JFDE

Journal of Family Diversity in Education

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.

Articles:

Special Issue Part I: Co-designing Educational Justice and Wellbeing with Families and Communities

Editors' Note

Family, school, and community relationships are at the core of JFDE's work. Since the journal's inception, it has strived to feature avant guard research and practices that highlight social justice-oriented work and challenge traditional school-partnership tropes. Unfortunately, over the past year, we have seen heightened tensions between schools and communities resulting from political division and culture wars, the impact of a global pandemic, and the ongoing systemic oppression of minoritized communities. Providing a venue for critical scholarship in this area is more important than ever. We are grateful for our outstanding editorial board, all of our reviewers, contributing authors, and, of course, our readers. We hope that you will find the articles in this issue as compelling and timely as we do and that you will share them widely so that we can continue to promote dialogue on these important topics.

In our first article, Kyle Miller, Jordan Arellanes, and Lakeesha James utilized community-based participatory research to make an important contribution to the existing scholarship on the engagement of fathers in education. The research design and questions were co-constructed with a coalition of community members interested in supporting local fathers. The authors write, "Members of the coalition identified the following shared goals for bringing the community together around fatherhood needs: supporting fathers (not "fixing" them); identifying and building on existing services for fathers; increasing the community's knowledge and skills in father-friendly practices; providing an inclusive platform for fathers' voices, and responding to the reported needs of all fathers through community-driven processes." The result is an article that centers the experience of fathers and highlights how the conceptualization of fatherhood continues to expand and evolve over time.

Next, Coy Carter, Jr., Eskender Yousuf, Bodunrin Bano, and Muhammad Khalifa examine culturally responsive district leadership and demonstrate "the importance of intentional, consistent, and long-lasting relational engagement of minoritized communities." This timely research includes two rich case studies that "demonstrate the importance of systematic actors in preparing systems, like schools, to be resilient, sensitive, and accountable when complex and diverse incidents systematically construct disparate realities for their organization members." Collectively, the article offers insights on district leader effectiveness and the need for ongoing critical self-reflection and introduces a new concept within educational leadership discourse, *Organizational Stress Tests*.

Finally, we are excited to share Part 1 of a special issue edited by Ann M. Ishimaru and Megan Bang., entitled Co-Designing Educational Justice and Wellbeing with Families and Communities. The articles featured in this issue share scholarship that seeks to create spaces to develop knowledge, everyday practices, and relational leadership to envision transformative possibilities for families and education beyond a school-centered, ahistoric paradigms. The articles are an outcome of research that emerged from a national network of scholars, family and community leaders, and educators who undertook critical historicity and collective learning using the following design principles:

- Begin with family and community ecologies;
- Refuse and transform dominant power;
- Enact solidarities in collective change-making;
- Cultivate ongoing transformative possibilities.

Each article in the special issue explores principle enactments to open the landscape of possibilities in the field and imagine anew what we need to cultivate just education. We hope you will enjoy these diverse and thoughtful articles over the next two issues.

In solidarity,

Michael P. Evans & Érica Fernández
Co-Editors JFDE

Support Father Engagement:
What Can we Learn from Fathers?

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Abstract

Fathers play a unique and important role in children's lives. However, gendered attitudes and practices with families have precluded their full engagement in children's education and development. Based on the collective effort of a local fatherhood coalition, the purpose of this community-based study was to explore how fathers view themselves as involved in children's lives and their perceived barriers to involvement in order to initiate change in local schools and community. Twenty-three fathers from ethnically and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds participated in interviews and focus groups to describe their definitions of father involvement, strengths as fathers, and needs. A collaborative, qualitative analysis of data led to the identification of four themes that framed the experiences of fathers and their needs. Mothers played a powerful role in promoting and prohibiting fathers' involvement; technology provided opportunities to connect but also interfered with attachment efforts; fathers in more privileged positions were able to focus on attachment rather than merely providing; and school engagement was rarely mentioned with a focus on extra-curricular involvement. We discuss the influence of paternal characteristics and situational factors in how these themes inform the lives of fathers and the complex nature of fatherhood. Implications for schools and communities are offered in hopes to disrupt current practices and design more inclusive and equitable approaches to including fathers in family engagement efforts.

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Introduction

Although the term *parent* implies the inclusion of both mothers and fathers, the vast majority of parental investigations focus solely on mothers. There is a notable lack of attention given to fathers (Downer, 2007; Guarin & Meyer, 2018; Posey-Maddox, 2017). This same sentiment can be found in many school and community initiatives that direct family engagement efforts toward mothers (Guterman et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Phares et al., 2010; Rice, 2015). Decades of research and practice have stressed the *absence*, *disinterest*, and *lack of competence* of fathers in their children's education and development (Booth & Edwards, 1980; Pruett et al., 2017; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019), placing fathers on the fringe of parenthood. These erroneous and gendered attitudes, which are entrenched in family engagement practices, have restricted fathers' abilities to fulfill a more comprehensive role in their children's lives (Amato, 2018).

Scholarship suggests that fathers do play a unique and important role in children's lives, and different studies have documented the social, emotional, and academic benefits of positive father involvement (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Carlson, 2006; Jeynes, 2015). However, the variable ways in which fathers engage with children often remain unseen or misunderstood by schools and communities (Arditti et al., 2019; Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Antiquated stereotypes of fathers as "hands-off" in regard to children's education has limited opportunities for schools and communities to meaningfully partner with and build relationships with fathers (Guterman et al., 2018). These missed opportunities are detrimental to both fathers and their children. The purpose of this study is to investigate how fathers view themselves as involved in their children's lives and understand their perceived barriers to involvement to initiate change in a local community and support more inclusive and equitable family partnerships, programs, and resources. In particular, this article highlights the valuable and collaborative work of a local fatherhood coalition located in the Midwest of the United States, which is a driving force in helping to improve the lives of fathers and their children.

Constructions and Contributions of Father Involvement

Historically, fatherhood has operated within the constraints of societal views of masculinity, which supports a paternal focus on one's career rather than family (Amato, 2018; Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). In turn, fathers in the United States have assumed the role of the *provider* in households with little emphasis on direct, hands-on engagement with their children and their children's learning (Ganong et al., 1990; Marsiglio et al., 2000). As the landscape of families and parental roles has evolved over time, a new era of fatherhood has emerged where fathers desire more supportive, attentive, and closer relationships with their children as compared with previous generations (Pleck, 2010). This generation of men, often referred to as the *modern father*, is composed of individuals who actively reject the previous generation's fathering practices, with an increasing number of stay-at-home fathers and increased time spent with children (Gottzen, 2011; Livingston & Parker, 2019; Trahan & Cheung, 2018;). Attachment, rather than simply financial provision, is at the core of fathers' desires for a more active part in their children's lives, with a focus on greater emotional and physical connections with their children (Carrillo et al., 2016; Påfs et al., 2016; Pleck & Masciardrelli, 2003). Fathers are as likely as mothers to describe parenting as central to their identity (Livingston & Parker, 2019); moreover, there is even a growing population of father activists gaining attention through social media and blogging to highlight the contributions and strengths of fathers (Scheibling, 2019).

As fathers assume a more central role in their children's lives, the children benefit in a range of ways. Recent research on fathers highlights the positive contributions fathers make to their children's cognitive gains, school achievement (McWayne et al., 2013; Gordon, 2016; Jeynes, 2015; Martin et al., 2007; Roggman et al., 2004; Wilson & Prior, 2011), social and emotional competencies (Amato &

Gilbreth, 1999; Bernard et al., 2015; Goncy & van Dulmen, 2010; Tautolo et al., 2015; Weitzman et al., 2011; Sarkadi et al., 2008), and basic needs provision (Kim et al., 2013). Therefore, school and community efforts to support the engagement of fathers will likely lead to positive outcomes for families and children (Solomon-Fears & Tollestrump, 2016). In simpler terms, we can definitively say that fathers matter.

Inequities and Bias

Although no longer an accurate representation of fatherhood, the stereotype that fathers are less accessible or interested in their children's learning and development continues to hinder the work of field practitioners (Amato, 2018; Gottzen, 2016). Many fathers believe that their responsibilities are to educate, care for, and maintain supportive relationships with their children (Pleck, 2010), but they also claim that they experience fewer inroads and responsivity within educational settings to enact these responsibilities (Osborn, 2015). Schools often think about being *culturally responsive* in relation to linguistic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity and rarely in connection to parenting and fatherhood. However, the culture of fatherhood has changed dramatically, while the environments in which they operate have yet to adequately respond (Valiquette-Tessier , 2019; Wall, 2007).

The ways fathers engage with children does not seemingly fit parental engagement models that were designed for mothers in traditional, middle-class families (Allen, 2007). When families are viewed as systems of interdependent roles, and mothers are held as the standard for involvement, this produces a restricted view of paternal efforts (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). The implicit assumption that family–related strategies function similarly for both fathers and mothers has led to many misunderstandings and negative views of fathers (Amatea, 2013). It is important to think about the parental sharing of responsibilities and how mothers and fathers might differ in their needs and behaviors (Osborn, 2015).This lack of responsiveness perpetuates the notion that fathers are less involved than mothers, especially for Black and low-income fathers who already face systems of oppression in schools and communities (Fleck et al., 2013; Posey-Maddox, 2017).

The Ecology of Fatherhood

This study considers father involvement as a dynamic process with a variety of environmental influences that intersect with children's development both directly and indirectly (Cabrera et al., 2014). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model has guided the work of the community's fatherhood coalition as well as our study design and subsequent analysis (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The group members believe that fathers exist within a complicated and complex world, which can variably support or hinder positive engagement with their children. Fathers serve as an influence within the child's immediate environment; however, their involvement is impacted by relationships with other caregivers, work, the economy, legal systems, media, and societal norms. Our aim is to better understand the environment that has shaped father involvement at a local level to help reduce barriers and support the goals of fathers in our community.

Bronfenbrenner (1986) believes that children's development is driven by interactions that occur at the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem levels as well as relationships among systems. At the microsystem level, father-child interactions serve as proximal processes in the child's immediate family system through direct contributions, such as father-child conversations and joint activities (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). At the mesosystem level, a father's communication with the child's teacher, participation in the child's religious community, and interactions with a sibling can also help shape a child's development. This model further suggests that places and individuals outside of the

child's immediate world can inform the child's outcomes. For example, at the exosystem level, a father's employment and job demands can impact his availability (Kramer et al., 2016). At the macrosystem level, community views of fatherhood and masculinity (Amato, 2018) can influence how fatherhood is embodied at the proximal level. The chronosystem, acknowledges time, both historically and in relation to transitions during the child's life. For example, generational philosophies of fatherhood change (Adams et al., 2011), which might in turn alter fathers' interactions with their children. All such layers emerged in the ongoing coalition meetings and the data analysis for this study.

Context of the Fatherhood Coalition

A local non-profit organization that serves families and children initiated the fatherhood coalition in the fall of 2018. Based on their previous failed attempts to incorporate fathers in their parenting programs, they wanted to bring a variety of stakeholders together to reflect and brainstorm ways to better support fathers in the area. Representatives from community organizations, early childhood services, K-12 school districts, a state university, and churches gathered with local residents to share their experiences and ideas. Members of the coalition identified the following shared goals for bringing the community together around fatherhood needs: supporting fathers (not "fixing" them); identifying and building on existing services for fathers; increasing the community's knowledge and skills in father-friendly practices; providing an inclusive platform for fathers' voices; and responding to the reported needs of all fathers through community-driven processes. The coalition includes over 70 members, with approximately 20 members attending regular meetings that follow the conversation-centered World Café workshop method (see www.worldcafe.com).

The initiators of the coalition selected the term father involvement to encompass the various ways fathers can connect with and support children. In the literature on parental involvement, "involvement" is typically viewed as a more restrictive term regarding how often and to what extent parents interact with their children or act on their behalf. However, the coalition utilized the term "involvement" in a broader, multidimensional way to include the relationship context, quality of interactions, attachment, fulfillment, and intention. This broader definition is typically labeled as "engagement." Therefore, this paper uses the terms involvement and engagement interchangeably based on the work of the coalition.

Leaders of the coalition originally desired to create a quantitative survey that they would distribute electronically to fathers. They believed that the data could guide the work of the group and justify its existence. However, after discussing the matter, coalition members feared a low response rate and lack of representation from a diverse range of fathers. As a result, the coalition members decided to collect qualitative information prior to designing a larger-scale survey for the community. Indeed, qualitative methods are well suited for collecting data germane to the experiences and needs of local fathers, ensuring that the subsequent use of a quantitative instrument would remain relevant to our work (Trahan & Cheung, 2018). As an original member of the coalition with prior research skills, I offered to facilitate the research process. Our research began as a small pilot project but grew after each coalition meeting, as members desired to increase the sample size and continue exploring emerging ideas and themes.

Methods

The design of this study is rooted in the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR; Lantz et al., 2001). The goal of using this method is to make the research process a co-learning and capacity building endeavor that attends to the social inequities fathers face in the local community

and beyond (Lee et al., 2016). The CBPR method combines research tools with local knowledge and social networks to address local issues. The purpose of CBPR is to use social science techniques to support community activism and change (Schensul et al., 2008). This method challenges elitist structures that dominate the production of scientific knowledge and instead places the research process and use of the results in the hands of community members. This involves shared decision-making power, co-learning, reciprocal transfers of expertise, and mutual ownership of the process and products of the research (Viswanathan et al., 2004). For example, instead of a researcher independently designing instruments for data collection based on previous research and theories, community members share their local knowledge to complement the research base to co-design the instruments based on the group's goals and the problem(s) they want to address. The CBPR method helps increase the value of studies for both researchers and communities as groups collectively move toward scholarly activism. The main investigator was a member of the coalition and involved co-members in the design, data collection, and analysis components of the study.

Collectively, we developed the following questions to guide our inquiry and analysis:

- RQ1: How do fathers describe their involvement with children and what it means to be an involved father?
    - RQ1a: How are fathers involved with children's education and/or schools?
- RQ2: What are fathers' perceived barriers to involvement with their children?

Within the CBPR design, we selected the grounded theory methodology to inductively identify themes connected to our research questions in conjunction with the interpretivist paradigm. Grounded theory is based on the interpretivist perspective that qualitative research is never purely objective and that multiple realities can exist (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through this design, we embraced the idea that participants would share their perspectives based on their perceived reality of fatherhood (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

Participants and Location

The study sample included fathers (N=23) who live in a small-sized city in the Midwest. Fathers were recruited through the fatherhood coalition, local organizations, and school districts. The only criteria were that participants identified as a father and lived in the specified county. Fathers were initially recruited to participate in one-on-one interviews. Fliers were electronically and physically distributed through listservs, community boards, and at public events to find volunteers for the study. Additionally, service providers informed clients and group members of the research opportunity. Interested fathers were contacted by the main investigator to arrange for a time and place to meet for the interview. Fourteen fathers participated in one-on-one interviews during the spring and summer of 2019.

Fourteen fathers also participated in focus group sessions held in the fall of 2019. Participants were recruited through the same channels as the prior interview recruitment process. Additionally, all interview participants were personally invited by email, with five volunteering to also participate in the focus group portion of the study. Involvement in the focus group portion required a two-hour window of availability on a Saturday afternoon at a public library in the area. Table 1 provides a list of participant characteristics.

Table 1

Focus Group Characteristics

	Interviews (N=14)	Focus Groups (N=14)
Race/Ethnicity		
Black	6 (42.9%)	6 (42.9%)
Asian	0	1 (7.1%)
White	8 (57.1%)	7 (50%)
Income Level		
Above 35,000	10 (71.4%)	10 (71.4%)
25,000-34,999	2 (14.3%)	3 (21.4%)
Below 25,000	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)
Education Level		
Graduate Degree	2 (14.3%)	4 (28.6%)
College Degree	6 (42.9%)	7 (50%)
Associate's Degree	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)
High School/GED	3 (21.4%)	1 (7.1%)
Family Structure		
Married	5 (35.7%)	10 (71.4%)
Blended Family	3 (21.4%)	2 (14.3%)
Divorced	2 (14.3%)	2 (14.3%)
Non-residential	2 (14.3%)	0
Co-parent	1 (7.1%)	0
Widower	1 (7.1%)	0
Age Range	23-60	27-59

Data Sources

This study's data sources include one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and a sociodemographic form. The coalition desired to conduct one-on-one interviews to develop a sense of individual father strengths and needs before moving to larger focus group sessions. The interview script was co-constructed with members of the fatherhood coalition and included questions related to family dynamics, current involvement, supports and barriers to involvement, and general needs and potential community responses. The coalition developed the interview questions to reflect its goals by beginning with fathers' strengths and then addressing self-identified personal and environmental barriers to involvement. The interview script and semi-structured facilitation was designed to elicit fathers' unique stories, experiences, parenting skills, and successes. We also aimed to actively push against the deficit-based views that often define father-related data collection (Wilson & Thompson, 2021). The main investigator administered one-on-one interviews that ranged from 20 minutes to two hours.

The focus group interviews followed the same flow of questions as the interviews. However, the focus groups ended with all fathers coming together to share their advice and guidance on how the community can better support their current involvement and respond to their needs. Two coalition members who identified as fathers volunteered to take the required ethics training to serve as focus group facilitators. The facilitators collected sociodemographic forms, administered the questions, and

engaged in the focus group conversations. All audio recordings of interviews and focus group sessions were transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. They were then compiled with the interviewer's and facilitators' reflective notes from each interview and focus group session, respectively.

Interviews and focus groups were treated non-hierarchically and used to create a more coherent and nuanced understanding of fathers that would not have been achieved by one method alone (Lamert & Loiselle, 2008). Semi-structured interviews provided a more intimate method to collect detailed accounts of fathers' thoughts, experiences, beliefs, and ideas through scripted questions and follow-up prompts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Focus groups allowed for discussions among participants where they commented on one another's experiences and questioned one another to unveil aspects of father involvement that may not have emerged in one-on-one interviews (Onwuegbuzie, 2009). We purposefully did not require fathers to participate in both methods or restrict participation to only one method. We assumed that some fathers may feel more comfortable in a one-on-one setting, while others might desire a group discussion, and others might be motivated to share their stories and experiences in multiple spaces (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). The two methods were not utilized to confirm data but rather to create a more comprehensive picture of personal and contextual dimensions of fathers' experiences and views.

Data Analysis

A research team of one faculty member, three undergraduate students, and one graduate student began the analysis as soon as interviews commenced. Additionally, a small team of coalition members took the required ethics training to more intimately familiarize themselves with the data and engage in analytic discussions and data review. The analysis followed Boyatzis' (1998) process for developing codes and thematically analyzing data, which incorporated elements of the constant comparative method during analysis phases (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The coding and analysis were inductive, which allowed for the discovery of new ideas and ways to systematically think about father involvement. Members of the research team were assigned to specific interviews where they summarized the interview and then presented it to the team. The summary was followed by the identification of open codes connected to the transcript, which were documented in a working codebook. We continued with this approach as focus group data were added.

During weekly research meetings, we compared interview and focus group summaries as the group moved from open to axial coding of larger, hierarchical codes. For example, early in the interviews, participants identified "legal issues" as an important concept that was interfering with father involvement. However, as we added additional data and revisited prior coding, we discovered that legal issues were part of a larger concept related to the power of mothers and gender bias. The working codebook was continually revised to reflect hierarchical codes, which were then re-applied to full transcripts using NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2010). We further interrogated codes to arrive at a more selective coding process in line with the study's theoretical lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). We consistently shared codes and emerging themes with the larger coalition for feedback and insights at roundtable discussions implemented from the spring of 2019 until the spring of 2020.

Findings

The thematic analysis led to four main themes. These themes fall into different ecological spaces within children's worlds. The first theme focuses on the relationship with the mother at the mesosystem level and is also guided by parenting philosophies from a macrosystem level. Themes two and three are related to direct interactions with the child involving technology and time management with the child at the microsystem level. Finally, the fourth theme focuses on the relationship with the

school at the mesosystem level. The following sections describe the themes with the support of quotations and data narratives.

Theme 1: Relationship with the Mother

Although not directly asked about mothers, the participating fathers often referenced the children's mothers in interviews and focus group discussions. The fathers explained that the mother and mother-child relationship both informed the quantity and quality of their involvement. Gatekeeping and co-parenting philosophies were the main subthemes within paternal discussions of mothers. As one father said in a focus group, "We really can't do this work [supporting fathers] without working with mothers." Each of the following subtheme highlights the power of mothers within family systems.

Gatekeeping

Fathers described mothers as the gatekeepers of involvement who possess the power to open or close the gate to their children's lives. Approximately one-third of participants reported a weak relationship with the child's mother, which interfered with the father's involvement. One father explained, "Right now she [the mother] isn't speaking to me. It has been up and down for the last eight years. When she speaks to me, I get to see my kid. When she doesn't, then I don't." Furthermore, fathers highlighted the court system and other community programs as assisting in mothers' power to block or limit fathers' involvement, suggesting that gatekeeping is a multifaceted and dynamic process (Puhlman & Pasley, 2017). One father reflected:

She [the mother] took the kids and moved to Iowa. She basically kidnapped them, and I had no number to reach them. I kept contacting agencies and the court system, but no one took me seriously. They basically took the position like – maybe she left for a reason. I had to hire a lawyer, and it took me five years to finally get them back. And even when I finally had some rights to see them, I was still missing out on so much. I'd love [to] talk to their teachers or attend their events, but that was off limits for a long time.

For most fathers in this category, it was not just about mothers possessing the power to open or close the gate but that maternal power was amplified within social and legal systems that favored mothers.

The other participants reported a strong relationship with their children's mothers, which helped them maintain involvement. One respondent stated, "My wife knows a lot about kids, so that helps me. She wants to see us spend time together, so she makes that happen." Similar to this father, many participants viewed mothers as one of the main supports to their involvement, as mothers actively facilitated father-child interactions and encouraged engagement (Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). The majority of these fathers lived with the mother and children, but they were from diverse sociodemographic and racial groups.

Co-Parenting and Philosophies

In addition to discussing gatekeeping, fathers discussed the importance of "being on the same page" with the mother. One father, Michael, shared his ongoing struggle with managing two different parenting approaches with his children. After years of fighting for parental rights, the four children currently live with him full-time and visit the mother once per month. He shared:

The barrier that I'm dealing with are the different type of lifestyles between me and my ex-wife. Me, myself, my value is my kids first. Her value is her first and then my kids. I just live on a whole different train of thought. She doesn't really parent, she just lets them sit in front of a screen for a weekend. She doesn't take them anywhere…she doesn't talk with them.

Another father, Steve, shared similar frustrations related to the mother's parenting philosophy during a focus group session. As with Michael, he had full custody of his daughter and reported the following stress and frustration with bi-monthly visits to the mother's house:

Steve: For me, the one and only barrier is really the other parent [mother]. I have constant issues with that. And I don't think it will ever stop, and I don't think it will ever change. It will forever be the biggest barrier I have with my kids. The lifestyle [at] that house is totally different than the lifestyle at my house. And when my daughter comes back from her house, she has a different attitude, and it makes it really hard on us.

Jude: You're always rebuilding?
Steve: Yeah, it's a constant reintegration into my own house and it sucks.
Terry: I'm going through that right now. And it is crazy.
Steve: I had no idea how much two days could change a child.

Philosophical tensions were not necessarily a symptom of blended or divorce family circumstances but rather a result of communication and the quality of the relationship with the mother (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). For example, Chris, who identified as a divorced father of two girls, described the mutual respect and trust with his daughters' mother. He credited their ongoing communication and commitment to a similar parenting philosophy as the source of success for their daughters' development. He said:

I will call my ex-wife and I might question whether I'm doing the right thing. But she's like, "You are a great dad." And then she'll explain to me, "You've never missed an event. You put our girls first. You teach them about being a leader." We are divorced, but we have always been on the same page, which helps us both be better parents.

Other fathers also reported that sharing the philosophy that parenting is a partnership, rather than accepting traditional gender roles, helps them raise their children more effectively and allows fathers to be more hands-on with their children.

Theme 2: Technology – Friend or Foe?

The most novel theme that emerged was the impact of technology. Fathers described technology as ubiquitous and alluring. Fathers observed that children's and parents' increased screen time increased hindered their abilities to connect with children and spend time with them in meaningful ways. However, they also recognized that technology can also help them connect remotely with their child or create opportunities for different types of connections.

Technology as Foe

Most participants viewed technology as a barrier to involvement. They described their children as "addicted" or "obsessed" with technology, and several admitted to their own phone addiction. Screen time interfered with these fathers' abilities to connect with children. One non-residential father, Dimitri, shared, "Their mom buys them all these pads and screens. When I call to talk to my kids, it's like they can't even have a conversation with me. I hear seven things going on in the background, and I have to say, 'Can you put that down?' It's really frustrating." Similarly, a residential father, Jeff, shared, "I mean it's like, *play Fortnight or hang out with dad?* I can't compete with that. He would much rather close his door and do whatever it is they do on Fortnight." Another residential father shared, "My daughters are glued to their phones, and it is hard to get their attention most times." This was especially challenging for fathers of teenagers who had their own smartphones, tablets, or video games and greater independence to manage their time.

Fathers of younger children felt more in control of limiting technology use. For example, Ellis shared:

Most of my childhood was in front of the TV or video games – literally all day. It makes me kind of sick thinking about that. My kids get 30 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays and an hour and a half on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. I want them to have other experiences. I want *us* to have other experiences."

As with Ellis, several fathers communicated that they enforce strict technology rules to support their involvement with their children. However, most fathers described a general frustration without a clear plan of how to address the interference of technology regardless of socioeconomic status, race, and family structure.

Technology as Friend

A few participants viewed technology as a way to spend time with their children through gaming or watching shows together. One father stated:

My son, he's an introvert. He's into video games and - you know, anything with tech. So, me and him, our favorite thing to do…we're going to like Comic-Con and video game conventions and that kind of thing.

Another father who identified himself as a "tech person" highlighted the value of technology in bonding and spending time with his son. However, he also clarified that technology needs to be used *with* the child and not as a babysitter. Jay explained, "We watch shows together, and we talk about them. I've learned so much about him by hearing about what he thinks or even what he wants to watch." This father was also involving the son in his online gaming hobby. He explained, "playing games online can really help him. There is so much problem solving and thinking involved." He viewed technology as an opportunity to spend time with the child while supporting important elements of his early learning. This approach to finding a shared father-child interest or activity is consistent with previous research on father engagement and allows fathers to help facilitate language and social-emotional development (Lynch, 2019). In these cases, it was through the use of technology.

Technology also assisted several fathers with safety, parental monitoring, and communication with their children when they were away from home. One father explained, "We have an app to be able to locate her (daughter). This helps with safety." Another father identified the valuable role of technology in keeping him connected to his children while they are living with the mother in another household. He stated, "It is the way I can still check in with my kids or talk with them when they are gone for a while. Sometimes you don't know what's going on, and you want to hear their voice. And maybe they want to hear my voice, too – or even see me." Technology provided remote avenues to perform what they viewed as parenting duties.

These data represent the mixed views on technology as both a friend and foe. It was an area where fathers desired greater support or ideas from other fathers in navigating the constantly evolving world of their children. Fathers acknowledged that technology is part of their children's world and were working towards setting boundaries and identifying ways to use technology together (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016).

Theme 3: Doing Something *for* Versus *with* Children

A divide emerged in the sample between participants who prioritized the importance of financial contributions to their children's wellbeing and participants who emphasized spending time with their children. This theme was identified early in the analysis when some fathers suggested their involvement was based on what they did *for* their child, while others suggested their involvement was founded on what they did *with* the child. Although participants tended to fit into one of these subthemes (*for* versus *with*), there were still elements of both subthemes within every interview. Almost every father felt somewhat torn between providing for children's material needs and building a strong, emotional attachment with them.

Instrumental Involvement

Five of the interview participants described contributing to their children's lives by advancing their careers or gaining money to support the monetary needs of their children and their children's development. One of the participants, Tyler, described his unconventional schedule of afternoon classes and working an over-night job to achieve an associate's degree and support his family financially. He said, "It makes it hard because I get home at seven in the morning and want to play with my daughter. I mean she is only three months old. But I do have to sleep for a while. It won't be this way forever." This father anticipated that by advancing his education, he would have opportunities for jobs that would normalize his schedule and allow for more time with his daughter.

The other fathers who prioritized financial contributions were in the process of trying to legally gain more parental rights and responsibilities, and they believed that monetary contributions were the optimal way for them to contribute to their children's upbringing based on their current circumstances. One father shared, "I work three jobs so he can be okay and have the things he needs. His mom won't let me see him, and the court stuff has been going on for four years. So, it is my way to help out, and he can know I'm working hard for him." Another father shared, "I know money doesn't do everything, but it helps. I mean you can't deny that money helps when it comes to kids. I can go to bed at night knowing that I helped with clothes, gas, you know."

This subtheme did not emerge in the focus group discussions other than participants suggesting that they tried to avoid setting financial contributions as a goal in parenting. One father shared:

Before we moved here, I used to work all the time and on weekends. It was just hard to be there, and I wasn't accessible. I mean it was all financial. That's who I was – the parent who made sure we had enough money. I look back with regret. That's not who I want to be. That's not the father I want to be. I want to do stuff with my kids. They are almost teenagers and I need to be there.

This quotation reflects a general sentiment among the overall sample that financial support is not enough and should not be the focus of involvement. However, for fathers with limited access to their children, financial support was a way to feel a sense of connection with the child.

Attunement and Attachment

The majority of participants from interviews and focus groups viewed involvement as bonding and connecting with their children in a direct way through play, informal conversations, and coaching. They favored spending time with children over making money for the family, although they still felt that financial responsibility was important. During the focus group, Alex reflected, "It's like what we get caught up with as men. Feeling the need to be the provider, rather than going to events. But being present in your child's life and whatever it is that they're doing, that is much more valuable than making more money." This was one example of many fathers explicitly rejecting historic images of fathers as the provider and reimaging their role as accessible, caring, and hands-on parental figures.

Attachment required a focus on children's social and emotional wellbeing. For example, one father said, "For me, it is about being aware about where she is at emotionally. Like the other day, she just seemed sad, so I was sure to ask her questions about how she was feeling. It ended up that it was related to something going on with her friends, and we talked through it." For this father, who had a history of mental health and substance abuse issues, he prioritized supporting his daughter's social and emotional needs through conversations and affection. Many fathers responded that they were working towards sensitivity in parenting and responding to children's emotional states in a developmentally responsive way, which mirrors the cultural shift from provider to caregiver (Livingston & Parker, 2019). As fathers, participants desired to sensitively support their children's

confidence, emotional coping skills, and positive decision-making. One father in the focus group highlighted the importance of "just keeping things positive and making sure that they can see both sides of the decisions they are making and their choices, and just try to keep them positive."

Building and maintaining a connection with their children also required that fathers possessed an awareness of where they themselves were at emotionally and what they needed in the moment. Another father, who described himself as a co-parent, shared:

When we moved in together, I became a father of four – just like that. It was crazy. And – [my partner] was very up front in telling me I could be as involved as I wanted. The younger kids were a little more open to me, which I guess makes sense. They even call me *Dad* now. The older kids usually call me by my name, which is fine. I don't want to push anything. It is what they are comfortable with. I just try to read them and consistently let them know that I care about them.

Although this father was in unique position in not being the birth parent of his four children, learning to read children and figuring out what they needed in the given moment was a consistent factor highlighted by many fathers. Especially with teenagers, fathers learned to appropriately respond to changing boundaries and needs with each new stage to preserve a positive attachment with their children. Attachment and attunement were more greatly emphasized by residential fathers with full-time jobs and benefits, who were not openly worried about their current income and feeling the additional stress of earning more money for the family or child.

Being the financial provider was not the ultimate goal of fatherhood and involvement for this sample of participants, but it was viewed as a necessary function of their role. It was an ongoing balancing act to neutralize financial needs and focus on bonding with their children. Some fathers also reflected on previous phases of their lives when substance abuse or mental health issues precluded them from "being there" for their children. These fathers expressed personal disappointment in their inability to provide financial support at times, but they expressed even greater regret in missing out on spending time with their children and being fully present in their children's lives.

Theme 4: School and Community Involvement

As with all other themes, fathers were not directly asked about children's schools or community, and the topics of classrooms, teachers, and schools rarely emerged. A few fathers discussed direct and active involvement with schools and children's classrooms, but they had to initiate that involvement. Instead, the majority of fathers highlighted their role in supporting children's extra-curricular interests. Most consistently, fathers described involvement in terms of attending performances, events, or games at schools through the school and community.

Initiating Contact

Four fathers reported involvement with schools and teachers, and these fathers proactively and intentionally initiated those relationships. One father, Jeff, explained:

At the beginning of every year, I would approach the teacher and tell her I wanted to help out and be a part of the class. I only ever had one teacher turn me down. As a cop, I had some weekdays off, so I could go help out in the class. Now, I get that isn't the reality for most fathers, especially fathers without a job or education, they might not be taken seriously by a teacher.

In the few instances when fathers mentioned schools or school-related learning, they often deferred to the efforts of the mother or described indirect involvement by encouraging the child or telling them they value learning. This can explain why mothers are often more visible to school personnel (Lynch & Zwerling, 2020). A few fathers were still fighting for parental rights and were therefore unable to build relationships with teachers or schools.

The analysis involved examining these participant outliers to best understand who viewed themselves as involved with schools and why. The father who identified as a widower described his

life as a single father of two and carrying the full responsibility of every aspect of development for his children. Communicating with the school was one of the many responsibilities he discussed. Specifically, he talked about priming teachers for situations related to the family's composition and the loss of the children's mother. He shared:

I ask to meet with the teacher at the beginning of the year just to explain our situation. I ask them questions, like, "What is your plan for Mother's Day if you have other kids make cards or a drawing for their mothers?" Usually, they have no idea. And I get it, they don't have to know everything, so I give them ideas. Maybe you can ask them to write a letter to their grandma or a neighbor. I just have to be proactive with teachers because we are a unique family.

As Curtis described above, his family circumstances prompted him to initiate relationships with teachers. Another father, Andrew, self-identified as an activist who valued and felt comfortable approaching teachers and serving on school and community committees. Another father, Steve, regretted his mother's lack of involvement in his education and prioritized breaking that pattern with his children by joining the parent-teacher organization. The fourth father, Jeff, credited his involvement to his outgoing personality. These fathers ranged in education levels, races, and family compositions. However, they shared the characteristics of living above the poverty level and living with their children. Conversely, several fathers who were still fighting for caregiving rights desired more information about their child's experiences in school but were not listed as a contact for teachers. They believed that they were unable to communicate with teachers or schools until the legal process was complete.

Extra-Curricular Focus

Most fathers viewed themselves as involved outside of the classroom setting, which is a common trend for fathers who most commonly report positive interactions with their children through sports and other outside activities (Knoester & Randolph, 2019). Attending children's events and games was a top priority for fathers in this study. Several fathers described their overall goal as a father to "never miss an event" and "always be in the stands." Other fathers desired to take a main role in extra-curricular involvement through coaching or assisting children's sports, groups, and other passions. One father explained, "They've been involved in basketball and track and volleyball. Our summer is all basketball. Yeah, I love that time with my kids and watching whatever it is that they're doing." Another father shared:

I find myself involved in a lot of the kids' activities. I've helped coach a lot of my kids' sports. I even drove the basketball bus to and from games for a while. And again, it's just time, I get to see my daughter…I mean I just get to be there and watch and see her talking and interacting.

These activities offered fathers scheduled time to spend time with their children or observe them with their peers. Another father shared that he would enroll his kids in every program he would hear about from the school. This theme was consistent across all fathers who participated in interviews and focus groups. Even for fathers who were still seeking rights, learning about children's extra-curricular interests and membership allowed for meaningful connection points.

Discussion

Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework suggests that paternal engagement exists within a larger context of interconnecting systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This aligns with the responses of our participants, as they explained and reflected upon the complexities of their lives and the everchanging environments that affected their experiences as fathers. The culture of fatherhood has changed, which has transformed children's proximal environment. However, this transformation is often unseen or

misunderstood in educational settings (Posey-Maddox, 2017), with limited studies focusing on the personal perspectives and needs of fathers (Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, family configurations are increasingly diverse. Within the sample for this study, there were six different types of fathers and family configurations. Although there were many overlapping themes, each father shared a unique story and set of needs. Listening to fathers is an essential first step, especially for educators and schools who have historically focused on mothers (Phares et al., 2010).

Influence of Mothers

The most robust finding was the power of mothers, who can either promote or stifle fathers' engagement efforts. As most family-related efforts are directed toward mothers, mothers often become the face of the family (Amatea, 2013). Indeed, the four fathers who reported involvement with schools had to initiative this involvement. If information and opportunities are funneled through mothers, gatekeeping can occur (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). *Are emails only addressed to mothers? Are mothers first to be called?* These simple, yet consequential practices can reinforce inequities for fathers and their desires to be included. Moreover, non-residential and lower-income fathers described years of legal battles to gain regular access to their children. This shows how learning about the child's father through the perspective of mothers might create a biased and erroneous view of fathers' ongoing efforts to gain access to the child's world and support the child's development. Deficit-based views of fathers that are promoted in society may underpin practitioners' willingness to readily accept the mainstream storyline that a father does not desire to be involved or contribute in any way (de Montigny et al., 2017).

Deficit-based views of fathers may also emerge when we evaluate a father's engagement through a mother's mindset. Fathers might not desire to engage their children in traditional school-based or "motherly" ways. Instead, they may prefer involvement outside of the school setting in ways that remain unseen or misunderstood by schools (Arditti et al., 2019). This signals that schools and communities need to shift their views and expectations of fathers and work with fathers to design activities that fit their interests and comfort zones. Otherwise, we will likely continue to marginalize fathers in educational contexts (Amato, 2018).

Promoting Inclusivity

Feeling torn between earning money and spending time with children was a tension expressed by most participants. Schools and communities can exacerbate this internal struggle if opportunities that *seen* and recognized by school and community professionals are only scheduled during their work hours. School and community practices should adapt to the timing and accessibility needs of fathers to make these practices more father-friendly. Furthermore, schools and community-based programs must define engagement in a manner that includes the various ways through which fathers can and want to engage with their children. They should be responsive to paternal needs rather than force fathers into traditional activities performed at traditional times.

Teachers and service providers who accept the stereotype of the "absent father" are neglecting to understand the ecological influences that serve as barriers to fathers being seen and supported by professionals in the field. Research suggests that fathers, especially Black fathers, often have to take extra steps to make their presence known by schools, such as by proactively introducing themselves to principals and teachers (Posey-Maddox, 2017). This aligns with this study's findings, as fathers who viewed themselves as involved with schools had to initiate contact. Schools and community-based programs can better support father engagement by actively seeking the opinions and perspectives of fathers and reimagining family engagement activities through a father-inclusive lens. Some changes can be as simple as including fathers on forms, addressing communication directly to fathers so they

do not have to initiate contact, and recognizing the educational value of children's extra-curricular activities.

Overall, family engagement efforts have largely targeted mothers, especially from middle- and upper middle-class backgrounds (Posey-Maddox, 2017). This has created a systemic bias against fathers and their engagement with children's education (Fagan & Kaufman, 2015). Partnering with fathers to build on their current areas of engagement can benefit students and help schools and communities fulfill the goal of creating more inclusive and welcoming environments for family members (Lynch & Zwerling, 2020). Additionally, schools should address specific barriers for fathers while simultaneously seeking strengths and resources that may be left untapped within the community (Allen, 2007; de Montigny et al., 2017).

Fatherhood is currently being redefined in society, and the fathers in this study actively rejected historic portrayals of fathers as the *provider*. Instead, they aimed for relationships with their children based on attunement and attachment. Although attachment has been consistently explored in relation to mothers, paternal attachment has received less scholarly attention (Vreeswijk et al., 2015). As with other studies, the majority of father participants highlighted their motivation to deeply connect with their children (Palm, 2014). At the same time, they also questioned whether they are doing enough as a father. Some of this self-doubt related to the lack of inclusivity in family engagement efforts, while other comments reflected general parenting struggles.

Technology

Fathers reported mixed opinions on technology and whether it supported or hindered attachment with their children. The previous literature supports that, with technology, you get *the good, the bad, and the ugly* (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016), similar to how fathers in the study wondered whether technology is a *friend* or *foe*. Watching television and playing video games together as a family have been associated with increased connection between parents and children (Padilla-Walker et al., 2012), which was supported by several fathers in this study. However, technology also presents a barrier to quality involvement (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016), which was also identified by the majority of our participants. Several fathers were self-aware that their technology use interfered with quality parenting and connecting with children, while most struggled to compete with their children's technology use. Technological interruptions, referred to as *technoference* in the literature, interfere with father-child interactions and have also been associated with reports of externalizing and internalizing behaviors in children (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018). This is an area that schools and communities can jointly explore and develop solutions for with fathers.

What Can Schools and Communities Do?

The needs of fathers range from simple to more complex needs. Helping fathers address parenting issues, such as the interference of technology, is a concrete and tangible effort that can be supported by the community. In contrast, the gender and racial biases that saturate institutionalized practices call for a much deeper examination of implicit bias in programming and communication. Agencies, organizations, and schools can audit and reflect upon their current practices. Instead of asking *if* they are favoring mother engagement, these entities need to begin by asking, "*how* are we favoring mother engagement?" It is safe to assume that systems are operating in favor of mothers and that we should focus on the *how* rather than the *if*.

Family engagement scholarship and practices implicitly send the message that families from low-income backgrounds should be the focus of efforts (Arditti et al., 2019). However, fathers from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances volunteered for this study and were interested in receiving support and supporting other fathers in the community. This suggests that schools and community

organizations need to reimagine their work more inclusively for all fathers regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and family structure. This CBPR project has helped build relationships between academic, school, and community-based stakeholders to support research and action on father involvement (Lee et al., 2016). This co-learning process has helped schools and communities learn from and about paternal strengths and barriers to involvement. The creation of a fatherhood coalition provided a space for individuals involved with schools, after-school programming, and family services to come together, share, reflect, and brainstorm based on the information provided by fathers.

Limitations

Although this study offers authentic data that can be used to address some proximal and remote barriers to father engagement, it is important to note its limitations. First, the sample includes the perspectives of majority African American and white fathers. Greater incorporation of fathers from different ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as same-sex couples and younger fathers, can enhance this work. Conducting a similar study in a different geographic region or among a different community population can also provide important insights regarding the context of paternal experiences and needs. Although this study offers important information for schools and communities, our work is clearly only the beginning. The next steps should include developing a mixed-methods survey instrument to reach a wider, more representative, sample of fathers and measure community change in response to the data on fathers. All of these efforts should also continue to be performed in conjunction with fathers and local stakeholders, who both offer important expertise regarding the questions that need to be answered and the avenues for using scholarship to enact meaningful change (Schensul et al., 2008).

Conclusion

The culture of fatherhood has changed dramatically in the last few decades, but social barriers continue to hinder fathers from fully embodying burgeoning images of the "new father." Fathers in this study desired to focus their parenting on attachment, co-parenting, joint activities with children, and reducing the interference of technology. However, real world realities, legal challenges, and gendered school and community practices hindered fathers from achieving their parenting goals. These findings contribute to scholarship on the disconnect between fathers' ideal versions of themselves and their current involvement behaviors due to the myriad obstacles that interfere with paternal involvement (Wall & Arnold, 2007). Ongoing investigations of local and national challenges to father engagement will likely help focus efforts to reduce these barriers.

As family structures continue to diversify (Amatea, 2013), challenges can mount for fathers and father figures who fall outside of traditional images of the family (Arditti et al., 2019). Additionally, judging fathers and their engagement based on parenting models that have centered mothers (Lechowicz et al., 2018; Possey-Maddox, 2017) leads to a misrepresentation of fathers and their contributions to their children's development. Rather than imposing traditional models of engagement, or focusing on what fathers are not doing, it may be more advantageous to understand and support the various ways in which fathers authentically engage with their children (Arditti et al., 2019). This article has highlighted fathers' voices through our belief that fathers know the most about their lives, circumstances, and needs. We hope that educational systems and programs embrace a similar process. As families and fatherhood are reimagined, this demands attendant changes in the work of schools and communities.

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Leadership With a Purpose: Responding to Crises Through Culturally Responsive District Leadership

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Abstract

This article explores how leaders in two public school districts intentionally shape their school's organizational culture to challenge harmful social ideologies and culture. The exanimation of systematic district leadership or *Culturally Responsive District Leaders* featured in this article demonstrates the importance of intentional, consistent, and long-lasting relational engagement of minoritized communities as an opportunity to prepare formal systems for crises of disruption. Moreover, the two district case studies featured will demonstrate the importance of systematic actors in preparing systems, like schools, to be resilient, sensitive, and accountable when complex and diverse incidents systematically construct disparate realities for their organization members. Likewise, this article explores a new concept, entitled "*Organizational Stress Tests*," a process that entrepreneurially builds upon past organizational incidences to function under severe or unexpected pressure.

Keywords: culturally responsive, equity, organization leadership, race, K-12 education

Over the years, educational leaders have become increasingly aware of how cultural responsiveness leadership (CRL) practices build systems that not only celebrate our students' cultures and heritages but act as dynamic tools for their socialization into a multicultural and multiethnic country. However,

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despite CRL's increasing popularity at the district level, some leaders fail to grapple with how harmful social ideologies and culture enter into their formal system, and they often fail to define how their marginalized students experience its cultural productions (Demerath, 2000; Piert, 2015; Wilderson III, 2014). Watkins (2001) and Apple (2004) regard the concealment and underestimation of ideology as our society's failing to see or care about how notions such as "social constructionism" are operationalized as apparatuses to control weaker members of our community. Watkins uniquely identifies this concealment as the machinery by which our society's dominant members reproduce and influence the social roles and expectations we see materializing daily at the district level (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Watkins, 2001).

Although the machinery of social constructionism is an essential concept for this article, we regard leaders who recognize the beneficial nature of confronting social conventions such as race, creed, and gender differences as seeing entrepreneurial opportunities to disrupt. Moreover, we regard these leaders as building the sociocultural system power and experience needed to challenge organizational inertia (Gilbert, 2005). The educational leaders featured in this article demonstrate the importance of intentional, consistent, and long-lasting relational engagement with communities to prepare for and manage crises such as COVID-19 and the social challenges that follow. The featured district leaders recognize that their focus on engagement is a process of forward-thinking capacity building that intentionally prepares their organization for resiliency. This is especially important when complex and diverse incidents from "a failed COVID response to the rise of white nationalism" systematically construct disparate realities for members of their organization. Drawing on Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL) as the theoretical framework to analyze district leaders' responses, this article builds on the previous work of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) and uses two case studies as examples of what authentic Culturally Responsive District Leaders (CRDL) should look like when CRL is systematically integrated into practice.

This article is shaped around two questions that examine how school district leaders respond and adjust to crises and conflicts driven by changing community demographics. The first question explores how school leaders develop their school culture through existing relationships with marginalized communities to manage organizational crises. The second question examines how school leaders without prior relationships to families and communities respond to racial incidents, conflicts, and injustices. This article contributes to the literature on school leadership by investigating how two school leaders—one from Pogonia Hills and one from Dakota Public Schools (DPS)—build institutional CRL capacity through intentional and critical self-reflective practices designed to disrupt negative notions of marginalization. In these two case studies, we systematically examine how harmful social attitudes shaped by social differences, histories, and stereotypes are repaired and excised out of the formal system by two organizational leaders we describe as CRDLs.

The first case study from DPS examines Jessica Dawson's 30-year history of intentional CRL practice. We focus on how she infuses practices of equity and cultural responsiveness into every aspect of her district, transforming how students, teachers, and leaders understand inclusion and cultural differences. The second case study explores Pogonia Hills Public Schools' novice district leader in the early stages of CRL implementation. In this case study, Karen Williams demonstrates how the beginning stages of culturally responsive leadership shift the organizational trajectory toward critical reflection patterns that uncompromisingly examine how culture and race influence student experiences and engagement. Although both cases are examples of CRDL, both leaders are in different phases of CRL and require a leadership praxis that is responsive to a particular time and space.

Literature Review

Understanding Organizational Impacts/Influences

In recent decades, sociologists have examined how complex organizations are influenced and affected by race and racial histories. Stinchcombe's (1965) classic paper "Social Structure and Organizations" argues that organizational formation is influenced by external environmental forces that persist long after an organization's foundation. Furthermore, Stinchcombe describes the process of imprinting, the idea that the past influences the present, and highlights how organizations are defined and affected by their foundation. If organizational leaders seek to eliminate histories of negative imprinting, they need to purposely work within organizations to identify and repair histories of harm (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2017).

Although Stinchcombe primarily focuses on the industrial level of organizations, he nevertheless offers a lens for seeing how traditions of white supremacy and social domination are embedded into formal organizational cultures and passed down through the multiple cycles of organizational participants. Similarly, March (1991) views organizational learning, particularly technical features such as the "usage of Best Practices and memo-ing," as a way for organizations to learn from past mistakes. In other words, organizations should preserve cultural cues that can inform future members of the organization by sending information to them across time. For March, this transforms the organization into a living breathing object, capable of remembering and learning through multiple cycles of participants (Groysberg, Lee, Price, & Cheng, 2018).

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Scholars of CRL regard their approach to school leadership as a process of influencing and expanding the school's cultural context by addressing all students, parents, and teachers' cultural needs. For example, Khalifa (2019) observes culturally responsive school leadership as a beginning stages of critical reflection tasks that promote an inclusive and open school culture. The goal is that marginalized students would understand, recognize, and find safety within this culture. Moreover, he imagines these leadership vanguards as having an active and connective presence with the community members they serve. In other words, a culturally responsive leader is a forward-thinking person who understands that organizations and power continuously shift and change over time. This requires a strong leadership disposition and awareness of school and social contexts, particularly when responding to the needs that accompany cultural and social shifts (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Shields, 2019).

From a structural perspective, CRL is a necessary tool to respond to our nation's diversifying schools. For the first time in US history, public schools now serve more non-white students than white students. Even as this demographic reality begins to inform the field of education, teachers remain predominantly white women, and the leaders are mainly white men. Some argue that these leaders lack the capacity to initiate the dynamic processes needed to interrogate and repair discourses surrounding race and diversifying communities. This is evident in the lack of disruption and the perpetuating of or acquiescing to deficit discourses and systems in mainstream schools that harm minoritize students through organizational reproduction. This is observed in discussion of the "opportunity/academic gap". Marginalized students are more often identified as having special education learning needs that are disassociated from academic metrics and instead tied to subjective interpretations of student behavior (Cortina, 2008; Eitle, 2016). They are disproportionately disciplined when violating the white, middle-class norms of colonial school culture. In turn, they receive more suspensions and office referrals than their white peers (Irby, 2014; Nowicki, 2018; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). This excludes them from classroom instruction which impacts the learning time and

teachers' and leaders' attention further contributing to being stigmatized as less academically successful than their white peers. Instead of addressing the systemic reproduction of racism and racial harm, school leaders continue to discuss an "unexplained" or "unaccounted for" gap in academic progress. As a result, a framework capable of engaging issue of diversity like is required (Young, Madsen, J., & Young, M. A. (2010)).

One of the most significant objectives for culturally responsive school leaders is to humanize minority youth both in and out of school. Culturally responsive leadership relies heavily on school leaders, as it is connected to their (anti-oppressive and culturally responsive) disposition and their ability to lead organizational change. More specifically, CRL must promote school climates that embrace minority youth and their identities. Scholars such as Banwo (2020) suggest the intentional implementation and promotion of culturally responsive pedagogies and organizational practices that establish communicable relationships with school officials, parents, and community members. Indeed, Khalifa (2018) believes that a leader must not only be critically self-aware but ready to employ administrative machinery to act on the information gleaned from "dual communicable relationships." While critical reflection is a crucial tenant of CRL, one must also show an understanding of one's biases and a willingness to use the organization's machinery to confront detrimental ways of viewing minority students through deficit framing and narratives.

Parent and Cultural Liaisons

One way that districts are creating culturally responsive and inclusive spaces for marginalized students is by tapping into their communities and hiring cultural liaisons (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006). Cultural liaisons provide a community/cultural-centric knowledge and understanding that has long been excluded from formal school environments. They help bridge the gap for schools to confront the historical oppressions and language barriers that impact student learning and outcomes (Colombo et al., 2006; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996). Different scholars also identify the role of cultural liaisons as a cultural broker (Weiss & Cambone, 1994) or buffer who serves as a "translator and a transmitter (Smiley, Howland, & Anderson, 2008, p. 342). As cultural liaisons are relatively new roles in schools, particularly in the US, the expectations and job descriptions for them remain unclear. A cultural liaison can be a parent, teacher aid, a community member, (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007) or someone who is specifically hired to be a liaison.

The literature addressing the roles, expectations, and even locations (e.g., school level, district level, or contractor) of cultural liaisons is limited. However, previous studies have shown how cultural liaisons must be placed in a leadership role—formal or informal—to be able to enact notable change (House & Hayes, 2002; Nolan & Palazzolo, 2011). This is important to consider when identifying a leader's commitment, as only having/hiring a cultural liaison is different from placing them in a position of power or allowing them to meaningfully contribute to the desired and/or necessary changes. Cultural liaisons are also advocates for marginalized students. Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone (2007) discuss parent liaisons who can learn and navigate the unwritten and inaccessible rules to accessing adequate resources and make other demands to help their children. We argue that these qualities also apply to any cultural liaison, as many students do not have parent liaisons/advocates who are available to show up in classrooms or school spaces because they experience exclusion or have other responsibilities/priorities.

Having access to hidden processes and procedures that traditionally benefit well-served students and being able to share these "rules" with marginalized families allows a cultural liaison to become a potential advocate within the school. Lastly, cultural liaisons provide a shared cultural and community connection that a teacher or administrator cannot provide. Lane (2017) highlights the example of a

teacher aide who, unlike teachers, can visualize and verbalize hidden procedures and practices for marginalized students and their families. Cultural liaisons can serve as conduits of clarity for marginalized communities (Martinez-Cosio, & Iannacone, 2007).

Theoretical Perspective: Culturally Responsive School Leadership

According to Khalifa (2018), leaders must promote schools that embrace the identities of minoritized youth, implement and promote culturally responsive pedagogy, and establish culturally responsive relationships with parents and community members. Khalifa (2018) argues that a leader's critical self-reflection recognizes both the history of marginalization of oppressed groups and the role leaders play in reproducing or contesting oppressive contexts. Leaders bear a unique responsibility for explicitly articulating how a school's organization will center students' concerns, particularly regarding cultural productions such as the inclusion and acceptance of minority students (Asante, 1991). The following four behaviors provide opportunities for promoting cultural responsiveness within a school:

1. **Critical self-awareness** focuses on the need to interrogate the ways that both leaders and their organizations contribute to, reproduce, or contest oppressive practices in schools (Gooden, 2005, McKenzie et al., 2008).

2. **Culturally responsive curricula and teacher development** require responsive leaders to support new curriculum and instruction modes that improve learning for and humanize minority students (Khalifa, 2018). This includes accessing community assets and experiential knowledge and ensuring their inclusion.

3. **Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments** address school climates and spaces and how they influence disparities in educational outcomes. Environments that affirm students' identities are critical, and school leaders should be able to leverage resources that foster embedded cultural affirmation (Dantley and Tillman, 2006, Riehl, 2000).

4. **Engaging students and parents in community contexts** incorporates adults outside the school as bearers of culturally appropriate knowledge. Thus, leaders establish routines for learning from the community and advocating for community knowledge, self-determination, and goals. This leads to a more culturally responsive education (Ishimaru, 2018) while also highlighting the place-based focus of CRSL.

Methodology

Our inquiry used a multi-year (September 2016-March 2020) qualitative case study research design that involves both embedded observations and interviews with district and school administrators, teachers, students, and community members. The qualitative research approach is established based on the premise that organizational cultures, practices, and realities are socially constructed, complicated, and in constant motion. Our approach was guided by an interpretative and descriptive approach to social phenomena, particularly the meaning that people use to understand their world and their reality. In particular, we focus on how participants' personal racialized experiences, through knowledge and understanding of history or personal perceptions, are used as an organizational "meaning-making" device for social analysis (Croker, 2009; Elliott & Timulak, 2005).

We performed data analysis using a content analysis method. During the analysis, we developed sub-themes and interpreted them for each of the conceptual areas. The interviews were conducted during the years 2016-2020. The first and second authors administered the interviews. The interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes by the transcription service REV.com and Zoom Video Communications, Inc. audio transcription.

This study is part of two larger culturally responsive school leadership projects that sought to investigate how district leaders in majority white and minority school districts perceive and act upon social, gender, class, and ethnic differences. The first data source is a series of 60 in-depth interviews conducted over five years. The second data source is broken into two parts. The first part refers to data gathered from district-level student and teacher focus groups. The district recommended the focus group participants. The second part refers to information gathered from two years of youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) in both featured school districts.

Research Questions
1. In what ways are educational leaders who enjoy existing relationships with their school communities better positioned to manage crises such as COVID and failed state and federal responses to the pandemic?
   a. How are they positioned to manage other issues, such as the rise of white nationalism and uprisings and protests against police brutality?
2. How do school leaders without prior relationships with or access to families, community members, and groups respond to such crises and/or other racial incidents, conflicts, and injustices?

Study Background and Cultural Liaisons Context
The cultural liaison program was adopted into the Midwest state regulations for special education in 2001. As envisioned by the state, the program serves to advocate for minority families and students to ensure equitable access to school and district services. According to the regulations, a cultural liaison refers to a person who is of the same racial, cultural, socioeconomic, or linguistic background as the pupil. The liaison also meets the following criteria:

a) provides information to the school's special team about the pupil's racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic background

al education team about the pupil's racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic background;

b) assists the team in understanding how racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic factors impact educational progress; and

c) facilitates the pupil's parents' understanding and involvement in the unique education process.

Ishimaru et al. (2016) have identified the typical cultural liaison (broker) position as one of fostering the conformity of non-dominant families to the existing professional norms. In contrast, DPS and Pogonia Hills Public Schools have expanded the state's expectations and incorporated a more reciprocal and challenging perspective that emphasizes student and family voices and focuses on equity and inclusion. Jessica and Karen regard student voices as an organizational tool that needs continuous examination through the development of healthy, culturally responsive relationships. For Jessica, Karen, and their districts, attention to student and family engagement has sought to infuse equitable affirmations and cultural responsiveness into every aspect of the district's culture and administrative practices.

Our case studies explore how district-level leadership enacts CRSL practices at a systemic level and transforms how organizational citizens experience and understand equity. Although Jessica and Karen regard their positions as opportunities to advocate for students and families, they also understand that their roles involve building the equity and inclusion capacity of their districts. This capacity building includes guiding teachers, students, and parents towards creating a district that fully values and respects all students' authentic cultural productions.

Findings: Case Studies

Case 1: DPS - "20 years in, and I am still fighting"

The DPS system's cultural liaison role has evolved from being a classroom helper to a professionalized position tasked with enacting significant cultural change to impact the school and its community. Over 30 years, the DPS system has developed this equity position to be somewhat distinct from other surrounding districts through their intentional focus on community connectedness. Their equity professionals have a shared cultural affinity with marginalized student populations (Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Moreover, the district views this intentional organizational practice as one that allows senior leadership an authentic and direct pipeline to the marginalized communities they have identified for interventions.

Jessica Dawson, a veteran administrator and head of DPS's Office of Equity and Inclusion (OEI), has been the driving force behind DPS's culturally responsive work since her arrival in the district 20 years ago. Although the OEI's cultural liaison program is not her original idea, she has shaped and expanded the program into one of the most dynamic and respected cultural responsiveness programs in the state. Throughout Jessica's tenure, she has cultivated her district's equity approach through her team's care for and responsiveness towards marginalized voices. Jessica regards student voices as a critical, culturally responsive tool that needs to be continuously examined through the development of healthy, culturally responsive relationships with students.

Moreover, for Jessica and DPS, this work has sought to infuse equity and cultural responsiveness into every aspect of the district and transform how students, teachers, and leaders understand inclusion and cultural differences. We perceive DPS's work as the district seeing and acting on "negative" and "racialized" organizational experiences, which we regard as commonplace in systems that are struggling with constructing healthy, culturally responsive environments (Asante, 1991). Jessica's practice of CRDL is unique within an educational landscape that fails to regard minority students' voices as significant warning signs of a lack of responsiveness. Through everyday interpersonal and organizational interactions, students and families transmit messages about their social and emotional position in the broader system. Jessica and her district recognize that these interactions serve as social cues for her office to gauge students' and parents' experiences and expectations. Her liaisons' development of their fine-tuned insight permits them to form deep, close relationships with students and families that help them improve learning outcomes and student socialization.

Listening to Social Signals

An essential goal for Jessica's team is creating institutional communication pathways between leadership and the broader organizations through which marginalized parents and students can express concerns for needed changes. For example, Jessica recounted a story about one of her parents being so upset with her son's school that she would place a tissue in the form of a Ku Klux Klan mask on the table during her school meetings. Although the relationship had deteriorated before Jessica was involved, it concerned her that the school's leadership team could not mediate this obvious racialized situation. The mother's nonverbal signals concerned Jessica and required her to step in and resolve

the problem. Jessica explains how she had formed a relationship with the mother's son, which allowed her to approach the mother as more of a friend: "before I had the first meeting I saw what she was wearing, and I said you go to a meeting like that…don't you have a coat outside…she went out and put on something. She came back in. She said nobody has ever said anything to me like that, but I know they were thinking it…and we laughed about that."

Jessica's breakthrough was only possible because she had worked with this family and demonstrated that she was coming from a place of sincere concern for the mother's son. The mother, according to Jessica, was not being heard or valued. Moreover, she did not have a person to trust or be honest with her. Jessica stated that "every time she threw that tissue on the table…I would swipe it off." Jessica's office focuses on capacity building and examining their district's culture, histories, and practices when it fails to be flexible and inclusive of its marginalized members. During our conversation, Jessica spoke about school leadership teams sometimes stop trying, blame external influences for their roadblocks, or assume marginalized people are reluctant to engage when students and families send social signals. Moreover, she believed these moments difficulties were times for growth and should be embraced and built upon.

Culturally Responsive District Leadership

Jessica regards social signs, one of the driving forces of DPS's equity policy, as an opportunity to act systematically to find the correct pathway for improvement. Moreover, over her tenure in the OEI, her eight-person team has cultivated relationships with students and teachers that have helped bridge the cultural gaps between families and the school district. The DPS team views this work as a crucial policy and organizational tool that effectively builds trust and the organizational capacity to overcome inevitable racialized roadblocks (i.e. organizational stress test and forward-thinking capacity building).

Moreover, Jessica and her office regard their position as "advocates" as an opportunity for the district to celebrate and strengthen students' overall schooling experience and embrace their differences. Jessica's approach is to not only improve the schooling experience for students on the ground but also increase her district's organizational capacity through the development of culturally responsive leadership skills of her district. She seeks to empower employees who "get the importance of equity" and who will one day be the leadership core of the district. For example, when we closed our interview, Jessica recounted concerns she has had with white female teachers targeting Somali male students for exclusionary discipline practices because of a pervasive belief that Muslim men do not fully respect women.

According to Jessica, when this problem was first raised as an equity concern, she had trouble explaining to the close-knit Somali community the racial and cultural nuances of the US. That they needed to be on guard for essentialist thinking from teachers and be prepared, if need be, to challenge a fight for a free and equitable education for their children. We recount this story because DPS's Somali cultural liaison was the first point of contact for Somali students at risk from teachers' essentialist thinking. Moreover, this Somali cultural liaison first brought the issue to Jessica, a senior district administrator. This liaison also was the first one to investigate, advocate, and make steps to disrupt the essentialist attitudes that the students and families found harmful.

Due to their socialization, the teachers from Jessica's story brought their racism and essentialist ideas about Somali, black, and Muslim students into DPS. Furthermore, this initially unchallenged view of students by school staff served to intentionally construct a malicious and harmful social reality. Without Jessica and her team's strong relationships with minority families, this issue would have likely continued unabated.

While the teachers' behavior was undoubtedly damaging to the black and Muslim students in the schools, this issue also relates to deeper concerns. The teachers denied the students an opportunity to be a part of the broader community as their authentic cultural selves. Moreover, for DPS's equity

agenda, these practices served as a reminder of how far their district has come and how far they must still go. Jessica stated that:

I'm relational. I build relationships with people, and my heart is really with kids. It really is because I know what it feels like to be sad. I know what it is like to be different, to be called ugly, be called white when you are not, and be teased about your freckles…I have gotten to a point where I tell kids that, yes, it used to hurt, but guess what, it's all me.

Case 2: New Leadership, New Beginnings and a New Shift towards Responsiveness

As Karen Williams transitioned into her new position, she quickly recognized her district's lack of preparedness in connecting and creating healthy spaces for marginalized students and their families. Before moving to her new role as the "principal on assignment for equity improvement," Karen served three years in the district. This allowed her to become familiar with the gap in achievement and opportunity that separates marginalized students and their white peers. Consequently, in this new position, she was not surprised to hear about the pervasive practices of over-policing, stereotypes, and racialization of Black and brown students. Pogonia Hills is known for its demographics in a way that even the city's nickname refers to both its foundation as a majority white population and unique topographical features. However, as the district became more diverse due to school choice options and an influx of minority families, Pogonia Hills began experiencing a community and racial crisis fueled by antiblackness and pervasive exclusionary practices.

As Karen began to settle into her new position, she recognized how pivotal the changing demographics were in how Pogonia Hills approached gaps in student engagement. According to Karen, the structural translation from historically serving white middle class and affluent students to merely accounting for and welcoming marginalized students' as new residents and community members had not happened. Her training in CRSL practices allowed her to be critically self-reflective in assisting the district's treatment of and relationships with its growing marginalized student population

Equity Audits as a Critical Reflection on Organizational Failure

A significant component of equity audits is to elevate students' voices by focusing on their experiences and lived realities. Karen believed that it was paramount to share how the students understood racialized events in the district. Moreover, she also saw the process of equity audits as an opportunity for the leadership to begin seeing how a lack of organizational inclusion and cultural responsiveness seriously harmed their students. Although many of the findings were deeply disturbing, it was clear that the district had little to no relationships with existing minority students and their families.

Marginalized students in the district voiced that they could not be their authentic selves in their schools and classrooms. Additionally, students reported being chastised and bullied by their white peers when expressing their traditional and cultural practices. However, Karen was most disturbed by teachers and administrators simply ignoring racialized slurs and the inappropriate touching of other students. As a result of this negligence, students—Black students in particular—were forced to learn in an environment where white students could get away with racism. At times, white students would employ something identified as "the N-word pass"—fabricated permission by an unknown Black student to say the word "nigga" or "nigger" without consequence. Karen found that this practice deeply demoralized some students and challenged their ability to learn in a fair and healthy school environment.

Although marginalized students were visible in the disproportionate discrimination and discipline they faced, they were invisible in the school curriculum and epistemologies discussed in the classroom. This was most relevant for Indigenous students who felt erased by the colonial curriculum.

One student noted, "You don't hear about any Natives. Like, what happened to them? They don't teach it at all. Natives are only mentioned in passing." In addition, when striving for high academic achievement, marginalized students were cast as unintelligible by teachers and administrators. One student accounted the following:

I took an honor class…I walked in there first day and it was all white…I felt really uncomfortable…one day the teacher came up to me and said, "I don't think this is right class for you." I said, what do you mean? He said, "take a look around." and I said, they are all white, and he said, "exactly"…he like installed a fear in me of having to do better that has impacted me all throughout my education career.

Moving to Culturally Responsive District Leadership
In an interview with the local press, Karen indicated the need to change and the district's willingness to make that change a reality. She began to create and repair the relationship between the district and marginalized families through CRSL. This involves engaging with critical consciousness and naming the oppressive practices that the district is enacting upon marginalized students. Karen has further advanced the district by creating an equity and engagement director position and embedding that position within the senior levels of district leadership. Moreover, she intentionally shaped the position in contrast to surrounding districts by targeting students and parents' engagement in a community context. This approach meets them where they are instead of forcing interaction on hostile foreign ground.

Although Pogonia Hills is only beginning its equity journey, its organizational embrace of culturally responsive leadership serves as a tool to disrupt the machinery of harm that pervasively defines marginalized student experiences. For more than two years, we have known Karen and watched her support student development through practices such as equity audits, YPAR, and direct outreach to marginalized communities. Moreover, we have seen Karen use these organizational tools as an opportunity to challenge stagnate, outdated thinking within her district. While there is still considerable work to be completed, we can see how the groundwork is being laid for both the academic and social-emotional success of all students.

Discussion

In the case study examples, we see differential degrees of effectiveness in response to racialized incidents. Since Jessica and her team have demonstrated their continued commitment to marginalized communities and families over many years, they are better positioned to bridge the gaps between families and the school district. In comparison, Pogonia Hills Schools are still in the beginning of their journey. This difference is significant. We argue that schools with CRDLs can better respond to racial incidents, crises, conflicts, and injustices than schools without these leaders. The relationships cultivated by the CRDLs establish communication pathways with school leaders who may not have prior relationships with or access to these families and communities.

Similarly, we claim that the overall effectiveness of the response to these issues is due to organizational stress tests. Similar to an economic stress test, an organizational stress test reveals issues within the organizational structure. These stress tests encourage the organization to grow stronger and enhance its abilities to weather future crises and incidences. Therefore, the more frequently an organization has responded to racialized incidents and injustices, the more effective their organizational players' capacity will be to function under severe or unexpected pressure. Ray (2019) understands this by examining what he terms the racialized organization and its ability to mobilize social phenomena, such as mobilizing whiteness as an organizational credential or access point for dominant organizational members.

However, Khalifa (2018) suggests that system leaders such as Jessica and Karen are positioned within their organizations as system-wide CDRLs who push and pull their districts towards an organizationally-reflective view of marginalized members' conditions and lived experiences. In both cases, leaders practicing CRL through critical self-reflection intentionally shaped and drove their organization to strengthen their marginalized students' social and organizational experience.

Culturally Responsive School District Leadership (CRSDL)

The DPS Director of Equity and Inclusion, Jessica, has demonstrated her long-standing commitment and ability to develop authentic relationships with minority students and their communities. Through her attentiveness to social cues, Jessica and her team captured these communities' concerns and communicated them to school leadership. Jessica then leveraged her position to facilitate institutional communication pathways between school leadership and marginalized communities and students. It is important to note that Jessica and her team received hostile responses from school workers when they attempted to shift the culture or report incidences that they believed were harmful to minority students. According to Jessica, teachers complained that her team implemented additional bureaucratic layers as a tool to undermine their siloed classroom space. While Jessica expressed her understanding of the teachers' position, she encouraged her liaisons to form a strong working relationship with school leadership, which she felt would translate to a positive relationship with teachers and other staff members.

In contrast, Karen's history of CRL demonstrates how district leaders can grapple with negative minority experiences and histories. Through critical self-awareness, Karen exhibited how leaders can alter their system's trajectory towards a process of culturally responsive organizational change. At the beginning of Karen's CRSL work, the district's values, beliefs, and dispositions did not healthily and responsively serve marginalized students. Karen changed this with her leadership training, as she instituted a process of repeatedly questioning systematic practices and attitudes through critical consciousness. This served to begin a process that would disrupt her district's oppressive practices and culture. Her leadership team began developing the district's strategic vision for the anticipated multiethnic and multicultural district they were becoming.

Organizational Stress Test

Both leaders argue that leadership development should focus on a process of forward-thinking capacity building that intentionally prepares their organizations to be resilient when racialized incidents occur. For Karen, her reflection on her district's neglect to recognize the significance of culture and racism, principally how it influenced their organizational structures, served as a powerful example of how deliberate processes hurt students by not challenging power and organizational inertia. Her CSL training led her to understand that organizations have agents within them who produce operations of interrelated processes, actions, and meanings that result in practices that maintain social inequalities (Acker, 2006).

Khalifa (2018) regards the disruptions of these operations as a critical juncture that leaders must examine when developing CRL to create a long-lasting and responsive institutional foundation. Both Jessica and Karen understand their roles as unmasking the structural machinery of whiteness, which is the residue of an earlier incarnation of their district's culture and practices. For Jessica, she unmasked this issue through her attention to marginalized students' social signals and how they serve to identify organizational blind spots. Jessica's critical work requires her to situate herself between teachers and staff who may not be ready for a changing organization and students and families harmed by a lack of organizational equity. Jessica's office carefully navigates and tailors its organizational goals of pushing and pulling actors towards a lasting and responsive foundation.

Moreover, we regard Karen and Jessica's work as contributing to an organizational stress test—through their leadership work that uses systematic breakdowns and activities (i.e. racial, equity and social differences) to prepare the organization's power and capacity to learn from mistakes and move forward within the new organizational paradigm. Moreover, we regard Karen and Jessica's ability to recognize, metabolize, and move forward with the new knowledge learned from the organizational breakdown as also preparing their school system to function better under severe or unexpected pressure. By laying the systematic groundwork of CRL, both leaders have strategically prepared actors within the district to grapple with future organizational crises. Indeed, both featured leaders understand their structural improvement mission is grounded in equity notions that center on aligning new policies, procedures, and equity values (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Moreover, their practices of establishing trust with white educators allow them to embrace the histories and raw experiences of their students while simultaneously moving their practice and leadership into a critically reflective and responsive framework. This space of criticality has the effect of authentically building social capital that is key to benefiting all students.

Culturally Responsive District Leader Effectiveness

The two CRDL cases demonstrate how these leaders have responded to the challenges of racialized incidents and other crises. We argue that organizational stress tests explain the effectiveness of their responses. By highlighting both cases, we aim to illustrate that CRL is an intentional practice that requires collaboration with minority communities and families, attentive listening, strategic thinking, and a willingness to advocate for change. These instances demonstrate how district leaders can employ CSL practices to create equitable solutions to racialized incidents within their school districts.

These actions also illustrate two critical components of CRDL: 1) systematically centering the concerns and voices of minoritized students and communities; and 2) communicating these concerns with school leadership to advocate for and promote dynamic systemic action for school improvement. This concept goes beyond the localized school building to the systemic leadership level and leaders who have a complete view of the systems' workings and operations. In the business field, this level of leadership is designated as "C-suite leadership." Moreover, these featured change agents demonstrate how district leaders can employ culturally responsive practices across systems to create equitable solutions to racialized incidents within their school districts. Indeed, we see these leaders as establishing synergistic communication pathways (two-way communication pathways) between minoritized communities, families, and school leaders, that enables school districts to be more responsive to different issues and concerns that fell into what scholars like Banwo (2020), term leader's cultural blind spots.

Implication for Practice

As district leaders attempt to implement positive changes, they must rely on relationships with the community if they hope to establish and promote culturally responsive organizations. In this research project, community relationships allowed district-level leaders to leverage community knowledge in ways that infused cultural responsiveness throughout different programs and structures. This phenomenon has deep implications for school leadership practice, as it explicitly calls on district leaders to institutionalize practices and policies. At a broad level, this research suggests that a cadre and network of cultural workers are needed to establish relationships and shift institutional practices.

These cultural liaisons must reflect the backgrounds of minority students. Due to the reproductive nature of white supremacist thinking, which is prevalent throughout a number of school structures, some cultural workers also need to examine and address white social and racial framings. Finally, leadership practices must always be critically self-reflective to allow educators to learn how to make

schools more inclusive. Awareness of practices of oppression that are automatically reproduced must be highlighted by elevating community perspectives and voices. Equity audits, community listening forums, frequent trips to the communities in service, and culturally responsive school leadership training are all strategies that can be undertaken to improve education for minority students.

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Designing with Families for Just Futures

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Community, power, justice. These concepts have long been potent for me, not only as a scholar but also as a teacher, community organizer, cultural arts worker, mother, auntie, granddaughter, and Nikkei community member. To me, these concepts are anchored in questions about how we might become fully ourselves. How do we bring who we have been, what we know, and the community traumas, resilience, knowledge, and even privileges we now have to build a more just education and society? As a fourth-generation Japanese American, such questions are shaped by my family's culture and history, indelibly marked by our community's incarceration by our government during World War II – for the crime of being ourselves.

Despite the uncertainty and betrayal at that time, my people created community and schools in the camps, built new lives afterwards in the face of racism and hatred, and then catalyzed a redress movement to try to ensure that the same thing cannot happen again to another community. And

MEGAN

Miigwechiwendan. Be grateful. Gizhewaadizi. Be kind, generous. Minwaajimo. Tell a good story. Mino-bimaadiziwin. The good life. Nanda-gikendan. Seek to learn it.

I come to this work, seeking to learn to live the good life, a just life, a sustainable life, as the mother of Ojibwe, Navajo, and Italian children, and in our ways, a mother and grandmother to many of my nieces and nephews who then extend my family to include Pima, Papago, Menominee, Potowatomi, Odawa, Oneida, Lakota, Mexican, Black and Iranian peoples. I am also a daughter, granddaughter, sister, and cousin. Some of these roles are through my blood relations, and some are made family.

My role in my families is made possible by those that came before me that struggled and endured, and continued to live. Those, like my grandfather, who survived boarding school, or my great-grandparents, who watched their lands being seized and sold and relocated as they lived in the unfolding aftermath of the

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though the legacy of Japanese American incarceration continues to cast a long shadow on the language and cultural practices of our increasingly diverse community, those experiences also taught us lessons about *gaman*, our ability to "make something beautiful through your anger, with your anger, and neither erase it nor let it define you."[1] We also learned about connections with other communities of color and Indigenous peoples on whose land we are simultaneously colonizers and colonized. The camps were often built on reservations, and my father was born on the Colorado River Indian Reservation in the camp known as Poston. As a fellow scholar wrote, we experienced for a few years what Indigenous communities have experienced for centuries. My father's family moved to Chicago after the war because a Black doctor there treated his asthma at a time when no white doctor would. I find myself reckoning with those histories as our community responds to anti-Asian racism that feels both new and ancient. Those histories are also present as we seek to move in solidarity with Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Pacific Islander communities who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic - alongside Muslim and immigrant communities facing ongoing oppression. My family and community taught me to draw strength and wisdom from those who came before us, to claim our political voice in resisting injustice, to see our lives and struggles as fundamentally interdependent, and to work to build a better world *kodomo no tame ni* – "for the sake of the children." These lessons from my own family and community infuse how I entered the process of co-developing the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC).

Indian Act. An act that disfigured nationhood, severed familial bonds, and forced western patriarchal domination into the fibers of grandparent-parent-child relations through laws of belonging intended to cause relational violence.

While the violence of these realities continues, it is also true that my family, past and present, continue to love, share stories, make art and music, grow and harvest food, pass on traditions, and make new ones. They have taught me to make life elsewhere to these violences, to fulfill our ancestral teachings and responsibilities in the here-and-now, and to continue to work to cultivate the conditions for our collective continuance.

Education has played a central role in our still-unfolding story. Education that has been saturated by settler colonialism and all of its dispossession and erasure, that removed through policy and violence, our communities forms of decision making about what our children learned, how they learned, why they learned, when they learned, and who taught them. Indeed recognized forms of education in the United States and Canada across history, whether through Christian missions, boarding schools, or public schooling, has continued to inflict onto-epistemic violence in stealthily muted and loud forms on Indigenous peoples intending to relegate our own forms of education to the shadows and the unceded time of what is often thought about as out of school learning.

Dreaming, making, growing what could be, what we need anyway, is always also happening. After being a teacher, I served as the Director of Education of the American Indian Center of Chicago (AIC) for twelve years. AIC, like many urban Indian centers, is a place that is the essence of Native peoples resisting and refusing colonial harm, of insisting on collective

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[1] From Traci Chee's young adult novel, "We are Not Free."

The sensibilities and commitments I bring to the FLDC also grow out of my experiences as a parent that pushed me into a completely different relationship with schools relative to the one I had as a teacher. After attending my first open house as a parent, I felt infantilized and condescended to - and swore only half-jokingly never to attend another parent meeting! I understood in a visceral new way how well-meaning white educators can signal to parents of color that they are to blame if their child does not succeed in school, that professionals know what's best for their children.

Through my research (and prior work) in community organizing, though, I witnessed powerful, organized Black and Brown parents and community members enact leadership to reshape policies, school cultures, and everyday educational practices. Families and their children were at the center of these schools – not only physically present, but shaping decisions, mentoring teachers, fostering the leadership of other parents, collaborating with educators on disciplinary processes, conceptualizing grant proposals, or advocating for resources. In short, they were enacting the community organizing definition of leadership: taking responsibility for what matters. Leadership in and out of systems was key: not as power and authority tied to formal positions within school hierarchies but as collective action and influence enacted in deep relation to others and to histories of oppression, resistance, and cultural resiliencies -- like the leadership I learned in my own family and community contexts.

To learn our way towards educational justice and wellbeing, we need multiple forms of expertise. Families, their young people, and communities bring powerful untapped forms of expertise, not only through their histories and experiences of inequities but also through our relationships, cultural and linguistic

continuance and communal wellbeing. A place birthed to continue community, culture, family, life, in the face of federal relocation policies intended to facilitate our assimilation. Instead, in this place, families came together to create the conditions where our stories and teachings lead us in creating learning environments and helped us to imagine and enact what we wanted for ourselves. While Indigenous people in urban communities reflect many tribal nations, in my experience, these processes of creating learning environments deepened, not erased or flattened, learning about our specific relationships and traditions. For me, I continued to deepen my understanding of my responsibilities as an Ojibwe woman and my ancestral teachings. I came to see the deep strength of engaging multiplicities and recognizing that the fear of assimilation and melting pot fantasies (e.g pan-indianism) can foreclose dreaming worlds forward. These fears can suffocate efforts to create decolonial education and cultivate our own resurgence through education. I have come to recognize the deep need to dislodge or desettle the foundational principles guiding much of education. Our current models, among other things, perpetuate age segregation, the removal of children from their familial and community life, and often deny family and communities roles and expertise in education.

Raising Indigenous children in the 21st century to be good ancestors to future generations is, from my perspective, my central task and responsibility as a mother and as an educator. Being a good ancestor requires simultaneously to live our ways of knowing and being in the present, to honor and remember our histories, and to continually work to bring into being robust forms of life and wellbeing with our peoples, now and into the future. The Family Leadership Design Collaborative marks a new phase of work for me in which

practices, knowledge, ethical stances, and ways of being in the world. Building from and weaving together those roots, we can begin to construct new solutions and work through possibilities for how communities and education might be.

I am aiming to help create solidarities across cultural communities that transform the foundational contradictions of education, that see generative tensions as key sites of change-making work to design, or dream anew, possible forms of education (and potentially policy) that contribute to multiple forms of community wellbeing and educational justice.

Building the Family Leadership Design Collaborative

As co-leads of the Family Leadership Design Collaborative, we open this special two-part section of JFDE with our own personal and scholarly narratives to situate the work of imagining just futures in the histories, struggles, understandings, and leadership of our own families and communities. The Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC) was established in 2015 with the aim of cultivating a place and space to develop theories, everyday practices, and local policies to reach beyond the well-developed critique of conventional parent involvement regimes and into transformative possibilities. We intentionally enter the story of FLDC through our own stories as a way to model what it means to begin with our histories and ecologies as well as our scholarship in taking up what we have come to call "solidarity-driven codesign." Drawing from our collective ecologies, theories, and scholarship, a core group of scholars, family/community leaders, and educators came together to codesign a transformative research-practice agenda that would center families and communities in envisioning and leading racially just education (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016). Our efforts built from Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies (Brayboy, 2005; Smith, 1999) as well as social justice-focused design-based research (such as social design experiments (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016), formative interventions (Engeström, 2004), and community-based design (Bang et al., 2016). From these roots, we evolved solidarity-driven codesign, an iterative inquiry process with nondominant youth, families, and communities to envision and enact just relations and educational futures.

This introduction to the special two-part section of this journal shares the theoretical foundations of FLDC's work and the principles of solidarity-driven codesign that connect efforts across vastly different geographies, racial and ethnic communities, and contexts to reimagine ways forward towards educational justice. We illuminate methodological and theoretical trajectories of intertwined research and practice that seek to reckon with systems that have disregarded, alienated, and disproportionately harmed racially minoritized families and communities – and to envision paths forward centered on the priorities and dreams of those youth, families, and communities.

To reimagine the role of families and communities in racially equitable education, we first drew on critical race and decolonizing lenses to illuminate the settled expectations of the current school-centered paradigm and to build from ancestral and community practices to expand those aims towards a process of collective learning towards education justice and community wellbeing. With a network of collaborators, we worked to "lean in" to the generative tensions of decolonizing education in a way that fostered solidarity relations with each other and with local communities. We brought lenses from the study of culture, race, and learning into conversation with the critical educational leadership, school improvement, and

family engagement fields to sharpen and expand the theoretical grounds for justice-focused change-making in education.

Settled Expectations in Family Engagement

We draw on Cheryl Harris' work on whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) to illuminate the settled expectations of family engagement that undergird the basic premises of school-community relations in US public schools. Dr. Harris analyzed the history of legal struggles and decisions to illuminate the intertwining of property rights and whiteness in the foundations of the United States, from the settler colonial logics of stolen lands from Indigenous peoples to the stolen labor of enslaved Africans kidnapped and brought by force to this country. She argued that the definitions of race (from "one drop" to "blood quantum") differ based on the property rights to be maintained, but they do so in ways that uphold the rights of those in power and sustain white institutional privilege, including the rights to determine meaning and the extent and pace of change:

> "[T]he law holds to the basic premise that definition from above can be fair to those below, that beneficiaries of racially conferred privilege have the right to establish norms for those who have historically been oppressed pursuant to those norms, and that race is not historically contingent. Although the substance of race definitions has changed, what persists is the expectation of white-controlled institutions in the continued right to determine meaning - the reified privilege of power - that reconstitutes the property interest in whiteness in contemporary form." (p 1762).

In the case of family engagement, schools – as white-controlled institutions – have the right to define what counts (as "engagement" and "positive" support) and what doesn't and what matters (as learning and outcomes) and what doesn't. Schools retain the power to recognize, value, and reward practices that adhere to white, middle-class parenting norms and disregard, erase or pathologize others to legitimize and maintain a set of privileges and exclusivity in property. Thus, settled expectations in family engagement are normed on white, middle-class childrearing practices (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; McCarthy, 2019; Yull et al., 2018); departures from those norms are rendered detrimental to children because they threaten those meanings and privileges.

Part of these settled expectations include the unquestioned assumption that Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and Pacific Islander parents and families are, at best, passive clients or beneficiaries, not experts on their own children, educators in their own rights, or leaders in change-making. The underlying assumptions and dynamics of schools perpetuate dynamics in which mostly white educators seek to "fix" families to become compliance officers for schools – to ensure children's attendance and compliance with school policies – while expecting families to trust educators and school systems to keep their children safe, physically, emotionally, and psychologically.

Decolonizing education: Leaning into the both/and of schools

Powerful forms of resistance, (re)vitalization and survivance have always existed despite settler colonialism and oppression in the US (Kaba, 2021; Smith, 1999; Vizenor, 2008). Families of color have long educated their children towards becoming contributing, thriving members of their communities. These forms of learning continue in many ways, for example, through Indigenous stories and practices, nondominant collective childrearing practices, language preservation and revitalization efforts, African American liberatory education traditions, Latinx storytelling, and cultural practices, and parent racialization processes. Challenging and transforming the settled expectations of family engagement requires

navigating inherent tensions and contradictions between fighting for the potential of public education in a pressing neoliberal policy context and cultivating the broader ecologies of learning across contexts essential for thriving beyond settled ends of meritocratic "escape" from one's community that so often is at the heart of "educational achievement."

In addition to recognizing the ancestral knowledges (Khalifa, 2018) and cultural "wealth" of communities of color (Yosso, 2005) then, efforts to transform the relationship between schools and families must reckon with the history of schools as sites of colonization built on stolen land, peoples and cultures, controlled by white educators, cultures, and structures. Compulsory attendance laws and policies of forced assimilation designed to separate children from their families, languages, knowledge, and ways of being (Fryberg & Bang, 2018) have given way to policing of behaviors, subtle forms of segregated schooling, remediation paradigms, and the nexus between school and prisons (Andersons, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Orfield & Frankenburg, 2014; Love, 2019; Meiners, 2011). These recognitions raise pressing questions about whether foundations of oppression can foster liberation or justice. Envisioning education beyond those structures and their interconnected oppressive systems requires constructing new possibilities starting from a fundamentally different set of understandings, stances, and relations (Mignolo, 2007).

### Learning our way to education justice and community wellbeing

Drawing from Black feminists who call us to move beyond either-or conceptualizations that subvert justice (hooks, 2003), we worked to move beyond static identities of "academics" versus "community" towards inviting each other to engage as whole human beings embedded in particular contexts as scholars, community leaders, family members, *and* educators. This was not a simple ask, given the histories of damage wrought by research in communities of color (Smith, 1999) and the powered racial, gender, and other hierarchies experienced by scholars of color in the academy (Niemann, 2012). In short, our practiced critique often led us to strategize change through negation (e.g., what's wrong or problematic that we should eliminate or strategize around), whereas we had not yet developed a shared practice of imagining beyond educational systems as they have been and currently exist – towards desired futures that might be.

By leaning into those tensions, we began to engage in collective learning and design that envisioned young people and families thriving in more expansive notions of education rooted in communities. We recognized that the aims of educational justice and community wellbeing cannot center schools and top-down policies or reforms but must be defined by each community within their own context. We pushed ourselves to build solidarities *across* communities and consider multiple theories of change for reimagining or working beyond existing systems. Although every community is distinct in its history, context, and nuances of culture, power, and relationality, the collaborative envisioned a set of principles that might collectively root and connect our efforts around a core set of stances and approaches.

FLDC Solidarity-driven Design Principles

We iteratively developed the following design principles to root subsequent inquiries across the collaborative in fostering educational justice and community wellbeing. Together we created a graphic (Cultural Organizing blog post) to help hold some of these principles, with each principle corresponding to a different aspect of the graphic (https://familydesigncollab.org/framework/). Because we have elsewhere provided examples

of practices that attend to the principles in specific contexts (Ishimaru et al., 2018), we focus here on the concepts and theoretical claims that inform the principles and their connections to one another.
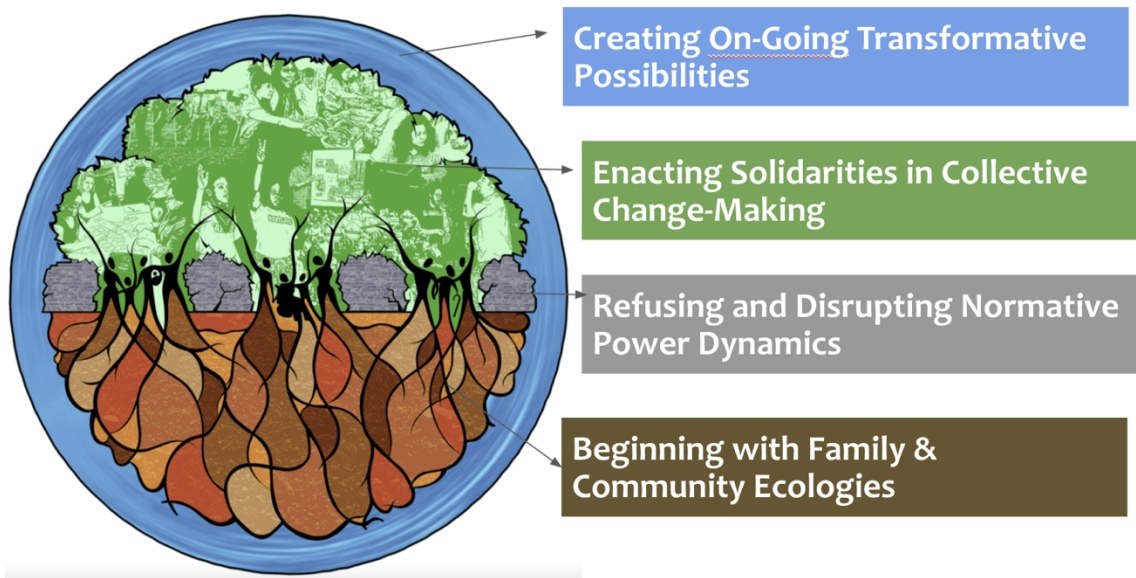
Beginning with Family & Community Ecologies

Beginning at the bottom of the graphic, the foundations of justice and wellbeing must be rooted in the knowledge, priorities, practices, ethics, and relations of nondominant families & communities. Starting codesign or process from an expansive understanding of those roots means situating work not only in histories and systems of oppression but also within ongoing forms of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) and resistance amidst settler colonialism and racism as well as histories of fugitivity, transformation and innovation in community spaces, both beyond and within formal institutions of education (Anderson, 2004; Cajete, 2016; Kelley, 2002; Siddle-Walker, 1996). In deliberately looking to ancestral knowledges, cultural practices, and lived experiences as resources in solidarity-driven codesign work with families and communities (Khalifa, 2018), we recognize nondominant communities as dynamic, multidimensional, and constantly evolving practices and knowledge across time and place. These stances recognize that the starting point for design and learning are consequential for the trajectories and pathways that open (or enclose) subsequent activity.

Refusing and Disrupting Normative Power Dynamics

Even as codesign roots itself in family and community ecologies, we also recognize current injustices in education (and society) as shaped by histories and power in systems, structures, and institutions that intersect differently across different positionalities. Thus, solidarity-driven codesign that reckons with power to transform it necessitates naming colonization, racism, colonialism, sexism, classism, ableism, and heteronormativity as root causes and intersectional forms of oppression. Beyond naming these dynamics and the barriers they constitute to thriving and dignity, codesign work seeks to "desettle" forms of normativity that function to assimilate and erase our cultural ways of knowing and being. Such forms of normativity include the settled expectations of nondominant families and communities we elaborated on earlier. Thus, this principle focuses on refusing and disrupting the normative processes or deliberations that position families as passive recipients or needy beneficiaries –

but not knowers, doers, or leaders – while simultaneously positioning educators, policymakers, or researchers as unquestioned experts on the lives, learning, and futures of young people.

This principle also references our efforts to refuse an interest convergence politic in the process of our deliberations. Derrek Bell's notion of interest convergence illuminates how advances in racial justice occur only when they converge with the interests of powerful elites (Bell, 1980). Although Bell emphasized interest convergence as a historical tool for understanding societal change vis-à-vis racism, a dominant paradigm for change continues to rely on expanding white, powered interests to motivate change and shift institutions (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). However, interest convergence remains anchored in the world as it is, rather than the world as we might want it to be. Thus, we draw on this principle to name and deliberately work to disrupt the dominant assumptions and status quo-bound systems that reinforce intersectional racial injustices and relations as we seek to imagine and implement more just futures.

Enacting Solidarities in Collective Change-Making

Solidarity-driven forms of codesign orient and build from long histories of mobilizing inquiry in solidarity with the change-making of youth, families, and communities impacted by injustices (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). This principle orients us beyond "how do" descriptive questions that build knowledge about how we came to the current structures, systems, practices, and outcomes. Instead, we seek to open "how can" questions that co-construct knowledge and envision *beyond* our existing systems and structures, even amidst the profound challenges in education.

This principle also orients us to the "here and now" relationships that constitute both process and product in solidarity-driven codesign. Across the design conversations, we reached for what scholars have called a "proleptic politic" (Cole, 1998), or what CADRE organizer Maisie Chin refers to as "realizing the future in the present." That is, we aimed to prefigure solidarity relations through the process of designing and imagining justice and wellbeing. However carefully structured or facilitated, no design process will be free of the powered dynamics and normative assumptions that shape our daily lives; instead, the moment-to-moment interactions in codesign work became opportunities to intervene in inequitable or problematic relations and systemic tensions. Building solidarities across and with difference constitutes a key aim of the work to enact transformative and consequential forms of learning and activity.

Cultivating Ongoing Transformative Possibilities

This principle attends to the process of educational change-making as an ongoing process that unfolds across contexts, communities, disciplines, institutions, and generations. Unlike the technical-rational and settler colonial logics of dominant white institutional systems and mainstream education reform, the work of codesign does not aspire to singular solutions or one-size-fits-all "silver bullets" that reinforce the current system logics. Instead, we posit that design *with* families and communities towards educational justice and community-determined wellbeing works to transform power and possible futures by drawing on heterogeneous disciplines, theories, and knowledge towards multiplicities. When taken up in ways that are consistent with this principle, solidarity-driven codesign cultivates relations and activity that ripple across space, time, and communities to engender ongoing possibilities and futurities for learning and living. This requires deliberate time and space for "social dreaming" (Espinoza, 2008) rooted in community knowledges and practices; lived through solidarities

that reckon with our unique histories *and* interdependencies (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012); and iteratively enacted as justice-making for collective continuance (Whyte, 2017).

Grounding Principles in Local Contexts & Communities

Through the FLDC network, we subsequently catalyzed a series of design circles to "ground truth" the principles and open new imaginative spaces and futurities across ten distinct geographical, racial, and cultural communities. FLDC partners facilitated design circles with urban Indigenous communities and Persian school families in Chicago, Toisanese (Chinese) families in Southeast Seattle, Latinx families in suburban Salem, Oregon, Black and Brown parents in South Central Los Angeles, Latinx families and educators in West Salt Lake City, Black childcare and early education providers in rural Greenville, Mississippi, multiracial youth and community organizers in Detroit, immigrant mothers in suburban Rhode Island, and Black parents and principals in Southfield, Michigan. Although the design circles varied by context and how they took up solidarity-driven codesign (as a continuation of existing work or as new work), all the efforts worked to address these principles to different extents across 3 to 5 sessions. These initial design circles aimed to expand possibilities for change and catalyze transformative visions that might evolve into further implementation-focused codesign. We subsequently supported a second, more in-depth set of codesign efforts with a subset of 4 of these collaboratives to evolve our methodological and facilitative practices and engender new forms of family-community-educator activity and inquiry towards justice and wellbeing.

About the JFDE Special Sections

The two articles in this special section of JFDE constitute the first of two sections of the journal focused on the work of the FLDC. In designing with the solidarity-driven codesign principles, the first two papers illuminate distinct immigrant codesigns that opened new conceptual and relational possibilities for change as participants grappled with tensions of identity, relationality, and complex personhood amid profound historical and sociopolitical challenges to raising and educating their children. Kuttner, Yanagui, López, Barton, & Mayer-Glenn (this issue) revisit a school-based budget decision-making body with Latinx families and educators. They examine how the group-centered contradictions of a policy intended to mandate parent voice in ways that fostered emergent solidarities across roles, race, culture, and experiences. The authors raise crucial questions about how to continuously cultivate opportunities for humanizing family-educator relations amidst school-centered engagement regimes and ongoing challenges, such as the covid pandemic and recently, state policymaking targeting "critical race theory" in schools.

Vossoughi takes up the thread of complex personhood, racial identity, and sociopolitical dynamics in her paper about intergenerational codesign with Iranian families in a Persian language school. Amid the 2016 election and Muslim ban, these design circles offered relational insights into the complex political tensions that emerged through the cultivation of a space of learning, as families grappled with sometimes contradictory narratives about race and identities. The author invites us to treat the stories and concerns in such dialogic social relations as "portals of meaning" that – over time –
might seed self-determining futurities and solidarities.

In the upcoming second section, we share papers that examine how sustained engagement shape our theories of change across contexts and time; how intergenerational

learning enacted everyday resurgence and global Indigeneities; and how Black and brown parent leaders took up "rehearsals" as a practice for re-humanizing relations with educators to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. Finally, the commentary looks across the two sections to illuminate implications for teachers, leaders, and educational systems. The scholarship across these sections seeks to create spaces to develop knowledge, everyday practices, and relational leadership to envision transformative relations and change for families and education beyond a school-centered, ahistoric paradigm. Collectively, we hope they open the landscape of possibilities in the field to imagine anew what we need to cultivate just education.

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Moments of Connection: Building Equitable Relationships Between Families and Educators Through Participatory Design Research

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Abstract
Recent years have borne evidence of a resurgence of calls for schools to include families in school decision-making as part of a broader movement for equitable family-school partnerships; these partnerships require strong parent-teacher relationships characterized by mutual trust. However, such relationships are inevitably shaped by systems and histories related to racialization and power. This article explores how culturally and linguistically diverse families alongside teachers from the dominant school culture can begin building trusting relationships in spite of inequity. Its basis is an in-depth analysis of family-educator interactions in a participatory design-based research project in Salt Lake City, UT. We extract what we call *moments of connection* — moments when participants connected with one another despite the personal, historical, social, and institutional forces that so often divide them. We utilize these moments to suggest avenues for building trust, solidarity, and increasingly humanizing forms of engagement in our schools and communities.

Keywords: design research, co-design, site-based management, family engagement, family-school partnerships, political trust, relational trust, family leadership

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On a summer morning, 20 adults arrived at the Glendale-Mountain View Community Learning Campus in Salt Lake City, UT. They selected pastries and coffee from the counter and sat in four small groups around square tables; younger children were in the room next door for childcare. This gathering was unique in both its makeup and its goal. One half of the participants were parents of children in local schools, and the majority of these parents were Spanish-speaking residents from immigrant and migrant communities on the city's west side. The remainder of the participants were educators from various levels of the K–12 system; the majority of these were White and and worked in west side schools while living outside of that area. These individuals and others had gathered 3 times over the course of a month to discuss how families and educators could better collaborate regarding shared decision-making at school sites.

They were engaged in redesigning a form of site-based school decision-making called *School Community Council* (SCC), a body legislated to include parents in the development of school improvement plans and the disbursement of state funds. Participants engaged not only as families and educators but also as coresearchers in a form of participatory design research called *solidarity-driven co-design* (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2019) that aimed to reimagine SCCs as spaces for equitable family-school collaboration (FSC). Participants were asked to contribute to a collective act of critical imagination (Cartwright & Noone, 2006; Greene, 2000) — to critique the SCC as it is and to imagine how it could be.

The push to include families in school decision-making has been revived in the past decade amid growing calls for more equitable forms of family engagement in which families and educators share power and view each other as partners (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Epstein et al., 2018; Hong, 2019; Ishimaru, 2019a; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017). Collaboration requires strong, positive relationships between families and professional educators; these relationships must be characterized by mutual trust, understanding, openness, valuing of each other's assets, and shared power (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). Building such relationships between culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families and educators from the dominant school culture requires more than opportunities for families and educators to become acquainted with each other (Park & Paulick, 2021). Such relationships are inevitably shaped by and must contend with the racial and social hierarchies of society, discourses that dehumanize and pathologize CLD families, and legitimate reasons that CLD communities distrust the schools that have harmed or failed them in the past (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Olivos, 2006; Vakil, de Royston, Nasir, & Kirshner, 2016).

Consequently, the relevant que nm stions are as follows: How can equitable, power-sharing relationships between families and professional educators be intentionally built and maintained in a context of inequity? How can families and educators move from alienation to collaboration, distrust to partnership, and conflict to solidarity? Where are the openings, or *aperturas* (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016), through which new kinds of relationships can be formed? These questions are at the core of the project we describe in this article. We comprise a community engagement professional, a community organizer, a critical scholar, a graduate student, and a lifelong public school educator. We are members of a design research team gathered around a shared commitment to family leadership in schools. In this article, we reflect on our first project together.

The primary goal of our project was to redesign SCCs to be spaces that foster collaborative, equitable relationships between families and educators. In addition, we utilized the design research process itself to explore and foster these relationships. As with other efforts to build equitable collaboration, we encountered challenges — some members were privileged and others were silenced, and social hierarchies asserted themselves within our circle. However, we also witnessed moments of understanding, empathy, learning, and collaboration. In this paper, we examine these moments — what we call *moments of connection* — to mine them for their insights into how we may begin building

the relational bridges through which equitable FSC thrives. Ultimately, we argue, these moments not only suggest opportunities to build trust but also offer a peek into developing increasingly humanizing forms of family engagement (Gallo, 2017) in our schools and communities.

Shared Decision-Making, Family-School Collaboration, and Relational-Political Trust

The past 60 years have seen several major initiatives to involve families in formal school decision-making processes, both in the US and abroad (Moradi, Hussin, & Barzegar, 2012; Preston, 2009). Under names such as *site-based management* and *shared governance*, these efforts have produced different forms of community councils with various levels of decision-making power scattered across the schooling landscape. Proponents of these councils argue that they can fulfill families' rights to have a voice in their children's educations, make schools more accountable and responsive to communities, advance needed reforms, keep parents from exiting the public school system, and ultimately lead to better and more equitable schools (Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Martell, 2008; Preston, 2009).

Research on such councils is mixed. Studies of Chicago's powerful local school councils offer evidence that well-functioning councils can effectively advocate for improved academic programming and facilities, increase families' involvement in schools, and build partnerships (Designs for Change, 2002). Councils with strong CLD family representation and necessary support are effective in building stronger understanding of community cultures among teachers while strengthening relationships between schools and CLD families (Marschall, 2006). However, while councils can work under certain conditions (Nygaard, 2010), they are often dominated by administrators and teachers, privilege middle-class White families who share backgrounds with school staff, involve parents largely in topics peripheral to teaching and learning, and do not contribute to changing fundamental school functions or power relationships (Anderson, 1998; Brown & Hunter, 1998; Malen & Ogawa, 1998). At worst, the discourse of participation becomes a way to control or co-opt parents from marginalized and racialized communities, deflect criticism from school leaders, and lead to rubber-stamping that legitimizes the status quo without changing inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Anderson, 1998; Brown & Hunter, 1998; Malen & Ogawa, 1998).

In recent years, a surge of calls has arisen demanding that schools move beyond traditional forms of parental involvement (e.g., volunteering in the office, attending parent-teacher conferences, or reading school newsletters) toward engaging, collaborating, and partnering in more equitable, reciprocal, and culturally responsive or sustaining ways regarding student learning and development (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Epstein et al., 2018; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Hong, 2019; Ishimaru, 2019a, 2019b; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017). This includes efforts for schools to share power with families as leaders and decision makers (Hong, 2011; Warren, Mapp, & Kuttner, 2015), recognizing the wealth of knowledge and assets that families provide (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; López, 2001; López & Vàzquez, 2006; Yosso, 2005) as well as the power of organized parents to promote educational justice and systemic change (Mediratta, McAlister, & Shah, 2009; Warren, Mapp, & the Community Organizing and School Reform Project, 2011).

Equitable FSC requires strong family-educator relationships that are rooted in mutual trust (Gallo, 2018; Ishimaru, 2019a). Addressing the challenges of partnership requires what Bryk and Schneider (2003) call *relational trust*, which is a vital lubricant for collaboration. Bryk and Schneider (2003) offer four considerations that, when present, foster trust: (a) respect, which includes authentically listening to another person and considering their perspectives; (b) personal regard, which is expressed through a proactive willingness to engage and be open; (c) competence, which is the sense that someone has

the knowledge and skills to fulfill their role; and (d) personal integrity, which determines whether an individual does what they say they will do. In their review of multidisciplinary definitions of trust, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) provide a somewhat different but overlapping taxonomy of trust that includes willing vulnerability, benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Trust cannot be assumed or legislated, and the process of building trust is never complete. Rather, it must be constantly recreated and reinforced through repeated social interactions in which the parties demonstrate the above considerations (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Trusting family-educator relationships are often lacking in schools. Relationships in many schools are characterized by mistrust on both sides, with educators tending to be less trusting of families than vice versa (Adams & Christenson, 1998, 2000). This particular issue is present in a growing number of schools in which a majority White educator workforce teaches a student body from CLD communities, including bicultural and immigrant communities of Latinx background (Olivos, 2006). Social hierarchies in language, race, and culture as well as personal and community histories of harm and marginalization by schools influence every family-school interaction (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). These disconnections are rooted in the racism, colonialism, and inequity that have been — and continue to be — fundamental to the structures of U.S. schooling (Race Forward, 2006; Warren, Mapp, & the Community Organizing for Education Reform Project, 2011). Systemic injustices are replicated in the microcosm of schools, leading to a dominant ideology that views families of color and bicultural families through a deficit lens — as problems rather than solutions to educational inequities (Delgado Gaitan, 2012; Olivos, 2006).

Building trusting family-educator relationships in spite of systemic inequity is a difficult but vital task in the movement for educational justice. General advice abounds regarding how educators can engage families in ways that increase trust and connection. For example, scholars recommend that educators communicate openly, demonstrate that they care, create a welcoming environment, conduct home visits, make positive calls home, take family concerns seriously, and treat people as individuals (i.e., resist stereotypes; e.g., Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Epstein et al., 2018). This work, however, often underappreciates the extent to which systems and histories related to race and power shape cross-racial and -cultural relationships and must be addressed in the relationship-building process (Gallo, 2017; Park & Paulick, 2021). In response, Vakil, de Royston, Nasir, and Kirshner (2016) seek to expand our definition of *trust* to include what they call *political trust*. Speaking from the context of design research in education, the authors argue that trust building within cross-racial collaboration requires a form of "political or racial solidarity" (p. 199) rooted in an explicit recognition of historical and current power relationships.

Neither trust nor solidarity is gained (nor should it be) by the assertion of good intentions, nor is it accomplished merely once and then set aside. Instead, politicized trust calls for ongoing building and cultivation of mutual trust and racial solidarity. It is thus a trust that actively acknowledges the racialized tensions and power dynamics inherent in design partnerships. (p. 199)

Building on the concepts of relational and political trust — and the recognition that building, rebuilding, and maintaining trust is an ongoing process of small interactions that, over time, reinforce or disintegrate family-educator relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Vakil, de Royston, Nasir, & Kirshner, 2016) — this article fulfills a pressing need for critical research that examines relationship building at the micro level and seeks how we can successfully create spaces for trust-building interactions to flourish.

Our Research Project

This study is part of a community-campus partnership called the *FSC Design Research Project*, which

is led by an evolving team of academic researchers, parent leaders, organizers, educators, and graduate students. Partners for the project include the University of Utah College of Education, the Utah Community Advocate Network (UCAN), the Salt Lake City School District, and University Neighborhood Partners, a department that convenes and supports community-campus partnerships on Salt Lake City's west side. As members have transferred to new universities but remained with the project, we have also developed connections at Michigan State University and the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

The FSC Design Research Project is part of the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC), a national network based at the University of Washington School of Education. The FLDC utilizes a research methodology we call *solidarity-driven codesign,* a critical and participatory form of design research (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Design research in education aims to advance educational theory and practice by enacting, studying, and revising educational theories and interventions amid the messiness of real-life learning situations (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003; Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004). Solidarity-driven codesign both extends and challenges previous design research processes by employing critical, decolonizing, and community-based methods (Beckman & Long, 2016; Smith, 1999; Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, & Donohue, 2003). Furthermore, solidarity-driven codesign centers upon the knowledge and participation of families from nondominant communities and provides ongoing attention to questions of power and inequity, not only in terms of the topics of study but also among codesigners themselves. As Bang and Vossoughi (2016) explain, this approach "links both structural critiques of normative hierarchies of power and imagined possible futures" while concurrently being "committed to consequential impacts in the here and now" (p. 174).

Solidarity-driven codesign follows an iterative 4-step cycle (Family Leadership Design Collaborative, 2019). It begins with relationship building and theorizing, during which diverse stakeholders engage in storytelling and assuming another person's perspective while working to create an inclusive space that attends to interpersonal power dynamics. Next, in the design and development phase, participants engage in multimodal activities to develop potential solutions to educational injustices that are rooted in the expertise and practices of nondominant families. In the third phase — enacting — participants pilot their designs in a real-world setting and collect data that aid understanding of the design's process and impact. Finally, in the analyze-and-reflect phase, the group collectively assesses the work, shares learning, celebrates successes, and utilizes new knowledge to launch another cycle of redesign. In reality, these phases are not clearly delineated, and some steps — such as relationship building — are ongoing throughout the design process. In this article, we examine data from the period before we enacted our pilot designs; therefore, the data focus mainly on Phases 1 and 2 of the cycle.

Our project centered around SCCs, a form of family involvement in school decision-making. SCCs are mandatory at every school in Utah and exert control of discretionary funds derived from profits on Utah lands that are held in trust for schools (School Land Trust Program, n.d.). SCCs comprise an administrator, at least two school staff, and at least four parents or guardians; parents must outnumber staff by at least two. SCCs are tasked with reviewing, revising, and approving a school improvement plan and creating a proposal to utilize the aforementioned state funds.

For years, parent leaders and community-minded educators had lamented that SCCs were failing families in the city's west-side neighborhoods, which are home to the majority of the city's residents of color as well as residents of immigrant, migrant, and refugee backgrounds, including 75% of the city's Spanish-speaking population. The west side has faced a history of disinvestment, marginalization, and educational inequity, as it is separated physically and culturally from the wealthier, Whiter east side (Downen, Perlich, Wood, & Munro, 2012). SCCs in west-side schools had typically

recruited and retained low numbers of students' family members or only White families, and families who attended often reported feeling that they were rubber-stamping plans created by educators.

The question for our project became this: how can we reimagine SCCs so that they are spaces for equitable parent leadership and FSC? This question led to the design of multiple products that were later piloted in schools, including a comic book that parents could utilize to recruit other parents to SCCs and educate families regarding their rights. However, in this article, we focus not on the products of the design circles but on the process. In this way, we aim to ascertain the possibilities illuminated by this process for building equitable family-educator relationships.

Research Methods

Our project utilized design circles (Ishimaru, Rajendran, Nolan, & Bang, 2018), in which community members gathered to codesign theories of change and solutions to pressing community issues. Design circles are similar to traditional focus groups, as they convene people from the study context in a recorded conversation who share their thoughts and experiences. However, in a design circle, sharing stories is one step in a larger process that includes relationship building, collective analysis of one another's stories, discussions of larger sociopolitical structures, and the cocreation of theories and solutions. Ishimaru and Bang (2016) describe circles more accurately as "in-depth reciprocal working groups"(p. 14) that leverage multiple forms of knowledge to catalyze action. Design circles are generally not singular events; rather, they are conducted in a series with time between each meeting during which facilitators investigate data from the previous circle and utilize them to inform the next by analyzing the flow of the conversation, determining ways to improve facilitation, and identifying data to present to the larger group for collective discussion.

We organized three design circles over the course of a month; each was 2.5 hours in duration. All meetings were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. We sought to create a space that was welcoming and accessible to both educators and families while specifically focusing on addressing the barriers that often exclude CLD families from school activities. We held the sessions at a community learning center that was frequently utilized by and comfortable for many families. We provided meals and childcare at all sessions and engaged in Spanish-English and English-Spanish translations throughout.

We invited approximately 10 parents of public school children. All but one were Spanish-speaking parents with immigrant backgrounds from Mexico and other Latin American countries; the remaining parent was a Somali American of refugee background. This reflects the primarily Latinx or Hispanic makeup of our main partner, UCAN, which is an intergenerational group of family and community leaders. Latinx or Hispanic students comprise 38.7% of the district's enrollment and are the majority in most west-side schools (Salt Lake City School District, 2021. We also invited approximately 10 educators in a range of positions — principal, assistant principal, counselor, teacher, family advocate, and district leader — all of whom had some experience in overseeing family engagement activities at the classroom, school, or district level.[1] Two of these educators, both of whom were in positions related to FSC, were Latina. The rest were White non-Latinx or Hispanic. The specific concern with SCCs that drove our effort originally emerged from conversations with UCAN and many of these educators. Several of these parents and educators were from the same schools, and some were already acquainted. Parent participants received a small stipend to honor their volunteered time.

Four of us comprised the lead research team for the design circles: Gerardo López, then a faculty member at the University of Utah College of Education; Almaid Yanagui, a local parent turned community organizer; Jennifer Mayer-Glenn, director of FSC for the school district; and Paul Kuttner, a community engagement professional from the University of Utah. Anne Barton, a graduate student, joined in a later phase of the project and supported analysis for this article. Our team met several times over the course of 4 months to discuss the objectives, goals, and facilitation techniques for each design

circle. With no firmly-established facilitation method for solidarity-driven codesign, we employed our backgrounds in teaching, meeting facilitation, and community organizing to lead discussions in a way that we thought would be culturally familiar and inclusive in our specific context. As demonstrated in the data sections that follow, we utilized tools such as small group discussions, circle practices in which each person receives dedicated time to speak, engagement opportunities in English and Spanish, and parent or educator affinity groups. We conducted a range of activities that included storytelling, presenting, analyzing quotes from previous circles, and drawing collectively. Almaida and Gerardo were lead facilitators for the design circles. The following were the overarching goals of each circle.

Design Circle 1: Discuss the topic of home, school, and family relationships from a critical perspective (i.e., What does it mean? Why do we do it? What do we hope it can accomplish?). Participants are asked to identify the challenges in home, school, and family relationships from their respective positions or vantage points.

Design Circle 2: Provide participants with information regarding the history and structure of SCCs and invite them to probe deeper into the specific challenges they face in orchestrating successful SCCs at their schools.

Design Circle 3: Engage participants in a redesigning process by posing the following questions: How can we rethink the SCC? In other words, what should a healthy and functioning SCC look like? What should it feel like? Who comes to the table?

Analysis

The findings in this article are based on a qualitative analysis of transcripts from the three design circles. We began by reading each transcript multiple times and discussing our observations while comparing the transcripts with our impressions as facilitators and participants in the circles. We then returned to the transcripts with a grounded coding process (Charmaz, 2007; Saldaña, 2015) to identify moments in which families and educators interacted in ways that offered promise for building equitable, trusting relationships. We sought segments of the transcripts that evinced the components of trusting relationships: empathy, listening, understanding, vulnerability, honesty, and humility, such as occasions when participants shifted from unidirectional interactions (e.g., telling, convincing, and explaining) to bi- and multidirectional interactions (e.g., asking and learning). These moments of connection were occasions when participants truly and deeply related with one another despite the personal, historical, social, and institutional forces that so often hinder this kind of relationship. We developed codes inductively to name the different types of connections (e.g., empathy or building on others' ideas).

By focusing our analysis on moments of connection, we sought what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call *goodness*. We were less interested in discovering evidence of pathology and challenge than in determining possibilities and solutions. However, similar to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, we understand that goodness is laced with imperfection. Consequently, in addition to coding for moments of connection, we coded the conversations around those moments, seeking what appeared to lead to or support these moments and what appeared to hinder or obstruct these moments. This led to another set of inductive codes that were focused on key topics or issues that sparked moments of connection and disconnection. We then employed coded sections and, through an iterative process of discussion and writing, merged and synthesized them into a set of themes that answered our questions (Saldaña, 2015). The importance of building trust was predominant from the beginning to us as facilitators and researchers; however, the salience of relational and political trust specifically emerged inductively as a strong through line across themes.

We, the five aforementioned authors, conducted the analysis for this article. We did not aim to incorporate the larger group's participation in the project, and we recognize that they may have

different perceptions of the data we present. We could have learned much from gathering the participants of the design circle once more to reflect on data and experiences from the first three circles. Interesting tensions are produced from the question regarding the appropriate amount of participation when creating academic products from solidarity-driven codesign. Should everyone be involved in every publication or presentation to acquire the richest and most multivocal analysis? What if, as with our case, community members are more interested in spending their limited time advancing the transformative work in schools rather than speaking to an academic audience? Solidarity-driven codesign leaves room for multiple approaches, and the specifics likely need to be negotiated within each project.

Concurrently, our approach breaks with traditional extractive research approaches in two ways. First, our core facilitation and research team was designed to include members of the key communities involved — a district educator and a local parent or organizer. Three of our five authors are Latinx, and the other two are White, non-Latinx. While we cannot speak for the larger communities of which we are a part, we bring a diverse array of positionalities, experiences, and ways of making sense of the world. Our small group reflects some of the same dynamics we witnessed in the circles. Moreover, during each design circle, we asked the larger group to reflect on the previous circle, and occasionally, we analyzed prior circle transcripts together. This is markedly different from traditional focus groups in which participant contributions are considered raw data to be analyzed by researchers at a later point. Therefore, our conclusions have inevitably been shaped by the critical thinking and analyses of our participants, and we are indebted to them for this knowledge.

The analysis in this article is perhaps optimally understood as a structured way for us as facilitators to critically reflect on our facilitation process. Such reflection, we have found, is critical to solidarity-driven codesign. Similar to the codesign process itself, facilitators must experiment, reflect, and improve the design of the spaces in which design occurs, with attention to racialized and other power dynamics that assert themselves in the process. As we explain in our discussion, these findings are tentative and exploratory but suggest avenues for further action and research.

Findings

In the following sections, we closely examine moments of connection between families and professional educators during our design circles, with particular attention to how they relate to the building blocks of relational and political trust.

From Vulnerability and Reflectivity to Empathy

The overarching goal of the first design circle, as Gerardo explained to the group, was "to really interrogate the promises and the challenges of school-community relations." Accordingly, we split the group into two self-identified smaller groups comprised of families and professional educators. Each was asked to identify, from their perspective, the key challenges to collaboration. When they finished, representatives from each group presented the list of challenges (without identifying any comment's contributor), and the other group was asked to reflect on the presentation. We designed the discussion this way to create space for people to express their frustrations and negative experiences with a reduced level of personal risk. We believed that this structure would allow people to raise critiques that may be silenced if we began the discussion as a large group and people had to own each critique individually. We were also intentional in framing the groups' presentations as a time for listening and acknowledging one another's experiences rather than defending or explaining them.

Some of the most promising moments of connection began in the first design circle when the educator group, who volunteered to present first, delivered their challenges and, in the process,

expressed *vulnerability* and *reflectivity*. In their presentation, educators stressed the drawbacks of teachers not living in the neighborhoods in which they teach. They said that teachers must be more culturally responsive and leave the school campus to become acquainted with the community. Perhaps more importantly, they expressed personal fears. Reading their list of challenges, the presenter ended with, "There's a lot of fear about things we engage in…opening our buildings to the community in current climate of violence…Fear, fear that I'll step on toes. That there will not be a payoff." Educators described the difficulty they feel when changing their methods of interactions with families. "How do I break out of my ways? Time and tradition. Change is hard. The only reality you know is what you are raised with. How do you think differently together?"

In response, some of the parents noted the honesty and vulnerability in the educators' comments. One parent said, "I hear some honesty in there. There's a lot of acceptance right there. There is a lot of willingness of making a change." Another parent highlighted the topic of fear, saying, "I hear that they have a fear of failure probably to the parents as a community too." This led still a third parent to call for empathy:

It's very easy to point to a teacher. But you're not in their shoes. They have families, they want to study, go back to school. I think it will be a better community if we put on their shoes. And understand better. They in ours, and ours in theirs. Both of us.

This refrain of "putting on their shoes" was emphasized by other participants when the parents presented their challenges. They offered a critique of what they perceived as unwelcoming and unhelpful attitudes in schools. Concurrently, they recognized the complex humanity of school staff.

[Another challenge is] trust, because sometimes, the people [at the school] are not willing to help us. I don't know. They're not in a good mood sometimes. Like you said, put on their shoes. They put on our shoes. We know as parents, too, that they have a life, like she said. Maybe that they cannot be having the best day of their life, but they're working there.

The parents further described a series of concerns that implicated educators. They expressed worry that some educators were merely completing tasks rather than participating in the community, loving their work, and passing that love to the students. Parents additionally stated that teachers disciplined students without inquiring regarding circumstances in the child's life that may be impacting them. Concurrently, they drew parallels between parents and teachers, noting that teachers also face challenges. In response, one educator honored the parent's honesty with another empathetic reference to the metaphor of shoes. In this case, the educator was a Latina family liaison with neighborhood roots who was both school staff and a community advocate:

What I hear as one of the educators is [that] this is an invitation. As parents, you are inviting us to understand what you want to understand. Because I think, sometimes, we may all speak English at some point, but we don't make sense to each other. We want the same thing…It's inviting us to be in your shoes.

By presenting fears, difficulties, and potential improvements, the educators engaged in several facets of trust that are commonly presented in the literature, including openness, honesty, and vulnerability (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Parents, in turn, expressed empathy and a recognition of educators as full people with challenges and lives outside of their school-based interactions. Moreover, participants capitalized on the session's structure to listen and engage with one another's concerns, which communicates respect (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). This established a strong foundation for dialogue and a potential foundation for solidarity and action.

Shared Frustration and Alienation

Other moments of connection emerged from shared experiences of frustration with the school system. Both groups communicated their frustrations and, with the facilitator's support, framed these

as a point of connection. During the first design circle, parents expressed frustration with schools that asked them to rubber-stamp plans that they did not create and often did not have time to understand. As one parent shared, "You just throw the paper [and say] 'please sign it.'" Families expressed frustration with schools that failed to understand, recognize, and validate their educational concerns or the complexity of their lived realities. Educators, in turn, expressed frustration with district policies that discourage connection with the community and support deficit assumptions about families. As one stated,

We spent a good amount of time talking about how we have barriers in our policy and in our attitudes about making home visits, about going to people's homes. That in the policy in our district, it says that you cannot do home visit[s] unless you go with someone else. You can't go alone. Part of what that policy makes people think is fear. It makes us feel fearful. There must be reasons why we can't go on this visit because that means that there must be something dangerous in the homes or something like that. Our own policies make it harder for us as educators to interact.

Educators further noted the considerable demands on teacher and parent time in schools as well as the perception of educators as being part of the establishment and thus untrustworthy. In other words, both groups expressed frustration with the structures and processes that shape family-school relations.

While these frustrations often targeted different sources (e.g., district policies vs. school-level practices), common ground appeared. One teacher spoke to the similarities between his frustrations and those of parents, highlighting systemic issues that affect everyone in schools and seeing himself in the experiences of families:

As a rank-and-file teacher, those are my frustrations, too. I'm part of a system. My principal, when he tells the budget, I have no say in that. He's just informing me, "Here's the budget. Deal with it." I could easily have written that [the parents' list of challenges] as a classroom teacher.

Gerardo reiterated this idea of frustration as a shared and systemic experience when summarizing remarks at the end of the first design circle. He framed it as an experience of mutual *alienation*. He noted, "It's fascinating just to see how both sides are dealing with forms of alienation. How we're collectively being alienated from each other." Gerardo reintroduced this idea to begin the second design circle, and as the group reflected on their previous discussion, the Latina family liaison seconded it: "I can see that policy kind of prevents us from being involved with each other."

During the second design circle, the group heard a state-sponsored presentation regarding the workings of SCCs, which raised new frustrations among parents, educators, research staff, and even the presenter herself. For example, participants expressed dissatisfaction regarding the lack of translated documents and the narrow limits for utilizing SCC funds. The presenter affirmed these challenges while also expressing exasperation that she could alter nothing without legislative change. The language of alienation was further emphasized by two educators and the presenter to describe the impact of SCC processes, such as distributing untranslated or difficult-to-understand documents, voting for SCC members, and comprehending rules regarding council eligibility.

Feelings of irritation and powerlessness culminated with a particularly vulnerable comment from one of the administrators. Gerardo utilized this as another moment to note his perception of common feelings around the room:

Administrator: I'm going into my third year as principal, and my School Community Council is something that I feel like I have completely failed at. As a human, it sucks to fail. I know it's important, but I feel like other community work that we're doing, it matters….when it comes to School Community Council, and all of the work we've tried to make it work in our school, it ends up feeling like compliance, and no one likes compliance because the focus is lost. I think we all learned today. We understand that there's a good purpose behind it, but it gets lost in all the bureaucracy. It doesn't feel like meaningful work. It feels like something that is on my list that I hate and that I don't do well

at. How do we make that meaningful? I don't know because I feel like there's so many barriers. That's my frustration. I understand the purpose behind all of it, but, on the ground in my school, it doesn't look like that. It doesn't make sense. I don't know how to wrap my head around it and how to feel successful at it. I'm hoping that something will come of this.

Gerardo López: I think what I'm sensing from your comments is that sense of frustration, that sense of, this is something that we are required to do, and it hasn't worked out. I'm also hearing the same kind of message from the parents as well.

Administrator: Exactly. It's failing for all of us, and it doesn't feel successful to my community. I don't know how to do it. I don't.

The facilitator's move to frame participants' frustrations as shared experiences of alienation created by the school system enabled some of the educators to see potential for solidarity with families, which is a central facet of politicized trust (Vakil, de Royston, Nasir, & Kirshner, 2016). The participating parents were less involved in this discussion — possibly because we arranged the second design circle in a way that was alienating for the parents, and this action afforded a privilege to the educators (i.e., the formal presentation with a large group discussion focused on the technicalities of educational policy). Additionally, the lack of parental input in this conversation may have been because the effort for participating parents to equate the two experiences with the school system did not fully resonate. We explore this in the next section.

Money and Value

Both parents and educators in our group expressed negative impacts from the school system. However, they were not affected equally. Families and professional educators hold different positions within the schools' power structures as well as within the racialized and economic hierarchies of society. The parents in our circle understood that they were in a more marginalized position than the educators.

One parent acknowledged this inequity during the parent-only small group in the first design circle, as he responded to another parent who commented that teacher pay was low: "Teachers are making $25 an hour. I'm making 10. Is it low? No, it's not low. In comparison to mine, it's not low. In comparison to the superintendent, yes." This parent questioned the common narrative that teachers are not paid what they deserve by clarifying that low teacher pay is relative. In other words, he highlighted the fact that this common discourse ignores the financial hierarchy between families and schools in communities such as west Salt Lake City.

The idea that teachers are paid insufficiently suggests that they are not paid according to their full value. What does it mean, then, that many parents are paid less than teachers yet are still asked to volunteer their time in the school? As the same parent said,

I have come to meetings where I'm participating as a volunteer. I sometimes would get a mere thank you when I know that the teacher was paid to be in the meeting. He stayed for 2 hours; he gets his 25 bucks an hour. That will make some of us not want to participate, because…I have to take away 2 hours of my time from where I work making $10 an hour. For me, it's $20 only, 2 hours, and then I'm going to sit right there and the teacher is making $50.

Another parent opined that money was not the issue as much as valuing and honoring people's contributions. She said, "We're not asking [for] incentives either from the school. We just want to make [you] recognize that we were there and that you know that we were there to help…A simple thank you."

In their presentation, parents shared these concerns with the educators. When educators reflected on parents' statements from the first design circle, one administrator — a Latina with a long history in the community — addressed the comments regarding pay: "One thing that I heard loud and clear

was that teachers complain about not being paid enough, but teachers actually get paid a lot more than people in the community." By honoring this comment (rather than, for example, becoming defensive), the administrator communicated her agreement and desire to address the issue in the design process. In the final design, recommendations included both financial remuneration for parents as well as other ways of honoring their engagement through food, celebrations, and awards.

This discussion suggests that cross-racial solidarity requires more than sharing frustrations or goals. In line with Vakil, de Royston, Nasir, and Kirshner's (2016) argument, it demands explicit contention with systemic power imbalances, both racial and otherwise, that affect families and educators differently. In this case, raising these issues created an opportunity for educators to hear, honor, and consider family critiques, which could deepen the sense of mutual respect (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Building on Ideas and Learning

One opportunity that the design process afforded participants, which many family-school interactions do not, is the ability to create together. In the third design circle, we asked small groups of parents and educators to reimagine SCCs. Gerardo explained it this way:

If we had an opportunity to redesign this, to rethink this, to create something that would work, what would a functioning SCC look like for you? What would that look like? What would it feel like? What would it taste like? I said it tastes like tamales. That's what it would taste like, but that's me.

Each group received paper, markers, and an open license to create in whatever form they wanted (e.g., visual art, sketches, text). Facilitators visited tables to nudge the conversations forward and elicit engagement from quieter participants.

This process unlocked opportunities for another kind of connection — *building on one another's ideas*. One example is the following exchange between a parent (Latina), a counselor (White female), and an administrator (White male):

Parent: I feel that sometimes the reunions [meetings] need to be more like family reunions. Like he said, maybe with food from different countries, and they can speak about their own countries. Before they start talking about academic issues or, I don't know, economic. We need to know each other: What's your name? Where do you live? What are your issues? A little more like a family reunion — first to have empathy, to feel that you are part of something.

Counselor: Yeah.

Parent: You need to do something, like about empathy, feelings, something like that. It may be a Latin way, but I think this would work. I have [a community organization, and in the name is the word] c*asa*. I put c*asa* because with the name, they can feel like, "Oh, casa." It's something that attracts them, and I think that this is the first thing. By then I'll start having empathy, no issue.

Counselor: What I'm hearing you saying is before we even start the SCC, meaning that [at] the beginning of the year, we have those parents there, and it's got to be a fiesta or a party itself. To get together, to know each other, even if it's a small group, because that's where we're going to build relationships and trust, and then we can move on with the business of the school at hand.

Administrator: With this, and this is a pretty basic question, where I grew up, we would always have a potluck or something like that, where everyone brings a dish and you share. Is that something appropriate to ask?

Parent: Yes, that would be your second meeting.

The parent employed her cultural and professional knowledge to reimagine the SCCs. The educators encouraged her to continue, demonstrated that they were listening, and then connected the ideas to their own lives. The counselor built on the idea of a family reunion with the idea of a party, although that arguably misses the family association that the parent suggested. She also utilized the

Spanish word *fiesta,* perhaps to connect with a Spanish-speaking parent or perhaps to build on the parent's usage of *casa* as a culturally relevant concept. Meanwhile, the administrator inquired whether it would be appropriate to ask parents to bring food, and the participating parent resisted, saying essentially that the school should be responsible for the initial event. Ultimately, both ideas — a more family-like or homelike space and school-planned fiestas to begin the year — were included as proposals in the final report. This process of listening respectfully, honoring each other's knowledge and expertise, asking questions to learn, and persisting by including those ideas in the final product implements many of the building blocks of trusting, equitable relationships.

Building on one another's ideas demonstrates respect for the other person as well as appreciation for their competency (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). In this case, educators acknowledged a parent's competency not only as a parent but also a community leader and a cultural authority. This concept of a parent role is broader than traditional in family engagement and celebrates the knowledge that CLD families provide (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006).

Discussion

In the previous sections, we shared moments of connection that occurred during our participatory design research project as well as encouragements or hindrances to these moments. As schools and families are increasingly asked to collaborate to support student success, these moments suggest promise for building the trusting relationships needed to undergird such collaboration. These findings are preliminary; we cannot say that the dynamics of our group will necessarily translate to others. Our group had a particular makeup: mostly White educators and Latinx families of immigrant or migrant backgrounds, the majority of whom had experience in FSC. Concurrently, we perceive clear connections to existing literature and the potential that our findings may resonate with other contexts.

Our research suggests that possibilities for building trust are opened when educators express vulnerability and self-critique to families. This is not common in our school system. More often, families are expected to be vulnerable — disclosing home events, accepting advice regarding their children, or allowing teachers to conduct home visits. Generally, teachers are not asked to be equally vulnerable regarding their fears and mistakes; rather, they are expected to project confident professionalism. Many teachers express fear of parental judgment, especially when parents ask to visit their classrooms (Hong, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). However, our research suggests that overcoming that fear and allowing vulnerability to surface can humanize teachers in parents' eyes. Families may respond with empathy.

These findings further suggest that shared frustration with the educational system creates potential for solidarity between families and educators. Families are often exasperated with the educational system, especially nondominant families who face layers of marginalization in schools. As the educators in our study noted, teachers and administrators are often the face of that system and thus receive the brunt of that frustration. However, educators are also impacted by the system in which they work, often in negative and dehumanizing ways (Carter Andrews, Bartell, & Richmond, 2016). Sharing those irritations with families and listening nondefensively to families' frustrations opens avenues of understanding and common causes. To utilize the language of our circles, the school system alienates families and educators from one another, but collaborative critique of an alienating system can be a point of connection.

However, this strategy of sharing alienation or frustration can backfire. Educators and families are not equally impacted by the school system, particularly in low-wealth communities of color with a majority of White, middle-class teaching staffs. Simply stating, "We're all in this together" without recognizing the power differentials between families and schools could lead to resentment and distrust.

Concurrently, enabling critiques of these differential positionalities can advance the conversation and, eventually perhaps, strengthen trust by attending to its racialized and political aspects (Vakil, de Royston, Nasir, & Kirshner, 2016).

Additionally, our research suggests the value of families and educators engaging in cocreation, sharing knowledge, and building on one another's ideas. A significant line of research highlights families' knowledge and assets and ways to introduce these aspects to school spaces to improve education (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; López, 2001; López & Vàzquez, 2006). However, deficit views of parents continue to proliferate in our school systems (Olivos, 2016). Educators need opportunities to experience firsthand the assets that families provide. In our case, codesign offered a critical scaffolding for this process, and we see significant potential in spreading the usage of this research approach in education.

Notably, the two Latina educators in the room, working in positions focused on FSC, were essential members in some of the interactions outlined above. At key moments, these individuals highlighted and validated parent critiques from an educator perspective. This emphasizes the value of *cultural brokers* — individuals who can bridge and mediate between the cultures, languages, and perspectives of families and schools (Lopez & Stack, 2001). Cultural brokering is a complex process that can be utilized as a further tool for socializing parents into dominant school cultures; however, it also offers potential for sparking additional transformative relationships (Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Finally, we cannot separate moments of connection from the fact that this was a highly designed and facilitated space. Our choices as a planning team were critical to the interactions that occurred. These decisions included whom to invite, where to hold the circles, what to include on the agenda, where people should sit, how discussions would be held (e.g., affinity groups, small groups, or the whole group), which topics or data would continue from one session to another, how many sessions to have, what ideas facilitators should highlight, and much more. For example, more than one reviewer of this article has remarked on the rarity of educators being as vulnerable as they were and questioned how it was possible in this context. While we cannot know with certainty, our prior design and facilitation choices likely had a substantial impact: we had prior relationships with each educator in the room; we invited educators who commonly expressed critiques of racist practices in schools; we invited parents from across the district, so educators were not speaking primarily to families from their own schools; and we had educators initially meet in the relatively safe space of an all-educator group before presenting together. After every session, our team reflected and redesigned, learning from our facilitation mistakes as well as our successes. While no one way is perfect to facilitate family-school relationship building, we believe that these design questions must be addressed thoughtfully.

Implications and Conclusion

The importance of relationships in FSC cannot be overstated. Understanding family-educator dynamics, particularly within inequity and power imbalances, is critical if we are to consciously foster such relationships in our schools and communities. The findings in this article, although tentative and exploratory, suggest avenues of possibilities for this relational work that is relevant to scholars and educators.

Primarily, this research communicates the possibilities and challenges of codesign work between families and educators. An emerging field of research and practice, codesign efforts may offer a vital alternative to school-centric, educator-dominated family engagement approaches (Ishimaru, 2019b). Our study supports this claim and offers recommendations for structuring and facilitating the design process to support family-educator relationship building. For example, it highlights the importance of engaging in self-reflection, of creating low-risk opportunities to express vulnerabilities and critiques, of implementing structured time to listen reflectively, of facilitating critical analysis of systems that

honor all experiences while also recognizing asymmetrical power relationships, of including cultural brokers in the group, and of unlocking space for creativity and imagination. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of presenting multiple opportunities to engage over time. The collaboration and respect we witnessed at the third session would likely not have been possible at the first or even the second meeting, because the ability to include these elements relied on participants feeling sufficiently safe and trusting to honestly share their ideas.

A more challenging question, perhaps, is how educators can foster these types of interactions within existing school and community spaces, where they have less control over the who, what, when, and how of engagement. On the one hand, educators can rethink how they employ existing interactions. Where can vulnerability be expressed? Are they responding to families' issues with affirmation and understanding of systemic injustice, rather than being defensive or dismissive? Could parent-teacher conferences be an opportunity to build on one another's ideas rather than a one-way information session? On the other hand, our traditional structures of family-educator interactions are typically school-centric and fraught with power imbalances and settled scripts. Our findings stress the importance of educators leaving their classrooms and offices to create new opportunities to interact and to work with families and community partners to build new spaces that bridge community and school.

Ultimately, we see the potential of these family-educator interactions to create more than simply trust, although this factor is critically important. These moments of connection further offer the possibility of a more humanizing form of family engagement. According to Gallo (2017), *humanizing family engagement* challenges deficit narratives regarding bicultural families and families of color, fosters understanding of people's diverse lives and challenges, honors and builds on the assets and knowledge of all parties, and involves critical introspection. Humanizing engagement is a long, slow process built through humanizing interactions among educators, families, and students. While far from perfect, our design circles appear to have fostered humanizing interactions: these moments enabled families and educators to look past assumptions and biases, seeing one another as full people with complex histories, lives, and futures and appreciating each other's valuable professional and cultural knowledge. This sense of connecting on a human level was captured in one parent's reflections a year later: "Design Circles was well thought out. Even the before and after social conversations that took place gave me a sense of belonging. I felt I was at the right place with the right people at the right time." We are not arguing that a few positive interactions will transform family-school relationships. Rather, we are suggesting that viewing these interactions as small openings or cracks in the barriers between families and schools — noticing, appreciating, and seeking to create more of these connections — can reveal new pathways to allow humanizing relationships to thrive.

In this project, one of our ultimate goals was to shift power imbalances that subordinate CLD parents to educators and alienate them from decision-making power within the school system. Relationships, regardless of their strength, do not automatically change power dynamics. However, we understand them to be an indispensable part of the process of shifting power in schools. Only when educators and families have mutual respect and willingness to be vulnerable can they undertake the risks associated with sharing power. Only when families and educators build racial and political solidarity can they begin to address the root causes of power imbalances. We have only begun to create SCCs that are truly hubs of family power in schools; regardless, we have observed ongoing shifts in power relationships throughout our project. For example, during our pilot, we were thrilled to see school administrators and teachers lending their support to a parent-led effort to recruit families to the SCC and educate them regarding their rights. Moreover, these educators accepted families from outside their school communities into the SCC as coresearchers who observed and took field notes on the councils' workings, which are roles that parents are rarely permitted to fill within schools.

At the end of the third circle, Almaida offered a tearful closing speech to the group, emphasizing the rarity of this kind of opportunity:

I wanted to share one thing with you guys...For the past 12 years, I've worked with families in the community, and time and again, I would come to administrators or come to this group of people that wanted to make a change in the community, and I would say, "Well, we need to bring groups together. We need to bring parents, teachers, and administrators together; we need to talk this out." And they said, it could not be done. But you are history in the making. It was able to be done. We did it here. We came together, we talked about a topic that affects everyone, that affects our children, that affects the education that our children are receiving, and our voices were heard all around the table. When they said it could not be done, we did it. Thank you. Give yourself a hand.

This project was largely uncharted territory for every person in the room, including us. Nothing like this has previously happened in our district, and so we began with a sense of hope and experimentation as well as naivete regarding the potential challenges. For example, we underestimated the extent to which unequal power relationships would assert themselves during discussions or how explicit we would need to be about centering on families and facilitating discussions regarding inequity and racism.

Our approach evolved over time as the project entered new phases. We have enjoyed success with family-only and family-dominated design circles, which created additional room for CLD parents to assume the lead in the design process and outcome. We struggled when we made the circles excessively large with people who did not have existing relationships and when we broadened our focus to FSC in general. We engaged in difficult conversations about intersectional power when gender and racial or ethnic dynamics in the group combined in complex ways to make equitable discussion difficult. Moreover, COVID-19 pushed us to radically reframe our process, and our study evolved into a Zoom-based video project in which experiences of families and educators were shared. As with family-educator relationships, the work of solidarity-driven codesign is not a static concept with a clear end. This ongoing and evolving process needs constant attention, learning, and work as the people and the context change. We hope this research contributes to the never-ending, rewarding work of building humanizing family-school relationships.

Notes

1. We invited an equal number of parents and educators with the idea that this would create a context in which both groups felt that they were on equal footing and felt safe to talk without dominating. However, we later recognized that numerical equality may not actually be effective in creating the equitable relationships that we need in the long term. In fact, SCCs call for more parents than educators in their membership. Over the years, we have increasingly shifted to inviting fewer educators than families to ensure that family perspectives and leadership are the core.

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Race, Parenting, and Identity in the Iranian Diaspora: Tracing Intergenerational Dialogues and Codesign

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Abstract

This paper traces intergenerational learning through a series of dialogues on race, parenting, and identity held with Iranian parents, grandparents and youth at a Persian language school located in the US. Drawing on ethnographic, interactional, and participatory design research methodologies, the analysis focuses on the forms of intergenerational sensemaking and social analysis that emerged over time and what they can teach us about (a) the intersections of parenting and racial identity within Iranian diasporic communities in the United States and (b) the complex forms of personhood (Gordon, 1997; Tuck, 2009), learning and becoming among Iranians raising children and grandchildren outside Iran. Bringing close attention to specific instances of talk as embedded in broader relational temporalities and dialogic arcs, findings illustrate the shifting ways participants articulated the educational needs of Iranian children living outside Iran, the emergence of complex and sometimes contradictory discourses on race and identity, and the ways participants worked together to disentangle self-defense and self-determination from the politics of respectability. The discussion considers the implications of complex personhood for the design, mediation, and interpretation of intergenerational sensemaking regarding race and identity within the Iranian diaspora, with attention to broader processes of community codesign.

Keywords: Iranian diaspora, race, identity, parenting, education

Between October 2016 and February 2017, I worked with Iranian parents, grandparents, and youth to hold a series of intergenerational dialogues regarding race, identity, education, and parenting. These dialogues, or design circles, were part of a national project organized by the Family Leadership Design Collaborative (FLDC), which develops critical approaches to family engagement that are rooted in racial and educational justice, community well-being, and self-determination. As Ishimaru and Bang (2016) describe, this work moves beyond "research and practice *on* families (based on a tradition of pathologizing them as part of the problem) to research and practice *with* families that builds from their knowledge, experiences and priorities for change" (p. 3). The setting for the dialogues was a weekend Persian language and community school with whom I have a longstanding partnership focused on youth and parent programming.

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As an educational ethnographer and learning scientist, my broader research involves closely studying microgenetic and relational processes within settings that support expansive learning, social critique, and imagination (Vossoughi, 2014). I take a collaborative approach to research by partnering with educators, families, and youth to study the conditions that foster educational dignity and possibility. Using these lenses to examine the dialogues held at the school, I sought to understand the intergenerational sensemaking and social analysis that emerged over time and what they can teach us about (a) the intersections of parenting and racial identity within Iranian diasporic communities in the United States and (b) the complex forms of personhood (Gordon, 1997; Tuck, 2009), learning and becoming among Iranians who are raising children and grandchildren outside Iran. I define *parenting* broadly, as caregiving practices conducted by multiple family and community members to support the healthy growth of young people.

My analysis of the design circles traces these lines of inquiry through three phenomena: the shifting ways participants articulated the educational needs of Iranian children living outside Iran, the emergence of complex and sometimes contradictory discourses on race and identity, and the ways participants worked together to disentangle self-defense and determination from the politics of respectability. I move between analyzing these substantive themes and highlighting implications for participatory design research (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016) by focusing on the forms of mediation I and other enacted, and the collective thinking that took shape over time. Throughout, I consider the relational and dialogic openings that can emerge when complex personhood is treated as an ethical and pedagogical stance in processes of codesign.

Diasporic Education, Race, and Identity

There is a growing body of literature on education, culture, race, language, and identity in the Iranian diaspora. Much of this work emphasizes the development of diasporic educational settings, such as community heritage language programs (Gholami, 2017; Shirazi, 2014), summer programs for youth (Maghbouleh, 2017; Vossoughi, 2011), and language learning in families (Kaveh, 2018). For Gholami, diasporic education is a form of collective praxis that emerges from "a critique of nationalistic systems of education," (2017, p. 577) and produces "counter-narratives, opportunities for self/other-exploration and modalities of citizenship which at once contest any essentialism arising from national and ethnic/denominational positions and prevent their full 'closure'" (Ibid.). Similarly, Malek (2015) prefers the term *diasporic* to *diaspora* for its emphasis on practice and "the embodied experiences of being in diaspora" (p. 38).

Shirazi (2019) argues that diasporic educational settings can both "engender creative possibilities for reworking exclusionary discourses" (p. 480) and underscore the need for decolonial education within schools. Such interventions in school curricula in the US include the need for more expansive and historicized ways of teaching about Southwest Asia and North Africa (Vossoughi, Shirazi, & Vakil, 2020) that are interwoven with critical discussions of anti-Blackness, settler-colonialism, and migration and support the development of complex sociohistorical analysis both within and across racialized communities (Lee et al., 2021).

I therefore situate diasporic education within broader efforts to theorize the racism and othering encountered by Iranians living in diaspora, the complexities therein, and the community spaces that aim to support healthy development and thriving for our young people. As an example of such theorizing, Khabeer et al. (2017) offer the term *anti-Muslim racism* as a critical alternative to *Islamophobia* to draw attention to "the structural and systemic production" (p. 1) of anti-Muslim racism beyond a focus on individual fear, and beyond the framing of discrimination as solely tied to religion. As Shirazi (2019) notes, "'Muslim' has become a stigmatized racial status that operates distinctly across the bodies

of Muslims, non-Muslims from Muslim-majority countries, and those perceived to be Muslim (Bayoumi, 2006)." Indeed, both the racialization of diasporic communities and the racial consciousness and identities of those within these communities must be understood as transnational phenomena that are tied to colonial histories, geopolitical events, structures of power, and resistance (Naber, 2012; Rana, 2007; Yalzadeh, 2020). Anti-Muslim racism is therefore situated in ongoing efforts to control the resources and political destinies of Muslim-majority countries, including Iran.

Numerous studies have pursued questions of race and identity through interviews and focus groups with Iranian immigrant youth and adults (e.g., Maghbouleh, 2017; Sadeghi, 2016; Shirazi, 2014, 2019), many of whom wrestle with their own complex racial positionings as well as what Sadeghi and Baker (2019) refer to as the everyday pressure to disavow Muslimness. Within Iranian diasporic communities, this pressure is often intertwined with internal critiques of the Iranian state's Islamic political rule and the repression that many minoritized, secular, and/or leftist Iranians have experienced at the hands of the Islamic Republic. Critiques of state religion among some Iranians in the West can therefore dovetail in complex ways with the tropes of anti-Muslim racism (Davari, 2018) and with narratives of "contemporary Iran as solely oppressive" (Khanmalek, 2021, p. 2). As I explore throughout this paper, understanding how Iranians interpret their racialized experiences is important to holding the historicized complexities of their stories and to nurturing spaces for collective sensemaking and learning. Building such collective space requires vigilance toward Iranian or Persian exceptionalisms that can reproduce regional hierarchies and supremacies. Cultivating solidarity within and across racialized communities in the US also requires holding important distinctions between Iranian experiences of racialization, structural economic exploitation, and systemic educational inequity in ways that recognize but do not presume classed, raced, or educational privileges among Iranians. I highlight these layers where relevant within the analysis.

Iranian youth face the multilayered developmental task (Nasir et al., 2006) of making sense of their racialized and intersectional experiences within this complex terrain. In addition to navigating multiple and sometimes conflicting ideas about Iranians' racial positionings, growing up Iranian in the US involves interpreting how young people's critical responses to racism may cast them as dissenting in ways that are often seen as illegitimate, if not dangerous (Dualatzai, 2012). The pressure to prove one's allegiance to the "American way of life" (Maira, 2016) is one that many Muslim, Arab, and Iranian youth encounter, particularly in school (Bayoumi, 2006; El-Haj, 2015). El-Haj (2015) therefore analyzes the racialization of Palestinian American youth through the logics of everyday nationalism: "the discourses and practices through which the nation is imagined and constructed in everyday life— as a key mechanism through which some young people become 'impossible subjects' (Ngai, 2004) of the nation" (p. 6). Discourses that position youth and their families as already suspect coupled with extensive surveillance and entrapment create a fraught terrain for collective dialogue and action within diasporic communities (Ali, 2017), where public critiques of imperialism can be risky and trust among community members is diminished through the threat of surveillance.

My own dialogues about racism with Iranian youth in the US have continuously revealed the ways young people wrestle with assimilationist practices (changing the pronunciation of their names, remaining silent, or making jokes in response to anti-Iranian racism), not necessarily because they have bought into Whiteness but often because they recognize that overtly critical responses will create more problems for them with peers and teachers. For youth and families with multiple racialized identities, such sensemaking can involve navigating racialization and ontological denial from both outside and inside their communities as well as drawing from multiple sources of cultural resilience and resistance. The Collective for Black Iranians, for example, has done powerful work to amplify Black and Afro-Iranian voices, forging important transnational conversations around Blackness and positive racial identity development in Iran and its diaspora. For youth whose experiences of racialization have been

shaped primarily through their Iranian identity, sensemaking around race and racism often occurs in a context of being positioned as legally White (Maghbouleh, 2017).

Expanding Units of Analysis and Inquiry

Both the research on diasporic education and studies of racialization among Muslim, Arab, and Iranian communities carry a strong focus on young people. Additionally, educational research on racial identity and human development typically emphasizes the experiences of children and youth, often to counter persistent deficit discourses and support positive identity development in and out of school (Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016; Rogers & Way, 2016). Young people who must routinely contend with the racism and everyday nationalism discussed above undoubtedly experience intensified forms of identity development, which are understood here as dynamic, shifting, and variable processes of becoming (Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016). However, a focus on family well-being suggests that it is equally important to attend to ongoing identity work among adults, such as immigrant parents and grandparents who are making sense of and negotiating their own cultural, racial, and sociopolitical subjectivities, often in relation to and in support of their children.

Emphasizing family learning and intergenerational dialogue can contribute additional insights to the literature on race and identity in the Iranian diaspora. While acknowledging important distinctions across generations, utilizing a relational approach aligns with the cultural emphasis on family within Iranian communities and recognizes how diasporic identities are shaped in and through everyday intergenerational and familial encounters. Rather than treating Iranian adults' diasporic identities as settled, an intergenerational view enables understanding of how the racial identities and sensemaking of adult immigrants intersects with their experiences as parents and grandparents, particularly as they work to support their children in navigating racism and the ever-present drumbeat for war with Iran. Given that racial socialization conversations with youth typically occur in family and community settings (Nasir, 2018), an intergenerational focus also contributes to an understanding of where and how Iranian diasporic parents learn to support their children's positive racial identity development.

In this paper, I examine an educational context that supported the shared identity work of Iranian youth, parents, and grandparents and consider the possibilities emergent within intergenerational dialogues grounded in the ethical and pedagogical stance of complex personhood. Tuck (2009) conceptualizes complex personhood as attending to the ways people make meaning of their lives through "what is immediately available as a story and what their imaginations are reaching toward" (Gordon, 1997, p. 4) in ways that account for—rather than flatten—deep complexities of thought and feeling. This disposition toward people's manifold internal and collective lives also means "conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning" [Gordon, Ibid, p. 5] (Tuck, 2009, p. 420). Building with Indigenous epistemologies and critical sociology, Tuck's attention to "the intricacies of people's lives" (2009, p. 422) necessitates a shift in educational research away from damage-centered narratives and toward careful attention to everyday forms of resistance, renewal, and survivance (Vizenor, 1994). My analysis therefore considers the implications of complex personhood for the design, mediation, and interpretation of intergenerational sensemaking regarding race and identity within the Iranian diaspora, with attention to broader processes of community codesign.

Setting and Methodology

The Persian school was established in the Midwest in 2007 by parents and grandparents committed to sustaining their language practices with and for the next generation as well as building

community among Iranian immigrants. The school is nonreligious and inclusive, and has served hundreds of students and families. Many alumni continue to participate either as teaching assistants or through the school's alumni association. Based on my work in a summer program serving youth in the Iranian diaspora, the school director asked me in 2014 to support the development of programming for high school students around culture and identity. When the FLDC began its work in 2015, the director and I discussed holding design circles with parents, grandparents, and youth. Parental programming had been a goal within my partnership with the school, and the director suggested participants from a range of backgrounds and timelines of engagement.

The intergenerational dialogues began in October 2016. I held four design circles with a small group of eight to ten participants, which culminated in the design and shared facilitation of a workshop for parents whose children attended the school (30 participants); the workshop topics covered the cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences of Iranian children growing up in the US. The youngest member of the original group was in the eighth grade, and the eldest was a grandmother whose grandchildren attended the school. The dialogues occurred at the school on weekends while children were in class. This time was traditionally reserved for parents and grandparents to connect informally (socializing, playing backgammon, and discussing childrearing, politics, and school needs). The design circles connected with this routine practice while creating a more formal context for discussing parenting, race, and identity in order to learn about participants' experiences and codesign a workshop for the larger community. Ishimaru et al. (2018, p. 45) define community design circles as "in-depth, reciprocal working groups that aim to engage stories, experiences, and expertise within our communities in order to catalyze action within a particular context." As my analysis addresses, the work of codesign also creates distinct conditions for dialogue, listening and collaboration.

My liminal existence between the first- and second-generation immigrants who participated in the design circles as well as the recent birth of my first child positioned me to mediate dialogue in ways that were distinct from my approaches to such facilitation prior to becoming a mother. I sensed, for example, that my frequent use of the term *we* to discuss parenting was important to the relationships and possibilities created within the design circles. I also have a history of participating in such educational spaces as a child of parents who organized similar settings, and thus, a deep appreciation for the love and collective effort required to sustain diasporic organizations.

Our timeline coincided with Donald Trump's election as president and the subsequent women's march and Muslim ban, which figured prominently in the dialogues:
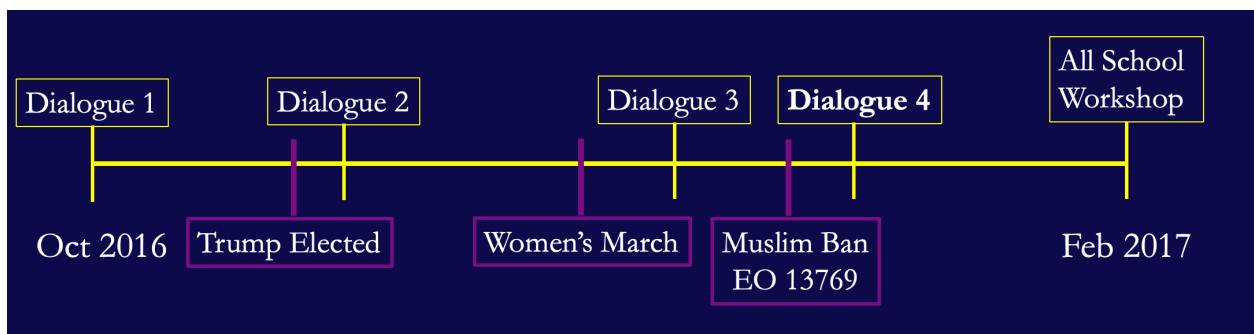
Figure 1: Timeline of Intergenerational Dialogues

This charged political context and the trust generated over time (Vakil et al., 2016) allowed participants to engage in forthright discussions about current events, their histories, and possible meanings for participants' sense of precarity within the US. With participants' consent, I audio-

recorded, transcribed, and translated the conversations in the design circles and the school-wide workshop. The dialogues largely occurred in Persian, although participants moved fluidly between English and Persian. Excerpts discussed below are translated from Persian.

My approach to documentation and analysis is guided by interpretive ethnographic research (Erickson, 1986), critical and decolonial methodologies (Bang et al., 2016; Paris & Winn, 2013; Smith, 2012), and participatory design research (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). In recent work with Miguel Zavala (Vossoughi & Zavala, 2020), we argue that these methodological frameworks resituate the pedagogical dialogues that can emerge within interviews away from logics of extraction and instrumentalism and toward relational encounters that both mediate larger political and ethical goals and become ends in themselves. Similarly, participatory design methodologies guide my efforts to conceptualize collaborative research with grandparents, parents, and youth as a joint activity through which role re-mediations, mutual learning, and historical action can become possible (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016). My training in interaction analysis and cultural-historical theories of learning further direct my attention to the details of talk and interaction as the processual and relational grounds of such learning.

I began my analysis by reading and rereading the transcripts, noting the topics discussed and their evolution over time. I also listened to the audio while reading the transcripts to refamiliarize myself with the social and emotional tone of the dialogues. Although several themes emerged in this first pass, I decided to focus on discussions of race and identity as they related to the educational needs of the younger generation. I sensed that the intergenerational dialogues could offer unique windows into these themes, both in terms of the revelations that emerged when grandparents, parents, and youth spoke with one another and in the reflections of elders as they recounted their experiences as tied to supporting their children's cultural and ontological thriving.

I then reexamined the data and identified all the instances in which race, racial identity, and the educational needs of the next generation were discussed, whether separately or cumulatively, explicitly or implicitly. My initial coding process involved examining the topics themselves, the ways participants engaged in these conversations, and how the dialogues were mediated. This process led me to the three themes that structure my analysis: (a) participants' discussions of educational needs, concerns, and dreams for their children; (b) complex and sometimes contradictory discourses on race and racial identity; and (c) collective efforts to disentangle self-defense from the politics of respectability.

In addition to analyzing the instances that were germane to these themes, I expanded my analysis to study specific arcs of dialogue over time. This approach emerged from my sense that more could be gained interpretively by investigating how these moments were mediated and how they built on one another rather than focusing only on discrete instances when particular topics were discussed. I defined these arcs according to how ideas were revisited and reworked both within and across design sessions as well as the ways in which particular contributions created grounds for dialogic shifts. The analysis combines my discussion of the three themes with my efforts to trace such dialogic arcs over time. This temporal dimension is important to working with the idea of complex personhood as both an analytic lens and sensibility towards pedagogical mediation. Design circles and the broader work of community codesign can thus attune us to the conditions that support thinking and dreaming together over time rather than seeking to identify and characterize "what people think" as a settled phenomenon. This analytic shift is rooted in my understanding of human learning and becoming as always unfolding, and of research as working in the service of locally constructed forms of social change and community well-being.

Analysis

Educational Needs, Concerns, and Dreams

We began our dialogues by describing what led us to bring our children to the school (Figure 2a) and what we believed to be the educational and social needs of children growing up in the Iranian diaspora (Figure 2b). As participants generated ideas (in Persian and English), I wrote them on pieces of poster paper (in English) as part of a river-of-life activity that was shared by the FLDC. This activity supports design circles to engage with community histories, presents and futures around particular themes, in this case the educational needs of our children.
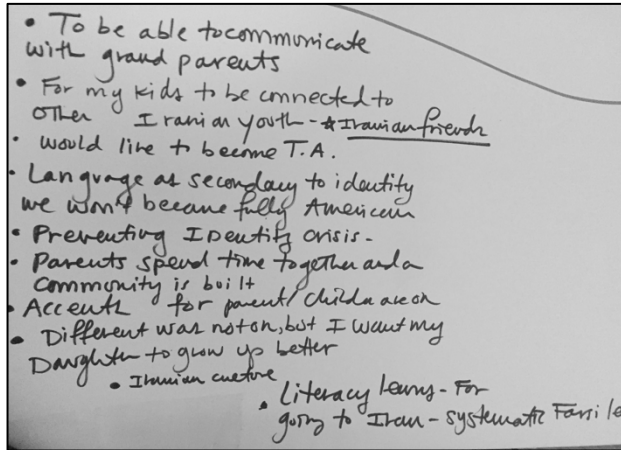

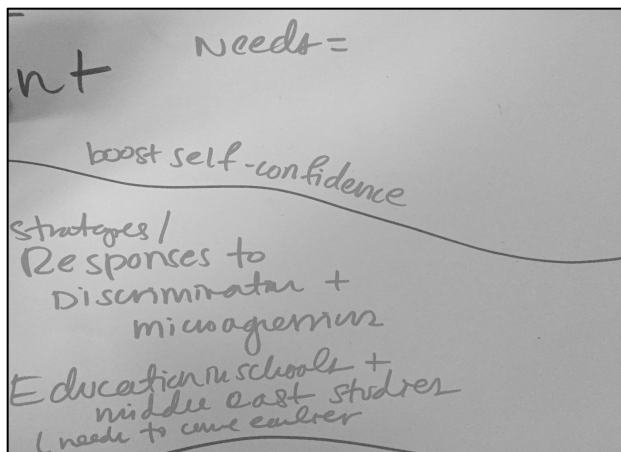**Figure 2a: What brought families to the school**

Figure 2b: Educational and social needs of Iranian children

This starting point was important, as it historicized our collective thinking regarding the school's genealogy and the communal work that families and school leaders had been doing for years. Parents and grandparents initially recounted their desires to support their children to maintain their language and culture; however, further discussion led to the expression of additional needs and concerns. Resonant with Shirazi's (2014) study of diasporic education, parents expressed a desire for "forming community in ways that go beyond language learning" (p. 121). This included sustaining relationships

with other Iranians and cultivating a deeper sense of belonging. Lily,[1] a 17-year-old alumna who served as a teacher's assistant at the school, described the space as follows: "You feel so much like [this is] home. Even if you cannot visit Iran, this is like a half-version of that." Parents also spoke about the desire for their children to learn Persian to communicate with grandparents and relatives in Iran (Kaveh, 2018), and about the importance of building friendships with other Iranian children. Beginning the design work with historicity therefore helped make visible prior cycles of local design and experience, which presented new horizons of possibility (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). For example, although language learning was a primary reason for their initial school involvement, participants stated that the weekly experience of connecting with other parents led to the articulation of building community as another central goal.

This dual focus regarding the school's existing role (Figure 2a) and parents' beliefs regarding their children's ongoing needs (Figure 2b) brought attention to issues of self-confidence in the face of anti-Iranian racism as well as the need for access to Middle Eastern studies and history earlier in their children's K-12 schooling. For Taraneh, a mother of two, the goal of language learning was secondary to that of identity:

> My main goal is to keep our identity. Because we are not Americans, no matter how much we kill ourselves to be American.…We aren't American, and we won't become American, not with our appearance or culturally. I want my kids to know that there are other people like them living in America.

Taraneh's statement aligns with what El-Haj (2015) calls "unsettled belonging" and reflects the many instances when Iranian parents and grandparents distanced themselves from Americanness, which often functioned as code for Whiteness.[2] Her usage of *we* suggests that she understood her own and her children's racial positionings in the US as similar; conversely, Rahim, a father whose son currently attended the school, stated:

> One thing that is very important to say is that my son is an American, but I'm not American. So I think we can talk about how to resist discrimination when we know more about ourselves. In order to resist discrimination, our children have to know about their culture and history.

While assimilationist and color-evasive discourses (Annamma et. al., 2017) sometimes emerged within the dialogues, very rarely, if at all, did parents and grandparents themselves claim "honorary Whiteness" as a racial identity (Dualatzai, 2012). As reflected in Rahim's comment, parents also expressed both ambivalence and concern about their children's assimilation.

Although not initially named as a reason to attend the school, explicit discussions of race led many participants to consider how such educational spaces can support children to know how to defend themselves—both interactionally and internally—against racial aggression and bullying. Akbar, another father, stated:

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[1] All names are pseudonyms

[2] There are complex layers to this use of the term "American," including critiques of the U.S. as a nation-state, potential avoidance of naming Whiteness, and the erasure and flattening that can occur when "American" is conflated with "White." At the same time, parents sometimes troubled the use of American as a proxy for Whiteness. When Akbar shared a story of American co-workers responding to the news that he annually travels to Iran with surprise and fear, Rahim said "What are they? White?"

> I am looking to the educational institutions, the Persian schools, or even his school. I'm not saying I'm a complete parent who knows what to do in this situation. I'm asking you to teach me or to teach my son how to respond to these things. Tell [him]: 'You are Iranian, and you are a Muslim. If they say this to you, you can respond in this way…'"

Akbar's statement, "I'm not saying I'm a complete parent," was one of the first explicit requests for support from fellow participants and helped sow the seeds for reciprocal vulnerability and mutual support regarding parenting further downstream (Kohli, 2014). Akbar and his son had recently migrated to the US, and he often posed questions to learn about their new political and educational context. For Akbar, claiming Muslimness as a point of pride against racial bullying (envisioning and perhaps rehearsing how educators might tell his son, "You are Iranian, and you are a Muslim. If they say this to you, you can respond in this way") was an important lesson, and he was beginning to see the Persian school as a potential site for such learning.

Some parents immediately took issue with Akbar's comment based on their own religious affiliations and histories with Islam. This point of tension (which emerged halfway through our first design circle) led to a lively and important discussion about the complexities of claiming or disavowing Muslimness (Sadeghi & Baker, 2019) in the context of both anti-Muslim racism and Iranian state politics and history. Both Taraneh and Nasrin (Taraneh's mother) argued that although they are not practicing Muslims, disavowing Muslim identity denies who Iranians are as a people. Countering this idea, Rahim spoke about his family's long history of resisting Islam, and how absurd it was for him to encourage his son to claim a Muslim identity in the U.S. He also hedged this comment by stating that he did not want the discussion to "get too political." As the facilitator, I intervened here, stating that I was "not afraid of politics" and that we should consider these discussions as a legitimate and important part of our work together.

Following this first session, I wondered whether I should have done more to highlight the racial and colonial politics of disavowing Muslimness in the US, or the flattening of internal heterogeneities that can occur when Iranians as a people are positioned as Muslim. Though my hesitation to do more than legitimize political discourse at this early point in our process resulted from a desire to respect participants' distinct religious histories, I now see that allowing the dialogue to breathe while trust was established over time helped create conditions for participants to hold and pursue these tensions together. There are many productive approaches to facilitation in such moments; however, this unfolding suggests that the ways dissension is navigated within participatory design work (especially early in the process) may create new grounds for authentic discourse that moves with rather than flattens complex histories. Indeed, nurturing the collective capacity to work with such tensions is an important mediational practice, a generator and marker of trust.

All of the examples discussed thus far emerged during the first design circle. In what follows, I discuss how the group widened their focus from children's educational needs and experiences with racism to parents and grandparents' racial identities.

Complex Discourses on Race and Racial Identity

Two new parents joined the second design circle, and I began the meeting by recounting the key themes from the prior session. My mention of racial discrimination as a theme spurred the group to dive back into the topic for the remainder of our time. This was likely related to the election of Donald Trump, which had occurred less than 2 weeks prior to our second dialogue. However, this shift was also intentional; our initial discussions of race focused on our children, and we had not yet spoken about how we are affected by anti-Iranian racism—particularly among first-generation immigrant parents who had likely encountered specific (if not intensified) racial and linguistic discrimination. The

move to carefully open such space was rooted in my assumption that co-developing strategies to support Iranian children would be limited without deeper discussion of our own racialized experiences. My analysis examines how holding space for the complex and sometimes contradictory discourses that emerged can support collective learning.

When I asked participants about their experiences with racism, Parisa (a new member and mother of two) initially stated that while she believed others had experienced "these things," she had not, even stating that some people use the "race-card" too often. Yet, within the same stretch of talk, Parisa shared that her parents-in-law did not accept her because she is Iranian. Two months later, Parisa recounted that her son's kindergarten teacher does not like him because he is Iranian. When participants encouraged Parisa to confront the teacher, she expressed a fear that it could make matters worse: "He has my child for 8 hours a day, and he can do many things."

Parisa's story helped expand the group's focus from bullying enacted by peers to the micro and macro aggressions enacted by teachers toward Iranian students, and the dynamics of power between teachers and families of color. It also reflects the complex tensions and movements embedded in participants' narratives about their racialized experiences. One interpretation of Parisa's shifting stances is that people may resolve the contradiction of denying racial discrimination and proceeding to recount clear instances of racism by sidestepping race as the logic undergirding the actions of others. The use of language such as *the race card* also demonstrates how conservative discourses regarding race in the US can infuse and mediate everyday sensemaking. Another, though not mutually exclusive, interpretation is that these tensions can signal emergent sensemaking and learning. This second perspective suggests that Parisa may have been publicly probing and perhaps reevaluating her initial denial of racism, a view that offers more in terms of the educational and dialogic potential embedded in such narratives.

Similar to Parisa, other parents opened up about experiences with racism only after establishing rapport and often in response to witnessing others' forthright narrations. During our fourth session, Nasrin, the sole grandparent in the group, shared that she feels that some patients at her clinic will never fully accept her due to her Iranian identity. In response, Rahim described his experiences with White supremacy as an Iranian child growing up in Germany, including standing close to the subway platform wall for fear of being pushed into the tracks by neo-Nazis. Nasrin responded with concern and asked whether he had discussed these experiences with his mother. Rahim replied,

> She didn't have any familiarity. It was me who had the experience. We never talked about it at home. It was vice versa. In order not to put any stress or fear on my mom, I held everything inside me.

It may be significant that Rahim voiced this experience while conversing with Nasrin, who was his elder within the group. Such moments offer glimpses into role re-mediations (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016) within design work, where the stories participants are moved to share create grounds for others to share memories. These occasions further suggest that noticing to whom a speaker is orienting their commentary within the collective (in this case, Rahim sharing with Nasrin) can evince the relational conditions that allow such stories to be spoken.

Nasrin and Rahim's exchange underscores the potential power of intergenerational dialogues. Though Rahim participated in the design circles as a father, Nasrin's presence and support may have allowed him to connect with the issues at hand as a son—both regarding the memory he shared and in terms of how she engaged with him as an elder. Such movements between generational identities are important, as remembering what it was like to be a child can nurture new ways of connecting with the experiences of one's children. In this case, Rahim framed his story with the caveat that Iranian

children growing up in the US do not suffer the racial violence he encountered as a child: "You have never had an experience like this [encountering neo-Nazis] growing up here…So, the experience that Iranian Americans have is very different." He further expressed the hope that his son can "stay in the world of playing football and not be exposed to things he's not old enough for yet." The connection between Rahim's childhood silence and our own children's potential silence about experiences with racism was left implicit within the exchange. Making such connections explicit and naming the generational perspective-taking that Nasrin and Rahim's dialogue supported as an important practice may contribute to fuller views of children's experiences across time and place.

Others wrestled with and sometimes challenged the idea that today's youth encounter less overt racism. Hossein, a father who attended the larger workshop, stated:

> I have a concern. I was a kid and attending school when we moved to the US. I had a struggle with my name, but I only changed my name back then. There was no racism, but things have changed a lot now. A 15-year-old kid has heard a lot of anti-Iranian and anti-Muslim words all his life. There was not such a thing when I was 15. The society is not the same.

Once again, we see how stances that may be in tension with one another can coexist. Though Hossein felt the need to change his name, he described the past in positive terms relative to his children's racialized experiences in the post-9/11 era. Hossein's comments simultaneously disrupted dominant narratives regarding American racial progress (his children, he stated, have heard more anti-Muslim and anti-Iranian racism than he did) and demonstrated the ongoing need for antiracist education and solidarity work within Iranian diasporic communities (considering his statement that there "was no racism").

These stories illustrate another key tension within our dialogues: while some participants recalled remaining silent about racism as children, and others shared that their young children were asking questions about their skin color and learning to value normative standards of beauty and language, many expressed the belief that young children may not be ready to discuss race. Although the group agreed that older children should have these conversations, they often worried that discussing race with younger children would imply that they are different or that any slight is due to their Iranian heritage. Some even expressed concern regarding older youth. Bita and Babak (her eighth-grade son) began participating in the design circles together. However, Bita expressed worry that Babak's participation may exacerbate feelings of difference, and Babak did not attend our final two sessions. Yet, in one of our final sessions, Bita eagerly shared that Babak had recently remarked on her frequent viewing of the Hallmark Channel, specifically asking why all the characters are White. Bita expressed a growing attunement to her children's existing awareness of race, which she felt was important to share with the group. Since 2016, Bita has spoken with me several times about her children's racial and cultural identities, seeking advice when Babak (then a high school junior) asked whether he should hide his Iranian identity following the U.S. assassination of Qasem Soleimani in January 2020. My conversations with Bita suggest that the complex discourses of race and parenting highlighted throughout this section may take shape differently over time as parents read ongoing experiences with their children through new lenses. As a high school senior, Babak cofacilitated storytelling workshops we organized for Iranian youth in the school, helping to create a space for younger students to process their experiences with race and identity.

Though the group consistently expressed the desire for their children not to feel "different," they reflected and wrestled with this idea in the larger, whole-school dialogue. As the workshop co-facilitator, I problematized the idea of difference as a deficit, sharing research that stresses the importance of talking with children about race as well as strategies parents can employ in such

conversations, such as the use of children's books to facilitate dialogue. I discussed the young age at which children begin to understand race (Kaveh, 2018; Kharij Collective, 2017; Shirazi, 2019), both regarding their own racial identities and the assumptions they begin to form about others in a society built on racial hierarchy. In response, Soroush described that his son "has seen himself as different and never thought of it as a bad thing; in fact, he thought of it as a good thing." Soroush signaled possibilities for supporting Iranian children to claim difference as an act of positive racial identity and as a critical stance toward White supremacy. His comment further affirms that intentional and explicit facilitation within design work can encourage alternative viewpoints to emerge.

The parental impulse to protect children from painful encounters with racial othering is real. At the same time, many parents know that "their attempts to comfort their children have more to do with shielding them from the truth than convincing them that their fears are unfounded" (Kharij Collective, 2017). As Maghbouleh (2017) argues, the language of difference "is the language of race and always has been" (p. 13). As the next section discusses, a key facet of critical pedagogies of race within Iranian diasporic communities involves codeveloping careful ways to support children in developing sociopolitical clarity about their racial identities (Sadeghi & Baker, 2019), generating the potential to deepen collective confidence, historical action, and solidarity. This approach resonates with one of the FLDC's core principles: "We aim for whole, healthy children (within healthy families and communities) who know/practice their culture, understand power, and can determine their own future" (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016, p. 7). It also stresses the need to move from focusing on whether to discuss race with young children, to the more important question of how.

Disentangling Self-Defense from Respectability

Analyzing the design circle transcripts with these issues in mind revealed key moments when elders and young people were working together to disentangle struggles against racism from the politics of respectability. Akbar offered the following example in our third session, which occurred just after the 2017 women's march and before the Muslim Ban:

> What can I say to my son to help him defend against this type of discrimination? For example, and this is a silly example but I'm just giving an idea here, what if someone says to him, 'You ride camels in Iran.' Or 'women can't drive in Iran.' Or worse, make fun of his name…or call him with a different name. This is very important to me—for my son to learn how to respond and defend himself against these types of comments.

A few participants responded by reaffirming the need for children to know their histories and the "good aspects of Iran," while Rahim offered a different perspective, suggesting that Iranian children should learn to engage in counterarguments:

> So, when someone says, 'You ride camels in your country,' the kid should say, 'Yes, our country is so big that in some parts they ride camels, in other parts they ride horses, and is some parts they drive cars. You don't have this type of diversity in your country.'

Rahim's amendment turned a defensive stance into one of cultural pride and a critique of presumed American superiority. Here, intergenerational engagement in shared problem-solving regarding racism and bullying not only generated strategies but also enabled the group to analyze the layers embedded in one another's proposed responses and the implications for children's evolving sense of personhood. This practice may have been enhanced by the sense of responsibility participants

felt to generate strategies to share with the larger school community in the culminating workshop, offering a view into what can emerge when participants are positioned as codesigners. In this case, Rahim generatively challenged the politics of respectability, although the flattening of heterogenous lifeways in the US context remained unexamined. In future design circles, visibly recording such suggestions and further examining their political layers may enable critiques of Whiteness and the US as a nation-state[3] to form the grounds for solidarity with multiple racialized communities.

A related trend emerged in the distinct ways older and younger participants conceptualized the educational needs of children in the diaspora. Parents and grandparents often discussed the need for Iranian children to learn their culture and history; however, Lily and Babak, the two youth participants, emphasized the need for schools to teach dominant populations a valid and complex view of Iran and the broader region, and to engage White students in antiracist education. This argument became more pronounced for Lily after the presidential election. She had previously characterized her primarily White, suburban high school as "very progressive" and open-minded. Following Trump's election, Lily described the deep dissonance she felt as she witnessed White peers waving American flags and expressing excitement about the election results. In the context of supportive dialogue within community, such moments of dissonance can create possibilities for reimagining self-defense and determination on young people's terms.

Discussion

More can be said about the topics that emerged within the dialogues, including the threat of war with Iran and how Iranians can work in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other communities of color to resist policies such as the Muslim ban, family separation at the border, and police brutality. Another central trend involved how both older and younger participants drew on shared histories with state power in Iran as resources for analyzing state power and politics in the US. These discussions, and the examples above, reveal a historical intersubjectivity (Matusov, 1996) that may have played a key role in allowing parents, grandparents, and youth who were informally acquainted through the school to embark on honest and probing dialogues that were anchored in resonant histories. My analysis of the dialogues emphasized what it can look like when complex personhood is treated both as an analytic lens and a mediational sensibility. I conclude by discussing some of these learnings.

First, the concept and practice of complex personhood can reorient our relationships with political tensions, disagreements, and dissent as they emerge within such dialogues. Here, holding space to wrestle with complexity, and explicitly naming politics as something we need not shy away from early in the design process, may have helped generate and assume the strength of emergent forms of trust within the collective. Such trust is essential for engaging with difficult topics in ways that deepen rather than threaten collectivity. In light of recent Iranian history, the concerns that participants expressed about "getting too political" likely reflect a shared knowledge of the many community organizations and spaces that have disbanded because of political rifts. Developing ways to engage in honest dialogue that nurtures rather than severs relationships can engender alternatives to apolitical and areligious collectivity as the only means of sustaining diasporic community, thereby supporting historicized forms of relational healing. The careful work of mediation is important to continue analyzing and naming as we consider how diasporic organizations can serve as environments for such intergenerational learning.

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[3] In light of Rahim's other critical comments throughout the design process, parents' own political identities and histories of critique with regard to U.S. imperialism (Nasrabadi & Matin-Asghari, 2018) may play an important role in their stances towards racial identity and parenting, a key area for future research.

Second, a mediational sensibility rooted in complex personhood can generatively slow down our movements with one another, helping attune to layered discourses regarding race and identity as spaces of learning. The sometimes-rapid shifts from expressing color-evasive ideologies to critiquing those ideologies or, as Parisa's stories reflected, from denying experiences of racism to sharing overt encounters with anti-Iranian discrimination, suggest that intentionally and patiently opening such spaces can allow different narratives to become available for collective sensemaking. The sometimes assimilationist discourses present within the dialogues could be read as evidence that Iranians (particularly first-generation immigrants) are invested in claiming the privileges of Whiteness. In line with the broader project of FLDC, challenging deficit views of parents can mean suspending such interpretations to create sustained opportunities for collective social analysis, which, in this context, allowed elders and youth to practice shifting from assimilationist responses to forms of self-determination.

This orientation toward temporality and relationality is also a methodological imperative: interviews and focus groups may capture the kinds of comments that emerged in the first or second design circle, allowing us as researchers to overlook the distinct stances that can be expressed over time. How can we learn to treat the stories, experiences and concerns exemplified here not as settled discourses, but as portals of meaning that can birth new possibilities and solidarities? One way to do this, as exemplified through the stories shared, is to focus on establishing and practicing routine forms of dialogue—such as carefully analyzing proposed responses to racism or the generational perspective-taking that emerged between Nasrin and Rahim—and trusting what such practices can give life to over time rather than trying to resolve each tension in its current moment. This is not mutually exclusive from the need for antiracist education within Iranian diasporic communities, as seen with the need to support parents and caregivers in talking with young children about race and to expand racial literacies around anti-Blackness and settler-colonialism. However it is an argument for recognizing the relational time required for learning and healing—in this case, among diasporic Iranians reflecting on sometimes painful histories to support the educational and social needs of the next generation.

Finally, the question of timescales and mediational patience matters both for how we move within design processes (the five sessions discussed here), and for what we learn through longer temporalities of partnership. During the school-wide workshop, some parents suggested holding a similar discussion with the school's teachers, many of whom grew up in Iran, to hear how they are navigating their experiences with racism as new immigrants and to allow them to benefit pedagogically from learning more about their students' racialized experiences. Four years after this workshop, the school director asked me to co-lead such a session with teachers following the U.S. assassination of Qasem Soleimani and the subsequent rise in anti-Iranian racism. Additionally, I was asked to hold a workshop for parents to discuss concerns for their children regarding the implications of the assassination and sense of impending war. I also worked with the school to create a guide (in English and Persian) for families to support their children amid ongoing militarism and sanctions against Iran. A few weeks after this parent workshop, a mother who had been present told me that she had shared some of the responses we discussed with the mother of her child's Chinese American peer, who had been experiencing increased anti-Asian racism in the era of COVID-19. She commented that she now felt confident in what she was sharing with other parents about supporting their children. Around this same time, Lily shared that she had facilitated similar conversations among Iranian families during a Parents' Day at her college, which she organized as a leader of the school's Iranian students' association. These ripples reflect the openings that can emerge when dialogic social relations are seeded and sustained over longer arcs of time. Moving with the ethics of complex personhood was central to this relational work.

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