JFDE

Journal of Family Diversity in Education

WINTER 2023/2024• ISSUE 1 • VOLUME 6

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.

JFDE

Journal of Family Diversity in Education

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Editors' Note

The JFDE is pleased to share with you our 2023/24 winter issue. Over the past year we have seen a continuation of many challenging issues that are facing education. The simmering culture wars persist, with district administrators, education leaders, teachers, community members and students experiencing the stresses of the moment. The post-Covid mental health crisis continues to impact both teachers and students and ongoing battles over anti-LGBTQ+ legislation threatens student well-being. Sadly, teachers and administrators are leaving the profession in record numbers and the public's trust in public education has been in decline since 2020.

Yet, despite these negative headlines, we continue to believe in the promise of public education and to be inspired by the work of families, students, community members and educators who are committed to collectively building a better future. The three research articles in this issue share the common thread of community-based innovation as a means to overcome significant challenges in education. We believe that each makes a unique and valuable contribution to their fields.

Alisha Nguyen's article, "In Solidarity: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Family Engagement and Home Learning Program During the Covid-19 Pandemic", discusses the work of Home Connection, a Boston based program focused on working with immigrant families with bilingual children. This mixed methods study traces the origins of the Home Connection program based on community identified needs and the cultivation of local community assets to meet these challenges. Of particular note, are the concerns that the immigrant families felt about excessive screen time associated with distance learning, and the appreciation they felt for the bilingual learning materials that were developed to foster more hands-on learning at home. This article speaks to the benefits of empowering community members throughout the planning process for the delivery of services.

The work of Soyoung Park is also focused on the experiences of immigrant families. Dr. Park's article, "Reframing Deficit Narratives to Honor the Community Cultural Wealth of Immigrant Families of Children with Disabilities", uses qualitative research to surface the perspectives of educators, but then centers the voices of immigrant families working to navigate the special education process. The families articulation of the cultural wealth that they bring to the process and the aspirations that they have for their children offers a stark contrast to the deficit based perspectives of some educators. Dr. Park calls upon the field to reimagine parent-school connections in special education and offers several compelling suggestions.

Anne Valauri's article, "Reimagining Post-Covid Relationships with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families: Reflections with a Preschool Director," is based on an ethnographic research collected prior to and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, which offers a unique real-time perspective on leadership challenges faced by early childhood educators. It also highlights the ways in which

systemic racism was made more explicit in the midst of pandemic policy implementation and how educational leaders and families collective perseverance helped transform historically unjust practices.

Finally, our winter issue concludes with a new JFDE feature "Community Spotlight." This section seeks to highlight the work of innovative community organizations from around the world. If readers have suggestions for community organizations that should be featured in the future please reach out to the editors. Our first Community Spotlight features "Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters" or HIPPY program, contributed by Deborah Stark and Miriam Westheimer. This feature provides an overview of research insights related to the HIPPY approach, and highlights the evolution of the program as additional equity-oriented benefits for participants were identified. As an international program, HIPPY also demonstrates the importance of organizational flexibility to meet the needs of diverse cultural contexts.

We hope that you enjoy the winter 2023-2024 issue of the JFDE. Please share our articles widely with your friends and colleagues and consider making your own contribution to the journal.

In Solidarity,

Michael P. Evans & Érica Fernández
Co-Editors JFDE

Article

In Solidarity: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Family Engagement and Home Learning Program During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Journal of Family Diversity in Education, 2023/2024
Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 1-26

Alisha Nguyen
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Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic caused serious social disruptions and posed significant challenges to all families, especially immigrant families. Immigrant families who spoke languages other than English and who had young bilingual children faced numerous barriers as they struggled to navigate remote learning with their children without adequate language and technological support. The need to design action plans to mitigate the negative educational impact of the pandemic on immigrant families with young bilingual children was urgent. To address the immediate needs of immigrant families during the first year of the pandemic, this transformative mixed-methods study presents a family engagement and home learning program called the Home Connection. This program was collaboratively designed and implemented to support 20 immigrant families with 42 young bilingual children from the Metro and Greater Boston Areas. Focusing on the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program, findings from this study demonstrate how the family participants actively engaged with and positively evaluated the program. These findings also suggest that family and community engagement play a crucial role in creating a more sustainable support system for immigrant families as well as equitable learning experiences for young bilingual children during and after the pandemic.

Keywords: Immigrant families, bilingual students, community-based research, family engagement, transformative mixed-methods, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused critical social disruptions and posed significant challenges to all families, especially immigrant families from low-income backgrounds. These families had limited access to healthcare and social services, overrepresented the essential workforce, and lived in structurally vulnerable neighborhoods with crowded housing that rendered them more vulnerable to the COVID-19 virus (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Fortuna et al., 2020). During this time of turmoil, anti-

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immigration sentiments and racial unrest also negatively impacted these families and heightened their risk of facing discrimination, bigotry, and violence (Cholera et al., 2020).

To mitigate the spread of the virus at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, school closures were enacted, and home quarantine was enforced across 50 US states. Most school districts made a sudden shift to emergency remote learning, without much preparation or consideration of students' diverse needs and their families' situations (Office of Civil Rights, 2021). This shift created numerous barriers for immigrant families who speak languages other than English and who have young bilingual children, especially newcomers who were taking initial steps to settle down and build their homes in a new place. During the first year of pandemic schooling, many immigrant families struggled to navigate remote learning with their children due to inadequate language and technological support. For immigrant families living in under-resourced communities, the lack of access to electricity, the internet, reliable technological devices, and learning resources made remote learning impossible (Nguyen, forthcoming).

The need to design action plans to mitigate and redress the negative educational impact of the pandemic on immigrant families and young bilingual children was urgent. Therefore, many researchers advocated for multisectoral community-based approaches to respond rapidly to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic and address social, health, economic, and educational inequities (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021; Endale et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020; Salma & Giri, 2021; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2020; Wieland et al., 2022). Additionally, action-oriented scholars argued for practical solutions to help immigrant families gain access to healthcare (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2020), social services (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021), teletherapy and psychological support (Endale et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020), and education services (Kaiper-Marquez et al., 2020). Collectively, this research has presented possibilities in which reciprocal partnerships between researchers and community members were established and maintained to drive collective actions during times of crisis.

Within this line of action-oriented scholarship, this transformative mixed-methods study (Mertens, 2010) employed a community-based approach to support 20 immigrant families[1] with 42 young bilingual children from the Metro and Greater Boston Areas. To address the immediate needs of these immigrant families and their children, the principal researcher collaborated with two community partners and 20 immigrant families to design collectively a family engagement and home learning program called the Home Connection. Focusing on the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program, the findings from this study demonstrate how the family and child participants actively engaged with and positively evaluated this equity-focused family engagement and home learning program.

Literature Review

Socioeconomic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Immigrant Families

A myriad of factors contributed to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on immigrant families. Many immigrant families work in essential sectors, such as service, food, construction, and agriculture, that took the hardest hit in the beginning of the pandemic, resulting in more job losses and a higher risk of reduced work hours (Gelatt et al., 2021). As reported by the Pew Research Center, the unemployment rate of foreign-born workers rose from 4% to 15.3% in the second quarter of 2020 (Kochhar & Bennetti, 2021). For those fortunate enough to keep their jobs, remote work was typically not an option. Many immigrant families included essential frontline workers, who had to cope with difficult, high-pressure, and unsafe working conditions with limited

[1] In this study, the term "family" is purposely used to include not only parents but also older siblings and multigenerational caregivers.

protective measures in place. Furthermore, immigrant families, especially those from low-income backgrounds, tend to take public transportation and live in multigenerational housing in overcrowded and under-resourced neighborhoods, which made it more difficult for these families to comply with social distancing, home quarantine, and other COVID-19 safety measures (Cholera et al., 2020). Therefore, immigrant families suffered from significantly higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2021). Even when they had contracted the virus, some immigrant families, especially unauthorized ones, were afraid to seek testing and treatment due to lack of insurance, lack of low-cost healthcare services, and/or fear of immigration enforcement, such as detention and deportation (Capps et al., 2020).

Although immigrant families were among the most vulnerable populations on which the pandemic had the most significant effects, many of them had limited access to public benefits, healthcare, and social services. For example, unauthorized and mixed-status families were unprotected and purposely excluded from federally funded COVID-19 safety net programs, such as unemployment insurance and stimulus payments through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Gomez & Merez, 2021). Even if they were eligible for some pandemic relief programs, immigrant families faced multiple barriers related to language, culture, and technology when obtaining essential information and gaining access to available services. The pandemic placed tremendous social and economic pressure on immigrant families to sustain their family lives and support their children.

Bilingual Students' Schooling Experiences in US Classrooms

More than five million bilingual students are enrolled in US public schools, most of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants (Jiménez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Labeled as English learners, bilingual students are often minoritized, marginalized, and underserved (American Psychological Association, 2016). Emergent bilingual students need specialized support to sustain their home languages, acquire English as an additional language, and learn new academic content across various subject areas. Many education scholars have provided evidence for and strongly recommended the use of culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy to meet bilingual students' learning needs, support their positive identity development, and foster their sense of belonging (Gay, 2014; Herrera et al., 2012; Hollie, 2017; Villegas, 1991; Zhang-Wu, 2017). However, schools often fail to acknowledge these students' full cultural and linguistic repertoire and often devalue their families' and communities' knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Education policies and programs designed to serve this population have often treated bilingualism as a problem and English monolingualism, in the specific form of standard academic English, as the only desired outcome (García & Torres-Guevara, 2009; Hinton, 2016). In addition, these programs rarely address structural challenges that prevent bilingual students from accessing equitable educational opportunities and learning resources. As studies have shown, bilingual students tend to attend segregated and underfunded schools (Knight & Mendoza, 2017), and many are tracked into lower-level classes (Callahan, 2005; Sung, 2018) and taught oversimplified curriculum by less-experienced teachers (Gándara et al., 2003). Struggling to survive in multiculturally deficient spaces with hegemonic structures (Nieto, 2021), bilingual students suffer from discrimination (Huber, 2011), microaggressions (Steketee et al., 2021), linguistic racism (Baker-Bell, 2020), and linguistic violence (Garza Ayala, 2022).

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Bilingual Students

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified existing educational equities and introduced new challenges to bilingual students. The shift to remote learning placed these students in an extremely disadvantaged position that included multiple new barriers. For example, remote learning required access to high-speed internet and reliable working devices that many bilingual students, especially

those from low-income backgrounds and attending low-resourced schools, did not have (Vogels, 2021). Bilingual students encountered not only infrastructure barriers but also the linguistic, digital, and cultural barriers of an English-only online learning environment in an unfamiliar education system. With their families working away from home, some bilingual students had to navigate remote learning alone.

Specifically, remote learning posed many challenges for young bilingual children, especially those starting their first year of formal schooling. These beginners often lean heavily on in-person interactions and non-verbal cues to develop their proficiency in an additional language and learn both academic content and school norms (Choi & Chiu, 2021). Through an online platform with limited human contact, these young bilingual students had difficulty understanding academic content and learning tasks, all of which were provided solely in English. For these young students, participating in remote learning required substantial adult support, from operating technological devices to navigating various online platforms and learning apps and then following a complicated learning schedule. To engage fully with online learning sessions, young bilingual children needed the co-participation and facilitation of their primary caregivers. However, many caregivers from immigrant families had to work outside of the home and struggled to meet their basic needs during the pandemic. Those who were able to stay at home with their children were not always able to offer substantial help, particularly in the absence of resources, linguistic support, and adequate information needed to navigate learning expectations from teachers, schools, and districts (Sayer & Braun, 2020).

Furthermore, many districts transitioned to emergency remote learning without sufficient resources, technological knowledge, or teacher training. As reported by numerous schools during the transition, not all teachers could quickly adapt culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices to remote learning while prioritizing the specific needs of bilingual students (Cushing-Leubner et al., 2021). Therefore, bilingual students were particularly impacted by the pandemic and were often left behind amid emergency remote learning. In some districts, the situation was so challenging that many students logged out of schools, resulting in a surge in chronic absenteeism among bilingual students in the pandemic school year (Bamberger, 2021).

Multisectoral Community-Based Approaches to Support Immigrant Families During the Pandemic

Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a public health crisis but also carried economic, social, psychological, and educational consequences, many scholars attempted to move beyond their disciplinary boundaries and traditional practices to meet new professional demands and fulfill social responsibilities. To respond rapidly to complex problems posed by the global pandemic, the field required innovative solutions and multisectoral partnerships that drew on "diverse experiences, skills, and knowledge" and drove collective actions (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020). Calling these partnerships the whole-of-society approach, the World Health Organization (WHO) strongly encouraged multisectoral stakeholders, academia included, to collaborate closely with the public and private sectors, communities, and families to tackle pandemic-related problems together. Compared to governmental institutions and state agencies, community-based and grassroots organizations have more experience serving historically underserved and marginalized communities. These organizations have been proactive in providing support to immigrant families, facilitating immigrant integration and receptivity, and fostering their sense of belonging (Jiménez, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2018). During the first year of the pandemic, many community-based and grassroots organizations filled the gaps to meet immigrant families' pressing needs, but they faced multiple challenges, such as overstretching their limited budgets, maintaining their own staffing, and performing community outreach under the constraints of COVID-19 quarantine (Bernstein et al., 2020). These organizations required additional funding and support to sustain their pandemic-responsive services. Thus, many scholars adopted

multisectoral, community-based approaches to collaborate closely with these community-based organizations to funnel funding and resources to underserved communities and to create services to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on these communities (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021; Endale et al., 2020; Falicov et al., 2020; Salma & Giri, 2021; Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2020; Weiland et al., 2022).

Multisectoral, community-based scholarship embraces "true collaboration between community members who understand their community needs and possible solutions, and professionals who are willing to listen and to learn" (Falicov et al., 2020, p. 866). For example, Wieland et al. (2022) documented how academics, health experts, and community partners co-created messages to deliver credible COVID-19 information to African and Hispanic immigrant populations. The study emphasized how the use of bidirectional communication helped accelerate responses to communities' concerns and obstacles and facilitated the connection of community members to essential resources. Similarly, Washburn et al. (2022) reported on community-academic partnerships that aimed to improve equitable access to COVID-19 testing, data, communication, and vaccination. They found that such partnerships ensured that community partners' voices were heard and that their perspectives were included in the decision-making process. Falicov et al. (2020) explained how, through the pandemic, their research team learned to become more flexible in terms of time and space to overcome pandemic-related constraints and attend to communities' basic needs, such as food, transportation, translation, and interpretation services. In their study, an interdisciplinary team of physicians, pharmacy teams, medical staff, and social workers collaborated closely with *promotoras* (experienced and trusted community members) to provide not only physical and mental healthcare but also cultural and emotional support to Latinx immigrant communities. The *promotoras* understood the communities' challenges and valued patients' cultural practices. Their roles as community connectors, health facilitators, and advisors were essential in connecting immigrant patients with much-needed services during the crisis.

These studies informed the present investigation and illustrate the potential of research that engages communities in social action. Adopting a community-based approach also means explicitly addressing social inequities and recognizing how "the vulnerabilities of the pandemic are compounded with the vulnerabilities imposed by policies that have long oppressed immigrants" (Cross & Gonzalez Benson, 2021, p. 116). Therefore, this line of research often adopts an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 2017) to understand how overlapping forces of oppression hinder immigrant families' survival and wellbeing and seeks concrete solutions from the ground up. It shifts from creating individual-focused intervention programs to redesigning social support systems that funnel resources, increase access, and equip communities. The goal of community-based projects is to enable marginalized communities "to take control of their own context and circumstances" (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020, p. 219). Moreover, actively engaging communities in the process of designing support systems leads to more effective capacity building, stronger program impact, and longer-term sustainability (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020; Salma & Giri, 2021).

The Current Study

Learning from multisectoral, community-based research, the current study aimed to establish meaningful and reciprocal partnerships among the researcher-educator, community organizers, and immigrant families to collectively solve pandemic-related educational problems and advance educational equities. Specifically, this transformative mixed-methods study was collaboratively designed to support 20 immigrant families with 42 young bilingual children from the Metro and Greater Boston Areas. The community and family partners participated in the co-design, implementation, and evaluation of a family engagement and home learning program called the Home Connection that included three key components, connection, curriculum, and community, as follows:

(i) **Connection:** connecting the families with essential services and helping them gain access to remote learning
(ii) **Curriculum:** co-designing with the families developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, and remote learning experiences for young bilingual children
(iii) **Community:** establishing reciprocal relationships with families; creating a safe space for them to share their knowledge, resources, and strategies to improve the children's learning experiences; and fostering community building by connecting families from within and across communities

Guided by the equitable collaboration framework (Ishimaru, 2019), the Home Connection program was created to recognize and leverage the families' collective strengths and existing capacities to mitigate the negative forces of the pandemic. It centered on the crucial roles of immigrant families as home educators and aimed to equip and engage immigrant families whose skills, knowledge, and sociocultural resources were highly valued and prioritized. Finally, it aimed to improve remote learning experiences for young bilingual children participating in the program, elevate intergenerational home learning, and foster community building.

Theoretical Framework

To enhance family engagement efforts, this study relied heavily on the theoretical framework of equitable collaboration (Ishimaru, 2019, 2020). Rooted in critical race, decolonizing, community organizing, and sociocultural learning scholarship, this theoretical framework refutes deficit-based narratives that frame immigrant families as not valuing education, not trying hard enough, or lacking the sociocultural capital and knowledge needed for successful engagement (i.e., always in need of remedies; Valencia, 2010). The framework criticizes traditional family involvement practices that are often centralized around white middle-class norms and have the sole purpose of forced assimilation and acculturation (Levine-Rasky, 2009).

Utilizing an equity-focused lens, the equitable collaboration framework focuses on enacting systemic changes through shared responsibilities and collective efforts (Ishimaru, 2020). Equitable collaboration aims to

(i) identify existing resources and leverage families' funds of knowledge;
(ii) build capacities and establish reciprocal relationships with families;
(iii) shift the focus from the individual to the collective to "facilitate advocacy and leadership to benefit *all* the children in a school or community" (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 7); and
(iv) cultivate relational power among families, community members, and educators not only to increase access to educational opportunities but also to transform schools systematically.

Within the context of this study, the equitable collaboration framework was used to guide the design and implementation of the Home Connection program. Considering the special circumstances of the pandemic, collective efforts to transform "schools" were redirected to foster family connection, community building, and collective healing during home quarantine. First, we listened carefully to the immigrant families' stories and concerns, attempting to understand their experiences and struggles and identify the educational needs of their bilingual children in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, the program recognized the immigrant families as co-designers, co-educators, and co-evaluators who actively participated in the program design, implementation, and evaluation processes. Third, the program's goals were to connect the immigrant families with existing resources and provide educational support to the bilingual children who participated in the program within a culture of shared responsibility among the researcher, family partners, and community partners. Fourth, the program included multiple relationship- and capacity-building strategies, such as home visits, family

workshops, and family online gathering sessions. This paper shows that a collaborative learning ecology could potentially be formed in the most difficult circumstance with limited resources if establishing trusting relationships with families and communities is prioritized.

Research Design

The research design of the study follows the cyclical model for transformative mixed-methods research (Mertens, 2010). Drawing from community-based participatory research, the transformative mixed methods design prioritizes community engagement throughout the entire research process, from defining the research problems based on communal needs and creating concrete social action plans to making research decisions in terms of data collection and analysis and evaluating the implementation of the solutions. The research process depends on the following:

(i) the establishment of trusting relationships between the principal researcher and the research partners (in this case, community organizers and immigrant families);

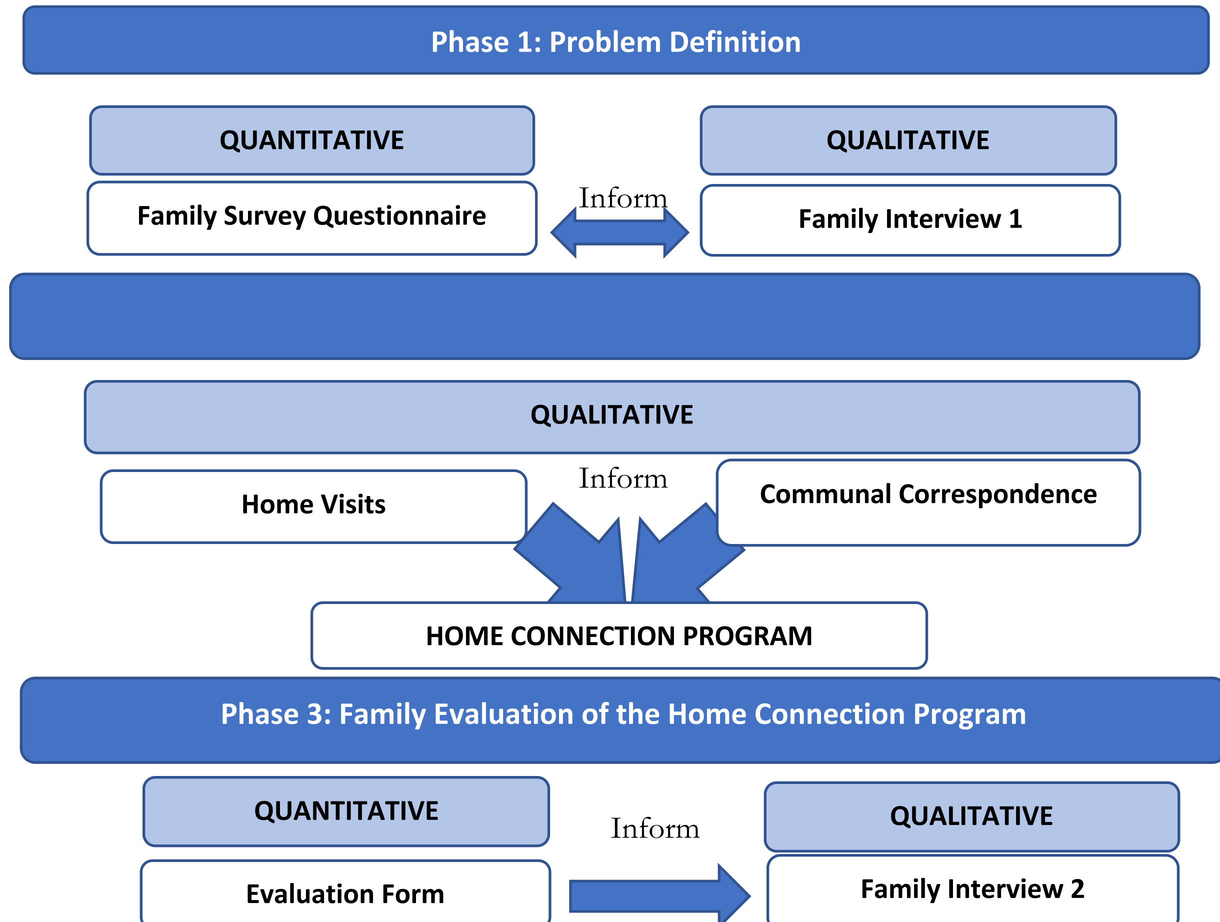
(ii) the co-design and development of culturally and linguistically responsive, equitable evaluation instruments; and

(iii) awareness of power dynamics and the willingness to address them at every research phase.

For more information on the transformative research cycle, please refer to Figure 1. In this project, multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed to serve the purposes of each research phase and answer the research question. Each phase is described in more detail in later sections.

Figure 1

Transformative Mixed-Methods Model



Partnering with Immigrant Families and Community Organizers

In this study, the principal researcher collaborated closely with two community organizers, referred to as community partners, and three immigrant families, referred to as family partners. These partners helped recruit family participants and actively participated in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program. The community partners worked for two immigrant-serving community organizations located in the Metro Boston Area and had been supporting immigrant families through multiple pandemic-responsive programs. The family partners were recommended by the community partners. They included first-generation immigrants who spoke Spanish, Portuguese, and Vietnamese and had been living in their neighborhoods for a long time, which allowed them to build trusting relationships with many family participants. All family partners' children also participated in the learning activities of the Home Connection program.

Sampling

Criteria-based snowball sampling was used to recruit the family participants (Parker et al., 2019). Snowball sampling is an effective recruitment method that helps connect with isolated communities under restricted conditions effected by COVID-19 and leverages existing acquaintances among families and partners (Sadler et al., 2010). The final sample included 20 immigrant families with 42 bilingual children (age range: 4–10 years old), who participated in the Home Connection program at different times. The first group of families (10 families and 15 children) participated from September–November 2020. The second group of families (10 families and 27 children) participated from January–March 2021.

Positionality

This study carries certain assumptions, beliefs, and biases centered around the principal researcher's multiple roles in the research site: education researcher, early childhood educator, and immigrant mother. I am a cisgender, married Vietnamese woman with children, which places me in an advantageous position to conduct research with young children and families. For this project, my cultural and linguistic competency allowed me to communicate and collaborate more effectively with Vietnamese families who speak different dialects and had emigrated from different regions of Vietnam. To collaborate with other families with whom I did not share a linguistic background, I relied mostly on my community and family partners, language brokers within the families, and translation applications. While the cultural and language barriers posed certain challenges, I also viewed them as a learning opportunity and a realistic projection of an educator working in a multilingual or multicultural society who often needs to serve linguistically and culturally diverse populations of children and families. The barriers diminished my power as "the knower" in this context and forced me and my community/family partners to acknowledge and appreciate our interdependence in the process of co-constructing knowledge.

Phase 1. Problem Definition

Family Survey Questionnaire

All 20 family participants completed a Qualtrics survey questionnaire including 50 open-ended, multiple-choice questions (4-point and 5-point Likert scale). The questionnaire was available in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Vietnamese) and was organized into four sections: (i) Demographics (20 items), (ii) Language Practices (7 items), (iii) COVID-19 Pandemic Experience (7 items), and (iv) Remote Learning Experience (16 items). The questionnaire was sent via email to 12 families who were able to read, write, and respond to an online web-based survey. For the remaining eight families, the content of the questionnaire was orally explained in Vietnamese by the researcher

(4 families) or in Spanish by the community/family partners (4 families). These families responded to the questionnaire orally, using their home languages.

Family Interview 1

All primary caregivers, most of whom were immigrant mothers, participated in a semi-structured, 1-hour interview. This interview was collaboratively conducted by the principal researcher and the community partners before the families joined the Home Connection program. The interview had with the following goals:

(i) to gain a deeper understanding of the families' backgrounds and their pandemic-related experiences

(ii) to learn about the families' remote-learning experiences, especially the barriers that prevented the primary caregivers and their children from effectively engaging with remote learning provided by their school districts.

This interview was conducted online with 12 families who had access to digital devices, were familiar with the Zoom platform, and would be able to log in to Zoom with minimal technological support. For the other eight families who did not have access to devices and/or needed substantial technological support, this interview was conducted in-person during home visits with social distancing practices.

Phase 2. Development and Implementation of the Home Connection Program

Home Visits

To establish trust and build relationships with the family participants, the researcher and community/family partners conducted multiple in-person and virtual home visits with the families during the program. The purposes of these visits were as follows:

(i) to document the families' current access to resources and services

(ii) to provide and connect families with essential services

(iii) to provide digital devices and/or technological support as needed

(iv) to gather the families' funds of knowledge and learn about their sociocultural and multilingual practices,

(v) to discover the children's learning interests

During these visits, the principal researcher and community partners took field notes and photographs and used these data to inform the design of the Home Connection program.

Communal Correspondence

All social interactions and communal correspondence among the principal researcher, the community/family partners, and the family participants was documented by the principal researcher. This set of data included text messages and photographs of the families and their children's engagement with the program. The photographs of the children's learning activities and their work were taken by the primary caregivers and sent to the researcher via different platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, and SMS text messages.

All data collected through Phase 1 interviews and Phase 2 home visits and correspondence were used to inform the development of the Home Connection program.

Phase 3. Family Evaluation of the Home Connection Program

Evaluation Form

The family participants were asked to complete web-based evaluation forms three times during their participation in the program. The forms included five open-ended and five multiple-choice questions (5-point Likert scale). Further, the form was divided into three main sections related to (i) picture books, (ii) the learning boxes, and (iii) the online learning activities (see Appendix G. Family Evaluation Form). This form was available via Qualtrics in different languages, including Vietnamese,

Spanish, and English. Child-friendly evaluation forms with a 3-point rating scale and visual items were also sent to the families to obtain the child participants' evaluations (see Appendix H. Child Evaluation Form).

The evaluation form was sent via email to 12 families who were able to read, write, and respond to an online web-based survey. For the remaining eight families, the hardcopy of the evaluation form was sent to the families to complete. This evaluation form was sent in Weeks 3, 6, and 10 of the program to gather the families' feedback for each set of the learning boxes with the purpose of using the families' suggestions to improve the program continuously.

Family Interview 2

The second interview was conducted at the end of the Home Connection program to learn about the families' overall experiences with the program. By the end of the program, all adult and child participants were familiar with the Zoom platform and could troubleshoot their devices themselves. Therefore, all interviews were conducted online via Zoom. As the children's experiences and evaluation were highly valued, both primary caregivers (most of whom were immigrant mothers) and their children were asked to participate in the second interview together. Additional interviews were conducted with three family partners and two community partners who took more active roles in the program to gather their feedback on the impact of and future directions for the program.

Data Analyses

Quantitative

Family Survey Questionnaire

The data were analyzed directly on Qualtrics to obtain descriptive statistics to build the family profiles (see Table 1) and determine how the families ranked different aspects of their home lives and remote learning experiences.

Program Evaluation Forms

Additionally, the data were analyzed directly on Qualtrics to reflect the families' ranking of different components of the curriculum, including (i) picture books, (ii) learning boxes, and (iii) online learning sessions. The rapid feedback evaluation method (McNall et al., 2007) was employed to capture the families' ongoing experiences. Subsequently, the researcher quickly revised each set of picture books and learning boxes and made changes to the online learning sessions according to the families' feedback.

Table 1

Family Profiles

Families	Race/ Ethnicity	Country of Origin	Home Languages	No. of Children/ Grade Levels	Occupation (Mother/Father)	Education Levels (Mother/Father)	Household Size	Housing Arrangements	Family Income
Ngoc Nguyen**	Asian	Vietnam	Vietnamese	3 (K, 1st, 3rd)	Manicurist/ Driver	Highschool Diploma/ Bachelor's Degree	13	5-bedroom house	$10,000–19,999
Kamila Gutierrez**	Latinx	El Salvador	Spanish	2 (Pre-K, K)	Cleaner/ Construction Worker	Highschool Diploma/ Highschool Diploma	4	1 bedroom	$10,000–19,999
Maria Flor**	Latinx	El Salvador	Spanish	3 (1st, 3rd, 6th)	Babysitter/ Grocery Worker	Some formal education/ Highschool Diploma	6	3-bedroom apartment	$10,000–19,999

Carmen Dalo**	Latinx	Argentina	Spanish	1 (1st)	Cleaner/ Grocery Worker	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	3	2-bedroom apartment	$20,000–29,999
Micaela Dafonte**	Latinx	Honduras	Spanish	2 (K, 2nd)	Homemaker / Car Mechanic	Highschool Diploma/ Bachelor's Degree	4	2-bedroom apartment	$20,000–29,999
Thu Nguyen**	Asian	Vietnam	Vietnamese	2 (Pre-K, K)	Manicurist/ Plumber	Some formal education/ Bachelor's Degree	8	3-bedroom condo	$20,000–29,999
Oscar Valdez**	Latinx	Venezuela	Spanish	2 (1st, 3rd)	Construction Worker/ Cleaner	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	4	2-bedroom apartment	$20,000–29,999
Ngoc Tran**	Asian	Vietnam	Vietnamese	2 (Pre-K, 1st)	Manicurist/ Factory Worker	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	6	4-bedroom house	$30,000–49,999
Susan Rodriguez **	Latinx	Honduras	Spanish	2 (Pre-K, 1st)	Restaurant Worker/ Plumber	Highschool Diploma/ Highschool Diploma	5	3-bedroom condo	$30,000–49,999
Mariana Lopez	Afro-Latinx	Cape Verde	Cape Verdean	2 (1st, 3rd)	Patient Coordinator/ Realtor	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	4	3-bedroom house	$50,000–74,999
Molly Morales	Afro-Latinx	Honduras	Spanish	1 (3rd grade)	Elderly Caregiver	Bachelor's Degree	2	1 bedroom	$50,000–74,999
Carol Carneiro	Latinx	Brazil	Portuguese	1 (1st)	Homemaker / Music Teacher	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	3	4-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Penelope Marcela	Latinx	Colombia	Spanish	2 (1st, 5th)	Administrator/ Engineer	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	4	3-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Phung Truong	Asian	Vietnam	Vietnamese	2 (Pre-K, K)	Homemaker / Lecturer	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	4	3-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Thao Pham	Asian	Vietnam	Vietnamese	2 (K, 4th)	Software Engineer/ Analytics Consultant	Bachelor's Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	5	3-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Phuong Tran	Asian	Vietnam	Vietnamese	3 (PreK, K, 1s)	Homemaker / Engineer	Bachelor's Degree/ Graduate Degree	5	3-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Ellis Canaris	Mixed	Argentina	Spanish, English	2 (PreK, 1st)	Book Editor/ Data Scientist	Bachelor's Degree/ Graduate Degree	4	3-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Camilla Rivera	Latinx	El Salvador	Spanish, English	3 (PreK, 1st, 3rd)	Homemaker / Bioinformatics Specialist	Graduate Degree/ Graduate Degree	5	3-bedroom house	$75,000–99,999
Carol Lim	Asian	Hong Kong	Cantonese, English	3 (Infant, Toddler, 1st)	Child Specialist/ Accountant	Graduate Degree/ Bachelor's Degree	5	4-bedroom house	$100,000–149,999

Ellie Hirano	Mixed	Japan	Japanese, English	2 (PreK, 1st)	Homemaker / Economist	Graduate Degree/ Graduate Degree	4	3-bedroom house	$100,000–149,999

**families with children participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program
Note. All family names are pseudonyms.

Qualitative

Family Interview 1

The first set of interview data collected during Phase 1: Problem Definition was transcribed, translated into English, and transferred to MAXQDA for thematic coding analysis (Saldaña, 2021). In the first cycle of coding, these interview data were deductively categorized into two main topics: (i) pandemic-related challenges and (ii) barriers to engaging with remote learning. These topics were aligned with the questions presented in the family survey questionnaire. From each transcript, recurring statements and phrases directly related to the two main topics were highlighted, extracted, and prescribed meanings (i.e., codes). In the second cycle of coding, similar codes were clustered into themes, and common themes across most transcripts were determined. Subsequently, the researcher engaged in a participants' check process to validate the findings by selecting four focal families and confirming with them the selected statements and interpretations of the statements.

Family Interview 2

The second set of interview data collected during Phase 3: Family Evaluation of the Curriculum was transcribed and translated into English. This set of data was categorized deductively to reflect the families' evaluation of each component of the program, including (i) connection, (ii) curriculum, and (iii) community. From each transcript, recurring statements and phrases directly related to each component were highlighted, extracted, and prescribed meanings (i.e., codes). In the second cycle of coding, codes were clustered into two predetermined sub-themes: (i) affordances and (ii) constraints related to each program component. The affordances are reported in the finding section, and the constraints are reported in the limitations and future directions section.

All field notes, text messages, and photographs taken during the program were used to further illustrate how the families engaged with the program and to triangulate the research findings. The principal researcher then conducted a participants' check with the community and family partners by presenting the preliminary findings of both the affordances and constraints of the program to validate these findings and collect the families' suggestions and ideas on how to improve the program.

Findings

Phase 1: Problem Definition

The findings revealed that the immigrant families faced multiple challenges to sustain their home lives during the pandemic. They also struggled to gain access to and engage with school-provided remote learning. In summary, the findings showed that, when describing their pandemic-related experiences, the family participants reported feeling stressed and overwhelmed because of the following factors:

i. job loss and financial hardship,
ii. fear of COVID-19 infection and loss of family members,
iii. their children's lack of learning opportunities and excessive screen time,

iv. heightened caregiving load for immigrant mother

As identified by the immigrant families, they also faced multiple barriers to accessing and engaging with remote learning. These barriers were mostly related to the following categories: (i) infrastructure, (ii) curriculum and instruction, and (iii) family engagement (see Table 2).

Table 2

Immigrant Families' Barriers to Engaging with Remote Learning

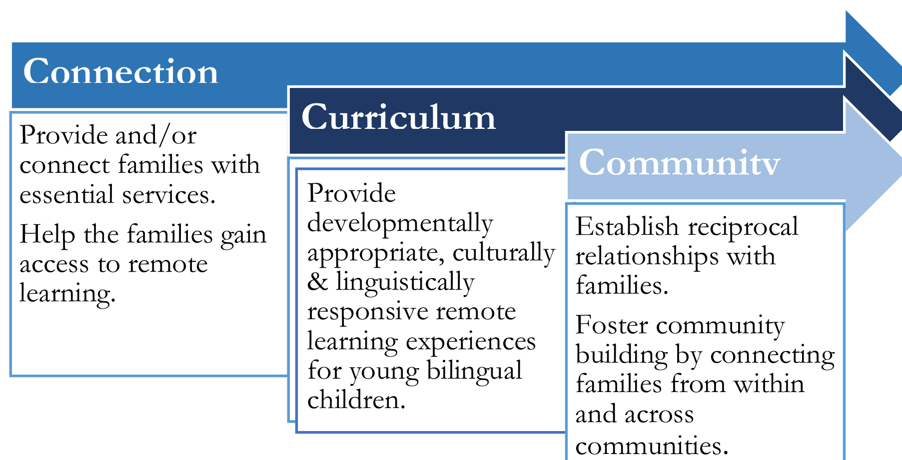
Infrastructure	Curriculum & Instruction	Family (Dis)engagement
Lack of electricity and high-speed internet	Complicated learning schedule that did not consider the families' working schedules and settings	Lack of social connection and family engagement practices
Lack of reliable technological devices and technological support	Lack of culturally and linguistically responsive educational resources	Microaggressions and discriminatory practices enacted by school personnel
Lack of language services, such as translation and interpretation, for families speaking languages other than English	Lack of developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical practices	Digital discipline, suspension, and punishment enacted by classroom teachers via Zoom

Phase II: Development and Implementation of the Home Connection Program

After identifying the immigrant families' pandemic-related challenges and the barriers that prevented them from successfully engaging with remote learning, the researcher-educator, community partners, and family partners engaged in multiple discussions and began planning actions. We designed the Home Connection program[2] to include three key components (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

The Key Components of the Home Connection Program



[2] This program was funded by multiple sources including the COVID-19 Rapid Response Student Success Grant by the NEA Foundation, the Equity Grant by American Educational Research Association-Division C Teaching & Learning, and crowdfunding sources through the collective efforts of community organizers and immigrant families participating in the program.

The design of the Home Connection program was firmly grounded in the equitable collaboration framework of family engagement to build a strong partnership with the family participants. This program recognizes the crucial roles of the families as co-designers, co-educators, co-researchers, and co-evaluators. We acknowledge that the Home Connection program was not a panacea that aimed to solve all pandemic-related problems and remote learning challenges faced by these immigrant families. Considering the temporal and spatial constraints created by the pandemic, we intentionally and collectively designed this program to meet some of the basic needs of the families but focused mainly on helping the families gain access to remote learning and improving the children's remote learning experiences.

Connection

To address the families' pandemic-related challenges, we partnered with two community-based organizations and one faith-based organization from red-zone neighborhoods in the Greater Boston Areas to provide and/or connect the families with basic services, including the following:

- Delivering free groceries and home-cooked meals to families infected with COVID-19
- Sending text messages in home languages to inform the families about COVID-19 vaccination
- Helping the families register for COVID-19 vaccination appointments
- Providing translation and interpretation services for families who spoke languages other than English

To remove barriers to accessing remote learning, we provided internet hotspots for two families who did not have access to high-speed internet. We also sponsored two iPads and three Chromebooks for five children who had not received school-provided devices at the beginning of the pandemic school year. The researcher-educator and the family partners helped troubleshoot school-provided devices and provided technological support in home languages to some family participants. We also provided translation and interpretation services for the families who spoke languages other than English.

Curriculum

We designed a 10-week Home Connection curriculum in the form of a learning box to be delivered to each family. This integrated curriculum centralized play-based, hands-on activities suitable for young learners; celebrated the students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and fostered intergenerational learning in home settings. Each learning box included bilingual picture books, an integrated project-based home learning curriculum with detailed instructions in English and home languages, and all supplies and materials needed for all children from each household (see Figure 3).

Figure 3
Learning Boxes

The learning activities included (i) independent, (ii) family-guided, and (iii) teacher-guided activities spanning subject matters including language arts, math, science, arts and crafts, and sensory play. Language arts and math activities comprised three levels of difficulty, K–1, 2–3, and 4–5, to fit the learning levels of the child participants. For science, arts and crafts, and sensory play, the learning activities were designed to encourage the child participants to work with their siblings and/or other family members to complete learning tasks.

To assist each family and their children with the teacher-guided activities, the researcher-educator conducted weekly online learning sessions via Zoom. Although the caregivers were encouraged to participate in the online learning sessions, it was not mandatory. Most children could independently work with the researcher-educator, as the activities were designed to suit their learning levels. For families with multiple children, all children participated in the online learning sessions together. These sessions were scheduled with flexibility to fit each family's working schedule and home settings. Embracing a multilingual online learning space, the researcher-educator collaborated with the family partners to conduct all online learning sessions in both English and the home languages.

Community

To foster community building, the researcher-educator, community partners, and family partners conducted both in-person and virtual home visits to establish trusting relationships with the families. We also ensured the occurrence of regular check-ins and used multiple methods of communication, such as social media, text messages, emails, and phone calls, to connect with the families. Our protocols included sending reminders in home languages to the families before the learning boxes were delivered and before each online learning session. We also gathered the families' verbal feedback for each learning box and directly following each learning session.

To connect families from within and across communities, we leveraged group text messages and social media to share remote learning tips and strategies and send announcements regarding online, family-friendly events in which the families might be interested. At the end of the program, we conducted a virtual family gathering to showcase the children's work and celebrate all the children and families for their active participation and engagement with the program.

Phase III: Family Evaluation

The following section presents the findings related to the three components of the program In general, all family participants showed a high level of participation, engagement, and interest in the Home Connection program. Of the 20 families, 19 completed all 10 weeks of the program and participated in all online learning sessions; only one family withdrew from the program after 7 weeks of participation due to COVID-19 infection. In terms of engagement, 18 of the 20 families completed all learning activities, including the independent, family-guided, and teacher-guided activities.

Most families shared that participating in the program helped them gain access to essential resources and services during the pandemic, become more confident in navigating school-provided remote learning, recognize their active roles in their children's education, and connect more closely with other families and communities.

Connection

Essential Services. Most families, especially those who had members infected with the COVID-19 virus, shared their gratitude that the program directly provided and/or helped them connect with essential services, such as groceries/meals delivery, COVID-19 vaccination, online learning resources, and online family events, among others, that were much needed at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition to the essential services provided by community-based or faith-based organizations, some families also volunteered to prepare groceries, cook meals, and deliver them to

other families in need (see Figure 4). Through these activities, many families became more connected to their community-based and faith-based organizations, and these connections are still being maintained.

Figure 4.
Groceries and Food Delivery Services

Language Support. Recognizing the lack of translation and interpretation services in most family participants' school districts, some bilingual families and community organizers volunteered to provide translation and interpretation services, such as translating and explaining school emails, especially those related to remote learning policies and practices. The researcher-educator also supported two Vietnamese family participants during parent-teacher conferences throughout the pandemic school year. The family participants who spoke languages other than English found the translation and interpretation services extremely helpful for obtaining the latest information on the COVID-19 vaccination and communicating with their children's schools, especially with the classroom teachers, more effectively.

Technological Support. Some families who faced the problems of connectivity and unreliable devices shared that the program helped their children gain access and the ability to participate in school-provided remote learning without delay. Recognizing the lack of technological support in home languages, some family participants also volunteered to record instructional videos in their home languages to share with other families that would provide instructions for logging in to Zoom, accessing learning applications, and uploading their children's work through the learning applications. All these videos were shared widely through the WhatsApp group chat and Facebook group page of the program.

The results showed that the family participants were not only beneficiaries who merely received resources and services but also active agents whose participation drove the change-making process. They served in multiple roles, such as volunteers, translators, interpreters, technological support staff, and advocates whose voices and ideas helped us constantly improve the design and implementation of the program.

Curriculum

All families shared that the best aspect of the program was the curriculum, which was often described in both the evaluation forms and family interviews as "fun," "hands-on," "engaging," "flexible," and "beneficial" for the children. Several themes appeared in the feedback received by families regarding the positive elements of the curriculum and the effectiveness of the program. For example, families reported that the program contained **engaging reading materials** that were entertaining and culturally and linguistically responsive. For this reason, most family participants read the books 4–5 times a week, some read them 2–3 times a week, and one family even read them more than five times a week. The families engaged with the picture books in multiple ways: (i) reading to their children, (ii) listening to their children read the books, or (iii) retelling the stories orally. If the children were old enough and knew how to read independently, some of them would read the books to their siblings and grandparents. Most families also confirmed that they used the suggested discussion questions to talk about the books with their children.

Sharing how the program had sparked her daughter's interest in reading, Carol Carneiro, a Brazilian mother of a 6-year-old emergent bilingual, said,

> *I always have a hard time catching Mimi's attention, and she is always on the tablet, on the games. Compared to that, you know, seeing a book is kind of boring to her. But, as she got into the program, she knew that she would do the projects with the books, so she was very interested and willing to pay attention to the story and try to understand what it is about. In the first week, she saw the mini koalas, and she was very curious about them, and I told her that you would teach her how to create a house for them—she was so into it. She read the book many times and even drew some designs of the koala house. . . . She was more interested in animal stories and really loved the dragon book.*

Penelope, a Colombian mother of two bilingual children (6 years old and 9 years old) appreciated that the picture books came in different languages and embraced cultural diversity:

> *We love the books. They are so diverse, beautiful stories with good lessons. The pictures are so beautiful. They love the tacos book, and the kids were like, aah, they have Spanish words. These books are both in Spanish and English.* [translated from Spanish]

Thu Nguyen, a Vietnamese mother of two, explained that having picture books in her home language encouraged her to participate more in shared reading with her children:

> *Most of the time, I don't know how to teach my kids. I don't read to them because I am afraid of my accent. . . . my pronunciation, you know, would not be correct, but these books were in Vietnamese, and you sent us the YouTube link for the English reading, so K. got to listen to both. He really loved it, and he talked a lot about the egg book—that's his favorite. He told his Dad about the book and asked all of the questions.* [translated from Vietnamese]

Having picture books sent directly to their homes helped the families build their home libraries and begin conducting regular shared reading sessions with their children. Having access to high-quality picture books and reading with family members, such as parents, grandparents, and siblings, created a literacy-rich environment for many young emergent bilinguals participating in the program.

Another theme related to the curriculum consisted of the families' and children's engagement with **hands-on relevant activities with instruction in home languages.** Commenting on the curriculum, Penelope Marcela, a Colombian mother of two, described her children's excitement and active engagement because of the experiential learning approach and the interconnection of the picture books' content and the learning activities:

> *I think that the kids really love it. . . . every time I said it's time to go learn with Alisha . . . they were like yeah, and they are so excited, all the time. I can see that the activities are all connected to the book, the math . . . and science, and all other things. I think that's the best part of the program. . . . My kids, they love working with their hands, with the materials. I have to say, the projects, they are really cool . . ., they are fun . . . and the sessions are not too long, you know, for Ben, he is younger, and it's good that [the online session is] not too long and he can work through the whole session by himself. . . . My kids love the koalas and the tacos books, but overall, they love all the boxes.* [translated from Spanish]

Other families, such as Phuong Tran, a Vietnamese mother of two, shared that the family-guided activities had detailed instruction in home languages and a lot of visual aids that made them accessible and easy to follow:

> *Mie could just look at the photos of the step-by-step instructions, and she would remind me on what to do next. I know it was a family-guided activity and you wanted the parents to help the kids, but they were so clear that Mia could even do it herself, of course with my supervision, but they were easy and fun.* [translated from Vietnamese]

Finally, the families commented on the importance and success of **interactive online learning sessions**. Evaluating the teacher-guided activities conducted through the online learning sessions, many families said that the setup of these sessions rendered them interactive and engaging. Thao Pham, a Vietnamese mother of two, shared her children's experience with the online learning sessions:

> *So when they did the online sessions, they were really engaging, they focused . . . and sometimes we had some family events and we told them, oh, how about skipping a session, and they did not like it, they wanted to learn with you, and they did not want to miss the lesson, any minute of it. They loved the birthday card project because they got to give them to their dad right away that week. But they loved everything. . . . They were very excited, and they always reminded me, it's time to log in, mommy, and I am glad they remembered.* [translated from Vietnamese]

Similarly, Penelope Marcela, a Colombian mother of two, described how her son engaged with hands-on learning activities that were aligned with his learning interests:

> *[The kids] are present and concentrate very well when they do the lessons with you. Sometimes for Ben, I don't think it's his strong suit. . . . When he learned in remote learning, he was not excited to learn through Zoom, he did not like the teacher lecturing, he would start finding something else to do, find something to play here and there and not paying attention. I can tell that he does not like that, you know, like, in reading and writing and math, he does not like it as much as he did with you, and I think because you connected well with him, and he got to do a lot of cool projects that he really liked.* [translated from Spanish]

The first few online learning sessions were purposely conducted with one family at a time to help the researcher-educator establish a relationship with each family and the children of each household. Many families found this setup highly effective in getting their children more engaged with remote learning. For example, Carol Carneiro, a Brazilian mother of one, shared that the one-on-one setting worked in favor of her daughter, Mimi, who was still developing both of her languages and needed more of a teacher's attention to support her participation in learning activities:

> *She is very shy when she came to [school-provided] remote learning. When she was in Zoom class with schools, with other kids, and she did not talk, she was afraid she said something wrong, wrong words, wrong pronunciation, and she thought they would laugh at her. I tried to encourage her, but she needs time, and school Zoom [sessions] with a lot of kids do not work for her—they were all fighting for attention, and Mimi knew*

> *that she would never get picked first. So one-on-one sessions are better for her. I could see that she changed completely when she did the program with you—she talks more, she can express herself better and learn better. I think it's a good design for kids like her.*

In the last four sessions, we began grouping the students—especially the children who did not have siblings—into small-group sessions (3–4 students max) to encourage peer learning. Some families with one child found this small group setting helpful for their children. For example, Carmen Dalo, an Argentinian mother of one, shared her daughter's experience:

> *She loves to talk and to share with her friends, and she did not get a chance to talk very often during remote learning. . . . She loved the sessions with other kids. That's why she is so excited about the program; she talks about it all the time.*

During the overall evaluation, the families reported the importance of **intergenerational connections** through the program**.** One of the important aspects of the curriculum was that all family-guided activities were purposely designed to encourage interactive family learning in different forms: it could be parent-children interactions, siblings working together on projects, and/or grandparents-grandchildren interactions during read-aloud sessions. Some families with grandparents living in the same household recognized how the program had actively engaged all family members and fostered meaningful intergenerational connections. For example, Vietnamese caregivers like Phung Truong and Thao Pham explained how the grandmothers participated in the program:

> *Grandma read for them* The Coming Home *book, and she was surprised to see a book in Vietnamese. She was really happy, I know, and then she said it is a good program.* [translated from Vietnamese]

> *Grandma likes it; she likes that the kids made a lot of stuff and . . . remember the week that they asked her about the fruits' names, and she got to help them with the Vietnamese names, and she went to the supermarket, the other week, she went to the supermarket to get the jackfruit. Then she cut it; she showed them how it looked like inside.* [translated from Vietnamese]

Observation data from the online learning sessions showed the same results. Even in families whose grandparents lived in separate homes, they were always included in some of the activities that could be done remotely, such as reading picture books via Zoom, watching how plants grow, learning fruit names in home languages, and so on. During some of the online learning sessions, the researcher-educator noticed that grandparents and other extended family members, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins, visited the households, and they were considered part of the children's learning circles. Therefore, these family members were encouraged to participate and work with the children on the projects if they were interested. Thus, the flexibility and family-focused aspect of these online learning sessions built a seamless learning environment with a high level of family engagement.

Community

The findings showed that, as a team, including the researcher-educator, community partners, and family partners, we were successful in establishing trust and reciprocal relationships with the family participants and the community members throughout the program.

Camilla, the family partner, shared in the interview,

> *I think many families love the program because we really connect with them and care for their kids. They can see that we care for the education quality of the program and want it to be better. . . . And we talked to the families all the time; we texted them; we visited them; we called.*"

Camilla believed that by offering a high-quality education program that engaged the children with meaningful learning experiences, we established successful relationships with the families. She

also believed that having clear communication and regular contact with the families contributed to these relationships.

Hani, the community partner, shared that frequent contact was beneficial, but treating the families with respect and actively listening to them were even more important:

> *Many people came into our neighborhood, brought this and that and said they wanted to help the families, but they did not treat the families with respect, you know. Yes, we are poor; yes, we don't have these fancy houses with green lawns and white fences, but we care for our children as much as you do. Even more because some of them move earth and mountain to get the kids into schools, to get an education. . . . So when* [the researcher-educator] *came to us and you worked with us, we told you that same thing . . . and the families told us that you listened to them, you talked to them and listened to what they got to say about their kids' education, and that's what matters to us, you know. That's why we worked with you.*

Regular contact, respect, and reciprocity were important factors that helped establish and sustain relationships among the researcher-educator, the family/community partners, and the family participants. These relationships were maintained not only throughout the program but also after the program ended.

By participating in the program, many families connected with each other through our online gathering sessions and (mostly) through social media and group chat. Many shared their children's work through Facebook and WhatsApp and received many positive comments from other families. Some families sent gifts, donated books, and made cards for their friends who participated in the same online learning session.

Another positive impact of the program was its amplification of the family participants' voices. It encouraged some of them to become more involved with district-level discussions and assume leadership roles. For example, four families volunteered to participate in a district-wide presentation to share about their experiences with the Home Connection program and to advocate for equitable family engagement practices with immigrant families.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the Home Connection program successfully established reciprocal relationships with immigrant families, offered an engaging and interactive remote learning program for young bilingual children, and fostered community building, this program had certain limitations regarding each component, as explained below.

Connection

With limited grant funding, the program could provide internet and/or devices to only eight immigrant families from two school districts, even though the actual number of immigrant families in need was much higher. Additionally, relying on family participants and community organizers to provide translation and interpretation services and technological support was a temporary solution for a systemic problem that should be addressed at the district level. Therefore, we reached out to district leaders, especially those from immigrant-serving districts, to alert them about immigrant families' linguistic rights to translation and interpretation services and how the lack of clear communication could marginalize these families and prevent them from engaging with their children's schooling. While some district leaders acknowledged the problem and promised to work toward a better solution, some families shared with us that the problem of language barriers has remained unsolved. Thus, more advocacy work is needed to keep school districts accountable and responsible for providing translation and interpretation services for immigrant families.

Curriculum

Although the curriculum received positive evaluations from both the family and child participants, it also had some limitations. First, the design of the program was mostly determined by the input from the seed families of the first group. When the program was offered to the second family group, some modifications were made to make the program more suitable for the children's learning levels and their linguistic backgrounds. However, the central texts and learning activities remained the same. Therefore, the curriculum may have privileged the first family group's lived experiences and funds of knowledge over those of the second group. Second, due to limitations in funding and human resources, the program could not be offered for a longer period to serve more immigrant families, especially those living in under-resourced neighborhoods. Some families commented that the program should be extended to contain more sessions and should be offered more regularly (instead of one time). To some families, the 10 sessions went too quickly, and they felt that their children would benefit from more sessions. For example, one family suggested, "*I think it's such a great program that we should have it for after-school or summer programs for bilingual children. To be honest, we want it to be longer and have more sessions. My suggestion would be to have more content developed and get it connected with the school curriculum.*" Considering this comment, we contacted some school districts and proposed to run the Home Connection program as an afterschool and/or summer program for young bilingual children. However, funding remains the biggest concern, and we are applying for more funding to implement and expand the program in the near future.

Community

While we made certain progress connecting the families from within communities, especially those sharing cultural and linguistic backgrounds, Hani, the community partner, explained that connecting families across communities had been challenging: "*Many families we worked with need to focus on getting back on their feet, and it will be very hard to add more to their plates, right? We understand that connecting different communities is important, but we need to take into consideration the families' situations and, of course, which community would benefit more from these activities.*" Reflecting on the community component, Camilla stated, "*I know it is hard, but we have to try, and we have to keep trying, because we are living in silos. We need to keep reminding ourselves that it is important to connect with different communities and bring the program to different neighborhoods.*" Although we attempted to organize online family gathering sessions to unite families, asynchronous settings, such as social media platforms, seemed to work better for most families, considering that the families had varying work schedules and other obligations. Considering that COVID-19 restrictions rapidly changed over time, we eventually decided to organize family events and group learning activities in outdoor places, such as backyard gardens or public parks, to foster community building, which remained an important component of the program.

Discussion and Practical Implications

This paper employed the equitable collaboration framework and the transformative mixed methods model to identify collective problems and address the immediate needs of 20 immigrant families and 42 young bilingual children during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first phase of the study revealed multiple unique challenges that these immigrant families faced during the pandemic and revealed structural barriers hindering the establishment of meaningful home-school connections during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the following:

- the asymmetric power relationships between school personnel and immigrant families,
- the lack of a resilient support system for immigrant families, and
- the oppressive practices of schooling for young bilingual children.

In addition to existing social and educational inequities, these immigrant families experienced schools as a hostile environment, even when moving to online learning spaces. These findings echoed other studies that documented the long history of inequitable treatments for nondominant families in general (Fennimore, 2017; Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2020) and how inequitable family disengagement practices negatively impacted the remote learning experiences of immigrant families and bilingual students during the pandemic (Cioè-Peña, 2022; Chen, 2021). While remote learning is no longer a reality of public schooling, inequitable family disengagement practices will continue to be enacted if not recognized and eliminated, which certainly threaten home-school relationships and perpetuate educational inequities.

The second and third phases of the study focused on the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program. The findings from this phase demonstrated how equitable family and community engagement played a crucial role in building a resilient support system for immigrant families and enhancing the educational experiences of their young bilingual children. By prioritizing equitable and collaborative family engagement practices, the Home Connection program was positively evaluated by the family participants whose active engagement defined the success of the program. This program could be successfully implemented under the constraints of the pandemic for the following reasons: First, it was designed based on the cultural and linguistic assets and specific needs of the immigrant families and their children. Actively listening to families' ideas and gathering families' feedback were crucial, considering how the pandemic required quick adaptation and response to meet the families' changing needs. Second, it was implemented through an interconnected network consisting of the community partners, family partners, and community-based organizations. Learning from other community-based studies conducted during the pandemic, such as Wieland et al. (2022) and Washburn et al. (2022), we purposely created and sustained this network through continuous, bidirectional communication via multiple platforms (home visits, text messages, social media, etc.). This work helped cultivate a culture of shared interests *and* shared responsibilities among stakeholders.

On one hand, leveraging connections with community partners and organizations helped funnel much-needed resources to better serve immigrant families during times of crisis. On the other hand, drawing on the immigrant families' diverse experiences, skills, and knowledge helped motivate these families to step up and take control of their situations (Suarez-Balcazar, 2020). The participating families contributed to all three components of the program in different ways and through different roles. After the program concluded, many families committed to sustaining the Home Connection program, maintaining their connection with other immigrant families and building stronger communities within their neighborhoods and districts through different initiatives. By actively engaging in the design, implementation, and evaluation processes of the program, these immigrant families, who have traditionally been marginalized and disempowered by discriminatory and disengaging practices, could view themselves as stakeholders whose funds of knowledge were highly valued and whose activism had a strong impact on their children's learning experiences.

Conclusion

By documenting the design, implementation, and evaluation of the Home Connection program, this study presents a counter-narrative about immigrant families: these immigrant families were not mere participants in a funded research program or receivers of resources and services. They were active social agents whose hopes and dreams for their children's education certainly motivated them to find ways to collaboratively create an interactive home-based learning environment, even within the constraints of the pandemic. Seeing them as co-educators of home-based learning

transcends the idea of schooling as bounded within the classroom walls and knowledge as generated only in formal learning contexts. Although the pandemic has quickly become our shared past experiences, what we saw and learned from the pandemic will determine how we tackle educational inequities in our public schools. What remains the same is the crucial role of meaningful and equitable family and community engagement in creating a sustainable support system for immigrant families and providing equitable learning opportunities for all bilingual students.

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Article

Reframing Deficit Narratives to Honor the Community Cultural Wealth of Immigrant Families of Children with Disabilities

Journal of Family Diversity in Education, 2023/2024
Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 27-46

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Abstract
Existing research suggests that immigrant families navigating the special education process are rarely positioned as powerful partners working alongside educators. This is a manifestation of the racism and ableism endemic to the United States schooling system that leads to educators viewing immigrant families from a deficit-based lens. Do these perceptions, however, match the ways that immigrant families view themselves? This qualitative participant-observation study addresses this question by exploring educators' and families' perceptions and positionings of immigrant families who are navigating special education. I unpack discrepant views among educators and families of 16 children labeled "English Learner" with or suspected of having disabilities. The findings indicate that the immigrant families see themselves as possessing tremendous community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which counters the deficit-oriented view the educators have of them. I argue for a reframing of the common narratives surrounding immigrant families in special education away from deficit-based conceptions towards ones that honor the strengths, knowledge, and assets of the families.

Keywords*:* Immigrant families, disabilities, community cultural wealth

Introduction

Families' involvement in the special education process is not only recommended (Burke, 2013; Haley et al., 2013; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015), but it is also required by federal law (IDEA, 2004). However, the prevailing notions regarding what it means for families to be involved in children's schooling are dominated by White, Western perspectives (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Lim, 2012; Miller, 2019; Park et al., 2001; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Loch, 2020). According to this perspective, the ideal "involved" parent has a "regular and visible presence at the school" (Posey-Maddox & Haley-Loch, 2020, p. 673). Therefore, families of color, immigrant families, and low-income families are frequently framed as "uninvolved" in their children's education (Cooper, 2009; Salas, 2004; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). For immigrant families in particular, this purported lack of involvement is attributed to cultural values around education, as well as deficiencies in the families' knowledge about U.S. schools (Cheatham & Lim-Mullins, 2018; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Pettit & McLaughlin, 2013). Moreover, for immigrant families also navigating the unique complexities of special education, research has presented a series of barriers prohibiting sufficient involvement, such as language barriers, limited time availability, and

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cultural dissonance (Tamzarian et al., 2012; Whitford & Addis, 2017; Wolfe & Duran, 2013). This body of literature has presented immigrant families of children with disabilities as uninvolved, unknowing, passive actors in their children's special education processes and schooling.

This prevailing perspective of immigrant families is deficit-based. Consequently, problems with family-school partnership are attributed to perceived deficits within the families—they do not speak English, do not understand IEPs, are in denial, do not know how to advocate, and so on (Cioè-Peña, 2021)—rather than to systemic power differentials that deny immigrant families opportunities for meaningful participation in their children's special education processes (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Wolfe & Duran, 2013). These narratives ignore the tremendous strengths, assets, and knowledge that immigrant families of children with disabilities bring into their interaction with the special education system (Cioè-Peña, 2021).

To move toward a more asset-based approach to working with immigrant families of children with disabilities, the discrepancies between how educators view the families and how the families view themselves must be identified. This paper is guided by the following research questions: 1) What are educators' perceptions of immigrant families of children with disabilities? 2) What are immigrant families' perceptions of themselves? How do these perceptions align (or not) with educators' views of the families? To answer these questions, I applied DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) to a qualitative inquiry into whether and how immigrant families are placed "outside of the Western cultural norms" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11) in ways that may not honor the families' views of themselves as advocates for their children. The findings from this inquiry show how deficit-oriented views of immigrant families of children with disabilities perpetuate a racist, ableist, and xenophobic system of schooling that prevents genuine collaboration between families and schools.

Parent Engagement in Special Education: (Un)Equal Partnership

The positioning of immigrant families of children with disabilities as deficient is rooted in unequal distributions of power endemic to special education. The structure and enactment of special education processes make it challenging for families' assets to be made known. In federal special education law, parents are identified as critical actors who must be involved in and agree to their child's identification for special education services and the subsequent development of the student's individualized education programs (IEPs; IDEA, 2004). For example, IDEA 2004 lists parents first among the required members of the IEP team, and they are afforded the right to accept or decline any aspect of a child's IEP. Schools are thus required to regard families as equal partners in identifying students with disabilities, developing their IEPs, and implementing special education services (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Burke, 2013; Haley et al., 2013; Knight & Wadsworth, 1999; Lechtenberger & Mullins, 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015; Valle, 2011).

Despite these legal mandates, special education processes are often enacted in ways that limit parent participation (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Spann et al., 2003). Research has indicated that families do not feel as though they are equal partners with schools when participating in IEP teams, as they struggle to advocate for their children due to feelings of inadequacy that emerge from power differentials between school personnel and families (Burke, 2013; Kalyanpur et al., 2000). Because families do not feel comfortable using their voice in special education processes, the power dynamic is perpetually reinforced.

The literature has identified many ways in which inequities between educators and families are established in special education. One is through the inaccessibility of special education documentation. Mandic et al. (2012) examined the readability of procedural safeguard documents—legal mandates issued by state departments of education to guarantee parents' rights to decision-making regarding special education identification and services for their children. The authors found that the average reading grade level of these documents was 16, with a majority of the procedural safeguards being in

the college or graduate/professional school reading level range. They argued that the lack of accessibility to legal documents detailing their rights in the special education process limits parent involvement. As parents may not have full awareness of their rights, educators can also ignore parental rights without parents realizing it. Thus, power differentials are established because educators become the primary holders of technical expertise.

In addition to structural limitations that perpetuate unequal distributions of power, school personnel may also contribute to the development of power differentials between themselves and families. For example, studies have found that educators will write students' IEPs before the IEP meetings are held, meaning that parents do not actively participate in the development of IEPs (Haley et al., 2013; Valle, 2011). This occurs despite the fact that IDEA 2004 explicates that parents must participate in determining special education eligibility and that the IEP team, of which parents are critical members, must collectively develop the educational program for each child (IDEA 2004). An underlying message in this approach to IEP development is that educators are professionals who understand how to write IEPs, whereas families are unknowing participants.

Similarly, schools also send parents mixed messages about families' involvement in special education. Although families are told that federal legislation supports their active engagement in school-family partnerships, they are also told that they are not professional experts and should therefore not do or request too much (Murray & Mereoiu, 2016). In Bezdek et al. (2016), special education professionals and other related service providers reported that, while they supported partnerships and a family-centered approach to special education service provision, they also had specific ideas about the "just right" amount of involvement. The educators did not want too little involvement from parents, but they also did not want too much involvement. They desired parents to support the practitioners' ideas of how best to work with the child and to conduct the recommended follow-through at home. In other words, the educators wanted parents to follow their lead. When families tried to offer suggestions for supporting the student, it was regarded as too much involvement.

Additionally, families have reported experiencing tension and dissonance when working with school personnel to support their child with disabilities. Angell et al. (2009) interviewed 16 mothers of children with disabilities about their experiences working with schools. These parents reported challenges in the following areas: lack of communication with school staff; general and special education teachers' not having deep knowledge about their child's disabilities; school personnel's judgment or unwillingness to understand parent perspectives; and feelings of being ostracized, unwelcome, or excluded during IEP or other team meetings. The difficulties these parents experienced impacted their feelings of trust toward the school personnel, creating further distance between families and educators. All these factors contribute to parents' feeling as though they cannot advocate for their children (Burke & Goldman, 2017).

As family involvement in special education is systemically rooted in unequal power distribution, viewing families of children with disabilities from a deficit-based lens is natural. Parents are regarded as uninvolved or unknowing when, in reality, their participation is controlled and limited by educators working within an unjust system. The literature reviewed here shows that family involvement is often treated as a box to check off the list to ensure compliance with federal law. Little evidence has indicated that families of children with disabilities are treated with genuine respect, as though they are truly primary actors in special education processes.

Added Systemic Injustices for Immigrant Families of Children with Disabilities

Against this backdrop, immigrant families of children with disabilities must navigate the complexities of the special education system. As immigrants who are often otherized by society at large, these families experience additional challenges to being seen as equal partners in important decision-making for their children. Across studies involving surveys, interviews, and focus groups with

immigrant parents of children with disabilities, a prominent theme is the presence of language barriers that impede meaningful communication with school personnel (Baker et al., 2010; Lee & Park, 2016; Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001; Lo, 2008; Park et al., 2001; Salas, 2004; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). The technical jargon commonly used in special education is an especially significant obstacle for immigrant parents to fully engage in the special education process (Salas, 2004; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Furthermore, research has suggested that even if language interpretation is available, it is often inadequate for families in special education (Cheatham, 2011; Mori et al., 2013). Parents have reported difficulties in working with interpreters who did not translate verbatim or could not be trusted to maintain confidentiality in the community (Lo, 2008; Park et al., 2001; Wolfe & Durán, 2013).

In addition to language barriers, immigrant families have reported that unfamiliarity with the U.S. school system and the complex nature of special education make them feel as though they do not fully understand their child's disability, services, or program options (Baker et al., 2010; Kozleski et al., 2008; Lee & Park, 2016; Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001; Lo, 2008; Salas, 2004; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Subsequently, families feel disempowered and unable to advocate for their child (Burke, 2017; Kozleski et al., 2008; Lo, 2008; Park et al., 2001). At times, families do not advocate because of cultural norms that denounce challenging or questioning authority (Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Other studies have suggested that families feel disempowered because they perceive a lack of respect from school personnel toward them, their perspectives, and their cultures (Lo, 2008; Park et al., 2001; Salas, 2004; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Immigrant parents have reported experiencing racial discrimination from school staff and perceiving school personnel as having a deficit view of their child with disabilities (Park et al., 2001; Wolfe & Durán, 2013).

When undergoing the special education referral and identification process specifically, immigrant families report the following challenges: a) experiencing language barriers, b) feeling confused about the process, c) experiencing long time lags between the referral and the actual evaluation, d) not always understanding what the assessments were for, e) not understanding why their child did not qualify for special education services, f) feeling as though the qualification was not explained fully or that the emphasis was solely on the child's deficits, g) feeling like students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds were not considered in testing, and h) feeling coerced to accept the assessments and professionals' advice (Hardin et al., 2009; Kozleski et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2017; Park et al., 2001). A couple studies involving observations of referral and placement meetings for immigrant students found that school staff marginalized parents in these meetings by overusing jargon, not providing translators (or providing inadequate translators), dominating the discourse in meetings, failing to communicate key aspects of the referral and identification process to families (e.g., that their child was in pre-referral interventions, what their progress was in the interventions, etc.), writing the IEPs and determining the child's eligibility prior to IEP meetings, and being insensitive and disrespectful to families (Klingner & Harry, 2006; Schoorman et al., 2011).

The literature on family-school partnerships in special education has described the many structural and interpersonal obstacles experienced by parents of children with disabilities, particularly immigrant parents, when engaging in special education processes. These obstacles collaboratively create a system of exclusion in which immigrant families lack access to meaningful partnerships and subsequent agency when navigating the special education system. Thus, these power differentials must be transformed. To do so, I believe educators' view of immigrant families of children with disabilities must be shifted; the families' strengths and assets must be illuminated to reach creative solutions for upending unequal partnerships and reimagining family involvement in special education. To move in this direction, the following must first be addressed: 1) What are educators' perceptions of immigrant families of children with disabilities? 2) What are immigrant families' perceptions of themselves? How do these perceptions align or not align with educators' views of families? I explored these questions

through a qualitative inquiry following 16 immigrant families of children with disabilities and the school staff working with their children.

Viewing Immigrant Families Through a Lens of DisCrit and Community Cultural Wealth

This inquiry draws from two primary theoretical concepts: disability critical race theory (DisCrit) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). At the heart of DisCrit is the understanding that race and disability are socially co-constructed and interdependent, as racism and ableism work together to limit equity for children of color with disabilities and their families (Annamma et al., 2013). The third tenet of DisCrit states that individuals are set "outside of the Western norm" when raced and disabled (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 11), which has significant implications for their daily lives. Annamma and colleagues (2013) explained that essentializing disability as a biological fact instead of a social construct is used to justify the continued segregation of children of color. While such segregation would be illegal if based on race, it is allowed for disabled children of color because "disability is seen as 'real' rather than a constructed difference" (Annamma et al., 2013). Thus, racism and ableism work in interconnected and collusive ways.

From this DisCrit perspective, immigrant families of children with disabilities are similarly positioned outside of the mainstream; their segregation and isolation from important decision-making about their children are justified by the essentialization of perceived deficits. Educators operating within a racist, ableist education system position immigrant families as inherently unable to make "appropriate" decisions for their children due to their cultural backgrounds. Yosso (2005) described this positioning as a result of traditional views of cultural capital that are "narrowly defined by White, middle class values, and [are] more limited than wealth—one's accumulated assets and resources" (p. 77). Drawing from critical race theory, Yosso offered an expansive view of communities of color through her concept of community cultural wealth, which she defined as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The six forms of capital that Yosso included in community cultural wealth include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital.

In this paper, I argue that educators and families in the special education system hold discrepant views of immigrant communities' cultural wealth. The failure of educators to recognize the cultural wealth possessed by immigrant families of children with disabilities perpetuates deficit views and continues power differentials between the educators and families. Nonetheless, these families engage in acts of resistance, viewing themselves as capable advocates for their children. By analyzing interviews with and observations of immigrant families navigating the special education identification process, I demonstrate how families leverage this resistant capital to maintain their positionality as knowledgeable, intentional experts on their children, even as educators position them as deficient. The guiding questions for this qualitative inquiry are as follows: 1) What are educators' perceptions of immigrant families of children with disabilities? 2) What are the families' perceptions of themselves? How do these perceptions align or not align with educators' views of families?

Methods

This paper utilizes data collected during a multi-site, participant-observation qualitative research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of the project was to explore special education processes—from referral to evaluation through the receipt of special education services—for

immigrant children at two elementary schools. The study included multiple levels: 1) the level of district policy, 2) the school level, and 3) the individual child level. The present paper primarily used the data collected to generate the school- and child-level case studies. For these studies, I performed participant observation (Erikson, 1986); document analysis (Bowen, 2009); and triangulation among documents, field notes, and interview data (Patton, 1990). I followed 16 children from immigrant families who were suspected of or identified as having disabilities to explore their experiences in special education processes during one academic year. The children's families participated in semi-structured interviews and field observations at various points throughout the year.

Participants

For the purposes of the larger study, I applied, according to Marshall (1996), a purposeful sampling approach to select the district, schools, and participants. Shavelson and Towne (2002) described this approach as necessary "to illuminate phenomena in depth," particularly "when good information about the group or setting is nonexistent or scant" (p. 105). Participants were strategically selected to form the most productive sample to answer my questions regarding the experiences of immigrant children and families in special education. The children, families, and educators who participated in this project were recruited from two elementary schools. The schools were selected in partnership with the district—a large urban district in a western U.S. state with a high percentage of immigrant and multilingual children enrolled in its schools (a little over one quarter of the student population). The district helped me identify the two schools with the largest numbers of immigrant or multilingual children who were identified for special education.

One school housed an English-only program and a Spanish-English dual immersion program for grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade; the other housed an English-only program and a Cantonese-English dual immersion program for grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Potential child participants were identified through consultation with social workers, general education teachers, and special education teachers at the schools. Because I was hoping to understand immigrant children's experiences with special education processes from referral through service provision, I specifically recruited children who met the following criteria: a) they were from families who had recently immigrated to the U.S. (in the last five years), and b) they were being considered for special education eligibility. Once the children were identified, I reached out to their parents and all educators who worked with the participating children. All parents of the recruited children provided informed consent for their children and for themselves to participate in the project. The educators also provided informed consent.

Sixteen children were recruited to participate in the study. Nine were predominantly Spanish-speaking, and seven were predominantly Cantonese-speaking. The children ranged in age (three kindergartners, three first graders, four second graders, two fourth graders, and two fifth graders) and disability category (autism, speech or language impairment, specific learning disability, and other health impairment—ADHD). The recruited adults included 17 parents (16 mothers and one father; 10 parents were Spanish dominant, and seven parents were Cantonese dominant) and 59 educators from the two schools that participated in the project. The educators comprised six administrators, 18 English-only teachers, 24 dual immersion teachers, three English-only special education teachers, one Cantonese-English bilingual special education teacher, two bilingual school psychologists (one was Cantonese- and English-speaking and one was Spanish- and English-speaking), one Spanish-English bilingual social worker, one English-only social worker, two bilingual literacy specialists, and one English-only literacy specialist. With the exception of two teachers, the bilingual educators at the Spanish-English dual immersion school were born and raised in the U.S. Six teachers, the social worker, and the school psychologist identified as Latinx, while the remainder of the staff identified as White or Asian. With the exception of one general education teacher, a special education teacher, and the

school psychologist, all bilingual staff at the Cantonese-English dual immersion school had immigrated from China but had been in the U.S. for over 20 years.

Data Collection

Field Observations

I spent about two days per week at each school across the school year, totaling 157 days of data collection. I gathered fieldnotes through participant observation methods while observing multiple contexts relevant to each child's special education identification process. These contexts included the general education classroom, interventions, psychoeducational evaluations, informal and formal staff meetings, informal and formal meetings between school personnel and families, IEP meetings, and special education services. A translator was present for all meetings involving parents. While observing in these contexts, I sat to the side with a small notebook and pen, describing in shorthand all that was occurring among stakeholders. I then took these notes and turned them into typed, thick descriptions of the scenes I observed. I also regularly wrote memos, in which I expressed my questions and initial hypotheses that emerged from each observation.

Across the contexts in which I observed, staff members often engaged in informal conversations about immigrant families of children with disabilities. Educators often spoke with each other and/or with me openly about their perspectives on and experiences with families. I wrote down direct quotes from these conversations to capture the language that educators used to describe the families. These were incorporated into the thick descriptions I later developed.

Interviews

In addition to the field observations and data collection, I interviewed all adult participants in the study. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes and was transcribed for analysis. As I am proficient in Spanish and do not speak Cantonese, translators were present for all interviews with families. The translators signed consent forms as well as confidentiality agreements. The transcripts were also submitted for translation so that the parents' responses were not solely reflected by the interpreter present during the meeting, ensuring the families' words would be included in my analysis.

Documents

During the participant observation, I also collected documents related to the various steps in the special education process. This included student work samples, correspondences between families and schools, intervention progress reports, evaluation reports, and IEPs.

Analysis

Using a combination of deductive and inductive coding, I applied an iterative, qualitative coding process to the collected data to create multiple case studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) at the student and school levels. The deductive codes were based on the processes for identifying children for special education eligibility as outlined by district policy. As I prepared for my data collection, I reviewed publicly available documents from the district that detailed its special education processes. I then created a flowchart that helped me identify what phases were included in these processes so I could observe each phase during data collection. I incorporated this chart into my interviews with participants as well. The phases of the special education identification process that I pulled from district data acted as the deductive codes I applied in my analysis. Included in these codes were categories such as *Student Assistant Program Team Meeting, Student Study Team Meeting, Interventions, Comprehensive Evaluation,* and *IEP Meeting.*

I also coded the data by each child participant's name. This allowed me to pull all of the deductively coded data for each individual child, one at a time. I then began inductive coding to

identify emergent categories and themes across the data organized by child and special education process phases. The inductive coding process first involved the open coding of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents relevant to each individual child in the study. Next, I performed an axial coding process to narrow the codes further, combining and refining the categories. I re-coded the data using these revised codes and subsequently narrowed and refined the categories further. These final codes were then applied to the data. Included in these inductive codes were categories such as *conversation with parent, teacher perception of child, teacher perception of family, classroom-based support for child, child's interaction with peer, child's interaction with educator,* and so on.

I used the coded data to create narrative case studies for each of the 16 participating children that detailed what the process for special education identification entailed for each child. The deductive codes served as subheadings for each case study, while the inductive codes helped me tell the story of each phase in the child's special education process. For example, when reviewing the data related to the Student Study Team meeting, *classroom-based support for the child* was a prevalent inductive code. I examined the fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and documents to paint a robust narrative picture of what that support for the child entailed and how it was discussed in the Student Study Team meeting. This process of drawing from multiple coded data sources to create detailed descriptions of each child's journey was applied to every phase of the special education identification process.

Subsequently, I open-coded the narratives to identify themes running across the 16 cases. The themes were used to support the school-level case studies, in which I detailed general trends in the identification of children labeled "English learner" for special education eligibility at each school. As I was examining the 16 case studies, one of the themes that emerged was *discrepancies in teachers' perceptions of the families and families' perceptions of themselves.* I decided to investigate this theme further by revisiting the data specifically pertaining to families. I accessed all coded excerpts falling under any category involving parents or families: *teachers' perceptions of parents, parents' perceptions of teachers, parents' perceptions of their children, meetings with parents, IEP meetings,* and so on. I also re-read all 75 interview transcripts and field notes for any interactions or meetings with families to ensure I did not miss pertinent coding categories. After examining all of the coded data once more, I wrote a thematic narrative (Creswell, 2014) related to *teachers' perceptions of families* and *families' perceptions of themselves.* Many of the perceptions described in this narrative came from the interview data, which is when educators and family members tended to speak most directly about this topic. The field notes also provided relevant data, as interactions between educators and families as well as among educators often revealed dynamics that corroborated the perceptions shared during the interviews. These data helped me to write narrative descriptions of how educators viewed families and how families viewed themselves.

For member-checking, I presented these themes to the special education teams and administrators at each school to gather their input and feedback. They were in general agreement with the themes and decided to use them to inform their professional development sessions with teachers at the beginning of the following school year. However, I was not able to connect with the families again after my analysis was complete to review the results with them.

Positionality of the Researcher

As an Asian American cis-gender woman situated in an institute of higher education, I entered this work from a place of power and privilege. The educators and families who welcomed me into their classrooms, schools, and lives were incredibly gracious. While my racial identity aligned with the teachers, children, and families at the Cantonese-English dual immersion school, I did not speak their native language and relied heavily on translators to support me in this work. Although I was not alike in race to the immigrant families at the Spanish-English dual immersion school, I was able to communicate with the families there in their native tongue. I recognize that my positionality as an individual with power who did not belong to the racial and cultural communities of the families or

educators played a role in my research and likely influenced every aspect of the data collection and analysis process (Milner, 2007).

While I know I cannot rid myself of biases, I attempted to at least illuminate any potential biases in my analysis process by using reflexive journaling (Meyer & Willis, 2018). As I coded data, developed categories, and created thematic narratives, I journaled about the personal values, beliefs, and prior experiences that arose. I reflected on the questions I asked in the interviews as well, considering how my phrasing of particular questions and my positionality could have impacted the responses provided. While engaging in this reflexive journaling, I revisited my thematic narratives several times, revising phrases and statements that I felt reflected my biases more than the data were illuminating. Despite these practices, I know that I am imperfect and vulnerable to bias. I, therefore, present the results as one interpretive account, not an absolute narrative.

Results

My analysis revealed that educators and parent participants positioned immigrant families of children with disabilities in divergent ways that reflected differential understandings of community cultural wealth. Educators' perspectives of immigrant families undergoing the special education process with their children were deficit-oriented. The educators had two dominant conceptualizations of the immigrant families: 1) as helpless and compliant recipients and 2) as defiant and in denial. Meanwhile, the immigrant parents viewed themselves as advocates for their children who had to navigate a complex, broken special education system. They described their behavior as being the best way to support their children. In their view, the system was deficient and unable to care for their children in the ways they deemed best. Their behavior was therefore an act of resistance, a way to engage the community cultural wealth they possessed to support their children.

School Staff Perceptions of Immigrant Families of Children with Disabilities

The staff at both schools tended to see immigrant families of children experiencing the special education identification process as falling under two characterizations. One characterization was the "helpless, compliant recipient." These families were perceived as agreeing with everything that educators said, despite maybe not fully understanding with what they were agreeing. The second characterization was "defiant and in denial." These families were perceived as unable to accept their children's disabilities and need for special education services. Across both themes, educators often attributed the immigrant families' behaviors to cultural norms or deficiencies in families' knowledge. The themes, which are addressed in detail below, were consistent across educators, regardless of their immigration status or positionality as English-only or dual immersion practitioners. I describe in further detail the school staff's perceptions of each type of family below.

The helpless, compliant recipient

From the perspective of the educators, a compliant recipient was a parent who received information from school personnel throughout the special education identification process, agreed to everything without asking questions or offering their own ideas, signed any documents placed in front of them, and followed the school personnel's lead. The compliant recipient attended any meetings that school personnel called but did not initiate communication with the school. During these meetings, they nodded along, answered questions asked of them, and agreed to whatever the school staff decided (such as interventions to try, referrals to evaluation, and special education services). These parents' involvement in the special education identification process was considered by the educators to be

minimal: they 1) attended meetings, 2) answered questions, 3) signed forms, and 4) filled out questionnaires.

During interviews and informal conversations, school staff described the compliant recipient parents as "supportive," "respectful," and "receptive." Some staff members attributed this type of behavior to families' gratitude. Regarding the special education process, they viewed these families as a demonstration of how much school personnel cared about and wanted to help their children. One school psychologist said of such immigrant parents,

> No one appreciates you working with their kid as much as a parent of a second language learner. They're like, "We're so glad you did all this work. Look at all these papers with my kid's name on it. On top of that you worked so hard to translate it." All that stuff. They are so appreciative. You always feel good leaving those meetings. I mean, they know they might be getting a service here or a support here that they wouldn't be getting in their home country. (Interview)

Along similar lines, several teachers stated that immigrant parents were often "pretty cooperative . . . because they know they cannot help their children," "receptive of whatever we tell them," "want the best for their kids . . . and respect the professionals," and "want their child to do well, so they support whatever recommendations that the IEP team has" (Interviews). One teacher said of a particular parent in this study, "She says, 'Whatever you guys think is right, I'll do.' She's very supportive, but doesn't give much information" (Interview).

The educators also often characterized immigrant families as compliant recipients because they were presumably confused about how special education worked. Staff members frequently commented on immigrant parents' not fully understanding the identification process. One teacher said of immigrant parents' participation in IEP meetings,

> Some of them are just sitting there like, "Okay, yes. I understand." Even though you kind of wonder if they really understand what's going on. And they're just there because they have to be there, but they're not really participating as much. . . . "I'll just sit here, and I'll listen. If you ask me any questions, everything is ok." (Interview)

Other teachers similarly commented on this passive participation among immigrant parents of children with disabilities. One teacher attributed passiveness to immigrant parents' not fully understanding their role in the IEP process: "I think they feel a little disempowered. Sometimes I think they don't know exactly what their role is. I think they're very respectful and they just listen to what's being said and what's being asked of them. They don't often have a lot of questions" (Interview). One teacher felt that the education level and culture of the immigrant families influenced their passivity in the IEP process: "We got a lot of working parents that are maybe not always college educated, and I know that in Latino culture there's a lot of respect for the teacher. Like the teacher knows what they're doing. They don't think to take on the role of going in and demanding things" (Interview). Another teacher said of immigrant families in IEP meetings, "I wish that they would open up more and give more input because I feel like the whole time, we're talking and they're just kind of like, uh-huh, you know?" (Interview).

Several interviewees spoke about the challenges of technical jargon in special education for immigrant families who lacked the understanding to participate actively in important decision-making processes. As one literacy specialist stated,

> My biggest frustration at IEP meetings is just jargon and look at this graph and look at these results and these things here and blah, blah, blah, and we did this blah, blah, blah test and the end results are—and I just don't think they're clear. I don't think, in my experience, that the parents really understand that this is a law-abiding document that they could check on to make sure that their child was receiving the service. . . . I would say that would be like the biggest

> thing that is just heart breaking to watch, that they don't really [understand and] they really do just accept whatever you say. (Interview)

Another structural challenge that educators identified was families' limited access to information about their rights in the special education process. One teacher related,

> And especially with, you know, English language learners, most of the parents have had a negative experience with the school district. They don't know their rights. They're intimidated, you know, they're never—they've never come across anything like this, so most of the time they don't advocate as much as they should for their child because they don't know, they don't know how to work the system. (Interview)

An inability to work the system was described as a disadvantage for immigrant families who do not advocate for themselves and their children in the way that non-immigrant, upper-, or middle-class families do. As one teacher stated,

> I find that it's only the students whose parents are native English speakers, who are socioeconomically advantaged, who know how to work the system, and who know how to demand that all their rights be met and that the IEP goals be met. If those parents make demands on the district, they get the services, but the immigrant families who can't advocate for themselves are often the ones who are being shortchanged in terms of the services they receive. (Interview)

The concern that these educators raised about immigrant families who took on the helpless, compliant recipient role not only emphasized problems in the special education system but also positioned the families as deficient. Families were framed as disempowered and unable to understand or do more than "accept whatever [educators] say," as the literacy specialist quoted above said (Interview). In other words, the immigrant families of children with disabilities were regarded as lacking the knowledge and capital needed to engage meaningfully in their children's education. In this way, the educators unknowingly perpetuated the systemic White, ableist, xenophobic gaze that dictates what appropriate involvement in special education should entail for families. Further, while acknowledging these systemic inequities, the educators did little to disrupt the injustices they observed. Perhaps they did not know how best to support immigrant families to take back power in broken systems, or they may have internalized the narrative that immigrant families of children with disabilities are helpless and incapable of supporting their children in the ways educators deem fit.

Defiant and in denial

In contrast with the "helpless, compliant families," the educators also frequently described stories of immigrant families whom they considered defiant and in denial of their children's disabilities. These stories were shared across educators regardless of their immigrant, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Conceptualizations of a "defiant and in denial family" often looked similar to this educator's description:

> I've had parents who are in denial; they don't see anything wrong with their child. . . . I've had a few situations where I tell my parents, this is what's going on, this is what we see in the classroom, this is what his work is. We need to get your consent, there may be a slight chance of a disability, we need your permission to test him or test her. Many times they're like, "No, no, they're fine. They don't need it, they're just being spunky, they're just being silly." (Interview)

The school staff typically attributed these patterns to immigrant families' cultural backgrounds. For example, one educator stated,

> Chinese parents don't like to be labeled as special. That's why sometimes it's hard to get these parents to agree to these accommodations or this help when they do qualify. . . . some parents I remember trying to get through, by the end they qualified, but their parents didn't sign on

> because they'd have that stigma, like "special." They don't understand that it's not—because Chinese have this stigma, like, if you're special, and everyone talking about your kid is not normal. (Interview)

Another educator speaking specifically about Chinese immigrant families said that Chinese families of children with disabilities are in denial "to save face. It's a reflection on the parents. Basically, it's a reflection, and they don't want to be embarrassed among their friends" (Interview). Others similarly stated that "it's culture," or "it's a culture thing" (Interview). As one teacher said,

> Culture, culture, I really think it's culture. Especially a lot of Asian parents, they don't want their children to be identified for anything unless it's something like [gifted and talented]—they'll say okay to that right away. But if their child is being identified for special ed, they say, "Oh no, no, no, my child cannot be identified with that. They're not dumb." That's the first thing they always think about. They don't want their child to be identified for something that is a disability. I definitely think it's a cultural thing. (Interview)

These characterizations were applied to both Asian and Latinx cultures. "Asian families, they don't want to admit there's, like, a problem, you know," said one educator, while yet another staff member explained,

> Specifically in the Latino culture, there's certain stigmas. And they're in denial, and they don't want their child to be labeled, like, special need; they don't want their child to try to get on the small yellow bus, you know. It's a huge disservice to their child because they need that extra support, but they're, you know, in shame, or they feel like it's going to be a reflection of them as having poor parenting skills and all that. And so sometimes they're in denial. (Interview)

According to these school staff members, the immigrant families' cultural beliefs led to their denial and even defiance of the special education process. Educators viewed such beliefs as a "disservice" to children. In other words, educators positioned immigrant families' cultures as deficient and a hindrance to ensuring children with disabilities receive the support they need.

One educator in the Spanish-English dual immersion school also connected their assumptions about families' education levels with their denial of children's disabilities. This teacher said about a particular Latinx family, "I'm thinking to myself, how can you not notice that your daughter can barely talk in an intelligible way? But the education level of the parents might be extremely low too. If you haven't really been taught, then how can you teach others?" (Interview). This comment aligned with many other statements that educators at this school made about Latinx immigrant families' education levels: "They are often not college educated," "they value education for their children because they don't have it for themselves," "there's a lack of education among the parents" (Interviews), and other similar comments were made among educators at the school. The portrayal of Latinx immigrant families as being in denial was thus tied to a common sentiment among the educators that the families were lacking in knowledge and skills needed for them to understand their children's development and accept their disabilities.

Immigrant Families' Perceptions of Themselves

The immigrant families' perceptions of themselves countered the deficit-oriented portrait painted by educators. Through their comments during interviews and their behaviors while interfacing with the special education system, families demonstrated their community's cultural wealth. Specifically, they drew on three forms of capital described by Yosso (2005): navigational, resistant, and aspirational capital.

Navigational capital

While the educators often characterized immigrant families of children with disabilities as helpless, compliant recipients who agreed with whatever educators said because they lacked understanding, the

families who participated in the study described their behaviors as intentional choices to navigate a complex special education system. Their understanding of the special education system, as well as their understanding of the limitations of their agency within this system, reflected an ability to "maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). A few parents positioned themselves as advocates who could not trust the system to provide their children the support they needed. One parent who struggled to get services for her child explained,

> It is taking too long. . . . [The district] told me that some lady will call me probably in the summer. They said that they are going to do it next year, maybe in the middle, three or four months later. . . . this is a city job. They take their time. That's how they make money. . . . They probably have plenty of time to do it, but they just still want to have a job. . . . You know your son. How he works, how he do in the house everywhere, and they're trying to tell you, "Oh no, probably we have to wait because he's still learning the language," you know? And you tell them already, "No, he's having a problem," and they want to wait too much time, and "Oh, we have to wait, we have to wait," and you already know, I mean, you're the parent. You are the one who knows more. . . . I will go to the district and tell them, "Hey, no." If I have to do it, I will. If they come up with that thing. I don't know what I'm going to do, but I'm going to do something. . . . I don't know if the district just don't want to help or not, but it doesn't feel like they want to help. . . . They talk to you, and you explain to them how your son works and the disability that they have, and they still don't want to do it. They are still, "We should wait." That's not the job that they're supposed to do. Probably they don't want to spend money sending somebody out. (Interview)

This parent showed her knowledge of the district's tendency to wait to identify immigrant children for special education. She saw herself as needing to fight for services because the district was going to "take their time," as she put it. Others who struggled to obtain services for their children spoke similarly about what they perceived as deficiencies in the district systems. While the parent quoted above saw the district as waiting too long, another saw the district as rushing through evaluations and not gathering enough data to truly understand her child's needs. She spoke about how important it was that she have a meeting with the school to "see how the exam is done," and "if I don't have this meeting, maybe my voice won't be heard" (Interview). Yet another parent addressed the need to write letters to the district to ensure their child was evaluated. None of these parents saw themselves as helpless or compliant. Rather, each identified deficiencies within the system and the need for them to fight for their children's access to services.

Other families believed that supporting teachers in their decisions was the best way to ensure their children thrived in school. They navigated the special education system by "putting [their] trust in the school's hand" (Interview). One parent told me, "I think [parents] should trust the teachers here and the [special education] experts. . . . Listen to the teachers, to the experts, and there won't be any harm. . . . We all want to help our kids" (Interview). Another parent stated, "I accept anything as long as it helps [my daughter]" (Interview). These parents deferred to the school staff because they thought doing so was in the best interest of their children, regarding school personnel as the "experts" who could help their children. These parents viewed their role as trusting the educators who "know how things work here" (Interview). One mother responded, "We don't know much about the education method here. It is different from China, so I'd let the teachers use their own methods here" (Interview). Therefore, what the educators might have called helpless compliance was, to the families, an intentional choice. They supported and trusted the educators working with their children because they felt this was the best way to navigate the special education system. The parents did not view themselves as clueless but rather as thoughtful actors making measured decisions to support their children.

Resistant capital

From the families' perspectives, those who did not go along with educators' decisions about their children were not defiant and in denial because of fears of saving face or a lack of understanding of special education. Rather, they were taking back power by engaging in acts of resistance. One of the most common forms of resistance was simply not following requests or recommendations made by school personnel. For example, one parent did not agree with the direction of IEP meetings for determining the most appropriate learning context for her child. The school had begun presenting the possibility of moving her kindergarten child to a different school with a self-contained special day class for children with autism. This parent related, "I wouldn't really like that, because I feel happy here, and I'm also doing my best to help my son" (Interview). As the educators began to push harder for a change of placement for the child, the mother began not attending the IEP meetings. When the school followed up with this parent, she would say that she never received any meeting notices. While school staff characterized this mother's behavior as deficient and evidence of her lack of understanding of the special education system, her refusal to attend the meetings can also be viewed as an act of subversion. Perhaps she was not lacking in her understanding of the system; rather, her understanding is exactly what propelled her to resist a system that was pushing her to accept changes to her child's services with which she did not agree.

Other parents similarly did not agree with one or more recommendations that the school made and chose not to follow through with them. For example, one parent was advised to take her child to a counselor to address his social-emotional variations related to his autism diagnosis. When I asked why she did not take her child to counseling, this parent told me, "It is not that serious. In the classroom, he cuts things, he cuts pants, he picks up things to smell; he smells them, but he likes to smell them; it is not that serious. Normal people like to smell the smell; my son does too. . . . When they talked about that, they made it too serious; I don't think that my son is that particularly serious" (Interview). This parent did not seem to want to avoid the stigma associated with counseling. She acknowledged her child's behavior but genuinely did not agree that these behaviors should cause concern.

Further, two parents were uncomfortable with the recommendation to give ADHD medication to their children, and one parent did not give her child the prescribed medication. She told me, "Right now, they prescribe the kind to take in the afternoon for two hours. I'm supposed to bring it to the office for him. I just don't bring it. I don't let him take it. . . . I'm afraid that he cannot sleep at night after taking it. The effect of this medicine is that it will affect his sleep; he can't eat meat. Not good" (Interview). The other parent initially did give her child the medication but sought out additional opinions about whether doing so was safe for a five-year-old. She eventually stopped giving her child the medication. As she explained in her interview,

> He didn't, he wasn't on [the medication] for very long. I felt like he didn't react to it very much but I couldn't tell. . . . When they told me, "Well, he might need to be on medication because he cannot focus. This might help him for a few hours, and then we'll see what happens." I'm like, "But his class is really high energy, can we also change the environment and see if that would help?" . . . As you know, that teacher changed, and then I don't want to say he grew up. I don't want to say that because I don't think it's that, I think it was more or less it just became a better controlled class, and that helped him settle down a little. (Interview)

This parent resisted giving her child medication for ADHD because she felt that the environment was at the root of his behaviors, not a chemical imbalance within her child. She seemed to have a strong understanding of her child as well as his classroom context. In her dissatisfaction with her child's learning environment, this parent took back power by refusing to follow a recommendation she did not see as valid.

All the parents described here engaged in what Yosso (2005) identified as "resistance to subordination" (p. 80), or refusing to follow educators' orders blindly. Their resistant acts were quiet, as they did not outwardly push back against educators. In this way, they maintained positions of deference and respect toward the teachers in public but drew on their resistant capital to subvert quietly a system that did not genuinely consider the families' perspectives on their child's disabilities.

Aspirational capital

The navigational and resistant capital were manifestations of the families' "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). All the participating families drew on their community's cultural wealth because they firmly believed that their children could and should thrive, and they saw strengths in their children that educators often neglected to see. As one mother stated, "I am very happy with my son. He learns slowly; I am not impatient. I don't need him to be really good right away. A lot of teachers say they can't understand him. For me, I can understand him 100%" (Interview). Speaking about the efforts he and his wife had made to create a comfortable home for his children, a father said, "Because the children are capable of doing everything. They absorb everything. If there's a good atmosphere, there's good relationships at home, and they can do well at school" (Interview). Another mother said of her child, "I feel that he is going to improve, and I have faith in God, because I don't think in his case it's that bad. In a short time, I've noticed a lot of changes. I feel that in a year or so, he will improve" (Interview). All these parents held a firm belief that their children would be able to thrive. They saw strengths in their children and within themselves that helped them to maintain hope in the face of challenges they experienced in special education.

Wary of educators' suggestions and the special education system, the parents I spoke with took responsibility for acting in ways they felt would ensure their children thrived. Whether pushing for special education services they believed their children needed or quietly refusing educators' recommendations they felt were inappropriate, the families did what they could to support their children. None of the parents fit educators' depictions of immigrant families of children with disabilities as helplessly compliant or defiant due to cultural stigmas. Rather, the parents made pointed, intentional decisions rooted in deep knowledge of their children and wariness of troubling systems that were not designed to help their children.

Discussion

The findings from this exploratory, qualitative inquiry reveal how immigrant families' views of themselves do not fit educators' perceptions of them as the families work through the special education system. While educators view immigrant families of children with disabilities as passive, unable to understand, or defiant due to cultural norms, the families see themselves as intentional actors who draw on their knowledge, strengths, and powers of resistance to support their children in ways they feel are best. For the participating families, what appeared to be denial or lack of understanding was actually quiet acts of subversion or deference. Families leveraged the information they did have about special education and their children to take back power in the unequal partnerships that existed between the educators and families.

The view that immigrant families of children with disabilities are helplessly compliant or defiantly in denial is often attributed to families' cultures. The racialized stereotypes that the educators applied to immigrant families positioned the families as "outside of the Western cultural norms" (Annamma et al., 2013). Thus, the educators perpetuated expectations about parents' involvement in school that were rooted in Whiteness (Boutte & Johnson, 2013; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020).

Based on the participating school staff's perceptions, the ideal immigrant family of a child with disabilities is one that actively participates in IEP team meetings, asks informed questions, and provides suggestions for the child's services. This family should also agree with the educators' suggestions and not question their expertise, which would stem from the families' possessing the same knowledge about the special education system as the educators. They should demonstrate this understanding through active verbal participation in special education processes.

However, because, in the participating educators' experiences, immigrant families of children with disabilities did not fit this mold, school staff believed that there must be something deficient with families' comprehension, agency, or cultural beliefs. Their narrow vision of what family involvement in special education might entail inhibited their ability to see the families' cultural wealth in the community. From a DisCrit stance, the intersection of racism and ableism contributed to the educators' deficit-based perspective of immigrant families of children with disabilities; the families were otherized in ways that justified their continued isolation, prohibiting genuine collaboration between families and educators.

The educators' deficit views contrasted with the views the immigrant families held of themselves and their children. The families drew on their community cultural wealth to navigate problematic systems and engage in acts of resistance in service of their deeply held belief that their children with disabilities could and should thrive in school. Through their actions—or, at times, nonactions—the families took back power that was denied them through a system that permits unequal power distribution. When educators pushed for services and approaches the families agreed with, they quietly and respectfully deferred to the teachers. However, when the families disagreed with the recommendations, they drew on their resistant capital to engage in acts of subversion. The immigrant families showed that they could use their navigational capital to determine what they needed to do to ensure their children's education proceeded in the ways they desired. Their intentional acts were driven by an aspirational capital that allowed the families to maintain hope that their children with disabilities would be able to thrive in school.

To address this discrepancy between educators' and families' perceptions, educators must learn to see families through a lens of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) rather than a deficit-oriented one. A critical step toward this shift in perspective is transforming dominant conceptions of parent engagement. Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock (2020) explained that educators often regard "school-centric" parent engagement as the only legitimate way that families can meaningfully be involved in the educational lives of their children. In other words, families who are present at school events and demonstrate understanding of school policies and procedures are the ones regarded as "involved," while parents who participate in their children's education in ways that are less visible to the educators are seen as "uninvolved." Therefore, professional development that widens the scope of what counts as parent engagement is an important step toward seeing families' community cultural wealth.

Another way to achieve better convergences of educators' and families' views of immigrant families of children with disabilities is reconceptualizing the general role of families in the special education process. Immigrant families of children with disabilities are not the only ones who are positioned as deficient by educators; challenges in family-school relationships in special education are pervasive across race, class, language, and immigration status (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenberg, 2020; Miller, 2019). The results from the present study show that, for immigrant families specifically, culture and language were the primary reasons used to explain the deficit views held by educators; for other families, alternative factors may be used to rationalize educators' deficit-based views. Ultimately, these perspectives emerge from tensions that educators and families collectively feel as they struggle to work meaningfully as a team to navigate the special education system (Francis et al., 2016; Murray & Mereoiu, 2016; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015). The field of special education, therefore, should determine how

the system is designed in ways that do not allow for genuine collaboration between families and schools. Reimagining parent-school connections in special education should center on relationship-building that enables families to be valued as important contributors to their children's education.

If educators were able to see the immigrant families as they see themselves—full of strengths and an array of capital resources—perhaps more genuine and equitable collaboration in special education would be possible. Acknowledging the cultural wealth of families might lead to transformations in how parent engagement in special education is conceptualized. If the partnership between families and schools began with attempting to understand the different forms of capital possessed by an immigrant family, then schools might be able to individualize their approaches to family-school engagement and center them around the families' cultural wealth. Such an approach to partnership would also dispel stereotypical judgments of immigrant families. The families' strengths, knowledges, and assets would be honored as deficit narratives are reframed and families' full selves are seen and respected in equitable relationships with schools.

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Article

Reimagining Post-Covid Relationships with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families: Reflecting with a Preschool Director

Journal of Family Diversity in Education, 2023/2024
Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 47-68

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Abstract
Guided by the concept of "Pandemic as Portal" (Souto-Manning, 2021), this work utilizes ethnographic methods of inquiry and analysis to understand home–school relationships between Lisa, an African American preschool leader, and families at an early childhood center in the U.S. Midwest. Analysis of data from before and during the pandemic revealed continued themes of extended relationships between center leadership and families beyond preschool years, themes based in care over time, and political clarity of leadership. This political clarity drew on Lisa's understanding of systemic racism and the school system that former students and older siblings would be entering. This paper also considers a disparity in the support and resources the center received, as it often had to rely on local problem-solving or established means and methods of communication to continue connecting with and supporting families throughout the pandemic, rather than turning to state or federal programs for support. Ultimately, the paper concludes that transformative and humanizing practices that developed before the pandemic helped guide the center through that time. The story of home-school relationships at this early childhood center provides examples of the potential to reimagine family engagement, avoiding a return to the "normalcy" of pre-pandemic home–school relationships across the U.S., which have historically been based in unequal power relationships that ignore systemic racism.

Keywords: Family engagement, preschool, leadership

Introduction

In multiple states in the U.S., early childhood workers were not included with K–12 educators in the COVID-19 vaccine priority period, despite the fact that many early childhood centers were open throughout the pandemic while K–12 schools transitioned to virtual learning for most of 2020. These educators should not have been excluded, but the exclusion of early childhood professionals conveyed that, despite their continued work, early childhood workers were somehow less important than K–12 educators.

As Austin and colleagues (2019) documented, the U.S. early childhood workforce is composed almost exclusively of women, and 40% of workers identify as People of Color. Furthermore, early childhood workers are among the lowest-paid workers in any state (Whitebook et. al, 2018), with African American early childhood workers earning less than white early childhood workers. After controlling for educational attainment, African American early educators still earn an average of $0.78

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less per hour than white early educators (Austin, et al., 2019). Therefore, this study is framed by the devaluation of early childhood educators and leaders, particularly African American early childhood educators and leaders, in the United States. This devaluing is evident both in their treatment during the vaccine rollout and the lack of pay in comparison with their K–12 counterparts, despite the role many early childhood leaders have maintained in communities throughout the pandemic.

For several years (before and during the pandemic), I researched and aided at an early childhood center called Daia Children's Center, which was led by Lisa, an African American preschool director, in the U.S. Midwest (all names for people and places are pseudonyms). At first, I began as an observer, but over time, I began to assist in teaching. Although Daia, which had a large immigrant community of diverse national and regional origins, closed for a few weeks in March 2020, the preschool was reopened as an emergency center for essential workers and their families by April 2020. By September 2020, it re-opened fully under state restrictions. Despite challenges such as keeping a safe distance from each other, young children were able to wear masks, and the center instituted other safety measures, such as temperature checks.

While attendance was reduced for several reasons (e.g., adult-to-child ratio changed in the pandemic), former students and older siblings also utilized the center to attend their virtual K–12 classes in 2020–2021. This was supported by state governance and was not uncommon for early childhood centers during the pandemic, as other early childhood centers in the Midwest also engaged in the practice of creating space for school-age siblings (Marsh et al., 2022). In taking the physical place of elementary school, Daia provided a safe and familiar space for former students and older siblings to maintain some semblance of normalcy throughout the pandemic. If not for the center, many families would have faced increased challenges, as many parents or caregivers had to return to work even though their child or children had no physical K–12 school to attend.

For several years before the pandemic, I documented the relationships between families and center leadership, identifying themes of continued connections and creative and intentional use of local resources to provide programming that benefitted families. To build on this knowledge, I engage in this study to examine how this early childhood center continued through the pandemic and what role the preschool leadership played in the community. The following research questions guide this investigation: 1) How did relationships between preschool leadership and families continue or change during the pandemic? 2) How did the pandemic impact programming for families? 3) What aspects of relationships before the pandemic did or did not support relationships during the pandemic?
To address these questions, this study draws on the field of social justice leadership in early childhood education (Long et al., 2016; Nicholson, 2017) and the body of work critiquing mainstream home–school practices (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2011a; Doucet 2011b; Gallo, 2017; Greene, 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Valdés, 1996). In the next section, I review both of these bodies of research to illustrate how they inform this study, with a particular focus on trust and ethics of care. I then consider work that has come out around leadership, family engagement, and the pandemic while elaborating how a "Pandemic as Portal" (Souto-Manning, 2021) frame has helped organize and guide this study.

Theoretical Approaches and Literature Review

In the following sections, I illustrate themes of critical perspectives of family engagement, ultimately showing how many of these concepts tie into the more recent research regarding early childhood leadership—specifically, social justice leadership (Long et al., 2016). I will also identify the overlaps and tensions between these two bodies of literature.

Critical Perspectives on Family Engagement

While the language around parent involvement has changed throughout the history of the U.S., the goals for this involvement have often aligned with universalist approaches to home–school connections. This universalist perspective was heavily influenced by "Culture of Poverty" social science, which tends to blame individuals for outcomes rather than to identify larger structures of oppression (Gorski, 2011). Considering traditional approaches to home–school relationships in the U.S., Valdés (1996) illustrated how coded, "universal" models have shaped involvement practices and expectations of parents and families, stating,

Many educators and policymakers believe that attention must be directed at educating or changing what I term here "nonstandard" families, that is, families that are non-mainstream in background orientation (e.g., nonwhite, non-English-speaking, non-middle-class). This concern about nonstandard families and the widely held belief that these families—for the good of their children—must be helped to be more like middle-class families has led to a strong movement in favor of family intervention or family education programs. (Valdés, 1996, p. 33)

In many mainstream or dominant narratives of parents or families in education, systemic racism, including segregation, tracking, and inequitable distribution of resources (as well as legacies of colonialism and nationalism), are often excused or ignored. Instead, teachers perpetuate a narrative that "nonstandard" (Valdés, 1996) parents "do not care" about their children (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2011a; Doucet 2011b; Dyrness, 2011; Greene, 2013; Valdés, 1996) if they do not participate in the ways predetermined by the school and instead need to be "educated" or corrected.

Rather than accepting this fallacious approach, however, critical scholars of home–school connections have suggested multiple ways to combat these damaging, deficit views, including building trust by positioning the teacher as a learner (Gallo, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). This trust takes time and a level of humility, including educators reciprocally sharing parts of themselves with families (Gallo, 2017). In her foundational work on involvement and Haitian immigrant families, Doucet (2011a) found that many parents/caregivers, despite the tensions of working with the school, seek partnerships with schools that reflected a sense of reciprocity and that reflect their agency and desires for their children. Similarly, Greene (2013) suggested that committing to more reciprocal family engagement can "reimagine schools as both inclusive and democratic spaces. Indeed, a dialogic conception of Parent Involvement that is relational provides the conditions of possibility for creative practice—practice that challenges normative conceptions of institutional spaces that reproduce inequality" (p. 107). Moreover, the literature has highlighted how educators and leaders working with families toward reciprocity must approach these relationships with an understanding of institutional and ideological power dynamics (Dyrness, 2011; Gallo, 2017), which is needed to build trust with family members.

Trust can also include recognizing the understandable boundaries that families create, or what Doucet (2011a) called a "resistance to bridging." These boundaries are based on the fact that families are often asked to take risks and come into schools. This expected "bridging" is particularly risky for parents or caregivers of color, who have been historically harmed by the school system; as Doucet (2011a) notes, "traditionally the burden of risk-taking has fallen on marginalized groups" (p. 2728). Gallo (2017) built on reciprocal concepts of trust that account for the riskiness of engaging with the school system by positing the idea of humanizing family engagement (HFE). HFE is structured around the following principles: 1) an interrogation of what counts as knowledge, education, and involvement; 2) ideological clarity regarding schooling; 3) positioning teachers as learners; and 4) relationships of *confianza*, or mutual trust, between school and families (Gallo, 2017). This concept of risk and critical frameworks guide how I understand trust throughout this study.

Besides relationship building, critical scholars have also considered expanding frameworks of family engagement to parent/caregiver leadership, particularly as a means of centering the voices of

parents of color in the home–school conversation (Dyrness, 2011; Fernández & López, 2016, Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Olivos, 2006, 2009; Warren & Goodman, 2018). These scholars directly oppose the harmful traditional narrative that parents of color do not care (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2011a; Doucet, 2011b; Dyrness, 2011; Greene, 2013; Valdés, 1996) about their children if they do not engage with schools in ways prescribed by educators. Fernández and Paredes Scribner (2018) noted that "disrupting traditional hierarchical schooling structures requires the voice and agency of parents and community members in schools" (p. 60). They further explored how parents of color can cultivate school leadership and organizing by engaging and activating community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) in their school communities.

While parent/caregiver leadership and organizing are not a central focus of this study, I am guided by the centrality of race and racism in both understanding home–school relationships in the U.S. and disrupting harmful traditional paradigms (Wilson, 2019). I am also guided by the necessity of centering the voices of parents/caregivers, particularly parents of color, in reimagining family engagement and reconceptualizing the roles of parents/caregivers.

The above section explains the critical body of work around family engagement, including frameworks that seek to "disrupt traditional paradigms of parent involvement that position minoritized families as not caring about education" (Gallo, 2017, p. 13), while considering some of the overlaps and tensions in the field. The next section will consider research around early childhood leadership and the many ways that social justice leadership work aligns with critical perspectives around home-school connections.

Early Childhood Leadership

The body of work regarding preschool leadership initially drew from traditional paradigms of education based in modernism (Nicholson, 2017), with a focus on outcome-based, business-oriented frameworks. Eventually, the field acknowledged the unique and relational role of early childhood leadership (Kagan, 1994; Kagan & Kauerz, 2015), in line with the more recent turn toward postmodernism. During this time, the field became more critical and aware of the social, historical, and cultural positioning of preschools and preschool leaders. "Leadership decisions, in this viewpoint, must be continuously reflected upon to analyze whose voices and ideas are privileged and which individuals and agendas are silenced in order to make visible the political consequences that result" (Nicholson et al., 2020, p. 95). While social justice can be a nebulous or over-utilized term (Patel, 2015), it is often used in the early childhood leadership literature from this postmodern turn (Long et al., 2016; Nicholson & Maniates, 2016) to center humanizing practice and equity. This field has also drawn from social justice work on K–12 leadership (Auerbach, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016); however, the unique role of early childhood education in relation to the school system creates different needs and roles for preschool leaders than for elementary school leaders.

The social justice field has also shifted to reflect the changing role of the preschool leader or director in working with families. Many early childhood educators are under great stress due to testing, accountability measures, and state and national school standards. This stress, combined with a lack of education or training for working with families, particularly immigrant families, often exacerbates the divides between families and schools. Several scholars (Long et al., 2016; Tobin et al., 2013) have noted this disconnect as a potential opportunity for preschool directors and other educational leaders to play a vital role in working with families to push back against damaging deficit positioning.

There are several examples of these kinds of leadership possibilities that exist in the overlap of leadership research and critical perspectives of home-school connections. Greene (2013) observed that in workshops facilitated by an elementary principal with teachers and families, a "sense of community helped to create conditions for agency and capacity, particularly family members' ability to consider alternative futures for their children, to get access to resources, and to hold accountable

those who were in power" (p. 61). In an early childhood leadership context, Souto-Manning and Mordan-Delgadillo (2016) followed Marilyn, an African American female Head Start director, as she attempted to work in partnership with immigrant parents in a Parent Leadership Project. This effort, which was organized between her Head Start center and a center for immigrant families, involved parents working to counter the racism directed against Spanish-dominant immigrant families of color by the local elementary schools. Connecting this with her own lived experiences of racism, Marilyn worked with families to help them navigate elementary schools, which was helpful for families with soon-to-be kindergarten-aged children.

Long and colleagues (2016) also highlighted the efforts of early childhood leaders as they attempt to work with and for children and families to create more equitable classrooms and neighborhoods. They outlined a framework of social justice leadership that moves away from deficit positioning toward responsive leadership and teaching that values the lived experiences of families and young children. This framework repeatedly returns to the idea of working with children and families, as evidenced in the following principles:

- Working to understand justice issues
- Seeking allies and engaging in critical and productive collaborations
- Engaging in ongoing and informed advocacy
- Positioning families as vital to the operation of the preschool and ensuring that their voices are sought and validated through joint action
- Demonstrating authentic commitment to students' communities
- Understanding and embracing bilingualism and multilingualism as the norm
- Hiring, respecting, and supporting a richly diverse body of teachers as knowledgeable partners who are willing to move beyond rhetorical expressions to grow and act for equity and justice
- Generating and using funding creatively to make socially just teaching possible (Long et al., 2016, p. 178–184)

These principles possess several similarities with the literature on critical perspectives on home–school connections (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cooper, 2009; Doucet, 2011a; Doucet 2011b; Gallo, 2017; Greene, 2013; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Valdés, 1996), including consideration of how families and communities are positioned, although with a focus on the role of leaders. Similar to the focus on educators' developing trust with families in the critical body of work regarding family engagement (Gallo, 2017), the leadership literature has investigated theories of trust and care, as well as the ways care may manifest or develop over time.

Ethics of Care in Leadership

Considering equity and preschool leadership, Nicholson (2017) emphasized the relational shifts in leadership toward "holistic commitments that require continuous cycles of reflection and responsive adjustment given the complex nature of social relationships" (p. 17). This approach highlighted theories of care (Beck, 1992; Noddings, 1984, 1988), which privilege the relational and interpersonal aspects of early childhood education and leadership. However, as in the family engagement literature, which has critiqued engagement centered on a universal model, many ethics of care have been criticized for holding a universalist approach to caring that ignores the endemic nature of racism in schools and society in the U.S. while failing to recognize other conceptions of care (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999; Watson et al., 2016). Thus, this paper considers connections between preschool leadership and families informed by care that, like the family engagement literature, draw on ideological or political clarity (Bartolome, 1994;

DeNicolo et al., 2017), pushing back against universalist perceptions of care. Concerning school leadership during the pandemic, Alvarez Gutiérrez (2022) and colleagues identified critical care, which considers empathy, compassion, and systemic critique (Wilson, 2016), as a necessary component of transformative, community-centered leadership and home–school relationships.

One of the tensions between early childhood leadership and critical approaches to home–school relationships lies in the roles of care and power. In critical perspectives on family engagement, scholars have often addressed the imbalance of power between home and school, as expectations of engagement are mostly set by schools, thereby creating a one-way relational street (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Greene, 2013; Valdés, 1996). However, the leadership literature has emphasized the role of a leader's power to work with and for families in a way that, though it might be one-directional, benefits families and children. Both the overlaps and tensions between the literature on leadership and critical perspectives on home-school connections will guide the theoretical framing of this study, as I also consider the recent body of work around family engagement and leadership during the pandemic.

Family Engagement and Early Childhood Leadership in the Pandemic

While the body of work around family engagement and leadership during the pandemic is relatively small, it reflects both challenges and opportunities created by the unprecedented global situation. In reflecting on community-centered care and school leadership during the pandemic, Alvarez Gutiérrez et al. (2022) identified how leaders and immigrant families co-constructed new meanings of home-school relationships, noting the following:

We found that the conditions and crisis imposed on education by COVID-19 brought new challenges, as well as *aperturas* for school leaders to navigate school-family relationships to support holistic aspects of student learning. Thus, examining "shifts" in leadership actions and perceptions in this context would offer implications and possibilities for community-centered leadership (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022, p.4).

Much of the literature around leadership and family engagement during the pandemic (particularly in the earlier days) has focused on whether schools were able to connect with parents or caregivers to support their children in remote learning. In contrast, for centers like Daia, family engagement meant communicating with families and supporting them while staying open, which often became the responsibility of early childhood leaders. McLeod and Dulsky (2021) found that effective school leadership during the pandemic involved leadership practices based on strong vision, values, relationships, and consistent communication with families before the pandemic. In addition to studies of effective leadership, the stresses faced by early childhood leaders during the pandemic were many, from staffing to determining safety precautions that aligned with state and federal guidance to the issue of distance learning when early childhood is a hands-on space (Neilsen-Hewett, et al. 2022). For many at Daia, distance learning was not a possibility, and few or no technological options were available for young children to connect with preschool teachers virtually. This was similar to other states, where many school districts were able to provide take-home technology to K–12 students, but not many pre-K students. However, despite the mix of technological options available to preschool children and their families, communication was key to staying connected to families during the pandemic. In a study of 30 pre-K teachers in Michigan, Wilinski and colleagues (2022) found that teachers believed family engagement to be "a necessary response to an unprecedented and uncertain situation" (p. 15). These early childhood centers provided support to families to access basic needs, and many educators reported that, in the early days of the pandemic, providing support to families was their top priority.

In addition to the stress and anxiety due to the uncertainty of the global situation, leaders and teachers undertook actual physical risk (Logan et al., 2021) in proceeding to teach and lead through the pandemic. The leaders often had to focus not only on their own well-being in surviving the pandemic but also on the well-being of teachers, families, and children. However, despite these many challenges, early childhood centers like Daia survived the pandemic and evolved with the ever-changing needs of communities in response to the global situation.

Investigating school leadership during the pandemic, Alvarez Gutiérrez (2022) and colleagues considered "aperturas," or openings and reimaginings, "for school leaders to radically shift and reimagine long-held understandings of their role in the lives of students and their families" (p. 3). This paper takes a similar stance to reflect on the ways that early childhood leadership was impacted by the pandemic, including opportunities for reimagining home–school relationships and the role of the early childhood leader.

Theorizing Pandemic as Portal

As I had been engaging in recursive analysis throughout my time at Daia, I took the opportunity to consider how practices at Daia illustrated extended themes or showed interruptions to themes I had observed. In this study, I draw on the concept of "Pandemic as Portal," or the "hard reset," in which scholars such as Souto-Manning (2021) and Ladson-Billings (2021) challenge educators to imagine more just futures rather than envisioning the future solely based on how things have been done in the past. Drawing on Roy (2021), who conceptualized "Pandemic as Portal," Souto-Manning (2021) emphasized the importance of telling stories of potentialities to both address historic oppression and envision a future that is not a return to normality. She noted how stories of potential can raise and address the following questions:

> How might [educators and researchers] better attend to siblings and foster intergenerational learning opportunities?
> How might parents be repositioned in the ecology of teaching and learning after the pandemic?
> How might [educators and researchers] re-orient schooling to an ethics of familism, collaboration, and interdependence?
>
> (Souto-Manning, 2021, p. 8)

Guided by these questions, I consider how telling stories of potentialities can help imagine new ways to reorient schooling toward ethics of familism, collaboration, and interdependence. This paper specifically investigated the practices at Daia Children's Center, where I had documented strong relationships with families before the pandemic, as well as the ways that these relationships helped guide the center community through the pandemic. Additionally, I draw on bodies of work regarding critical perspectives of family engagement and social justice early leadership.

Methods and Data Sources

When I first began this work, I was aiming to perform research at an early childhood center with a large immigrant population. I was initially interested in working with families from the Balkans or a similar area, as my family came to the U.S. from the Balkans in the mid-twentieth century. However, I struggled to find a research site that fit my parameters. At this point, I was connected with Lisa, and we immediately developed a relationship. She expressed her interest in growing her practice in home–school relationships and explained her philosophy of family engagement, which aligned with my

interests. She also told me how she grew up in a community on the East Coast with a large population of immigrants from diverse regional and national origins, which she believed prepared her to understand the diversity of immigrant experiences at Daia. While Daia did not have many (if any) Balkan immigrant families, I was interested in learning more about the diverse regional origins of many of the families whose children attended the center. I began visiting weekly and then increased my time, coming almost every day and helping with teaching. After building relationships for multiple months, I spent the next three years engaging in ethnographic research methods (Heath & Street, 2008) to follow and document the daily routines at Daia.

The center is located on the edge of a large Midwestern city in a mixed socioeconomic area with strong immigrant communities and many local businesses and institutions. Much of the U.S. Midwest is undergoing an increase in immigration due to the New Latino Diaspora (Villenas, 2002; Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002), though historically, certain areas of the Midwest (like Chicago) have historically had large Latine communities. This part of the Midwest has also seen a rise in immigration from areas including Somalia, West Africa, and the Middle East (Fix & Capps, 2012; Capps & Soto, 2016).

Daia is run by Lisa, who owns and operates the center with a mix of private and public funding. The center serves children from birth to age five, with infant and toddler rooms as well as two pre-K classrooms serving three to five-year-old children. The center functions as a Head Start partnership, as about half of the pre-K students come for half of the day and are funded by Head Start, while the other half of students pay tuition and attend the full day. Parents and families at Daia are from across the world, and they speak a variety of dialects and languages, although the language of classroom discourse is predominantly English. The focal families and students included a mix of immigrant and non-immigrant families, including families from Syria, Guinea, Pakistan, Mexico, and two African American families. Furthermore, a majority of immigrant families at Daia practiced Islam. Most immigrant families at Daia have lived in the U.S. for less than 20 years, and the children at the center are mostly second-generation immigrants in the U.S.

Following ethnographic methods of collection, the data corpus primarily comprises participant observations documented via collection of field notes (Emerson et al., 2011), collection of artifacts (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), and interviews with Lisa and focal families. While most of this data was collected before the pandemic, the data also contain personal reflections and interviews with Lisa collected during the 2020–2021 school year to reflect changes or continuations of themes from the initial collection. These data were included to learn more about how the pandemic impacted this center. Because of an initial pause in data collection during the pandemic, there are fewer interviews and more personal reflections from this period. Additionally, as was the case at most early childhood centers during the pandemic, parents and caregivers were discouraged from coming into the center for long periods to minimize the spread of COVID-19, so most interviews from 2020 on were conducted solely with Lisa. Based upon Nicholson's (2016) suggestion of continuous cycles of reflection and responsive adjustment for leaders, a major focus of these later interviews involved reflecting on relationships with families and changes at the center due to the pandemic. In their work regarding the pandemic and reimagining school leadership, Alvarez Gutiérrez and colleagues (2022) noted that critical, ongoing self-reflection plays a large part in transformative leadership practices.

According to Sipe and Ghiso (2004), while "ethnographic research at times forefronts the notion of letting data 'speak' and categories 'emerge,' we do not approach sites or data as blank slates but are influenced by our prior theoretical readings and life experiences" (p. 473). My initial coding evolved around reading through notes and transcripts for emergent themes and also drew on the relevant literature around leadership and home–school connections. The first and second rounds of coding (Miles et al., 2013) helped me create a codebook and a guiding framework, which I then used to further analyze my observations and interview data collected during the pandemic. I also used interviews with

Lisa as a means to create a reciprocal research relationship and as member checks (Doucet, 2011b; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a white researcher from a Balkan background, I do not have the lived experience of anti-Black racial oppression, and I drew on these interviews and member checks to help make sense of emergent themes. I also recognize that while my family has a 20th-century immigration story, I do not face the same experiences of 21st-century immigration (Arzubiaga et al., 2009), such as new levels of racism, xenophobia, and exclusion.

I aimed to be intentional in the methods I used for data collection, particularly in the protection of participants' privacy and safety. I grappled with this tension in what Pillow (2003) called an "uncomfortable reflexivity" (p. 188). I view this kind of reflexivity as tied to the work of being what Love (2019) called a co-conspirator, which requires "serious critique and reflection of one's sociocultural heritage . . . taken side by side with a critical analysis of racism, sexism, white supremacy, and Whiteness" (p. 118). Aiming for co-conspiracy, I have undertaken continuous reflection throughout my time at Daia in relationships and data collection, both regarding how I collected data and drawing on the relevant literature that has investigated home–school connections in the context of the lived experience of racism and research in the U.S. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 1991; Cooper, 2009; Villenas & Dehyle, 1999, Yosso, 2005). Although I do not utilize these theories in analysis, as they are based on the lived experience of racial oppression that I do not experience, I want to honor the spirit of this work, and I return to Black womanism in the implications and suggestions for the future. While engaging in this process, I follow Blackburn's (2014) suggestion of not reading for gaps in the literature but for gaps in my understanding. Considering what internal and external work co-conspiratorship indicates in research, I aim for this work to bring greater attention to families as well as a profession that is often underpaid and undervalued, and to do the work in a spirit of "authentic relationships of solidarity and mutuality" (Love, 2019, p. 118).

While this work utilizes ethnographic methods of collection and analysis, I also use the concept of "Pandemic as Portal" (Souto-Manning, 2021) as an additional analytic research frame. Because the pandemic was recent and ongoing, not many models yet exist for considering and analyzing how themes change over time due to a major event like a pandemic. Therefore, I also used the concept of "Pandemic as Portal" to guide me methodologically and theoretically. As shown in the findings, transformative change did not necessarily occur during the pandemic. However, the ways that Lisa pushed back on damaging, dominant narratives of family engagement through trusting relationships and social justice leadership helped the center survive the pandemic and provided stories of potentiality. Thus, I utilize "Pandemic as Portal" (Souto-Manning, 2021) to consider how these practices can guide and reposition family engagement and leadership practices in a new era.

Findings

Two of Souto-Manning's (2021) three questions guided the findings regarding stories of potentialities: 1) How might [educators and researchers] better attend to siblings and foster intergenerational learning opportunities? 2) How might [educators and researchers] re-orient schooling to an ethics of familism, collaboration, and interdependence? (p. 8). While I draw on the first and third question to frame the findings, I use the second question, "How might parents be repositioned in the ecology of teaching and learning after the pandemic?" (Souto-Manning, 2021, p. 8), to guide the discussion and implications, as I feel this answer is still in the making.

Attending to siblings and fostering intergenerational learning opportunities

This section outlines the ways in which Lisa engaged in extended relationships with both parents/caregivers and older siblings, as well as possibilities for intergenerational learning

opportunities. Before the pandemic, I often found themes of extended relationships between center leadership and families that lasted long beyond the preschool years. Lisa explained how she viewed these long-term relationships with families who had left or were leaving the center:

A lot of them have my cell number**.** And you know, it's just life, people come and go, they grow up, they leave. But I think we've always had good relationships. So it's really just an extension of family, and I think it just goes back to just what I was saying, you know when I invite families in, this is a relationship. And so hopefully we all have the same interests in getting your child to the right place, but also seeing you in a good place. And it doesn't stop with childcare or preschool.

Her description identifies elements of building trust at Daia, from communication (in having her cell number) to extended notions of family as evidenced in relationships with families that included continuous help in navigating the school system that "doesn't stop with childcare or preschool." Lisa emphasized that "this is a relationship," meaning she was not merely interested in having a relationship that supported the child but also one that engaged the family member.

This theme manifested in multiple ways, including continued support and advocacy for parents after their children had left the preschool. For example, I initially met a student named Nikkia as a preschooler when I first began research at the center. Nikkia was a young Black girl who then graduated and went on to kindergarten. For over a year, Lisa communicated with Nikkia's mother about how her elementary school was over-disciplining Nikkia. Lisa, who had known Nikkia for several years, believed that she was overwhelmed and that the school was stifling Nikkia's natural curiosity and playfulness. She talked to Nikkia's mother on the phone multiple times a week, ultimately helping her advocate for Nikkia and switch schools to a program that might better serve the child. While this relationship had developed during preschool, the communication and assistance with navigating the school system continued well beyond that period.

In the literature regarding care and leadership, time is considered a key element of care (Beck, 1992). By engaging in caring relationships that extended beyond the preschool years, Lisa pushed back against prescribed U.S. school expectations that relationships between home and school begin and end within the construct of the school year. Instead, she moved toward extended, communal care that went beyond Western practices of schooling (Collins, 1991; DeNicolo et al., 2017) and universalist ideas of care. This was seen not only in continued communication between Lisa and families but also in how older siblings and former students returned to the center for summer events and activities when they were off from elementary school. Even before the pandemic, Lisa cultivated relationships that pushed back against normative home–school practices—those that have been criticized as the traditional framework. These practices later became foundational to the center during the pandemic. Indeed, continued relationships with students and families were an integral piece of home–school connections at Daia, helping the center navigate the pandemic, as many of these bonds of trust were forged before the pandemic.

Not only were the extended relationships based in time outside of the constructs of the school year, like those relationships with older siblings and the families of former students, but they were also based in a political clarity (Bartolome, 1994) of the children's experiences going forward into the school system. Lisa demonstrated this clarity when she frequently recounted a story of a Black boy in her daughter's eighth-grade class as an example of racial profiling and its impact on students, as well as a reminder for herself of the need for continuous reflection:

I guess he talks a lot. His name is Carl, and so she [her daughter's teacher] said, "Carl, you sit in the yellow," and then she said, "Never mind, go sit in the blue chair because you talk too much." And so my daughter was like, "Why did she have to say that?" These are eighth-grade children. Why did she have to say that? And that messed up her experience because she was so upset that the teacher said that, and she's like, that had to hurt his feelings. And so there has to be that level of respect, and I'm guilty of it also. You know, sometimes, we get so caught in our own feelings of what we need right

now that we forget that this person is a person and that they have feelings. We don't consider that, and I cut you to the quick. . . . You look at the student as a kid, as a person who has feelings.

Over the years, she remembered this story of Carl, not only in talking about Nikkia or other students' experiences of elementary school but also in reflecting on her relationships and how she treated family members and older siblings.

In another instance, Lisa realized she had reacted negatively when confronting an older sibling who had been coming to the center over the summer. Lisa again engaged in self-reflection on the young person's life situation to consider what happened, stating, "You always have a piece in what is transpiring. What I told my daughter last night, I said, 'The things I didn't consider, what the residual is, for a child that has a mother in jail. . . . That . . . I don't know.'"

This reflection on her actions not only reflects political clarity but also illustrates Long and colleagues' (2016) principles of social justice leadership, including a recognition of injustices and "their stronghold in educational institutions" (Long et al., 2016, p. 178). Her reflection and understanding also align with the recommendation that leaders continuously work to understand issues of injustice, not only performing self-examination but also making that reflection visible and "turning reflection into action" (Long et al., 2016, p. 179), as Lisa did in attempting to repair her relationship with this older sibling. Therefore, Lisa's extended relationships were guided by practices that both pushed back on narrow conceptions of what home–school relationships could and should be and followed social justice leadership practices.

In line with her development and cultivation of extended relationships, Lisa responded to the pandemic in the fall of 2020 by opening the center to former students and older siblings who would normally be at elementary school but might not have internet access at home. Alternately, their parents might have had to work, and the siblings were too young to stay at home alone to do elementary school virtually. During preschool activities at Daia, the older students used their computers or laptops to complete their schoolwork with help from assigned staff, whom the students already knew and with whom they had relationships. The center seemed prepared for this level of activity, as I have documented a similar approach of involving older siblings and former students in center activities and events before the pandemic, during summers.

As shown above, the extended relationships at Daia lasted beyond the bounds of preschool, as former families were welcomed back to the center as a safe place for their elementary-aged children to go during the day. While the foundations of these continued relationships were developed before the pandemic, as evidenced by Nikkia's story and the continuous engagement of former students and older siblings as part of the community, practices during the pandemic reflected Souto-Manning's (2021) call for greater familism and interdependence, particularly the question "How might [educators and researchers] better attend to siblings and foster intergenerational learning opportunities?" Home–school practices during the pandemic positioned older siblings, who are often overlooked stakeholders in home–school relationships, as vital members of the community. Thus, these relationships represent a rupture in normative home–school practices, illustrating relationships that extend beyond the limitations of the Western school year and beyond the walls of the school to build an intergenerational learning community that includes former students and older siblings.

While the rupture from normative practice might have begun before the pandemic, the foundation of the relationships helped sustain them during the pandemic, a theme that will be demonstrated throughout the findings. Thus, the pandemic did not necessarily function as a shift in practices (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022) but provided an opportunity to reflect on how Lisa was already cultivating an intergenerational learning community, and how these practices can continue past the pandemic.

Re-orienting schooling to ethics of familism, collaboration, and interdependence

Similar to the literature on family engagement and leadership (DeNicolo et al., 2017; Long et al., 2016; Nicholson, 2016), care and familism emerged as a major theme throughout data collection. Considering feelings of care, I initially examined how families expressed feelings of what they specifically referred to as care, and what elements this entailed. One research participant, Mamadou, an immigrant from Guinea, had grown concerned with his daughter Fatima's readiness for kindergarten the next year. He came into Daia and met with Lisa, who listened to his concerns and devised a plan to make him and Fatima feel more prepared for the transition. In an interview, I asked him how he felt about the meeting. He expressed how he saw and felt care at the center:

> Mamadou: Yeah, yeah, Lisa, it's nice, kinda scared for a minute.
> Researcher: Yeah?
> Mamadou: Yeah, cause you never know.
> Researcher: That's true. How did she reassure you? Or how did you decide how you felt about it?
> Mamadou: It's just, because when I ask them my questions, about like how it's standing, and then . . . it's just all like psychological you know, parenting, you wanna, it's not like you don't care, but there's a certain way to ask a question to see if the person shows they care. Because I used to work at the nursing home.
> Researcher: You did? Oh, and you felt like they cared here?
> Mamadou: Yeah! You know, the same thing we parents ask about, like kids ask about their parents, how are you doing, and what are you up to? They do that here.

This exchange illustrated an understandable wariness or apprehension that many parents, particularly immigrant parents, may have or experience in their relationships with U.S. schools (Doucet, 2011a; Gallo, 2017, Tobin et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996). Mamadou, who was from Guinea but had been in the U.S. for almost 20 years and spoke Fulani at home, had worked in another field where he had to demonstrate and communicate care to family members. He connected his experience to how he felt Lisa showed care for him and his daughter at the center. As he said, "There's a certain way to ask a question to see if the person shows they care." In showing care and building trust at the center, Lisa needed to find ways to demonstrate care for families and children meaningfully, which Mamadou believed she did.

This form of care also relates to humanizing engagement practices (Gallo, 2017) and Freirean (1970) dialogue, or teachers demonstrating care by "risking an act of love" (p. 35). Allen (2007) drew on both Freire (1970) and Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) to illustrate the risk of dialogue for many families, particularly for parents or families of color. Given the historical harm of the school system, many families have little reason to trust the system or engage in any relationship with schools. In this interview, Mamadou appeared to risk this faith because he believed that Lisa answered his questions in a way that demonstrated her care for him and his daughter.

Another parent, Yasra, who spoke English and Urdu, came to the U.S. with her family from Karachi, Pakistan, in the last five years and identified as a refugee. In the following, she explained how she connected safety to care at the center, and she even recommended the center to other families in her community:

> I really like the center, and the center is really welcoming for everyone, even, we are planning to move house, but we all want to have our little one in the center because we found this is safe, this is caring, full of care, the teachers have a lot of care to give

> them, so we recommend, always recommend it to everyone. My one friend, she's also sending her three-year-old here.

Again, the connection between safety and care, ultimately leading to recommendation, demonstrated how care was felt by parents or caregivers. While my interviews with parents decreased during the pandemic, the themes of relational care clearly wove into extended relationships with families.

Before the pandemic, home–school relationships and care were also based in positioning the teacher or leader as a learner (Gallo, 2017), with an understanding that expectations were not only set by Lisa or the center. She often collected information through informal means (in conversation and relationships), as well as formal methods (continued surveys). Using this information, Lisa worked to build programming that reflected what families actually wanted from the center, saying that she tried to generate "some ideas as to what information we can actually use . . . if we really try to help parents, then we really need to know what they want to know. As opposed to what we think they want." Lisa's work aligns with Long and colleagues' (2016) framework of social justice leadership, which includes "positioning families as vital to the operation of the preschool; ensuring that their voices are sought and validated" (p. 181). Additionally, it exemplifies a form of care. To Lisa, care rested not only on relationships but also on providing resources and programming that families actually wanted or needed, not just what she thought families needed.

Alvarez Gutiérrez and colleagues (2022) connect authentic home-school relationships to leaders going beyond school during the pandemic, noting: "cultivating authentic relationships includes actionable care for individuals beyond academics . . . which was critical . . . in the time of COVID-19" (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022, p. 4). Lisa engaged in "actionable care," from opening the center as soon as possible to connecting families with resources during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, Lisa repeatedly referred to a desire to provide families with holistic tools and resources to cope with circumstances outside their control—tools and resources she often called "coping skills." This desire to help develop these coping skills became even more evident during the pandemic. She described how her holistic approach went beyond education toward actionable care:

It was not just caring for children; it needed a holistic approach. Dealing with behavior, dealing with families, dealing with education, dealing with . . . everything else that it comes with. Which, you know, as I came to find, families, being homeless, dealing with domestic issues, dealing with refugee families.

While the circumstances shifted during the pandemic, Lisa still worked to provide what she viewed as holistic resources to help families cope with circumstances outside their control—in this case, a worldwide pandemic that forced the closure of almost all in-person elementary schools, caused several parents or family members to lose or change jobs, and carried the threat of illness and possibly death.

This connection with and to resources aligned with parents/caregivers' feelings of care, as was the case before the pandemic. Multiple parents, including Yasra, spoke of the assistance the center provided them in helping them choose and register for a kindergarten program, specifically with paperwork. Valdés (1996) noted this paperwork is often a particular form of school gatekeeping that alienates immigrant families. In this example, "actionable care" extended beyond academics, demonstrating a political clarity (Bartolome, 1994; DeNicolo, et al, 2017) of what families needed. Due to pandemic restrictions, I was not able to talk to families about their feelings of care during the pandemic, but I still observed a consistent connection with resources "beyond academics."

A common theme throughout this paper is how the relationships cultivated before the pandemic allowed for this trust and care to continue and extend through the pandemic. As the circumstances shifted, the aim to provide families with actionable care remained the same.

Collaboration(s)

Lisa's desire to connect families with resources before and during the pandemic aligned with another part of Long and colleagues' (2013) social justice leadership framework: the creative use of funding and partnerships with local organizations. These collaborations, which began before the pandemic, also reflected Souto-Manning's (2021) question regarding how schooling can be re-oriented to an ethic of collaboration and interdependence. Many times during the years I spent at the center, Lisa found creative means to ensure students could attend activities, such as summer programming (during which time federal funding shifted) or field trips and other events. In addition to being creative with her resources, throughout my data collection, Lisa was continually meeting with other local organizations or leaders to pursue partnerships that would potentially benefit the center community.

In December 2019, Lisa recounted her plans to work with multiple local organizations that reflected the center community, from several organizations that reflected the multiple immigrant communities at Daia to a historically Black college that had programming and family events planned with the center for Spring 2020. These plans aligned with themes from the data, as I had documented Lisa's attempts to work with local racially and culturally reflective organizations throughout the initial data collection. Despite her general interest and commitment to generating and utilizing resources to support the center, Lisa seemed wary of resources that might cause harm to families and children at Daia. She explained that she wanted resources to benefit people who needed them, not just to be what she called "lip service." However, many of these efforts were suspended once Lisa had to focus on the survival of the center.

Unfortunately, a few months after she shared her plans for future collaborations, the COVID-19 global pandemic hit, causing the center, like most others in the U.S., to immediately close down for several weeks. Once Daia opened back up, the goals changed from expanding partnerships and resources to surviving and providing a community space for families during the pandemic. Wilinski and colleagues (2022) suggested that early childhood family engagement practices shifted during the pandemic because there was no clear script to follow, suggesting that the pandemic allowed educators and families to rewrite the script away from the unidirectional, school-centered family engagement of the past. In her planning, Lisa did rewrite the script, as she often had to problem-solve and find solutions on her own, but she had planted the seeds for this work before the pandemic, as shown above. Ultimately, the humanizing and, at times, transformative work that Lisa performed in cultivating home–school relationships before the pandemic helped support home–school relationships during the pandemic. Through engaging in practices that connect critical frameworks of home–school relationships with social justice leadership practices, Lisa laid the groundwork for continued engagement during a time when survival, whether it was the center's survival or actual survival, was paramount. In this, the pandemic functioned as a portal, not because practices were markedly different during the pandemic beyond responding to the changes in circumstance, but because it marked a shift or opening to help pay attention to and learn from these practices and means of cultivating home–school relationships.

At Daia, families were able to trust that Lisa would help them navigate the unclear way forward with schools as she had in the past, leveraging her existing knowledge of local resources with the ever-changing reality of the community and school system in the pandemic. Lisa's existing relationships and trust with families helped her connect many families with much-needed resources, highlighting early childhood leaders' vital role in communities during the pandemic. Home–school practices were often crucial for families, as "connections between home and school have been lifelines for many families during the pandemic, particularly as families navigate online learning and plan to meet their needs related to food insecurity, unstable housing, barriers to internet technology" (Vesely et al., 2021, p. 180).

Now, as society enters a new era, how this interconnectedness and interdependence can be maintained beyond times of crisis must be determined. These practices should continue beyond the survival and crisis mode that was characteristic of the pandemic to become the new "normal."

Also, while I aim not to focus on deficits, it is important to acknowledge disparities in access to resources, like technology. While many elementary schools were able to hold classes online, the center did not have the technical capacity to do so with students who could not come in during the day. Daia only had a few tablets or computers and did not have much guidance on virtual school programming from a state or federal body (though they did continue to conduct center visits via Zoom with state and federal licensing bodies). Lisa noted that, while state or federal programs had attempted to provide guidance during the pandemic, the center had often already solved the issue by the time this guidance was given. Despite this lack of technical support and direction, the trusting relationships that had been built before the pandemic and the often informal means of communication, like texting or chatting on the phone, continued between Lisa and families, even those who no longer had children attending preschool. These continued relationships indicated that the connection and communication practices they had established would endure through the pandemic.

Discussion

Many families took advantage of the center as a community hub during the pandemic, yet a smaller number of families never came back after the initial shutdown, despite Lisa's efforts to reach out or engage with them. Thus, while the bonds that had been forged before the pandemic mostly brought the Daia community closer together, some families were pushed further away by the global crisis.

Additionally, the theme of survival arose during the pandemic. While there were practices that could potentially be built on and continue humanizing practices and relationships from before the pandemic, the center was in survival mode from March 2020 onward. While a main theme of this paper is how strong relationships were cultivated through care, trust, and time before the pandemic, circumstances did change during the pandemic. However, many of these themes continued or were potentially extended due to the strong roots developed previously. Thus, using "Pandemic as Portal"(Souto-Manning, 2021) as a lens is not entirely accurate when many of transformative practices began long before the pandemic. However, I use the frame of "Pandemic as Portal" (Souto-Manning, 2021) to consider how not only Daia can grow beyond the pandemic but also how social justice leadership and home–school relationships can learn from these stories of potentiality.

Siblings and Intergenerational Learning

While the literature has suggested that schools offer child care for siblings at family events (Baker et al., 2016), older siblings are not often an integral part of the family engagement literature. However, the way in which older siblings and former students were considered and included as part of the Daia community suggests that older siblings can be key stakeholders in family engagement and that building and maintaining relationships with them is an important piece of developing trusting home–school relationships. For early childhood leaders, making a place for older siblings in home–school relationships demonstrates a commitment to the entire family. In the case of Daia, many older siblings were also former students at the center, so the relationships with caring adults were already present when they came back to the center.

Continuing to include older siblings and former students as part of the school or center communities will likely be a challenge going forward. Many of the restrictions that changed during the pandemic to allow older students to come into the centers (Marsh, et al., 2022) have not continued

past mask-wearing in schools. However, engaging older siblings and former students allows educators and leaders to grow extended relationships with families and demonstrate "actionable care" (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022), which does not end with the construct of school. Thus, early childhood leaders will likely have to be creative in how they continue to engage and involve older siblings and former students as part of the intergenerational learning community, rather than returning to the way things have been done. Lisa's work at Daia offers glimpses of creative means of integrating intergenerational learning and rethinking who is considered "family", including developing relationships with older siblings and inviting them into the space. In the next section, I return to some of the challenges in this rethinking or reimagination of home-school relationships.

Re-Orienting Early Schooling and Leadership Toward Ethics of Familism and Care

Teaching or replicating care, trust, and extended relationships is difficult. The world is not full of people like Lisa, and the intangible aspects of her relationship-building are difficult to quantify. Assuming that everyone is willing to engage in the emotional labor required both for navigating the pandemic and nurturing continued relationships is likely not realistic (it is also important to acknowledge this labor). Even Lisa noted how much can be required in preschool leadership and how she had to take care of herself, stating, "And sometimes I tend to take on more than I have to, and I'm learning that even in extending myself, I've learned how to extend myself but not extend myself to the point where it's intruding on my life."

In addition, there are not as many early childhood leadership education programs as there are teacher education programs, and translating the implications into methods with which to prepare preschool directors is challenging. However, some takeaways can be communicated to early childhood educators and leaders, namely the emphasis on care that is genuine and felt by parents and trust that is based in extended relationships. As part of the extended relationships at the center, Lisa consistently supported families in navigating the school system and the transition to kindergarten, as well as with local legal systems and other institutions of the state. She aided undocumented family members in legal representation and supported parents in advocating for their children amid harsh discipline and suspensions. This navigation was similar to the advocacy that is a central part of courageous or social justice leadership in early childhood (Long et al, 2016; Souto-Manning & Mordan-Delgadillo, 2016).

Furthermore, the assistance continued throughout the pandemic, as Lisa helped families navigate local and state resources not only for their preschool children but also for older siblings. This work was aligned with an understanding of institutional dynamics, which also was present in Lisa's reflections on state or federal support during the pandemic, as she noted that they often were too late to address issues that she had solved in the moment given her knowledge of the local institutions and the resources available to families.

In considering these take-aways from Lisa's relationships and practice at Daia, I ponder how to translate many of Lisa's practices into family engagement teacher education material. Research on family engagement courses has demonstrated that the courses have the potential to help disrupt damaging, dominant perspectives that pre-service or in-service teachers might hold (Evans, 2013; Vesely, 2021). However, in addition to this perspective, the possibilities of teaching advocacy or accessing resources in these kinds of classes is not yet well understood. Perhaps another aspect of rejecting a return to normalcy includes how examining models of social justice leadership, such as Lisa's, can help students strive toward this work in their own practice.

Repositioning Parents and Caregivers in School Communities

As stated above, Lisa engaged in practices that positioned herself as a learner with parents and caregivers before the pandemic, illustrating reciprocal home–school relationships (Doucet, 2011a; Greene, 2013). Incorporating leadership perspectives, Lisa also positioned families as central to the

community and actively sought their voices (Long et al., 2016). However, this is also an area with the greatest potentiality for growth. One of the tensions between the preschool/school leadership body of work and the body of work critiquing mainstream home–school practices includes the role of power. The social justice leadership body of research has argued that leaders can draw on their power to support and fight for children, particularly with an ethic of care (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Nicholson, 2017; Souto Manning & Morgan-Delgadillo, 2016). In contrast, work criticizing home–school practices has emphasized the imbalance of power in home–school relationships, as well as the school-centricity of traditional frameworks of engagement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Graue & Hawkins, 2010; Greene, 2013). Moreover, this body of work has highlighted the organizing power of parents and caregivers for collective action or leadership (Dyrness, 2011; Fernández & López, 2016; Fernández & Paredes Scribner, 2018; Olivos, 2006, 2009; Warren & Goodman, 2018). Lisa's work at Daia reflected more of the social justice leadership model of engaging in practices with and for families, with some centrality of power. Lisa's work before and during the pandemic illustrates this ethic of care but still leaves room for growth in how parents and caregivers can be positioned in the school community. While Lisa often practiced humanizing family engagement in her relationships with families, positioning herself as a learner (Gallo, 2017), there is potentiality in utilizing these foundations of humanizing home–school relationships to promote parent and caregiver organizing power and orient toward new positioning of the parents/caregivers. Given the foundational ethic of care that was cultivated before the pandemic and sustained the center during the pandemic, this care can likely help guide the ways that parents and caregivers are positioned in a new era.

Looking Ahead

This work highlights the existing bonds between preschool leadership and families at an early childcare center in the United States and examines how these bonds helped support the center community during the pandemic. It also illustrates the ways in which the center leadership often had to act locally to make decisions and support families while not receiving the resources or support that elementary schools did. Although many community hubs, such as K–12 schools and libraries, went virtual in 2020, early childhood centers around the country sustained neighborhoods and communities during the pandemic since they were among the few places where families could bring their children when they had to go back to work.

However, as noted at the beginning of this article, early childhood leaders' and workers' pay is often comparatively low next to K–12 educators, especially for African American early educators (Austin et al., 2019). Considering this imbalance, particularly as it reflects racial injustice, provides an opportunity to examine work around ethics of care through a lens of Black womanism (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Collins, 1991). Given my limited positionality, I am likely not the right person to lead this work, but centering the role of race and racism, as well as the voices and experiences of African American early educators and leaders should be a necessary waypoint for research around social justice leadership and family engagement in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A significant and powerful body of work has considered the lived experiences of teachers of color, specifically Black teachers and leaders working in a historically harmful system of education (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Haddix et al., 2016; Souto-Manning & Mordan-Delgadillo, 2016; Wilson, 2016). An overlap of this body of work that considers Black womanism (Collins, 1991) and ethics of care from racialized perspectives (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020) with work around social justice leadership in early childhood has the potential to illuminate new ways forward in leadership and home–school relationships.

Regarding potentialities, calls to reimagine family engagement existed long before the pandemic. Doucet (2011b) noted over a decade ago how dominant home–school approaches that create "cults" of mainstream practice further marginalize those who are already historically marginalized and pushed to take the risk of connecting with their child's schools, exacerbating the issue of school-centricity and the fallacious "those parents don't care" ideology. In making this point, Doucet (2011b) argued that these "cults" also obscure the imaginative potential for different kinds of home–school relationships. Before the pandemic, Lisa and Daia were engaging in some moments of potential, pushing back against home–school relationships dictated by traditional frameworks of involvement. These moments laid the groundwork for strong relationships and survival during the pandemic. Thus, I call for educational researchers to continue documenting this work and to question what the role of parents and caregivers will look like in the wake of the pandemic as new possibilities of engagement are imagined.

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An Equity Accelerator Strategy: Parents Developing Careers in an Early Childhood Literacy Program

Journal of Family Diversity in Education, 2023/2024
Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 69-77

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Introduction

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is an early childhood literacy program delivered through home visits to families who have children ages 2-5. The program was founded in Israel in the 1960s by Avima Lombard as a research project at Hebrew University. Lombard believed that parents – or other adults who have primary caregiving responsibility such as grandparents or other relatives -- have an innate desire to do all they can for their children. She sought to develop a program to support families in their most important role as their child's first teacher. HIPPY is now operating in 15 countries and 7 languages, offering tools so that families can help their children learn foundational concepts that will ready them for school.

Health and social service organizations are increasingly realizing the importance of cultivating an equitable and diverse workforce that identifies with or comes from the communities they serve (National Academy for State Health Policy, 2021). This is especially true for the field of early childhood home visiting where the preparation, recruitment, and retention of qualified and motivated home visitors is key to the success of the home visiting program (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2022; Connolly & Chaitowitz, 2022). One of the features that makes HIPPY unique among similar programs is an emphasis on hiring home visitors from its pool of participating families. HIPPY is mindful of the importance of providing supports to these community-based home visitors, who are often entering the workforce for the first

What is Early Childhood Home Visiting?

Home visiting is a service delivery strategy that connects parents and primary caregivers to a designated support person – a home visitor – to help adults and children thrive. Home visitors work with families in their homes or at another location identified by the family. As frontline staff, home visitors use an assortment of tools to assess needs and then, with the families' input, tailor services and support. They provide direct education and assistance to encourage positive parenting practices, support a strong parent-child bond, and make homes safer. In addition, home visitors help to connect families to services in the community such as early care and education, health and mental health care, domestic violence resources, and other needed services.

The Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness project of the US Department of Health and Human Services reviews the research on home visiting models and identifies those – like HIPPY – that have strong evidence of effectiveness. Effectiveness is demonstrated in many ways – positive parenting practices, child development and school readiness, improved child and maternal health, reductions in child maltreatment, and reductions in juvenile delinquency and family violence.

For general information on home visiting including the numbers of families served, please visit the 2022 Home Visiting Yearbook. (National Home Visiting Resource Center, 2022) For specific information on the effectiveness of individual home visiting models, please visit the Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) website of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022)

time. As such, HIPPY offers opportunities for program participants-turned-home visitors to continue their own personal and professional development as well as career planning.

Because of its positive impact for both children and parents, HIPPY has become recognized by the federal HomVEE research review as a replicable evidence-based two-generational program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). HIPPY can also work as an ***equity accelerator*** – a program that can help individuals transition out of poverty and into careers. As such, it accelerates equity at the personal and program levels.

- *Individual equity accelerator*. Individuals who have an especially positive experience with the HIPPY program and want to share that with their peers, apply for and are hired to work as home visitors. While working for HIPPY, they learn essential hard and soft skills that can help them find future employment which can enhance the economic well-being of their family. Some HIPPY programs in the United States are connected with the AmeriCorps program which offers its members education awards that can be used for college costs or student loan payments.
- *Program equity accelerator*. Typically, social service programs struggle to build an equitable and diverse workforce that is reflective of their customers. HIPPY participants-turned-home visitors over time may transition into jobs in child care, education, health care, and social services bringing their lived experience and diverse backgrounds to those fields.

As local communities, states, and even countries seek to promote opportunities for advancement that embrace equitable approaches for both children and parents, HIPPY provides a promising model that is worthy of consideration. What follows is a description of the HIPPY model, a summary of the evidence, and examples of how the model is implemented in Australia and Canada in ways that emphasize the essential role HIPPY can play in accelerating equity at the individual and program level. The paper ends with quotes from HIPPY parents-turned-home visitors illustrating the many benefits to participation as articulated by them, and insights on future directions for practice, research, systems, and policy.

The HIPPY Model

Lombard started the HIPPY program in Israel at a time when families were immigrating to the country from all over the world. She was a leader in the Israeli early childhood field and recognized that children had very different abilities and readiness to engage in the classroom. Some children walked in and were ready to learn, and others needed much more support. Lombard realized that the home countries had different approaches to, and philosophies of, education and she thought that was contributing to the disparities. To ensure all children could be successful in the Israeli education system, she believed they needed to start earlier -- and in the home -- to ready children before they arrived at school. While Lombard had experience in the early years of Head Start in the United States, she wanted something different in Israel. In the 1960s Head Start approach, children went to the Head Start center as the place for learning; HIPPY would focus on the parent as the teacher and the home as the classroom.

Lombard initially envisioned HIPPY as a national program to serve families throughout Israel. For decades it was funded by the Israel Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs with additional support from local communities. In 1988, Lombard spent a sabbatical year in the United States on a Ford Foundation fellowship with the idea that she would start a HIPPY pilot program in the United States. The National Council of Jewish Women was committed to working with Lombard to support the growth of HIPPY and while there was interest in some states – Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, and

Oklahoma – it did not grow into a national model in the United States with steady government funding. There was interest as well in starting the program in the Netherlands and South Africa.

Fidelity to the HIPPY model was important to Lombard. From the beginning, all coordinators were required to go to Israel to be trained by Lombard herself. They would not be able to start up their program in their home community until Lombard visited the program and personally trained all the home visitors. As demand for the HIPPY program grew, Lombard started to hold two-week workshops for aspiring HIPPY coordinators at Hebrew University in Israel. After each two-week workshop, Lombard would decide if the people trained were qualified and able to operate a HIPPY program.

As time passed, there became a need to create a broader network to support meaningful expansion of HIPPY programs around the world. Miriam Westheimer, who had spent time in both the United States and Israel working alongside Lombard, was tapped to become the first director of HIPPY USA, and later was invited to become the first director of HIPPY International. Westheimer's approach to collaboration, systems building, and network thinking supported rapid expansion such that today HIPPY is operating in 15 countries. She emphasized the core components and was careful to not over-reach to make HIPPY more than what it could do best – provide support to parents via storybooks and activities that would empower parents to ready their children for school. She encouraged HIPPY implementers to find ways that HIPPY could fit within existing programs and systems and not layer on onerous requirements such as unique HIPPY assessments, or services that could be provided more easily by others. And she helped shift the organization mindset from employing parents as home visitors because it is more economical and scalable, to employing parents as home visitors because it can influence workforce diversity and create important career opportunities for families.

Today the program is designed around four core components:

1. **A Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum:** Developmentally appropriate easy to use educational activity packets and storybooks form the foundation of the program that serves families with children ages 2 to 5. Nine storybooks and 30 educational activity packets guide parents in doing fun, engaging activities with their children. Typically, parents spend 15-20 each day for 5 days per week on these activities. Individual HIPPY programs are encouraged to adapt the materials so that they are both developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive, reflecting the culture and language of participating families.
2. **Role Play as the Primary Method of Training:** All home visitors participate in regular training by a professional HIPPY coordinator so that they can implement the model with fidelity. Training includes a review of the curriculum to be implemented the next week, explanation of the rationale behind each activity so that they can help families understand how the activity supports children's development, and role plays to practice how they will deliver the curriculum. After the weekly training with the local HIPPY coordinator, each home visitor tries out the weeks' activities with a practice child, sometimes her own child. The following week, the home visitor brings any questions or concerns about the activities to the weekly training before meeting with her assigned families.

   After the training, home visitors meet one-on-one with families to provide a set of lessons that match the children's age. Through role play, the home visitors demonstrate how to share the material with their children. Families learn about what to expect in terms of their children's learning and development, how to introduce activities that are lively and joyful, and how the various activities are designed to reinforce skills and introduce children to new concepts.

3. **Coordinators and Community-Based Home Visitors**: HIPPY program coordinators are professionals in the fields of early childhood, community development, general education, or social work. They supervise and train the home visitors who are from the community. Ideally, HIPPY home visitors are former program participants who had positive experiences implementing the curriculum and want to share HIPPY with other parents. In places that are especially challenged by illiteracy, the home visitors might be community members with more formal education.
4. **Home Visits and Group Meetings:** Weekly home visits are at the heart of the HIPPY program. Families are met in the comfort of their own homes which makes the program more accessible and validates the home as an important place for children's growth and learning. During these one-on-one visits, home visitors can build trusting relationships which can then lead to connections with other resources and referrals as needed.

   Group meetings are arranged bi-weekly or monthly to offer an opportunity to socialize together. These meetings typically have activities for guardians and children separately and joint parent-child activities. This gives the program coordinator an opportunity to meet all the families and observe firsthand the interactions between home visitors and families.

HIPPY can be a stand-alone program, or it can be integrated into existing early childhood programs or community-based family support organizations. This flexibility ensures that each place the model is implemented can determine the most appropriate use of the program. For example, in some cases, HIPPY is tied to the school system as with the Dallas Independent School District. In other cases, HIPPY is linked to social service programs as in Milwaukee's Youth and Family Centers. A video about HIPPY in the United States can be found here. Links to HIPPY programs in each of the countries can be found here.

Evidence of Impact

Decades of research shows that the HIPPY program works. Children who participate in HIPPY do better in school, and families who participate are better prepared to support their children throughout their education and feel more confident in their parenting. Home visitors, themselves once parents in the program, also benefit from their experience in HIPPY.

Major areas of impact:

Child Outcomes

- School readiness
- Promotion to first grade
- Social-emotional development
- Academic testing

Parent Outcomes

- Knowledge of child development
- Parent-child engagement
- Social-emotional development
- Social connections

Home Visitor Outcomes

- Employability
- Social Mobility
- Community advocacy

Recent studies of the model in Australia demonstrate that HIPPY contributes to a transformational experience for parents, building their self-confidence and readying them for workforce participation. The Australia study found that only 30 percent of home visitors nominated 'wanting a job' as a reason they became a home visitor, but after serving in this capacity, almost 65 percent indicated a desire to obtain further employment (Connolly & Chaitowitz, 2022).

Outcomes for children are noteworthy as well. A recent quasi-experimental of HIPPY in Florida demonstrated that the odds of passing the Florida school readiness screening process were almost two times greater for children who participated in the HIPPY program, and their odds of being promoted to first grade were almost five times greater than a matched sample (Payne et al, 2020). In Australia, where HIPPY is a federally funded program operating in communities with greatest need, a recent study showed that after two years of program participation, HIPPY children were at or slightly above the national norm (Connolly & Chaitowitz, 2022).

While HIPPY focuses primarily on school readiness, it has been found to have social-emotional outcomes as well. For example, in a study of HIPPY in Wisconsin during the COVID-19 pandemic, program participants demonstrated reduced parental stress, reduced child externalizing behaviors, and improve child adaptive functioning over the course of the program. Additionally, parents who reported significant symptoms of depression at baseline demonstrated a decline in depression over time (Koop et al, 2022).

An Emphasis on Equity – The Unique Role of Community-Based Home Visitors

Most evidence-based home visiting programs hire staff who have degrees in nursing, social work, early education, or related fields. HIPPY, on the other hand, hires and trains program participants to become home visitors. By hiring mothers (and sometimes fathers) who are from the community and who successfully participated in the home visiting program with their children, HIPPY can employ staff who have the lived-experience and cultural awareness that is important for relationship building with new parents.

Lived-experience matters. HIPPY home visitors travel the same roads – literally and figuratively – as the families they support. They speak the same language, share the same customs, and know well the joys and challenges of navigating parenting. They may have struggled to access services and supports, and likely have suggestions for how to overcome barriers. This gives them unique perspective to understand what families in their community are facing and to know the best ways to offer guidance and support.

HIPPY recognizes the importance of investing in building the skills of the community-based home visitors so that they can feel prepared, stick with the work, and use the HIPPY experience as a launching pad for future employment. HIPPY teaches the home visitors about essential hard and soft skills. Hard skills include things like setting up meetings, keeping a calendar, planning an agenda, taking notes, and reporting on progress. Soft skills include things such as building trusting relationships, listening, understanding and holding boundaries, practicing resilience, and expressing agency. What follows are two concrete examples of the HIPPY program in action in Australia and Canada.

Australia Demonstrates the Concept of the Individual Equity Accelerator

HIPPY Australia was started in 1998 by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, and since 2008 has enjoyed stable funding from the Australian government. From the beginning, the program focused

on building capacity and innovations, including with their parents-turned-home visitors, or tutors as they are called in Australia.

Australia's Pathways to Possibilities (P2P) program represents the most targeted approach to ensuring HIPPY tutors are supported to develop skills to match their personal and professional goals. "When creating P2P, it was important that it help parents to build their confidence and skills to support their journey, whatever that might be. Some might have a goal of getting a degree in mental health, others might want to be better at public speaking, and still others might want to know how to make nutritious meals for their family. Whatever their goal, P2P is there for them," said Laura Romeo-Cocciardi, Manager of Network Engagement, Brotherhood of St. Laurence.

As such, P2P focuses on preparing parent tutors to implement the HIPPY program with fidelity, while at the same time supporting them in building human capital (new skills and knowledge), extending social capital (new networks and relationships), deepening psychological capital (new understanding of self, values, and motivations), all in service of readying parents for futures of their choice, including but not limited to enhanced labor market competitiveness. The motivation for this comes from the Australia Commonwealth's desire to increase education and labor force participation among women with children and to reduce welfare dependence.

Tutors and the site coordinator develop a Working Together Statement that clarifies the role of the tutor and the coordinator and what can be expected of each. From this, they develop a Pathways Plan that spells out the goals and aspirations of the tutor related to five areas of skills and knowledge including: core HIPPY tutor skills, self-development, learning, relationships, and work. The plan is reviewed by the HIPPY program coordinator four times over a two-year period to ensure the tutor is on track with learning. "The reason this works so well is because tutors are able to practice the skills that they want to build as they are working," said Romeo-Cocciardi. In addition, an on-line learning management system includes modules that support tutors in developing new knowledge related to their goals and aspirations. Flexible funds are available at each site to support the tutors' continued learning, development, and job readiness.

A study of 412 tutors employed in 2019 found HIPPY improved confidence and increased job readiness because of their participation as a tutor (Connolly & Chaitowitz, 2022):

- 95% agreed or strongly agreed that their job readiness had improved.
- 92% agreed or strongly agreed that HIPPY had improved their confidence.
- 65% indicated they would like to obtain employment after the HIPPY program (just 30% were employed prior to working for HIPPY)
- 26% plan to enroll in further study.

Oftentimes, at the end of their two-year position with HIPPY, tutors are hired for other positions within the host organization. Others choose to continue their education, and often do their student placement in the host organization. "I have seen tutors go on to become nurses, or work in the field of mental health or drug rehabilitation. They are doing extraordinary things in their communities," said Romeo-Cocciardi.

Becky Belcher started as a tutor in 2017 and moved up to become a coordinator overseeing a team of four tutors and a play helper in 2018. She describes her role supporting the tutors with P2P:

> Within the first few months of employment, I invite the tutor to complete a self-assessment where she can indicate her skills across the five areas. We then sit down together and use that as the basis of conversation. We look at opportunities for setting goals. Oftentimes in the first year the goals are about work-life balance and health and well-being; the second-year goals might be about looking for training opportunities

> and employment. Regular check-ins during supervision meetings offer encouragement and provide accountability.

Belcher also shared her reflections on working with another tutor:

> Steph started with us as a young parent. She had previous inconsistent work as a cleaner and limited other workplace experiences. During her first year as a tutor, she and her partner focused on getting healthy. Then in the second year, she set high goals and enrolled in a dual diploma course for business and human resources. HIPPY provided funding to help her enroll in the program. Some of us wondered if it would be the right fit for Steph's bubbly personality, but she loved data entry, scheduling, organization, and project management tasks. A few weeks before the end of the school year, she was hired by a company for an administrative role. Twelve months later she was promoted to be a manager over 25 people. Steph tells us that it's the support and scaffolding of P2P that helped her develop the self-confidence and motivation to build her career.

The HIPPY program is working hard to provide opportunities personal and professional growth.

HIPPY Canada Partners with Red River College to Offer Badges for Home Visitors

HIPPY Canada was started in 2001 and since that time has transformed more than 40,000 lives, providing isolated mothers opportunities to connect with peers, receive support in their critical role as their child's first teacher, and develop the agency to be change-makers for their families. The program is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. It is a project of the Mothers Matter Centre (MMC) and is offered at 38 sites in 7 provinces (Mothers Matters Center Fact Sheet).

In partnership with Red River College (RRC) Polytechnic, MMC created an accredited professional development program to provide cohort-based training to graduates of HIPPY who are hired to be home visitors in their communities. Home visitors can receive micro-credentials and digital badges upon completion of the professional development series, setting them up for further study in post-secondary institutions and additional employment opportunities.

Expert instructors and a learning management system ensure home visitors receive quality, accessible content. The core training series includes two levels of study delivered during 42 hours of instruction. Courses addresses: basics of home visiting; adult education; science of early childhood development; violence against women; immigrant, settlement, and integration; and building bridges with first nations peoples. Additional courses focus on recognizing signs of mental health challenges (Mental Health First Aid); building self-confidence, problem-solving, and motivation; and leadership strengths and capacity.

Parents Finding Their Power and Exercising Their Leadership

Across the continents where HIPPY is implemented, parents are finding their power and exercising their leadership as they transition from program participant, to HIPPY home visitor, to employment in related fields. Power and leadership show up for HIPPY parents in all aspects of their lives and persists over time. Interviews for this spotlight that were conducted with HIPPY families makes this abundantly clear:

Increasing Social Connection: "I moved to Alabama when my son was born. I didn't know anyone. I was a stay-at-home mom. When my son was four-years-old, one of the ladies at the library asked me if I would want to do HIPPY with them. I was excited because it would give me a chance to meet other moms in the community. I was feeling really isolated, secluded. A girlfriend and I started HIPPY together. The home visitor came to my friend's house where we had weekly meetings. I loved

the program, and my son loved it too. It got me out into the community and around other people, which was important."

Building Self-Confidence: "HIPPY helped me develop my voice and opened a doorway for me to find my path to go further and pursue a nursing career. I always wanted that, but as a young mom, I felt lost in a bubble with the baby, and I didn't have the self-confidence to move forward. My program coordinator gave me the guidance and encouragement that I needed to build confidence in myself. When I was nervous about going to a placement during my mental health studies, she ringed me the day before, the day of, and the day after to tell me all would be fine. She believed in me, and that helped me to believe in myself."

Helping Other Parents: "Having HIPPY in my life helped to build my confidence and power. Now I can work with other HIPPY parents to help them build their power and be involved in their children's lives. I can help them feel confident in showing up for parent-teacher meetings, reading books to their children, and advocating for their family."

Sparking a Commitment to Helping Community: "HIPPY was so much more for me than a job or a program I could share with my children. Everyone was an 'auntie,' 'grandma,' or 'cousin.' We supported and encouraged each other. They wrapped their arms around me. Now I'm paying back and wrapping my arms around other families in my community."

Expanding Exposure to New Work Opportunities: "Without HIPPY, I would have never found my way to the first pre-kindergarten position. It was HIPPY's work with parents and kids, and realizing just how much you can help them, that made me want to be in the classroom."

Future Directions for Practice, Research, Systems, and Policy

When HIPPY was originally developed in the 1960s, its goal was to help young children develop their cognitive skills so that they would be able to engage actively in quality early childhood settings which would then prepare them for success in school. Its uniqueness, at the time, was to focus on parents and the home environment. Today and moving forward, this focus on parents has become another central goal of the program. Promoting parents to become home visitors is now a core component of the HIPPY model, even if the extent to which programs invest in this parent-home visitor component varies greatly from country to country. Looking ahead, this will play a more central role in describing and training for program implementation.

There are countless success stories of parents who grew and developed because of their HIPPY experience. The generally accepted wisdom is that individuals who persevere and thrive when doing an activity that at first felt intimidating they become more confident and secure in their own abilities to change and grow. In HIPPY, parents are highly motivated because they start working with their own child. And they feel safe doing the activities because it is unsupervised and in the privacy of their own home. Many of them then feel they could do the same for others, their neighbors, and peers. The training for home visitors is structured and supportive with ample time for role play so that it almost guarantees success. At present this developmental flow remains a strong hunch of people with much experience. This is an important new area for future research.

As social systems grapple with ongoing learnings about and exposure to systemic racism, there is an increasing call for including service recipients in the design, development, promotion, and research on social programs. A simple phrase that captures this notion is "Nothing about us, without us." HIPPY, like all social programs, needs to undergo a serious review of the underlying assumptions embedded in the early years of its development. HIPPY is still somewhat deficit based. It assumes that schools are okay, and children need to be helped to get ready for them. The question we should really be asking is not are children ready for schools, but are schools ready for all children. HIPPY

parents-turned-home visitors can also offer this growing movement a ready-made pool of potential parent leaders -- parent leaders who have had firsthand experience teaching their own children, working with other parents in their community, and engaging in community development activities. These parents need to hold schools accountable to teach all children.

More broadly, the decades of experience working with community-based home visitors have much to share with the field of family support and home visiting. Too often, one hears about debates whether professional or community-based home visitors are best suited to deliver home visiting services to families. Rather than an either/or decision, HIPPY offers a both/and approach. Both bring valuable expertise to any community-based program. The professionals bring significant content expertise in child development and school readiness, and the community-based home visitors bring their expertise of the lived experiences in their communities, its strengths and challenges and their own awareness of systemic barriers.

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