JFDE

Journal of Family Diversity in Education

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Focus and Scope for JFDE

The Journal of Family Diversity in Education (JFDE) is hosted by the Institute for Community Justice and Wellbeing (ICJW) at Miami University's College of Education, Health & Society. In order to enact the mission of the ICJW to cultivate mutually beneficial, ethical, and transformative relationships among diverse community allies, this journal offers a rigorous exchange of new ideas, pedagogy, curricula, and activism in and around education endeavors.

The JFDE is committed to decolonizing and disrupting oppressive, deficit and racist ideologies by focusing on work that prioritizes schools, families, communities, scholars, and activists seeking to establish liberatory and humanized spaces.

The JFDE commits to:

- Featuring critical scholarship and the voices, experiences, and liberatory acts of historically marginalized families and communities with an emphasis on issues and concerns that impact the educational experiences of educators, students, families, and
- communities (i.e., anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, racialized [i.e., anti-blackness] discipline and policing practices, housing insecurities, etc.)
- Creating and sustaining a JFDE leadership model that is inclusive of critically engaged, diverse scholars and community stakeholders.
- Supporting educators, community stakeholders, organizers, scholar activists and public scholarship by publishing and promoting timely work that advances social justice agendas.
- Offering a peer review process that is rigorous, transparent, and honors community voice.

We are pleased to offer a fully refereed, online journal that welcomes a wide range of innovative theoretical approaches. To support public scholarship, we are committed to providing accessible multimodal content. We encourage diverse scholarly and community contributions including research articles, podcasts, digital stories, essays and interviews, practitioner and community perspectives on practice, book and media reviews, and other interdisciplinary forms of scholarship or creative works.

History of JFDE

The Journal of Family Diversity in Education was started in 2014 by the Family Diversity Education Council. Under the leadership of the founding editors Dr. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and Dr. Monica Miller Marsh the journal was initially hosted at Kent State University.

The founding editors developed the JFDE to honor those whose work attempted to shine light upon and oppose limited, hegemonic conceptions of families, particularly in the domain of family-school-community partnerships. The journal provided a much-needed outlet for scholars and practitioners working to analyze, critique, and redefine notions of family and the resultant implications for those partnerships.

The current editorial team seeks to carry on this legacy and commits to furthering this mission as outlined above in the focus and scope of the journal.

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Volume 4, Number 1 – Summer 2021

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Editors' Note

It is our great pleasure to share with you the first volume of the JFDE published under our editorial leadership. We are grateful to the founding JFDE editors Dr. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and Dr. Monica Miller Marsh for their trust and for providing us with the opportunity to take on this responsibility. We are also grateful to our colleagues on the editorial board who have played a critical role in helping us to reimagine the focus and scope of the JFDE.

Taking on this responsibility in the midst of the Covid-19 global pandemic and during a time of political unrest in the United States has been both a challenge and a learning opportunity. It has forced us to carefully evaluate the priorities and commitments of the JFDE. A full description of the new focus and scope for the JFDE can be found in the first pages of this issue but we wanted to highlight some important points in this editorial note.

The JFDE is committed to prioritizing work that offers insights on efforts to establish more liberatory, just, and humanized spaces in education. We know that systemic oppression exists in our social and education systems and seek to use this platform to disrupt embedded deficit and racist ideologies. As a part of these efforts, the JFDE will partner with board members, contributing authors, and community members to utilize social media and other emerging technologies to broadly share content both inside and outside of traditional academic circles. We hope that our readers will also support and engage in these attempts to surface critical conversations and we welcome feedback throughout this process and journey.

The JFDE strives to be inclusive in all of our actions as editors. Historically, the voices of many individuals and marginalized populations have been silenced in academia and broader society. As editors, we recognize our own limitations due to our personal positionalities, and have sought to create an inclusive culture for the JFDE by recruiting an editorial board composed of diverse individuals with different backgrounds, identities, and professional responsibilities. We have charged our board with holding us accountable for the goals and aims of the JFDE.

In this first issue, we are proud to present the work of a diverse group of scholars whose research reflects the reimagined focus and scope of the JFDE. In the first featured article, Dr. Cynthia C. Reyes and colleagues not only center the experiences and knowledge of refugee families but do so through the use of decolonized methods that "[...] interrogate the power structure inherent in research relationships between 'researcher' and 'researched' (p. 2). The second featured article, centers the experiences of families of students who are classified as both English learners and with dis/abilities. In their work, Dr. Jamey Burho and Dr. Karen Thompson highlight the actions parents took to actively subvert power structures inherent in the communication process and flow of information received from school officials.

Continuing the trend of intentionally centering the voices and experiences of parents and families, the third featured article by Robert Cotto Jr. and Dr. Sarah Woulfin utilizes mixed-methods to explore the family decision-making process of returning to in-person schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic and in the process calls into question the concept of "school choice with(out) equity." The fourth featured article in this issue utilizes institutional agency and community cultural wealth frameworks to explore the collective work of the Council of African American Parents (CAAP). In centering the

collective work of Black parents, Dr. Raquel M. Rall nuances how Black parental collective involvement "[...] influences the academic preparation, path, and destination of Black students" (p. 81). Finally, Zhen Lin provides a book review of the edited volume from Dr. Guofang Li and Dr. Wen Ma entitled *Educating Chinese-heritage Students in the Global-Local Nexus: Identities, Challenges, and Opportunities* that centers the experiences of Chinese-heritage students from a more global perspective.

Collectively these works challenge deficit and racist ideologies that perpetually surround historically marginalized families, parents, and communities. We hope that these pieces serve as a reminder for JFDE readers to continue engaging in practices, research, and work that creates equitable, collectivist, liberatory, and humanizing spaces *with* and *alongside* historically marginalized families, parents, and communities.

In Solidarity,

Michael P. Evans & Érica Fernández
Co-Editors JFDE

Article

"Your Eyes Open and So Do Your Ears": Centering Knowledge of Families With Refugee Backgrounds During a Follow-up Interview

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Cynthia C. Reyes, Shana J. Haines, Hemant Ghising, Ashraf Alamatouri, Madina Haji, & Rachel Hurwitz
University of Vermont

Abstract
In an exploratory case study of partnerships between educators and refugee families recently resettled in the U.S, we conducted follow-up interviews with each of the ten participating families during year one. In this paper, we report on themes from these interviews highlighted in three family case studies. We used methodological approaches that enabled us to reenvision and interrogate the power structure inherent in research relationships between 'researcher' and 'researched." The purposes of the additional interview were to conduct a member check on the data we had gathered, understand what had changed since our initial interview with the family, and gather families' feedback about our comportment and methods. The two-part question was, How might decolonizing methods from a postcolonial lens serve as guideposts for disrupting research methods with families with refugee backgrounds?, and How did partnering with transnational student researchers inform ways of representing the family narratives? The follow-up narratives suggest a complex understanding of building knowledge within the limitations of a conventional research paradigm.

Keywords: refugee families, community knowledge, decolonizing, postcolonial

Introduction
There has been a great deal of writing on the dilemmas of translating practices that follow a biomedical model for qualitative social science research, particularly with refugee-background populations (Block et al., 2013; DeHaene et al., 2010; Dyregrov et al., 2000; Ellis et al., 2007; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Nakkash et al., 2009; Perry, 2011; Schrag, 2010). Examining research methods with families and children who have endured transnational migration, as well as the ethical complications of representing their experiences, is a key issue we explore in this piece. As a research team comprised of U.S.-born education professors and students, and students from the global majority (i.e., South Asia, Middle East, Africa), we organically explored decolonizing methods for determining how to partner with each other in a study called *Centering Connections: Examining Relationships Between Refugee*

Corresponding Author:
Cynthia Reyes, Associate Professor, University of Vermont, Waterman Building Room 410, Burlington, VT, 05405, USA
Email: Cynthia.Reyes@uvm.edu

Families and Educators (Reyes et al., 2021). *Centering Connections* was an exploratory study of 10 families with refugee backgrounds across five different language communities who connected with their children's teachers in U.S. public schools. This subject is part of a larger longitudinal study that examines the intersection of decolonizing research methods and postcolonial theory in a project with families with refugee experiences.

We first examine how we use the term *decolonizing methods* and what it means to decolonize. The term is complex and rooted in unique foundational and historical enterprises. Scholars who engage in decolonizing Indigenous methods (Chilisa, 2020; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2019) seek to decenter colonial epistemology in order to "struggle and assert their claim for humanity" (Smith, 2012, p. 27). Other scholars describe decoloniality as "ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 17). According to Mignolo and Walsh, decolonization is not an academic field, but a dynamic and fluid process that depends on a variety of local histories, politics, and ways of communing. As emerging learners of decolonizing methods and postcolonial theory, we gain inspiration from these differing bodies of knowledge and humbly describe decolonizing as an ongoing praxis for critical deconstruction of Western research methods in the field of education. In her book examining educational research as a site of coloniality, Patel (2016) notes the damaging ways in which researchers from dominant cultural backgrounds have influenced research practices such as gaining informed consent, conducting interviews, and representing nondominant cultural groups. Many critical scholars describe the responsibility of researchers to interrogate their "ontological entry-points and impacts" (Patel, 2016; p. 57) in their research by considering self-examining questions such as "Why me?," "Why this?," and "Who now?" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). Patel also recognizes the limitations of deconstruction to transform conditions structurally and materially. Nevertheless, these prompts resonate with the relational tensions that emerged in our study between Western and non-Western approaches to research.

Desiring to center participants' situated lives during our analysis, we used methodological approaches that enabled us to reenvision and interrogate the power structure inherent in research relationships between 'researcher' and 'researched'. Partnering with students from the global majority also influenced our understandings of power and knowledge construction when considering prior transnational ways of knowing. Therefore, our two-part question was, How might decolonizing methods from a postcolonial lens serve as guideposts for disrupting research methods with families with refugee backgrounds, and how did partnering with transnational student researchers inform ways of representing the family narratives? In this piece, we examine what we learned through our research methods by conducting two interviews with 10 refugee families, using a total of five different languages (Nepali Bhutanese, Somali, Mai Mai, Swahili, and Arabic). We used follow-up interviews as a way to assess our conduct with the families and to provide them with the opportunity to share with us what they learned from the first interview.

Second, we critically explore the use of a postcolonial framework for considering relationships with refugee families who are newly resettled. We examine the tensions of engaging in research in refugee communities and discuss attempts at bridging these tensions by clarifying what they are through our reflections of the follow-up interviews with families. Many researchers who conduct research in refugee communities refer to a dual imperative: producing knowledge that meets the criteria of the academy and protecting the refugee community at the same time (Block et al., 2013; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Nakkash, et al., 2009; Schrag, 2010). The problem with the dual imperative is that one misses the opportunity to develop intentional relationships with families if they focus solely on operationalizing the research methods. The desire to protect the refugee is an obvious ethical commitment of the researcher, but the manner in which this commitment may be fulfilled can have deleterious consequences for refugees. Third, we describe the methods we used to hone a critical

reflexivity that considers decolonizing our ways of knowing and doing research. Afterwards, we provide narrative descriptions of the families while also situating ourselves in these narratives to be more transparent about who we were and what we did during the interviews. Lastly, we discuss how decolonizing methods and a postcolonial framework compelled us to examine tensions of power dynamics and knowledge construction in the study.

The research team consisted of two U.S.-born co-primary investigators, one Filipina American education professor and one White education professor, and four university students, three of whom were personally invested because they also served as liaisons interpreting between the university and the communities that participated in our study. The two graduate students were from Bhutan and Syria and were also planning their graduate work around this study, while the two undergraduate students were from Somalia and the US. Together, these students from the research team (hereinafter referred to as *student researchers*) served as intermediaries to help arrange interviews with the families and act as interpreters. Their roles extended to shaping how we (the research team) would naturally construct norms for relationship building. It is important to note that we self-identify here, because throughout the study we shared with each other our identities and prior ways of knowing, which we discuss in our reflections on research methods below. Our self-location stories (Windchief & San Pedro, 2019) acknowledged the different filters we used to understand participant stories, and sometimes roles were reversed when the professors depended on students to help them interpret participants' values, gestures, or experiences.

Unpacking "Alterity": The Complexity of Refugee Lives from a Postcolonial Lens

Postcolonial theory can provide a critical framework for analyzing and centering the historical, social, political, economic, and aesthetic elements of the subaltern or the Other. Postcolonial scholars have been committed to critiquing the material consequences and the dangers of ethnocentrism rooted in Western/Enlightenment thinking. They draw attention to an understanding of alterity or difference, a hostility to the Other, and the dangers of dominant knowledge (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Said, 1993; Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial theory is also instructive for questioning the production of Western knowledge and representation of voice.

In research and popular literature involving families and children with refugee experiences, there is an all-too-common paradigm that constructs their experiences as displaced victims from civil war or governmental upheaval whose lives are perpetually fraught with peril and trauma throughout their migration journey (Haddad, 2008; Hemon, 2018; Nguyen, 2018). But how does one describe humanity in the stories of refugee families and children without pathologizing their experiences? According to Hemon (2018), literature is key: "The very proposition of storytelling is that each life is a multitude of details, an irreplaceable combination of experiences, which can be contained in their totality only in narration" (p. 93).

Many scholars agree there are ethical ways to develop research that is humanizing and that protects families from exploitative means (DeHaene et al., 2010; Isik-Ercan, 2010; Jacobsen & Landau, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Perry, 2011; Pittaway et al., 2010). However, the question remains of who represents these stories and how. Postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak has described the contributions that Marxist theory made to the poststructural movement but has also interrogated its limitations, especially around the notion of difference. She challenged the academic elite with her question about who could really speak for the "subaltern," individuals who could not speak for themselves because of their perceived inferiority in society (Gandhi, 2019; Spivak, 1988). We are curious about the concept of alterity, the state of being or making oneself different from another, and

how alterity operates in a postcolonial world. Fanon described the difference between the colonizer and the colonized subject who is "[c]onfronted with a world configured by the colonizer, [and] . . . is always presumed guilty" (1963, p. 16). However, Fanon goes on to say that although the colonized may be made to feel inferior, they are by no means convinced of that inferiority. Gandhi (2019) states it is this complex relationship that so vexes postcolonial scholars because there exists no comfortable alliance between the colonizer and colonized in a postcolonial world without the risk of further marginalizing the Other.

According to Andreotti (2011), Spivak is suspicious of any attempt on the part of Western scholars to speak for the subaltern or even for any "pure form of subaltern consciousness" because such efforts to produce such an unadulterated voice relies more on the scholar's goodwill or benevolence, which sooner or later ends up silencing the subaltern again. The debate for where this conclusion lies is beyond the scope of this paper; however, the ideas that emerge from these debates are useful for interrogating the scholar's goodwill. From our emerging understandings of postcolonial theory, we highlight these difficult discussions about the subaltern and the concept of alterity because they are useful for us as educational researchers to explore our own constructions and viewpoints of knowledge and power. Forced to examine the ontological roots of these concepts, we come to realize that research methods, if left unexamined, risk generating observations of differences in individuals or groups that result from a reduced, objective, and relativistic manner.

The historical and political lives of families with refugee experiences are constitutive of power and powerlessness as they seek to negotiate the terms of the conditions of their lives, which have mostly been controlled by geopolitical laws and governmental whims. Bringing attention to these conditions without perpetuating the paradigm of difference requires reflection when seeking to highlight the humanity in refugee families' experiences. As we reflect on participants' stories of resettlement, we evoke Said's writing on imperialism and how domination of land and the inequities associated with it are "perceived facts of human society" (Said, 1993, p. 19). Many of the families in our study who fled from Iraq, Congo, Bhutan, Syria, Kenya, or Mozambique shared common stories: living a content life before the violence found them, escaping from violence in their country (and sometimes in the countries where they initially sought refuge), enduring hazardous travel, and encountering postmigration trauma in perplexing new institutions and policies. However, upon closer analysis, these experiences varied from family to family. Words they extolled time and again throughout the study were "home" and "community." Being both emotionally and geographically informed, we reflect on our own decolonization to develop an operating praxis when working with families in these liminal spaces in a research context. When we draw upon postcolonial theory, we can also problematize static notions of non-Western cultures and languages as well as ask the question of "Whose gaze?" when recording the families' experiences or when listening to their stories through the equally subjective interpretations of the student researchers. In her work that analyzes educational policy discourse, Andreotti (2011, p. 107) proposes an actionable postcolonial lens that seeks to resist "uncritical celebration of fixed identities and ethnicities in the discourse" related to multicultural education. Decolonizing our methods is an intentional way for the research team to work out what criticality means, and postcolonial theory provides a body of knowledge that troubles the notion of alterity in dynamic and relational research settings.

Study Overview

Our Methods: Working with Communities

In conducting *Centering Connections*, we sought to obtain a deeper understanding of what connections flourished between families and schools and why. Using an embedded case study design

(Yin, 2009), we qualitatively explored family-school partnerships through interviews, observations, and document collection. We first sought consent to conduct this study from two school systems. Then, through purposive sampling (Maxwell, 2012), we worked with community members to identify families who came to the US as refugees within the preceding 36 months and lived in two refugee resettlement communities in the Northeast.

Participants included 10 families (four Bhutanese Nepali-speakers, one Somali, one Somali Bantu, one Congolese, and three Iraqi), 17 teachers (at least one English Learner [EL] and one general education teacher for each student), six home-school liaisons employed through the school district, and two administrators. All students were between 10 and 17 years old.

In our first interaction with the families, we explained the study and asked for consent, which involved one or both of the co-PIs and a student researcher visiting their homes. The student researcher explained the study to them and inquired if they would be interested in participating. For each family in this study, we conducted an interview of the whole family, an interview with the children, one interview with at least two of the children's teachers, one with their school-based home-school liaisons, and one with an administrator. The families and children identified which teachers they wanted us to invite for an interview. We then returned to the family for a second interview. The interviews with the families and children were mostly conducted in their native language by the student researchers, and the interviews with teachers, liaisons, and administrators were conducted in English. We conducted a total of 55 interviews, and interviews with families lasted anywhere between 45 minutes and 3.5 hours.

Throughout the study, especially between the first and second interviews, we strove to integrate self-reflection activities that seemed organic to the process and that progressively became more intensive as we broached personal topics related to childrearing, family dynamics, education, teaching, and cultural rituals. We began to "think more narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), examining the ontological intersections between the families' stories and our own as family members, students, teachers, children of immigrant and refugee families, or travelers and workers in other countries. "Just as reductionism makes the whole into something lesser, sociological and political analysis can also make the whole lesser through the use of abstract and formalism" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 38). To counter what we perceived was a formal and abstract process, we sought to "slow down" these reflection activities and aspired to create something more dynamic and whole: knowing each other and inviting the dismantling of hierarchical mechanisms within the research study. The co-PIs were aware of their position of power opposite their students, but as the study continued, they made it clear to the student researchers that their knowledge and skills were invaluable to the process. Although at the time we did not use the term "decolonize" to describe the reflection process we were engaging in, we were approaching responses to the following questions: Who were we to the families? What might the families think of the activities we were doing? How do notions of status and power influence relationships between the professors and the student researchers, between the student researchers and members of their own communities, and between the professors and the families? We recorded these reflections during the team's bimonthly meetings and during two research retreats. During the first research retreat, we each wrote identity narratives related to what we learned about ourselves during the study and what we hoped to learn as we delved deeper into our work. The narratives fostered a fundamental trust among the team as professors learned about their student researchers' aspirations and the student researchers learned about their professors' family lives. The narratives also informed our understandings of family experiences. Nevertheless, it is this trust that instilled in the team a collaborative approach for communicating the study to the families and gaining their consent.

Getting to Know the Families: Three Case Study Narratives

To illustrate the substance of the second interview, we introduce three of the 10 families who participated in *Centering Connections*. We chose these three family case studies because their narratives highlighted themes that emerged across participants. The data referred to the ways that decolonizing methods enabled reciprocity and forms of trust, but they also showed limitations in the way such methods are practiced within a conventional research study. These methodologies enabled tensions to emerge when considering the assumptions that some families and teachers had of the other. These narratives also reflect the research interviews that we used as field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and through the generative perspectives of the student researchers, we developed them into narratives of our interactions with the families.

Gogo

Gogo and her five children (aged 3–13 years old) were Somali Bantu. Gogo's daughter, Habi, a 13-year-old who was attending a newcomer program for newly arrived students, participated in the study. The family was resettled from Kenya, where they had been living in the Kakuma refugee camp among a mostly Somali Bantu population for 20 years, and they had been living in a northeastern city for only two weeks when we met her for the first interview. As a single mother of five children, Gogo had extended family in the area where she resettled and moved into an apartment with her uncle's family. Although Gogo spoke with a quiet voice, her mannerisms with the student researcher seemed friendly and relaxed. After the interview, Madina admitted to Cynthia that, in Gogo's culture, Gogo was considered her grandmother because Gogo was her grandmother's sister. Gogo's young children were therefore considered to be Madina's aunts and uncles. Madina, who had lived in the US for 16 years, visited Gogo's home regularly to help her with shopping, childcare, and cooking.

During the first interview, Gogo expressed determination to find a job. When Madina asked Gogo if she found a job, she used the Mai Mai word for "given" rather than "found," which prompted Gogo to ask, "Who's giving me a job? I'm looking for it! I only go to school. I want the job!" She wanted her own place to live but needed a job first. She said that in the refugee camp where they lived, she would leave the children while she used her "driver card" (a document allowing her to leave the camp or "go on the road") to go to Mombasa or Nairobi for days at a time to work and then send money back home to her family. She said, "In Kakuma, they only serve maize . . . and you can't live on that. We all can't be sitting around waiting for that. So, you get up and go out . . . leave the camp." She heard that a parent could be arrested for leaving their children at home alone in the US, however, so she was concerned about how she would be able to find a job that would allow her to come home in time to collect her children from school.

She had neither met her children's teachers nor received any correspondence from the school, according to Gogo. Teacher interviews confirmed that they had not met Gogo, and they recognized that it might be difficult for her to meet with the teachers of all four of her school-aged children. Gogo was not particularly concerned about her children's schools because, as she noted, any school was better than the school her children attended in Kakuma, where a single classroom would hold 150 students. She said, "They teach English, but only the ones that actually are determined to learn, learn something. The school walls have holes in them. What are kids going to learn in such a big classroom with just one teacher?"

Leenata, Guaresh, and Suchandra

On the day that the research team consisting of Shana and Hemant met with Leenata and Guaresh, their extended family was visiting from Canada to celebrate Dashain (celebration of Durga).

Five adults sat packed together on the couch and insisted the team members sit in the bigger armchairs. Leenata's husband, Guaresh, set up a folding chair across from us. The teens, children, and one other adult woman (Leenata's deaf sister-in-law) sat on the floor. Hemant had arranged to meet with Leenata, but Guaresh told us that she was in the garden and would be home soon. It felt a bit awkward to arrive in the midst of a festival celebration, with participants in elaborate clothes and decorated faces, and ask personal questions about refugee resettlement with so many people in the room listening. We started the interview with Guaresh, and we learned that the family had been farmers in Bhutan before migrating to Nepal and living in a refugee camp there for 22 years. In the refugee camp, the large extended family that had lived together in Bhutan was divided across numerous smaller dwellings. One of the smaller family units then migrated to the US, leaving behind the extended family they had lived with in Bhutan.

The parents had no formal education, but the children had attended school at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees camp in Nepal. Guaresh stated, "In Bhutan, I was a farmer and worked in agriculture. In Nepal, I worked for my children's education. I made other people's houses better, but mine was still a shack." Neither the mother nor the father was literate, though Guaresh said, "I learned to write a little—my name—but I can't speak in English." Guaresh said he did not know much about the children's school because he worked during the day and the school had Leenata's phone number, not his. When Leenata came home from the garden, she was trailed by her two eldest daughters, and they each carried a large parcel full of the early October harvest. Leenata said that Suchandra, her 13-year-old daughter who was participating in the study, was doing fine in school, because she had never heard otherwise. The parents had never met her teacher even though Suchandra had been in the same "newcomer" class for three years. The parents stated that they "had never been invited to the school." We conducted an interview with Suchandra immediately following the interview with her parents. All family members moved to the kitchen to prepare food for the festivities, and Suchandra moved to the couch. She spoke in a whisper and did not make eye contact. Shana and Hemant conducted the interview and felt pained because of her shyness, but we had to ask many of the questions numerous times in order to hear her answers.

Sabiya and Ahmed

Sabiya and Ahmed were from Iraq and were the parents of six children (one daughter in community college, two daughters in high school, one son in elementary school, and a younger boy and girl at home). When Cynthia, Shana, and Ashraf met the parents for the first interview, the couple was eager to share what they and their children experienced during the first few months at their new school. Their second older daughter in high school, Sahar, who was 16 years old, was supposed to be the focal child for the study, but Sabiya and Ahmed also wanted to include Sahar's little brother Mahdi, who was 10.

When her children attended US schools for the first time, Sabiya was disappointed by the lack of awareness the teachers had of her children's skills. She did not understand why they evaluated her children's intellects and knowledge based solely on their linguistic skills. As Ahmed described it, not knowing the English language was the primary problem. He felt that the teachers did not initially have high expectations of his children. He said, "My kids have studied physics, chemistry, and some English. But when they came here, they put them in classes that teach 1 + 1 = 2." Sabiya's voice became more and more passionate as she described her children's frustrations with being placed in the lowest level classes offered at their schools. She said,

> Yes, of course . . . My girls cried all the time. It means your body—your head is some problem you have a problem. You are not normal. You know what I mean? For six months, I believe we suffered that, and then I went to the teacher. I told her we have a background. We have studied we studied hard, but the problem is that we do not know how to speak English. We know Arabic.

> We know science, math, everything, but the problem is just that. If you fix this problem, you will see that my girls are so clever.

This idea of "fixing the problem" became a theme throughout the interview as Sabiya described how she perceived US schools and teachers.

These snapshots provide an overview of our first meetings with the three families, and although brief, they are necessary to explain the value of the follow-up interviews several months later. In the following sections, we discuss how the second interview demonstrated to participants that we valued family knowledge and the information they shared with us; this step provided us with a different idea of how one's comportment in a research setting could be interpreted and examined.

The Second Interview

To decolonize our methods, we problematized the idea of extracting knowledge from refugee-background participants during the interview (Chilisa, 2020; DeHaene et al., 2010; Dyregrov et al., 2000; Mackenzie et al., 2007; Pittaway et al., 2010). Based on a case study that specifically examined refugee families' experiences of the interview process (Dyregrov et al., 2000), we developed a modified protocol for follow-up interviews (see Figure 1). We asked family members their feelings about the first interview, focusing on the following topics, which we modified from Dryregrov et al.'s study (2000): clarification, personal learning, gaining access, the interview, and the period following the interview. The co-PIs generated these areas of focus based on what we learned from Dryregrov and colleagues' article about developing follow-up prompts that may gather more personal input from the families. Since we developed these questions for the IRB protocol, we did not have time to review them with the student researchers until after they were already approved by the human subjects review. In hindsight, these words already possessed a formal and distant ring to them due to their semantic nature. While we intended to center the experiences of families, we still depended on a semi-structured protocol in the service of examining our own methods.

Figure 1

Modified Protocol for Follow-Up Interview

Focus	**Prompt**
Clarification	*Does this summary capture what you shared with us? Are there any parts of this summary that are inaccurate? Where should we clarify the data?*
Personal Learning	*What has changed since our last interview? Do you have any new observations? Have you learned anything new? What caused these changes?*
Gaining Access	*How did you feel about how we contacted you to participate in this research?*
Interview	*How did you feel about the interview itself? Did you enjoy any aspects of the interview?*
Compensation for Time	*We wanted to give you something for your time, so we gave you a gift card. Is there anything we could have done to compensate you better for your time?*

Time	*Was the interview itself an acceptable length? Does the timing for the follow-up interview work well, or would you suggest a different spacing of these interviews?*

We designed the second interview with three main purposes in mind, and all of them were aimed at developing a more open relationship with participants than if we had conducted one isolated interview. We hoped to examine the role of reciprocity in our relationships with the families by doing the following: conducting a member check in which we summarized what we learned during the first interviews with all of the participants, providing families with the opportunity to revise our inquiries and discuss any ways their participation in our study affected them, and, lastly, inviting families to provide feedback about our comportment from the first interview.

Examining the Second Interview Through Decolonizing Moves

When we met with the families a second time, we brought new information that we had learned from the interviews with the teachers and the home-school liaisons. Immediately, we could see that the families had thought a great deal about our previous conversations regarding their role in their children's education and their relationships with their children's teachers. In the following narratives, we describe the shift in perspective that families had about their children's education as well as the tensions that emerged relating to our positionalities as researchers and teachers. In addition, we discuss how the question to the families about our comportment during the first interview may have been presumptuous and unnecessary.

Gogo

We visited Gogo at a new location—a large apartment she was able to find through her network of community friends. Cynthia led this interview, but Madina interpreted, and Shana also came. We found Gogo at home preparing sambusas, dough filled with beef and spices and then fried in a small galley kitchen. The student researcher took off her coat and washed her hands at the sink. Cynthia and Shana followed what their student was doing. Gogo carried the large bowl of filling, her fingers smeared with sticky dough, from the small kitchen into the living room where we could all sit together without halting the sambusa preparation. Following Gogo, we all sat down on the carpet, forming a small circle around the bowl. Madina casually put her hand in, pulled apart some of the sticky dough, and began to shape it with her hands into a little ball, eventually flattening it into the shape of a small half-moon. After a little hesitation, we each grabbed some dough with our fingers. It felt natural to imitate Gogo and Madina's actions, and we proceeded to do the same thing (though the results were not nearly as beautiful). Sitting on the floor shaping and patting the sambusa dough, occasionally looking up for approval from Gogo that we were doing it correctly, we conducted our interview. All five children were also in the room, watching TV.

Even though we were researchers there for a study, our identities as mothers who had experienced making dinner while caring for children informed the way we conducted the conventional interview process. We all sat in a circle around the bowl of dough with flour on our hands and teased a younger child who was sneaking behind us to try and snatch Cynthia's mobile phone as we conversed about how Gogo's children were doing in school. The act of sitting on the floor and offering to help make sambusas created a moment that was relaxed rather than formalized, allowing for routines to continue. We joined Gogo in her activity, which also positioned her as the expert.

There was a lot that had transpired since we last saw Gogo. She had found a job at a nursing home working directly with the elderly two days a week, and she was learning some English from the new position. She talked about how much she enjoyed the work and how it reminded her of providing massage therapy to children with physical disabilities in Kenya. She was using a similar approach with some of the elderly, and being able to transfer her knowledge to the new setting seemed to bring her satisfaction. Although she had experienced a setback in her own educational goals to pursue becoming a nurse, Gogo communicated a familiar hopefulness we had observed in the first interview. She seemed less worried since the last time we had met.

Throughout the interview, Gogo sounded less mystified about the expectations the school had of parents. Gogo shared that our first interview prompted her to meet with her children's teachers. She explained, "Yeah I met with the teachers. I went to the schools; they said their learning is good. They were moving on to the next grade levels." She had finally met Habi's teacher, Ms. L. She was still confused by some of the correspondences from school, however. For example, she did not understand how to read the report card and could only make sense of it with the help of other family members like Madina. She did not know how to use email to correspond with teachers. She also shared that, more recently, her older son's teachers had been calling her to complain about her son getting into trouble. She said that all she could do was say that she was sorry for his behavior. As we talked, a couple of the children interjected to answer for their mother in a joking manner. When Madina asked what activities the children were doing after school, Gogo said she took them outside to play, to which Habi immediately denied, "No you don't!" Madina laughed and told Habi to behave.

Toward the end of the interview, we asked Gogo what she had learned about the interview process specifically. She said,

> It's good. If a person is sitting at home and someone comes to them and tells them things, that's a good thing. Your eyes open up and so do your ears. If you were sleeping, you would wake up; you understand everything. The children—you see their situation. It's like this.

From a postcolonial perspective, Gogo's insights and actions took on a different set of values and meanings than seemed possible through the IRB definition of her as a "vulnerable participant." Gogo's knowledge of the norms and practices of US schools was growing. However, as former classroom teachers, we were aware of implicit biases that schools had of nondominant families feeding into the perception of families that knew little and had to be taken care of, further perpetuating the "vulnerable" stereotype of refugee families (Ishimaru et al., 2019). These biases were often rooted in normative understandings of how to be successful in schools and how to decode school language in order for the children of mainstream society to navigate school successfully. Such knowledge rarely accommodates other forms of understanding that is not codified in the English language. We came to learn about Gogo's fierce determination to make a new life for her children without full knowledge of English or the underlying cultural knowledge one learns from being born and raised in the US (which gives one the ability to decode codified norms and practices). As such, our eyes and ears opened to the predictable assumptions and expectations that researchers may have of individuals like Gogo who are classified in a particular way in an IRB protocol.

Months prior, Gogo's reality consisted of leaving the refugee camp to find work and forage for extra food. As a single parent of five children whose husband stayed behind in the refugee camp with his second wife and their children, Gogo had accomplished a great deal in just a short period of time, and she spoke of dreams she had for herself and for her children. During our interview with Ms. L, it became increasingly clear that she and Gogo's children's other teachers did not know Gogo that well. In fact, Ms. L mentioned that she never got to know the students' parents unless they were waiting outside her door after school to pick up their children. Educational research on refugee families has found that there exists a perception that non-English speaking families are unable to support their children's schooling because of their lack of English proficiency. This unfortunately leads to the family

being blamed (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; Haines et al., 2015; Haines et al., 2018; McBrien, 2005; Olivos et al., 2010). We contemplate the original purpose of the study, which is to better understand the partnership between families with refugee experiences and schools, and we see a fundamental unfairness in the way that the partnership could be misconstrued to seem more beneficial for the family than for the school.

Leenata, Guaresh, and Suchandra

Before Cynthia, Shana, and Hemant met with Suchandra's family for the second interview, we had just learned that Suchandra, according to her EL teacher, was making progress in eighth grade but was reading at the first-grade level. Furthermore, the teacher stated that Suchandra was quiet, shy, and reserved at school, which we confirmed through our own observations at school as well as during the first interview with her. According to her EL teacher, "she doesn't get particularly driven about anything. She doesn't get particularly stressed about anything. She's the most pleasant person. And I've noticed that . . . she doesn't have that real—that hungry attitude about learning. She's very passive about it." Her teacher told us that she only met with families when the children had difficult behavior; since Suchandra was well-behaved in school, she had never reached out to the family to schedule a meeting.

Upon returning to Suchandra's home for the follow-up interview, we were filled with ambivalence as we reflected on the solicitous description that Suchandra's teacher had of her as a student. The characterization of a young adolescent refugee girl as passive and quiet represented an implicit bias held toward children who do not reflect the normative school behaviors ("she doesn't have that real—that hungry attitude about learning") because of perceived cultural and linguistic differences (Bermudez et al., 2016; Guierrez & Rogoff, 2003). We felt that even coming from a well-intentioned practitioner, this description of Suchandra could perpetuate a deficit perspective that is well documented in the educational literature on emergent bilingual and multilingual learners (García & Kleifgen, 2018). This perspective also demonstrates a lack of understanding that it generally takes seven to 10 years for English learners to acquire academic English and that a more, rather than less, challenging curriculum is beneficial. The teacher expressed that Suchandra was doing well because she was not disruptive in class, but she did not get to know her or her family.

In a tricky balance of researching the phenomenon of what was taking place, we found ourselves in an ethically complex position of intentionally influencing the very actions we were researching. Should we share information that might influence the relationships we sought to understand? We decided to describe what the teacher had told us about the reading curriculum and the online program that Suchandra had access to through her school-issued iPad. We asked her parents if they had ever received any information about her reading levels. By highlighting this question, we heightened the parents' awareness of their daughter's reading ability and introduced the idea that they could help her practice her reading even if they were not readers themselves. Upon receiving the information and responding to our questions, Leenata expressed concern about how her daughter might do in high school. Leenata also voiced her apprehension about the level of rigor of Suchandra's schooling, to which Cynthia suggested, "I hope . . . when you meet with Suchandra's teachers . . . you bring up the questions that you had asked earlier [about] wanting Suchandra to learn harder materials. I think they're very good questions to ask." Leenata responded, "Usually in the evenings it's hard for me to do it, but I will plan to talk to the teachers about making Suchandra learn more English."

We motivated Suchandra's parents to advocate for their daughter. We had also asked questions to her EL teacher, aiming to discern her perception of whether Suchandra's parents understood that she was not reading at grade level. These questions prompted the teacher to reflect on the general difficulty of explaining reading levels to parents, but it also caused her to think about the impact of not sharing this information.

Furthermore, in the second interview, the discussion about goals and dreams for their daughter had prompted Leenata to reflect on her desire for her child to be challenged more by the school so that she would be ready for college. In the second interview, Leenata stated,

> We wish that our kids would be challenged with hard subjects. We actually don't know what's happening in the schools. But as [parents], we feel that they should have some hard courses so that they learn from it. More subjects will help them to learn more about the laws of this country, so that helps when they grow old and become an adult. Suchandra feels that English is hard, and she could work more on that. She could stay after school and learn more and better English.

This sense of agency and desire to improve the education her daughter was receiving was a significant shift from the passive acceptance of the school's practices that Leenata and Guaresh had expressed in the first interview. The questions we had asked in the first interview had evoked a change in the way they saw their role constructions in regard to Suchandra's learning. This shift illustrated Carter and colleagues' (2008) description about the effect of participating in research: "The act of participation had an epistemic dimension–it reconstructed one's knowledge about one's own experience–and an ontological dimension–it reconstructed the self" (p. 1271). After this second interview, this family continued to shift from maintaining a passive role in their daughter's education to taking a more involved position by requesting a parent-teacher conference with the teacher they had never met and by helping Suchandra access a supplemental literacy program on her school iPad.

There was also a stark contrast in Suchandra's behavior from the first interview to the second. During our second interview with Suchandra, we were amazed when she greeted us openly, spoke to us in a clear voice, and made eye contact with us. It was almost hard to imagine how quiet and shy she had been during the first interview. Modifying the semi-structured protocol, we asked why she was speaking more openly. She replied, "Yeah, like, I realized I needed to talk more. After you left last time, my parents asked why I spoke so quietly. They said, you need to speak up. I decided to speak up more, even at school." When we turned to Leenata to ask what she thought about this, she said, "It's not that we asked her to prepare to talk more, but we have been encouraging her: 'you know things, and you should be able to speak.'" Her mother's encouragement had greatly affected Suchandra's use of her voice, compelling us to imagine the effects a stronger partnership with her children's teachers could have.

Sabiya and Ahmed

When Cynthia, Shana, and Ashraf returned for the second interview, we asked Sabiya how things were going, especially for her younger son Mahdi, then 11 years old, who had been struggling in fifth grade. Sabiya and her husband seemed less critical about their expectations of teachers. Time had passed, all of their children seemed to be settling into their schools, and the parents seemed to have found an effective method of advocating for their children and partnering with their children's teachers. Sabiya and Ahmed, after voicing frustrations with their children's teachers to us and envisioning their ideal relationship with the teachers during the first interview, persevered to form a trusting partnership with their son's teacher. Over time, their oldest daughter went on to register for community college so that she could receive more challenging instruction, while the second oldest daughter found teachers who advocated for her and was able to take more challenging classes.

Sitting in their living room, sharing Turkish coffee, and listening to the families' stories of the countless ways they supported their children in their education and the ways they negotiated schooling in Syria was critical for us to learn and reaffirm our knowledge about the families. According to Chilisa (2020), researchers often position themselves as the "knower" or teacher, while the researched is seen as the "object" or pupil. "Researchers become the authoritative authors who are not sensitive to the voices of the researched but are more interested in their standing as authorities in the subject they write" (Chilisa, 2020, p. 238). She argues that the researcher should instead consistently self-reflect on

their relationships with others and examine the quality of those connections. As teacher researchers, we understood the dangers of assuming a deficit gap in the educational experiences of families before they came to the US. We were also aware that schools often fixate on the resettlement, viewing it as a disruption to the children's education that puts them behind, rather than focus on how learning could be bridged equitably (Georgis et al., 2014; Kao et al., 2013; McBrien, 2005; Turney & Kao, 2009). We learned that Sabiya and Ahmed were resourceful; they drew upon their wisdom and perseverance in helping their daughters overcome their educational issues. We acknowledged Sabiya and Ahmed's feelings of being dismissed by the teachers as well as their commitment to their children's education. Through our questions, listening, and genuine effort to understand, we demonstrated our respect for the family.

During the follow-up interview, Sabiya was excited to share how she collaborated with her middle school son's teacher to support his literacy learning in school. We remembered from the first interview that Mahdi was distracted in school and was not able to advance his reading and writing skills. This time, because of Sabiya's persistence in working with her son's teacher, Mahdi was doing better in school. We noticed a huge difference between how she felt about her children's teachers from the beginning and what was happening now because of Mahdi's progress and his teacher's willingness to accept input from her. Sabiya explained that the teacher invited Mahdi to take on more responsibility and serve as a mentor for a kindergartener because of her belief in him. According to Sabiya, this belief in her son seemed to transfer to his own attitude, causing him to do better in school. Knowing that Sabiya and Ahmed were originally disappointed in the lack of confidence they perceived in their children's teachers toward their children, we asked Sabiya what had prompted the teacher to give her son that responsibility. What changed? Sabiya launched into a story that reflected her trust in the teacher:

> Mahdi had some difficulties in reading and writing at the beginning, so I asked for a meeting, and they told me that it is going to be better for him if he joins a private school that teaches the basics. He refused to go because he wanted to stay with his friends. That affected him a lot, so I asked for another interview meeting and asked them to do something for him. They assigned a teacher who can teach him [for] an hour every day. I worked with the teacher to give more responsibilities to Mahdi. Since then, I am calling them, and they tell me that he is doing great in his math level, and for the reading and writing, he is doing well. They are giving him responsibilities, and he is doing well in the teamwork with his friends.

The frustration that Sabiya had expressed to us during the first interview had now changed to feelings of hope and excitement. Her son's teacher was open to her ideas and willing to integrate them into a plan for supporting her son. In turn, she interpreted the school's responsibility to her son and the teacher's responsiveness as a sign of respect for her parenting. Sabiya was pleased that the school was recognizing her knowledge about educational curricula and teaching. Sabiya spoke proudly about her ability to advocate for her son and seemed satisfied with the interactions with her son's teacher. The turnaround between the first and second interviews was remarkable. If we had only conducted the first interview, we would have had a narrow snapshot of the relationship Sabiya and Ahmed had with Mahdi's teacher. In addition, we would not have become aware of how Sabiya was able to find a way to give more input to her son's teacher.

"Your Eyes Open and so Do Your Ears": Broadening Our Understanding as Researchers

In examining the questions of what we could learn from using decolonizing methods as guideposts for disrupting the research methods we used in the study and how partnering with

transnational student researchers inform ways of representing the narratives of families, we break down this discussion into three points: (a) the follow-up interview was a crucial element in an embedded case study involving different stakeholders, (b) the modified interview protocol compelled us to examine the potential for deficit language in an interview protocol, and (c) a practice of critical reflexivity in partnership with student researchers helped us to understand the different perspectives that emerged from the family narrative field texts.

First, the embedded case study was useful for helping us understand the network of relationships that refugee families and their children engaged in, which included the home-school liaison who interpreted for them, the children's EL teachers, and their general education. Engaging in conversation with others who worked with the families helped us to better understand Hemon's earlier quotation about individual lives that are made up of details that can only be understood in their totality after being pieced together through narration (2018). We could not have experienced the complexity of an embedded case study (e.g., schools and parents) if we had not centered the second interview on families, asking them what they had learned and what was of value to them. Using an embedded case study also provided us with the opportunity to understand how parents' perspectives shifted after the first interview. By returning to the families for a second interview, we were also able to share with the parents what we had learned about their children's schooling after our interviews with the teachers, home-school liaisons, and administrators. Our conversations with families focused on agency as we sensitively called their attention to their children's schoolwork, such as the example of Suchandra's reading.

Second, a follow-up interview made us more aware of the linguistic component of our interview protocol; language that appears neutral may sound formal and distant as opposed to language that recognizes the historical and material conditions of its audience. There are many studies that have examined the use of language and power in research methods and have valorized the agency in language practices of transnational communities (Campano et al., 2016; Janks, 2010; Lincoln et al., 2008; McKinney, 2017; Motha, 2014). These works framed our understanding of linguistic ideologies inherent in postcolonial settings. In reflecting on our methods, we ponder the importance of partnering with transnational student researchers or community members who can provide more valuable insight about the language that we use in our protocols.

When we returned for the second interview with the families, we brought copies of the prompts from the IRB-approved follow-up interview script. We realized early on that asking the "gaining access" question conveyed a sense of Western presumptuousness. The question also posed a timing challenge; we had to decide when to ask it so that it did not have a trivializing effect, which was reflected in one instance where Cynthia experienced awkwardness when formulating the question to Sabiya just after she had offered Turkish coffee to the research team. Sabiya, along with the rest of the families, did not register the question as relevant or important. This led us to remove the question from the script altogether. Instead, we came to understand that families responded to our comportment with their comfort level and willingness to share stories. This was reflected in our experience making sambusas with Gogo, for example. Asking about how our comportment could be improved led to no new understandings except that the question was inappropriate; instead, we learned that our relationships, relaxed agenda and tone, and demonstrated interest and commitment to our participants and their stories helped our participants trust us and share more of their stories with us. This, too, was reflected in the way Cynthia and Shana considered their identity and roles as parents as well as their awareness of and empathy for the responsibility Gogo had as a parent taking care of five children.

Resisting culturally insensitive approaches may seem obvious; however, in practice, interviewing, question-asking, and member checking may be more complicated when engaging in a relationship informed by transnational and transcultural contexts through intermediaries. These procedural details

exemplify the microethics that arise in research situations that researchers are not often prepared for through their training (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Simply inserting a feature in our research method to enhance the rapport with our families was not enough; we also needed to interrogate the seemingly neutral and static language that we used in our protocols and the rationale for that language. This we were able to do, especially when we reflected on it with the student researchers. Scholars who conduct qualitative research critique the discourse that is reflected in IRB protocols, especially in studies where English learners are the participants (Perry, 2011; Schrag, 2010). In addition, member checking involves a democratic process that invites participant input, but that process also needs to be unpacked by researchers and families. As we gave up control of managing the interviews, we were able to assess our comportment and behavior through the level of interest that participants had in the discussion. This control symbolized the urge to organize, reduce, and formalize methods that we often do instinctively in conventional research.

Third, in examining our roles as researchers, teachers, and student researchers, we realized that these identities were dynamic and always in flux as we negotiated the knowledge that we co-constructed from the interviews with families and debriefed experiences among the research team members. Through our reflection discussions from the research meetings and the sharing of the identity narratives, we experienced divergent viewpoints, challenging and enriching the ways we interpreted the data. This raises the question of who gets to represent and how. According to Patel (2016), it is difficult for researchers to ignore discussing "the ways in which specific manifestations yield specific locations for the knowledge being offered" (p. 58). For example, during the interview with Sabiya and Ahmed, Sabiya was terribly disappointed that her daughters' teachers could not witness her girls' cleverness because they were too focused on what Sabiya perceived as her daughters' lack of English language skills. Ashraf's respect for the family and his initial description of the intelligence of the family, noting Sabiya's artistic talents as a children's author and painter and the parents' high expectations for their children's education, was also the centerpiece of our discussions. We knew that Ashraf also assisted them with their English classes and was actively involved in supporting the family. They were also good friends, which became even clearer when Ashraf invited us all to his house for dinner. The deep knowledge that the student researchers had of the families, which arose through their shared experiences in refugee camps or in English as a second language classes, manifested into stories that we integrated into our reflections.

Similarly, we learned that Madina and Gogo were related and knew each other well. Madina often visited Gogo's home and helped her with the children or with shopping. In the first interview, we learned that Madina shared Gogo's joking and fun-loving manner—dispositions we witnessed when we noticed how Gogo and her children teased each other during the second interview or when Cynthia and Shana attended Madina's wedding and initially stood on the sidelines of an elaborate community dance while Gogo was one of the leading revelers. Partnering with the student researchers predisposed us to a level of agency that families had, which we were able to understand through trust. Sometimes this understanding starkly contrasted with what we heard in interviews from some of the teachers who had little information about the families.

Decolonizing methods compelled us to resist the deficit notions that we sometimes heard about the students' or families' English linguistic abilities or about the students' lack of formal school preparation. Without an intentional way to meet with families, this was the only information some teachers had of them. English being a barrier is a common narrative that schools perpetuate about English learners. It is certainly a phrase we often heard attributed to the children and their families; it signified a particular power dynamic. Such themes often came from a place of good intentions and an imperative to help the students. At the same time, these one-sided descriptions served to protect what is deemed to be prized or appropriate behavior in the school. According to some language scholars (Flores & Rosa, 2015; García & Kleifgen, 2015; Motha, 2014), the continuing dependence on the

construction of English learners and the teaching of English learners often create divisions between native and non-native speakers, sometimes perpetuating the notion of difference even more. Difference plays a pivotal role in the formation of school as a site of coloniality, where the system is created to "segment land, people, and relationships among them into strata" (Patel, 2016). As "insiders" in the field of education, both troubled by displays of inequity and inspired by movements of school personnel and students within it who endeavor to make it better, we are still aware of a hidden curriculum that often leans toward the normative idea of "fixing" students who are considered different. We also know of many teachers who resist overarching generalizations about their students and strive to help students academically and socially. Sometimes, we struggled with reconciling these divergent viewpoints and considered how to co-construct knowledge if participant groups reflected different epistemic ideas about the other, especially if it related to language and learning. We simply held on to these incommensurable tensions about culture and language informed by power dynamics, recognizing that these *contact zones* of conflict could also become spaces for understanding praxis (Pratt, 1999). How these differences are managed depends on the researchers' willingness to tolerate ambiguity. The relational aspects of doing research will always be complicated and messy, but they are necessary for troubling the colonial notion of knowledge production as a universal concept.

Conclusion

In continuing the work of critically examining partnerships between schools and families with refugee experiences, we recognize that, through certain advantages, researchers and school personnel are ideally positioned to interrogate their own approaches with families. Considering our commitments to mediate information between schools and families, we see a potential for reciprocal reflection between families and teachers. Using our research findings to help them reflect back information about each other could potentially create opportunities for families and teachers to get to know each other and overcome the systemic and power constraints in order to build relationships. We were able to return to the teachers and share broader narratives about their students, hoping to expand their limited awareness of the families, and the research team was intentional about demystifying the school system for families. Most of the families we talked to were also grateful that their children had the opportunity to attend schools in the US. In general, they perceived the school community to be safer and more organized than the refugee camp schools, and in many cases, parents were impressed with some teachers who showed a deep interest in their children. Not all of the teachers had the same perspectives that we described in this paper, and not all families shared similar ideas about their children's schooling. Postcolonial theory offers an entry way into deconstructing research relationships with refugee families and highlighting the idea of alterity in an embedded case study that features different and dynamic transnational and transcultural perspectives. This study sought to describe the complexity of *Centering Connections* and examine the trust families had in us as well as the research team's commitment to encourage schools to support equitable partnerships with the families in the future. A shift towards family-centered outcomes requires a concerted effort to critique Western ways of knowing in conventional qualitative research studies.

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Article

Parent Engagement in Reclassification for English Learner Students with Disabilities

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Jamey Burho & Karen Thompson
Oregon State University

Abstract
Laws governing special education services and EL services specify different roles for parents in educational decision-making. Little research exists on home-school communication for families of English learner students with disabilities (ELSWDs), who are navigating both sets of services. We conducted six case studies of ELSWDs to examine parents and educators' communication about educational services and, specifically, how parents were engaged in decisions about whether students should be reclassified and exit EL services. Findings suggest that educators conveyed information to parents using a one-way transmission approach (Nichols & Read, 2002). Parents often had incomplete or inaccurate information about their children's services, had questions and concerns that they did not voice to educators, and sought out non-school sources to inform their decision-making.

Keywords: English learners, special education, reclassification, parent engagement

Introduction

English learners (ELs) are expected to be reclassified as "proficient" in English at some point during their K-12 schooling, and thus exit EL services. However, English learner students with disabilities (ELSWDs) may have special needs that impact their performance on English language proficiency (ELP) assessments, on which EL reclassification decisions are typically based. At the secondary level, ELSWDs are less likely than ELs without disabilities to attain the test-based criteria necessary to exit EL services, a phenomenon which results in a *reclassification bottleneck* (Umansky et al., 2017). This bottleneck is problematic for many reasons, including the fact that ELSWDs are often enrolled in two types of non-credit-bearing courses—special education classes and classes focusing on English acquisition (e.g., English Language Development [ELD] or English as a Second Language [ESL]). This academically marginalized population consequently faces even greater risks for not earning enough credits to graduate and missing out on high-interest electives.

For all students with disabilities, including ELSWDs, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2015) specifies that parent engagement is a crucial, required component of educational decision-making (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2000). In ESSA and the 2015 amendment to IDEA, the language shifted from "involvement" to "engagement", signaling a more meaningful role for parents. Shirley (1997) proposed this shift, explaining the use of the term *involvement* "avoids issue of power and assigns parents a passive role in the maintenance of school culture" (p. 73), whereas *engagement*

Corresponding Author:
Jamey Burho, Postdoctoral Research Associate, Oregon State University, 104 Furman Hall, Corvallis, OR, 97331, USA
Email: jamey.burho@oregonstate.edu

"designates parents as citizens in the fullest sense— change agents who can transform urban schools and neighborhoods" (p. 73). A body of research has documented barriers to meaningful parent engagement in decisions about special education services, particularly for ELs (e.g., Burke & Goldman, 2018; Cobb, 2014; Cioè-Peña, 2020b). Little research focuses specifically on parent engagement for ELSWDs.

Regarding parent engagement on behalf of ELSWDs at the elementary level, one study by Cioè-Peña (2020b) indicates that racial discrimination pervades interactions between educators and Latinx mothers. However, no prior research focuses on parent engagement in reclassification decisions for secondary ELSWDs specifically. Given the critical nature of parent engagement in special education, combined with secondary ELSWDs' difficulty exiting EL services and the high stakes of earning credits to graduate, a close examination of reclassification decisions for secondary ELSWDs is warranted.

Given that little is known about how parents are engaged in reclassification decisions for secondary ELSWDs, we conducted a comparative case study to explore two research questions: (1) How do parents and educators communicate about reclassification decisions? and (2) How are parents engaged in reclassification decisions? To this end, we conducted six case studies of ELSWDs attending middle and high schools in a state in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. These students were either recently reclassified or were being considered for reclassification from EL services during data collection.

We begin this article by demonstrating that federal law stipulates greater parent engagement in special education decision-making than in decisions about EL services, where only parent notification is typically required. Next, we review the literature related to parent engagement in the special education and EL-service contexts, highlighting common obstacles. We then introduce our conceptual framework, contrasting one-way *transmission* models of parent-educator communication with *reciprocal dialogue*. As part of this framework, we consider how one-way modes of communication reflect cultural deficit thinking. After describing our methods, sites, participants, and analysis process, we describe findings. Specifically, we demonstrate that through their reliance on one-way *transmission* communication patterns, educators systematically excluded parents from meaningful decision-making about reclassification. Parents subverted this dynamic, however, by seeking information from their children and other family members to make informed decisions. Finally, we discuss implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Literature Review

We contextualize our study in federal guidelines for engaging parents in special education and EL-service decision-making, as well as a long-standing literature documenting the oppression of parents of multilingual students. We end by reviewing literature concerning the unique challenges ELSWDs and their parents face.

Federal law outlines vastly different roles for parent engagement in special education versus EL services (see Table 1). In special education, IDEA stipulates parent engagement at every point in special education decision-making, from the initiation of eligibility evaluation, to consent for placement, to the drafting of IEP goals. By contrast, federal law stipulates a more limited decision-making role for parents of ELs (ESSA, §1112(3), 2015). LEAs are required only to *notify* parents of ELs about relevant testing data and associated educational decisions, including the following: (1) results of the child's English language proficiency screener; (2) the school's available language instructional programs; (3) the parent's right to *waive* services; (4) ELP assessment results; and (5) the final EL-service exit decision. Some states and districts "consult" with parents about exiting decisions, but this is not required under federal law, and interpretations of this consultation practice differ and

vary widely (e.g., California Department of Education, 2019; Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). A review of all 50 states' criteria for exiting students from EL services identified only four that included parent opinion or consultation as one of the criteria (Linquanti & Cook, 2015).

Table 1

Parents' role in decisions about special education and EL services under federal law.

	Special education services	English learner services
Initial screening	Either a parent of a child or the school may initiate an initial eligibility evaluation. Before conducting an initial evaluation, schools must obtain informed consent from the child's parents (IDEA, §300.300).	Family member completes a home language survey when initially registering their child for school. If the family member indicates the child uses a language other than English to communicate, the child takes the state's English language proficiency screener (ESSA, §3113(b)(2); USED, 2017).
Eligibility determination	Schools must include parents in eligibility meetings where eligibility decisions are made (IDEA, §300.306).	The LEA must notify the family of: the child's ELP screener results. In addition, if the child did not score proficient, the LEA must notify the family of: 1. Available language instructional program options (e.g., EL services). 2. Their right to waive EL services. 3. Their right to remove their child from EL services. 4. Criteria for exiting EL services (ESSA, §1112(3)(A))
Establishing educational goals	Schools must ensure that parents are present at each annual IEP meeting, in which educational goals are established and agreed upon by all IEP team members, including parents (IDEA, §300.321). Schools must inform parents of ELSWDs as to how EL services meet IEP goals (IDEA, §300.324).	No specific process exists for establishing educational goals for students classified as ELs, other than notifying parents of the criteria students must meet to exit EL services.
Planning for service delivery	Schools must include parents in eligibility meetings and follow-up IEP meetings where special education placement decisions are made (IDEA, §300.306, §300.322).	No specific process exists for planning for EL service delivery, other than notifying parents of the available language instruction educational programs and their right to waive services.
Annual assessment	Schools must obtain informed consent from parents to conduct triennial reevaluations (§300.300),	Students classified as ELs, including those whose parents have waived EL services, take the state's annual ELP

	and parents must participate in the annual IEP meeting in which reevaluation results are discussed. At these IEP meetings, parents participate in decision-making for students' continued goals and educational placement (IDEA, §300.321, §300.321).	assessment each year. Families are notified of the ELP assessment results (ESSA, §1112(3)(A)).
Exiting services	Schools must ensure that parents are present at each annual IEP meeting, in which team members decide whether a student should continue to receive special education services (IDEA, §300.321, §300.321)	Federal policy defines no specific role for parents in making decisions about when children should exit EL services. Some states' policies require parent consultation, but interpretations of "consultation" vary (Linquanti & Cook, 2015).

We identified several studies that examine parent engagement in special education on behalf of students who are traditionally marginalized in schools. Students and their parents in these studies were described as culturally and linguistically diverse. Three recent reviews of relevant literature (Cobb, 2014; Harry, 2008; Wolfe & Durán, 2013), plus two other peer-reviewed studies we located (Baker et al., 2010; Burke & Goldman, 2018) indicated these parents face myriad challenges, including (1) language barriers, (2) incomplete or inaccessible information, and (3) oppression and marginalization. In contrast, almost no literature exists about any aspect of parents' participation in decisions about EL services, including the reclassification decision. The clearest way in which parents can exercise decision-making power regarding EL services is by waiving these services for their children. However, there is only very limited attention to this practice in the literature, with no descriptive research at the national, state, or even district level.[1] In our review of the literature, we found only one study that explores parents' role in EL-service decision-making. Brooks (2019) described one Mexican-American mother's attempts to advocate for her son and have him exited from EL services. Like the marginalized parents in the special education studies, this mother lacked adequate information and school support to participate in meaningful engagement.

Research has demonstrated that educators who are not specialists in EL services or special education services often do not fully understand the relevant policies and services (Kangas, 2017a). Yet in order to be meaningfully engaged in key decisions about their children's education, parents of ELSWDs must learn about *two* complex sets of policies and services. For parents of multilingual students, including immigrant parents who did not attend U.S. schools themselves, engagement in educational decisions becomes even more challenging.

Scant research has specifically focused on parent engagement in reclassification decisions for ELSWDs. However, in the research that does exist about ELSWDs, a key theme that emerges is the fragmented nature of the educational landscape that these students and their parents face, with special education and EL services often viewed as competing needs (Kangas, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Schissel & Kangas, 2018). Special education and EL services each have separate federal legislation, separate funding streams, and separate teacher preparation systems. As Kangas (2017a) noted, "[T]eachers and specialists conceptualize their work in terms of boundaries corresponding to their own specialization—what they can or cannot do and which students they can or cannot support" (p. 267). This lack of collaboration among specialists, in addition to a failure to meaningfully engage ELSWD parents, might have serious consequences to instructional delivery. For example, IEP goals and

accommodations developed on behalf of ELSWDs have been shown to lack research-based EL teaching practices, as well as details related to students' family cultural background, linguistic learning needs, and funds of knowledge (Hoover et al., 2018). Regarding reclassification in particular, Kangas and Schissel (2021) found that teachers disagree about the consequences of these decisions for ELSWDs. EL teachers believed reclassification promotes equity for ELSWDs, while special education teachers believed some students are pushed out of EL services and denied the language support they need.

Equity is a critical issue in reclassification for ELSWDs, especially considering how educators' cultural deficit thinking might influence this high-stakes decision point. Valencia (2010) defined cultural deficit thinking is a phenomenon in which poor students, students of color, and their families are marginalized and pathologized, especially in terms of students' perceived academic deficiencies. Cultural deficit thinking places the blame on these students and their families, rather than examining how schools are structured to disadvantage these students. Such oppression against ELSWDs and their families was another key theme that emerged in our review. In a study of ELSWD parent participation in IEP meetings, Cioé-Peña (2020a) reported these parents were relegated to a role of passive listeners and information-gatherers, and lacked opportunities to shape the agenda or ask questions. When different professionals cycled in and out of IEP meetings, parents were further devalued and silenced, and hindered in seeking clarity and making sense of the IEP as a whole. Institutional factors and stakeholders' deficit perspectives combined to systematically place ELSWDs in classes on lower academic tracks (Kangas, 2020; Kangas & Cook, 2020). ELSWD parents, in turn, have internalized these deficit views, as Cioè-Peña (2020b) found in her study of elementary-age ELSWDs and their Latinx mothers. In confronting schools led by a majority of English-only speakers, these immigrant mothers doubted their own ability to advocate for their children. They also adopted deficit perspectives toward their own child's language and academic capabilities, likely owing to the fact that "discourse around their children as disabled is so central to their relationships with the schools" (p. 11).

Conceptual Framework

Transmission vs. Reciprocal Dialogue in Communication between Educators and Parents

To investigate communication between parents and educators about reclassification for ELSWDs, we drew on two key concepts from literature about home-school communication: *transmission* and *reciprocal dialogue*. Researchers have argued that meaningful involvement in educational decisions requires *reciprocal dialogue*, which involves bidirectional conversation (Ishimaru, 2017), in which "participants listen to one another and build on each other's words" (Bertrand, 2014, p. 814). Full implementation of IDEA requires this reciprocity, which is characterized by educators seeking out parents' perspectives on their children's strengths and needs, and parents learning about educational policies and available services (Kalyanpur et al., 2000).

By contrast, home-school communication typically follows a *transmission* model (Nichols & Read, 2002). Schools notify parents of meetings, inform them of eligibility determinations, and send home assessment results, with information flowing unidirectionally from educators to parents. As Nichols & Read (2002) stated: "The goal of communication, according to this perspective, is for information transmission to occur smoothly so that the receiver 'gets' the message intended by the transmitter" (p. 51). Unfortunately, data has suggested that even within this more modest vision of home-school communication, schools are often not successful in transmitting key information to parents (National School Public Relations Association, 2011; Public Agenda, 2012).

It is perhaps not surprising that enacting the reciprocal dialogue mandated by IDEA poses serious challenges for all parties involved. Research has suggested that interactions between parents and teachers typically follow a *diagnosis-prescription* framework, which privileges teachers' perspectives and limits parents' ability to meaningfully engage (MacLure & Walker, 2000; Nichols & Read, 2002). As Nichols & Read (2002) explained, "[P]arents invariably wait until the teacher has offered the 'diagnosis' before entering into dialogue; as a consequence, parents' contributions are framed as responses to the teacher's knowledge" (p. 54, emphasis added). Thus, the diagnosis-prescription model operates as a subset of the general transmission framework of communication, with educators seeking to transmit the diagnosis and prescription to parents.

A serious consequence of the transmission approach generally and the diagnosis-prescription framework specifically is the perpetuation of cultural deficit thinking, by which educators marginalize parents through the institutional power they hold. This issue is especially pervasive and problematic for parents of multilingual students (Mendoza & Olivos, 2013). Traditional engagement approaches are biased toward White middle-class culture of schools and dismissive of potential contributions of parents of multilingual students (Baquedano- López et al., 2013). Despite good intentions, educators have constrained and silenced parents of multilingual students by shaping conversations around their own identities, ideologies, and interests (Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2020; Rocha-Schmid, 2010). Unfortunately, educators receive little training for critiquing their own engagement practices and facilitating reciprocal dialogue (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Park & Paulick, 2021).

In this study we explore the tension between transmission and reciprocal dialogue, analyzing ways in which educators and parents of English learner students with disabilities attempted to enact both and the challenges and opportunities that emerged.

State Policy Context for Reclassification of English Learners with Disabilities

In the state where this study took place, there have been a variety of recent policy developments that have impacted reclassification processes for ELSWDs. In the past, ELs in the state were typically reclassified if they scored proficient on the state ELP assessment. However, districts were allowed to consider additional criteria, such as teacher recommendations or additional assessment data. Some districts considered parent input as part of these additional criteria. Parent notification of reclassification decisions was required for all districts, but parent input was not. Additionally, until February 2019, the state allowed students, including ELSWDs, to be reclassified if a school-based team analyzed a portfolio of student work and determined that the student had demonstrated they would benefit from instruction in the regular education program without additional language support. In these cases, in which a student was allowed to exit EL services without having scored proficient on the state ELP assessment, parental input was required, though parent attendance at the team meeting was not.

The passage of ESSA in 2015 led to several policy changes. Most importantly, ESSA required that states implement "standardized, statewide entrance and exit procedures" for ELs. Thus, the state worked to build greater uniformity in EL reclassification processes across districts. Several state policy documents regarding reclassification have stated that Title III of ESSA requires districts to "include parents as active participants" during the reclassification process, but this directive has remained relatively open to interpretation by districts. Importantly, beginning in February 2019, the state began to require that all students, including ELSWDs, must have scored proficient on the state ELP assessment in order to be reclassified. Given the ambiguity about parents' role in the reclassification process, and given prior research demonstrating the marginalization of parents of multilingual learners in special education, the participation ELSWD parents in reclassification decisions merits attention.

Methods

Our comparative case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) examined communication between parents and educators about services and reclassification for ELSWDs. This analysis is part of a larger qualitative study on reclassification decisions on behalf of ELSWDs. We investigated reclassification policy and six student cases across four school districts, comparing and contrasting cases across multiple locations to better understand individual cases (Stake, 2006). We grounded inquiry in participants' lived experiences to understand related social dynamics and little-studied situations and phenomena (Patton, 2015).

Sites

Our study took place in four school districts in a state in the Pacific Northwest. Charles, Landon, and Valley Districts serve small cities, while Allen District serves a town on the fringe of an urban area. These districts were chosen because they all had been part of state-wide conversations about reclassification policies for ELSWDs, and had adopted related reclassification practices, including the review of work samples and other relevant data. Moreover, these districts demonstrated variation across a number of factors, including size, geographic location, socioeconomic factors, and characteristics of their EL populations.

We conducted case studies in four schools across three of the districts, all of which enrolled ELs at a rate of 20% or more of their population: Creekside Middle School (Allen District), Shepherd Middle School (Allen District), Fletcher High School (Landon District), and Andrews High School (Valley District) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Key demographic information for participating school sites.

School name	District	Location	Student enrollment	English learner enrollment	Students receiving free or reduced-price lunch
Andrews HS	Valley	Town (fringe)	Small	90%	95%
Creekside MS	Allen	City (small)	Medium	20%	30%
Fletcher HS	Landon	City (small)	Large	20%	50%
Shepherd MS	Allen	City (small)	Medium	20%	30%

Notes. Location is classified using NCES locale codes (USED, NCES, n.d.). Small cities are cities inside urbanized areas with populations of less than 100,000. Fringe towns are areas inside an urban cluster located less than 10 miles from an urbanized area. "Small" enrollment is < 500, "Medium" enrollment is 500-1000, "Large" enrollment is > 1000. The term "Ever English learners" denotes students who are currently English learners (enrolled in EL services) as well as former English learners who have been reclassified and no longer receive EL services.

We chose these sites based on recommendations from our district-level contacts, who helped us reach teachers who were involved in reclassification decisions on behalf of ELSWDs. Teachers then referred us to the parents of students who had been reclassified from EL services during the last two school years, or who would be considered for reclassification in the near future.

In the fourth district, Charles, we collected data related to our overarching focus, but did not conduct a case study. Charles District infuses secondary special education and content courses with targeted language support for ELSWDs, rather than always requiring ELSWDs to attend separate special education *and* ELD courses. Thus, EL status does not serve as a barrier to enrollment in content course in this district, and, perhaps for this reason, there was less urgency among educators to reclassify ELSWDs in this district, and reclassification of ELSWDs at the secondary level occurred less often. Interviews with teachers and administrators in this district informed our study by shedding light on district policies for engaging parents when reclassification decisions did occur.

Table 2 offers demographic information for each school site.

Participants

This study focused on six case study students, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Case study student information.

Student	Site	District	Grade	Reclassification status	Disability
Adrian	Creekside MS	Allen	8	Reclassified January 2019	SLD
Jessica	Shepherd MS	Allen	8	Reclassified May 2019	CD
Johnny			11	Reclassified January 2019	CD
Andrea	Fletcher HS	Landon	11	Reclassified June 2018	CD
Sebastian			11	Reclassified January 2019	SLD
Marcos	Andrews HS	Valley	10	Reclassified June 2017	CD

Our purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 2015) allowed us to connect with students who met our study criteria. Case study students were either 8th graders attending middle school or 10th or 11th graders attending high school. All were identified with higher-incidence disabilities: three with a specific learning disability (SLD), and three with a communication disorder (CD). All case study students were of Mexican heritage. They received school instruction in English and had Spanish as a home language. One student was reclassified a year-and-a-half prior to this study, one was reclassified six months before data collection, and four were reclassified during our data collection (January 2019 and May 2019). By studying the cases of students who were at different stages in the reclassification process, we were able to capture data on parent engagement that spanned the decision process: (1) leading up to the decision, (2) during the decision-making process, and (3) after the decision, when the student continued to be monitored for academic progress.

In addition to the six case study students and their parents, we purposefully sampled (Creswell & Poth, 2018) school- and district-based educators who worked directly with case study students, or who had expertise on the district's reclassification policy, or both. These participants included: 29 teachers (11 ESOL/ELD, 10 content area/general education, eight special education), 11

administrators (six district-level, five school-level), and 14 other staff (eight speech and language pathologists, four high school counselors, one family liaison, and one instructional assistant).

Data Collection

The data in this article come from a larger qualitative study on reclassification decisions on behalf of ELSWDs. Data were collected over the course of eight months (November 2018-June 2019). The full scope of data collection included 78 semi-structured interviews with parents, students, teachers, and administrators. In this article, we focus our analysis on data most relevant to our case study research questions, which came from the following: (1) parent and educator interviews clustered around student cases, (2) educator interviews focused on reclassification policies, and (2) observations of reclassification meetings.

Students and their parents were interviewed twice (at the beginning and end of our data collection period). Interviews took place in their homes, except in the case of Andrea and her grandparents, who asked to be interviewed at the school. We asked parents about their engagement with educators before, during, and after the reclassification decision. Interviews with teachers and administrators took place at the school or district office and sometimes involved follow-up interviews. These professionals responded to questions about their experiences with reclassification decisions, their engagement with parents, and their experience working with the case study students. See Appendix A for the complete interview guides. We focus our discussion of the findings particularly on the cases of Adrian, Johnny, and Sebastian, since reclassification decisions on their behalf were made during the time frame of our data collection, and thus we gained the most direct evidence of parents' engagement in these three cases.

Reclassification meetings were an important and novel part of reclassification protocol in one district in our study, Landon. Due to the fact that parents were invited to reclassification meetings, and that these meetings offered a fuller picture of how parents were engaged in reclassification decisions, we observed two reclassification meetings on behalf of case study students Johnny and Sebastian. We also reviewed academic records for all case study students (including transcripts, EL exit forms, IEPs, work sample scoring rubrics, and school letters [sent to and often signed by parents]). We referred to these records while conducting interviews and while analyzing interviews and notes from observations of reclassification meetings.

We collected data in four districts that represented a range of policies regarding parent engagement in reclassification decisions. In Landon District, educators invited parents to reclassification meetings and prioritized their attendance. In Valley and Charles Districts, parents were invited to reclassification meetings but often did not attend, perhaps because parent attendance was not prioritized. In Allen District, reclassification meetings were not conducted. Further detail on this district variation in policy is offered later in this section.

Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-step coding scheme guided our iterative data analysis process. First, we conducted open coding by reviewing data, field notes, and memos line by line. We constantly compared these codes and their component data to decide how best to form our first set of codes. We next engaged in axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), in which we reread our initial codes and their underlying data to draw connections among the codes and then organize codes into conceptual categories. Finally, we engaged in thematic building, in which we reread the axial codes we established in the previous step, and decided how the codes and code clusters related to each other, to develop a narrative based on these relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this final step of analysis, we compared aspects of home-school communication and parent engagement among sites and districts.

After inductively analyzing relationships among our axial codes, a pattern of one-way communication emerged across all six student cases, in which parents were systematically excluded from meaningful engagement. We then turned to the literature to explore theoretical frameworks that aligned with our data. Nichols and Read's (2002) model for understanding nuances in *transmission* and *diagnosis-prescription* patterns in home-school communication emerged as the most relevant to the communication patterns we discovered. Most of our final codes aligned with the "transmission" main code and "diagnosis-prescription" sub-code (MacLure & Walker, 2000; Nichols and Read, 2002). Our approach aligns with the grounded theory method of prioritizing empirically generated conceptual categories and codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As we revised codes throughout the data analysis process, we re-coded all data to align with these subsequent changes. We conducted coding and analysis via the online application Dedoose.

The two authors jointly employed multiple validation strategies during coding and post-coding analysis. The first author conducted all interviews and document analysis, and assumed a chief coding role, due to her greater knowledge of participants and the school contexts. Consistent with the view that analysis is deeply intertwined with subjectivities that the positivistic concept of "inter-rater reliability" is not always appropriate in qualitative research (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), we jointly engaged in multiple validation strategies of the initial coding, such as peer review and debriefing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In our peer debriefing, we shared our research process and preliminary findings with researchers at the state education agency. These representatives provided further insight on policies such as their own efforts to engage EL and ELSWD parents.

In our joint post-coding analysis, we strove to ensure the four main validity criteria of qualitative analysis, as laid out by Whittemore and colleagues (2001): *credibility*, *authenticity*, *criticality*, and *integrity*. Our analysis reflects *credibility* due to the effort we made to accurately interpret the meaning of interview and observation data. To this end, we used triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018), such as checking interview reports from parents, teachers, and students against data found in student transcripts, test scores, IEPs, and school- and district-level policies. We conducted member checks (Creswell & Poth, 2018) by sharing preliminary findings with administrators in each district. These leaders confirmed the patterns we identified and added insights related to context. For example, they explained how the review process of student work samples had evolved, and how engaging parents in reclassification meetings was a new undertaking for teachers. We also checked our findings with each case study student and parent during follow-up interviews, who confirmed and added further reflection, such as offering their personal evaluation of the reclassification process. This check helped the authors understand and correct their biases in data analysis.

We worked to establish *authenticity* by reflecting the lived experiences reported by participants. The subjectivity inherent in qualitative research required us to reflect on our values and ensure our interpretations were valid and grounded in the data. As part of building authenticity, we offered thick, detailed descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018), including ample quotes from participant interviews, to back our interpretations. We engaged in *self-critical* reflection and demonstrated *integrity* as researchers. Our analysis involved recursive, repeated checks on our interpretations, described discrepant data in detail, and discussed disconfirming alternatives (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

We maintained reflexivity of our assumptions, beliefs, values, and biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018) by continually contemplating the influence of our personal and professional experiences. The first author, who conducted all interviews, is a special education researcher and former special education teacher. She was familiar with this study's district contacts through previous collaborative work. The second author, who helped design the study and collaborated on data analysis and writing, is a teacher educator and conducts research focused on multilingual students. She is a former bilingual teacher and speaks Spanish. Prior to the study, she had been an active participant in a statewide work group

about reclassification for EL students with disabilities, collaborating alongside many of the district administrators in the study to discuss possible changes to policies and procedures.

When conducting interviews, the first author presented herself to participating teachers, families, and students as a university researcher, educator, and proficient Spanish speaker. In preparation for interviews, the first author reflected on her position as a high-status professional, and considered her biases as a White person representing dominant culture. She understood that study participants might guess what she wanted to hear, instead of disclosing more authentic perceptions. She also considered how her lack of personal understanding of the families' immigrant experiences might influence her own interactions with students and their families. The first author thus strove to develop rapport with all participants. She did so by meeting families at the location of their preference (in the parents' homes for four students, and at the student's school for two students), and spending about an hour before each interview sharing informal dialogue with the families and, when possible, observing students informally in their home environments. For example, in her interview with Johnny's parents, she met the entire family in their home and spoke to Johnny and his siblings about their personal interests. She also responded to questions from Johnny's parents about how she learned Spanish. The first author also conducted joint interviews with students and parents when participants stated that preference, as was the case with Johnny. The first author worked to facilitate interviews with respect and sensitivity, recognizing these interviews were not "neutral" or "objective" data collection experiences, but rather situated events in which participants would respond in ways that reflected their worldviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, she approached each interview with the goal of thoughtfully and carefully listening to participants, taking the information as it unfolded and avoiding interpreting information through preconceived ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). She and the second author maintained this reflective stance during data analysis. We regularly shared our reflections during joint analysis and peer debriefing, and logged and analyzed these reflections in memos.

Findings

In our analysis of home-school communication about parent engagement during reclassification, we found that educators chiefly conveyed information in a traditional, one-way manner, following the "transmission" model (Nichols & Read, 2002). Communication reflected the "diagnosis-prescription" pattern of transmission (MacClure & Walker, 2000), with educators *diagnosing* students' English proficiency level and *prescribing* the student's exit from ELD. A variety of barriers prevented parents and educators from engaging in reciprocal dialogue. Prime among these was the institutional power educators hold, consistent with previous research on asymmetrical power relationships between educators and parents of multilingual students (e.g., Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Mendoza & Olivos, 2013). Parents frequently did not share their insights or concerns with educators. When making educational decisions, parents often did not rely on information educators shared with them but sought information from their children, relatives, and their own informal assessments. Parents were thus silenced, a pattern of marginalization that reflects educators' cultural deficit thinking.

Findings are organized into three sections. The first section addresses the educators' attempts at communication through "transmission", including through the "diagnosis-prescription" mode during reclassification. The second part describes communication from the parents' standpoint. Finally, we discuss promising instances of "reciprocal" dialogue.

Educator Contribution: Transmission and Diagnosis-Prescription during Reclassification Decisions

To determine the effectiveness of educators' transmissions, we considered what case study parents understood following their interactions with educators. As explained in the beginning of this paper, when data was collected, educators in this particular state were allowed to consider work samples in reading, writing, listening, and speaking as part of a portfolio review, in addition to ELP test scores, to determine students' eligibility for reclassification. At the time of data collection, all four districts in our sample used these additional criteria when making reclassification decisions.

Evidence from our case studies suggested that educators' knowledge was privileged in reclassification decisions for ELSWDs. Specifically, the way in which educators transmitted information about reclassification decisions followed a diagnosis-prescription pattern (MacLure & Walker, 2000; Nichols & Read, 2002), with educators using school-based data to *diagnose* whether students were proficient in English and, if so, then *prescribe* reclassification out of EL services. This pattern was evident in reclassification meetings where parents attended, as in Landon District, and in reclassification decisions made without the parents' direct participation in a meeting, in the three other districts. Parents were effectively silenced through this dynamic.

Diagnosis-prescription model of transmission during formal meetings.

Just as MacLure & Walker (2000) identified, the meetings we observed began with a brief, formal introduction, followed by "an unbroken stretch of talk" (p. 8) in which educators presented a diagnosis based on evidence and their professional judgment, which they "ran through" with the parent (p. 10). During these one-way conversations, educators attempted to transmit an immense amount of detailed, technical diagnostic information to parents, such as (1) scores from multiple tests, (2) rubrics with reclassification criteria for speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and (3) evaluations of student work based on these criteria.

The onus educators faced in conveying information may have prevented them from seizing opportunities to engage parents in reciprocal dialogue. For example, Sebastian's parent asked at the beginning of her son's meeting whether he might struggle in core content classes if he stopped receiving ELD. The administrator put up her hand and told the parent she would answer her questions after they reviewed Sebastian's work. Thus, the administrator asserted control over the conversation and deferred the parent's question until after the educators finished issuing their diagnosis and prescription, a discourse pattern documented in a variety of other parent-teacher meetings (MacLure & Walker, 2000; Nichols & Read, 2002).

Parents spent most of the reclassification meeting leaning toward the interpreter to receive simultaneous interpretation, a demand on parents' attention that seemed to silence parents. Educators used technical language (e.g., "increased complexity", "Level 4 designation", "phonetic structures"), a practice noted also by MacLure & Walker (2000). For each ELP domain, educators reached consensus on a rubric-based score, before the administrator turned the discussion to the next domain. Educators solicited the parent's opinions and questions only at the end of the meeting, once all four domains had been discussed.

Before soliciting parents' opinions, educators' discourse in both meetings suggested they had already agreed as a team that the students should be exited. For example, at Johnny's meeting, the administrator said, "We'll review what we decided for each of the four domains and make a decision and thank the family for coming." Educators also used a celebratory and persuasive tone, such as when the administrator told Johnny's father, "I love seeing Dad smile" *before* they asked Johnny's father for his opinion. At the end of both Johnny's and Sebastian's meetings, after educators compared numerous work samples to proficiency standards for each domain, the administrator solicited the parent's opinion for the exit decision, thus offering the "diagnosis" before inviting parent participation. This pattern mirrored MacLure & Walker's (2000) findings, where "the first occasion for parents to influence the agenda was at the end of the diagnosis" (p. 10). Johnny's father offered

minimal response to educators' expert judgment (a pattern also noted by MacLure & Walker [2000] among parents who require interpretation at diagnosis-prescription-style meetings). However, just like Sebastian's parent asked at the beginning of the meeting whether her son would regress without the ELD class, Johnny's father posed the same question when his opinion was solicited. The educators at the meeting explained the post-exit monitoring process to Johnny's father. Johnny's father then verbally assented to the prescription—of reclassification—issued by educators.

At the end of Sebastian's reclassification meeting, the parent attempted to break the educators' control of the diagnosis-prescription pattern by asking her son's opinion in front of the group. The educators listened as the parent and son engaged in this dialogue. However, the educators closed the conversation by persuading the parent to accept the exit decision, and did not address the parent's root concern.

> **Parent:** Estoy entre "sí" y "no". Si en vez de avanzar, se estanca, y despues se va por atras... (I'm between "yes" and "no". If instead of advancing, he stagnates, and then he falls back...)
> **ELD teacher:** (to Parent): What do you think will happen?
> **Parent:** (in English) I want him to be on level, I'm worried he'll fall behind.
> **ELD teacher:** How?
> **Parent:** Estoy preocupada. (I'm worried.)
> **Administrator:** It's a worry.
> **Special education teacher:** I'll monitor grades, not just letting him go.
> **ELD teacher:** If he starts to fall back, he can come back (to the ELD class) at any moment. That's why we call it monitoring.
> **Parent:** (to Sebastian): (in English) How do you feel?
> **Sebastian:** Me cae bien. (It's ok with me).
> **Parent:** (to educators): Sure. (agreeing with exit decision)
> **ELD teacher:** In every class, he can grow.
> **Special education teacher:** In every class, he's doing great.
> **ELD teacher:** (Sebastian) is confident about his ability.
> **Administrator:** (ELD teacher) can always help, also (Special education teacher). (To Sebastian): If we decide to remove you (from EL services), these teachers (referring to all teachers at the table) aren't going anywhere. (to Parent): Mom, are you okay with this?
> **Parent:** A tratar... (Let's try...)

Interestingly, in a follow-up interview, the same ELD teacher believed the parent had been effectively engaged in decision-making:

> It was the parental and the student decision. We asked: 'What do you think?' And the mother asked, 'Is it the right decision? Is he going to be missing instruction?' It was explained to her what we would do, and he can always come back. And the student participated. I think it wasa true team decision.

Perhaps the fact that the educators heard from Sebastian's mother and her son—beyond the simple agreement that educators might be accustomed to from parents—might appear to be more like reciprocal dialogue than is typical in these decisions. Offering parents an opportunity to express their opinions during reclassification meetings is certainly a step closer to collaborative decision-making than merely notifying parents.However, Sebastian's parent believed the educators did not adequately answer her questions. As she explained in our follow-up interview,

> Cuando (Sebastian) salga de ELD y en vez de seguir aprendiendo, vaya retrosándose en su aprendizaje porque le haga falta esa clase. ¿Qué contestó el maestro (de ELD)? 'A qué terefieres con eso?' De ahí no hubo una respuesta. Nada más dijeron, 'Vamos a ver en qué podemos ayudar a (Sebastian) o puede regresar paulatinamente a la clase del maestro (de ELD).When (Sebastian)

leaves ELD and instead of continuing to learn, he falls behind in his learning because he needed that class. How did the ELD teacher respond? 'What are you referring to?' From there, there wasn't an answer. They just told me, 'Let's see how we can help (Sebastian) or he can gradually regress back to the ELD teacher's class.'

In this instance, Sebastian's mother was raising a concern about the potential negative impact of the exit "prescription", just like Johnny's father did. The educators attempted to respond, but this parent did not feel heard, and she felt that the ELD teacher had been defensive in asking "What do you mean?" (The first author who observed had the same impression, that the ELD teacher's question was defensive, and that the ELD teacher and administrator were making an effort to convince the parent of the appropriateness of the exit decision.) Perhaps the parent felt unheard because the educators' reassurances did not offer enough information about subsequent monitoring. It is notable that in both Johnny's and Sebastian's cases, parents attempted to interrupt the diagnosis-prescription pattern of communication by raising a highly anticipatable concern: whether their child would regress academically after exiting ELD. Our findings here also parallel those of MacLure &Walker (2000) in two respects. First, parents questioned a "good news" diagnosis by raising a concern or asking for information, perhaps because they were not convinced the educators had devoted significant attention to their child's need. Second, educators responded by controlling the conversation through explaining the subsequent monitoring process, rather than directly addressing and exploring the parent's concern.

Diagnosis-prescription model of transmission outside formal meetings.

In Allen District, where educators do not invite parents to take part in meetings about reclassification decisions, and in Charles and Valley Districts, where parents are invited but usually do not attend, home-school communication about reclassification also followed a diagnosis-prescription style of transmission. Educators from Charles District said their policy is to contact parents by phone to "get them on board" with the ELD exit decision. This stance clearly indicated educators' control of the diagnosis and prescription, and the potential silencing of parents' questions or dissenting opinions. Another Charles District administrator explained, "I'll contact parents and let them know that this kid was exited." Similarly, Jessica's ELD teacher (in Allen District) simply informed the parent that Jessica would be exited from ELD based on her scores. As this teacher said, "I just passed all my scores off to the facilitator so we can put them in envelopes and send them home."

Parents often did not successfully receive educators' transmissions of information about reclassification decisions. Parents of Jessica, Marcos, and Andrea were unaware their child had exited EL services and were no longer enrolled in ELD, despite having signed related consent forms. Sebastian's and Johnny's parents were unsure about the purpose of the reclassification meetings in follow-up interviews, since their child's annual IEP meeting were also scheduled within days of the reclassification meetings. This coincidence highlights the siloed nature of specialized service delivery and resulting confusion for parents.

Thus, in the context of reclassification decisions and formal reclassification meetings, educators attempted to transmit to parents a mass of detailed information using a diagnosis-prescription patterns of communication. Considering that federal law requires only parent notification in reclassification decisions, it is notable that educators in our study strove to gain parents' consent for these decisions, either within or outside the context of formal meetings. However, across contexts, parents' consent typically did not signal meaningful understanding of the decision, and their voices were silenced precisely at the point of decision-making.

Parent Contribution: Often Silenced, but Also Resourceful

In this second section, we shift from analyzing educators' role in reclassification to analyzing the voice and perspective of case study parents. We will explore examples of questions, concerns, and

insights related to reclassification that parents communicated during interviews but did not communicate to educators. We discovered that case study parents felt silenced and marginalized by educators. Educators demonstrated cultural deficit thinking by failing to engage parents in meaningful conversation around reclassification decisions.

Adrian's parents did not understand they could waive their son's EL services—and thereby waive his ELD enrollment—until a relative informed them. Adrian's parent was disappointed with how her son's ELD teacher handled the exit decision the year before, when Adrian did not pass the portfolio review. As this parent explained, "La maestra le dio mucha esperanza a (Adrian). Por eso (Adrian) desespera." (The teacher gave a lot of hope to [Adrian]. For that reason, [Adrian] despaired.") This parent did not raise her concern with the teacher.

Sebastian's parent offered evidence that discrimination on the part of school personnel might have negatively impacted her communication with the school. For example, she complained during our interview that her son roamed the hallways during class. She felt the teachers isolated her son by allowing this behavior: "(Sebastian) tiene que estar en su clase. Pero en vez de hacer eso, lo que hacía era cerrar la puerta, por eso digo, él se sentía aislado." ("[Sebastian] needs to be in class. But instead of doing that, what [the teacher] did was close the door, and for that reason I say, [my son] felt isolated.") However, when two teachers complained about this same problem at the reclassification meeting, the parent smiled at her son and said nothing to the teachers.

This breakdown in communication between Sebastian's parent and the teachers might be due to another unvoiced complaint this parent shared during our interview: Sebastian told his mother that the ELD teacher once angrily said to him in class, "I'm going to send you back to Mexico." Sebastian asked his mother not to complain about this remark, to avoid reprisal. Sebastian's mother also explained she was reluctant to ask educators for help due to her family's position as immigrants: "A veces nos tiene como un poquito aislados de como pedir más ayuda o darnos información. Ese tipo de cosas... Es difícil porque todos somos inmigrantes." ("Sometimes they have us a little isolated for asking for help or giving us information. These types of things... It's difficult because we're all immigrants.") Sebastian's parent explained in a follow-up interview that during the five months since her son had been reclassified from ELD, she called the school repeatedly to learn about his progress, but her calls were not returned. Such a lack of communication effectively ended the conversation and silenced the parent.

Another interesting contrast between parent and teacher accounts in Sebastian's case, centered on Sebastian's habit of being talkative during class (a behavior observed by the first author). Sebastian's teachers complained about this habit, but his parent offered an interesting explanation during our interview—that Sebastian talks to avoid appearing unintelligent: "Y digo yo (a Sebastian), '¿Por qué hablas?' (Sebastian responde): 'Para que no piensen que estoy tonto. Porque todos hablan, saben escribir y leer y yo hablo para que no piensen que soy tonto.'" (I say [to Sebastian], 'Why do you talk?' [Sebastian responds]: 'So they don't think I'm stupid. Because everyone talks, and knows how to write and read and I talk so they don't think I'm stupid.'") During the reclassification meeting, as the parent sat listening to simultaneous interpretation, the administrator and teachers discussed how Sebastian's speaking was far clearer than his writing. The special education teacher hypothesized that Sebastian "was in a hurry during writing". The parent did not share her relevant insight regarding Sebastian's talk. If the parent had explained the purpose of Sebastian's frequent classroom talk, the team might have focused on Sebastian's social and emotional needs, and his resourcefulness in focusing on his relative strength in speech. Instead, the parent was silenced, perhaps due to her overall feeling of isolation, and the ELD teacher's previous discrimination toward her son.

Parents of all high school case study students expressed concerns during our interviews about whether their child would graduate, and about their child's options for work and study beyond graduation. However, parents did not share these concerns with educators. In particular, parents of

Johnny and Sebastian did not ask about their child's post-secondary options during reclassification meetings, even as educators discussed possible course options and advised students to visit their counselors to adjust their class schedules. This omission of such highly anticipatable parent questions is another example of educators' inadvertent silencing of parents.

Educators in our study explained that parents typically defer to educators' decisions for cultural reasons, or based on parents' lack of interest. Correspondingly, some parents in our study reported having deferred to teachers' expertise. As Adrian's father said, "Pues, no sabemos. Porque en realidad, los que tienen la experiencia son ellos, ¿no? No nosotros." ("Well, we don't know. Because is reality, those who have the experience are them [the educators], right? Not us.") However, our interview data indicate that parents might have deferred to educators' decisions even while they held dissenting opinions. For example, Sebastian's parent disagreed with how Sebastian's teachers had treated him, and she did not voice valuable insights about her son's behavior during reclassification meetings. Likewise, Adrian's mother believed her son should have been exited during the previous school year, but she did not share her opinion because she was countered by the educators and her husband. These examples highlight the ways in which parents might appear deferential while continuing to disagree with educators' decisions, perhaps for the sake of maintaining harmony with teachers and a school system on which they might depend for years to come.

It might seem that educators' silencing moves limited parents' ability to meaningfully engage in reclassification decisions. However, evidence from our study points to less apparent ways in which parents took an active, though behind-the-scenes, role in gathering information about their child's readiness to exit EL services. Parents in our study relied on their child's opinion about exiting ELD, such as when Sebastian's parent asked her son's opinion about the exit decision at the end of the reclassification meeting. Johnny's parent reported conversing with his son about exiting ELD before the reclassification meeting: "Yo le pregunté a (Johnny), dice, 'Sí, sí salgo de eso, sí, la hago. Sí puedo'." ("I asked [Johnny], and he says, 'Yes, I'll leave that, yes, I'll do it. Yes, I can.'"). Similarly, Adrian's parents said, "[Adrian] mencionó, 'Yo no quiero tener esa materia. Porque decía que lo trataban como si fuera un tonto." ("[Adrian] mentioned, 'I don't want that class.' Because he said they treated him as if he were stupid.") Adrian's parents also explained how they leaned heavily on their oldest son's opinion: "Su hermano habló con (Adrian) sobre esa clase también (ELD) y le dijo que no le convenía esa clase". ("His brother talked to him about that class [ELD], and told him that that class didn't suit him.")

Parents in our study also made informal, independent assessments of their children's ability to succeed without ELD. For example, Sebastian's parent expressed faith in her son's ability, saying, "Confío mucho en [Sebastian] y yo que soy su mamá y creo que [Sebastian] no va a necesitar regresar a la clase de (ELD)." ("I trust a lot in [Sebastian] and I'm his mother and I believe that [Sebastian] is not going to need to go back to the ELD class.")

Evidence of Reciprocal Dialogue

Most evidence in our study points to a one-way, transmission style of home-school communication in which educators systematically silenced parents. However, we also discovered glimmers of two-way, home-school dialogue.

Parents sometimes described educators as helpful and responsive. For example, Adrian's parents described asking school staff for tips on how they could further help their son at home. Marcos's parent explained how various educators regularly informed her and responded to her questions. Johnny's parent explained how he told his son's teachers not to push his son too hard, and that teachers responded with assurances that they would do all they could to help his child.

Educators described ways in which they felt they engaged parents in two-way dialogue about reclassification decisions. As a Landon District administrator explained about reclassification

meetings, "If no one (from the family) shows up, it's hard to decide how to proceed." Another administrator explained, "It is finally the parent that decides whether they do agree with the exit or not." While obtaining consent and granting parents a sort of "veto power" might not strictly represent "reciprocal dialogue", this coordinated action among educators might be viewed as a positive step, especially considering educators' limited time, and the fact that laws surrounding EL services do not mandate parent consent.

Several educators cited instances when parents disagreed with an exit decision and asked that their child remain in ELD. As one administrator said, "I've had parents be the deal-breakers." Many educators expressed that they would like to build better relationships with parents and improve the quality of family engagement in reclassification decisions. As one ELD teacher said, "We would never make a decision in special education without the parent involved. I feel like ESL doesn't have those very rigid guidelines, but perhaps it should." Another teacher stated, "[Family engagement] is so foundational to what's going to take place in high school when the [ELSWD] kid can really get lost if the family is not actively involved." One administrator from Valley District suggested that the state department of education develop a flow chart to help guide educators in their engagement with ELSWD families around reclassification and other key decisions.

Discussion

Key Findings

Analysis of parent engagement in our six case studies demonstrates that while educators made efforts to engage parents of ELSWDs in reclassification decisions, these parents nonetheless faced systematic oppression in these home-school interactions, similar to those documented for culturally and linguistically diverse parents of children with disabilities, including language barriers and being silenced by educators. Analysis showed that home-school communication typically followed a one-way transmission pattern, with educators sending information to parents that was often not received as intended. Though two parents attended meetings, and all parents signed required forms, each parent nonetheless participated minimally in decisions, and some had incomplete information about key aspects of the reclassification decision. Communication in these decisions followed a *diagnosis-prescription* pattern of transmission, with educators using school-based assessments and work samples to *diagnose* the student's English proficiency level and *prescribe* reclassification when appropriate. This *diagnosis-prescription* pattern occurred at reclassification meetings when parents were present and also in cases where parents received the diagnosis and prescription via a phone call or letter. This discourse pattern reflected cultural deficit thinking by marginalizing ELSWD parents: parents were severely limited in their ability to partner with educators or receive answers to their questions about reclassification decisions. Findings also showed that parents had important insights about their children that could have informed educational decisions but that parents did not voice, further demonstrating how these parents were silenced.

At the same time, analysis showed that parents often drew on non-school resources to support them in navigating educational decisions for their children. In particular, parents frequently used information from their child, their other children, and extended family members to inform their thinking about whether their child should exit EL services. This resourcefulness on the part of parents suggests the ineffective nature of traditional school-facilitated, home-school communication (at least from the viewpoint of parents), and the need for educators to engage parents in meaningful, productive two-way conversations.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Our findings reveal a pressing need to establish more reciprocal patterns of communication between educators and parents of ELSWDs, as well as opportunities for meaningful parent engagement in reclassification decision-making. One potential strategy to foster reciprocal dialogue is to prioritize interactions between educators and parents outside of compliance-focused meetings, with a focus on relationship-building. While staffing and time constraints make this extremely challenging, a variety of initiatives have shown promise. For example, home visit programs, in which educators go to families' homes to learn more about their lives and hopes for the future, have shown potential to improve home-school communication and, ultimately, student outcomes (e.g., Johnson, 2014; Meyer & Mann, 2011; Park & Paulick, 2021; Sheldon & Jung, 2018). To prepare for home visits, however, educators would require specific preparation to avoid "perpetuating an oppressive status quo" of traditional home-school interaction (Park & Paulick, 2021, p. 1). In addition, family liaisons can serve as cultural brokers between home and school, helping parents feel more welcome, included, and able to ask question (Ishimaru, 2017). In home-based settings or in conversations with family liaisons, parents might have more opportunities to share information about their children's interests, passions, and post-secondary aspirations, laying the groundwork for more informed decision-making moving forward.

Another potential strategy to increase meaningful engagement in educational decisions for parents of ELSWDs is to provide additional professional learning opportunities for both pre-service and in-service teachers to increase their knowledge and skills in parent engagement, including learning opportunities focused specifically on engaging with parents of ELSWDs (e.g., Evans, 2013). These learning opportunities could center parent perspectives, for example by including videos with parents of ELSWDs describing questions they had about their child's services that educators did not address, insights they had about their children that they did not share with educators, and information or practices that would have been helpful to them. In addition, role plays or other active learning opportunities could help educators gain skills in enacting reciprocal dialogue.

In addition, IEP and reclassification meetings could potentially be combined so that children's progress and needs could be discussed by all stakeholders (students, parents, ELD teachers, special education teachers, content teachers, and administrators) in a more thoughtful and logical way. This combination could potentially streamline communication, minimize confusion, and ensure parents' engagement in reclassification decisions. Considering that IEP goals and accommodations on behalf of ELSWDs have been shown to lack attention to relevant cultural, experiential, linguistic, and family background information (Hoover et al., 2018), creating combined IEP and reclassification meetings might also be a logical step for creating truly individualized education plans that support these students as they transition to a "monitored" status of English language development.

Finally, in the next reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we suggest that the role for parents within EL policy should potentially shift to more closely parallel the role for parents within special education. We do not think there is a compelling reason for parents of ELs to have fewer rights in educational decision-making for their children than parents of students with disabilities do. Rather than requiring only parent notification about key decisions in EL services, future EL policy could require that parents actively participate in decision-making about their children's services. Research in special education—and our own observations of reclassification meetings where parents were in attendance—clearly demonstrates that parent attendance at meetings does not ensure reciprocal dialogue or meaningful partnership in decision-making (e.g., Wolfe & Durán, 2013). However, such partnership is impossible if only parent notification is required. This expanded role for parents in EL policy would undoubtedly pose complex implementation challenges. However, it would represent a meaningful shift to more fully recognizing parents of ELs, who frequently experience marginalization and oppression (e.g., Brooks, 2019; *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Cioé-Peña, 2020a), as true respected and valued partners in their children's education.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

It is notable that we observed reclassification meetings in only one school district (Landon), and within this school district, we only observed two reclassification meetings involving ELSWDs. However, parents do not typically attend reclassification meetings in other districts. In addition, it may not be possible to observe future reclassification meetings in any district, due to a recent policy change, which requires districts to use the ELP assessment as the sole criterion for exiting students from EL services.

Currently, there is extremely limited research on parent engagement in decisions about EL services generally and even less research about engagement for parents of ELSWDs. Future research is needed about these topics in other states and districts, across the full K-12 spectrum, and across a broader range of disability types. For example, further research is needed about the proportion of EL students whose parents waive EL services, variation in this proportion across contexts, reasons why parents waive services, and how parents learn about the option to waive services. Finally, more research is needed about instances in which reciprocal dialogue between parents and educators has occurred, particularly for parents of ELSWDs. Understanding the factors that enabled this reciprocal dialogue to occur, however fleeting, could inform future efforts to work towards more meaningful parent engagement—and a more responsive, just education system.

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Notes

[1] Flores and Drake (2014) do include "waiver status" as a variable in their state-level analysis of the relationship in Texas between EL classification and later need for remediation in college. The authors note that EL students whose parents have waived services represent "a distinct and highly under-evaluated" group (p. 13), but they do not focus on analyzing the prevalence of this practice.

Article

Choice With(out) Equity? Family Decisions on Return to Urban Schools During COVID-19

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Robert Cotto, Jr.
Trinity College
University of Connecticut

Sarah Woulfin
University of Texas at Austin

Abstract
In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, most schools across the country closed in-person instruction for a period of time, and many shifted to online schooling. Beginning in fall 2020, schools around the United States began reopening, and many districts offered families a choice to return their children to an in-person or online schooling experience. In many cities, this approach complicated existing school choice and permanent closure policies with already existing equity issues. Building upon previous scholarship on school choice and closure, this exploratory study draws on the concept of school choice with(out) equity. Using data from an online survey (N = 155 participants) in August 2020, this study examines why families (50% white, 50% people of color) decided to return their children to in-person schooling in Hartford, Connecticut. This study uses a mixed-methods analysis of qualitative responses and quantitative data to understand family decisions to return to in-person schooling. Family responses focused on the need for childcare for parents and guardians working full-time and in-person as well as health safety that shaped their particular choices about in-person school. Rather than school choices with full equity considerations during the pandemic, family responses suggest *partial* equity in available choices that do not meet all family and child needs. The study raises questions about reapplying old forms of school choice to a new form of temporary school closure during the pandemic.

Keywords: families, choice, equity, COVID-19, urban schools

Introduction

In spring 2020, nearly all of the United States closed in-person PK-12 public school buildings as the entire country faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Scholars estimate that mandated in-person school closures likely reduced the incidence and mortality of the COVID-19 pandemic across the United States (Auger et al., 2020). Despite the emergence of remote schooling programs, the prolonged

Corresponding Author:
Robert Cotto Jr., Trinity College, 70 Vernon Street, Room 304, Hartford, CT, 06106, USA; Robert is also a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA.
Email: Robert.Cotto@trincoll.edu; Robert.Cotto@uconn.edu

closure of school buildings placed tremendous economic, health, and educational pressures on families, as their children were not able to experience in-person schooling (Jones, 2020; Scott, 2020). During the following summer months, many state and district leaders across the U.S. debated the reopening of public school buildings to offer in-person schooling in the fall of 2020. From California to Connecticut, states across the country offered different responses to the question of in-person reopening (Gecker & Ronayne, 2020; Rabe Thomas, 2020). Depending on state and district policy, many families needed to make challenging decisions regarding whether and when to return their children to some form of school amidst a terrain of health and economic crisis with deep racial inequalities.

Amid these complex conditions, families were offered choices about sending their children to in-person school during the COVID-19 pandemic. By the summer of 2020, school districts began to propose choices that included in-person, hybrid (partly in-person), and remote schooling options. Even districts that offered in-person schooling, including Hartford (CT), Little Rock (AK), Miami-Dade (FL), and New York City, also offered families the option for students to continue with remote learning (Maxwell, 2020). Many families with children were required to make a choice among a mixed set of school options. Understanding new forms of school choice matters as educators work toward the next phases of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Building upon previous scholarship on school choice and closure, this study draws on the concept of school choice with(out) equity (Witten et al., 2003; Lipman et al., 2014; de la Torre et al., 2015; Duncan-Shippy, 2019). A progressive approach to equity in education is situated around the notion of opportunities and support for children to meet similar academic goals (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Scott, 2013; Ishimaru, 2020, p. 10). When considering school choice programs, equity policies must both recognize and address systemic racial inequality within schools and the contexts in which they exist (Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013, p. 126). Equity in school choice includes sufficient resources, access, and support services provided by states and districts (Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013, p. 127; Horsford et al., 2019, p. 132). As these and other scholars note, this form of equity attempts to systematically address inequality in early childhood education, funding, academic staff, racial isolation (e.g., desegregation), and other areas (Scott, 2013, p. 62). In light of these points, "choice without equity" fails to properly respond to these needs inside and outside school, including depleted or unstable housing, family work status, and lack of medical care (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013).

Regarding the choice of attending in-person school during the COVID-19 pandemic, the question remains of whether families made choices with equity in either in-person or remote/online learning. A choice with equity for in-person school could have meant sufficient face coverings, small class sizes for social distance, and other physical safety measures (Gurdasani et al., 2021). Relatedly, an equitable remote choice would have meant that children had access to technology, added instructional support in the curriculum, and work/childcare support (external) for families that chose this option. During this moment of returning to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, the question of the equity of these school choices was at the forefront (Roesch, 2020).

Focusing on the medium-sized northeastern city of Hartford, Connecticut, this mixed-methods study examines the decision made by families to choose in-person school or other options for their children in the summer before the 2020–21 school year. This convergent mixed-methods inquiry first uses quantitative data from an online survey to understand the relationships between choosing in-person schooling and family demographics, access needs at children's schools, and school ratings during the pandemic. Next, the study uses qualitative methods to examine open-ended responses about the choice of in-person schooling. This study aims to answer the following research question: Why did families decide for their children to return or not return to in-person education at schools in Hartford, Connecticut, during the COVID-19 pandemic in late summer 2020?

In places such as Hartford, families were asked by the state and school districts to respond to temporary, health-related school building closures due to the pandemic. This version of school choice and temporary school building closure in this and other cities resembled similar past policies of permanent school closure that also interrupted and complicated families' lives. As Chang-Bacon (2021) notes, "Interrupted schooling is not a new phenomenon." The current moment must be compared to the past, and these past experiences must be considered as we move forward. In sum, the interruption of schooling now has similarities to past moments of interrupted formal schooling experienced by children facing multiple challenges in their lives.

This exploratory study argues that rather than school choices that offered full equity considerations during the pandemic, Hartford families faced a landscape of choices that offered *partial* equity. Many families made choices based on one particular feature in each choice of schooling. For example, families chose in-person schooling for learning and childcare needs to continue full-time, in-person work, and these equity resources were not available if they selected remote school. And families that chose remote schooling for safety knew that the resources and practices to prevent COVID-19 infection were not available, in their view, through in-person schooling. For many families, a full set of equity considerations—deeper learning, childcare, safety from COVID-19—were not all available in either schooling choice. Families understood and made choices based on the most important characteristic of partial equity available to them. Many families also noted that their choices felt required or even forced. These survey responses raise questions about the use of a new form of school choice policy in the process of reopening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

School Choice and Closure across the U.S.

Prior to COVID-19, school choice and permanent closures were already affecting many Black and Latino parents with school-aged children in cities around the country. Beyond the primary mechanism of housing as the way to purchase attendance to schools, the secondary form of school selection, or choice, has been in place for at least the last half-century (Murnane, 2005; Dougherty, 2012). These school choice programs, including charter and magnet schools, have been advertised as a way to connect parent preferences with improved academic performance and market forms of accountability (Cobb et al., 2011; Horsford et al., 2019). In this market concept, if parents are allowed to choose schools, then schools would, in theory, perform well or lose students (Chubb & Moe, 1988). In newer versions of this concept, providing parents with more forms of school choice has been referred to as a "portfolio" model where multiple types of schools are offered by urban districts and/or private providers (Scott, 2011; Cucchiara, 2013; Quinn & Ogburn, 2019). These market concepts (e.g., portfolio model) have grown in cities in recent decades and are in cities facing COVID-19.

Scholars have raised substantial questions about issues related to various forms of school choice. In particular, scholars of school choice now raise questions about financial sustainability, democratic practices, community, equity, and diversity (Horsford et al., 2019). Along these lines, Holme (2002) found that the primarily White parents in her qualitative study relied on information about schools from other parents rather than official statistics such as overall school achievement. This indicates school choice can work in a way that relies on different information within racial groups. For example, in one mixed-methods study, Latino parents noted safety and discipline as key issues in their school choice rather than only dominant measures of achievement or quality that White families discussed (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016). And these choices are not in a vacuum. As Lubienski (2007) notes, educators and administrators in market forms of school choice often seek to attract "better-

performing" students rather than children most in need. Thus, it is important to examine various forms of school choice as a process between families and schools within particular social contexts.

Closure and Choice

Added to the complexity of school choice is the deep connection to policies of school closure. As a market-oriented reform, school choice proponents envisioned parents choosing new schools that would eventually lead to school closings due to lower enrollment related to decreases in funding and/or negative consequences through accountability policies (Witten et al., 2003; Lipman, 2011; Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013, p. 124). Many scholars note the possibility of using choice as a way to create multiracial spaces (e.g., diversity, desegregation), yet the policy implementation of school choice is connected to the privatization of schools, shifts toward market-based schooling, competition between accountability and racial diversity, and opportunity hoarding that benefits White families over families of color (Cucchiara, 2013; Frankenberg et al., 2017; Sattin-Bajaj & Roda, 2018; Thompson-Dorsey & Roulhac, 2019).

School closures are often connected to this implementation of school choice. And the cumulative result over the last two decades of school closures was the displacement of a disproportionate number of Black and increasingly Latino students and communities, particularly in cities (Duncan-Shippy, 2019; Diem & Welton, 2020). For many families, school closures were negative experiences along psychological (e.g., "root shock"), sociological (e.g., "institutional mourning"), material (e.g., "dispossession," "displacement"), and systemic (e.g., "structural violence") ways of thinking (Fullilove, 2001; Aggarwal et al., 2012; Lipman, 2014; Hernandez & Galletta, 2016; Ewing, 2018; Galletta, 2019). In sum, Black and Latino families have experienced various forms of interconnected school choice and closure.

In cities across the country, these related policies also created a particular form of school choice after school closure. When schools close permanently for accountability, facility, or financial reasons, families and children in many urban school districts are often required to choose new schools. For example, families in Chicago with children in permanently closed schools nearly a decade ago were offered some degree of involuntary choice of a new school. In one study, Black Chicago parents explained their school choice after a permanent closure based on proximity to home, perceptions of safety, strong academics, and personal connections to people and staff from closed schools (de la Torre et al., 2015). Many parents responded that they "did not have choice" of a new school after permanent closure. In this way, school closures in market contexts can create an illusion of choice that families face.

School Choice After Pandemic Closures

The current moment of school choice to respond to the new context of temporary school building closures during COVID-19 can be viewed as a new, modified application of past forms of school choice (e.g., choice after closure). Of particulate note is that many urban districts facing decisions about returning to school in Fall 2020 had previously offered some variety of school choice related to permanent school closure policies in past years. Like Chicago, cities such as Hartford and San Antonio, to name only two, closed schools due to accountability and market policies over the last decade and offered parents a "choice" of new schools to attend, including the same building with different management or learning themes (de la Torre et al., 2015; Cotto, 2018; Phillips, 2020). Reapplying the school choice concept after closure to the COVID-19 context, states and districts began to offer some version of choice of either in-person or remote/online forms of schooling after the spring 2020 physical building closures. Districts using this approach included, but were not limited to, Hartford (CT), Miami-Dade (FL), New York City, Fairfax (VA), and San Antonio (Maxwell, 2020; SBG San Antonio, 2020). Later, in 2021, districts such as Chicago also offered choices for parents of

either in-person or remote schooling after the previous temporary school building closures (Leone, 2021).

The new form of choice of either remote or in-person learning related to concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic does not entirely match old forms of school choice. A key difference is that past forms of school choice were often related to permanent physical movement from one building to another. There are key similarities in terms of communities in cities that have previously faced a forced choice of new buildings (or even the same buildings with new management) after school closures. In addition, there was an inversion of interests supporting choice of schooling after these temporary school closures during the pandemic. For example, two former U.S. secretaries of education who were supportive of permanent school closures as local and federal policies in past decades recently cowrote guidance on reopening temporarily closed schools to in-person learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lipman, 2011; Debenedetti, 2020; Frieden et al., 2020). On the other side, teachers and activists in cities such as Chicago who opposed permanent school closures nearly a decade ago supported the temporary closure of schools during the pandemic for the safety of workers, students, and families (Resnikoff, 2013; Issa, 2020). This inversion of responses helps situate different forms of school choice after closure: from permanent spatial dislocation to temporary schooling modes.

After schools closed in-person activities in spring 2020, many families and children struggled with various forms of remote or online school. This remote schooling was a temporary and immediate response to a deadly pandemic. Despite this being an emergency situation, recent scholarship raises a number of questions about remote or online learning in spring 2020. For example, DeMatthews et al. (2020) noted, "As districts rely on online distance learning, equitable access to learning opportunities is a chief concern" (p. 400). Along these lines, Domina et al. (2021) reported that students in remote schooling showed higher engagement when connected to high-speed internet and internet devices, more diverse socioemotional and academic learning opportunities at home, and social relationships with other highly engaged families. Therefore, student experiences during remote schooling were associated with family material and social resources. In addition to questions about student engagement, families also faced new obligations. As recent scholarship suggests, the move to remote schooling "forced parents into new teaching roles as *proxy* educators" (Davis et al., 2021, p. 1). Families then faced elevated mental distress that required support in a way that resembled past teacher burnout.

There was also evidence that reopening schools in person had mixed support from families and students, particularly along lines of race and class. In an interrogation of various reopening policy options, a number of surveys by commercial groups compiled information about family needs when considering a return to school (Caissa Public Strategy, 2020). In one survey, only 55% of families wanted to return to in-person school (Kiernan, 2020). In other studies, researchers directly examined Black and Latino family concerns (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2020). For example, one survey of 800 respondents found that Black, Latino, and low-income families, particularly in New York City, disproportionately felt "wary of reopening schools" because of concerns about "their family's safety and well-being" (Global Strategy Group & Education Trust – New York, 2020, p.1). In addition, Domina et al. (2021) found different perceptions of remote schooling along racial lines.

In fact, families in many urban school districts overwhelmingly chose not to return to in-person schooling. From fall 2020 to spring 2021, local city newspapers reported district numbers and rates of families choosing remote or online schooling instead of in-person forms. For example, Hartford Public Schools reported to the local news that "54% of Hartford families have opted to start the year with remote learning, and more than 20% have not made a decision yet (Blanco, 2020)." Concomitantly, many suburban and rural districts announced opening plans with more prominent in-person or hybrid in-person/remote plans. Beyond urban and suburban lines, the numbers were even more stark across racial lines within districts. Offering a choice of in-person schooling later in the

school year, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that fewer than 20% of families chose in-person school. Moreover, "When CPS offered the choice to return to schools to families in the first two waves, 67% of white students opted in, followed by 55% of multiracial students, 34% of Black students, 33% of Asian students and 31% of Latino students" (Leone, 2021). This pattern emerged in cities across the U.S.

Responding to Pandemic School Closure With Choice in Connecticut

By mid-summer 2020, state and district leaders in states such as Connecticut began to consider reopening schools on an in-person basis. Organizational bureaucrats and some elected officials reframed schools as organizations that are crucial to economic development along with academic and social goals. For example, the Connecticut governor stated, "I wanted to make sure we had a class day and a class week that was something that employers can bank upon for their employees, so they knew what the schedule would be" (Rabe Thomas, 2020). In sum, in-person schooling would have been associated with childcare for families to work and a financial gain for employers.

Following this choice logic, the State of Connecticut offered a number of resources for implementing family choices of either in-person or remote learning. In guidance entitled *Advance, Adapt, Achieve: Connecticut's Plan to Learn and Grow Together,* key goals are safety and access, in-person schooling, equity, access, support, and two-way communication with families. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CT SDE) also suggested that districts offer in-person school or an option of "temporarily choosing not to participate" (p. 6). CT SDE guidance to districts for in-person schooling suggested following and monitoring CDC rules that may change, educating children on how COVID-19 is spread, practicing social distance rules and protocols, using clear procedures for being in schools such as washing hands, and requiring facial guards and masks to prevent viral spread (CT SDE, 2020).

In addition to guidance on safety rules and practices provided by the CT SDE, the legislature and governor provided a range of resources to public schools. The State and private donors facilitated the delivery of 141,000 student laptops/devices for remote learning (Office of Governor Lamont, 2020). Further, the State of Connecticut and the federal government offered additional funds for public and private school districts to operate as they decided—in-person, remote, or hybrid—during the 2020–21 school year (Reck, 2021). The CT SDE focused its approach to equity on written guidance, laptop computers, and additional funding to school districts while allowing, at least on paper, various schooling options. Equity among choices of in-person or remote schooling allowed various approaches while implicitly acknowledging a difference in resources as the "community and school building's unique circumstances" (CT SDE, 2020, p. 4).

Conceptual Framework: School Choice With(out) Equity

This study applies the concept of choice with(out) equity to examine family decisions to return their children to public schools in person during a global pandemic. As Scott and Stuart Wells (2013) note, school choice policies can advance "the democratic goal of greater educational equity" if they are "conceptualized and constructed in a manner that acknowledges the structural inequality within which public schools exist today and if they include sensible and powerful provisions to counteract its effects" (p. 126). In other words, educational policies such as school choice must also address and counteract other structural inequalities enmeshed in schools and their social context. Otherwise, policies such as school choice of different buildings can exacerbate existing inequalities inside and outside of schools. In particular, equity concerns can relate to insufficient funding, human and physical resources, and support for learning in classrooms and schools (e.g., language access, special education resources, and staffing; Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013). In addition, out-of-school conditions that can

undermine equitable education may include inadequate information and transportation, depleted or unstable housing, family work status, and lack of medical care. Just offering the choice of a school (e.g., voucher, charter, magnet) without addressing with equity the issues that children and families may face within and outside of school amounts to "choice without equity" (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013). New forms of school choice during the pandemic may have complicated family experiences in places with existing school choice and equity concerns.

This revised version of the choice of in-person or remote schooling raised the questions of whether there was family choice with or without equity built into policy implementation. As previously stated, an equitable choice for in-person school might mean sufficient face coverings, small class sizes for social distance, and other physical safety measures such as effective ventilation, mass COVID-19 testing, vaccinations for adults (not available until early 2021), and other support for children's learning and well-being (Gurdasani et al., 2021). Relatedly, an equitable remote choice might mean that children have access to technology, added instructional support in the curriculum, and work/childcare support (external) for parents that choose this option. The choice between in-person and online schooling was not equity in and of itself (Foley, 2020). In the choice of in-person or online school, choice with equity would mean sufficient provisions to access either option in this particular moment. Asking families about their choice not only shows their priorities behind decisions but also what efforts, policies, and resources toward equity that districts offered.

Methods

This exploratory study focuses on family decisions about whether to return their children to in-person or remote schooling in Hartford, Connecticut. In Hartford, families must choose the schools which they want their children to attend. In addition to the choice of enrollment in "traditional" schools for Hartford Public Schools, choice also happens through a variety of regional interdistrict magnet schools, charter schools, and cross-district choice programs that are largely the result of the *Sheff v. O'Neill* (1996) desegregation case and response that featured school choice programs as a remedy (Green, 1999; Cobb, 2011). If families do not choose a school in the official regional lottery process, then they are placed by the Hartford district in whatever space is still available in a non-lottery school. In addition, many lottery-based Hartford-area schools (i.e., interdistrict magnet schools) now actively work to attract a racially diverse group of students (Debs, 2019). In past years, reduced isolation meant any Asian or White students that were not Black/African American or "any part Hispanic" (Sheff v. O'Neill, 2013, p. 5). Thus, many families in Hartford are familiar to some degree with school choice.

Like in other cities, many Hartford families have also experienced permanent school closures in the past. In 2007, Hartford Public Schools became an all-choice district that featured school closures for accountability and the creation of new school forms and themes. As Pappano (2010) notes in her study of school turnaround policies, "The theme of closure, redesign, and restart is a familiar cycle in Hartford" (p. 27). However, permanent school closures have been contested over the last decade, and the academic results of turnaround reforms are mixed at best, as achievement results coincided with the exclusion of students with disabilities (Cotto, 2016). In Hartford, permanent school closure and choice are interconnected policies.

Data Collection: Online Survey With Quantitative and Qualitative Responses

This study is based on online survey responses from families with children in schools in Hartford about their decision to return to in-person school. We conducted an online survey to reveal the basis for family decisions to return to in-person school or the alternative of remote schooling. The survey provided families with the option to read question text and respond in English or Spanish. Specifically,

the survey asked participants to answer the question "Will you be sending your child back to school for in-person learning, if available, for the first day of the fall 2020–21 semester?" This question resembled local districts' survey questions about return (Hartford Public Schools, 2020). Like those surveys, families could respond either "yes" or "no." Thus, this qualitative response of either "yes" or "no" could also be interpreted as a binary numerical response (no = 0, yes = 1). By focusing on decision to return to in-person school, the survey invited a purposeful sample of families to analyze one part of reopening implementation.

In addition, the survey offered participants a series of quantitative and qualitative questions to describe themselves and their children. The survey also asked key questions about family experiences at school before and during the pandemic in already complex choice environments (e.g., charter, cross-district, magnets, traditional). To situate family choices, the survey first asked families, "How would you describe your experience with your child's online learning when schools closed from March to June 2020? Please explain." In addition to questions created by the authors and revised from other surveys, this survey included three sets of questions about family demographics, children's needs in schools, and family ratings of their school experiences (Ewall-Wice, 2020; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2020). Because of safety restrictions on in-person activities, the authors distributed the survey only online from August 10 to 19, 2020. The authors also shared the survey link on social media group pages and local news sites (León, 2020). Families participated voluntarily with no compensation.

Data Analysis

To analyze the survey data, we used a convergent mixed-methods approach that began with quantitative data as a way to situate the prioritized qualitative data (quantitative → qualitative). Matching this approach, the quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time in the survey. Next, the two types of data were analyzed separately and compared to determine if "findings confirm[ed] or disconfirm[ed] each other" (Creswell, 2014, p. 219). This approach was fruitful since the survey collected both quantitative and qualitative information with the same group of people rather than connecting two separate sets of data with potentially overlapping or different samples (Kirshner et al., 2010; Patel et al., 2016).

The analysis first calculated descriptive statistics on family demographics (e.g., race, work status, town of residence). In the RStudio program, we then identified correlations between family variables and the dependent variable of the decision to return to school in person (binary: no = 0, yes = 1). Drawing on past studies of decisions to return to schools after permanent closure, key variables included family demographics of race and full-time work status, children's needs in schools such as bussing, service needs, multiple children in school, and lottery-based placement (de la Torre et al., 2015, pp. 44-47). Several of these key demographic variables were converted to binary measures (e.g., full-time work = 1, not full-time work = 0; child takes bus = 1, no bus = 0). In addition, variables also included family ratings of a) their school experience in the year of 2019–20, b) their experience with the shift to remote learning when COVID-19 closed in-person schooling in spring 2020, and c) their concern for health safety in the possible return to in-person schooling in fall 2020. The family ratings on these variables were reported on scales of 0.00–10.00.

Next, we used deductive coding to analyze the open-ended, qualitative responses about returning to school in person. In particular, this analysis examines family responses to the two written questions: 1) What was their experience with temporary in-person school closure with the transition to remote school in spring 2020? and 2) Why did parents decide to return to in-person school or not? Using NVivo software, the responses to these two questions were coded or "chunked" into similar categories (Bhattacharya, 2017). These codes were clustered into categories within or outside of the "choice with(out) equity" framework (Bhattacharya, 2017, pp. 150-151; Horsford et al., 2019). Using the quantitative data analysis as an initial step, the qualitative analysis was then compared and contrasted

to the descriptive statistical analysis in order to develop a "more complete picture" and establish "convergence" or "divergence" between the types of data (Grbich, 2013, p. 29; Creswell, 2014). As a final step, any areas of divergence were addressed by returning to the data to propose possible explanations and needs for further inquiry in either the quantitative or qualitative data (Creswell, 2014, p. 223).

Findings

Quantitative Analysis

A majority of survey participants identified as female. Out of 320 clicks on the survey, 152 completed 100% of the survey, and three participants completed more than 80%. Therefore, the final sample includes 155 responses. Among this group, 137, or 88%, of participants identified as female. Only 13 participants, or 8%, identified as male, and four participants also identified "in another way" or with non-binary gender identity. As André-Bechaly (2005) notes about choice of school programs in the past, "The work involved in choosing schools only adds to the women's work that mothers already do on behalf of their children's education" (p.10). Like past scholarship on choice of particular schools and programs, this study mostly includes female family members, who reported on their decisions about forms of schooling in the process of reopening of buildings for fall 2020.

In terms of racial identification, this sample of participant families resembled the region rather than only the city of Hartford's composition of students. First, nearly two-thirds of participants responded as Hartford (city proper) residents. Among these survey participants, 70 (45%) parents identified as White, 56 (36%) as Hispanic/Latino, 17 (11%) as Black, and 12 (8%) as Two or More Races. Several Asian families completed the survey, but their children were among the dozen participants that attended school outside of Hartford in other towns not in the inquiry. Therefore, roughly half the participants identified as either Latino, Black, Two or More Races, and another half identified as White. In comparison, Hartford Public Schools alone had 54.4% Latino, 29.4% Black or African American, 9.2% White, and 4.4% Asian students in 2019–20 (CT SDE, 2021). And *all* of the Hartford region's public school districts and public-private charter school districts had student racial demographics of 47.6% White, 26.4% Latino, 14.3% Black, and 7.4% Asian students. Thus, the sample of participants in this survey resembles the Hartford *region's* student demographics, but not the *city* school district alone.[1]

The majority of families responding to this survey chose "no" in response to the question of whether they would return to in-person school. There were 89 out of 155 families that responded "no" to returning to in-person schooling, or 57%. And there were 66 families that selected "yes" to returning to in-person schooling, or 43%. Nearly 70% (69.7%) of all participants identified as having full-time work. Importantly, the survey rate of choice to return in person resembled the early reported rate of families that selected in-person schooling in Hartford (Blanco, 2020). According to Hartford Public Schools, by August 3, 2020, the district "received over 12,000 responses from across the district with 42% choosing to return in-person and 58% choosing to continue with online learning" (Hartford Public Schools, 2020). The overlapping regional district that operates magnet schools, Capitol Region Education Council, had 42% of students select remote/online schooling (Capitol Region Education Council, 2020). However, school decisions varied across demographics, student needs, and family experiences.

Using the RStudio program, descriptive statistical correlations were conducted. Several correlations between the choice of in-person school (or not) and independent variables offer

[1] *Appendix A* offers descriptive statistics of the survey participants.

important insight. As shown in Table 1, many independent variables were not closely related ($r < .1$) to the selection of in-person schooling. However, several variables had minor to moderate relations ($r < .3$) and were statistically significant correlations. Independent variables of full-time work status, choice school enrollment, and last year's school rating were positively and significantly correlated with in-person school selection (i.e., "yes"). On the other hand, independent variables of person-of-color identification, multiple district enrollment, and concern for health in returning in person were negatively and significantly correlated with in-person school selection. These statistically significant correlations do not explain the cause of why families selected in-person school. But they suggest various connections between family status (e.g., full-time work, racial identification), concerns about returning to in-person schooling, and the context of Hartford's existing school choice environment (e.g., bus transportation, multiple school districts, lottery-based school).

Of particular note were the differences of choice to return between all racial groups. As a whole group, all participants identifying as people of color—Black, Latino, and Two or More Races—more often selected "no" to returning to in-person school. While slightly more families identifying as White selected "yes" to in-person schooling (yes = 36, no = 34), people of color mostly selected "no" to in-person schooling (yes = 30, no =55). However, when viewed as distinct racial groups, Black families stood out as having selected "no" to in-person schooling, or 14 out of 17 (yes = 3, no = 14). Correlations by each group show this distinction. At a particular level ($p < .05$), Black families were negatively and significantly correlated to in-person school selection ($r = -0.174$, $p < .05$) and White families were positively and significantly correlated to in-person school selection ($r = 0.162$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, Latino ($r = -0.022$) and Two or More Race families ($r = -0.054$) numerically selected "no" to in-person schooling but were not statistically significantly correlated to selecting this option. In sum, Black and White families were numerically on opposite ends of this choice spectrum, while Latino and Two or More Race families were numerically in between these groups.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Major Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. In-Person school choice	-									
2. Race - Person of Color	-0.16*	-								
3. Full-time work	0.22**	0	-							
4. Bus transportation	0.01	0.08	0.3**	-						
5. Education service need	0.09	0.09	-0.04	0.12	-					
6. Multiple district enrollment	-0.13†	0.11	0.1	0.29**	0.02	-				
7. Choice school (lottery-based)	0.17*	-0.2*	0.23**	-0.06	-0.12	-0.17*	-			
8. Last school year rating	0.23**	-0.15†	0.13	-0.08	-0.15†	-0.14†	0.13†	-		
9. Transition to online rating	-0.07	-0.03	0.1	0.04	-0.03	-0.05	-0.09	0.6**	-	
10. Concern health return in-person rating	-0.38**	0.23**	-0.07	0.05	0.02	-0.02	0	-0.14†	-0.02	-
M (Mean)	0.43	0.55	0.70	0.36	0.45	0.11	0.83	7.46	5.71	8.55
SD (Standard Deviation)	0.50	0.50	0.46	0.48	0.50	0.31	0.37	2.31	2.63	2.26

† $p < .10.$, * $p < .05.$, ** $p < .01$

Qualitative Analysis

Challenges and Successes With Remote Learning in Spring 2020

Families described their experience with the temporary closure of in-person schools as challenging in spring 2020. Many parents directly responded with the words "challenge" or "challenging" during this period. In practice, families across the several Hartford districts in this study went to some form of remote or online learning as schools across the state and country temporarily closed. For example, one Latino parent wrote, "It was challenging at first as expected but it worked given the circumstances." Another family noted, "Somewhat chaotic in the beginning, and challenging,

as it was for most parents." Challenges varied with key themes, including support for children's learning in remote schooling and balancing family needs.

Support to Learn

Among these challenges in spring 2020, families expressed new responsibilities to quickly move to support remote learning during these sudden in-person school building closures. For example, one White family critiqued remote learning by sharing that "[they] have a really academically motivated child, and he really just wasn't engaged in learning completely from apps/programs. *[Online program name removed]* was a daily struggle, not because he couldn't do it, but he was so disinterested." Families also gave brief descriptions about temporary in-person school closure and remote learning, such as "super hard" and "difficult. Unstructured." Similarly, one Black parent wrote about remote learning during in-person closure, "It was disorganized and not much was expected from my children, academically." And one Latino parent wrote, "A little frustrated was [*sic*] difficult to deal with my son." These challenges with emergency remote learning were associated with both learning and families' day-to-day lives.

Many families also noted that their children did make learning progress during remote schooling in spring 2020. These positive experiences were noted across racial groups. For example, one Black family noted that remote schooling was "safe and effective." In addition, another Black family noted, "Online learning worked well for us. She got better grades than normal. I believe it's because there were fewer distractions at home." A few Latino families noted the temporary in-person closures and remote schooling as "good," "very good," and "was ok." Another family noted, "He learned. Not as much as if he was in school but he did learn and we were all safe." Many families tolerated the emergency nature of this remote schooling.

Many other families and children struggled with remote schooling during temporary in-person school closures. Within these struggles was the issue of remote learning itself, particularly in the areas of engagement, communication with teachers/schools, structure of lessons, and learning. One Black family noted about their child's experience, "Very hard for her. She needed hands on." Related to this critique of remote schooling, one White family noted, "The *[Product Name Removed]* classroom setup was poorly designed. The curriculum products (online learning) offered by *[District Name Removed]* did not allow for differentiated learning and were not appropriate for my child. There was very little interactivity." In terms of learning, one Black family also wrote, "My oldest child barely made contact with teachers at all. She was overwhelmed with the work and didn't receive much help. Some days, she didn't even log on." One Latino parent described the closure and remote school experience as "*fatal. Nadie sabía nada de nada.*"[2] Families had a wide variety of experiences with remote schooling.

Special Needs

Many families struggled with remote school because their children with special needs shared particularly difficult situations in this form of schooling. These needs included support for emerging bilingual children (e.g., "English Learners") and children with disabilities with a formal Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 designation. For example, one Latino family noted, "*Muy distraído, no hacía sus tareas. No le ofrecieron ninguna alternativa basada en su 504. Le fue mal.*"[3] This quote illustrates how this family's child had a negative experience that was very distracting from their schoolwork, and that an alternative to the remote schooling program which reflected their 504 plan was not provided. Even when these families had support to some degree, many had very difficult situations with the district in

[2] *Author translation: Awful. Nobody knew anything about anything.*

[3] *Author translation: "Very distracted, they didn't do their homework. They didn't offer any alternative based on the 504. They did poorly. "*

meeting their children's learning needs through remote learning. Another Latino family wrote this about their child on one of the more substantive responses:

> His teacher never contacted him via video chats & never provided any lesson plans. She would just post assignments to be completed. My son has a developmental delay & an IEP. He continued receiving his supports once per week via video (tele health) for speech therapy & social worker [*sic*]. There were days he cried from frustration since not even I would understand some assignments.

This family's response about remote schooling was among a handful of frustrating and emotionally difficult experiences, particularly for children with needs for special services (i.e., IEP, 504, bilingual education). As one White family also noted about remote schooling, "It was awful because he has autism and was out of routine. He wouldn't do the work without meltdown or go on *[Product Name Removed]* calls." Without typical support from educators on an in-person basis, a number of students with special needs were in tears, struggling with staying connected to their learning, or in need of typically required additional support.

Choosing "Yes" To In-Person School For Full-Time Work and Child Learning Needs

For many families that selected "yes" to in-person school, key needs included childcare for full-time, in-person work and support to learn for their children. Unlike families that might have been able to continue work remotely, these families often explained their choice as a need to go *back* to work. Only a few explicitly explained this choice as a need for *physical* return, but staying in the house with their children was not possible any longer. Related to returning to full-time work on an in-person basis were childcare needs. Often mixed with these needs was learning support for children that was sometimes related to the limits of remote learning.

Full-Time, In-Person Work

The family choice of in-person school was based often on full-time work status but particularly on an in-person basis. Among the group of parents that selected in-person school, this group most often made their decisions along a theme of family needs, particularly the issue of full-time work on an in-person basis. Within these family needs were a mix of codes about childcare needed for families to physically go back to full-time work. For example, one Latino parent wrote, "I need to go back to work. Financially I have to go back. I can't afford to stay home with them." Indeed, many parents questioned the idea that it was a "choice" to return to in-person school. One Latino wrote, "I have no choice is [*sic*] either send my child to school or loose [*sic*] my employment. My job will not accommodate me working for from home to have my child take online learning." Like this Latino parent, many families that chose in-person learning did not always feel they had a choice because their need to work and have childcare steered their decision.

Some concerns about returning to in-person schooling also meant difficulty supporting remote learning. As one White male wrote, "I wouldn't know how to support online learning and still earn a paycheck. I used up most of my time off in the spring." Similarly, one Latino parent wrote, "My children were failing at online learning [*sic*] high honors at school with guidance. I work so much and don't feel like I can be of much assistance." Families suggested combined reasons, such as the need for educational support, struggles with remote school, and family members needing to work, related to decisions to return.

Support to Learn

In addition to the need for childcare to perform their own full-time work, many families selected in-person schooling because of the theme of a need for learning support for their children. Key issues within this theme were family ideas of in-person school being "better," offering more teacher support

for learning, and their child's relationship with other children and adults in school. As one Latino family put it clearly, they chose in-person school for their children "*para aprender mas*."[4] And as one White parent wrote, "Virtual learning did not work for my family because my son needs extra help with reading and sees a social worker. He has anxiety and trouble focusing." Particularly noticeable in White families' responses were also noted concerns about their children's development and the idea of "falling behind." Like the group of families concerned about childcare and work, some parents who elevated their child's learning also infused concerns about work and childcare. This suggests that parent responses elevated primary concerns while potentially also reflecting related concerns. For some, families wanted their child to learn but also felt "forced to choose in person."

Many Latino families offered similar concerns about learning in school but in relational, not entirely service-needs terms. As one Latino parent wrote, "I believe kids should be able to have in person clases [*sic*] and the right person to teach them [*sic*] too many distractions at home." Another Latino parent wrote, "He really wanted to go back to school to be taught by his teachers and not a random virtual teacher." And another Latino parent wrote:

> My son is too little and can't read yet and therefore he needs someone to be with him at all times to guide him through, and he is reluctant to do so at home. Whereas when he is in school he loves school and learning and engages easily and willingly with his teacher.

White and Latino respondents shared concern about learning but understood it in subtly different ways. Rather than school meeting only a work or educational service-oriented need, Latino children thrived on the connected and relational aspects of schooling in a particular social context (Irizarry et al., 2014). These Latino families suggested that remote school made it difficult for their children to feel connected to peers and cared for by teachers in particular ways that supported learning and growth (Rolón-Dow, 2005; Antrop-González & DeJesus, 2006).

Choosing "No" to In-Person School for Child and Family Safety Concerns

Families choosing "no" to in-person schooling centered their decisions on issues of safety from COVID-19. Nearly half of all families in the survey selected "no" to in-person schooling with the theme of health safety as key to their decision. Out of the entire group of respondents that selected "no" to in-person school, a vast majority of this group cited the theme of safety during the pandemic in their decision. Many families used the exact words "safe" or "safety" within their responses. For example, a Latino parent wrote, "I do not feel my children would be safe from contracting Covid-19." Similarly, one White male family member wrote, "To keep him as safe as possible we decided to keep him home." Safety concerns were judgments about broader systemic responses to the pandemic, not just about individual educators or schools.

Like these families, several others also cited the physical conditions of school buildings and the possibility of exposure to COVID-19. Families knew their schools and where exposure to COVID-19 could occur. For example, a Latino family wrote:

> …school buildings are not any safer now simply because everyone is asked to wear a mask, *[school district name removed]* buildings are old with poor ventilation, not many windows, high class sizes etc. social distancing "when possible" does not make me feel confident in sending my child to school.

These calculations were important because many newspaper articles suggested a lack of trust from families, particularly Black and Latino, to return to in-person schools during the pandemic (Harris, 2020; Shapiro, et al., 2021). However, the decisions were not made only on trust but on direct knowledge of school buildings and understanding of how their schools would operate in pandemic

[4] Author translation: "to learn more."

conditions. In this study, families of color, particularly Black families, were disproportionately among the group selecting "no" to in-person school. These responses were clear that safety from COVID-19 drove their decisions to keep children home with some form of remote school even if that was not the preferred mode.

This theme of health safety extended beyond children at school to the scope of the whole family's health. In addition to safety, many families specifically discussed the health concerns of their children and other siblings, grandparents, and family members living in the same household. In particular, many respondents discussed their families' existing asthma and immune complications as key health issues in their decisions to keep children at home. As one Latino family wrote, "At home we are immunocompromised so we did it out of abundance of caution and for the health of the family." Similarly, one Black family responded, "My child will not be returning to in person learning because I feel that it is still not safe and if they were to get sick then a [*sic*] can make me extremely sick as well as other people in the home." As such, safety was not merely about individual safety or academic performance. Rather, safety for many families across racial groups was about mutual health for their children *and* family.

More often than every other group, Black families in this survey selected not to return to in-person school in fall 2020. In total, 14 out of 17, or 82%, Black participants selected "no" to in-person school for fall 2020. Nine of the 14 families specifically talked about safety as their primary concern. In particular, these families noted the context of limited plans from schools and districts along lines of safety. Like many Black families, one parent wrote that her child's district "doesn't have much of a plan to protect our children from spread of the virus." Another Black parent wrote, "My children will engage in distance learning to start because I don't feel the school is equipped to safely operate with the plan they've presented." In response to lack of safety plans, one Black parent noted she was "not risking anything" because schools "were barely clean before COVID-19." In her final analysis, she believed that "[her] kids [would] be missing out on a few things but it [was] for the best."

In this survey, Black families were the most consistent in explaining their concerns about health safety, risk, and the lives of their children and family. Only one White and one Black family noted direct family death from COVID-19. Despite that small number, Black families in this survey were the most direct about their families' lives. As one Black male parent noted, "I want my children to stay alive." In addition, several Black parents with full-time jobs *and* children with disabilities chose the safety of their children first through remote online school over in-person school. For a few Black families, online schooling could provide safety *and* more focused learning that in-person school had limited in the past. While there was no stated connection between past school closures that had severely impacted Black and Latino families, these Black families contested in-person schooling in language as sharp as opposition to past permanent school closures in Hartford and other cities.

Finally, a few families made choices about their own as well as other families' safety. For example, some families with particular resources, such as less immediate need for in-person school and out-of-house work, made their remote/online choice for the safety of their children and support for others. One Latino parent with full-time work wrote:

> We have all the resources available for my son to stay home and attend online learning. I feel like one less child in class for those children who don't have the resources available and have no choice but to attend in person school is beneficial for all. One less child one less potential exposure.

With the resources available for remote schooling even with full-time work, this parent and other families explicitly chose remote schooling as a way to help other people's children by creating smaller school sizes (i.e., safety).

Convergence and Divergence

When comparing qualitative and quantitative findings, there was convergence along key areas of making these choices for types of schooling. First, there was convergence of families' explanations of full-time work pushing the need to return to in-person schooling along with quantitative data. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between full-time work status and the selection of "yes" to in-person schooling ($r = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). While the correlation is not causal, families explained their decisions to return to in-person schooling as often connected to their need to return to full-time work and need for support for their children to learn. Many families also explained their need to return to full-time work in person as a key issue. In addition, many of these families explained their children's needs for support to learn in the classroom. As these families noted, remote schooling often struggled to support the needs of their children and families.

Second, there was convergence between family concern of healthy safety from COVID-19 and choosing "no" to in-person schooling. In terms of quantitative data, there was a significant negative correlation between selecting in-person schooling and families' scores on the question of concern about health safety in their possible return ($r = -0.38$, $p < 0.01$). While the correlation is not causal, families selecting "no" to in-person schooling also explained a set of health concerns for their children and families. Many families also noted the limitations of remote schooling in supporting their child's schooling. But families selecting "no" to in-person schooling also explained that schools lacked safety precautions from COVID-19 to satisfy their concerns that remote schooling could offer them. Although the majority of families of color explained this concern of returning to in-person learning, the qualitative concern was most noted by Black families that numerically selected "no" to in-person schooling more than any other racial group in this study (no = 14, yes = 3).

There was some divergence in the qualitative and quantitative data. In terms of special services (i.e. Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 plan, Bilingual Education / English Language (EL) services), there was no significant correlation with the selection of in-person schooling. However, many families explained key concerns of special services related to IEPs and 504 plans in the qualitative responses explaining their decision to return or not. Second, there was a strong qualitative concern with online remote learning during the spring 2020 session connected to decisions to return to in-person schooling in fall 2020; but the concern of remote learning in spring 2020 was not strongly correlated to decisions to return in person. These factors may be worth exploring in combination with each other and controlling for variables in a more advanced statistical model (e.g., logistic regression).

Conclusion

In many cities, a response to temporary school closures during COVID-19 was the offer to families of a new form of schooling choice with partial, not full, equity. Both quantitative and qualitative responses converged to show that families choosing "yes" to in-person schooling explained their need for childcare to assist with their full-time, often in-person work. Rather than full equity in their choices, these families viewed in-person schooling as the only method that would provide their children with the education they needed. For these families, remote schooling did not offer the childcare they needed to continue full-time work or the support for learning their children needed. On the other hand, both qualitative and quantitative responses converged to show that families choosing "no" to in-person schooling explained their concern about safety from COVID-19. Rather than full equity in their choice, this remote schooling choice provided their children and families with health safety but also many limits on educational interaction with other children, educators, and other aspects of school buildings. For these families, the choice of in-person schooling did not offer the safety these families needed.

Rather than fully equitable policies related to the choice of either in-person or remote schooling, families faced a set of programmatic and space choices that addressed one but not all of their family needs during COVID-19 (Frankenberg et al., 2010; Scott & Stuart Wells, 2013; Horsford et al., 2019). As this study suggests, decisions for in-person schooling often related to levels of employment. In addition, decisions for remote schooling, or "no" to in-person learning, were based on safety considerations. Those choices helped reduce in-person school building enrollment and class size in a way that potentially benefitted families with full-time in-person work and provided their children with access to potentially safer school buildings. Families that selected remote schooling—a majority of families in Hartford and other cities—arguably made in-person school possible by reducing enrollment in school buildings. While families concerned about safety chose online classes and computers, families that selected in-person school received smaller school environments that provided in-person instruction and childcare.

Schooling choices during the pandemic that offered partial equity also raised questions in terms of racial inequality. As Ishimaru (2020) notes, equitable collaboration between schools and families "begins from the premise that non-dominant families (which includes young people themselves, their caregivers, and extended relations) represent a largely untapped source of expertise and leadership for achievement of educational equity and justice" (p.4). Yet the reapplication of past school choice language and offering different forms of schooling raises questions. As a powerful educational policy, or "schema" in Ray's (2019) sociological terms, applying the old idea of school choice to the new problem of pandemic school closures might satisfy a variety of needs among different actors, such as state and district leaders, businesses, families, and other actors in the education sphere. However, such a reapplication of school choice to return in person or remotely may also reproduce racial inequality (Ray, 2019). In Hartford and other cities, a sizeable number of Black and Latino families selected remote learning in ways that helped provide other city residents with safer in-person schooling.

In sum, families' explanations of their choices and their consequences should be further examined. With a sample of participants in a study of a new issue, there were also unexpected limitations that can be further explored. A small number of families with multiple children chose "yes" to in-person in the quantitative response but sent only one or two children to in-person school and kept another child home for remote schooling. While this was only a small number of families, this issue suggests the need for deeper statistical analysis. Thus, future research should account for the ways that families negotiated choice for multiple children. The next questions for study may also include how families experienced and evaluated their choice during the school year. Choices during the school year may have shifted as family conditions and context changed.

Next steps must go beyond concepts of choice with partial equity and community engagement toward equitable education now and after the pandemic. In light of this, leaders and teachers should plan now to work with families toward creating a safe, well-resourced, and rich educational experience for a potentially long transition. This transition will likely include returning to in-person schooling and some continuation of remote learning for a period of time. Any expansion of in-person schooling must include specific and concrete steps, including, but not limited to, continued physical spacing, building updates, safety equipment, vaccinations (only available to children over 12 years old as of this writing), and wide COVID-19 testing.

In addition, schools must concretely explain how their school practices will address past and present inequities in how children of color are treated by schools. Educational leaders may also be wise to review existing guides that suggest racial equity, cultural responsiveness, and humanizing approaches with families to devise new community-centered plans for school return (Kirkland, 2021). In this study, many Black and Latino families suggested that remote schooling was the safest choice during the pandemic and foreseeable future. The next steps must include safe physical spaces and education that addresses past and present issues of racial inequity.

Appendix A: Family Demographics, Child Access Needs, & School Ratings

Return to In-Person School	No (n = 89)	Yes (n = 66)	Total (n = 155)
Family Demographics			
Racial Identification			
Black	14 (15.7%)	3 (4.5%)	17 (11.0%)
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	33 (37.1%)	23 (34.8%)	56 (36.1%)
Two or More Races	8 (9.0%)	4 (6.1%)	12 (7.7%)
White	34 (38.2%)	36 (54.5%)	70 (45.2%
Gender Identification*			
Female	79 (88.8%)	58 (89.2%)	137 (89.0%)
In another way...	3 (3.4%)	1 (1.5%)	4 (2.6%)
Male	7 (7.9%)	6 (9.2%)	13 (8.4%)
Residence			
Hartford Resident	59 (66.3%)	38 (57.6%)	97 (62.6%)
Not Hartford Resident	30 (33.7%)	28 (42.4%)	58 (37.4%)
Work Status			
Full Time	54 (60.7%)	54 (81.8%)	108 (69.7%)
No Full Time work	35 (39.3%)	12 (18.2%)	47 (30.3%)
Child Access Needs			
Type of School			
Lottery-based enrollment	69 (77.5%)	60 (90.9%)	129 (83.2%)
No Lottery-based enrollment	20 (22.5%)	6 (9.1%)	26 (16.8%)
Children in Single/Multiple Districts			
Single District	76 (85.4%)	62 (93.9%)	138 (89%)
Multiple Districts	13 (14.6%)	4 (6.1%)	17 (11.0%)
Elementary Level Child			
Elementary	61 (68.5%)	50 (75.8%)	111 (71.6%)
No Elementary	28 (31.5%)	16 (24.2%)	44 (28.4%)
Service Needs			
Service Need (IEP, 504, Bilingual)	36 (40.4%)	33 (50.0%)	69 (44.5%)
No Service Need	53 (59.6%)	33 (50.0%)	86 (55.5%)
Transportation Need (bus)*			
Bus	32 (36.0%)	24 (36.9%)	56 (36.4%)
No bus	57 (64.0%)	41 (63.1%)	98 (63.6%)
School Ratings (0-10 scale)			
Last Year School Rating ('19-20)	7.0	8.1	7.5
Remote Learning Rating Spring '21	5.9	5.5	5.7
Concern Health with Return to In-Person Fall '21	9.3	7.6	8.6

**One family did not respond to this question*

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Article

Why We Gather: Educational Empowerment and Academic Success Through Collective Black Parental Agency

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Raquel M. Rall
University of California, Riverside

Abstract
Though previous literature has explored the importance of parents in education, scholarship has failed to empirically demonstrate the influence voluntary parent *groups* have on the educational trajectory of Black students. Using institutional agency and community cultural wealth frameworks, the author qualitatively evaluates a Black parent group's self-initiated efforts to influence the academic outcomes of high-achieving students. The author illustrates how one parent organization negotiates an environment in which their racial group comprises less than 5% of the population to effectively guide and support families as their students navigate academic success. Findings show that at least three critical components— accountability, alliances and networks, and legitimacy—are vital in the provision of collaborative support and agency on behalf of high-achieving students.

Keywords*:* high-achieving Black students, institutional agents, community cultural wealth, Black parents, community organization

"Human education is not simply a matter of schools; it is much more a matter of family and group life—the training of one's home, of one's daily companions, of one's social class."

-W.E.B. DuBois, 1903

Historically, the literature has suggested that Black families tend to not be involved in their children's schooling due to cultural dissonance between the family and school practitioners (Brown-Wright & Tyler, 2010; Irvine, 1990; Jeynes, 2007; Turney & Kao, 2009). Furthermore, if these families do participate in school life, the academic effects and extent of their involvement are thought to be unequal to those seen among other racial/ethnic groups (Bauch & Goldring, 1995; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). However, while past deficit-based scholarship has perpetuated the disproportionate focus on the underachievement of Black students, negative portrayal of Black families, and

Corresponding Author:
Raquel M. Rall, Assistant Professor, University of California, Riverside, 900 University Ave. Riverside, CA, 92521, USA.
Email: raquel.rall@ucr.edu

noninvolvement of Black parents (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Houston et al., 2020; Kim & Hargrove, 2013), a growing list of scholars acknowledges the present and historical causes of the disparity in how deficit-based scholarship evaluates Black and white involvement in schooling (Warikoo & Carter, 2009) and instead focuses on those students who do achieve in academics (Delpit, 2012; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Griffin, 2006; Hampton, 2016; Strayhorn, 2009; Strmic-Pawl & Leffler, 2011) and Black parents who are intentionally engaged in their children's education (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021; Rollock et al., 2015; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

The focus on high-achieving Black students (Griffin & Perez, 2013; Freeman, 1999; Fries-Britt, 2002; Marsh et al., 2012; McGee & Pearman, 2015) is important as the literature often implies that Black students who achieve success from within predominantly white communities are rarities or have had to ascribe to certain oppositional identities (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1987; Ogbu, 2004). Though the literature addressing the characteristics of high-achieving Black students is growing (Fries-Britt, 2017), more scholarship on such students is needed (McGee & Pearman, 2015; Strayhorn, 2009).

Two notions are clear regarding Black student success from the literature: supportive families are necessary for school achievement, and effective community-based strategies that support and enhance academic success can help prevent school failure (Slaugther-Defoe, 1991). Two issues warrant further investigation in the literature concerning Black parental involvement in education. First, there is minimal information about the specifics of how and why Black *parent groups* choose to support their children in racially inhospitable schooling environments. Second, the research on the influence of *collective* Black parental involvement in children's education is lacking. Group action, collective leadership, and group organization are important means for facilitating Black parental involvement in children's education (Rall & Holman, forthcoming), but parental involvement has yet to be framed from the collective perspective. This study therefore investigates the collective vantage point, shared experiences, and unique cultural aspects of Black parental involvement in education.

Various empirical studies highlight the role of activism and parental involvement in education (Durand, 2011; Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016; Young et al., 2013), particularly for minority and first-generation students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). However, few emphasize the necessary, unique, sustained, and successful role that Black parents and the Black community can play in the educational attainment of their students (Brandon, 2007; Cooper, 2009; Jayakumar et al., 2013), let alone discuss how Black parents come together to create and define their involvement in educational spaces. Research is lacking on how Black parent groups are formed on the initiative of parents, rather than schools, and how these groups sustain and execute their mission of ensuring their Black students achieve educational success, especially in light of prior research suggesting that Black parents often expect communication to be initiated by the school (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). It is useful to differentiate between the terms used in the literature to describe the relation between parent groups and their children's schools. "Empowerment" goes beyond the powerless "involvement" (Goldring & Shapira, 1993). Parental empowerment in education describes parents' ability to voice their concerns to the schools and demonstrate authority over their child's education (Kim & Bryan, 2017). Hence, it describes a more active and influential parental role (Warren et al., 2009). "Engagement" encompasses more than activity; it calls for a feeling of ownership of that activity (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). For this paper, parental empowerment is the ability to act on behalf of their children and the knowledge of how to do so and ensure their actions are effective. Additionally, consideration of such empowerment was not limited to the confines of school spaces in this study, as families can exert empowerment on behalf of their students within the community as well.

The research presented in this paper serves to counter the dominant depiction of failure, disappointment, and deficiency of Black students in education as well as the absent or inadequate participation of Black parents. This study highlights how Black parental agency in education can result

in positive outcomes for Black students, Black parents, and the Black community. Specifically, the aim of this study was to investigate and describe the intricacies of how a Black parent nonprofit organization shapes the development and mediates the success of the educational trajectory of high-achieving Black students in a suburban community.

This study was part of a larger study that investigated not only the role, function, and success of a Black parent organization that aims to positively and proactively impact student academic success, but also the intricacies of the formation and maintenance of such an organization. The larger study was designed to understand *what* was taking place within the parent group, *how* this group was able to enact its mission, and *why* what was happening with this group was important. In this specific paper, I endeavored to answer the following research question: How does a Black parent group, The Council of African American Parents (CAAP), empower parents and students as they navigate academic success in a highly racialized academic environment? This was important to answer because, despite an abundance of literature indicating that key personnel help students navigate academic environments and that Communities of Color (COC) possess forms of capital which are vital to their success, research describing how these two aspects can be activated is limited.

To accomplish this task, I first share my investment in, and the scholarly significance of, this topic to make a case for why new research is needed in this area. I follow this with an overview of the theoretical frameworks that inform the research. I then present critical ethnography as a methodological structure useful for engaging in praxis-based educational research and highlight the selected findings of this study that led to a model of accountability for CAAP. Finally, I describe the implications and conclusions of this work.

A Lamp to Guide my Feet: Theoretical Framework

Three bodies of literature inform the investigation of the collective role that Black parents play in their students' education—parental involvement in education, institutional agency, and community cultural wealth. Content from these sources establishes a foundation that informs how parents in this study were able to create, maintain, and extend their influence in the academic success of their children. The fusion of approaches was important because, despite the extensive use of critical race theory (CRT) and Bourdieusian frameworks in education research to offer innovative analyses of educational inequities, scholarship has yet to consider how, together, these frames might facilitate novel insights into marginalized populations (Tichavakunda, 2019). The overarching framework for these three corpuses of literature is CRT, which offers a counter to the dominant color-blind approaches in educational research (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). CRT has been used by scholars across the field of education to enhance understanding of educational inequities (Howard & Navarro, 2016). It is appropriate for this study because "African American parents often do not control the political discourse on education, nor do those at the forefront of reform actively seek out African American parents" (Martin, 2006, p. 200). It is important to consider the role that parents—Black parents, in particular—play in reform efforts (Martin, 2006). My use of CRT to explore parental involvement in education has precedent in the work of Marchand et al. (2019).

Parental Involvement in Education

Parental involvement has myriad definitions that span attitudinal components (Soto, 1989; Thompson et al., 1992), behavioral components (Stevenson & Baker, 1987), and parenting style (Dornbusch, 1991). The literature substantiates the assertion that family support positively influences student success and is influential in child development and academic achievement (Epstein, 2001, 2008; Epstein et al., 1997; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Jeynes, 2007; Park & Holloway, 2013; Sampson,

2002; Slaughter & Kuehne, 2017; Slaughter-Defoe, 1991)e. Studies often cite the importance of family structure (El Nokali et al., 2010; Heiss, 1996; Jeynes, 2005; Lee, 2018), parental education (Bush & Lawson Bush, 2010; Muller, 2018; Wilson, 2007), parenting style (Hoeve et al., 2011; Mandara, 2003; Pinquart, 2016), physical discipline (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Sangawi et al., 2015), socioeconomic status/family income (Barr, 2015; Bush & Lawson Bush, 2010; McLoyd, 1990; Quinn et al., 2016; Vincent et al., 2000), family function (Mandara, 2006), or a condensed, all-encompassing family support variable (Palmer et al., 2010) but either ignore or report mixed results about the differences inherent in Black parental involvement as compared to other ethnicities (Cooper, 2009; Fine, 1993; Reynolds, 2010, 2015; Wilson, 2019). Cooper (2009), for example, found that although Black mothers worked hard to fight and sacrifice to help their children succeed, they described this care in ways that educators did not expect. Additionally, while some research posits that Black parents participate less in their children's schooling than white parents do (Brown & Hunter, 1998; Wong & Hughes, 2006), researchers such as Tillman (2006) suggest that Black parents consider themselves as stakeholders in their children's education. Tillman used qualitative methods to capture a more comprehensive picture of the various social, economic, political, and educational factors that impact the lives of Black people.

While some researchers assert that some parents become involved because "that's what parents do" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), studies have fallen short of investigating how Black parents may be differently motivated to become involved with schools and how they may engage as a group rather than as individuals. For example, because the academic environment is racialized in schools where Black students are in a minority (O'Connor et al., 2007), Black parents may feel more inclined to participate, observe, support, or contest these school conditions as a collective. Despite negative experiences with the educational system (Pattillo, 2015), many Black parents demonstrate agency and advocacy on behalf of their children (Clark, 1984; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016). For example, Varner et al. (2018) found that students that receive affirming parental involvement experienced better academic outcomes in spite of racial discrimination (Varner et al., 2018), while Brody (2016) found that students of involved/vigilant parents had higher levels of self-regulation and school engagement and developed a positive ethnic identity.

While studies show that Black parental involvement can contribute positively to academic achievement (Arnold et al., 2008; Latunde & Clark-Louque, 2016), the data does not provide robust information regarding such involvement in education in general (e.g., why Black parents choose to become involved, how their involvement differs from the involvement of parents of other ethnicities, what goals they have for their involvement, etc.). For example, there is a deficit in the academic literature that describes, examines, and suggests strategies to maximize the involvement and community empowerment of Black families within education (Rollock et al., 2015). The data often fails to address the intentionality (actions taken by Black parents without the mandate of the school) and collective action of Black parents to help their children successfully navigate the P-20 pipeline even though research indicates the pivotal role of parents in promoting students' academic success and college matriculation (Banerjee et al., 2011; Carey, 2016). The literature on Black parental influence on their students' education presently lacks acknowledgment of agency and advocacy (Martin, 2006) as well as an understanding of how parents establish connections with school leadership (Auerbach, 2010).

Parental Agency in Education

Despite growing information on the relationship between parents and schools, the use of parental voices that allow caregivers to speak directly to their experiences with schools is just beginning to emerge (McClain, 2010; Koskela, 2021). Parental agency describes the actions and responses parents take in regard to their educational concerns about their children (Vincent, 2001). Agency is particularly important for Black parents because they are not always welcomed in their children's schools

(Marchand et al., 2019). Vincent and Martin (2002) included silence, conversation, storming, by-pass, and exit within a range of parental agency, from inaction to departure, when interacting with schools. Parents' social class influences their sense of entitlement and agency in engaging in the educational space on behalf of their children (Vincent, 2001). Further differences in parental agency shown in my sample were based on race and not merely rooted in parental education, occupations, and lifestyles, as posited by (Vincent, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, I wanted to identify that agency is more than involvement. While both are useful components in supporting students in educational spaces, I view engagement as a subsection of the broader umbrella of involvement. For the purposes of this study, involvement is seen as a more passive interaction while engagement is active, intentional (Koskela, 2021), and meaningful (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Involvement is typically at the request of the school or within currently established parameters while engagement is initiated by the parents in this study and may require the creation of networks, conversations, and opportunities to influence outcomes. As used in Morris (2004), agency is "a heuristic to describe the collective actions by Black people to positively influence Black children's schooling" (p. 70).

Institutional Agency and Community Cultural Wealth

Theoretical foundations related to the partnership between home and school remain incomplete and insufficient in many ways (Daniel, 2011). To elucidate the deliberate actions taken by Black parents to influence the academic outcomes of their students, I drew upon two interrelated theoretical frames—institutional agents (IAs) and community cultural wealth—as the frameworks best suited for highlighting the importance and strength of "nontraditional" networks for students of color. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's work defining the characteristics and roles of institutional agents (e.g., resource agent, advocate, cultural guide, institutional broker, etc.) was used to better understand the efforts made by Black parents to establish valuable resources that would aid in propelling their students to academic success. Stanton-Salazar (2010) describes institutional agents as "non-kin" individuals who utilize their own status and authority, resources, and networks in the service of disenfranchised students. Institutional agents serve as leaders to help students negotiate success in institutional environments by increasing the capital the students can access, in the case considered in this paper by leveraging the attributes named above to support students to navigate the educational system.

Institutional agents go beyond serving as role models or providing psychological support to students; they provide students with access to networks and knowledge bases full of resources through various forms of support (Dowd et al., 2012). Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001, 2010) classified institutional agent roles into four categories: (1) direct support, (2) integrative support, (3) system developer, and (4) system linkage and networking support. Institutional agents possess extensive levels of social, human, and cultural capital that can impact the social mobility of racial and ethnic groups that are underrepresented in education (Dowd et al., 2012). Those individuals desiring to serve as institutional agents for students of color, specifically Black students, need to be aware of additional forms of capital than those supported by the mainstream. This study showed how Black parent members in CAAP assumed the various roles of institutional agents and how, as a collective entity, they brokered resources to facilitate an environment supporting the success of high-achieving Black students. Without the benefits of CAAP and the Black capital the CAAP community asserted on behalf of its families, Black parents would be unable to advocate for their students' academic success (Taysum & Ayanlaja, 2020).

Bourdieu (1973, 1986) asserted that cultural, economic, and social capital could be acquired from family or through formal schooling but only certain groups keep power and privilege in society; his model assumes that only some communities (those currently advantaged in society) have capital that is deemed valuable. Morris (2004) asserts, however, that "it is important that social capital theory also consider the agency and sustenance that are characteristic of African American people, culture and

institutions—apart from and in response to oppressive forces" (p. 102).

To account for the negative and undesirable description typically ascribed to the resources abounding in COC, Yosso (2005) extends the conversation about capital to include community cultural wealth, which is "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression" (p.77). The community cultural wealth literature offers insights on how Black parents might better provide direct support to Black students in academic settings. Similar to the literature on institutional agents, community cultural wealth provides a background to the contributory aspects of the community that empower students to be successful in secondary education and go on to post-secondary education.

Community cultural wealth critiques deficit-mindedness, which tends to disadvantage COC (Araujo, 2011). Yosso and Garcia (2007) posit that forms of community cultural wealth are not static but, rather, inextricably linked and shifting. Community cultural wealth challenges the dominant negative perspectives of COC and identifies how people of color have historically utilized their resources to adjust to, persevere in, and succeed within racist institutional and social structures (Huber, 2009; Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). Community cultural wealth is comprised of at least six types of capital—aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, social, and linguistic. Although these six components have gone historically unnoticed and undervalued in academic settings (Liou et al., 2009), possession of community cultural wealth or "non-dominant" capital is essential for socially marginalized groups (Carter, 2003; Wallace, 2016). All but linguistic capital are referenced in relation to the data presented later in this text. Community cultural wealth combats the deficit capital perspective of COC and highlights their strengths (Listman et al., 2011). Together, these frameworks may help scholars to better study and understand the interplay of agency and societal structures while also centering race (Tichavakunda, 2019).

Done Decently and in Order: Design and Methodology

Positionality

Critical ethnography recognizes that those who produce knowledge are neither innocent nor politically neutral (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005); therefore, my positionality informs my work. Further, critical ethnographers ought to facilitate the creation and dissemination of useful knowledge (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995). I am a Black woman and scholar who is profoundly committed to the study of Black education (Morris, 2004; Tillman, 2006). As a student who has benefited from an association with CAAP in the past, when it was in its infancy, I desired to go back with "an ethnographer's eye" (Jacobs-Huey, 2006) and try to elucidate the interworkings and aspects that do or do not influence student academic trajectories and success within this community where CAAP originated. My time away from CAAP after I graduated high school and before I returned as a volunteer, granted me a fresh perspective of the organization; my knowledge of and prior personal involvement with CAAP facilitated access to the group. Ladson-Billings (2000) posits that "scholars of color who have experienced racism and ethnic discrimination (yet survived the rigors of the degree credentialing process) have a perspective advantage…" (p. 271). With this study, therefore, I returned to my own community to conduct fieldwork in the knowledge that researchers are increasingly accountable to both their communities of origin and their communities of interest (hooks, 1984). A qualitative approach allowed me to access perspectives of how parents and students view the organization as a whole and which of its components are most pertinent to students and parents on an individual level.

CRT values experiential knowledge, asserting that people of color, a marginalized population, can offer insight into studying and confronting inequities within educational spaces (Tichavakunda, 2019). Voices from within such a population can offer accurate narratives about its experiences (Delgado &

Stefancic, 2012; Solórzano, 1997). Under the guidance of the critical paradigm, I worked to elucidate the cultural phenomenon of collective Black parental involvement and high-achieving students in a meaningful way that did not distort the data (Van Maanen, 2011). Critical research is concerned with social inequities and pushes toward constructive social change (Carspecken, 2013). More specifically, I conducted a critical ethnography because critical ethnographies are concerned with human agency (Barton, 2001) but have yet to be maximized in relation to the role of parents and community in schooling (Anderson, 1989). Critical ethnographies focus on the connectivity between knowledge, culture, society, and action (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnographers speak from distinct identity locations including, but not limited to, race and class (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). I spent more than 120 hours of observation at various CAAP programs and events over ten months (excluding the two summer months) and over 20 hours interviewing and following up with CAAP affiliates.

Selection of and Access to CAAP

Contextual, social, and personal life factors are important for understanding agency (Koskela, 2021). I looked to CAAP to determine how this organization plays a role in shaping the educational paths of academically successful Black students because "CAAP is…committed to providing ways to enhance the educational opportunities of students through academics, social activities, and cultural awareness" (CAAP, n.d.). CAAP has a track record of positive action to increase the level of postsecondary attainment through partnerships and programs that promote higher education, community and family involvement, cultural affirmation, and volunteerism. According to the founding families, CAAP was created nearly thirty years ago in response to the racist, prejudiced, and biased stakeholders and structures that implicitly and explicitly excluded and disadvantaged Black students in one school district. After a meeting at the district office with the superintendent, five Black families came together to create CAAP. The first president of CAAP shared that "...we were all in the parking lot talking, and we said, we need to have an organization so we can all get together on a regular basis and thus, the Council of African American Parents was born." Since then, the organization has expanded across multiple school districts and has helped to create policy changes within the schools. In the words of one of the CAAP founders:

> …when we started, African American students weren't allowed to take AP and honors classes unless they were recommended by a teacher…We took that whole process out through working with the superintendent …that if your child gets an A or a B, they're able to take the next level of classes, no matter if they have a teacher recommendation. The other successful thing we did was the name-calling…A number of students were calling our students out of their names—niggers, monkeys, and stuff—and we started a rule where if you name call, that's the same as a suspension for hitting someone…And we have developed a network and cadre of students who are very dynamic and robust in that they are becoming change agents.

The genesis of CAAP, rooted in a need to combat racism, is connected to my overarching theoretical frame, CRT, which was birthed from protest; CRT pushes scholars to acknowledge ad elucidate the endemic reality of race and racism in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012)

Agency builds on prior experiences and past interactions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The CAAP originated in 1992. All of its work is conducted by volunteer members who have developed and maintained a network of thousands of scholars who have attended and graduated from institutions of higher learning throughout the nation. The accomplishments of these students have been facilitated by partnerships with collegiate personnel, businesses, local school districts, parents, and community-based entities to leverage resources and time to cultivate a college-going culture and expand scholarship opportunities. CAAP has developed a college-going legacy through financial aid workshops; college tours; scholarships; summer enrichment; academic advisement; parenting workshops; test preparation; tutoring; college preparation; educational symposia career fair; student

recognition programs; cultural fairs; and holiday celebrations honoring the cultures and traditions of its students.

While agency is rooted in the past, its aims are for the future (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). In CAAP, the past is a prologue to the future. There is an emphasis on returning to the community to "pay forward" the help received from volunteer mentors. CAAP states that the education of Black students and future leaders is at the top of its organizational agenda and further asserts:

> It is our goal to empower and equip parents with tools and resources that will help maximize their child's learning potential and increase their academic performance. The single most important thing that we as parents and community members can do for our children is to ensure that they: (1) will be prepared to competitively compete for seats at selective colleges and universities; (2) will become productive and responsible leaders, and (3) will make positive contributions to our families, communities, and society at large (CAAP, n.d.).

CAAP is an open-access organization which families can join by paying $100 in dues for year-round programming, while individuals can opt to only attend select programming open to the public. CAAP services cumulatively reach approximately 1,500 people each year. CAAP student participants enroll in both private and public K-12 schools, but the majority attend public institutions within the service area. CAAP sustains its membership through blind interest expressed via the website or seeing CAAP programming as well as word of mouth from current and past CAAP affiliates. Its various community and collegiate partners across the P-20 continuum also serve as a funnel for additional members.

I elected to study this culture-sharing group for four reasons. First, this group was established and is currently maintained by collective parent initiative and action. This acknowledgment is important because, as noted in my review of the literature, there is minimal information on successful, collective Black parental involvement in the education of their students that was not initiated through the school. Second, because the group has been in existence for nearly three decades, I had an abundance of parents and students to interview, events to observe, and archival data to analyze. Creswell (2007) supports the benefit of a wealth of data sources when he writes that in "Well-defined studies of a single culture-sharing group…numerous artifacts, interviews, and observations are collected until the workings of the cultural-group are clear" (p. 128). Third, because this organization is based in a highly racialized city and school community yet claims that high percentages of affiliated Black students attend a four-year college or university, the findings of this study have the potential to inform best practices for the education of Black students. Numerous scholars have documented the experience of Black students educated in highly racialized environments in which an individual student is the only, or one of few, Black students (Bell Jr, 1970; Delpit, 1988; Gibbs, 1974; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). Jones, et al. (2006) state that potentially unclear criteria should be defined. Thus, "highly racialized" in this study describes an environment in which African American/Black students comprise less than 5% of the community population and, specifically, where Black students in honors and advanced courses number one, or at most two, and are therefore forced to experience education in a racial context. The demographics of the environment are significant because "…human actions are based upon, or infused by, social or cultural meanings…by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, discourses, and values" and, ultimately, by context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003, p. 7). Racialization is "an ongoing process that…involves questions of who belongs where, what categories mean, and what effect they have on people's life chances and opportunities" and can happen to people and in institutions (e.g., schools) by people who act as racializing agents (Lewis, 2003, p. 285).

The success of these scholars even when underrepresented at the schools is notable. As a case in point, according to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2018), only 13.6% of the nation's Black students were enrolled in degree-granting institutions in 2017. However, since its inception, this organization has had a 99.8% success rate in sending students off

to *four-year institutions* (two students went to the military). Lastly, this group of parents allow me to contribute to the literature because of their middle-class backgrounds. The abundance of literature on Black family interaction with schools disproportionately looks at lower-income communities (e.g., Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Selection of Participants

The process of sampling within CAAP was intentional to emphasize information-rich cases that illuminate a comprehensive understanding of the area of interest (Jones et al., 2006). I addressed the sampling dimensions of context, people, and time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003) through my participant selection. All participants self-identified as African American/Black, confirmed their current or prior membership in CAAP, and lived within the community that CAAP serves, which is a community with a median income 30% over the average income in the state and is less than 4% Black (US Census Bureau). The community is 85% white and Asian. I conducted in-person interviews with five students and seven parents: representing five CAAP families. I targeted families with more than one child in the family and families where all the siblings went to four-year institutions. As not all of the students went to a top-tier school, these parents might convey a diversity of experiences. I was also intentional in selecting families that are still involved with CAAP even though one or more of their children have graduated. Of the five families included here, one had only one child, three had two children, and two had three children. My focus on families with students who have already gone to an institution of higher education was critical to my study because these students have experienced the complete influence of CAAP, which aims to empower parents to equip their students with the tools they need to succeed academically. Those families with students currently enrolled in secondary education are in the midst of CAAP activities and will not have the full spectrum of the experiences within the group.

All families had one or more of their children matriculate to a top-tier four-year university (e.g., Berkeley, USC, Stanford, and Princeton) at the end of their senior year of high school. Parents of academically successful students and academically successful students themselves were selected to better understand what these parents and students deemed important regarding the education and capacity needs required to successfully provide these important components. To understand why Black students whose parents are members of CAAP compete in and complete high school and postsecondary education despite community circumstances, it is necessary to understand this culture-sharing group's past experiences and actions and how it does or does not aid Black students to achieve academically.

Data Collection

Ethnographers collect data through interviews, observations, and documents/artifacts (Creswell, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003; Spradley, 1979). Though most of the information presented in this paper is from interview transcripts, all three methods were used to establish a holistic interpretation of the role that CAAP plays in the academic success of students (Merriam, 1998). Based on information gleaned from the research literature, a pilot interview with the current CAAP president, and informal conversations with CAAP members, semi-structured interview protocols (separate protocols for parents and students, available from the author upon request) were generated to use for in-depth interviews with parents and students to understand what, if any, aspects of CAAP contribute to better outcomes for Black students. All interviews were conducted individually except two in which both parents of a student were present at once. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each. I served as the interviewer in each interview to maintain consistency. Participants were asked to elucidate how CAAP had or had not shaped the development and mediated the implementation and success of the educational trajectory of high-achieving African American students. Questions focused

on parent/student involvement with CAAP, the support it provided, its benefits/challenges, and its impact on students and parents. Participants were given the time and authority to share in our conversation.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that "[t]he most accurate rendition of what occurred…is on tape" (p. 123), and so, as proposed by Creswell (2007), all interviews were audio-recorded with high-quality tapes, backed up on computer files, and accompanied by a master list of types of information gathered and transcribed by hand. These actions are necessary but not sufficient to ensure that the voice of the participant is not only heard but also presented in a way that maintains veracity. Utilizing the data collection methods of interviews, observations, and document analysis permitted the triangulation of data so that my findings are better substantiated (Merriam, 1998). Observations were conducted at general member meetings, board meetings, cultural events, and academic workshops and presentations. Documents including past agendas, flyers, student applications, brochures, etc., were collected. The cyclical informing nature of the triad of interviews, site observations, and document analysis allowed me to garner data to better understand factors that contribute to Black student success in a community in which they are an extreme minority.

Data Analysis

Ethnography involves a cyclical process that includes preparing, organizing, and representing research data (Creswell, 2007); therefore, analysis was not isolated to a distinct stage of my research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003). Per the recommendation of Hammersley and Atkinson (2003), my data analysis began with finding concepts that helped me to make sense of occurrences documented by the data. My analysis was iterative. I triangulated the data from documents, interviews, and observations into a progressively focused, funnel structure (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2003) starting with themes, then categories, and finally codes.

Coding is an emergent process in which unexpected ideas can come to the forefront at any stage of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). I gave special attention to issues of power, conflict, social structures, and hegemonic assumptions and values that came up instead of universal themes, as suggested by critical theory. All transcription, coding, and analysis was done by hand without the use of qualitative computer software per one of the founding principles of action research, namely that "those who experience a phenomenon are the most qualified to investigate it" (DePoy et al., 1999, p. 561). For this reason, I did not place a machine between me and the data (Creswell, 2007).

For there is Nothing Hidden that will not be Disclosed: Findings

The data show the salience of collective Black parental involvement on the academic outcomes for all students in the study. In this section, I explicate three key areas arising from the data which serve as the dominant influential factors that provide insight on the establishment, sustainability, and accomplishment of the organization— (1) accountability, (2) alliances and networks, and (3) legitimacy. Below, I define these three aspects, provide examples of each from the data, and reveal how they serve as sources of fortitude for this organization. All names used in this text are pseudonyms.

To Whom Much is Given: Accountability

The participants emphasized their commitment and accountability to others within the community regardless of their status as either parent or student. The theme of accountability arose when: (1) I asked questions regarding why participants are still involved or would assist the organization today even though the student already graduated high school and college and so has

received the "maximum" benefit from CAAP; (2) they spoke about prominent aspects of CAAP that influenced success in primary and secondary education; and (3) when they explained how their CAAP involvement impacted their current work or volunteer efforts. While parents chose to intervene or assist based on past, present, and future investment in and obligation to their students, other parents, the organization, or the Black community at large, students foregrounded their academic success on responsibility to other students, their parents, the organization, or the Black community at large. All participants communicated a sense of being part of something greater: one part of a greater body. When asked to identify the major element she took away from CAAP, Sasha, a UC Berkeley graduate who was told by her high school counselor she should only apply to community colleges, answered:

> I think accountability, like you're not only accountable for yourself, you're accountable for others. You're accountable for…what kind of example you want to be and… you are not a representative of yourself, you're a representative of an entire whole…that's something that was one of the main things that I learned.

One father of two sons, Adu, expanded upon this idea by also noting that accountability is not without support from the organization.

> You're not just going to college for yourself. You're doing it for a community…If you want to let yourself down, you're letting the community down…We tried to work our views as a group…to let the student know, hey, we're all depending on you and then to let them know that we are here to help…that he's not alone.

CAAP offers the direct support of institutional agency. That direct support developed a system so that everyone who became a member was part of the network. Ray, who graduated from UC Berkeley and was the son of one of the CAAP co-founders, teased out high expectations within the characteristic of accountability:

> …the students were held to a higher accountability because they realized, yeah, I've got my parents here going to bat for me and they're interacting with the leaders at the school and they're interacting with each other and if I act up, word is going to get back and I'm going to have to deal with more than just my parents…I'm going to hear about it from two or three more sets of parents because that's the expectation...We had no excuse. Let me put it like that. There was no excuse for failure.

The students felt the effect of the familial capital of which they were part, and they leveraged this communal environment to establish high standards of success. Familial capital is a form of cultural wealth that prioritizes a commitment to community and extends the concept of family to include fictive kin (Yosso, 2014). It minimizes isolation and details how families become connected with others around common issues (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Communal bonds within Black communities (Morris, 1999) are central for the Council of African American Parents—the CAAP family.

While some participants noted that they *learned* accountability through their involvement with CAAP, Michelle, who divorced while her children were in middle school and thus navigated high school as a single parent, expressed that accountability is *taught*:

> I want to touch on that…all along the kids are taught to give back…they instill that in the parents. They instill that in the students and then you have young people who are the products of CAAP, like my daughter who still comes back and…shares her experiences… so that is one of the core components is reaching back and giving back…CAAP teaches that.

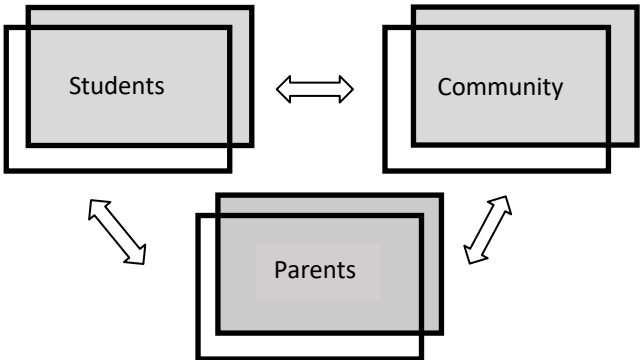
CAAP members are intentional about their network. System development and integrative support are not by chance. An additional caveat of accountability found in this study was a sense of collective responsibility. While some spoke of their individual accountability, others, like Pele, the first Black valedictorian at his high school and current physician, spoke of community accountability:

> What the collective…group does is, it holds the community sort of accountable because when you have individual families trying to deal with individual kids you can somewhat feel isolated

> and you're sort of only responsible for your family, but when you have this council, I definitely remember the sense that I had multiple mothers, multiple parents…

As seen in Figure 1, the model of CAAP's accountability is a triadic exchange and has both individual and collective levels. Parents and students felt individual accountability to certain parents or students (e.g., student X felt a need to succeed in academics because he/she was accountable to his/her parents) while also feeling a sense of collective responsibility (e.g., Parent Y expressed a sense of urgency surrounding sharing information with other Black parents about the organization). Within this organization, Black students were not treated as other people's children (Delpit, 1995). Each parent, each student, and the community in which they live as a whole had a vested interest in not only the academic success of the students but also the successful empowerment of parents. Parents and students were empowered through this accountability which strengthened the familial and resistant capital of the group.

Figure 1. CAAP Accountability Model



**Gray box is the collective level. White box is the individual level.*

Where two or three are gathered-Alliances and Networks

For school success, students need access to habitual and unobstructed opportunities to foster relationships with institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The institutional agents here were the Black parents in CAAP who mobilized to seek information, resources, and answers to questions that they were not privy to in the past because they were either not informed or misinformed about key academic components. The need to connect with, be a part of, and maximize alliances and networks was imperative to the study's participants. Because of the racialized nature of their milieu (e.g., Black students in this area facing unmerited tracking into special education, lack of entrance to or testing for AP/Honors classes or Gifted and Talented Education programming, etc.), parents and students believed that leveraging their resources had both direct and indirect effects. Issues highlighting alliances and networks surfaced when participants were asked: (1) to talk about how and why the organization is successful in its specific environment; (2) about the benefits of being associated with CAAP; (3) how they learned about or have had opportunities to share about CAAP; and (4) how the organization has grown and can grow further to expand its reach in the community.

Participants shared that though they were tossed into a sea which had been agitated by feelings of isolation created in their racialized environment, association with CAAP provided a calm in the midst of the storm. The network of CAAP created a community within a community for these individuals. Michael, a CAAP alum who now has his daughter in CAAP, shared:

> [Y]ou know…it is necessary because of the community that's around here because African Americans are in such limited numbers that it's good to be able to see so many African Americans

> together in the same place that can end up helping a lot of students because they see other students in the same situations

George, a father of two CAAP scholars, echoed this point: "What I believe is, as an African American, if you don't belong to some kind of organization, that's a part of your struggle right there because…your kids don't look like the other kids. They don't sound like the other kids." Members of CAAP actively recruit other students and parents into the organization. They serve as bridging agents, institutional brokers, and coordinators to establish a system linkage. When discussing how CAAP can execute such disproportional results with minimal volunteers, Claire, the president and co-founder of CAAP, commented:

> We collaborate with a number of other groups because…of the limited resources…We leverage our resources of time, expertise, and money with our collegiate partners...We have community partners and we have the schools that we work with. We are not averse to working with any group that is all about making sure that we're closing that achievement gap. We are truly mentoring and developing excellence in African American students.

Tied to accountability, every student, parent, and community member plays a role in expanding the CAAP network. Not all affiliates contribute in the same way; rather, they contribute in distinct ways that highlight their respective strengths and expertise. Michelle, who, after her divorce, raised her son and daughter (Sasha) on her own, said:

> [T]here are dynamic, successful Black professionals, politicians, corporate professionals, business owners, doctors, attorneys, researchers, that are consistently brought in to speak to our students so our students can see, touch, and feel people that have made it through and are successful and are coming back to tell them, 'this is the pathway I took, this is how you can do it. See me, touch me, I did it, I look like you, you can do this too.'

A relationship with CAAP was advantageous to parents, students, and the organization as a whole. To help students meet the demands of schools, CAAP provided resource-rich relationships which provided social and institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) and so, as Sasha's mother, Michelle, continued, the benefit to students was that:

> "they're connected. CAAP students are connected. A non-CAAP student is not gonna be connected. Because they, it would be impossible for them to tap into the pool of relationships that CAAP has cultivated over the last 20 years. That's impossible."

Pele, Adu's son, continued this sentiment:

> ...you don't feel so isolated. You can go to so many different people and get the answers to your questions. You can go to your peers. You can go to your peers' parents…On the flip side, there were things that I wouldn't go to my parents about but a different parent in CAAP might know or might have access to something I needed to know about. I asked my dad, do you know anybody in CAAP that might know where I can do this type of internship or where I can get information on this? And he would have his list of parents. He would know. And so, you sort of have this network of this larger community…of families that were now about something bigger…And so it really added more support, for being able to be more comfortable in an environment that really wasn't catered toward being Black at the time.

These members model the aspirational capital fortified via CAAP. Families maintained high educational aspirations despite inequities they faced within the schools and community. Networks were spoken about as integral to the receipt of valuable academic information and resources as well as the key component of expanding current connections. Participants of this study suggested that individuals within the group, as well as the group as a whole, serve as empowerment agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Stanton-Salazar (2010) posits that the "capacity of institutional agents to empower others is largely dependent upon the structure and resourcefulness of their own social networks as

well as their orientation toward effective networking" (p. 1068). Pele, a former CAAP student and board member elucidated parts of the network creation:

> …they also linked me with other groups like Young Black Scholars and Upward Bound so, through CAAP, I was able to get so many resources that I don't think would have been at all offered to me if I were to just have been a regular high school student… So, they do a great job at building networks…

It was not just the students who benefitted from CAAP. Parents also felt like they gained from participation. Adu, Pele's father, explained:

> Being members of CAAP, having all these parents that you could work with…other parents that knew of other organizations…other things happening…We were able to kind of bring all of our stuff together and whatever information we had to support each other. It was a lot easier than one parent trying to do all the research…

The interviews, observations, and document analysis tell the tale of the importance of social networks. The parents and students tapped into the community's social capital to gain the support necessary to navigate the educational pipeline. Document analysis, in particular, provided powerful support for the reliance of this organization on network support and the success it has had in expanding its networks at the local, regional, and national levels, to a point where now it experiences high levels of esteem. A call for participants for a summer program defined the organization as "a cadre of collegiate, corporate, and community partners" while the flyer for the 15th annual Parent and Student Educational Symposium publicized the ability to "*connect* with top academic organizational leaders" and "*network* with top college representatives." With each year and new member, CAAP bolstered its social capital as an organization, and all members were able to access that growing network.

By Their Fruit you will Recognize Them: Legitimization

Since the inception of the organization, CAAP has seen an expansion of the respect it earns and the clout it carries at various levels in society. One salient idea that resonated with the participants is the idea that CAAP has been validated. This legitimization resides at two levels. First, the local, in-house sphere describes when parents and/or students join and stay involved because they have either seen the results of the organization first hand or witnessed the effect of CAAP's influence on someone they know. For example, Adu, the married father of two sons, including Pele, told me "I mean, I saw this pretty early, but I saw there w[as] success from other students who went through the program…I saw it was beneficial to be part of it." Theo, another student alum who ultimately obtained his B.S. and M.S. from the University of Southern California, shared his thoughts on why individuals might consider joining CAAP in this manner:

> I mean, you see most of the kids going to a four-year institution and you're looking at your kid and you want him to go to a four-year institution, it's almost a no brainer. Get in CAAP and go to college is kind of the perception that it gives off… So, if CAAP is sending…African American youth…to four-year institutions and four-year institutions are seeing how many CAAP students are enrolling in their programs, it only makes sense for those schools to support those programs because they are trying to boost their numbers to create a diverse learning environment.

Second, at the more expansive institutional level (including the K-12 school system as well as higher education institutions), CAAP has been legitimized both formally (e.g., inclusion of CAAP as an organization that students can say they participated in on their UC application) and informally (e.g., institutions coming to CAAP events and programs for recruitment purposes). Michelle, a longtime volunteer and parent of two CAAP alums, shared:

> We have, through our alliances with various colleges and universities…college reps coming in... presenting to the kids and basically because the CAAP program…and specifically the Junior/Senior workshop has been identified as a gold mine…where they know they can come

> and pitch their university or college to academically qualified and competitive African American students. They know that they can take that to the bank when they come to CAAP so, basically, our kids are sitting there prepared because they've been groomed for so many years to be competitive...They want our students on their campus.

Demonstrating the import of those college connections that Michelle shared, Theo recalled his experience as a college-bound high school student when discussing how CAAP might influence the decision of where to attend college: "They've got various connections with various schools to help out. You know, you've already got institutional buy-in from certain schools and you go to these schools and it is easier to see yourself…going to that school." Because the students had familiarity with the schools as they had been present at CAAP programming, Theo could see himself at one of those institutions.

The legitimacy of CAAP was not just focused on the bridge to higher education. Sasha, Michelle's daughter, spoke of the influence CAAP wielded in her high school:

> There's, like, power in numbers and I think because…CAAP has become a powerful unit, like so, when students or like, administrators, or anyone, like in the districts and schools, think or hear of CAAP coming because of something that's happened on their campus…it creates a sense of fear…That's how these injustices and things like that that take place at these high schools are nipped in the bud because CAAP is there. You cannot do that to these students...These are not parents who are…fluff. Parents…are powerful within these communities, and so when you collectively bring them together that creates a powerful movement and so you can't just get away with just any old thing and treating Black students just any old way.

The navigational capital of CAAP empowers parents and families to maneuver within these unsupportive or hostile environments. Taken together these notions of accountability, alliances and networks, and legitimization sustain the cycle of empowerment of Black parents in the community. These pieces are interrelated and demonstrate that the CAAP involvement is mutualistic—all parties involved (even non-CAAP-affiliated Black students and parents in the community) benefit from participation.

The Good News: Discussion and Implications

The combination of community cultural wealth and institutional agency captures the diligence, experiences, perspectives, and challenges that Black students (and their parents) must navigate to persist in school and matriculate to college. Findings suggest that the existing depictions of Black parental involvement do not fully capture the experience and needs of the participants in this study. In using critical ethnography, the findings can be examined for aspects of social reality that are taken for granted (Myers, 1997). Research in and with COC is important, relevant, and necessary to the advancement of education. While the stories shared in this paper might be typical within the organization, the data is counter to the dominant rhetoric describing Blacks in education in the larger society. The evidence provided in this study demonstrates that CAAP simultaneously acted as a bulwark against injustices encountered by Black students and parents in the school and the community and as a springboard for valuable resources (knowledge and networks) for Black parents and students.

This study demonstrated that affiliation with the cultural group CAAP was an integral component of academic attainment, aligning with prior research supporting the idea that the establishment or maintenance of racial/ethnic identity is key to academic success (McGee, 2013a, 2013b; McGee, & Pearman, 2014, 2015). Unlike the middle-class status that solidified entitlement of white parents in Vincent's (2001) work, the participants of this study demonstrated they had to get involved because their financial standing did nothing to protect their scholars from the racist and biased educational

environments in which they lived. Additionally, this piece builds upon research that acknowledges the import of previously established support systems (e.g., sports, churches, etc.) (Nasir & Hand, 2008) to consider that support structures may be intentionally established to specifically support students and their families as they strive for academic success. These parents not only demonstrated the heightened importance of parental involvement, but they also showed that in situations of significant disparity and injustice, parents cannot merely be involved—they must take a commanding role in education. Parents stressed that collective, impactful involvement led to the accountability, networks, and legitimacy that helped them positively influence the education of the Black students in their organization. As one parent shared about his experience in the environment when his son was often the only Black student in his advance classes, "[y]ou need to work in a group to succeed and there's a community there, so if you want to have your student to succeed then you need to have him as part of this community." For him, there was no question that CAAP played a huge role in his son's matriculation to Princeton.

This study highlights three key ways to think about parental involvement in education (with an emphasis on Black parental involvement): (1) our notion of what it means to be an involved parent transcends the walls of the school (as evidenced in the discussion of alliances and networks and legitimization); (2) parental involvement for Black families can sometimes be more likened to community involvement (as supported through notions of accountability and alliances and networks); and (3) the community can and, when necessary, should serve as the author and finisher of Black students' educational fates.

Parents have to become informed about the operations of the school system to actively participate in schools (Carreón et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) but CAAP parents demonstrated that they needed to become knowledgeable about the interworkings of the school to support their students *inside* and *outside* of the school setting. More directly, this organization equipped parents with the resources they needed outside the walls of the schools so that they could then go and impact and monitor the happenings within the confines of the school. The information they learned and subsequently disseminated to other members was merely the first step in their quest to empower and position themselves as institutional agents for their students. Their impact was magnified as the parents of CAAP embodied their role as institutional agents and did not just act on behalf of their own children, but on behalf of all of the affiliated students. The community played a positive role in facilitating college access (Jayakumar et al., 2013). CAAP became almost a "one-stop shop" for these families. They could be supported academically, socially, and culturally in this space, which made the group more enticing for membership and influential in outcomes because it provided a majority of resources and opportunities that traditionally have been disparate. The necessary proactivity inherent in accountability, alliances, and networks and legitimization allowed CAAP parents to set high expectations for parents so that they, in turn, would have high expectations for students. Black parents established themselves as institutional agents and then served as the model for other Black parents to do the same. Parents can be social capital reservoirs for each other when they share information, offer and give support, and proactively build community (Gillanders et al., 2012; Yull et al., 2014). CAAP parents became the resource agents, advocates, knowledge agents, advisors, networking coaches, political advocates, lobbyists, program developers, and cultural guides (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) for their students that the staff at the schools could not and would not be.

The element of community was integral because the parents recognized that they were all one part of the collective. The Black parents shared their cultural capital to create Black social capital so that they could survive in a segregated environment. The parents leveraged aspirational capital to maintain hopes and dreams for the future for their children, even in the face of real and perceived barriers within the educational system in their community. Further, their kinship through CAAP rooted these students and families in a sense of history and culture to reinforce their commitment to

their created CAAP community—familial capital. Additional research on this intentional collective unity may also explore the ways in which a strong community may support single parents in particular; the literature on single Black parents is overwhelmingly focused on mothers (e.g., Cooper, 2009) so additional research is needed on single Black fathers.

With each new member, and each new year of service to its community, CAAP both explicitly and implicitly armed its affiliates with the valuable navigational capital to maneuver through the K-12 institution, which was not made with Black students in mind. As the students mentioned, they felt that they had to succeed not just for themselves, but for those in the community who were supporting them. The parents echoed this need for familial capital as they recounted the importance of maintaining a connection to the people, information, and resources available to them via CAAP. CAAP made the isolation these Black students and families felt in the community more bearable because they were no longer alone when they joined the organization. Ultimately, CAAP parents and students were equipped with resistant capital: the knowledge and skills to oppose the various micro and macro aggressions that would have kept them out of honors and AP classes or suspended when their white counterparts were learning in the classroom. Challenging inequity (Giroux, 1983) and preserving and bequeathing various dimensions of community cultural wealth to other families are essential aspects of resistant capital (Yosso, 2014). CAAP was intentional about passing on the cultural knowledge of the racist structures of the school district and encouraging other members to transform the oppressive structures, as discussed in scholarship like Villenas and Deyhle (1999). Linquanti (1992) uses the term "resiliency" to describe children who do not succumb to the pitfalls of school failure despite the significant challenges in their lives. I aimed to push these ideas further by looking at the parents of academically successful Black students who attended a school with an extremely low number of Black students to investigate how these students are not only resilient but also academically competitive and successful and the role a parent group played in that success. Their resistance became their success, and that of all the Black students who still benefit from CAAP today.

Several implications arise from this work. First, even without school support, parents should not think they have to be alone in guiding their students through education. There is nothing that precludes individual parents from collaborating and networking with other parents in order to share resources, experiences, and knowledge. CAAP demonstrated how a small group of parents can make a large impact. Second, parents must recognize the power they have within themselves and within their community. They do not need a background in education, but only a commitment to their students and a willingness to unify and influence the educational space. Third, parents should be sure to hold the school system accountable for educating their youth in ways that are culturally affirming. Fourth, the intersection of race and class in the decision-making of parents as they help their students navigate the educational pipeline merits further consideration. The students and families highlighted here were from a well-resourced community, so race, and not socioeconomic status, was a salient factor in their education. Though they were high achievers, these Black students encountered and overcome numerous institutional barriers by leveraging resources (Houston et al., 2020). The CAAP community, either directly or indirectly, identified, secured, and provided the necessary support to help them academically, socially, and culturally. Educators and practitioners interested in improving the college matriculation numbers of traditionally marginalized populations may need to consider that potential for better student outcomes might reside outside the walls of the school and require the centering of parents and community (Rall, 2014). These implications lead to the recommendation of looking beyond the school walls for academic support and, if none is available, starting an organization committed to student support and success.

Limitations

The scope of this analysis is small due to the emphasis on particular types of students and parents within a specific community. Though the findings of this paper may be used as a model for other minority and low-income/low-education communities, not every concept can be generalizable because of the specific population I studied. Despite only having a dozen participants, however, the rich data presented in this text provided here enhances understanding of high-achieving Black students (Houston et al., 2020) and aligns with prior qualitative research that prioritizes gaining rich insights into specific contexts, locations, and topics over generalizability (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003). Future research should include a comparison of participants who come from single-parent households as well as dual-parent households (there were only two single parents in this sample), additional interviews with Black families who lived in the same community but did not participate in this organization, and longitudinal research that may be able to better identify specific inflection points where CAAP's influence may be more readily implemented than others.

Now all has been heard: Conclusion

My analysis contributes an additional layer of understanding to the expanding literature on Black student achievement by focusing on Black parents in general, but a self-formed Black parent group in particular. The literature has failed to fully explicate and understand "…the nuances of parents' relationships with schools, why particular parents interact in particular ways with schools, and what resources, what orientations they call on in that interaction" (Vincent & Martin, 2002, p. 109). My study attempted to address these shortfalls with an intentional eye on Black parents and families. This study demonstrated how Black families can support Black students' academic success by proactively and collectively becoming involved in their academic paths. I examined the attitudes, beliefs, actions, thoughts, and practices of academically successful Black students and their parents to provide insight as to how a group like CAAP empowers parents despite racialized school environments. The data supported the accountability model, with bidirectional arrows connecting students, parents, and the community. Spradley (1979) notes that "ethnography offers other dividends to anyone involved in culture change, social planning, or trying to solve a wide range of human problems" (p. 13). Therefore, in this study, I used my "same-race, same culture, indigenous-insider status to conduct praxis-oriented research…to contribute to the broader [Black] community" (Tillman, 2006, p. 282).

What was revealed is simultaneously commonplace and extraordinary—more can be learned about how the collective involvement of Black parents influences the academic preparation, path, and destination of Black students. This is expected, because we will always need additional research to better reveal what is going on with Black education; at the same time, the takeaways may be unanticipated because here I focus on optimistic and sustained accounts of Black student success. That said, the results of this study offer insight that can be utilized to initiate positive change for other African American students and families in similarly racially composed communities. As mentioned early, CAAP parents recognized the need to unify on behalf of their students even before they knew what that work would entail. Over nearly three decades, they figured out a mission, established a voice in the community, and supported myriad families and students to reach educational goals. They did not stagnate in early phases about concerns over whether they could make a difference but knew that they had no other choice, so they deliberately collaborated to bring about change. Other parent groups may want to follow this playbook and come together for the common purpose of changing current conditions (even if all of the needs are unknown at first) and then adapting to the specific community needs along the way. CAAP allowed the disparate treatments of their students and families to guide the organization until other goals took shape or other specific goals pulled them in specific directions.

The takeaway is that in comprehensively supporting the families and students first, the specific targets and accomplishments will follow. The information gathered from this study's participants can serve to strengthen and contribute to knowledge that can be shared with Black families who may benefit from more explicit guidance on how to initiate involvement to ultimately support their children's academic excellence. This work also highlights the triumph, fulfillment, and excellence of Black students. Excellence for these students, these parents, and this community was not individualistic but accomplished through collective impact harnessed by gathering together in the name of education.

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***Educating Chinese-heritage Students in the Global-Local Nexus: Identities, Challenges, and Opportunities*, Edited by Guofang Li and Wen Ma. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018, 272 pages.**

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Zhen Lin
The University of British Columbia, Vancouver

The book, *Educating Chinese-heritage students in the global-local nexus: Identities, challenges, and opportunities*, edited by Guofang Li and Wen Ma, provides a significant addition to the current need for a better understanding of Chinese immigrant literacy learning around the world.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China estimated that as many as 149 million people from mainland China live in other countries by the end of 2018, forming the largest migratory population in human history. Meanwhile, diverse sociocultural, political, and geographical characteristics from diasporic Chinese communities have led to increasingly diverse populations of Chinese immigrants. The situation brings researchers and policymakers difficulties in obtaining a clear overview of the impact of changing demographics in gaining an in-depth understanding of the "Chinese diaspora," and responding to the needs of the specific Chinese-immigrant communities (e.g., Skeldon, 2003). Although current literature (e.g., Ho, 2019; Junker, 2019; Mu & Pang, 2019; Teoh, 2018) has approached the Chinese diaspora from a multitude of disciplinary perspectives, the lack of studies on the educational domain is evident. To respond to this urgent demand, the book adds an extensive understanding of how oversea ethnic Chinese are doing educationally in the international spectrum with a socio-cultural lens. Building on a previous 2016 volume, which focuses on the literacy performance of K-12 Chinese heritage learners (CHLs, learners who grow up and learn in communities where the mainstream language is not Chinese) in North American schools, this volume offers a sequel by turning to the settings outside of North America, paying close attention to the status quo of CHLs' education from multiple diasporic cohorts worldwide. Specifically, this book addresses crucial aspects of existing CHLs' education overseas, such as host language (English) learning, heritage language (Chinese) learning and culture maintenance, and CHLs' adaptation, acculturation, literacy construction, and identity formation.

In the preface, the authors elaborate on the notion of CHL, which enables the audience to anchor this vital term throughout the book quickly. Next, the authors arrange the volume's 13 chapters following the abovementioned dominant strands, outlining CHLs' learning and life in different world regions. This overview shows three themes, including; 1) CHLs' achievements, failures, and needs when they learn and live in the mainstream society (chapters 1 to 5); 2) their strategic efforts in wrestling with the obstacles and challenges (chapters 6 to 10), as well as instructional implications of how educational practitioners scaffold CHLs' literacy learning and identity construction (chapters 11, 12, and 13).

Corresponding Author:
Zhen Lin, Doctoral Student, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 6445 University Blvd. Vancouver, BC Canada, V6T 1Z2.
Email: zhen.lin@ubc.ca

CHLs encounter multiple issues during their process of acculturation, academic development, and identity formation in global-local settings. Based on what is depicted in this book, these issues include how languages and cultures are interwoven to (re)shape and enrich CHLs' academic and life experiences, how minoritized learners negotiate their literacy options and identities in mainstream learning settings, and how they shuttle back and forth between their host and Chinese home societies. During learning, accommodation, and acculturation, most CHLs believe that a transnational identity and multilingual skills will help them step over lingual/cultural boundaries and bring new possibilities for their academic life overseas. This topic is addressed in Chapter 2. The researcher Tsukada looks at CHLs' dilemmas, challenges, and opportunities in a particular anglicized English-focused but Japanese-dominated community. Tsukada finds that Chinese international students attempt to transcend national borders by taking Japanese language courses, alongside the compulsory English courses, which serve as a bridge to the local (Japanese) language in non-English-speaking countries like Japan. CHLs with multilinguistic capacities thus encompass expanding possibilities that support their process of "becoming transnationals" (Baas, 2010), which increases their flexibility for life. Since "linguistic structures provide elements for a communication system" which "becomes the resource through which social practices are created and accomplished" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 17), the different languages CHLs learn bind them to the sociocultural context where they study and live, following the glocal flows of "interested knowledge and cultural capital" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). The entanglements among languages and cultures encourage literacy practitioners to pay attention to learners' diverse linguistic heritages to expand opportunities for situated literacy practices and intercultural awareness development.

Besides issues related to literacy and cultural challenges, CHLs' psycho-emotional struggles also raise current scholars' concerns. The psycho-emotional issues reported in Chapters 3 and 4 mainly relate to CHLs' "sense of affiliation, frustration, and boredom" (Chapter 3, p. 57) when they shuttle between their heritage language/culture and the mainstream one. Two dominant factors contributing to this are the dread of dissociation with local peers and the lack of immediate incentive to maintain Chinese language and culture in the host country. In addition, "the context of reception, the organization of the Chinese community, sociocultural needs, and family dynamics" (Chapter 4, p. 67) also alter CHLs' degree of connections with their Chinese language and culture. All these factors impel educators to consider how the interplay of environment, cultures, and individuals affects the status of different languages within learners' self-concepts, which further impacts their emotional and pragmatic needs and experiences. Therefore, language can be a strategic yet flexible symbolic resource for managing tensions and shifts between varying identities and cultures. This extensive understanding of interrelationships between language, socio-culture, and identity sheds light on further investigations of how to satisfy CHLs' emotional-psychological demands during their literacy development and continuous identity construction by focusing on interactions between individuals and the situational dynamics. There is also a need to design relevant and culturally rich literacy events/resources to ensure meaningful literacy practices for CHLs, keeping a close eye on their uphill journey of heritage language and culture maintenance in the host society.

Moreover, the book further probes multidimensional obstacles that CHLs encounter in the host community and highlights their efforts of integrating into the specific local circumstances. Factors undermining CHLs' adaptation concentrate on linguistic, sociocultural, and ideological conflicts. For example, attitudes from teachers, relationships with fellow students, and Western-oriented curriculum/pedagogies may hinder CHLs' academic performance and change their life trajectory,

transforming their "educational and social identity" (Chapter 7, p. 126). However, Chapter 6, 7, 8, and 9 unravel that CHLs' strive to overcome the lingual, cultural, and ideological barriers by learning other languages that mediate their learning in the host country (e.g., including dialects, for example, Cantonese), actively participating in local communities, and consciously socializing and collaborating with local people. As the author/s point out, the coping skills of individual CHLs suggests that further efforts need to be made to 1) provide professional training to equip educators with awareness and understanding of learner' diversity, 2) establish reciprocal-respectful "third spaces," to enhance dialogues between the marginalized groups and the dominant community, and 3) encourage appropriate praises, positive feedback, and encouragement from teachers on CHLs' literacy improvement and identity transformation.

Further, multi-scalar glocal influences (e.g., patterns of settlement, types of migration, dialects, and political affiliations) engender Chinese-heritage students' divergent and shifting transnational identities. As noted in many chapters of the volume, building on Ma's (2003) work on Chinese transnational mobility, researchers note that CHLs' transnational experiences are both "place-based" (influenced by place of origin) and "place-nourished" (affected by local contexts of reception). For example, "cultural gaps" are experienced by China-born learners who participate in a "root-seeking" program in Taiwan (Chapter 13) as well as by Mainland Chinese students who study in Hong Kong (Chapter 6). Although both groups of learners share the same physical features with local-born Chinese peers, the root-seeking learners feel like "outsiders" in Taiwan. At the same time, the Hong Kong group learners find themselves not only linguistically but also culturally different from their Cantonese-speaking HK-born peers. These two chapters show that dynamic and fluid identities of CHLs must be interpreted both within the local environments and across global contexts.

The conclusion chapter is a retrospect of the whole book. Implications of facilitating CHLs' language and identity development endows the book with a practical significance in guiding literacy education for CHLs in the contemporary global nexus. These implications include: 1) fostering CHLs' language development by expanding their use of target language in daily interactions; 2) considering CHLs' appropriateness of language use in authentic communications; 3) enhancing the marginalized learner's awareness of self-development (e.g., a sense of entitlement which empowers them to challenge and question the mainstream texts) through their shifting sociocultural positioning; 4) providing educators with adequate pedagogical support of teaching students with multilingual and multicultural backgrounds; 5) raising Chinese immigrant parents' awareness and appreciation of educational values of Chinese language; and 6) building dialogic spaces for the marginalized community groups and the mainstream community to discuss, negotiate, and contest differences respectfully. Notably, as the book suggests, it is the time that educators and researchers work against the tendency of "cosmopolitan monolingualism." Preference for one language/culture in the host society neglects CHLs' contradictions and struggles while adapting to their new life. The editors point out that CHLs tend to conceal their differences and yield to the language and culture that are locally admitted as "mainstream." In this case, cultural, social, and linguistic capital of the learners from multiple communities of the minority should be encouraged and heeded as one of the powerful resources for them to have more opportunities for literacy development and identity formation; multilingualism and multiculturalism need to be maximized in literacy education for the minority learners in the global society.

The book is readable for all actors of literacy education for marginalized learners in multiple sociocultural settings. The book's content may foster reflective inquiry among the readership of JFDE,

raising their critical awareness toward the experiences and demands of minority learners and families while enriching their pedagogical tool kits to meet educational expectations. In doing so, readers of JFDE will be inspired to transform their dilemmas into various educational opportunities and embark on individual exploration for better-supporting learners from culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse communities. In terms of structure, the organization, coherent narration, and abundant examples make the book a useful addition of knowledge about oversea CHLs' education for its intended audience. Each chapter successfully contributes to the book's aim through rigorous empirical analysis, sound theoretical grounding, and nuanced explanations of its specific topic. However, one shortcoming of the book lies in the confusion of using multiple terms to refer to Chinese-heritage learners in different chapters, such as "Chinese international students," "local-born Chinese learners," "Students with Chinese as a heritage language," and "overseas Chinese students." Even though the opening chapter carefully explains the notion of "Chinese-heritage learners," the book may still need to provide a clear summary of the terms appearing throughout to enhance its coherence. In addition, the similar research methodologies and methods (e.g., case study and ethnographic tools) employed by most of the chapters' authors may generate "aesthetical fatigue" and decrease the reading enjoyment among the readership.

In closing, the book, *Educating Chinese-heritage Students in the Global-Local Nexus: Identities, Challenges, and Opportunities*, is nevertheless a propaedeutic integrative collection of empirical studies and theoretical insights that set a stage for much-needed additional exploration of the themes about Chinese-heritage learners' literacy education and identity construction.

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