizing their budgetary priorities, we are making our commitment to the families we serve real. So we were ahead of other districts in building partnerships with parents. They came to us and told us they wanted, for example, more counselors.

Many of them didn't really know what social workers were at that time, and this was prior to the pandemic. But they did know that a lot of kids were hurting as a result of social and emotional isolation. Many were feeling unsupported. So, we listened to the parents and we were one of the first districts in Orange County to ensure access to social workers through the LCAP funding.

That created a lot more trust. We also started Parent Learning Walks so that parents could see what was happening in the classroom. Thousands of parents across the district participated in the learning walks on a monthly basis. It allowed them to see what was going on in terms of teaching and learning and that really helped us in building trust.

Dean Noguera: So, they were involved in making observations at the schools? In many places, teachers are not in favor of exposing themselves to so much scrutiny. How did you pull that off with teacher support?

Superintendent Matsuda: We spent the first 40 minutes explaining to parents about our learning objectives and instructional priorities. We prioritize critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and compassion or character. We call them the 5Cs. And so we would spend about 40 minutes going over what each of those things mean and what they should be looking for in the classroom.

That's how we built our social compact with parents. If you think about it, our learning priorities are hard to argue with. They are part of the Common Core in California. It's in the state's frameworks, but unfortunately, many districts don't teach these standards because they are not tested.

When we go into classrooms, the visit is usually led by a community liaison who is able to speak the language of the families. In every case, they come away appreciative. It's nonjudgmental. They don't use this as a chance to point fingers at teachers. It's really about just understanding what you're observing.

However, at the same time, the parental observations are putting attention on teaching and learning in our schools. And afterwards they have a debrief and there are two takeaway questions: (1) What did you see in terms of these 5Cs, and (2) What can you do to support the learning you observed at home? Then, there is also a third piece: If it's not happening, what should you do? So, the parents were learning about who to hold accountable, and the process of holding folks accountable.

Dean Noguera: I'm really impressed that you and your teachers had no objection to that kind of parental involvement.

Superintendent Matsuda: Initially, some did, so we piloted the learning walks with teachers who volunteered. This allowed us to create a positive narrative about the process. We worked with the teachers who were confident in their practice. Later, we shared the practice at staff meetings, and worked closely with the teacher's association on this. This allowed the learning walks to grow to a point where it is now institutionalized.

Carl Cohn, the former superintendent of Long Beach and the founding executive director of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), came to the district and observed what we were doing. I think he was really impressed.

All of this was happening before the pandemic. And that's how we built trust in the system at a time when many schools were going the opposite direction in terms of lack of trust in institutions. And that was exposed during COVID.

Dean Noguera: Well, this is impressive because both you and I know in a lot of districts figuring out how to prioritize needs under LCAP has been a source of some tension, and even lawsuits. So, it sounds like really building trust has worked for you.

Here's another question: In what way are the leaders in your district working to manage the controversies that have emerged over how to manage during COVID? In several communities there have been conflicts around masks and vaccines mandates. This has been especially the case in Orange County. Have your district leaders been able to use the trust they built with parents to manage effectively during this period of conflict? I'm particularly interested in hearing how they have worked with communities that have been reluctant to accept the vaccines?

Superintendent Matsuda: Well, we have drawn heavily on the concept of coherence that Michael Fullan [2016] has written about, and systems from Peter Senge [2006], to create a "learning organization." We did this so that we can pivot during periods of uncertainty, like the pandemic. As was true for everyone else, this was thrust upon us. In such a situation you have that trust. This made it possible for us to immediately close schools on March 13th, 2020.

I had a book study with our admins on *Leadership in Turbulent Times* by Doris Kearns Goodwin. As you know, she has studied four presidents. We studied her book together and we examined how these folks managed public opinion, public sentiment, and created a system internally that allowed them to respond to crisis.

That's what we were aiming for. But the pandemic really put us to the test. As we formulated our response, we immediately started holding town halls to keep our community informed. Fortunately, we already had good partnerships with nonprofits and higher ed institutions like UC Irvine, and their medical school. We even drew upon expertise from as far away as Johns Hopkins University. Fortunately, we could get a lot done through Zoom meetings so that we could reach across the country to find experts.

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We also identified medical experts within our own community. We have 30,000 students. Doctors and healthcare workers who can speak the languages of the families we serve were essential. We drew on the concept of *promotura* that's used in the healthcare industry. It's a Spanish word, meaning promoter, and we used it to promote understanding and trust. Trying to reach immigrant communities during a period of crisis is not easy. We had families that wanted to know where to go for pap smears and breast cancer screening. A lot of the women in our community did not know where to obtain this information. There was a lot of stigma about seeking it out. So, the healthcare industry came up with the idea of training lay people, often referred to as *comadres* who were already trusted by their communities as a source of information.

So, what we did, Pedro, when the pandemic happened, was we trained staff and community volunteers with UCI and Latino Health Access, a local nonprofit. These folks helped us in building trust. We used some of our COVID monies to pay them, and that was really effective.

Dean Noguera: How did you get these women, the *comadres,* to work with you? How did you recruit them?

Superintendent Matsuda: We were already working with a lot of folks we identified as community leaders through the learning walks. These are parents that were ready to become parent ambassadors because they are the organizers and leaders.

Other districts may be reluctant to engage students and parents and voices the way we do. But we have found that when parents have a say at the table it makes a difference. Right? Democracy is messy, but if you're going to build trust, you've got to allow different voices and perspectives to be represented.

We do something similar to encourage student voices. I'll give you some concrete examples. We have our own version of Ted Talks. We call them AUHSDtalks and some of them take place in our English classes. It happens in science and other subjects all across the district, from grade 7 through grade 12. For kids who've been participating in these public talks you can really see how strong our student voices become.

All of this work on parent and student engagement has converged into a new framework that we call the Career Preparedness Systems Framework (CPSF). There are three components that are central to CPSF. One component is the development of soft skills. The second driver is the technical

skills. That's the career tech education pathways. We brought in Google and we were the first district in the nation to partner with Google, who has put a billion dollars into a program to create greater cohesion between higher ed and the world of work. The third driver is probably the most important, and that's the development of student voice and purpose.

Dean Noguera: You sent me some data about your academic accomplishments yesterday. Can you tell me about it, the data that you sent?

Superintendent Matsuda: Yeah, we're very excited about the three-year data we have. On several indicators, our Anaheim kids are outperforming kids from wealthier districts. All of the other districts in our county collect data on GPA and college persistence rates, right? Our persistence rates are 10 points above the average and we are blown away by what we have accomplished.

Dean Noguera: I'm really impressed by what your district has done. What's particularly significant is that your kids come from households with much lower incomes.

Superintendent Matsuda: Yes, that's right, Pedro. I want to make this really clear. We do not use the interim assessments for the SPAC to teach the test. We spend our Professional Learning Community time on applied projects, on developing the 5Cs. In terms of academic performance, we are way above California, particularly with respect to our A-G rates.[2]

This is a mindblower. Our A-G completion rates are now tied or above districts like Newport Mesa and tied with Huntington Beach. Wow! So, UCI is looking at what we're doing to understand how we've managed to make so much progress.

We're not settling for good test scores though. We've developed career pathways, 20 of them across eight high schools. We begin in junior high. We have developed cutting edge pathways in partnership with business and nonprofit, and we have 90 partners now.

For example, we lead Southern California in preparing kids to work in cybersecurity. We brought in a cybersecurity firm, FinTech, and the dean of the business department at Cypress College, because we were building a dual-credit program. Now we have kids who are graduating from high school, getting jobs at Hulu, starting out at $65,000 a year with a high school diploma, and two dual-credit courses. That's really impressive. Hulu helps subsidize their education and they get salaried over $100,000 when they get a bachelor's in computer science. We've used that same model to build an artificial intelligence program at Kennedy High School. And we're building a biotechnology program at Anaheim High School.

Dean Noguera: Wow! These are really the jobs of the future. Getting kids into good paying jobs in the high-tech sector will hopefully lead to careers that will allow your kids to support themselves and improve the circumstances of their families.

Superintendent Matsuda: Yeah. And you could imagine we've changed the narrative for the parents. We used to have parents who were putting a lot of pressure on the kids to get a job. And kids would leave school to take a job as a carpenter or whatever. That's fine if that's what you want to do or if that's your calling. But our students can see that there's a lot of great jobs available in an all kinds of fields if you get adequately prepared.

You can imagine a first-generation Latino parent, because initially they didn't want their kid to go into cybersecurity because they didn't know what it is. Now that kid is bringing home enough money to pay for the rent and so, now they're saying, "Hey, tell me more about cybersecurity." The kids are telling their parents about the kinds of jobs they can get now.

Dean Noguera: That's really awesome, Mike. I just want to say how commendable and important what you're doing is. It's so comprehensive with respect to the way you're thinking about serving this community, serving these students, and the results you're getting is so impressive.

To summarize and bring this interview to a close, what you're basically doing is you're working on all the fronts. You're engaging parents in key decision-making roles about funding and how to prioritize those LCAP funds. You're involving parents in learning walks so they can see what's happening in the classroom, and you're really getting kids prepared for college.

And the evidence is showing that your students are doing extremely well, despite, again, the economic disadvantages they face. You're also giving them access to jobs in the high-tech sector which will really expand opportunities to improve their mobility in the future. You're demonstrating that poverty, while still an issue, doesn't have to be insurmountable.

References

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Endnotes

[1] A district's Local Control Accountability Plans, or LCAPs, sit inside of California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) legislation. The intent of the LCFF legislation was to decentralize decisions from the state to local school districts, based on the assumption that districts know their population best and know the resources needed to support the students—especially struggling students. LCFF requires a stakeholder engagement process, such that stakeholders are involved in how to spend money from the state. All districts are required to develop their LCAP, on a three-year cycle, with stakeholder involvement..

[2] To meet minimum admission requirements for the University of California and the California State University systems, students must complete 15 year-long high school courses with a letter grade of C or better—at least 11 of them prior to the last year of high school. These are known as the A-G requirements.

Michael Matsuda is a nationally recognized 21st century educational leader known for innovation, entrepreneurship, and compassion. Under his leadership, the Anaheim Union High School District has built a new educational model incorporating "reverse engineered" career pathways in partnership with higher education, private, and non-profit sectors, which have extended and transformed educational opportunities for all students. Mr. Matsuda has been superintendent since 2014, during which time he has earned several accolades, including a national "Leaders to Learn From" Award from Education Week Magazine and the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE) Administrator of the Year Award.

Pedro Noguera is the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the Rossier School of Education and a Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. Prior to joining USC, Noguera served as a Distinguished Professor of Education at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Before joining the faculty at UCLA, he served as a tenured professor and holder of endowed chairs at New York University, Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of 15 books. In 2022 he was ranked 3rd in the nation for influence and impact in education by Education Week.

Jennifer Goldstein, Ph.D., is Professor of Educational Leadership at California State University Fullerton. She directs Leadership Education for Anaheim Districts, a vibrant university-district partnership for leadership preparation and development and a member of the National Network for Educational Research Practice Partnerships. Prior to coming to CSUF, she taught in the School of Public Affairs at City University of New York, Baruch College.

Willful Defiance:
Connecting the Arts, Liberatory Education, Research, and Movement Building

An interview conducted by Mark R. Warren with Patrice Hill and Denisha "Coco" Bland
from Sacramento Area Youth Speaks

Patrice and Coco are the creators and performers of the spoken word piece "Willful Defiance," produced in association with the book *Willful Defiance: The Movement to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline,* authored by Mark Warren, Professor of Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston. In this interview, Patrice and Coco discuss the role of spoken word and the arts in empowering young people, dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, and partnering with community-engaged scholarship to engage participants in building a movement for educational justice.

Patrice Hill is director of Sacramento Area Youth Speaks. She is a community based educator and activist scholar and serves as a steering committee member of the People's Think Tank for Educational Justice.

Denisha (Coco) Bland is associate director of Sacramento Area Youth Speaks. She is a community based educator and activist scholar and serves as a steering committee member of the People's Think Tank for Educational Justice.

The purpose of the interview is to provide an opportunity for community-based educators of color, particularly Black women who are mothers and embedded in extended family and community networks, to describe the connections they see between the arts, liberatory pedagogy, and organizing for equity and justice. The spoken word piece they wrote to engage people around the *Willful Defiance* book offers an opportunity for them to reflect on their day-to-day local work with young people and connect it to national movements for educational justice. We can see from this interview that the lines that are often drawn between organizing, artistic expression, and research are false; rather in the hands of organizers like Patrice and Coco, they form an integrated whole, driven by a passion for children and for justice.

This integrated vision and practice, articulated by women of color, offers a different framework for thinking about where educational leadership for social justice is grounded and emerges, and consequently contributes to the theme of this issue. "We" do not always engage "them" in research and advocacy as implied by the title of the special issue; rather, these educators demand to be heard, to be recognized as scholar activists, and to hold a seat at the table of community engaged scholarship and advocacy.

Mark: Can you tell me a little bit about Sacramento Area Youth Speaks and what you are trying to accomplish in your work with young people.

Patrice: Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS) is a program of the University of California at Davis. We exist to help bridge the university to the community. SAYS is a critical literacy program that uses spoken word and hip-hop poetry to help young people become authors of their own lives and agents of change. We are committed to being scholar activists, to having one foot in the university and one foot in the community, and trying to really understand what it means for the university to serve the community.

SAYS uses a pedagogy of poetry to go into schools and work with young people. We have a plethora of programs we offer to young people. We have accredited elective classes, in-class residencies, and after-school programs where young people are exposed to a culturally relevant curriculum that uses

JAY DUTHIE, 11TH GRADE

the foundations and principles of spoken word poetry, hip-hop, and literacy as something that can unlock academic success.

Coco: We're a social justice movement that creates a bridge between the university, the schools, and the community. We're here to give young people a safe space to share their voice and their truth, as well to create a pipeline into higher education.

Mark: Can you say a little more about what you do in schools?

Coco: We go into the schools, making sure the most vulnerable youth have the things that they need to achieve academic success. We work with the students that are considered "low achieving" and "at risk." We like to say "at promise" instead. So we make sure they understand all the tools and the things they need to be able to access higher education as well as exposing them to higher education.

Patrice: It takes different forms. One is a credit elective class, HEAL, which stands for Health, Education, Activism, and Literacy, where we as Black women began to work with Black girls. We see a cohort of young people now every day of the school week. It's really in-depth, and it goes on their transcript. We're engaging them with a critical, culturally relevant education that empowers them.

One of the most unique things about SAYS is that we bring community-based poet-mentors into the classroom. They work hand in hand with teachers to engage students. These community artist-educators have similar backgrounds to our students. They went through the public school system and understand the things that students might be struggling with outside of school.

This brings the arts into schools with a social justice foundation that allows the arts to be a catalyst for activism, inspiration, and academic success. Then, using the arts, we give young people a voice outside of the classroom, running the city youth poetry slam season of events, the Sacramento youth poet laureate program, and the MC Olympics, which is a youth hip-hop MC battle-style competition. We give young people outlets and platforms to stand in their truth without being censored and without being confined.

We want to create spaces where young people have the opportunity to thrive and succeed and be motivated. That ties back to the university because there are so many young people in Sacramento who have never been to UC Davis, even though UC Davis is just 25 minutes away from the city. The university is supposed to be a place of inspiration, of welcoming, and of honoring the place where it lives. All young people should have access to that. So SAYS brings 500 young people to the UC Davis campus every year to let them see that this is for you too.

Mark: You both recently wrote and performed a spoken word piece — published in the Expressions section of this issue — connected to the book *Willful Defiance: The Movement to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline,* which is a book about how Black and Brown young people, parents, and communities are fighting for educational justice. Could you tell me what you were hoping to achieve and accomplish with this piece?

Coco: When we wrote the piece, it was the passion of it all. I've been working in the classroom for almost 14 years, both of us, and we work with the kids that are the cogs in this school-to-prison pipeline. How do we dismantle that? By speaking to our youth, shining a light on what's happening, because sometimes our youth don't fully understand what's happening to them.

I got very passionate about dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline when I was about 20 years old. I took one of my cousins to juvenile court. And I noticed that the only youth in the court system was Black and Brown youth. And I said, "something's wrong." The way you start to put those pieces together is to start to speak out about it, to share your truth about it. I've been gifted with the talent to be able to speak my truth with poetry. So when we started putting the spoken word piece together, we just dived into all the things that we saw that was happening in these schools that sometimes gets swept under the rug. Sometimes, the best way to shine light on it is through poetry.

Patrice: We have lived this experience of teaching in schools where there are adverse policies and systems set up to fuel the school to prison pipeline. And we have been working at SAYS to dismantle systems of oppression that occur in schools that push our babies out, that push Black and Brown students out.

The *Willful Defiance* book gave us fuel to understand that we have to speak our truth because we're living this. We're teaching in schools where there are partnerships with the local police departments and contracts with the local police who get paid to take our students to jail. And it's disproportionately Black and Brown students who end up in the juvenile justice system. We know that that is wrong— when young people can come to school and go to jail. We know that there are issues that our young people face that sometimes cause behaviors that are not appropriate. However, taking young people to jail is the wrong answer. It needs to stop. Our young people need curriculum and a holistic education that fuels them to want to come to school and learn and to want to be more than what they see.

Our passion fuels this because we are in the schools every day. It's different when you're writing about it and you see the school system on paper versus when you're in the schools every day, interacting with young people and having to help young people navigate through the systems that work against them.

Coco: The book is a great resource, but we wanted to express our passion through spoken word.

The book reveals a lot of things people don't know. I didn't know how widespread are the laws allowing suspensions for willful defiance. To be able to go back into school to show kids what happens when you get kicked out of class is powerful. They sometimes think, "Yeah, I'm happy I got kicked out of class." But we tell them that they're building a case on you, this is going to transfer with you into your adulthood.

I didn't know about this when I was in the K through 12 system. I thought when a teacher kicked me out of class, it was good because I didn't have to do the work. But, no, I was playing in this system that impacted me. As a result, I didn't graduate from high school. I graduated from a continuation school and went back to college in my mid-twenties. At SAYS we don't want our students to have to go down these same paths. We expose them to these things early on. If you can't read or write, you're being pipelined to the prison. If you're getting referrals all throughout your high school career, you'll never go to a university. Many of our students don't even know that!

So, to be able to have that information and give it back to the students front-hand, like "Hey, it's a book, me and Mama P [Patrice] is doing a poem to it. Let me expose you to some real game that's happening in America." That's why we were so excited to be a part of the book and the movement to expose the system not only to our kids but to our parents—what this "willful defiance" is all about.

Patrice: When we started writing the poem, we started doing a lot of additional research. We had already done a lot of research on the school-to-prison pipeline because this is one of the core pedagogical components of our curriculum: trying to get young people to understand the school system and how it connects to the prison industrial complex.

You sent us the proofs of the book *Willful Defiance* and as I was reading it, the data is what infuriated me. I'm working in this system where this data keeps showing me that Black and Brown students are being disproportionately funneled out and pushed out. I didn't even know "willful defiance" was a legal term that they used. We were finding things out like Black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to be suspended at least once from school. "Huh! How is this possible in America?" The data speaks for itself, and we're so honored to be a part of something that's so informative.

When we bring this curriculum to our young people, and we ask, "What is the school-to-prison pipeline?" So many times people don't even know it's a thing. We have to be able to spread awareness and access to what is going on in our schools and in our school systems.

Coco: We're in California, the prison state. We have almost 40 prisons in this state, privately owned. We have more prisons than we have universities. We're prison heavy. The California prison system is one of the biggest prison systems in the United States. How do we dismantle that from the inside? Why not be on the front lines to break that?

Mark: Why does the educational justice movement or social justice movement need the arts, like spoken word and other artistic forms of expression?

Coco: Art speaks truth to power.

Patrice: Our founder and former director, Dr. Vajra Watson always says there's no protest without poetry. The arts have always played a vital role in movements. In the Civil Rights Movement you had various artists that contributed their artistic power and their artistic voice to help bring light to the suffering that folks were going through. In this country, we have the blues as one of the oldest art forms for Black folks. It was born out of oppression, out of suffering, out of abuse and longing and wanting to have an outlet to speak your truth, to sing your sorrow, to speak your pain, to fight

for your liberation through something that couldn't be taken from you. One of the oldest things that Black folks have kept with them is art and song and celebration through music and poetry.

So, I believe that the arts have a valuable place in social justice movements. Art can connect us in ways that sometimes academia can't. I think that art speaks to people's souls. Art connects people. Art is rooted in truth and is rooted in our humanity and who we are. Art can break through those barriers that divide us. Art connects people because it shines light on people's stories.

Coco: Hip-hop started out as political protest: young Black and Brown boys telling people what's happening in our neighborhood and the injustices we faced. People connect through movement, dance, and graffiti. So the best way to get information out, to connect us, is through music and rhythm. We can't have a movement without arts like poetry, like a Harlem Renaissance, a Black Arts Movement, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, all these great people that shined light on what was happening. Artists encouraged and motivated people in the movement.

Patrice: I think about Billie Holiday and "Strange Fruit." I think about James Brown, "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud." I think about artists who have continuously used their platform to inform folks of the disparities and the injustices that folks have been put through. It's my duty as an artist to name what is happening, to give a lens on what is happening, to spread awareness to what is happening. In my profession as a teaching artist, as an educator, I've been able to touch way more young people through art and poetry and spoken word and hip-hop than in any other way. Art helps us get past the barriers and we can start speaking to each other's souls.

Mark: Do you have an example of how you see the impact of the work of SAYS in the arts on young people and the community in Sacramento?

Coco: SAYS has become the predominant youth voice program in the city. SAYS curates the citywide youth poetry slam scene. If anyone is looking for a youth poet, or a youth artist, they turn to SAYS. They ask for SAYS youth to help facilitate their programs. Alexandra Huynh, our youth poet laureate in Sacramento, is now the 2021-2022 national youth poet laureate. She came out of a SAYS class at Mira Loma High School.

Patrice: Prior to COVID, we had more than our fair share of police killings. Young people responded in myriad ways, through art, through organized protest, through school walkouts. We saw that the young people who were empowered artistically took a lead in the youth resistance to police killings in Sacramento and led actions and protests. I see the young people that have been given places and stages to speak their truth unapologetically through the arts take the reins on civic engagement and youth political response to various injustices that have been happening.

Also, a lot of the young people that have been given spaces for their artistic voice have made careers out of using their art in social justice movements. I see art empowering folks and contributing to their agency in ways that hadn't happened before, because there weren't these outlets and spaces where young people can go and have access to a mic and be able to say whatever they want to say.

Mark: As you know, the *Willful Defiance* book is a project of the People's Think Tank on Educational Justice and we have a whole program to use the book to engage educators, communities, and the public around the critical importance of centering the people most impacted by injustice in efforts to transform schools towards equity and justice. The think tank is dedicated to producing knowledge that supports educational justice movements. You both have made a commitment to be on the steering committee of this think tank. Can you tell us what you feel you are contributing to this form of community-engaged research and knowledge production?

Coco: This is so important to me because it gives us the opportunity to be able to connect with people across the nation. Sometimes we get so siloed in our own state. It's so exciting when we get to come together and just sit down and get the information on what's happening across the country. We find out things like, "Oh my gosh, I did not know that was happening in Baltimore too, or I didn't know that was happening in Boston too." This is not just California. For so long I thought California was the only prison state and doing this school-to-prison pipeline thing. To be able to

have our voice on the panel to talk about what's happening in California is an honor. And it's a great opportunity to sit with like-minded people from across the country.

Patrice: This work can be very draining sometimes. Being part of a group of folks that are doing this work across the nation feels so empowering. It just shines a light on the educational system as a whole. To work with folks like Jonathan Stith from the Alliance for Educational Justice, folks that have dedicated their lives to this work, it makes us understand that we're so much more powerful together than we are apart.

The things that we've been able to do in so little time have shown the impact of movement-building and national organizing. We know that to change public education is going to take everyone coming together.

Everyone in the think tank is focused on a different aspect of the disparities in the school system, from immigration rights to police-free schools, and we come together to see the interconnections. The concept of intersectional organizing builds my spirit. The term intersectional organizing is one of those "aha" moments for me. I feel honored and privileged to be in constant communication with a group of individuals that is really living out this work.

Nobody talks about it. Everybody is being about it. Mark is writing books. Everybody is doing different types of grassroots social justice work in their respective cities and in their respective organizations. It's so important for us to understand how the different types of injustice in our schools are playing out across the nation, how we help each other, how we bring light to that, how we contribute to the movement, how we convene and then bring other folks together to convene with us, how we plan and do the research. All of that just is so empowering and also is building a legacy for national educational justice movements to come together and understand how we can shift this narrative and shift this reality that's happening in our schools.

Patrice: The books from the People's Think Tank, like *Willful Defiance* and *Lift Us Up Don't Push Us Out!,* are legacy writings that are documenting the work that's happening right now across the nation in regards to educational justice. So, I'm just honored to be doing this work alongside you and other folks and able to contribute in these small artistic ways. The folks on the People's Think Tank are like family. You've got to have a family because this work can be so draining.

I want to say a shout out to young people, especially our young people in Sacramento and our young people that helped contribute to the video. The young people always got our backs. When we say, "Me and Ms. Coco need to shoot a video today," they step up to the plate and have our backs.

To the folks that are doing this work, I say keep pushing, keep going. We know it's hard. It takes a lot to move a mountain, but just stay in this fight because our young people need you. Our babies need you. We're all in this together.

Coco: Education is one of the oldest systems. We all have to send our kids to school, no matter what shape, color, or size. So why not come together to transform education. It's a new America after COVID. It's a new time, so why not finally bring justice to the most vulnerable community, which is our children. As we say in SAYS, "futures forward," because the future is for us.

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Mark R. Warren is Professor of Public Policy and Public Affairs at the University of Massachusetts Boston and author of Willful Defiance: The Movement to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline, which can be found at http://peoplesthinktank.us/willful-defiance/

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Expressions
in Urban
Education

"Displaced"

By Farkhanda M. Zahir & Jennifer C. Mann

Teachers, our students bear great burdens.
A poem penned by student and teacher.

They brought up religion
Promising a thousand things

At a happy party
They brought a martyr

Displaced from *the place*
Injured in the leg

Mother of the martyr
Searching for the shroud

And I cannot complain
As I do not search for graves

It has been destroyed
This homeland, *this* pain

Yet I remain
Frozen in this space

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Farkhanda Mohammad Zahir is a recent graduate of UNC Chapel with a Bachelor's degree in Neuroscience. She plans to one day pursue a PhD in Biomedical Sciences or attend medical school. Farkhanda works for North Carolina's U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants and is concerned about health and educational disparities in access and outcomes based on socioeconomic, geographic, and racial/ethnic factors. Through connections with various families, Farkhanda has developed a sense of self-awareness and cultural sensitivity, which she hopes to cultivate as she interacts with the community. Farkhanda is confident that higher education will prepare her to improve individuals' lives and address a community's needs.

Jennifer C. Mann is a doctoral candidate in the Teacher Education and Learning Sciences program at North Carolina State University, where she specializes in Literacy and English Language Arts. Her research interests include critical literacy, multilingual education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy. She has spent 15 years teaching students ranging from kindergarten to college, spending the majority of that time as a high school English Literature teacher, specializing in instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse students.

"Willful Defiance"

By Patrice Hill & Denisha "Coco" Bland

"Willful Defiance" is a spoken-word piece produced in association with the book *Willful Defiance: The Movement to Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline,* authored by Mark Warren.

Click to watch "Willful Defiance"

They don't care if our babies thrive at school
Long as they get by at school
Get by institutionalized racism and intergenerational oppressions systems
That keep prison pipelines thriving
Disguised as willful defiance
I'm trying
To figure out why urban schools have the highest rates of incarceration
Instead of culturally relevant curriculum that should be motivation leading
　　to liberation

Suspensions from school feel like eternity
Strategically guide the black and brown kids out
When we truly come to school with the intention to get free
Stifle academic and social/emotional education
I'm just saying
Could this be racially motivated?

Outcomes means primarily black and brown youth become
 academically stagnated
Leading to suspensions, expulsions, less school participation
Stereotypes perpetuated

Is your school pedagogy student discipline or human elevation?

Discipline data from the Department of Education
Found that Black girls are over five times more likely than white girls to be
 suspended at least once from school

This data infuriating

When Black girls are seven times more likely to receive multiple
 out-of-school suspensions

Where is the healing, motivation and rebuilding?

How do we stand in our confidence after is it disciplined away
How do I come to school ready to learn when you are trying to strip my
 intelligence and make it seem like I am insane?

Black girls three times more likely to receive referrals to law enforcement when
 white girls are getting away with behaving the same way.

And we already know what they are doing to Black and Brown boys it's insane
Just check the data it's been staying the same
I mean steady increasing it's definitely a shame
Do we want to teach Black boys or do we want to lead them away
To trajectories that don't lead to trade school or higher education degrees
Schools act like they are paid to lead them to the police
When it's supposed to be a safe haven to keep the youth off the streets
Expand opportunities increase the chances to succeed
Shouldn't school be focused on how to keep young people engaged and excited
 to be in their seats?

Stop mistaking our pride for reasons to collide us with suspensions, infractions
 eventually leading to police

We are attempting to dismantle the school to prison pipeline

Restorative practices instead of going to court to testify
Why my child deserves to be at school
Why does it seem like only the students of color are always breaking the
 school rules

Is it willful defiance or a term disguised as a way to label black and brown kids?
That engage in school determined behavior infractions
Exile them
Profile them
Initiate wrap sheets cause they speak in a way you may not understand
Demenors may not be what you deem appropriate but school learning should
    be cultural so teachers can comprehend

Who their students are and the environment they are living in
What students have to go through when they go home and live through before
    they can make it back to school again.
Have you taken out the time to comprehend
The life experiences of the children you are teaching and how your experience
    greatly differs from them.
We have to remember school can empower or be a major hindrance
Is your school pushing towards prison or the most beautiful existence

This difference is we fighting for educational justice
Trust us
We won't stop until we get our babies free
Educational liberation means we have to fight for what we believe
You can't suspend the truth out of our youth and you can't expel a generation
    that's meant to prevail
We demand an education where we can be more than our ancestors
    wildest dreams
We want to go to school and truly be free

Can somebody explain to me?

Why!
we try to go to school
As soon as we enter the class
the teacher says, "Bye-bye, we're not getting paid enough, why should I
Care for kids who don't care for self?
That's just one less person of color
We have to worry about getting wealth."

Can somebody explain to me?

Why! Our young sista's being suspended disproportionately?

Hands bounds with zip ties for throwing a tantrum,
Kicked out of zoom for sending messages.
Pipe down black girl; you're too domineering!
Push out; harshly disciplined; over criminalized.
Schools not meant for a black girl to shine.

Can somebody explain to me?

Why! all my beautiful Black and brown faces,
Sitting in the courtrooms over classrooms.
Juvenile offenders, minors, underage,
Facing life rather than graduating.
Something is wrong with this country's education?

We're losing our babies,
Perpetuating racism in a system
That is supposed to be set up for us to win.

If parents don't send their kids to school,
They criminalize them.
It's clear to me
Education is not for liberation;
It's for disciplining

Can somebody explain to me?

Why!

Officer on campus arresting teens,
Place the minors in custody,
Body slamming youth to prove inferiority.
It's a shame we live in a nation,
That doesn't invest in education.

Can somebody explain to me,
WHY?

Being black in school is a crime.
My skin ain't willful defiance,
It's just a dirty trap used,
To keep us stuck in the School-to-prison pipeline.

Patrice Hill is director of Sacramento Area Youth Speaks. She is a community based educator and activist scholar and serves as a steering committee member of the People's Think Tank for Educational Justice.

Denisha (Coco) Bland is associate director of Sacramento Area Youth Speaks. She is a community based educator and activist scholar and serves as a steering committee member of the People's Think Tank for Educational Justice.

"What Black Lives Matter means to an eleven (11) year old."

Jolia Bossette

"My Skin Is Not A Threat" is a fifth grade graduation speech given by Jolia Bossette in 2020. The speech was recorded by Vox Media as part of their ongoing reporting related to the unjustified murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others at the hands of police, and resulting protests and advocacy occuring in not only in the United States, but also around the world.

In the calendar year of 2020, the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and hundreds of other Black Americans at the hands of police officers inspired protests across the United States and around the world. The news coverage of America's racial reckoning was impossible to ignore, and it begs the question: How are kids, especially Black kids, processing this reality? How do they make sense of these deaths and the systemic factors that made them possible? In June of 2020, 11-year-old Californian Jolia Bossette decided to use her fifth-grade graduation speech as an occasion to give voice to her thoughts and feelings. In Jolia's speech, she reminisces about how she could go from being "the cutest thing," as a toddler and asked, "But when did I stop being cute and start being scary?" "Does my dad scare you? Does my mom scare you? Does my auntie scare you? Because let me tell you something: We are not scary."

This is a recording of the speech 11-year-old Jolia Bossette gave at her fifth-grade graduation in June 2020:
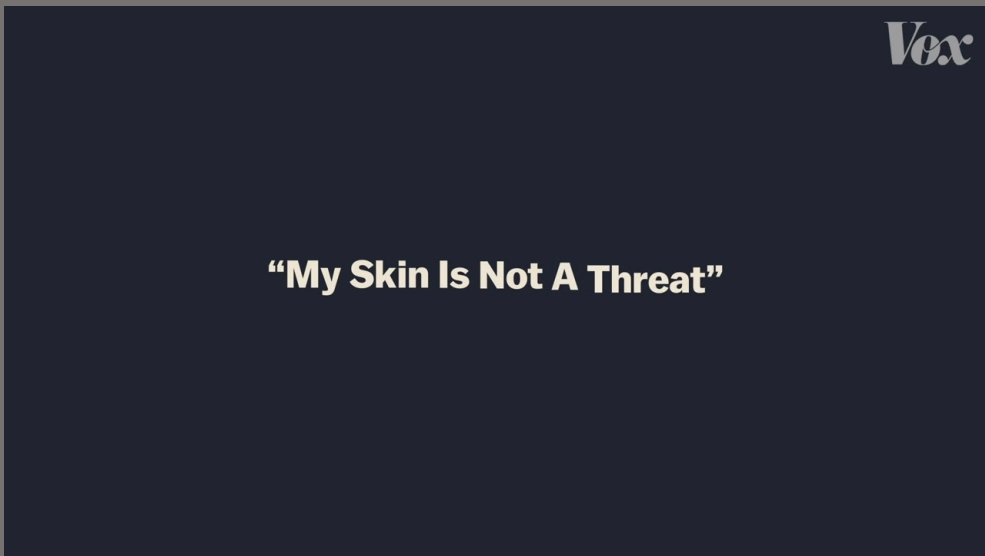
Click to watch "What Black Lives Matter means to an eleven (11) year old.

LESLIE RUIZ, 9TH GRADE

Research Perspectives on Urban Education

Rising Up:
Collectivizing, Strategizing, and Forging Solidarities among Parents and Caregivers Leading for Racial Justice

Dr. Vidya Shah and
Diana Grimaldos

Abstract

This study explores the experiences of 11 Black parents, one Latinx parent and one South Asian parent in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) in Ontario, Canada, who have challenged racial injustices and inequities in schools, districts, and the province. Drawing on composite counter-storytelling as a methodology of critical race theory, we reframe the activism of Black and racialized parents as the ultimate form of parent engagement and an important example of educational leadership. These strategies include: the energy of collectivizing, powering up, and building cross-racial and cross-community solidarity. We share implications for educational leaders in rethinking parent engagement and antiracist, educational leadership.

Este estudio explora las experiencias de 11 madres/padres negros, 1 madre latina y 1 madre surasiática del área metropolitana de Toronto y Hamilton en Ontario, Canadá, quienes han desafiado las injusticias y desigualdades raciales en las escuelas, los distritos y la provincia. Basándonos en la narración de historias como metodología de la teoría crítica de la raza, reformulamos el activismo de las/los madres/padres negros y racializados como la forma definitiva de participación de los padres y un ejemplo importante de liderazgo educativo. Estas estrategias incluyen: la energía de colectivizar, potenciar y construir la solidaridad entre razas y entre comunidades. Compartimos las implicaciones para los líderes educativos al repensar la participación de las/los madres/padres y el liderazgo educativo antirracista.

Keywords: Parent activism, community organizing, racial justice, educational leadership, parent engagement

Palabras Claves: Activismo, organización comunitaria, justicia racial, liderazgo educativo y participación de padres y madres.

The parallel pandemics of COVID-19 and white supremacy have exacerbated long-standing racial and intersecting injustices in schooling and society. The movement for Black lives, reignited by the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the United States, and Regis Korchinksi-Paquet, D'Andre Campbell, Jamal Francique, and others in Canada, are forcing us to reckon with historical and ongoing expressions of anti-Black racism, colonial violence, and other forms of racism worldwide. As a result, a global uprising in racial consciousness and solidarity with Black life met an uprising by largely White, middle- and upper-middle-class families fighting mask mandates and opposing antiracist and anti-oppressive approaches to schooling. Despite the enactments of antiracist leadership by select educational leaders in Ontario, Canada, there are pervasive systemic gaps in leadership preparation for racial justice and intersecting justices (Shah et al., 2022a).

Black, Indigenous, and racialized[1] families and communities have been leading racial justice efforts for decades, despite tremendous risks to themselves and their children. Against the backdrop of parallel pandemics, there has been a renewed rising up of parents, caregivers, and parent collectives leading antiracist transformations for Indigenous, Black, and racialized children and families in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). These collectives, both formal and informal, have led to increased parent activism and are leading to important changes in governance, policies, and
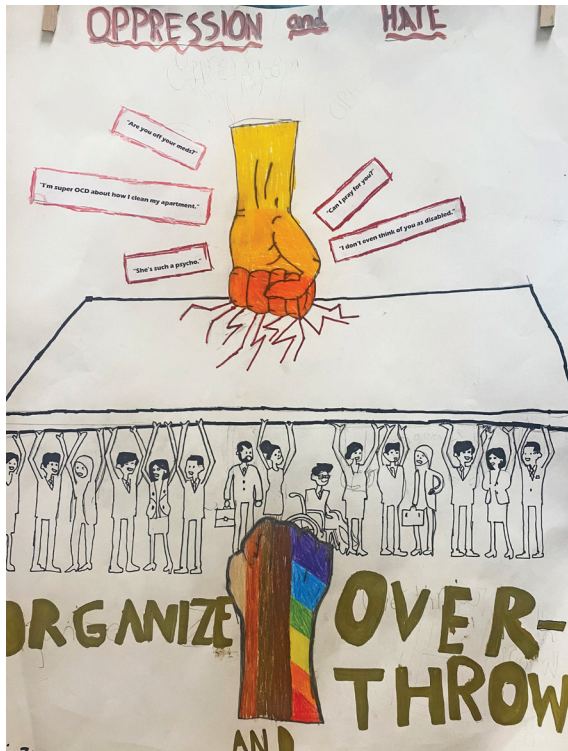
MUAZ HUSSEN, HAWKEYE THOMPSON, CALVIN BAKER,
AND OLIVER FIERSTEIN, 7TH AND 8TH GRADES

schooling structures throughout the province. We join others in acknowledging the tremendous leadership of parents and parent collectives (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru, 2014) and consider what educational leaders might learn about antiracist leadership from the activism, advocacy, and community engagement of Black and racialized parents, caregivers, and communities fighting for racial justice. Furthermore, we consider what educational leaders might learn about parent engagement from the very parents they have been socialized to construct as "problem parents" (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). We consider possibilities for conceptualizing parent engagement and leadership beyond individual, hierarchical, race-neutral, and apolitical aims to center collectivist, antiracist aims. This study uses composite counter-storytelling as a methodology to analyze the leadership and activism of 11 Black parents, one Latinx parent, and one South Asian parent in the GTHA. We begin by exploring the literature on parent activism and educational leadership for racial justice. We then offer three composite counter-stories that explore the nuances in Black and racialized parents' activism-leadership based on in-depth interviews, ongoing conversations, and the literature on community and racial justice leadership. Finally, we consider implications for educational leaders on rethinking both leadership and parent engagement for racial justice.

Parent Activism and Leadership in Communities

We draw on critical scholarship that explores how racism and intersecting systems of oppression mediate school-family-community relations in which Black, racialized, and immigrant communities are often viewed through a deficit lens (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). In these constructions, parent activists are often viewed as "problem parents" (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017) and experience a range of coercive tactics by educators and educational leaders who maintain the overarching power and control of schools over families (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022). As such, the experiences and activism of Black and racialized parents must be contextualized through critical, race-conscious discourses that promote collective and transformative agency (Ishimaru, 2020).

We also draw on scholarship that acknowledges community organizing with parents, community members, and youth as central to transformative schooling for historically oppressed populations,

and challenges power asymmetries in schooling by building collective power in nondominant communities (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011). From this perspective, educators, families, and students are seen as experts on policies and decisions that affect them (Warren & Mapp, 2011; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Black and racialized communities have expertise and lived experiences, making them important leaders in education (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Hong, 2011; Welton & Freelon, 2018). In Ontario, parents who have challenged racism and called for greater transparency and accountability in school districts are now running for election as school board trustees (Javed, 2018), filing human rights complaints (Francis, 2020), and rallying to protest anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism, and other forms of racism and exclusion experienced by educators, students, and families (Francis, 2020; Paradkar, 2020).

We draw on Ishimaru's (2014, 2019) equitable collaboration framework for family engagement that centers on reciprocal, collective, and relational strategies rather than traditional, deficit-oriented models (Baquedano-López et. al, 2013; Ishimaru, 2018; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Ishimaru (2019, p. 354) explains, "Equitable community–school collaborations entail (a) systemic change goals, (b) strategies that build capacity and relationships, (c) the role of lower-income parents and families of color as experts and fellow educational leaders, and (d) educational change as a context-specific political process." We also acknowledge that a growing body of antiracist educational strategies has emerged from the organizing work of Black families and community activists (Aladejebi, 2021, p. 5). Black mothers figured prominently in this study, as nine of the 13 participants identify as Black women. Central to Black mothering is the importance of protecting and affirming the child's racial identity (Mullings & Mullings-Lewis, 2013), childrearing as a shared responsibility, and the collective care and nurturance of Black children for the benefit and survival of Black communities (Collins, 2000).

Where Leading for Racial Justice Meets Leading for Activism

Over the past decade, a growing body of research on educational leadership for racial justice has emerged focusing on the importance of leaders unpacking their racial identities (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016), learning about race, racism, and Whiteness to advance dialogue and understandings about antiracism (Allen & Liou, 2019; Radd & Grosland, 2019), and developing a racial literacy (Horsford, 2014; Lewis, 2018). Rivera-McCutchen (2019) speaks to the importance of engaging antiracism with urgency to address persistent inequalities as an ethic of "armed love" (p. 237). Several studies focus on the importance of building relationships with families/communities and drawing on community cultural and linguistic wealth (Johnson, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016).

In considering community organizing as a form of educational leadership, school administrators engage in the public sphere by speaking to media outlets and in academic spaces to advocate for the needs of Black and racialized communities and students (Johnson, 2014; Welton & Freelon, 2018), by bridging community and educational institutions (Johnson, 2014), and by intentionally engaging in antiracist advocacy within schools and communities (Diem et al., 2019; Johnson, 2014; Rivera-McCutchen, 2019; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Horsford et al. (2019) use the conceptualization of political race as a framework to understand cross-racial coalitions between Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities and educational leaders as part of a shared struggle for educational justice. We also consider studies that explore conceptions of leadership beyond formal roles and individuals (Ishimaru, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018; Welton & Freelon, 2018). Like Rodela & Bertrand (2018, p. 4), we wonder, "if we expand the margins of who gets to be an educational leader to include youth, parents, and community members, what does this mean for how we prepare formal educational administrators to work collaboratively for social justice?" Ishimaru (2013) invites us to see youth, families, and communities as educational leaders, and invites educational leaders to lead *with* them, rather than *for* them.

Counter-Storytelling as Methodology

Counter-storytelling is a foundational tenet and methodology of critical race theory. Solórzano & Yosso (2002, p. 26) define counter-storytelling as "a method of telling the stories of those people

whose experiences are not often told," stories that both challenge dominant discourses and open the space for alternative narratives (Ikemoto, 1997). As such, knowledge is understood to be subjective and contextual (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Ikemoto (1997, p. 136) reminds us, "By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse." Instead, counter-storytelling intentionally highlights the stories that are silenced, erased, and ignored to perpetuate systems of power. Counter-stories also serve to "facilitate social, political, and cultural cohesion, as well as survival and resistance among marginalized groups" (Merriweather-Hunn et al., 2006, p. 45). Through "personal stories," "other people's stories," or "composite stories or narratives" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 32-33), voices from the margins become "places of transformative resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37) and a counter to narratives based on deficit models. We use composite counter-storytelling to challenge the dominant discourse of educational leadership being the sole domain of administrators and district leaders in kindergarten to grade 12 schooling and extend this discourse to include parents and community activists. We also aim to reframe the activism of Black and racialized parents fighting for racial justice as antiracist leadership and the ultimate example of parent engagement.

Contexts and Participants

This study is situated in urban and suburban settings within the GTHA in Ontario, Canada. While these local settings are distinct, they also share certain characteristics: high levels of diversity and the reproduction of social inequalities based on race, language, accent, religion and spiritual worldview, migration status, social class, gender and sexuality, disability, and more. Participants in this study come from five urban and suburban school districts in the GTHA, including four English school boards, one French Catholic school board, and one independent school board. To protect participant identities, we offer important details of the anonymized participant profiles in Table 1.

TABLE 1.
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT IDENTITIES

Race	Immigration
• 10 identified as Black • 1 mixed race (Black & White) • 1 Latinx • 1 South Asian	• 3 of the Black parents identified as African • 2 of the Black parents identified as immigrants • 2 of the non-Black parents identified as immigrants
Educational Background	**Religion Educational Background**
• 5 parents attended or completed college • 5 parents hold bachelor's degrees • 1 holds a master's degree • 2 hold PhDs	• 2 identified as Muslim • 4 identified as Catholic or Christian

Gender

12 identified as cisgender female (9 Black, 1 South Asian, 1 Latinx, 1 mixed Black and White) and 1 identified as a Black, cisgender male

This table speaks to the intersections of religion, migration status, gender, and race, offering important insights into the GTHA context. Importantly, all Black parents in this study experienced harmful and racist interactions in their children's school communities regardless of their educational attainment, dispelling the myth that social class mitigates against racism.

Researcher Positionality

Vidya Shah is a second-generation South Asian, cisgender woman on the stolen lands of T'karonto[2] in Dish With One Spoon territory. As a scholar-practitioner-activist, she is committed to antiracist approaches to leadership and school district transformation and continues to engage in initiatives, both formally and informally, to support parent and community activism as a necessary aspect of this work. Importantly, she is not a parent, which presents both limits and opportunities to engage in research on parent activism.

Diana Grimaldos is an immigrant Latina, cisgender woman mothering two first-generation, biracial, school-aged children in Toronto. She is committed to decolonizing her parenting, and with it, the public system that problematizes her activism. As a scholar, community advocate and mother, her anti-oppressive and antiracist approaches to education are reflected in her activism in parent engagement. She intentionally enacts resistance to racial injustice in both formal and informal spaces as co-chair of the school advisory council of her children's school and through coalition-building and conducting community-based participatory research in Ontario.

We consider the political, social, and ethical implications of engaging in this research as non-Black, racialized people, given that 11 of the 13 participants shared their experiences as Black parents. We have reflected on this tension throughout our research, shared initial ideas with participants for feedback, continued to follow and learn from participants beyond the initial interview, and turned to scholarly literature and the analysis of antiracist colleagues to hold us accountable. We are cognizant of communities of color being over-researched and under-supported, community knowledge being devalued, and researchers using community knowledge for professional advancement with limited action to change the very conditions about which they theorize. We have committed to sharing our research in public venues and making it accessible to a wide variety of audiences, including parents. For example, we have developed a webinar series and parent engagement guide (Grimaldos & Lara-Villanueva, 2021) on antiracist approaches to parent engagement for educators, parents, and caregivers. We continue to reflect on how we might engage in active resistance to change the structures of schooling that make the activism of Black and racialized parents an unfair additional burden and necessity.

Data Collection

We used snowball sampling techniques to invite into dialogue participants who have resisted racial injustice in schools, districts, and/or provincially for at least five years in the GTHA. Participants are all part of informal and/or formal parent networks committed to racial and intersectional justice in schooling. Most of the participants have relationships with one or both of us through personal relationships, community activism, or parent and caregiver collectives. Of the 13 participants, three were referred to us by known participants. Table 2 demonstrates the breadth of parent activism among participants.

TABLE 2.
SPECTRUM OF PARTICIPANT ACTIVISM

- 7 of the 13 parents started or are members of parent coalitions or organizations
- 5 parents are/were actively involved with school councils
- 5 parents are/were actively involved at the school district level
- 4 parents have run for elected office as school board trustees, or plan to do so
- All 13 are informally participating in parent engagement groups via WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram
- 6 parents learned about activism from their own parents/families
- Participant activism spanned classrooms, school advisory councils/school councils, district advisory councils and committees, the Ontario Ministry of Education, teachers' unions, and professional associations

In building on these relationships, we naturally moved from semistructured to unstructured interviews to disrupt the normative power dynamics between researchers and participants. We were also aware that we were being researched by participants as we were involved in the research process to assess our authenticity and commitment. We interviewed participants over Zoom to abide by COVID-19 protocols. The interviews lasted between 1.5–2 hours and became spaces where participants shared their experiences, emoted, questioned practices and structures, and celebrated their tremendous power as parents and caregivers. The interviews were recorded to develop transcripts and stored on a secure cloud-based service.

As part of a larger study, participants were asked about the incidents of racism that they and their children experienced that precipitated their activism, as well as their journeys towards activism and advocacy to lead change for racial justice. The former findings are shared and analyzed in our first publication (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022), with the latter findings shared and analyzed in this paper. In this study, we asked participants to share stories of their activism and advocacy, how their approaches have changed over time, and what they have learned. Transcripts were shared with participants, and they were invited to edit or add ideas. In some cases, participants shared thoughts that emerged after the interview on the phone or in written form.

Data Analysis

We engaged in co-reflection of the thoughts, hunches, questions, and reactions we noted individually during the live interviews and how we were reading and responding to the narratives of Black participants as non-Black researchers, in particular. We talked about the complexities of cross-racial solidarity that both center our shared experiences in a system of white supremacy and acknowledge the ways we are differentially racialized.

We triangulated interview responses with news reports and social media campaigns about parents fighting for racial justice in the GTHA, and ongoing conversations with participants. We used Marshall and Rossman's (1999) six phases of analytic procedures (organizing the data, generating categories, coding the data, testing the emergent understandings, searching for alternative explanations, writing the report) to co-create meaning from the data. Over a period of six months, we communicated two to three times per week about ideas that were emerging in these six phases, such as connections and contradictions between and across interviews.

Like Solórzano and Yosso (2002), we created composite counter-stories using this triangulated data, returning to the existing literature at multiple stages, and drawing on our own professional and personal experiences with parent and community activism. Below we outline three researcher-constructed composite counter-stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), each representative of themes we identified from the collective voices of participants. We chose to employ composite characters to protect the anonymity of participants (Cook & Dixson, 2013), while attentive to how we might be speaking for, attempting to save, or minimizing the expertise and experiences of parents, especially Black parents. We share these composite counter-stories below and conclude with comments on the importance of reframing parent activism *as* parent engagement and antiracist leadership.

Findings

In response to guiding research questions, we present the findings as the following composite counternarratives:

1. The Power of Collectivizing: "When the *I* Became *We*" as a counter-story to the individual leader and individualized understandings of racial injustice,

2. Strategies for Powering Up: "We Don't Want to Be Fighting Like This in 10 Years" as a counternarrative to hierarchical leadership models that aim to contain and reduce the power of others

3. Cross-Community and Cross-Racial Solidarities: "They're Standing in Front of Us, not Just Beside Us" as a counter-story to siloed and disconnected efforts towards justice

The Power of Collectivizing: "When the *I* Became *We*"

Collectivizing, moving from I to we, necessitates the sharing of stories, the sharing of power, and the sharing of wisdom. Collectivizing situates disconnected, individual experiences within a larger socio-political and historical analysis.

Charmaine's Story

I sat at the kitchen table poring over a news article about Black parents. They were fighting for their children's right to be seen, to be heard, to be believed. It was like I was reading a story about me and my son. I exhaled. Tears were rolling down my face. I picked up the phone and called Arlene.

"Did you see the article? It's not just James. It's not just us!"

"I've been telling you this," said Arlene. "This is the same nonsense that happened to me and my brothers when we were in school."

"I know, you've been telling me that. It's so hard because you don't hear about it in the news, and when your own son is treated like a criminal, you really feel at fault. It plays with your head."

"Look, Charmaine, systems are really afraid of a critical mass of people. They try to isolate you. They try to corner you so that they can then silence you and shut you down. So, we need to do the opposite."

"I can't believe we're still having these conversations. I can't believe we *still* have to fight for our children like this. Your mother had to fight for you. I have to fight for James. How much longer will we have to fight for our kids? It's exhausting. Do you see what it has done to James? His anxiety is getting worse."

"And what it's done to you and your health. Now you're working part-time just to deal with the school stuff. But, you know, as parents, we have so much power in the system. I wish more parents knew they have a voice and that their voice is power… And I know it's scary. Like the first few times you do it, it's like, 'Should I stand up to them? Are they going to hate me? Are they going to harm my kid?' … What about Amira? She doesn't speak English. How can she advocate confidently for her son?"

"You're right. You're so right," I said. "This can't keep happening to our children! It makes me so angry! You know, I feel like when we speak out to protect ourselves and our rights, we pay the price for it. We lose our jobs, or our kids face consequences at school. And nothing happens to the teacher or the principal! Nothing! They try to convince us that they're 'nice people' that don't deserve consequences. So, I'm not a nice person? Nobody cares if I'm nice or not. I just get fired. How's that fair? Where's the accountability here?"

"Exactly. It's not," said Arlene. "And it can't be an empty apology. So, if you are in a position of power and you did something racist, you either step down or you cut me a cheque because I'm going to sue you for it. I'm holding everyone accountable. I am reporting. And we have to educate and teach and empower others to do the same because that's the only way they will learn."

"That's it. We need to come together and share our stories so that we know we're not alone. And we have to be there for each other and show up for each other and each other's children. I'm going to reach out to the reporter to see if she can put me in touch with these parents."

"Good," said Arlene. "How can I help?"

Strategies for Powering Up: "We Don't Want to Be Fighting Like This in 10 Years"

In contrast to hierarchical organizations oriented to power hoarding and power over, *powering up* is a political and civic strategic approach that builds collective power by flattening hierarchies and connecting individual goals to larger visions for justice.

Jennifer's Story

That evening, I decided to attend a local parent meeting. It was filled with Black and racialized parents from schools across the district and maybe even other districts. Off to the right, one parent was translating a brochure to another parent in Urdu. In the corner, a parent volunteer was explaining the rights of parents in the special education process and offering to attend meetings with parents as a support and witness. "We'll be gathering in a few minutes, everyone," said one of the organizers. As I made my way to the front, there was a sign-up sheet for a variety of workshops, from deputations to how to launch a social media campaign.

"Welcome, welcome. What a turnout! We are especially glad to see so many new faces tonight. My name is Kendra, and this is Colleen and Jasmine. We are here because, like many of you, our children have experienced a lot of harm at school simply because of the color of their skin. This group has been supporting families for the past three years, families just like yours! We are committed to fighting racial injustice in schools and holding schools and educators accountable for their behaviors. We don't want to be fighting like this in 10 years and we definitely don't want our children to have to continue this fight. We have launched social media campaigns, we have met with school principals and the Minister of Education, and we have made deputations at school boards on behalf of Black and racialized parents. But we are also committed to listening to you, to hearing your stories, and to supporting you in whatever ways you need—whether that's providing a shoulder to cry on or helping you prepare for a meeting with the school principal, filing a human rights complaint, or whatever might support our fight for racial justice."

"Is this for real?" I asked the person sitting next to me.

"I know," he said. "It seems unreal at first. And it gets even better the more you get to know everyone. Kendra, Colleen, and Jasmine are amazing! They're not here for themselves. They're here for the work." I smiled and raised my hand.

"This all sounds wonderful, but I have to be honest. I don't really want to get involved politically. I just want to protect my child from harm at school and make sure she is happy and learning," I said.

"I didn't either at first," said Jasmine. "I had no intention of getting involved politically, but I'll tell you, I realized that it was a necessity. I had to understand the system, the policies, and the players to protect my child. I had to reach out to other parents in the same situation to ask them how they dealt with it. I needed these relationships to survive. I need these relationships to strategize my next steps. And trust me, that's all political."

"Black and racialized parents like me, from lower-income neighborhoods where school zones are not great, we survive because of our village," said Jasmine. "Aunties, grandmothers, neighbors, friends, all caring for each other's children. We care for all children; they are all ours and that is a political act." I smiled. I could feel the excitement and the nervousness well up in me. I felt the power of that village!

Cross-Community and Cross-Racial Solidarities: "They're Standing in Front of Us, not Just Beside Us."

Cross-community and cross-solidarity efforts invite organizers to see both the interconnections and power asymmetries between communities and to balance large-scale visions with local needs.

Shauna, Amira, and Isabela's Story

"I couldn't believe it. We had Muslim, White, Asian, Latinx, and all kinds of parents and caregivers standing up for us and with us. I never thought I would see the day," said Shauna.

"It really was beautiful, especially after all the conversations I've had about anti-Blackness in the Latinx community. I have to explain that whatever we do for us, others will benefit. And we will benefit from what they do," said Isabela.

"It's the same in South Asian communities. There's a lot of anti-Blackness," said Amira.

"Other racialized communities often gravitate to Whiteness and defend it and that is a disservice for not only Black kids, but for other racialized kids as well… My focus is Black kids, but what we know is that doing this work and changing the system will benefit Black children, but it will benefit all children in the long run," said Shauna.

"When we really think about it, like when we really understand the larger problem of white supremacy, we don't work for our community alone. We go where the need is greatest. We have to see it as a burden we all share," said Amira.

"Yeah, but we need to make sure that we acknowledge the differences within communities. There are so many differences and issues within each community, and we can't ignore that either. Social class is a huge one, and of course immigration and religion," said Isabela.

"It's true. And I think about some of the White folks that have come out to support us. They're standing in front of us, not just beside us. They're standing in front of us to shield us from some of the backlash or some of the daggers that are coming our way. That's true solidarity," said Shauna.

"We need to do that for each other. Communities need to be able to count on each other," said Isabela.

"We have to find ways to work together, across races. When that Islamophobic incident happened last week in Lexington, it spread like wildfire throughout networks of Muslim parents across the province. We need to organize so that we can learn from each other's struggles in different schools and districts and then think about how it applies to our local communities," said Amira.

"And back to the point about us experiencing racism differently," said Shauna. "It's also true that Black parents, and Black mothers in particular, have been leading the fight for racial justice for decades and our labour is often invisible. And we're often treated the worst and have the least protection in activism work. Black motherhood is inherently political. You know, the fact that we're able to keep and raise our own children and send them to school is an act of resistance, right? Because in slavery, we couldn't. We weren't afforded that. And so, I think as Black mothers, you have to be advocates for your kids. You cannot get through, particularly when you're raising boys, without some level of advocacy for your children."

"I'm so glad we can talk about this. We have to be able to talk about this. It's the only way we can move forward, together," said Isabela.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

This study positions the activism of Black and racialized parents fighting for racial justice as the ultimate form of parent engagement and an important example of educational leadership. In this section, we explore what educational leaders might learn from this activism about antiracist approaches to parent engagement and educational leadership.

Implications for Parent Engagement

As educational leaders continue to unpack how they frame parent engagement through hegemonic discourses of Whiteness, they might:

- Undo deficit-oriented institutional scripts (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017) and logics (Shah and Grimaldos, 2022) about Indigenous, Black, and racialized families, and recognize and value local knowledge. This positions families and communities as experts of their own experiences *and* the education system (Ishimaru, 2014; Welton & Freelon, 2018).

- Challenge parent and caregiver entitlement in White, wealthy communities.

- Reconcile the financial/emotional/psychic burdens of Black and racialized parents as another aspect of education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

- Disrupt racist notions of parent and family engagement that continue to position parental activism and advocacy as dangerous acts that need to be quelled to protect the same racist system that has harmed historically oppressed populations. Reframe fighting to protect your child as the ultimate form of parent engagement.

- Acknowledge that Black and racialized families *are* heavily engaged in their children's schooling (Ishimaru, 2020), often outside of formal schooling and often unacknowledged and silenced because they challenge racism in schools. These forms of engagement are born of necessity to protect children and support their learning, drawing on a tremendous breadth of intergenerational organizing strategies.

- Support the development of broader notions of parent engagement that account for multiple caregivers (family members, neighbors, and friends), caregiving structures (communal approaches to childrearing), and networks (across communities of identity and geography) that many Black, racialized, low-income, and immigrant families rely on for survival and wellness.

- Recognize their own role in creating the conditions for parents, caregivers, and families from various communities to come together, share individual and intergenerational experiences, heal, connect, and build networks, which often includes stepping back and allowing parents the space to engage in their own collective mobilization.

- Meet parents where they are (e.g., needs, interests, spaces), support them in navigating the school system and learning about their rights, and ensure the responsibility to families and communities is built into the school/district culture and every structure of schooling (Ishimaru, 2020).

- Co-create a transformative vision of schooling in which families, especially families from historically oppressed communities, inform every aspect of decision-making (Ishimaru, 2020; Shah et al, 2022b).

- Commit to a presence in the public sphere (e.g., writing, media) that works alongside parent and community activists to shift public discourse (Welton & Freelon, 2018) and raise collective critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Implications for Antiracist Educational Leadership

What might antiracist leadership learn from the organizing of Black and racialized parents and community activism?

- Broader notions of *who* can be a leader and *what* constitutes leadership (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018) and the importance of inviting parents and community members to lead alongside "formal" educational leadership.

- Understandings of leadership as a flattened network of reciprocal relationships and interchangeable roles, influenced by policy, discourse, and demographic realities.

- Ways to foster communities of care across identities (Horsford et al., 2019) and geographies through strong relationships and commitments to justice.

- The limits of their abilities to engage in antiracist leadership within colonial, racist institutions (Ishimaru, 2013) that often punish these efforts (Shah et al., 2022a) and the necessity of collaborations between leaders in schools, families, and communities to further educational equity (Ishimaru, 2020; Shah et al., 2022a).

- Their responsibility as paid leaders with often more stable work and institutional protection to share the burden by taking personal and professional risks for the collective goal of racial justice.

- The importance of engaging in organizing efforts with parents, caregivers, and communities to strengthen their socio-political consciousness and connect efforts between schools and communities.

Educational leaders have much to learn about parent engagement and educational leadership from the activism of Black, Indigenous, and racialized parent activists challenging the very systems that were designed to exclude them. We are grateful to the tremendous expertise, leadership, and labor of parent and community activists and organizers who take tremendous risks in their personal and professional lives to fight for more humane worlds and for schools that all children deserve.

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Endnotes

[1] We use the term racialized to speak to people who are non-Indigenous, non-Black, and non-White. In the context of this study, we are speaking to South Asian and Latinx parents and communities.

[2] Toronto originates from T'karonto, a Mohawk word that means the place in the water where the trees are standing.

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"To Make the Powerless Parents Powerful": Examining a BIPOC Community-Driven Approach to Family Liaisons

Eupha Jeanne Daramola

Abstract

School leaders continually seek innovative ways to engage with diverse communities. In this exploratory case study, I draw on the concept of community cultural wealth to explore how a Black and Latinx parent organization designed a family liaison role to support families with virtual learning during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that attention to the historical and cultural knowledge of Black and Latinx communities allowed for the family liaison position to be both supportive and emancipatory for the parents in the study. This research has policy and practice implications for leaders working with Black and Latinx communities.

Keywords: family engagement, Black parents, Latinx parents, qualitative methods, case study

"To Make the Powerless Parents Powerful": Examining a BIPOC Community-Driven Approach to Family Liaisons

A crisis, such as a global pandemic, may act as a focusing event where the ideas of politically disfavored groups are able to emerge and take hold (Baumgartner et al., 2018). COVID-19 posed a wide swath of problems for public education and has elevated issues of educational equity to the public's consciousness. As education systems seek a way forward, perhaps they will become more open to innovations from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

This study examines an innovation created by Black and Latinx parents during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the summer of 2020, a Black and Latinx parent advocacy organization named *Helping Our People's Education* (HOPE)[1] formed a model of wrap-around family support. At the center of the model were family liaisons. Traditionally, family liaisons are school support staff who connect parents to school resources. HOPE employed Black and Latinx parents to act as a nonjudgmental support system for other families as they navigated the daily process of pandemic education. As schools around the country struggled to support parents in the wake of the COVID-19, it is notable that HOPE relied on a staff position schools have historically implemented. Many schools and school districts employ family or community liaisons; however, the role is often shaped to meet the needs of educators and not BIPOC families (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007).

Through exploratory case study methods, this study aims to understand a BIPOC community approach to the family liaisons position. Applying the lens of community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005), I ask:

1. What was HOPE's family liaison model?

2. To what extent did HOPE's model draw on community knowledge and strengths?

3. How did parents experience HOPE family liaisons?

In the end, I found that an asset-based approach to BIPOC families was embedded in HOPE's organizational culture, the goal of the family liaison position, and the work of family liaisons. Par-

EMMA MORROW, MIKHAL CHERMOSHYNUK, LIAM KING,
AND LILLIAN BONEAU, 6TH AND 8TH GRADES

ents reported feeling deeply supported by their family liaisons, with some parents suggesting that working with a liaison increased their ability to address inequities within schools. This exploratory study of HOPE's community leadership has implications for school and district leaders seeking to adopt asset-based and community approaches to interacting with BIPOC families.

Literature Review

Family engagement is a critical strategy for supporting student learning and improving school policy (e.g., Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Warren et al., 2009). Unfortunately, school norms and politics often act as barriers to BIPOC families' full inclusion in school communities (Horsford & Sampson, 2014). For instance, family engagement standards are influenced by White middle-class norms, such as joining Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and fundraising (Dyrness, 2011). Low-income BIPOC parents may not have the time to join committees or have skills in fundraising (Posey-Maddox, 2016). Barajas-Lopez and Ishimaru (2020) found that "one size fits all" approaches may contradict leaders' community engagement efforts.

Furthermore, factors limit BIPOC involvement in traditional family engagement activities. When engaged in traditional family engagement activities, BIPOC parents may be excluded from positions of power or viewed solely as "helpers" (Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018). For example, McCarthy-Foubert's (2020) study of PTA practices in one racially diverse school district found the input of the Black parents was only implemented when it aligned with the interests of White parents, school staff, and district leaders. The alienation of BIPOC families from school spaces hinders school improvement efforts. BIPOC families possess knowledge that could aid educational improvement (Warren, et al., 2009). However, BIPOC families' historical, cultural, and community knowledge is often ignored by school leaders. Scholars have linked the erosion of BIPOC community voices to low student outcomes and poor policy decisions (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018; Ishimaru, 2018).

To bridge the divide between school-based actors and BIPOC families, many schools and school districts have implemented a role focused on school–community relationships, known as *family liaisons, community liaisons, home school liaisons,* or *parent coordinators* (Jacobsen, 2003). I use

the term family liaisons throughout while recognizing these positions have various names across schools. The next section of this review provides details and evidence on the work of family liaisons.

Family Liaisons

Family liaisons—often BIPOC women—are tasked with connecting schools and families. For example, the work of family liaisons might include keeping families informed on school policies and programs, providing services to families of "at risk students," hosting school events, and offering translation. There is limited research on family liaisons, and the existing research on the effectiveness of the family liaisons position is mixed.

A subset of research indicates that family liaisons foster relational connections between families and schools (Howland et al., 2008; Sanders, 2008). For instance, in one urban school district, teachers reported that family liaisons aided teachers in building trust and communicating with families (Ingram et al., 2008). In another study of family liaisons within a single school district, family liaisons reported that their work fostered a welcoming environment for families (Dretzke & Rickers, 2014). Importantly, most studies on family liaisons draw on the experiences of the school staff but do not include the perspectives of the families working with family liaisons.

Other research suggests that there are limitations to the family liaison role as traditionally defined. First, school leaders may narrowly construct the role of family liaisons, requiring them to act as "institutional agents" tasked with fulfilling school goals and agendas (Ishimaru et al., 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). For instance, in a study of family liaisons across three school districts, Ishimaru and colleagues (2016) found that family liaisons were tasked with explaining the schools' culture and expectations to parents. The authors also showed that family liaisons' approaches to family engagement was school-centered rather than emancipatory (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Centering schools' needs limits family liaisons' ability to advocate for parents (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007).

Next, school leaders may not fully understand the importance of the family liaison position and task family liaisons with school support roles. Dretzke and Rickers (2014) found that family liaisons reported monitoring the cafeteria or covering classes. Furthermore, family liaisons expressed wanting more support from district leaders, such as professional development opportunities and inclusion in school events to increase the role's visibility. The value school leaders place on BIPOC communities may shape how much they prioritize and protect the time of family liaisons (Green, 2017; Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Taken together, these studies suggest that family liaisons may foster deeper and more trusting relationships between schools and communities. However, the research also indicates these relationships tend to be centered on the needs of schools, rather than families. There is little evidence that family liaisons aid BIPOC communities in building power to influence school decision-making and practice, suggesting the need to interrogate new and community-based family liaison models.

Theoretical Framework

This study applies the concept of CCW (Yosso, 2005) to the work of family liaisons. Yosso's concept of CCW is in the lineage of work on cultural capital, which argues that middle-class and wealthy families provide their children with cultural and social advantages which aid their children in school and perpetuate social inequality (Bourdieu, et al., 1977; Lareau, et al., 2016). Often the theory of cultural capital is used to justify White students outperforming BIPOC students in educational spaces. Yosso countered this deficit view of BIPOC families by considering how BIPOC culture may empower and nurture students' educational trajectories.

CCW is grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). An aim of CRT scholarship is to give voice to the unique perspectives and experiences of BIPOC people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Yosso (2005) turned toward CRT to form an asset-based version of cultural capital. CCW details six distinct forms of capital—cultural knowledge skills, and abilities—which BIPOC families possess:

aspirational, social, familial, navigational, linguistic, and resistant (Allen & White-Smith; 2018; Yosso, 2005).

Aspirational capital is the capacity to erect and maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers. *Linguistic capital* refers to the intellectual and social skills gained through the ability to communicate in more than one language or style. *Familial capital* is a sense of community, history, memory, and cultural leanings. *Social capital* is the networks and community resources that provide instrumental and emotional support. *Navigational capital* is the social and psychological skills to maneuver through social institutions which are not built for BIPOC communities. *Resistant capital* is the knowledge and skills to challenge inequality. Taken together, the research suggests that while CCW may be overlooked by the dominant culture, these capitals assist BIPOC communities in reaching educational success.

CCW is often used to analyze how students across the K–16 spectrum deal with unequal educational systems. However, scholars have also utilized CCW to illuminate the experiences of BIPOC teachers (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018), BIPOC school leaders (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020), and BIPOC parents (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). Applying CCW to the work of family liaisons allows for the consideration of how family liaisons may draw on BIPOC cultural knowledge to support family engagement work.

Methodology

This research is part of a larger data collection effort focused on understanding the work of a parent advocacy organization during the first year of COVID-19. This sub-study employs a qualitative exploratory case study approach (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009) to examine the role of family liaisons.

Study Setting

The setting for this case study was a large urban city in the Western U.S. The case, HOPE, a parent advocacy organization, was started in 2016 by Black and Latinx parents concerned with educational inequity in their city. Through training and community organizing, HOPE aimed to empower Black and Latinx families to advocate for policies and reforms. HOPE officially became a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization in 2019 and is run by Black and Latinx parents and grandparents. At the time of the study, the organization had 14 full-time employees. Eight of the employees were Black, five were Latinx, and one identified as White-presenting.

Before COVID-19, HOPE did not have student programming. However, in response to pressing needs in the community, the organization created The Center, a virtual program. The Center offered K–8

TABLE 1.
**PARTICIPANTS
BY TYPE**

Participant Type	Relationship to HOPE	Participants
Leaders	Full-time HOPE employees; Held various organizational leadership roles	7
Family Liaisons	Part-time or full-time HOPE employees; Worked directly with parents	5
Parents	Non-HOPE employees; parents of child(ren) enrolled in The Center	6
		Total: 18

academic and enrichment virtual programming and a variety of online family supports. Originally, The Center worked independently from local schools, but after HOPE received local and national recognition for The Center, school systems approached HOPE to collaborate. For example, local charter schools partnered with HOPE to enroll students in The Center. Further, HOPE and the local school district received a $900,000 grant to scale aspects of The Center, including the family liaison position, into six district schools. HOPE leaders credited the success of their program to family liaisons.

Data Collection

This study draws on multiple forms of data to provide a deep description of HOPE's family liaison model (Merriam, 1998). The data for this study include 18 semi-structured interviews. I interviewed three types of participants: (a) HOPE leaders, (b) HOPE family liaisons, and (c) HOPE parents (see Table 1). All interviews were conducted virtually, recorded, and transcribed.

Virtual observations and documents also informed the analysis (Table 2).

TABLE 2.
NON-INTERVIEW SOURCES OF DATA

Data Type	Number of Data Collected
Organizational Meetings	2
Press Conference	1
Organizational Documents	18
	Total: 21

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process guided by the theoretical framework (Miles et al., 2013). First, I created a 240-page case summary, documenting the narrative of the overall case and capturing preliminary patterns and themes (Bush-Mecenas & Marsh, 2018; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Next, I identified the interviews and observations pertinent to this sub-study on family liaisons. The 18 transcripts and three observational field notes were uploaded into Dedoose analytic software and coded using a set of a priori codes to identify patterns (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, I utilized analytical memos to guide an axial coding process where I identified patterns within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I engaged in member checking and analyzed multiple forms of data to ensure trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 2009).

Findings

HOPE's Center was a model of wrap-around family services to support BIPOC families during COVID-19 virtual learning. At the center of this approach was the family liaison position. Each family enrolled in the program received a family liaison. HOPE's executive director discusses the role:

> What made this Center so special is every family had a family liaison. So that was like the sauce, the secret sauce on everything … if you can call that parent and check-in and say, "Hey, your baby's not showing up, is everything okay, what's going on?" and they'd be like, "Oh, they had the computer on and they go in there and sleep." Like it's everything that you need for somebody to actually understand another parent and not be judging that parent for what they can't do. It's actually supporting that parent where they are.

The HOPE leaders saw the family liaisons as the "secret sauce" of The Center. Family liaisons offered non-judgmental support to parents as they navigated the daily process of accessing virtual education.

The caseload for HOPE family liaisons was between 15 and 25 families. The HOPE executive director argued that keeping the family liaisons' caseloads small allowed for them to have a greater impact:

> So, something like a family liaison is not this new concept, but the way we incorporated it in The Center, it's more effective than you, than you've ever even seen it in [schools], because the ways that family liaisons' … work in the traditional public school system you have like one family liaison for like 300 kids. What, 150 families. So, most of these type of roles that are supporting the community and the district, they're already set up for failure, because they're already set up where you're not going to really be able to meet the needs of your community. It's already, it's like a deficit model, right? And so we built this like a real growth and support model so each, you know, so each family liaison has no more than 25 families.

The executive director admits that the family liaison position is "not this new concept," but in the HOPE model, family liaisons have smaller and more manageable caseloads compared to those in school districts. She argues that a family liaison with a caseload of 300 students cannot meet the specific needs of communities. By reducing family liaisons' caseloads to 15 to 25, HOPE family liaisons had the capacity to develop deep relationships with their families.

All the family liaisons interviewed reported similar work-related tasks. For instance, family liaisons called each family on their caseloads once a week. Furthermore, family liaisons were also expected to help enroll students in Center classes, monitor attendance, administer surveys to families, and provide resources and information on Center and community programming. Family liaisons reported that their priority was to build relationships with families. As one family liaison described:

> Our main focus is to build relationships with our families. You know, if you can have a relationship with someone, everything else can kind of like smoothly, you know, transpire. … You'll always hear us talk about relationships, relationships, relationships. Because that's the most important thing to us.

At first, HOPE's approach to the family liaison role appears similar to how school districts traditionally implement the role (Dretzke & Rickers, 2014). However, HOPE's organizational culture, the goals of the family liaison position, and the work of the family liaisons promoted an asset-based orientation to aiding and sustaining families (Table 3). A review of the data suggests two types of community capital (aspirational and familial) drove HOPE's organizational culture. Another form of community capital (resistant) was the goal of the family liaison position. Finally, three forms of capital (linguistic, social, navigational) influenced how family liaisons approached their work.

TABLE 3.
COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH CAPITALS EMBEDDED INTO THE HOPE FAMILY LIAISON ROL

Organizational Culture	Family Liaisons' Goal	Family Liaison Work
Aspirational, Familial	Resistant	Linguistic, Social, Navigational

Organizational Culture Shapes the Family Liaison Role

Organizational culture is the values, assumptions, and routines that shape how organizations approach work (Hatch, 1993). Data suggest HOPE valued aspirational and familial capital as an organization. In turn, this organizational value shaped how HOPE constructed the family liaison role.

Aspirational Capital

HOPE's core belief was that all parents wanted the best for their children. As one family liaison noted: "You want your children to thrive … and you want to set them up for success when they leave high school and get into college." However, the organization also recognized that BIPOC families experienced systemic barriers to receiving a high-quality education. As another family liaison shared:

> [HOPE] is a parent-led group that has empowered parents from the most underserved communities to demand high quality for schools and to disrupt systematic inequality that exists in [our] public schools. You know, it's our mission to make the powerless parents powerful, so, and that's what we're doing.

HOPE saw its role as helping families obtain a quality education for their children even with the barriers before them. The role of the family liaisons was to connect parents to resources to aid parents' hopes and dreams for their children.

Familial Capital

HOPE's solution to systemic barriers in education was to bring parents together as a community to address them. As one HOPE leader shared:

> [HOPE leadership] knew that we needed to make change happen, and we couldn't wait on the system to make it happen. We needed to make it happen ourselves. And over a period of time, we just came together and started demanding that quality education was something that was going to happen for all kids. Not just for ours individually, but as we fought for our kids, we started fighting for others.

The community-based approach to school change influenced the family liaisons who saw their caseloads as a community. As a family liaison shared:

> We will ascend through education together as a family, as a community. … Every parent I speak to, you don't feel like you got enough power, I'm going to make you powerful. We're going to make you powerful.

Family liaisons worked to bring parents into a community-driven movement striving for educational quality.

Resistance as the Goal of Family Liaison Work

The goal of HOPE's family liaisons was for families to develop the ability to advocate for themselves at the school and system levels. For instance, family liaisons wanted parents to have the skills to speak up when they experienced an equity issue at their schools. As one family liaison described:

> The main thing for us is to be an advocate for families. It's important to help families develop their own ability to advocate for their children. In order to become their, you know, their own leaders in their kids' lives.

Family liaisons worked with parents to become "leaders in their kids' lives." The support they offered parents was in service to that goal.

Asset-Based Perspective of Families Driving the Work of Family Liaisons

Linguistic, social, and navigational capitals shaped the tasks that family liaisons performed in relationship with families.

Linguistic Capital

The Center served both Black and Latinx families. The organization ensured that Spanish-speaking families had the same access to The Center and programs as English-speaking families. Four of the family liaisons spoke Spanish fluently and worked with Spanish-speaking families. The family liaisons on the Spanish team emphasized that they continually presented information in both English and Spanish. One Spanish-speaking family liaison recognized that translation is time-intensive but essential:

> [HOPE is] always sending information, we always have to translate it. We always have to translate it if parents can't, are not able to do it themselves … and also it takes longer. I think with us it takes longer. The Latino community needs a lot of support, and it takes time.

HOPE family liaisons recognized that parents possessed a multitude of communication and language skills and worked to remove any potential barriers to Spanish-speaking parents.

Social Capital

Across the study, participants expressed the stress of parenting both as a Black and Latinx person *and* during the pandemic. One parent shared her feelings of unpreparedness at the transition to virtual learning:

> I was just so overwhelmed. I was getting emails daily, multiple emails from the school. I just didn't know which way was up. Trying to navigate all the different platforms that they were giving [my daughter], like you know, she does Power School, Google this. It was just, it was so overwhelming for me that I can imagine that it was overwhelming for [her] too.

The overwhelming burden that virtual learning placed on parents was echoed by all the parents in the study.

A large component of the HOPE family liaisons' job was providing social and emotional care to parents. Family liaisons acknowledged that parenting was challenging and offered a sounding board. Family liaisons built relationships with families by drawing on their own experiences as Black and Latinx parents navigating the educational system. One family liaison explained her process: "Once I get to like telling my story and just opening up to them and letting them know, you know, they're not alone, and I, you know, we all relate in some type of way, and we come together."

Family liaisons also encouraged parents to have community with each other. For example, family liaisons heard from parents that the isolation of the pandemic was becoming a challenge:

> [Families shared] "virtual stuff is wearing me down too, and I need to—I need some social, I need to be social with somebody." So, they've been asking for like yoga classes and cooking classes and things where they can be engaged with the parents and stuff.

The family liaisons took that information back to HOPE leadership, and family liaisons began to facilitate a weekly virtual group for parents to engage in check-ins and activities such as yoga.

Navigational Capital

Family Liaisons provided families with support to navigate virtual school, public school policies, and the education system. First, family liaisons provided support to navigating The Center and virtual schooling in general, such as offering technical support and connecting parents to The Center-provided technological resources. As one family liaison described:

So, I work closely with families calling them, letting them know what we have going on, helping them set up their Zooms or, you know, just their emails, walking them through different things.

Next, family liaisons assisted parents in addressing school-based issues. For instance, one family liaison discussed how a student on her caseload was in danger of being left back due to her academic performance during the pandemic. As the student was a high-performing student before COVID-19, her mother and the family liaison found this unacceptable. The family liaison described how she supported the mother and her daughter (who the family liaison endearingly refers to as "baby"):

You know, but when you are a family liaison, and you communicate with a parent and the parent is telling me this, this is what they facing, you're like, "Oh, hell no. It's not going down like that. We need to, we need to fight. And if it takes me and you and a village too, we all going up to the school. We all going to be on that Zoom meeting, conference to see how we can make that baby thrives."

Here, the family liaison attended school meetings to support the mother and find a solution for the student.

Further, family liaisons assisted parents to navigate school systems. For instance, there was an open enrollment in the local school district where parents applied for traditional public schools and charter schools. Family liaisons expressed that the enrollment process was complicated and challenging for some parents. Therefore, family liaisons aided parents with the enrollment process. As one family liaison described:

If we have a parent that needs help navigating to find a good school, then we have to navigate. We have to walk them through the process, and we see what they need out of the school, and we see what the best choices we got for them with good schools, and we sit down and we go over it and let them make choices that they need to make for their kids.

Family liaisons saw their role as assisting parents to navigate all aspects of schooling, whether through The Center, schools, or educational systems.

Parents' Experiences of Family Liaisons

All the parents interviewed shared that their family liaison was a valuable resource in navigating The Center and traditional virtual school. Parents appreciated having someone staying in contact and informing them about the resources available at The Center. Further, parents knew that if they had a question or concern, it would be answered quickly. As one parent shared:

The best thing was, you can call any time. There was always a liaison to help you, they have tech support … It was just wonderful. There wasn't ever a, "Well sorry, I don't know what to tell you" or "we'll get back to you." There was always an answer and helpful and just so much support.

Parents also valued the social and emotional support provided by family liaisons. One parent described the family liaison role as "an aunt or a best cousin that keeps in contact." Another parent shared that just knowing support was available was important. The parent explained: "When you're in a pandemic with kids and going through so much, to have somebody that really has your back, especially with academics and programs, it's so nice." During COVID-19, when families faced so many challenges, HOPE family liaisons reminded them they were not alone.

Lastly, evidence suggests that families were gaining skills in how to address inequality within their school communities. For example, one parent shared that her time in The Center and the support of her family liaison gave her the confidence to speak with her daughter's second-grade teacher about their experience in the virtual learning classroom. The mother reported: "I already sent an email to my daughter's teacher and [the teacher] kind of started to change a little tiny bit." The mother

also reported that if the issues persisted, she knew her family liaison would assist her in setting up a meeting with the principal.

Implications for Practice

In summary, HOPE, a parent advocacy organization instituted a family liaison position to support parents during the pandemic and facilitate equitable access to their virtual student programming. HOPE's organizational culture and family liaisons' tasks and goals were aligned with community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), an asset-based view of BIPOC communities. HOPE's theory of action was that when parents are supported and empowered, students experience positive outcomes. Through the redesign of the family liaison role, HOPE showed the power of community-based leadership. Ultimately, The Center had a daily attendance rate of 90%. Furthermore, according to HOPE-administered testing, 60% of The Center students in grades K–2 jumped two reading levels. These results are impressive given the challenges many school systems faced in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. HOPE is an advocacy organization and not a school, yet there are lessons that traditional educators and leaders could learn from HOPE's community leadership.

First, school leaders should consider increasing the number of family liaisons within schools. A distinct feature of the HOPE model was that the family liaisons managed between 15 and 25 families. Traditionally, a school might have 1 or 2 family liaisons. In other cases, a central office might have a small number of family liaisons for an entire district. Large caseloads limit family liaisons from building deep and supportive relationships with families (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Investing more in family liaisons could reap benefits as trusting and deep relationships with BIPOC communities have been linked to school success (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Second, organizational culture matters for the treatment of diverse groups in school organizations (Kohli, 2018; Madsen & Mabokela, 2000). As an organization, HOPE had an asset-based view of Black and Latinx families. The organization's views of families shaped how family liaisons built parents' capacity to become self and community advocates. Overall, evidence from this study suggests that an organization's culture around family engagement will shape the work of family liaisons within that context. Therefore, how school organizations view families will shape how leaders design the role and scope of the family liaison position.

Leaders should evaluate their school's or district's values and assumptions about BIPOC parents. Indeed, leaders might consider developing asset-based and racially aware cultures around BIPOC families *before* instituting family liaisons roles within their organizations. In contexts where family liaisons already exist, leaders could consider how an asset-based view of families could sharpen or expand the work of family liaisons. Multiple resources are available for educators to develop asset-based views of BIPOC families for themselves and their staff (DeMatthews, 2018; Green, 2017). Family liaisons should be a part of an asset-based and community-focused approach to family engagement.

Third, HOPE family liaisons had a goal beyond The Center's outcomes. For instance, although the family liaisons checked Center attendance, the purpose of the position was not to ensure The Center could boast of a high attendance rate but to center the needs of families. School and district leaders might consider reframing the role of family liaisons. For example, rather than family liaisons focusing on supporting parents to meet school outcomes, family liaison roles could be reformulated to build parent capacity to interact with and thrive within educational systems. In the end, with parents taking the lead, schools might see an increase in student outcomes such as attendance and academic achievement.

Lastly, leaders who reframe the role of family liaisons to focus on family empowerment must be aware of the possibility of tension. Parents who are empowered might identify issues with schools and school leaders. In one view, empowering parents may cause additional work and headaches for educators. However, evidence suggests that some parents, often White and affluent, who already leverage their voice and wield advocacy skills (Evans, 2021; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Leaders should consider how schools might improve if educators are required to attend to the advocacy of Black and Latinx parents at the same rate as White and affluent parents. If public education is part

of our Democratic institutions, all families should be involved in school governance and policy decision making. Asset-based models of the family liaison role could aid BIPOC parents to develop the capacity for advocacy and involvement with issues central to learning.

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Endnotes

[1] Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect anonymity

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Family Stories Matter:
Critical Pedagogy of Storytelling in Elementary Classrooms

Moraima Machado

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

Family Stories Matter: Critical Pedagogy of Storytelling in Elementary Classrooms

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-story-telling 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 interper-sonal 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*
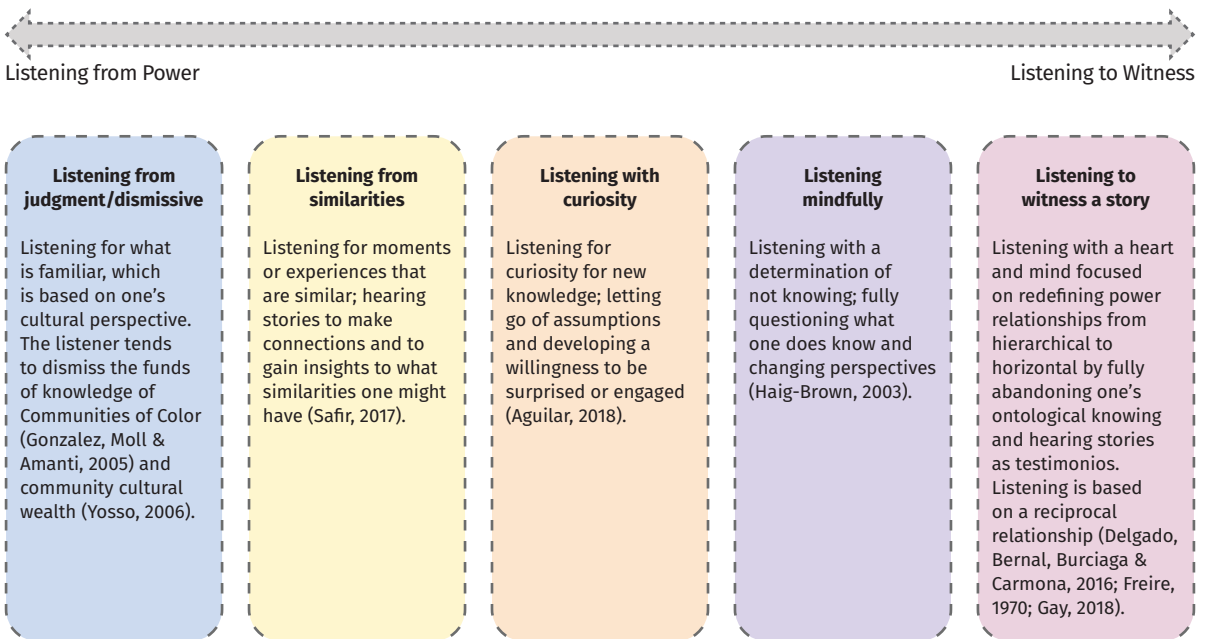
Those listening from judgment tend to dismiss the funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth of people of color (Yosso, 2006) and concentrate on comparing the story to what they hear instead of listening with full attention. In *listening to witness,* the listener becomes open to redefining power 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 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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Caring Through Crisis: Newcomer Students and Their Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

All human beings need care, including professional caregivers such as educators. What happens when a global crisis places care providers' own care needs in conflict with their duty and desire to provide care? In this article, we apply care ethics to one school district's decisions regarding newcomer English learners and their educators during the 2020–2021 academic year. Drawing on qualitative case study data from a larger multi-district, multi-state study, we examine how educators and administrators in a small urban school district in New England made sense of students' and educators' sometimes conflicting care needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. We argue that even school districts with clear commitments to equity and justice have their efforts severely limited by state and federal leadership's neglect of care/essential workers, youth, and marginalized groups. To end the ongoing pandemic and prevent future harm, we recommend that educational and political leaders prioritize human needs and relationships through a move towards "universal care" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

Keywords: care, COVID-19, newcomers, remote learning, leadership

During a pandemic which has already claimed over 6.5 million lives worldwide (as of October 4, 2022; World Health Organization, 2022), educators are struggling to support their students while protecting their own safety and livelihoods. At the same time, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and many more Black people resulted in massive protests across the United States and worldwide; combined with the pandemic, these protests have drawn attention to structural racism and other forms of systemic violence. Care theorists, activists, workers, organizers, and others who engage with care work have noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the surface questions regarding care, a practice that is increasingly marginalized and taken for granted as neoliberal capitalism maintains a "crisis of care" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020).

In this article, we apply care theory—specifically, Tronto's (1993) conceptualization of conflict and scarcity as constraints on care workers—to the pandemic response of an immigrant- and refugee-serving school district in the northeastern United States. To explore the district's response, we first lay out the basics of care theory and what caring looks like for newcomer immigrant youth and their educators. We offer background and context regarding African immigrants in the U.S. and in the school district under study. We attend to the research question, "How do educators and district leaders balance their own needs with the needs of their students during the COVID-19 pandemic?"

Our findings show how conditions of conflict and scarcity place constraints upon what school district leaders and individual educators can do to support newcomer students and the educators who care for them. Every day, educators and district leaders face the challenges of keeping everyone, including themselves and their own families, safe, while attending to students' educational, social, material, and psychological needs. While educators find creative ways to care for students, this

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effort takes a toll on their own sense of safety and feelings of being cared for. Our study highlights the importance of educator practices that support immigrant students and families, as well as their educators, through simultaneously acute and chronic crises, or what some call a "dual pandemic" of illness and inequality (Pak, 2021).

Background

Care Theory

Emerging as an area of academic study from the feminist, civil rights, and liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, care theory (or care ethics) identifies humans as fundamentally social and interconnected beings. As a result, care has major social and political implications. Fisher and Tronto (1991) define care as

> A species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (p. 40)

Care has four dimensions: "caring about," or the recognition that a need exists and should be met; "taking care of," or believing that a need can be met and taking some responsibility for meeting that need; "care-giving," or direct contact between those giving and receiving care; and "care-receiving," or the response that the person(s) being cared for provide to the care they get (Tronto, 1993, p. 107).

In addition to these four dimensions, care has other aspects which affect how it is provided and experienced. First, care is not solely a principle or an emotion, but a practice. This is because care involves interrelated thought and action directed toward a goal. Second, care can involve conflict between and within its dimensions (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993). For example, a caregiver and a care-receiver may have diverging ideas of what constitutes good care, two caregivers may disagree on how to provide care, or caregivers' needs for self-care may clash with their work. Third, care is a universal aspect of human life, but what "good care" looks like can be very different across cultures as well as across individuals and groups. For example, an adolescent student and their teacher both need care, but the specifics of those needs may differ. Finally, good care requires material, temporal, and

skill resources. Scarcity—of money, goods, time, and/or skilled caregivers—has an adverse impact on the care process (Tronto, 1993). This article focuses on dilemmas of conflict and resource scarcity.

"Care work" encompasses occupations as diverse as, but not limited to, teaching, health care, child and elder care, and labor in customer service, retail, sanitation, restaurants, and bars; labor that is increasingly referred to as "essential work" since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Fine & Tronto, 2020). Care is clearly necessary for our continued survival, so why and how is it that care and the people who carry it out are routinely devalued? As Tronto (1993) writes,

> Caring in our society does not function in an egalitarian manner. The distribution of caring work and who is cared-for serves to maintain and to reinforce patterns of subordination. Those who care are made still less important because their needs are not as important as the needs of those privileged enough to be able to pay others to care for them. (p. 166)

Furthermore, in most societies, the division of labor is arranged such that people of certain genders, classes, castes, races, and ethnicities are more often tasked with doing care work, paid or unpaid, than others. In the United States, the most marginalized people, including women, Black people, Indigenous people, and immigrants from the global South, depending on the occupation, tend to carry out lower-wage and lower-prestige care work, such as child and elder care, teaching, nursing, cleaning, and service-industry labor (Duffy, 2007; Wingfield, 2019). Of course, race, class, ability, language proficiency, immigration status, gender expression, and sexuality mediate access to caring careers like teaching. In the U.S., this results in a teaching workforce that is overwhelmingly made up of non-Latina, non-immigrant White women, even as the student body diversifies (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021).

To create a more just society, Tronto (1993) argues, "we need to see the world differently, so that the activities that legitimate the accretion of power to the existing powerful are less valued, and the activities that might legitimate a sharing of power with outsiders are increased in value" (p. 20). In other words, we must change how care work and the people who carry it out are valued, which requires a fundamental shift in the organization of our world.

Supporting and Caring for Immigrant-Origin Youth

As sites of intercommunity interaction and contact with the state, public schools play a vital role in supporting or marginalizing immigrant students and families (Patel, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). While schools are, in theory, sites of caring for all (Noddings, 2013), in practice they are often places that reproduce and reinforce subjugation (Dumas, 2014). Minoritized students and families often learn that their chances of receiving (sometimes inauthentic, shallow, or irrelevant) care are contingent upon being able to perform practices accepted by the dominant culture and that repress their authentic ways of being (Antrop-González & De Jesus, 2006; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, the neoliberalization of schooling forces educators to prioritize test scores and grades over caring for the whole child (Ball & Olmedo, 2013; Luttrell, 2013; Rabin, 2013; Tuck, 2013). On top of this, minoritized students—particularly those who do not conform to the dominant culture—are often held to low standards by educators who do not believe that their students are capable of high academic achievement (Rivera-McCutchen, 2012). The disconnect between minoritized students' needs and educators' expectations, allegiances, and actions can cause students and families to distrust and disengage from the school (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Hos, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999).

Much like minoritized students, minoritized teachers also face obstacles to providing and receiving care. Teachers of color are often valorized by White colleagues and school leaders as model minorities who can "handle" students of color deemed "difficult," creating an imbalance of work responsibility without additional compensation or recognition. At the same time, when educators of color challenge oppressive policies and practices, they are often marginalized by their peers and castigated by administrators (Acosta, 2019; Endo, 2019; Milner, 2020). This marginalization from colleagues and supervisors can make care work extremely difficult for educators, as it forces them to choose between preserving their own well-being and tending to that of their students.

Engaging in genuinely caring relationships with marginalized students, families, and educators is hard work during times of "normalcy" and the COVID-19 crisis has only amplified this difficulty. School districts like the one highlighted in this article quickly transitioned into remote learning, interrupting students' familiar routines and creating physical barriers to relationship-building (Marshall et al., 2020; Primdahl et al., 2021). Many parents lost their jobs, while others—mainly in the "essential work" sectors of healthcare, retail, manufacturing, education, sanitation, agriculture, shipping, and transportation—had no choice but to risk infection to make a living (Gelatt, 2020). Educators, many of whom had their own children to care for and assist through remote learning, struggled to develop work–life balance and tend to their mental health (Kaden, 2020; Kraft et al., 2020). Few educators have had prior experience with or training on effective remote teaching (Marshall et al., 2020; Myung et al., 2020). At the same time, remote learning has provided students and educators with opportunities to use novel approaches to learning and care (Anderson et al., 2021; Kaden, 2020). These conditions posed immense challenges to educators and educational leaders with limited resources and limited training on managing crises at the scale of a multi-year pandemic (Harris & Jones, 2020). It is within this set of conditions that we studied the myriad and conflicting components of care.

Context

The school district highlighted in this article, Westfield,[1] serves approximately 7,000 students in a small New England city. Just over half of Westfield students receive free or reduced-price meals. While the city is in an overwhelmingly White area, about one in three of its students are from what the district's educators often call "multilingual families," or immigrant/refugee-origin families who speak languages other than or in addition to English. This article focuses on the experiences of educators of multilingual newcomer students. Black students, who make up about a quarter of the students in Westfield, are primarily immigrants, refugees, or the children of immigrants and refugees from Somalia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Angola.

Westfield schools had the means of providing resources to students and families thanks to their existing partnerships with local organizations and intentional planning around meeting needs. Pre-pandemic, I (Edom) observed classrooms and social workers' offices full of snacks for students to take freely; in one classroom for newcomer English learners, I saw a teacher distribute new hats and insulated gloves donated by a community member. On days when large numbers of parents visited schools, for example during parent–teacher–student conferences, schools prepared free food and secondhand clothing for families to take home. At one school's conference day, I noticed racks of clothes for men, women, children, and infants, as well as tables piled with fresh bread and produce. Additionally, parent–community liaisons, who work within the district's multilingual services department and who represent most of the city's immigrant communities, are in constant communication with parents to answer their questions and connect them with resources. I observed and interviewed one liaison who fielded phone calls all day, resolving issues from helping a newcomer mother resolve a parking ticket to supporting a parent whose spouse had been detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Despite Westfield's diversity and attentiveness to community needs, the state in which Westfield is located has one of the Whitest populations in the country and one of the largest disparities in COVID-19 infection rates along racial and national origin/immigrant status lines. Immigrants and refugees make up about 5% of the state's population, 10% of the city's residents, and 35% of Westfield's student body. Data released by the state's Department of Public Health in May 2020 showed that Black residents, who make up less than 2% of the state's population, made up about 12% of positive COVID-19 cases and were almost 14 times more likely than White residents to contract COVID-19. While the state did not collect COVID-19 data related to immigrant status, most of the state's cases were concentrated in cities and towns with relatively large immigrant-origin populations, such as Westfield. Black people in the city and state, over half of whom are immigrant-origin, live under circumstances that make them particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. Among families in which at least one head of household is foreign-born, 12.6% are under the federal poverty line, compared to 7% for families in which all heads of household are U.S.-born. Vulnerability to COVID-19 is linked to class, race, and immigrant status in Westfield, as it is in the rest of the United States.

Methods and Data

This descriptive and explanatory single case study (Yin, 2014) presents a slice of data from a larger study of six immigrant-serving districts across the United States. The six districts represent unique contexts of reception (Golash-Boza & Valdez, 2018; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006), serving distinct immigrant communities and geographic regions. Our study initially sought to investigate how educators in varying contexts of reception respond to recent federal immigration policies but pivoted towards investigating how educators and districts across the country were responding to immigrant communities' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the crucial role schools play as the primary point of contact with the state for immigrant youth and families (Patel, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2018), our research has documented how shifts in national and local COVID-19-related policies and conditions inform educational practices and their effects.

We collected data from educators and administrators through in-person and virtual means. Edom conducted pre-pandemic semi-structured interviews and observations in schools in November 2019, and over Zoom in-pandemic in November and December 2020. Throughout 2020 and 2021, we also collected data through synchronous video conferences with educators from Westfield along with educators from our five other partner districts. Interviews were transcribed and cleaned up using third-party human transcribers and Otter.ai, a transcription tool that uses artificial intelligence. We analyzed transcripts line-by-line to identify what educators did in their daily work, what they felt was effective or ineffective and why, and how they believed their work and working conditions could improve.

The impetus of this article, the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in one major limitation: the impossibility of meeting and observing people in person. Due to public health restrictions on travel, school operations, and gatherings, we could not conduct observations or in-person interviews. We also experienced significant difficulties in gathering data, as spikes in positive cases caused schools to make sudden switches to fully remote learning. During data collection, one author and several interviewees contracted COVID-19, while at least one educator who we interviewed pre-pandemic took a leave of absence and could not be reached.

Researcher Positionality

As lead author on this paper, my (Edom's) positionality is important to discuss. My identities—as a Black person, a U.S. citizen since birth, the child of Ethiopian immigrants, a young adult (sometimes closer in age to students than to their educators), a doctoral student at an elite university, and someone raised in a lower-middle-class household, among others—affected how I formed relationships with and gained trust from the people I met. Before the pandemic, as I met educators and students for the first time, I was struck by how welcoming everyone seemed to be. With African immigrant educators, while our common Black and African identities allowed us to be more honest about anti-Blackness, racism, and xenophobia, other power differentials—particularly age, gender, ethnicity, immigration status, and institutional affiliation—complicated the interpersonal dynamic. It felt as though who had more power could change from one moment to the next. With others, especially when listening to White educators, I wondered how much was being held back out of a desire to be seen as "an ally" or "one of the good ones." The second author of the paper, Rebecca, was aware of her own positionality in the process of conducting research and writing as well. As a White woman and the principal investigator of the larger study, she worked to listen with a perspective of understanding to the experiences of others, recognizing that her own identity shaped her interpretation of the experiences of Black immigrant students and educators.

Findings

We found that conflicting needs and scarce resources contributed to ethical dilemmas in making decisions regarding in-person classes and educator labor issues. In this section, we begin by summarizing Westfield's response to the onset of the pandemic in the spring of 2020. We then turn to how educators and the district held conflicting positions on what constituted "good care" for newcomer

immigrant students and how educators creatively balanced students' care needs with their own. We also discuss how scarce and uncertain funding impacted educators' attempts to keep themselves safe and raised concerns regarding the ethics of hiring primarily Black immigrants for temporary roles that may not turn into long-term employment.

Community Relationships and the Onset of the Pandemic

In mid-March 2020, as schools and businesses across the U.S. began to shut down, Westfield schools rapidly ensured that all students had the means to attend online classes by lending out Chromebooks and internet hotspots. Students receiving free- and reduced-price meals could take food home for the days when they were not in school. COVID-19 tests were provided to staff and students for free; Westfield schools also hired additional multilingual nurse aides to maximize access for immigrant communities. The district was able to raise additional funds over the spring and summer of 2020 to support families, including undocumented families, who needed help paying for necessities that the state and federal governments are unwilling to provide. The district also connected with community organizations to provide childcare for working families. In sum, the regularity and variety of resource distribution pre-pandemic meant that Westfield was at least somewhat prepared to meet students' and families' basic needs in the absence of state and federal direct relief.

Paraprofessionals and educational technicians, many of whom are themselves African immigrants and refugees, were able to take on roles with more responsibilities and room for creativity. They worked with teachers to develop lessons and improve communication with families, including starting to use WhatsApp in lieu of sending mail or emails. In some cases, teachers and educational technicians visited homes while maintaining masks and social distancing to check up on students experiencing attendance issues.

Westfield's prioritization of basic resource distribution pre-pandemic meant that students and families had access to food, basic health care, computers, and a stable internet connection. This has been a priority of the district for years, and their efforts paid off as the district was able to transition quickly into remote instruction. However, more complex issues regarding the provision of adequate care remained. We next examine two points of conflict and scarcity during the COVID-19 pandemic: policymaking around in-person classes and educator labor conditions. Despite individual and district-level efforts to protect them, Black immigrant students and their educators suffered due to state and federal governments' neglect of marginalized workers and families; a "crisis of care" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020) resulting from decades of neoliberal and settler colonial policies that prioritize productivity and efficiency over human needs (Lopez & Neely, 2021). One product of this crisis is a dilemma faced daily by educators and leaders: is it possible to provide "good care" to students while everyone is struggling? If so, how?

Hybrid Learning and Conflicting Ideas of "Good Care"

After months of fully remote learning in spring 2020, Westfield school officials announced that most of the district would transition into hybrid learning for the 2020-2021 academic year. Students at each elementary and middle school were split into two groups; one half would attend school in person on Mondays and Tuesdays, while the other half would be on campus on Thursdays and Fridays. On days when students were not on campus, they would attend classes online. Wednesdays were exclusively on-line so that facilities could be disinfected. High school classes were held remotely until the spring of 2021, when high schools adopted the hybrid model in response to rising student absences and course failures.

With more days of in-person instruction, district leadership argued, students get more out of instruction-al time in terms of academic, linguistic, and social–emotional development. However, students, families, and educators are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. This is especially worrisome because "multilingual students and families," as Westfield sometimes calls them, are more likely than the average Westfield resident to work in low-wage, low-protection settings as "essential workers," which also puts them at high risk of contracting COVID-19. At the same time, with fewer or zero in-person instruction days, students, families, and teachers were less likely to contract COVID-19, but students missed out on the educational and social–emotional benefits of in-person instruction. Students, families, educators,

noninstructional staff, and administrators puzzled over what constituted a "good educational experience" under these circumstances.

This was a major point of contention across the district. One teacher who works with newcomers felt as though "we [multilingual educators] are being punished" for working with especially vulnerable students. Having to provide in-person instruction twice as often as educators of English-proficient students, he argued, put him and his colleagues at increased risk of infection. While this teacher enjoyed his work pre-pandemic and cared strongly for his students, he felt that district leadership was not adequately balancing educators' needs with those of their students. In an online post, an administrator wrote,

> We have staked out providing more time in school for newcomer students; our parent and community specialists [liaisons between immigrant communities and the schools] tell us that our multilingual families desperately want their children in school (not universally, but largely). Our ELL [English language learning] teachers are the strongest voice of dissent. They ground their opposition in that it's 'racist' of us to want the students in school. (Online communication, spring 2021)

While the administrator acknowledged the parents' and community specialists' efforts and the preferences of multilingual families, they did not address teachers' concerns, possibly exacerbating tensions between teachers and the district.

While they grappled with concerns about their own safety, teachers still wanted to provide care to their students. The result was a series of daily struggles over the best course of action while teaching. In the classroom, teachers struggled with assisting students while maintaining the six-foot distance recommended by the CDC and the district. One teacher explained to me his workarounds, such as using a document camera in front of the classroom instead of writing immediately next to students. However, he said, at times it was impossible to keep his distance, especially when students experienced difficulties using their computers. Some students, particularly those who lived in refugee camps, had never used a computer before arriving in the United States. Helping these students was particularly challenging if a student could not express their needs in English and was too shy to ask for help from a classmate, or if none of their classmates spoke their language. "The quality of teaching really goes down," he noted, when he cannot point to things on a student's physical or digital materials. Time spent on devising workarounds, he felt, could have been spent on teaching and connecting with his students.

Labor Conditions, Scarcity, and Creativity

While Black immigrant students and families experienced immense difficulties during the pandemic, their educators also struggled to keep themselves safe while supporting their students. As discussed earlier, the choice to have multilingual students learn in person for four days a week instead of the standard two also had consequences for educators, who worried about being infected with COVID-19 at school and bringing the virus home to their families. Many educators were parents themselves and are thus responsible for two sets of students: their own children at home, and their class of students at school. Others were older or had conditions that made them more vulnerable to life-threatening illness. Educators in this situation who were ineligible for retirement were faced with a difficult choice: keep working despite the risks, or take a leave of absence and forgo income during an economic crisis in favor of reducing their risk of infection. Teachers who took leaves of absence faced significant obstacles in obtaining leave, such as delays in bureaucratic processes and pressure from colleagues and administrators to remain at work.

The pandemic also led to new opportunities for Black immigrant paraprofessionals and educational technicians in the district to meet students' needs creatively and advance their professional goals. For example, one secondary school moved the multilingual classes to the library, which was otherwise closed to students. Joseph, the library's educational technician who is himself an immigrant from the same African country as most of the school's newcomers, found himself with an opportunity to take on a bigger role. Joseph was spending more time with newcomer students than ever before, and as someone with teaching experience prior to immigrating, he was eager to return to the profession in the United States. Joseph co-taught the homeroom class and began to build deeper relationships with his students

and their families. Having a teacher from their home country, Joseph and his colleagues noted, helped students feel more at ease in class during turbulent times. Furthermore, unlike his colleagues, Joseph could communicate directly and fluently with parents. When the school's multilingual instructional team noticed frequent student absences, Joseph drove to each student's home to speak with their families:

> So, we the staff members [decided], 'I'm going to go to [a student's] house,' drove to their house and asked, 'How is it, Dad?' 'Oh, well, [my children] told me they only have school twice, two days a week.' All my guys, you should have seen those kids' eyes, like embarrassed. So, we were able to straighten a lot of things like that.

Later in the fall, when a full-time multilingual teacher took a leave of absence for the rest of the school year due to COVID-19, Joseph filled her position and continued to work intensively with African newcomer students.

District and school leaders also grappled with the ethics of using temporary employees to fill in for staff who had taken leave or retired during the pandemic, as Joseph had done at his middle school. Funding for these positions was available through the $180 billion Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER) Fund, which was distributed to state departments of education to support student learning and technology infrastructure improvements. About 90% of the ESSER Fund was left to the discretion of states and districts. According to one school's assistant principal, the state's Department of Education provided Westfield with funding to hire staff on one-year contracts. Like Joseph, many of these temporary employees were Black immigrants and other people of color interested in gaining permanent, full-time employment within the district. This administrator, a White man who had worked in the district for several years pre-pandemic, noted that while this practice improved diversity in the district's workforce and allowed multilingual students to work with educators who speak their native languages, it also "smacks of having Black and dark-skinned people doing the work that White people are too scared to do." He worried that these staff who risked their health to care for students, especially those working with multilingual students in person four days a week, would be left without the permanent employment they sought once the pandemic-related state funds ran out.

Discussion

Which groups of people receive care, and from whom? What kind of care is provided? Who gets to decide how and when care is provided? Who feels as though they are receiving or giving adequate care, and why? What do those who feel uncared for do about it? The answers to these questions about care become especially relevant and clear during times of crisis, including the present moment (Fine & Tronto, 2020). In anticipation of future pandemics and other acute crises, a possibility signaled by epidemiologists and environmental scientists (Marani et al., 2021), we conclude with recommendations for district leaders as well as state and federal policymakers with the opportunity to construct new approaches to care. Specifically, we recommend that educational and political leaders adopt the approach of "universal care" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020), which prioritizes human needs, relationships, and the environment over the profit motive.

The unnecessarily protracted nature of the pandemic placed schools and the communities they serve in a Catch-22 situation: regardless of what path leaders take, low-income and racialized students, families, and the educational workers who care for them experience harm in some way. While districts' efforts (e.g., communication, provision of free or low-cost basic health services, distribution of essential goods) showed that they intended to address and mitigate inequity, and their efforts did have a positive effect on students and families, structural violence embedded at every level of U.S. society means that these efforts were insufficient. Post-crisis, what we need is not to "return to normal," because for so many, "normal" was a state of crisis and exploitation. Instead, we must build a society in which we prioritize restorative care for all.

We argue that leaders should work toward adopting the approach of "universal care" (Chatzidakis et al., 2020), which replaces neoliberal logics of efficiency, individual responsibility, and privatization with policies driven by the acknowledgement that networks of care-giving and care-receiving are essential for human life. A caring country would have free, high-quality medical care for everyone.

Our internet would have safeguards against disinformation. Our schools would teach scientific and media literacy to combat disinformation. Students and staff would be treated with dignity and respect. All workers, especially care workers like educators, would have much higher wages and more paid leave. Early childhood and post-secondary education would be free, as would child and elder care. Public health departments and research would flourish thanks to abundant funding. No one would experience food or housing insecurity. In a society built on universal care, educators would be able to care for students while their own needs are securely met.

Universal care does not entail a one-size-fits-all approach to caring, as "adequate care" is context-specific. For Black immigrant communities at Westfield schools, universal care could look like having more community members in permanent, full-time, well-compensated positions, including in school- and district-level leadership. Through their knowledge and connections, including drawing on Indigenous epistemologies, they can resist the uncaring climate of the U.S. to respond to students' and families' holistic care needs (Abdi, 2021). This study's findings suggest that Black immigrant educators may have the pedagogical skills that districts like Westfield are looking for, but without continued support from the state and federal levels, their employment and ability to care for students remain precarious. Universal care could also entail putting resources into improving computer literacy for newcomer students and families, particularly those with limited or interrupted formal schooling experiences such as refugees or the growing population of unaccompanied Central American minors in Westfield. Newcomer students' difficulties in engaging with course materials suggest that this is an area of growth for the district. Overall, entering into partnerships with communities, rather than imposing top-down changes, is essential for providing universal care to immigrant students and families. As communities across the country respond to ongoing and new challenges, school districts might work toward universal care as an aspirational and attainable goal.

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Endnotes

[1] To maintain participants' privacy, all people and locations have been given pseudonyms.

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Critical Participatory Action Research as Leadership Praxis:

Sociopolitical Crises as Ordinary Moments for Expansive Educational Leadership

Dr. Kristen P. Goessling, pep marie, and Alice S. Cooper

Abstract

Philadelphia offers an ideal case study for understanding how community and education leaders negotiate the contemporary sociopolitical context and various crises to advance educational equity and justice. This paper focuses on our critical participation action research and organizing within an education coalition to offer an example of community-engaged research that strives for education equity and justice through leadership development. Our goal is to expand conceptualizations of educational leadership to include diverse stakeholders connected to school communities as experts. Toward that end, we examine and amplify the expertise of informal education leaders (e.g., families and communities) involved in struggles for education justice with attention to their response to the twin crises of COVID-19 and uprisings against anti-Black racism and police violence. Our work centers those directly impacted by systems and structures of oppression as experts on relationship building and community engagement. Findings offer insights and strategies to educational leaders for fostering family and community engagement and collaboration in times of crises and conflict.

Keywords: Education organizing, leaders, leadership development, intersectional praxis, critical participatory action research

Critical Participatory Action Research as Leadership Praxis: Sociopolitical Crises as Ordinary Moments for Expansive Educational Leadership

The current sociopolitical context includes pervasive crisis discourse—student debt crisis, climate crisis, housing crisis, healthcare crisis—a feature of neoliberal ideology often deployed to support reforms, particularly in education (Takayama, 2007). Viewing public education in Philadelphia through the lens of crisis constructs a story of political contention between local and state governments evidenced by various privatization strategies that disproportionately affect schools in predominantly Black and/or poor neighborhoods and reifies historical legacies of racism, discrimination, and urban disinvestment (Good, 2017; Lipman, 2017). Philadelphia offers an ideal case study for understanding how leaders effectively negotiate rapidly changing complex material conditions through various crises—specifically COVID-19 and uprisings against anti-Black racism and police violence—toward educational equity and justice. Philadelphia parents, students, educators, and community members have long fought against these manufactured crises toward a radical vision of quality education. More recently, the Philadelphia Education Coalition (PEC [a pseudonym], or coalition) led and won the fight for local control of the district as a racial and social justice issue.

ABBY COLE, 10TH GRADE

This paper focuses on our critical participation action research (CPAR) and organizing within PEC to offer an example of community-engaged research that strives for education equity and justice through leadership development. Our goal is to expand conceptualizations of educational leadership to include diverse stakeholders connected to school communities as experts. Toward that end, we examine and amplify the expertise of informal education leaders (e.g., families and communities) involved in struggles for education justice with attention to their response to the twin crises of COVID-19 and uprisings for racial justice. We consider "formalized" leaders as those with institutional positions of authority (superintendent, school boards, administrators) and "informal" leaders as families, youth, educators, and communities (Ishimaru, 2019a).

First, we define key concepts and ideas from research on school–community engagement and education leadership. Second, we provide details of the study, context, and methods. Third, we present a

data-driven narrative that illustrates key moments of learning and leadership in PEC responding to COVID-19 and the uprisings. Fourth, we offer insights informed by Ishimaru's (2019b) framework for equitable collaboration organized by three key ideas: 1) culture shift, 2) practices and structure, and 3) transformative relationships. We conclude by summarizing key points and implications.

Community and Families as Educational Experts

Critical education scholars have long advocated for a view of schools as community resources and sites of transformation (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Mediratta et al., 2009; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Viewing schools as community assets and a source for generating "intracommunity ties" is key to building "community control," which generally refers to increasing parent/family influence on schools through shared governance and empowered families and communities (Mayger & Hochbein, 2020; Noguera, 2001). Education organizing situates families, parents, students, teachers, and community members as experts while developing power through relationship building and leadership development (Hong, 2012; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). Education organizing addresses family and community engagement as an equity issue with a participatory approach to school–community collaborations where historically marginalized communities collectively build power and take action to dismantle policies and practices that systematically undermine their schools and neighborhoods (Epstein, 2016; Ishimaru, 2019a). Education organizing flips traditional hierarchical relationships between families, communities, and schools to a reciprocal relationship where there is a mutual exchange of knowledge and learning between communities and schools (Welton & Freelon, 2018).

Educational leadership scholarship has demonstrated both the urgent need for educational leaders committed to equity and justice as well as the complex challenges they face (Mayger & Hochbein, 2020; Medina et al., 2020). Scholars have argued that education leadership programs are responsible for providing future leaders with the skills, knowledge, and disposition necessary to be effective leaders in a rapidly changing and increasingly diverse society (Barakat et al., 2019; Furman, 2012; Horsford et al., 2011). Social justice leaders must address the widely recognized opportunity gaps which lead to academic disparities for nondominant racial and cultural groups (Carter & Welner, 2013) and pervasive deficit perspectives in education policy and practice contributing to educational disparities (Anyon, 2005; Warren, 2018). Further challenges include contradictions between district mandates and community needs (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016), struggles with their own lack of cultural competence (Horsford et al., 2011), or a lack of racial literacy (Horsford, 2014). These challenges become heightened when considered within a social justice leadership framework. It is essential for socially just leaders to develop trust through honest public dialogue that deconstructs and situates issues within the sociopolitical context and openly acknowledges how schooling reproduces inequity and oppression (Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014). Transformational educational leaders: 1) understand the school's surrounding community and political context, (2) care for sustainable authentic relationships with communities, and (3) collaborate across stakeholders (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016).

We apply Ishimaru's (2019b) framework for equitable collaboration informed by organizing, critical race, and sociocultural theories to our analysis and discussion. In contrast to traditional involvement approaches underwritten by deficit assumptions, equitable community–school collaborations entail (a) systemic change *goals,* (b) *strategies* that build capacity and relationships, (c) the *role* of lower-income parents and families of color as experts and fellow educational leaders, and (d) educational change as a *context-specific* political process. (p. 354). Three dimensions are used to contrast equitable collaboration strategies with traditional partnership approaches: "intervention level (individuals vs. collective), directionality (unidirectional vs. reciprocal), and power (unilateral vs. relational)" (Ishimaru, 2019b, p. 355). Ishimaru's (2019b) typology of strategies guides our interpretations and insights. First, parent/family capacity-building strategies focus on developing knowledge and skills to foster family and community agency and capacity. Second, parent-to-school and parent-to-parent relationship-building strategies involve "cultural brokers" at the school level to connect with nondominant families, parent-centered practices, and spaces for parents and families to build relationships with each other. Lastly, systemic capacity-building strategies that address infrastructure and capacity for educators, meaning family collaboration as well as platforms for families/communities to exercise leadership and influence in schools and school systems.

Critical Participatory Action Research as Leadership Praxis: The Rootwork Project

We begin by describing our research approach and positionality. Next, we introduce the context, coalition, and collaborators/participants. Finally, we outline the data collection and analysis methods utilized in this inquiry.

Research Approach and Positionality

CPAR is an epistemological and methodological approach to research grounded in democratic participation and critical analysis to advance social justice aims (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine & Torre, 2021). Organizing and CPAR are underpinned by the premise that the individuals closest to the issue—neighborhood schools—are experts and best situated to make decisions and develop strategies for educational equity (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2012; Fals Borda, 1979). People's ability to build meaningful trusting relationships across differences is essential to these forms of collaboration. Our intersectional critical praxis is designed to support social movements, illuminate the intricacies of social justice work, critique education as a complex system of inequalities, imagine possibilities, and inform collective action (Hill Collins, 2015). Transformative organizing's dual focus on self and societal transformation considers personal growth as essential to systemic change (Pastor et al., 2011) and guides our work to build coalitions with a leadership development culture (Ganz & Mckenna, 2019).

Kristen and pep began working together within a city-wide education coalition in 2016 and have been researching and organizing for public education in Philadelphia since then. We founded the Philadelphia Participatory Research Collective (Research Collective) in 2019 with a group of diverse stakeholders who use participatory, community-led research to build the power of local leaders and grassroots social movements. Kristen is a public-school graduate, scholar-educator-activist-artist from rural Missouri. She uses CPAR to create spaces of belonging where people build meaningful relationships, construct knowledge, and take collective action. pep marie, the current PEC facilitator, is a proud graduate of the school district and family to current students. Since they were in high school, they have been working alongside school community members to build more pathways for their leadership, while calling for more immediate investments and divestments. Alice, a recent education policy graduate student, is also family to current Philadelphia students. She has provided support to diverse community stakeholders throughout the region, fostering community partnerships and engagement with ongoing political initiatives.

Context

The School District of Philadelphia is the largest and most diverse district in Pennsylvania. At the outset of the 2021 school year, nearly 200,000 students were enrolled across the district's 323 schools, with a student body of 52% Black/African American, 22% Latinx, 13% White, 7% Asian, and 5% multiracial/other (School District of Philadelphia, 2022). The 2019-2020 school year, leading up to COVID-19, at least 10 Philadelphia school communities faced closure due to asbestos, mold, and lead. The lack of pathways for the public to engage with the district resulted in public outcry and direct action, as well as a lawsuit by the teachers' union for mishandling dangerous building conditions (Philadelphia Inquirer, 2017/18).

The Coalition and Participants

PEC strives to represent the city's diversity as a multiracial intergenerational coalition that amplifies campaigns and concerns led by school-based directly impacted groups. PEC

> shifts power and resources in Philadelphia for the sake of great schools in our historically neglected neighborhoods through citywide campaigns. We do this work for the sake of great schools in our historically neglected Black, Brown and working class neighborhoods. We include leadership development in campaigns that build citywide movements and capacity of leaders working at the school level. (PEC Grounding Statement, September 2019)

The research praxis has focused on building a coalitional culture of leadership development that embraces learning as integral to building individual and collective power, especially for those often pushed to the margins and out of conversations about their own livelihoods. PEC prioritizes responsive structures including a collective process for reflecting and evolving them.

The PEC facilitator holds cross-organizational long-term strategy building spaces, monthly full coalition meetings, and regular one-on-one conversations with members. pep was the PEC facilitator at the time of this study. PEC meetings and activities take place via phone, Zoom, email, and in person. We model our vision of leadership and follow a consensus decision-making model and center directly impacted folks' expertise for contentious issues. When PEC launches a campaign and official stance, all member organizations are listed as supporters in the name of transparency and accountability. Since the coalition's inception, member organizations select at least one individual as their representative. From 2019-2020, an influx of predominantly Black and Brown youth, parent, and educator organizations joined the coalition. In summer 2020, the coalition included representatives from 25 youth, caregiver, school staff, and community organizations. PEC's platform includes campaigns spanning issues of local and state funding, school governance, and school district investments.

Rootwork Data Collection

This two-year CPAR project began in early 2020 with the goal of documenting and assessing the research praxis as leadership development. Our methods bridge community organizing and qualitative research to track changes at the micro, local, and macro levels. This inquiry focuses on a topical dataset relevant to COVID-19 and the uprisings, including pep and Kristen's researcher field notes, focus group #1, and PEC and district cultural artifacts. We use field notes to document and reflect on organizing practices and evolving research process. To accommodate schedules, we provided PEC members the choice of three different sessions to participate in focus group #1 on Zoom between August and December 2020. Focus groups lasted about two hours, were recorded and transcribed, and included questions about the impact of COVID-19 and the uprisings. Participants included 13 PEC members representing 12 different organizations. PEC cultural artifacts included private structure, training and campaign documents, meeting agendas and notes, and member organization campaigns and tools. District artifacts included publicly available data, website and social media, press releases, and Board of Education (BOE) communications.

Data Analysis

We used a hybrid thematic and conventional content analysis approach to prepare, organize, and make meaning of our data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002). First, we prepared and reviewed all our collected data to identify a dataset explicitly related to COVID-19 and the uprisings. Second, we conducted an inductive, data-driven analysis of the focus groups to identify codes and emergent themes about leadership and leaders' responses to the crises. Third, we compiled and organized the focus groups, field notes, and cultural artifacts chronologically to identify key moments of learning and leadership within the data. Finally, we applied Ishimaru's (2019b) equitable collaboration framework to attend to: 1) culture shift, 2) practices and structure, and 3) relationships within the data.

Education Organizers Learning and Leading through Crises

This data-driven narrative is presented chronologically beginning with the first school closures in March 2020 followed by two significant moments of learning and leadership that emerged from the data. Participant quotes and data excerpts were edited minimally for basic grammar and ease of reading. Because our work is rooted in our local education justice ecosystem and deep long-term relationships, some descriptive information is withheld while organization and participant names are anonymized with an attempt to honor identities while protecting privacy and confidentiality.

Cross-Stakeholder Collaboration to Safely Re-Open Schools

On March 13, 2020, Superintendent Hite announced district schools would close for two weeks. The statement blamed the closures on staff shortages, rather than COVID-19:

> **Though the School District of Philadelphia still does NOT have any suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 (coronavirus) in schools or offices** [Bold in original], this closure has become necessary as many SDP employees who reside in neighboring counties are being asked to avoid non-essential travel and to not report to work. (Hite, 2020a)

The letter stated that students were encouraged to take home all of their belongings and anything they would need during the closure but provided insufficient information about what families could expect moving forward. Following Hite's letter, the BOE announced there would be no public input at the March Action Meeting. These two initial responses from formalized institutional leaders lacked transparency and eliminated communication with the public, leading to mass confusion and public outcry. PEC immediately asked their network to call, email, and tweet concerns about the BOE meeting and the district's inadequate response to COVID-19. Promptly, the BOE changed the meeting format to allow written public testimonies, and Board members responded to live tweets and emails for over two hours. Further communication improvements were made to the SDP website and Hite held weekly "Q & A" sessions on Facebook Live.

The pandemic catalyzed an important developmental period for PEC: we intentionally had to resist feelings of urgency and reactivity heightened by the crises. Emotions were intense, folks were angry at the district, and tensions emerged between stakeholder groups around making public statements before communicating with the full coalition. When Hite announced the two-week closure, educators launched a petition calling for all schools to be closed immediately and indefinitely. Youth and families scrambled to make childcare arrangements amidst uncertainties around employment, confusion, and concerns as to why they were not involved in the school closure decision. With no clear plan from district leadership, PEC gathered all coalition members to work through widespread misinformation and uncover the truth about what was happening in our schools. We were horrified to hear from educators and staff that many schools had fewer than five adults in the building at a time with all students packed into auditoriums and cafeterias. When everyone finally understood what was happening inside schools, the coalition unanimously agreed buildings should be closed until it was safe to return.

Following early missteps and confusion, most school-based groups paused operations to prioritize their members' changing needs before taking public-facing actions. One method that pep and the PEC Leadership Development Committee established was a weekly space for cross-stakeholder groups to meet, share, and listen. This led to a more cohesive response that centered the experiences of our most directly impacted groups. During the focus group, Queenie, a parent leader and organizer, reflected on the importance of PEC as a place of support and leadership development during that time. Queenie shared, "We need each other. We couldn't do it by ourselves anymore and having pep be there as a strong leader made you want to come into the fold."

Throughout the pandemic, the coalition's "safe schools" demands have maintained three ideas: 1) communication with families and school communities, 2) equitable access to internet, technology, and accommodations to support student success, and 3) safe, healthy, and clean schools. PEC's organizing work holds the central desire for educational leaders to work alongside school communities to repair harm from decades of disinvestment, to rebuild trust, and reimagine with us what schooling can be (PEC Re-opening Statement, March 20, 2020). The re-opening statement reflects the power of collective voice that is informed by people's lived experiences of policies and practices. We have seen the impact of our strength in the ways that district leadership altered their engagement reflecting the coalition's demands, including the BOE replacing their one-way public virtual meeting format with Zoom, a translation hotline, and attention to Chromebook distribution issues.

Responsive and Supportive Educational Leadership During Crisis

The murder of George Floyd by police officer Derick Chauvin on May 25, 2020, sparked global uprisings against anti-Black racism and police brutality. The national spotlight quickly shone on Philadelphia as near daily protests and demonstrations began on May 30, 2020, and lasted through July. Many actions were organized by local, Black-led groups, were peaceful, and took place across every corner of the city, including the front steps of the school district building where Superintendent Hite spoke. He showed a side of himself that the public rarely sees as he implored the crowd to, "Stand up against racism, any time we see it in our schools," and that, "Institutionalized racism is when the Philadelphia school system doesn't get the funding it needs… We can't stand that anymore" (Hite, 2020b).

All PEC members expressed appreciation, hope, and inspiration from the protests. However, as uprisings continued, it became more complicated for the coalition's Black organizers. Philadelphians expressed their anger at police brutality while they were also responding to historical exploitative and oppressive material conditions exacerbated by COVID-19. Police tactics escalated with the use of force, tear gas, air guns, and eventual militarization of our neighborhoods with armored tanks, helicopters, and armed National Guard. Public transit shut down and major interstates and thoroughfares were closed. Philadelphians were scared, unable to sleep, and had limited access to necessities like food and medicine.

Throughout the uprisings, pep continued regular check-ins with Black organizers who wanted to share events in their lives and communities but were wary to discuss with non-Black people. pep created an unstructured space for Black members to share and process their feelings. Concurrently, many White organizers were moving with a sense of urgency but a lack of clarity about what to do. In June 2020, pep drew upon the direct guidance from Black members and led PEC into a new area of work with racial affinity caucuses: Black caucus, non-Black POC caucus, and White caucus. Kristen co-coordinated the White caucus with an initial aim of calling-in White folks and deepening our commitment to our racial consciousness development to be more effective co-conspirators in a multiracial coalition.

Also in June, the Consortium (a student-led organization), led PEC's learning about policing in schools. For years, Philadelphia students have fought against carceral policies and practices that disproportionately criminalize racialized students. In 2019, student groups in PEC pushed to have all metal detectors removed from schools, but the BOE voted against the students. Thus, the Consortium's police-free schools campaign was a continuation of their work and expertise. pep began facilitating consensus conversations following one-on-one conversations, a specific organizing tactic, with concerned member organizations and invited the Consortium to share their expertise as political education for PEC. Kristen integrated activities connecting race with policing and abolition in the White caucus to facilitate critical reflection on the pervasiveness of White supremacist values, which was contentious for some folks. Particularly compelling to some of the more hesitant PEC members was the students' divest/invest analysis. The students illustrated their vision for school safety as divestment from the $31 million yearly spending on policing to investment in mental health resources for healthy schools and communities. In collective conversations, folks offered great insight into alternatives to policing; some even committed to fill proposed roles. This was deeply personal work for Black and Brown coalition members. pep reflected in field notes: "I was much more vulnerable than usual with White organizers and shared experiences with policing. I do believe it was that personal relationship with me and the youth-led orgs that got the sign-on" (August 2020).

Leadership development was evidenced in individuals, organizations, and within the coalition as members took on new responsibilities while uplifting others. In the focus group, diverse members shared how the police-free school campaign felt restorative by reigniting the original spark from some activist paths, including elders who were part of copwatches in Boston in the 1990s or Civil Rights marches in the 1960s. Others shared how this moment challenged and shifted their organizing work. During the focus group, Blue Ivy, a parent organizer, described how this pushed her role as a parent organizer at her child's elementary school:

I had to then go have a conversation around police-free schools with the School Advisory Council, who are comprised of older Black moms who aren't really like anti-cop and who aren't really like, you know, abolitionists when it comes to police reform, and being that X is an elementary school, the one officer that we have there is, the dynamic is not the same that you get at a high school level … So I was very nervous about having that conversation, you know, even with experience and as an organizer.

This work posed unique challenges for differently positioned members and brought underlying tensions to light, and thus exposed areas for collective growth that PEC is currently addressing.

Although many members were happy with this new work, there was also significant pushback. Primary resistance was from White organizers who thought, based on differing political analyses or concerns, that creating distinct spaces based on racial identity was unnecessarily divisive (K. Goessling, personal communication, August 14, 2020). The caucuses played a vital role moving PEC toward consensus on police-free schools, an area of work the coalition had previously been unable to formally support, despite its centrality to our student organizations. For some organizations, the real concern was not about the youth, but about having their logo listed on an abolitionist agenda alongside city-wide calls to defund the police; they did not feel prepared to justify their support in the face of any potential backlash. Although some groups will still not join the city-level campaign to #defundthepolice, PEC expanded support for police reform and a police-free sector of our society. This is growth.

Insights from Informal Education Leaders: Relationships for Transformation

We summarize key insights from the narratives to compel educational leaders to highlight authentic relationships with families, communities, and educational stakeholders as essential for effective leadership. Our insights are inspired by Ishimaru's (2019b) ideas organized as responses to questions attending to: 1) culture shift as necessary systemic change, 2) shifting culture through practices and structure, and 3) transformative relationships as the foundation and driving force. We identify strategies and lessons from our experiences to support educational leaders working toward transformative aims of equity and racial justice in collaboration with families and communities.

Culture Shift: How Do We Move an Ecosystem from a Traditional Ethos to a Transformative Intersectional Ethos?

Embracing a transformational or social justice approach to educational leadership begins by attending to the sociopolitical context. It cannot be apolitical (Ishimaru, 2019b), while simultaneously striving to transform society and individuals as they are interrelated (Pastor et al., 2011). The PEC culture shift began in 2019 with one-to-ones and continued conversations about what members envisioned for the coalition and public education. The clarity of vision and shared purpose led to a *collective commitment to a transformative, intersectional culture.* A through-line of the coalition's work includes fighting the school district for more pathways to decision making for school communities. By turning the gaze inward, PEC is building a culture that reflects the vision and structures we want to see in the district. The twin crises have been referred to as a reckoning, a moment of reflection, an awakening of a nation to the fact that structural oppression and White supremacy are woven into the social fabric of this nation, but this was not an awakening for the Black, Brown, and racialized PEC organizers. Black folks are experts on the ways in which racism, as a structure of oppression and power, operates at the ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels. If there are no Black, Brown, Indigenous, or People of Color in educational leadership spaces, there is a glaring gap in knowledge and experience.

Traditional coalitions are temporary, short-term formations typically focused on a single-issue or campaign with a hierarchical structure (McCammon & Moon, 2015). PEC offers a new coalition formation based on a transformative organizing approach that amplifies a platform of campaigns and concerns led by school-based groups. Echoing our demands to formalized district leaders, coalition members must listen to and trust the expertise of youth, caregivers, school staff, and

community members. A transformative intersectional culture is a paradigm shift intended to dismantle traditional oppressive or "unilateral" to "relational" (Ishimaru, 2019b). From this stance, directly impacted individuals and groups hold invaluable knowledge and expertise to inform PEC's work and collective stances.

Honoring the experiences and knowledge of community members as equal to that of formalized leaders anchors the work in the material reality of what truly happened when schools closed and uprisings brought military occupation home. For PEC, these crises reaffirmed the importance of coming to a shared understanding that collective action must be informed and driven by lived expertise. This reinforces the understanding that any action or education policy uninformed by lived experience is inherently flawed and advances schooling as a system that reproduces inequity (Watson & Rivera-McCutchen, 2016).

Culture to Practice: How Do We Build Supportive Structures and Practices?

There must be labor and commitment to continuously revise practices and approaches to navigate ever-changing material conditions. In this way, transformational *educational leaders build and maintain responsive structures.* While PEC fights for pathways to participation for school community members, it strives to create and model responsive internal structures. This includes creating autonomous spaces where participants confront distinct needs as they arise, such as racial affinity caucuses. Transparent structures are reinforced through consistent communication and accessible meetings for all members, which is reinforced through complete information and resource sharing. Members are encouraged to communicate directly with each other to reinforce relationships and collaboration. Other examples include our living curriculum, time-sensitive conversations, and capacity-flexible agendas.

Responsibility for Responsive Structures

PEC is a grassroots organization funded by grants and donations overseen by a fiscal sponsor led entirely by a part-time, paid facilitator position. Being resourced provides capacity and time to schedule one-on-one conversations with members when convening the full coalition was difficult, especially during this phase of data collection. As the facilitator, pep was flexible and met members with different capacities where they were by offering time for members to share feelings and requests for the coalition. pep draws support from PEC's Leadership Development Committee and Research Collective, by holding and weaving the vast array of stories and perspectives within PEC into full coalition conversations intentionally to inform long-term strategy.

Educational leaders: Disagreements and Challenges as Transformational Opportunities

Mostly, PEC arrives at shared understandings and agreements on effective responses. The coalition embraces differing opinions as an opportunity to grapple with the many divergent perspectives in the larger educational ecosystem. By leaning in and facing disagreement directly, we understand each other and ourselves better. We are forced to face the fears and insecurities that come with working across differences. We grow our collective power by learning together. We had to revisit our commitments to re-centering school-based groups and trusting their leadership. Formalized education leaders must lean into disagreement and contend with differences to overcome symbolic, surface-level engagement and instead build structures and platforms to meet directly impacted folks' needs and desires. This is a stark contrast to the district's culture of leadership as demonstrated by formalized education leaders' attempts to foreclose opportunities for communication and engagement in initial responses to COVID-19.

Culture of Relationships: How Do We Build Authentic Relationships Toward Transformational Aims and Practices?

Authentic relationships are rooted in respect, reciprocity, and care for each other in our full humanness, which informs how we engage with each other through our structures and practices. Our *radical humanistic approach to relationships* recognizes PEC members first as people with

needs, hopes, dreams, and capacities, and second as organizational representatives. This relational view guided the coalition's steps through these crises. Members shared stories in personalized conversations, focus groups, and meetings laden with themes of death, loss, grief, alienation and isolation, and guilt and privilege. This recognition provided a pathway for us to pivot our work and create containers to process emotions and meet urgent needs. Slowing down is contrary to what most educational leaders experience in their work (formal or informal), yet time to listen and learn about each other is essential for our own understanding of the world and our possible accomplishments. To reiterate the call from the Black caucus: "Ask people how they're doing and what they need" (PEC cultural artifact, June 3, 2020).

Finally, authentic relationships *celebrate mutual accountability.* The commitment to a culture shift of transformative intersectionality is based on a relational structure of mutual accountability. In other words, we are accountable to each other by way of the collective spaces we share, collective strategy building, and by centering those directly impacted. There are structures in place for when people fail to meet the agreed upon expectations. Curiosity, rather than judgment, guides conversations to identify barriers and gaps in existing structures to ensure members have what is needed to uphold their commitments. For example, after the teachers responded without cross-stakeholder collaboration, we established a weekly COVID-19 meeting to facilitate collaboration and communication and reduce chances for uninformed actions.

Conclusion

We call for an expansive view of educational leadership and increased leadership pathways to democratize the institution of schooling. We define leaders as people who support and develop other leaders. We hold ourselves accountable to modeling the leadership we want to see in our district by centering people and groups who have been disenfranchised, marginalized, and silenced as experts. The data and insights shared here show how research can be used to refine and adapt leadership practices to successfully navigate changing material conditions. The coalition provides an example of effective educational leadership that centers authentic relationships across diverse stakeholders working toward equitable and just education.

Embracing a transformational rather than traditional approach to organizing or schooling is a philosophical shift operating across the cultural, practice, and relational levels. In PEC, this shift began with the understanding that relationships are a site for personal and social transformation. To strive for transformational aims like equity and justice requires change at both individual and social levels; you cannot have one without the other. This commitment is not explicitly outlined in most formalized leadership positions, yet this is how leaders advance social and restorative justice beyond symbolic gestures. Educational leaders make difficult decisions every day, knowing there is no perfect choice and that challenges will always exist. In the face of crisis and in the pursuit of equity and racial justice, educational leaders must rely on the authentic relationships they have with families and communities to respond in a meaningful and relevant way. Having a leader who can establish, uphold, and deepen commitments over time is often what makes the difference between the success or failure of social change efforts (Ganz & McKenna, 2019), and this applies to formalized educational leaders' efforts to improve schools and academic performance (Ishimaru, 2019b).

We ask formalized educational leaders to consider what it would take to create an institutional structure that fosters stronger connections across families and communities who are empowered as educational leaders to make decisions and take action toward their own aims rather than administrative determined outcomes. This relational commitment to others is beyond what most traditional, formalized leadership roles entail, possibly even contrary to expectations and responsibilities of those institutionalized positions. We recognize this is challenging, time-consuming, frustrating, and can be inharmonious with institutional roles and expectations. We believe the collective power of authentic relationships is the way to move the needle toward justice.

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The Purple Room:
A YPAR-Designed Healing Space Grounded in Community-Engaged School Leadership

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Abstract

This article explores how a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) team and adult co-conspirators in varied school leadership positions became partners, an unusual pairing as urban schools do not often prioritize young people as leaders. The school leveraged the district's community-engaged mission and their collective power to increase youth organizing and mental health in an urban-based community school. Drawing from community engagement and social justice, the authors use the concepts of sharing power and engaging healing to better understand the development of this YPAR project, a youth-designed healing space called "The Purple Room." Findings show that multiple levels of school leadership can set the conditions with youth researchers to build trust and to support the justice-oriented work that students know is needed.

Keywords: community engagement, youth participatory action research, urban, sharing power, leadership, healing

The Purple Room: A YPAR-Designed Healing Space Grounded in Community-Engaged School Leadership

Recent overlapping crises (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests, 2020 presidential election, anti-Asian racism) have had an overwhelming global impact, particularly among young people (Castrellón et al., 2021). In school, some students have experienced islands of decency with humanizing staff "allowing" space to process; simultaneously, students remain subsumed by educators, administrators, curriculum, and policies that range from avoiding race to racist. As students have ramped up in-school activism (including sit-ins, teach-ins, and walk-outs), school-building leadership has played varying roles in engaging young people. This prompted us to ask in our local context: How does school leadership, within a community-engagement and equity frame, involve youth as leaders?

In this article, we write about the possibility of youth participatory action research (YPAR) intentionally connected to school leadership. Community-engaged research, like YPAR, encourages young people to engage with research and action that affects them, with justice that they care about, and it gives adult leaders in schools the chance to collaborate in ways that honor the knowledge and experiences of youth. Next, we review literature on engagement initiatives of school leadership and examples using YPAR. Then, we describe a community-engaged conceptual framework that includes sharing power for healing to analyze a YPAR project, "The Purple Room": a youth-designed, youth-centered healing space in Racial Justice Community Schools (RJCS, a pseudonym). Finally, we propose implications to increase shared power between adult leaders and youth in schools and to prioritize students as community-connected decision makers and valued agents of change.

Literature Review

School leadership includes building-level leaders (e.g., principals and assistant principals), district-level administrators and personnel (e.g., superintendents, coordinators), community leaders,

and teacher leaders (Khalifa et al., 2016). School leaders are held accountable for improving school environments through inclusive practices and goals for equity. In leadership for social justice, trust within and across communities is an essential element for transformative change (Rivera-Mc-Cutchen & Watson, 2014). Urban school leadership has improved school climate and academic achievement by valuing families and communities and incorporating pedagogies driven by equity and social justice (Medina et al., 2020).

Sampson and Horsford (2017) substantiate a robust equity agenda for school leaders working with communities. They draw from policies in the Every Student Succeeds Act and use multiple case studies across three school districts focusing on Black, Latinx, and multilingual learners. They list 11 recommendations for school leadership regarding community engagement and advocacy. Their first five recommendations focus on how community advocates—like those supporting the YPAR team in this article—can help school leaders identify inequities. Their second five recommendations ask school leaders to "implement structural and systematic avenues for community advocates" to participate with district and school level leadership. Their last recommendation emphasizes federal protections and the courts for addresing educational inequities.

While exemplary scholarship exists for how principals can build lasting community relationships (Khalifa et al., 2016), there remain too many principals, particularly those working in diverse schools, who demonstrate an inability to lead around issues that matter to those communities (Young et al., 2010). Likewise, "scant research focuses on the role of *district* leadership in community organizing approaches to education reform" (Ishimaru, 2014, p. 190). Making use of community engagement efforts with students can raise considerable improvements for equitable school leadership and positive student outcomes such as those outlined in this article.

YPAR is an inclusive approach to critical investigations in education, highlighting the expertise and knowledge youth bring to transformative change within schools and communities (Caraballo et al., 2017). YPAR positions youth as leaders who act against injustices (Fox et al., 2010). Too often school leadership undervalues youth even though they have the most at stake regarding educational decision making (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). In fact, as Bertrand and Rodela (2018) state, "social justice leadership scholarship, despite its focus on equity as an *end,* often overlooks equity in decision making as the *means* to this end" (p. 11). Partnering with and prioritizing young people as decision makers is a way to increase equity in the process of community-engaged work.

Wilhelm et al. (2021) reflected on a community-academic partnership, Training for Resiliency in Urban Students and Teachers (TRUST). TRUST used both youth and parent participatory action research to develop youth-oriented school environments and promote school connectedness. The partnership included middle and high school students, parents, university researchers, community organizations, and school leaders in an urban school district. During the school-based intervention, building a sense of community supported the participatory action research process. Adult and youth researchers were able to explore their individual identities as well as foster group cohesion when applying research methods. The ability of the TRUST project to research with community helped push school leadership to meet the needs of marginalized youth and to make transformative change in health and academics.

Growing research about YPAR bridges the possibilities between adult and youth partners. Bertrand's (2018) study detailed YPAR as a process to include students of color in school decision making and to leverage their experiential knowledge about institutional racism and white supremacy with school leadership. During this afterschool program: a) adults (including teachers and university researchers) facilitated conversations about theories, including community cultural wealth and intersectionality, b) students connected theories with lived experiences to suggest research topics, c) students surveyed and interviewed teachers and students with the guidance of adults, and d) students presented their findings and called for teachers and administrators to make change. Through this YPAR program, students and adult supporters repositioned the young people as school leaders. Our manuscript builds on this existing literature by describing a YPAR project with intentional collaboration between youth and adult leaders in a secondary community school.

A Conceptual Frame: Community-Engagement and the Role of Shared Power and Healing

Community engagement is a collaborative, action-centered practice which considers the shared interests within a network of connected individuals. According to Noel (2011), who writes from an urban teacher education context, three important steps support authentic community engagement: 1) becoming integrated into the community to develop trust, 2) conducting studies to learn about communities' practices and histories, and 3) becoming involved in community engagement activities. Implications for integrating community engagement into public education include improving the social context of education, fostering family and community participation, transforming the culture of schools, holding school officials accountable, and building political capital to redistribute resources (Warren, 2005). To bring these implications to fruition, culturally responsive leadership can access, leverage, and support youth leadership through community organizing for change. A strategic cousin to community engagement, community organizing has been a historical and contemporary approach towards social justice in education. "It is important that we aim for a community engagement praxis that centers social justice—that seeks to bring more just conditions to our communities and more just futures for the people in those communities" (Mitchell & Chavous, 2021, p. 4). Thus, we bring in two justice-oriented concepts to this conceptual frame: sharing power and engaging healing.

Sharing Power

Sharing power, through traditionally uneven relationships, holds the potential to elevate oft-unheard voices and to broaden the idea of who can create educational change. Capacity-building, individually and collectively, can address power imbalances in community–district collaborations (Ishimaru, 2014). Education scholar Bettina Love (2019) recalls long-time community organizer Ella Baker, recognizing "the power of oppressed people and communities to create pathways to leadership that were decentralized and not hierarchical" (p. 65). New leadership pathways can be paved from sharing power, including with young people. Decentering hierarchies in schools is not common, but young people crave it (Rombalski, 2020). And, based on shared leadership research, there are some roadmaps. For instance, while engaging youth leaders of color, adults can share power by 1) being open to new sources of knowledge especially around inequity, 2) initiating opportunities for youth of color leadership, and 3) buffering student leaders from outside pressures (Salisbury, 2021). This manuscript illustrates that sharing power between youth and multiple levels of culturally responsive adult leadership in schools (Marshall & Khalifa, 2018) has great potential for better utilizing young people who are already full of knowledge, resistance, and truth-telling.

Engaging Healing

In addition to the concept of sharing power, the need for healing is also a serious and unrealized—though emerging—endeavor in most urban school communities (Ginwright, 2015). This is especially true following the COVID-19 pandemic (Castrellón et al., 2021) and global racial justice uprisings (Navarro, 2018), through which restorative practices have begun to address some healing from harm. In education contexts, critical youth-centered research acknowledges trauma-informed care and outlines the need to move toward healing-centered engagement, with youth as agents in the creation of their own well-being (Ginwright, 2018). Ginwright outlines healing-centered engagement as political, culturally grounded, and asset-driven, with healing identity work for both youth and adults. In reflecting on organizing and leadership within Black communities, Ginwright (2015) analyzed how the Black Lives Matter movement enacted a healing justice frame through restoration, resistance, and reclamation. In this article, the movement for Black lives was pivotal to the lived experience of the YPAR team and the development of an in-school healing space. Thus, we use Ginwright's ideas to ask: How did this YPAR team's research restore collective well-being, meaning, and purpose? What hegemonic notions of justice and race were disrupted and rejected? How was capacity grown to reclaim, redefine, and reimagine the future? In the next section, we explore the context of youth researchers and administrative leaders as they create opportunities for shared power and healing.

YPAR Approach, Context, and Story

Overview

YPAR is a justice-oriented epistemology that honors marginalized youth and their knowledge and research toward action. YPAR is not a new trend in community-engaged research; the possibilities of YPAR are rich in organizing spaces (Fox et al., 2010). In school leadership, however, the scholarship is slimmer. In an exhaustive YPAR literature review (Anyon et al., 2018), 75% of the articles reported positive outcomes in youth agency and leadership, followed by academic and social growth. However, studies in school settings were less likely to report outcomes related to agency and leadership. As Bertrand and Lozenski (2021) attest, the outcomes of the YPAR projects are too often delivered to school decision makers with a lofty hope that something will be done, rather than school-based leaders working to share power and work with youth to change policies and practices. The Racial Justice Community School (RJCS, a pseudonym) in this article is unique, not only because of its model as a community school, but also because it has multiple levels of school and district leaders who value and prioritize community, research, and youth in their decision-making processes. YPAR was one method that this school leadership supported to engage with youth and work towards equity in an urban school.

Context and Positionality

This article stems from the engagement between an urban-based, community and university-connected youth research team and a local secondary school (grades 6-12). YoUthROC is a research team of young people with a few adult co-conspirators; the team collaborates with community partners who conduct YPAR projects that utilize the collective power of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth through culturally relevant research methods. In this context, co-conspirators are defined as adults who understand the systems of privilege and oppression related to youth-driven research and practice solidarity to confront power imbalances in youth–adult relationships (Love, 2019). YoUthROC's goals include co-constructing ethical knowledge to inform racial justice in education, challenging the status quo in areas of leadership and learning, and increasing the capacity of youth leaders especially in spaces intended for them. Those of us crafting this paper include a Black woman and YoUthROC leader working as a YPAR coordinator with RJCS's interracial high school YPAR team, a multiracial male school leader who is a research and equity coordinator at RJCS, and two others from YoUthROC: a white woman university faculty member and a Black woman graduate student. Together, we had a shared commitment to center BIPOC youth (YoUthROC, 2022) and we met multiple times a week to plan, work, and reflect about the YPAR teams. In addition, the data section comes directly from the secondary school's YPAR team.

In this article, we share one story from RJCS, a school partner for YoUthROC for over a year. RJCS is a community school located in a first-ring suburb with 82% of the student body eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. Student demographics are as follows: 17.7% white, 39% Black, 12.7% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 22.4% Hispanic/Latino, 1.4% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. As a community school, RJCS acts as a community resource, providing childcare, school supplies, meals, and housing resources to families whose children attend RJCS as well as the local community. Being a community school is a centerpiece of the school district's identity, and a useful leverage point for racial justice in the community, specifically as it pertains to navigating institutional barriers and advocating for the RJCS YPAR program. In this article we ask what conditions were created to enable the development of a youth-led, in-school healing space and what roles both youth and adult leadership played in its creation.

The Purple Room as a Youth-Designed, Youth-Centered Healing Space: The YPAR Team Tells the Story

The idea of The Purple Room, a newly designed youth-centered healing room within RJCS, stemmed from students' experiences with trauma and harm, especially in school spaces. Many students felt they didn't have a sense of belonging or ownership in school, were struggling with mental

health, and didn't have an outlet to deal with their emotions at school or at home. Students resorted to sitting on floors and in bathrooms to fight off their emotions. This lack of mental support led to conflicts, including students being pushed out of classrooms or forced back into traumatic spaces without time to take a mental breather. Through the extended protests at the police department near RJCS following the murder of Daunte Wright [for more context see page 114], and the needs of community members amid the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting distance/hybrid learning, students and school leaders had yet another chance to come together as a community to create a space for individual and collective healing.

The RJCS YPAR team centered their community-engaged research project around student experiences with school discipline and mental health. Throughout the research process, the RJCS YPAR team practiced ethnographic inquiry and narrative storytelling, designed a school-based survey, and qualitatively analyzed over 150 responses from students in grades 6-12. Over the course of three weeks, the team held reflective meetings to discuss the major themes from their data collection: 1) Student-led space, 2) Conflict resolution, and 3) What stops conflict resolution in schools? The research showed that many students did not feel comfortable in school and adults escalated tensions and unproductively interfered with conflict resolution. Collectively, the RJCS YPAR team concluded that young people should not feel embarrassed, guilty, or judged for their emotions. Students deserved a space to process those emotions without adult interference.

Within the research process, two members of the RJCS YPAR team were invited to a budget meeting with community stakeholders, administrators, and other RJCS building leaders. The purpose of the meeting was to determine priorities for the upcoming school year and to allocate funds based on those priorities. RJCS YPAR members entered the budget meeting with the team's research findings guiding their engagement. The idea of a "Purple Room" was put on the table by one of the RJCS YPAR team members as a project that would align with their research findings as well as school priorities. Adults were generally supportive. Some claimed that a similar idea had been floated, but the team recognized that there had been no plans to enact it. After receiving feedback from more community stakeholders and building leaders, the YPAR team's research and next steps built a case for opening a healing space within RJCS that was youth-designed and youth-driven.

Following the budget meeting, the RJCS YPAR team worked closely with the wellness coordinator to transition the "Purple Room" from an idea to a reality. The principal was supportive of the development process and trusted other building leaders and "critical friends," including an equity coordinator, youth programs manager, and YPAR youth, to create norms and culture for the space. Additionally, the wellness coordinator and the university mentor helped connect the team to mental health initiative grants to fund it. The Purple Room officially opened in the spring of 2022. Figure 1 is the youth-generated Instagram account post from its opening day.

Figure 1

The Purple Room: A Youth-Generated Instagram Post

YPAR as an Organizing Tool for Social Justice in School: Sharing Power and Healing

Critical and participatory practices like YPAR not only strive towards social justice, they also sustain organizing efforts in education and healing for young people (Caraballo et al., 2017; Navarro, 2018). When students organize against injustice, they create new ways of seeing themselves as leaders and change makers (Rombalski, 2020). Based on examples in this article, youth leaders engaged in YPAR not only practiced what shared power might look like, but they also played a role toward collective healing. With these possibilities in mind, what can we learn from the YPAR team and their collaboration with school leadership?

When adult leaders in schools participate with, learn about, and advocate for youth, trust develops in bidirectional ways. School building leadership can take up new frames for sharing power with youth, families, and communities and for creating institutional memories that honor community contributions. In the continuing dual pandemics of racial violence and COVID-19, ideas for healing must be community-engaged, not decided in isolation behind the tall plexiglass of a front office. In the development of The Purple Room, youth and adults attended to a community-engagement frame (Noel, 2011); they learned more about student perspectives through YPAR and participated in activities together, building trust across groups. In this process, the idea of school leadership was broadened to include young people. However, even though community engagement tenets were present, examining the concepts of shared power and healing allow for deeper analysis and implications toward the schools and leadership that students deserve.

Adult School Leadership Engaging in Shared Power

School administrators play a pivotal role in providing opportunities for youth and adults to share power in decision making. At RJCS, the YPAR team and its collaboration with adult leaders serves as an example for how leadership can be distributed to both students and other adults in the building. In this site, multiple levels of school leaders practiced centering equity and youth. The relationship between a few key educators and the YPAR team led to increased trust. The principal's open support for a mental health/healing space was a key factor. Together, the YPAR team and adult leaders supported engagement, staffing, and funding that led to The Purple Room.

The adults who supported the YPAR team and The Purple Room were open to new sources of knowledge around inequity, the first of three tenets to sharing power with youth of color in schools (Salisbury, 2021). This aligns with community engagement as well: "Community engagement rooted in care, trust and morality must take community members' knowledge seriously and directly benefit the community" (Campano et al., 2015). In fact, Amina and Abby had co-facilitated a professional development session for the district with YoUthROC, and the opening activity was entitled "Rethinking Youth Knowledge." It included a spectrum activity for participants to walk, think, talk, share out, and listen to consider the ways they position, value, or prioritize young people. Of course, not every staff member was "on the same page," but the opportunity to explore perceptions about youth and their knowledge was crucial in setting up conditions for a YPAR team at school. In addition, in the data shared above about The Purple Room, youth research revealed clear needs for mental health outlets; sitting on floors and in bathrooms and describing how adults interfered and escalated tensions warranted disruption. Just because some adults valued youth knowledge did not mean this work was seamless or easy, but it made opportunities for sustained engagement more possible.

Listening to youth knowledge, indeed believing young people, increased opportunities for youth of color leadership, Salisbury's (2021) second tenet in sharing power with youth in schools. Themes from the YPAR team's research also clamored for increased youth engagement, as students wanted student-led space, conflict resolution, and to engage with deep inquiry such as, "What stops conflict resolution in schools?" They built a case for opening The Purple Room as a youth-designed healing space. They worked with the wellness coordinator, equity coordinator, youth program manager from community education, some teachers and staff, university researchers, and were supported by school administration. This multilevel collaboration with varied adults moved research-based findings to an opportunity for action.

The third tenet in sharing power with youth is about the buffering that is needed from adult co-conspirators. Buffering practices include protecting youth from unrealistic timelines, racist criticisms, and defensiveness from unsupportive staff (Salisbury, 2021). In addition to being supportive of youth, some adult leaders who were involved in the development of The Purple Room created buffers for students. Sometimes that meant keeping certain adults away from meetings. It also meant having honest conversations with school administrators. At times, "the practical implications for [work as an administrator] started to get in the way of the process of youth leadership." At one point Ryan paraphrased what he said as a buffer in a meeting:

> It's not about what you can do. This is a process, to let young people make choices for themselves and let the community see those things. It's a much bigger project than just getting something up and running because it's an action item on your list.

Young people will do work in a different way and with a different pace, especially in creating norms and culture for a space. It is a gift for administrators to have critical friends and youth advocates within a school community. Likewise, it is important—and can be unusual-- to have administrators who trust and share power with their staff, who then help to push/guide both trust and sharing power with students. This multidimensional, youth advocacy approach to creating change in schools is pivotal when repositioning youth as school leaders.

Can Everyone Engage in Healing?

Conditions that created potential to engage healing in this urban school relied on the distribution of power from administrative leadership and the equity-driven engagement of a YPAR team. This school, like too many others, was a nearby site to the recent police killing of a young Black man. Within the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning, and continued protests, the school community had been increasingly conscious of the need for more mental health support for students. Gaining community and grant-based support was also helpful for public awareness and accountability. Beyond the context, however, we take the time here to explore what else we can learn about the part that restoration, resistance, and reclamation (Ginwright, 2015) play in this work toward healing justice.

The Purple Room could be considered a restoration project stemming from youth research and design, made tangible inside of a school. Restoration "involves actions and activities that restore collective well-being, meaning, and purpose" (Ginwright, 2015, p. 39). With an interracial group of YPAR team members who had been working together for years, they were able to create a shared purpose that supported the aches of their own stories and the experiences of other students yearning for a healing space. The purpose of The Purple Room aligned with the YPAR team's research findings as well as school priorities; the collective work in young people creating the design, the norms, and the rollout restored meaning and purpose to their work while contributing to the collective well-being of students. One of their norms stated, "Be mindful of everyone in the space." Mindfulness and well-being went beyond an individual need toward a collective responsibility. One YPAR member reported:

> I feel like a lot of kids don't know exactly what mental health is or how to express themselves. I know in the Black community where I grew up, a lot of people don't know how to express themselves. They don't really go to therapy … therapy is looked down on in my community specifically because it can break up families, so people don't seek those mental health resources.

Normalizing mental health, including in Black communities, was named by young people and began to be a goal closer to realization.

Prior to restoration, however, there was necessary disruption. In the spring of 2021, during distance learning and vast COVID-19 community needs, a police officer killed 20-year-old unarmed community member Daunte Wright. The police department is kitty-corner to the school's backyard; protests and state-sanctioned community harm from tear gas, flash-bang grenades, rubber bullets,

and curfews ensued. How were students allowed to heal through this continued community trauma? Resmaa Menakem (2017) writes about healing on an individual level as mending, working through unprocessed trauma in one's own body. He also recognizes the potential in "mending our collective body," a concept to ground a group, which can take place through community activism. The school responded by organizing a large, ongoing community distribution center. During that time, the YPAR team planned and led a school-based day of protest by providing a time to speak up and a space to gather with students and staff. The social action of the rally and protest fueled the desire to claim space for community and for healing. That feeling continued through the YPAR team's initial research and the recommendation to set up a healing space within the bounds of the school; something youth-centered that was not a classroom. When hegemony and racial violence persist, then disruption must as well, when collective healing is a goal. What might happen in The Purple Room if this contextualized history and the memory of Daunte Wright is erased? If race is flattened and the needs of students of color are not centered? If participation in the room is threatened as a loss of privilege? Continual analysis and disruption will be an important part of the potential for collective healing.

The question of reclamation remains. How did The Purple Room project grow capacity "to reclaim, redefine, and reimagine a possible future" (Ginwright, 2015, p. 40) with youth at the center? First, the reclamation of youth decision makers within school leadership and the development of a healing space was an important model. Three adult coordinators in the building spoke about the project as a "mediated space" between and with adult and youth leaders. Second, the opportunity for youth to design a space within the school meant that there was enough trust for youth to define not only youth norms, but adult norms for the Purple Room. Some adults were reticent about the room's expectations, even those who had been named as allies or "safety nets" by young people. However, adult participants were surprised. More than one adult resonated with this comment: "It's a really good energy … we didn't know that we also would feel so re-centered in this space … We are benefitting from it. … it's what we need too." Healing and identity work is needed for youth and adults alike (Ginwright, 2015). Starting with a youth research team that engages with school leadership, spilling over into a youth-driven protest, and designing a youth-led healing space, those were seeds for reimagining school futures.

Conclusion

The development and the potential of The Purple Room offers two elements that are not often accessible in schools: shared power and space to engage with healing. Thich Nhat Hanh writes (2020, p. 57):

> To me, a meditation center is where you get back to yourself, you get a clearer understanding of reality, you get more strength in understanding and love, and you prepare for your reentry into society. If it's not like that, it's not a real meditation center. As we develop real understanding, we can re-enter society and make a real contribution.

The Purple Room may not be a meditation center, but it may become a youth-centered healing space where students can gain clarity of self and strength of community before re-entering school or where they can access resources to repair harm. Healing justice seeks both (a) collective healing and well-being, and (b) transforming the institutions and relationships that are causing the harm in the first place (Ginwright, 2015, p. 38). This can be challenging work for school leadership because it can mean admitting harm, and acknowledging those stories from youth, in the first place.

Community-engagement and trust, across varying levels, is key to YPAR. In school, YPAR was not a project for its own sake; it was tethered and accountable to a school and broader community. The YPAR team wasn't distanced from adult leadership. They were not a singular check box for youth voice. Administrative leaders leaned on equity-driven engaged research, including with school employees, university researchers, families, and youth. This YPAR team compensated youth leaders who guided discussions with adults and other youth; they were utilized in decision making and built into the community design of a school.

There are implications for multiple levels of community-engaged administrative leaders working with youth and YPAR teams. For adult leaders who are already in critical conversations about relationships, trust, and power, then sharing power with students is not such a stretch; however, there will always be adults to coach along the way. We are interested in seeing how administrative leaders prioritize structures in which young people of color are valued and prioritized to lead toward social justice, even when it may be easier or quicker to have someone else do the work. We wonder where The Purple Room will go next. An outdoor space? How will the memories of this work carry on? The Purple Room is a legacy and a hope that will take continued commitment with a new team of young people and adults working together who are willing to engage in both resistance and healing toward sustained change.

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

Dr. Cynthia Reyes, Dr. Shana Haines and Arby Ghemari

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; Bartolóme, 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 knowledg-es 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. Bondeko	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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