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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.

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Volume 6, Number 2 – Winter 2024

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Editors' Note

The JFDE is pleased to share with you our 2024 winter issue. As we continue to navigate attacks on historically marginalized families and communities, it is even more urgent we continue to publish and promote scholarship that centers, highlights, and resist dehumanizing, criminalizing, and deficit policies and rhetoric. We hope that readers can see how each article centers the various ways that families and parents engage in supporting their children. Collectively, these articles as well as the work of our community spotlight feature, challenge deficit orientations of historically marginalized families and communities.

In our first featured article, "You Don't Need the Words to be in the Book": The Cultivation of Textual Agency during Families' Shared Text Experiences," Kira Baker-Doyle, Sarai Coba-Rodriguez, Andrea Vaughan, and Evelyn Pollins draw from perspectives on culturally sustaining family literacies to examine the role that shared texts played in co-learning among families in Read, Make, and Play (RMP), a bilingual family literacy program in Chicago, IL. Dr. Baker-Doyle and her colleagues found that families cultivate textual agency through adapting, re-storying, and integrating texts and materials into everyday routines and rituals, which transforms hierarchies of knowledge between family members and texts.

Next, Sue Nichols, Karen Dooley, and Hannah Soong's article, "Seesawing (Dis)connections: Digital Parental Involvement in a Culturally Diverse School Community", addresses the limitations of the extant research on digital parental involvement by examining how families in a case study school are oriented to digital technology, how cultural and linguistic resources impact home-school connections, and how a learning management system impacts digital inclusion in a diverse school community. Dr. Nichols and her collegues' findings point to the heterogeneity of school-home connections particularly as it relates to digital involvement.

Our third featured piece comes from Jasmine Alvarado and Yalda Kaveh. In their article entitled "Beyond "Engaged/Involved": Latina Immigrant Mothers' Negotiations of Family-Bilingual Program Relations During the COVID-19 Pandemic", Drs. Alvarado and Kaveh, focuses on the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers. Their work highlights the counter-stories of immigrant Latina mothers in dual language education programs. Drs. Alvarado and Kaveh call for the continued interrogation and reconfiguration of school-led forms of engagement to ensure that racially minoritized families engage in shared leadership and school governance.

Lastly, Leta Hooper and Brenda Muzeta's article, "Using Queen Sugar as a Lens to Counter Hegemonic Conceptions of Black Fathers' Involvement in P-12 Schools," engages in an analysis of the *Queen Sugar*. Drs. Hooper and Muzeta shed light on how excerpts of the show challenge narratives and images on Black fathers' relationships with their children, particularly their Black sons. Implications of this work illustrate how excerpts of *Queen Sugar* can be used in specific teacher

education courses to give pre-service teachers multiple opportunities to learn about the dynamics of Black families, Black fathers' parenting practices, and contributions to their families and communities.

Finally, our winter issue concludes with our "Community Spotlight" feature. 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. Featured in this issue is "The Black American Tree Project" (BATP), contributed by L. Danyetta Najoli. This feature provides an overview of BATP's a unique, participatory educational experience that seeks to foster understanding, respect, truth, racial healing, and reconciliation about the experience of Black Americans from pre-colonial Africa to the present day. Danyetta provides a first-person account of the experiences and ideas that helped shape the development of this project, an overview of the BAPT experience, and reflection on the impact and challenges of this work in local communities.

We hope that you enjoy the winter 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

"You Don't Need the Words to be in the Book": The Cultivation of Textual Agency during Families' Shared Text Experiences

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Abstract
In recent years, there has been significant interest in designing critical, asset-based family literacy and engagement programs that transform systemic racial and economic inequities and affirm and sustain marginalized families' cultural and linguistic practices. This study draws from perspectives on culturally sustaining family literacies to examine the role that shared texts played in co-learning among families in Read, Make, and Play (RMP), a bilingual family literacy program in Chicago, IL. As a collaborative practitioner-researcher team, we use qualitative methods to study the experience of parents/caregivers in two cohorts from 2021–2022. Our findings suggest that families cultivate textual agency through adapting, re-storying, and integrating texts and materials into everyday routines and rituals, which transforms hierarchies of knowledge between family members and texts. This study has implications for transformative family literacy and engagement work, research, and theory-building.

Keywords: Family Literacies, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, Text Analysis, Children's Literature, Family Engagement

Introduction

Family engagement and literacy programs in the United States have long been criticized for deficit-oriented approaches that dehumanize and disempower marginalized people (Auerbach, 1995; Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022; Delgado-Gaitan, 2005; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Jarrett et al., 2015; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017). As such, practitioners and scholars have sought to better understand family and community literacies as a means to construct more asset-oriented and transformative programming. Our study delves deeply into one particular aspect of family literacy and engagement work: the role of shared texts in fostering agency and connections. Texts and literacies have served as knowledge authorities in formal academic settings (Luke et al., 1983). Thus, they can promote a deficit approach to family literacy by advancing a "one-right-way" understanding of cultural knowledge or practices. On the other hand, reading, making, and remaking texts in ways that center and affirm the everyday lives of families – particularly marginalized families – has the potential to do the opposite: humanize families and transform relationships and power hierarchies. This study examines a bilingual family literacy program that centered on family stories and *everydayness* (Corntassel & Scow, 2017) as

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caregivers[1] and their children engaged in co-learning (learning together), play with culturally sustaining texts and materials.

The Read, Make, and Play (RMP) program was a family literacy program that provided bookbags full of culturally relevant texts, games, and crafts to families in Chicago and offered a six-week, online, bilingual series of conversational meetings for families (caregivers and their families were invited to participate). These meetings explored how the families used the materials at home and discussed conceptual literacy strategies (such as playing, family storytelling, and questioning). We conducted a collaborative practitioner-researcher inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Baumann & Duffy, 2001) of the experiences of caregivers in the program over the course of two years. In this paper, we examine the experiences of caregivers in two cohorts through instrumental case studies (Compton-Lilly, 2021). We ask, "*What did co-learning look like among RMP families, and what role did the materials play in their co-learning experiences*?" As such, we examined the role that the materials played in families' co-learning, paying particular attention to critical text use, the sustainment of culture, and relationships. Our findings provide insight into the role that "textual agency," or a sense of ownership over a text or story, plays in cultivating family literacy and relationships. The identification of textual agency and its features has implications for text selection, design, and use in culturally sustaining family literacy and engagement programs and for theoretical frameworks of family literacy.

Review of the Literature

Shared Text Reading in Diverse Families

This study draws on literature exploring shared text reading in diverse families, particularly Black and Latinx families. The last 40 years of research demonstrate that children's reading is positively impacted by reading aloud with teachers, peers, and family (Clark, 1987; Teale, 1984) and that being read to by caregivers at home is positively connected to children's academic preparedness and performance in school (Morrow & Gambrell, 2002; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Dixon-Krause, Januszka, and Chae (2010), in a study of diverse families of many different races but primarily Hispanic/Latino and African American families with children ages three to five years old, found that caregivers reading in dyads with their children engaged dialogically through back-and-forth experience with the text, typically with the caregivers initiating or prompting discussion.

Importantly, the choice of text matters. Children tend to prefer and be more motivated to read texts that reflect their personal experiences (Purves & Beach, 1972). In a study of 10 African American families whose caregivers engaged in a family literacy program that specifically promoted African American authors, illustrators, and stories, McNair (2011) found that caregivers and their children (who were in kindergarten through second grade) collaboratively negotiated the process of choosing books together and that families were motivated to choose books that connected to their own lives. Factors that families noted when describing their book selection included gender (e.g., girls choosing books about girls), personal experiences (e.g., children choosing books in which characters have hobbies or milestones similar to their own), and relationships (e.g., books that feature similar family structures or important loved ones).

Shared book reading among families can also act as a mechanism for passing on cultural knowledge. In another analysis of the same dataset, McNair (2013) found that African American caregivers in this family literacy program reported an increase in time spent reading with their children over the course of the program and that caregivers used intentional comprehension strategies to support their children's literacy development. Furthermore, when supported in selecting books that connected to their families' experiences and positively represented African Americans, caregivers reported passing on knowledge about African American authors and illustrators and sharing

experiences and cultural knowledge through reading with their children.

Agency in Shared Text Reading

Shared family reading has the potential to strengthen caregivers' confidence and agency as active participants in the literate lives of their families. In a study of a Latinx caregiver literacy project, Larrotta and Ramirez (2009) found that Latino/a caregivers identified as having "low-socioeconomic status and low literacy skills" benefited from learning reading and literacy strategies in this context. Through engaging in Spanish with other Spanish-speaking caregivers and using books selected for and highlighting relevant cultural experiences, these caregivers grew in both their discrete literacy skills (e.g., vocabulary, reading comprehension, etc.) and their confidence and motivation (p. 628). Crucially, Larrotta and Ramirez highlight that treating caregivers as experts and inviting caregivers to share their personal experiences were critical to fostering this sense of confidence and agency.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that shared book reading among families can promote engagement and active participation in the reading process. Particularly of interest to scholars are wordless picture books, or picture books in which images and other features are the primary carriers of narrative and meaning. Studies of wordless picture books highlight these books' ability to support emergent readers in developing sequential and inferential thinking skills (Knudsen-Lindaur, 1988), second-language learning (Chen & Pan, 2009), and reading comprehension (Arizpe, 2013). Arizpe (2013) theorizes that this has to do with how wordless picture books invite readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning because there are no words there to act authoritatively. In a study of Latina mothers reading wordless picture books with their children, Petrie, Mayr, Zhao, and Montanari (2023) found that families reading wordless picture books with children ages three to five "engendered more interaction than the book with text, with a higher rate of parental prompts and responsive feedback, and significantly more child contributions" (p. 104). They write that wordless picture books "equalize parent-child shared reading interactions and encourage co-production of a narrative" (p. 127).

While caregiver voices have not historically been highlighted as central to the experience of shared reading with children, recent studies have attempted to explore this relationship. Nicholas and Paatsch (2021), in a study of mothers of two-year-old children in Australia, specifically explored caregivers' experiences of shared reading with their children. Nicholas and Paatsch found that participating mothers were actively and thoughtfully engaged in shared reading and made intentional choices oriented around both literacy development and personal connection with their children (p. 14). The participating mothers expressed purpose and motivation as they engaged actively in shared reading. In a similar vein, Coba-Rodriguez and colleagues (2020) and Coba-Rodriguez and Jarrett (2022) study of Latinx mothers' support of their preschoolers' transitions to kindergarten highlighted the resourcefulness and *familismo* (a core value that involves centering family) of the mothers (see Bermúdez & Mancini, 2013). Building on such research, we hope our findings will provide additional insights into caregiver experiences.

Conceptual Framework: Culturally Sustaining Family Literacies

We apply a critical, socio-ideological lens to the concept (and role) of family literacy practices through our theoretical framework of culturally sustaining family literacies, which brings together perspectives on culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSPs; Flores & Springer, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017) and family literacies (Auerbach, 1995; Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Gadsden, 1993; Reyes & Torres, 2007; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Within this broad framework, we focus specifically on two concepts: *everydayness* (Cornatassel & Scow, 2017) and critical engagement with texts. In the next

section, we describe literature that informs our culturally sustaining family literacy perspective and look deeper into the concepts of everydayness and critical engagement with texts.

Culturally Sustaining Family Literacies

For over three decades, U.S. family engagement scholars and practitioners have critiqued programs framed with a deficit perspective on marginalized families (Auerbach, 1995; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994; Noguerón-Liu, 2020). A deficit perspective approach centers middle-class whiteness as normative (Bang et al., 2018) and seeks to deny, suppress, and erase non-conforming cultural practices, often using "racialized scripts" (Ishimaru et al., 2018) such as "hard to reach" and "problem parents" to describe families. Deficit perspectives can appear to be equalizing as they often frame programs as "closing the gap" (Gutiérrez, 2008) or "fixing" families (Reyes & Torres, 2007), but they tend to locate the problem in individual families rather than systemic inequities (Auerbach, 1995). Scholars argue that programs designed from deficit perspectives both deny the wealth of knowledge that families bring (Hong et al., 2022) and reinscribe systematic inequities because their focus on problematizing individuals limits systemic change (Auerbach, 1995; Bang et al., 2018).

Our culturally sustaining family literacies perspective integrates CSPs, which are meant to counter and transform such deficit perspectives. Developed by Paris and Alim (2017) as a response to the uncritical uptake of Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy, CSPs go beyond simply connecting to families' cultures and instead sustain linguistic and cultural diversity, cultivate healing, and challenge deficit narratives (Flores & Springer, 2021; Paris & Alim, 2017; Pearson et al., 2021). Importantly, what is culturally sustaining is not monolithic; scholars and educators must acknowledge that not every text is relevant to or sustaining for everyone and resist essentializing frames that group entire communities together based on their national, racial/ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. Paris and Alim (2014) explicitly describe the need to "perpetuate, foster, and sustain" not only heritage practices but contemporary, hybrid, and evolving practices (p. 85). Our understanding of culturally relevant texts and practices includes an expansive notion of culture as something that is "dynamic, shifting, and encompassing both past-oriented heritage dimensions and present-oriented community dimensions" (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 90).

As practitioner-researchers, this aspect of culturally sustaining family literacies held special relevance during the selection and examination of texts in the study. Throughout the program, we intentionally chose texts that potentially had salience for participating families. We chose bilingual books in Spanish and English, books that featured families living in urban contexts like our own, and books that represented Black and Latinx families positively. However, we did not see any given text or literacy practice as inherently culturally sustaining or not. Rather, whether a text is culturally sustaining depends upon the meaning that the reader makes from the text as they connect it to their own life. Different communities, families, and individuals will experience this differently, even when reading the same texts.

Our conceptual framework also draws from family literacies scholarship, which itself fits into a broader realm of research and theory about out-of-school literacies. Hull and Schultz (2002) explained that out-of-school literacies studies are a convergence of three fields: ethnographic studies of communication (e.g., Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992; Purcell-Gates, 1996), Vygotskian perspectives on social practices of literacy (e.g., Engeström, 1996), and new literacy studies (e.g., Gee, 1999). As such, the notion of "practice" in out-of-school literacies work often expands from notions of cognitive skills and strategies to social practices infused with ideologies and embedded in hierarchies of power. This more socio-ideological conception of practice also fits into Freire and Macedo's (2005) critical stance that social transformation requires critical consciousness of "reading the world" while "reading the word." This perspective has helped family literacies scholars uncover how families integrate identities, aspirations, and histories into their literacy practices (Coba-Rodriguez & Jarrett, 2022;

Gadsden, 1993; Moll et al., 1992). For our study, this aspect of the framework was especially relevant to the concept of everydayness (discussed below) and the ways in which we observed and analyzed family literacy practices.

Everydayness

We want to focus specifically on the concept of everydayness as an important facet of our analysis. This concept is often referred to in studies of Indigenous family engagement programs (see, e.g., Bang et al. 2018) and originates from Corntassel and Scow's (2017) research and reflections on the topic (both are Indigenous scholars and practitioners). Corntassel and Scow urge scholars to look beyond surface-level signaling of "culture" to the relationality, intimate politics, convergences of time and space, and gender relationships within everyday interactions and settings to gain a deeper sense of families' cultures. They contend that "our everyday actions, especially within a familial context, embody processes of leadership, governance, and community that help perpetuate our relationships at the interpersonal level as well as with the natural world" (p. 56). Corntassel and Scow argue that cultivating an awareness of everydayness ultimately fosters "family resurgence" through "renewing, remembering, and regenerating" (p. 56) ones' own cultures against the vise of colonialist narratives.

While Corntassel and Scow's research has focused on indigenous families, the concept can be extended to apply to other marginalized families. Bang et al. suggest that "focusing on everydayness through analysis of family roles, relations, and responsibilities is a promising strategy" (2018, p. 10). In this paper, we pay particular attention to what we call "family rituals and routines," or the small, everyday actions that families engage in together, such as cooking, talking walks, riding the bus, telling stories, and doing chores, and the ways that literacy practices, language practices, and the use of texts are or become embedded within them. Literacy scholars have drawn on similar concepts to broaden their understandings of literacy and language beyond the normative, text-based practices typically privileged in traditional school settings (e.g., Heath, 1983). For example, Arnold et al. (2012) illustrate the importance of the kitchen as a context for all kinds of literacies, such as reading the news at breakfast or working on homework after school. Understanding literacy as a social practice necessitates looking beyond the official classroom context in order to see how literacy practices function in everyday activities, as well as venues for fostering and transmitting cultural knowledge.

As an explicitly critical transformative stance, culturally sustaining family literacies encompass socio-ideological literacy practices that foster the type of "renewing, remembering, and regenerating" (Corntassel & Scow, 2017, p. 56) of family culture, languages, and histories that Corntassel and Scow promote in their discussion of *everydayness*. These may include practices embedded in everyday making and doing (such as cooking, cleaning, traveling, and shopping). It may also include moments when families challenge deficit narratives about their cultures, histories, and communities and support the development of relationships and identity.

Critical Engagement with Texts

Another concept that we are especially focused on within our theoretical framework is critical engagement with texts. Promoting culturally sustaining family literacies involves providing opportunities for families to counter, interrogate, re-make, connect with, and re-imagine narratives about their lives. However, the texts used in family engagement and literacy programs can carry with them the "authority" of schooling, which, without intentional, critical pedagogical praxis, can serve to reinscribe deficit narratives (Grever & Van Der Viles, 2017; Luke et al., 1983). This issue has been central to recent efforts to decolonize texts and school curricula that promote single-story narratives that marginalize and "asterisk"-ize (Tuck & Yang, 2012) the histories of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and other people of color) individuals (Reyes & Torres, 2007; Shahjahan et al., 2022).

Luke, de Castell, and Luke (1983) speak to the concept of the "authority" of school texts in their study by testing Olson's (1980) argument that school texts, created by mainly White, American

English-speaking dominant, middle and upper-class people, replicate societal inequities due to the authority they are afforded. They note Olson's claim that "despite historically differing educational aims and instructional approaches, the school text continues to embody the 'authorized version of society's valid knowledge'" (Olson, 1980, p. 192, in Luke et al., 1983, p. 112). However, they also challenge Olson's arguments, suggesting that texts themselves are only one factor in promoting a singular viewpoint of cultural knowledge. Several factors within a text's "discursive field" (described as "a field of use and exchange;" p. 112) frame the impact of the text, such as the *material techniques* (within the text), *institutions* (such as schools), practices that *put them in place*, and practices that *derive from them* (and thus shape and/or modify social relations). In other words, the authority given to a text depends on its social environment and pedagogical use. A teacher or caregiver who approaches a text as something to interrogate, question, and rewrite does not center its authority but rather gives the reader agency over the text. This is not to discount the importance of the material techniques (i.e., the messaging within the text) – diverse texts authentically representing the lived experiences of marginalized groups can foster agency and equity. However, the pedagogical practices surrounding the use of any texts should not go uninterrogated.

Critical engagement with text requires expanding our understanding of the ways in which we engage with texts and a social repositioning of the "teacher" and "learner" in terms of authority over the text and with each other. Noted literacy scholar Gordon Wells categorized several different modes of literacy engagement readers have with texts: informational, recreational, functional, performative, and epistemic (Wells, 1990). He argued that traditional literacy pedagogies tend to teach a narrower form of literacy engagement that is mainly performative rather than teaching deeper, more epistemic engagement. Wells' call for a more expansive understanding of literacy engagement was echoed by sociological scholars Moll et al. (1992) in their research on Latinx family home literacy practices and literacy scholars Janes and Kermani (2001) in their research on families' affective approaches to texts. Wells and his contemporaries (e.g., Beck et al. 1996) contend that in order to teach epistemic forms of engagement with text, teachers need to reposition themselves as learners *with* students (in this paper, we use the term *co-learning* to describe this practice), rather than authoritative transmitters of knowledge. Wells' research demonstrated that teachers who reposition themselves in such a way report greater appreciation of and respect for their students. As such, examinations of critical text engagement in family literacy work require attention to the authoritative positioning of readers and texts.

We propose that critical engagement with text can foster families' agency to reimagine deficit-oriented narratives from and through texts. Our conceptualization of agency in this study recognizes that literacy practices are mediated by human and non-human influences, including materials (e.g., the texts), designed spaces for learning (e.g., digital tools and the virtual platform in which sessions took place), and social relationships (e.g., other caregivers, facilitators) (Daniels, 2021; Zapata et al., 2018). However, learners' individual agency matters as well (as defined in Vaughn et al. 2020), including how they (re)position themselves and their families within existing power structures (Miller et al., 2020). For this reason, we focus on critical engagement with texts to centralize the texts and materials as important to families' meaning-making but also consider how caregivers and families (re)negotiate existing power dynamics through engagement with texts.

Context

About the Read, Make, and Play (RMP) Program

The RMP program was developed and facilitated by University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Center for Literacy (CFL) staff. CFL is a community engagement organization and research center

that supports Chicago families in achieving their educational goals by offering multigenerational family literacy support services, building pipelines to future education and employment, and contributing significantly to public policy and scholarship in literacy education. Caregivers in RMP were mainly adult education learners at CFL in the English as a Second Language (ESL) or General Educational Development (GED) programs, but anyone with at least one child in a Chicago Early Learning program (Head Start, preschool, etc.) could participate.

The RMP program ran during the summer months of 2021 and 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was initiated in part as a response to a need voiced by CFL learners to foster more caregiver connections through virtual programming. The RMP program distributed bookbags full of culturally relevant texts, arts and crafts materials, and games to participating families (one bag per family). Families had the option to pick up the materials at specific locations or for staff to deliver a backpack to their doorstep. RMP held six weekly dialogue sessions virtually (over Zoom) with caregivers and their children. These were facilitated by bilingual literacy instructors within CFL's Adult Education department. Each Zoom session was recorded. Because RMP occurred while COVID-19 restrictions were in place, Zoom was the only way that families could participate. Zoom sessions were scheduled with families' busy schedules in mind.

Each of the weekly sessions was guided by an overarching theme and mapped onto a particular text and activity from the provided materials (see Table 1 for a list of key texts, text selection criteria, and related discussion themes). The six themes were selected with the intent to promote agency among parents and children and to conceptualize texts as tools for intergenerational literacy learning at home. The sessions were structured to build an empowering space for families and to discuss their reading, making, and playing at home. Facilitators took an explicit stance that they were not there as "trainers" or "teachers" but rather there to learn *with* families. The sessions were structured around a general protocol that included (1) a check-in around families' activities and general wellness in the prior week, (2) the introduction of a focal theme (e.g., family storytelling) and a text from the bookbag, (3) discussion and/or play around the text and the week's theme, (4) discussion and brainstorming around potential at-home activities related to the theme or text, and (5) open play or discussion.

Text Selection and Feedback Process

RMP coordinators approached text (and material) selection with critical intentionality, as the texts and materials were central to the project (a full list of all RMP texts and materials in the bags is included in Appendix A). RMP practitioners were instructors in CFL and were familiar with the adult learner population, and in some cases had taught ESL or GED classes to the learners in the past. The practitioners developed five criteria to guide text selection, aiming to choose texts that (1) engaged families in their home languages (about 60% of adult learners in CFL spoke Spanish at home, and many of our selected texts were bilingual or in Spanish); (2) represented families' racial and ethnic backgrounds positively and authentically; (3) referenced experiences and places familiar to Chicago families, such as urban spaces and parks; (4) made room for playful dialogue and relationship development between caregivers and children; and (5) celebrated creativity, invention, and artfulness. Upon identifying these criteria, CFL practitioners (several of whom were former CFL learners) and UIC literacy faculty were sought for text recommendations. Then, RMP practitioners went through a sorting process based on the criteria to choose the final materials. During the workshops, facilitators encouraged learners to take a critical stance in interrogating the texts and sought feedback on the initial text selection. In the second iteration of RMP, several additional bilingual texts were added to the bags as a result of feedback from participants and growing interest in RMP within the Latinx population. We recognize that not every text will be relevant to every family, but, as practitioner-researchers, we aimed in our practice to be attentive to the social, cultural, and historical contexts of families' lives in selecting texts.

Table 1

Key Texts, Weekly Discussion Themes, and Text Selection Criteria

Week	Discussion Theme	Key Text	Selection Criteria
1	Play, liberation, and creativity	*We Are In a Book* (Willems, 2010)	D, E
2	Features of texts (texts as tools)	*Todos A Comer* (Pérez, 2018) [bilingual]	A, B, D, E
3	Making connections	*Last Stop on Market Street* (De la Peña, 2015)	B, C
4	Questioning/agency	*The Neighborhood Mother Goose* (Crews, 2003)	B, C, D
5	Storytelling	*Imagine* (Colón, 2018) [wordless]	A, D, E
6	Family stories	*Family Pictures / Cuadros de Familia* (Garza, 2005) [bilingual]	A, B, E

Text selection criteria key:

- **A.** Texts that engaged families in their home languages
- **B.** Texts in which families saw their racial and ethnic backgrounds represented positively and authentically
- **C.** Texts that referenced experiences and places familiar to Chicago families, such as urban spaces and parks
- **D.** Texts that made room for playful dialogue and relationship development between caregiver and child
- **E.** Books that celebrated creativity, invention, and artfulness

About the Study Participants

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit study participants (Patton, 1990) in the RMP program. Caregivers who met the following criteria were invited to participate: adult caregivers identified as attending the RMP program with children between the ages of two and 18. While our larger study included a total of 31 participants, 14 were interviewed, and these participants are the focus of the present paper. In Cohort 1, seven participants were interviewed. Five identified as Latinx, one identified as African American, and one did not identify a race or ethnicity. Two participants spoke Spanish as their primary language, and five indicated that English was their primary language. In Cohort 2, seven more participants were interviewed. One identified as African American and six identified as Latinx. Five participants spoke Spanish as their primary language, and two indicated English as their primary language. In both cohorts, all participants identified as female, and almost all had annual incomes of under $50,000. The caregivers ranged from 27 to 59 years old, with an average age of 36. Almost all Latinx participants reported being from Mexico.

Researchers and Identities

Our five-person practitioner-researcher collaborative research team consisted of a mix of scholars, practitioners, and organizational leaders, four of whom are contributing authors on this paper. Kira Baker-Doyle identifies as a mixed-race (Black and White) cisgender woman whose home language is English and who has intermediate knowledge of Spanish. She played a leadership role in CFL and contributed to the design of the RMP program. Sarai Coba-Rodriguez identifies as a Latina cisgender woman whose native language is Spanish. Her role was as a scholar on the team. Andrea Vaughan is a white, cisgender woman. Her home language is English, and she speaks and writes Spanish in professional and informal contexts. She was in a leadership role at CFL at the time of this project and supported the implementation of the RMP program. Evelyn Pollins identifies as a white, cisgender woman whose first language is English. She contributed to the project as a researcher. Our fifth team member, Shawndra Allen, is a Black cisgender woman whose home language is English. She was a practitioner-scholar in our research team. She helped to facilitate weekly sessions and improve upon program design. While she did not contribute directly to the development of this article, she was involved in researching earlier iterations of analysis on the project.

Methodology

Study Design

Our study design draws from a long tradition in education research of collaborative inquiry between researchers and practitioners (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Baumann & Duffy, 2001). In our case, we were a team of scholars, CFL organizational leaders, and RMP practitioners. Together, we sought to gain a greater understanding of the voices and experiences of caregivers in the RMP program. We aimed to develop a clearer theoretical lens on our work and gain insights for future iterations of the program or similar programs. We adopted an instrumental case study design for our inquiry. Compton Lilly (2021) described studies that use this approach as "designed and implemented in order to examine and explore a particular issue or situation" (p. 13). The situation we examine here is caregivers' experiences in the RMP program. We used qualitative methods to capture the stories and experiences of caregivers.

Data Collection and Sources

This study uses data from two RMP cohorts: one from summer 2021 and one from summer 2022. In the face of COVID-19 and stay-at-home restrictions, our data collection procedures were primarily virtual. Specifically, we utilized session observations and in-depth interviews over Zoom, which are detailed below. A bilingual Latina female researcher (Dr. Coba-Rodriguez) conducted interviews with each participant. An interview protocol with open-ended and semi-structured questions was used (Patton, 1990). Interviews ranged from 60–75 minutes. Examples of protocol questions included "How would you describe RMP to someone who doesn't know anything about it?" and "Thinking about the materials you received, which ones did you and your family use the most? How and why did you use them?" The research team developed the interview questions using literature on family literacy, literacy practices, family engagement, and learning practices. The protocol was used to ensure that all topics were covered while still allowing the interviews to remain flexible and open (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1990; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Participants chose whether they wanted their interview to be conducted in English or Spanish. Carrying out interviews in participants' native languages promoted participants' confidence and comfort (Knight, Roosa, & Umaña-Taylor, 2009). The English interview protocol was translated into Spanish and then back-

translated into English by a professional translator, which is a procedure widely used in cross-cultural research to maximize the cultural equivalency of measures (Knight et al., 2009).

Data Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. We used REV, an American speech-to-text company that provides transcription services, for all English interviews. Once REV transcriptions were received, Drs. Coba-Rodriguez and Vaughan reviewed them for accuracy. Spanish interviews were transcribed and translated by a professional translator who self-identified as Mexican and has been working with the second author for almost a decade. Dr. Coba-Rodriguez reviewed all translated material for accuracy and intentionality. Members of the research team – a mix of practitioners and scholars – immersed themselves in the data by actively reading all transcripts to identify specific categories and themes in the caregivers' responses.

Coding began with the team developing a priori codes derived from guiding questions and substantive literature. For example, we identified co-learning as a core concept of our research question and, therefore, had codes such as "co-learning between family adults," "co-learning between caregivers and children," and "co-learning between children." Co-learning was understood to be a shared inquiry and discovery process among learners. These a priori codes were then complemented by new or emergent codes that were derived from the data (Saldaña, 2015).

We also engaged in open coding, for which the research team immersed themselves in the data through line-by-line analysis. The goal of the initial line-by-line coding was to identify key phrases or terms in the interviewee's words that could be used as preliminary codes. Coding disagreements were resolved through a collaborative discussion process known as coding by consensus (Hill et al., 2005; Hill, 2012).

We used profile and proximity matrices data displays – condensed visual representations of data – to aid us in pattern identification, determine the frequency of code mentions, and facilitate integration (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994). For profile matrices, we examined demographic variables that may influence families' literacy practices and experiences. Proximity matrices, on the other hand, helped us to better identify similarities and/or differences across participants' responses. Analytical memos were written throughout the analysis. These encouraged critical reflexivity and helped move the analysis to a deeper level of understanding. Member checks were also utilized in this study. Member checking is a technique for confirming a researcher's interpretation with study participants (Hill et al., 2005). For this study, Dr. Coba-Rodriguez engaged in question-answer validity. Question-answer validity is when researchers engage in real-time paraphrasing of interviewees' comments during an interview to confirm or clarify the intended meaning (Hill et al., 2005; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Taylor et al., 2015). For example, if inconsistent or vague information was identified throughout the interview, we asked participants to elaborate on previous comments or ideas.

Lastly, peer debriefing, defined as having a researcher or someone familiar with the phenomena review and provide critical and extensive feedback on the process, descriptions, analyses, and interpretation of the study's findings (see Bratlinger et al., 2005), was used to further enhance data management. Peer debriefing contributed to confirming that our findings and interpretations of the study were honest (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and that possible biases and errors in the data-gathering process and analysis were addressed prior to manuscript writing. Conversations with impartial colleagues involved the discussion of themes, ideas, and conceptualizations. Feedback was provided orally and covered all aspects of the study.

Findings

> *To be honest, when I saw it, I thought that it was a boring book. The cover wasn't appealing to me. I thought that my kids wouldn't want to read it, but when we read it, they were happy because they know tacos, horchata water. Everybody loved it. Tamales, we made tamales. It reinforced their roots greatly. But when I saw it the first time, I wasn't impressed. (Marisol)*[2]

In the above quote, Marisol reflects on how her family read and used *Todos A Comer!* [Let's Eat!], a book about Mexican meals (Pérez, 2018). She was initially skeptical about the text as the cover was not appealing to her. Other caregivers reported feeling similarly at first, primarily because the text seemed too "long" and "difficult." However, Marisol and other caregivers were open to trying it and willing to listen to how their children responded to the text. In that moment of openness, Marisol saw an opportunity to engage in a family activity (cooking), connect back to her family's heritage, and spend time with her family using the text in new and experimental ways. Other caregivers reported similar reactions. Some noted that when they saw the text not only as words to decipher but as an opportunity to engage in family remembrances, rituals, and routines, it became a tool for supporting family connections.

This pattern is indicative of our findings overall. While we used a range of codes to analyze our data, two coding categories stood out. The average number of codes per coding category stood at 144.2 (with an SD of 152.3 of 18 total categories). However, "co-learning between caregivers and children" was coded 444 times, and "effects of texts on relationships" was coded 499 times. These codes frequently co-occurred with several other codes, most notably with codes that indicated co-learning and an activity extension (co-occurred 76 times) and changes in approach to using texts (co-occurred 74 times). When we looked more closely at the nature of the shared learning activities, many were connected to families' everyday routines, rituals, and remembrances. Further, in our qualitative examination of the effects of texts on relationships, we saw a shift around the social hierarchy and authority of knowledge between caregivers and children and between families and texts. Below, we delve more closely into these two themes.

Co-Learning Between Caregivers and Children: Family Routines, Remembrances, and Rituals

Like in Marisol's story, RMP participants reported that texts were integrated into activities that included family routines, rituals, and remembrances of heritage, language, and culture. These practices were not ceremonial or tokenistic representations of culture; they were unique to each family and deeply embedded in everyday life, exemplifying Corntassel and Scow's (2017) conceptualization of everydayness. The majority of the time, the texts inspired them to engage in such activities. In some instances, caregivers initiated and used the texts to engage in such activities with other family members. Cooking and bedtime storytelling were family routines that over half of RMP participants reported engaging in or being inspired by the texts to engage in. Five participants reported that their children encouraged them to make the foods they saw in the two cookbooks that were in the RMP bag. Devisha, an African American grandmother, reported:

> I was at my daughter's house, and I was telling my grandson I was doing my homework. He like, "I want to do homework, too." I said, "Good, we can read this book." So, I was looking in the book, and I [inaudible], "Okay, Mom-Mom, we can make this." So, we made it. (Devisha)

Rosario, a Latinx mother, noted that the cookbook and games in the bag fostered sibling teamwork. In her interview, Rosario described an interaction between her daughters:

> As they're playing, [Reina] is actually looking at another book that you guys gave us, which is actually like a cooking book, where it showed instructions for parents on how to cook and had separate instructions for the kids on how to cook the same meal. … I remember she was telling her sister about how to cook something out of that book … Honestly, I think they're learning how to do teamwork. (Rosario)

The book that Rosario referred to was *Pretend Soup* (Katzen & Henderson, 1994), which provided detailed descriptions of recipes for adults and picture recipes for children. Several caregivers reported that their children used the text to direct them on what and how to cook. Miranda, a Latinx mother, discussed frequent use of the text: "We have even done it on two or three occasions where she says, 'Mom, bring flour, bring eggs, I mix, and you cook.'" Likewise, Alondra noted that her daughter developed a more varied interest in foods through cooking activities with the text.

There were several texts in the bag that inspired family storytelling or had familiar rhymes. About half of the RMP participants talked about how the stories in the texts and discussion of the texts among caregivers inspired remembrances of family songs and stories, often told during bedtime routines. For example, after looking at the *Family Pictures* (Garza, 2005) text and discussing the idea of telling family stories with others in the program, Miranda, a Latinx mother, remembered the songs of Cri-Cri the Cricket, part of a children's music series by composer Francisco Gabilondo Soler that was extremely popular in Mexico in the mid-20th century. She recalled the story of *La Negrita Cucurumbé*, which, as a child, encouraged her to see the beauty of her darker skin. She decided that she wanted to pass this on to her daughter as it was an important part of her identity development:

> It occurred to me to sing the song "The *Negrita Cucurumbé* went for a walk to the sea to see if the white waves could whiten her little face." And she says, "I wanted to be white as the moon; I wanted to be white as the foam that the sea brings." Then, a fish arrived, and the fish was wearing a bowler hat. He approached her and waved his tail, greeted her, and said, "But woman, why don't you see how beautiful your face is, *Negrita Cucurumbe*?" … Because perhaps it is a moment in which one, as a parent, can share with the children things from your childhood, from when you were younger, so that they know the culture and the customs that one had. (Miranda)

Another caregiver, Joanna, a Latinx mother, similarly recalled the power of song and family history after members discussed the *Neighborhood Mother Goose* (Crews, 2003) book, which triggered remembrances of family songs:

> …this lady shared about some songs that she will sing to her grandkids. And my mother passed away six years ago, so I can't really ask my mother what songs she used to sing to me. But there was one song that she would sing, and right away, like, it came back to my memory – I was like "Wait, my mom used to sing me that song." It was really nice that people got to share their experiences like that. (Joanna)

For family remembrances, the texts and discussions served more as a reminder that the caregivers *could* tell family stories – that they were not always limited to reading the words in a book. Eleanor, a Latinx mother, described her revelation that the texts could help her talk about her childhood with her children:

> Sometimes, one can see oneself reflected in the books. One comes remembering several things that happened to you in your childhood, and also what caught my attention is that one as a person, as an adult, can talk to his children about what you lived in his childhood. … Honestly, I never imagined that everything from one's childhood could come out of a book… (Eleanor)

Finally, another family routine that several caregivers reported when discussing text use was travel. Two texts that were popular in the bag and often incorporated into travel activities were *Last Stop on Market Street* (De la Peña, 2015) and *Hello Nature: Draw, Collect, Make & Grow* (Chakrabarti, 2016). Participants discussed how, through travel activities, they began to see everyday routines as different and more adventurous than before. One caregiver, Diana, a Latinx mother, reported a kind of heightened awareness of her daughter's perceptions of nature through shared text and travel activities: "Seeing beauty through her eyes. Because sometimes there are things that are so small that you pass by and don't give them so much importance, but they observe it." Another Latinx mother, Yadira, described how, like the cooking and bedtime activities, travel-related activities offered the opportunity for multiple family members to become involved in literacy practices:

> …we all, even my husband, we all loved that book, so we took it with us when we went to the forest or the park. And it had checklists, what to look for, and types of plants we could look for, and then what we think would happen, so we all started filling that book out as a family. (Yadira)

Other families reported that the texts were used as an accompaniment to travel activities, sparking a feeling that the participants were inside the story. For example, several participants discussed bringing the *Last Stop on Market Street* book with them during bus rides so that their children could read about the bus while being on the bus. Engaging with texts from the RMP bags encouraged families to work together intergenerationally, remember and pass on stories and songs in their home language, and learn more about each other during everyday family literacy activities.

Effects of Texts on Relationships: (Re)Positioning of Hierarchies

RMP participants reported the use of the texts as a means of exploring their own relationships, culture, and family dynamics and indicated a shift in the ways they related to each other over the course of the program. Several characteristics of the text and materials in the bags were important in this dynamic: wordless books served to support caregivers in pushing themselves to be co-authors with the illustrators, arts and crafts materials offered families the opportunity to extend stories and questioning beyond the text, and texts that were bilingual or reflected participants' cultures brought in more family participation in Latinx families. While the materials were helpful in creating space for these dynamics, the topics discussed in the weekly meetings, such as questioning, making connections, playing, and family storytelling, also supported families' experimentation with the texts.

The appearance of a wordless book in the RMP bags initially confounded some participants. Three participants reported that the *Imagine* book seemed unhelpful at first. However, after some exploration and discussion in the meeting about storytelling, the participants reported that they began to rethink their assumptions. Rosario described this change:

> I know that we had a book that didn't even have words in it. It was one of the books that we received, and I actually did learn that – I learned how, like, you don't need the words to be in the book -- for you to be engaged with your child. (Rosario)

A similar realization led many participants to rethink how they approached books with text. Six participants reported that when a text was uninteresting to their children, they focused on the pictures or ideas and discussed those aspects of the text with them. Instead of focusing primarily on decoding words in a text, these participants focused more on collective sense-making. Eleanor credited this shift with an increase in her daughter's reading engagement overall: "To be honest, [before] I just based myself on the letters, I based myself on giving the reading, and that's why I think my daughter was bored."

This broadened use of text – from focusing on the "word" to the "world" (Freire & Macedo, 2005) – was also reflected in the ways participants discussed shifts in the way they listened and learned with their children around texts. Toni, an African American mother, described becoming more "child-receptive:"

> So I'm listening to the kids. I'm looking to see, you know, what play they're going to do, or what are they going to ask. You know, I'm doing more attention as opposed to reading. And I always gave it more attention. But now I'm more child-receptive. (Toni)

Myrna described this kind of shift as repositioning who led the interrogation of the text: "So, much more letting her lead me and then following up with more questions about what she sees in the picture or whatever is happening in the book, what did she think of that?" This child-led approach was most evident when caregivers extended their explorations of texts through art, cooking, or community walks. Crafting, making, and engaging in extension activities supported families to explore ideas from the texts and position their children to be co-learners with them in these explorations.

Another factor that supported family co-learning and text interrogation was the cultural relevance of the text. Linguistic access was critical to bilingual families. Yadira noted that the Spanish-bilingual texts in the bag helped her husband become more involved in the RMP activities "because my husband only speaks Spanish, so… I'm usually the one that reads to them, so these were in Spanish, now my husband reads to them, so that was nice." As noted previously, the Mexican cookbook elicited much family discussion around food and cooking among Latinx participants. Diana observed that another book about Mexican culture, *Family Pictures* (Garza, 2005), fostered thoughtful discussion among the entire family about family history:

> …it makes you think; get some ideas. In fact, I shared it with my girls; I shared it with my husband…. And we started talking about how certain things connect with our lives. I started asking him questions, and right now, I don't remember, but I wanted to see what interpretation he had about it, and it was very interesting. (Diana)

Diana's reflections also indicated that family co-learning around the text supported an interrogation of family culture and history. This type of critical identity reflection was evident in other participants' discussions of culturally sustaining texts. Myrna noted that her experiences reading and discussing the *Last Stop on Market Street* text made her question why she did not seek out more culturally and linguistically sustaining texts and highlighted how important those texts were in engaging her daughter and fostering family relationships:

> I think it was very interesting because it stayed with me; it made me question why I do not go looking for books in Spanish, in English too, to be able to connect to real life … I really liked that one because it really made me have that connection with my daughter, because she liked that I asked her the questions. (Myrna)

Overall, participants indicated two kinds of repositioning in their interviews. The first was a repositioning of their relationships with the texts and authors. The second was a repositioning of their relationships with their children and other family members in terms of learning. While certain features of the texts helped to encourage repositioning, the discussions during the family sessions provided a space for families to see how others were using the texts and imagine other possibilities for themselves.

The repositioning generated a sense of agency and awareness of the possibility for caregivers to adapt their use of texts to read with their children in ways that met their interests and needs. For example, one mother, Elena, described how she changed the ways in which she engaged with her three-year-old child while positioned as a co-learner:

> [Before RMP,] I feel that the way I used to read to him was not good because he didn't understand, got bored, and wanted me to stop reading. So now, even if the book has a lot of text, if he likes the characters, we make a story that is not the one in the book. (Elena)

Elena described a greater level of freedom in using texts once she began adapting their use. In addition, as a result of this adaptation, she had a revelation: her son was aware of more than she realized. Although in the previous quote, Elena described her toddler as "not understanding" the long text of the book, she later discussed how her alternative approach to exploring the text and the world with him allowed her to learn more about his understanding:

> If the character falls into a puddle, I say, "Look, it's all muddy now," and he says, "Yes, all his face is muddy; he is very dirty now, and he likes it." Then, when we walk around, he remembers, he tells me, "Look, it's raining, and there is a puddle like the one in the book, do you remember?" and I say, "Yes," and he says, "I don't want to get closer to the puddle, or I can fall into it." (Elena)

Other caregivers reported similar realizations about their children and initiated participatory learning experiences in which caregivers and children explored the unknown together. Cooking together, going on nature hikes, making art, and even doing laundry together became opportunities for caregivers to become co-equal learners with their children.

Discussion: Textual Agency in Family Literacy Activities

Our study explored what co-learning looked like among family members in the RMP program and the role that texts and materials played in shaping those experiences. The empirical literature on shared family reading demonstrates that reading aloud with children has a variety of positive impacts (Clark, 1987; Teale, 1984) and that Black and Latinx families engage in rich, dialogic discussions during family reading (Dixon-Krause et al., 2010). Of particular interest to us was the use of texts that connect to families' lives (McNair, 2011). We observed that co-learning involved families extending their use of texts through their integration into routines and family rituals that represented everydayness (Corntassel & Scow, 2017). These practices all involve an agency to adapt, re-make, and apply texts and materials to one's own family practices and languages, home pedagogies (Delgado Bernal, 2002), and values – something we have come to call *textual agency*. Texts that reflected participants' languages and experiences, revolved around everyday family activities, and made space for invention (such as wordless books) provided initial connections and idea generation among children and caregivers around how to use these texts. In addition, the opportunity to discuss texts, exchange stories, and

explore ways of using texts with other family members also gave caregivers a sense of permission to assert agency over the authority of the texts. This connects to the existing literature on wordless picture books (Petrie et al., 2023), which indicates that they have multiple benefits for caregivers and children and that they foster back-and-forth interactions and discussion in shared reading settings. Across each cohort, we witnessed that, through these activities and the assertion of textual agency, the hierarchies of knowledge and power shifted among family members and between families and the texts. These findings reinforce Daniels' (2021) conceptualization of agency as a part of complex systems involving the interplay of materials, relationships, and social power in family literacy and illustrate ways that family members cultivate agency through their literacy practices.

Textual Agency and the Shifting Knowledge Authority of Texts

Textual agency played a critical role in extending families' use of texts and helping caregivers feel capable of engaging in literacy practices with their children. Caregivers' realizations that they could do more than decode texts with their children altered negative dynamics between them and their children. Through developing stronger textual agency, caregivers and children began to see texts as tools that they could use and adapt to support relationship-building, co-exploration, and cultural/linguistic sustainment rather than sources of information to which they must conform, and parents understood that their children had the capacity for storytelling and analysis even if a child could not decode a particular word.

Textual agency positions families as the authors of their stories and lives, and texts become tools for interpretation, exploration, and reflection. Thus, textual agency shifts the authority of the text from the author to the reader. Our findings build upon previous research in shared reading and critical text engagement and provide new insights into caregiver perspectives and experiences. We found that certain forms of text supported families' textual agency. Texts that connect to everyday activities such as cooking and traveling create possibilities for integration into families' daily lives, and texts that allow readers to insert themselves and become storytellers with or beyond the author also support textual agency. This aligns with research on shared family reading in Black and Latinx families indicating that shared reading can be a mechanism for passing on cultural knowledge (McNair, 2013). However, as Luke, De Castell, and Luke (1983) argue, texts play only one part in shifting the dominant authority of a text. The collective discussions around questioning, storytelling, making connections, and play that happened during the RMP program fostered reimagination among caregivers around what they could do with texts. Thus, a major takeaway from these findings is that integrating text use and reflections with family activities (not pre-scripted, but ingrained, family-directed everyday rituals and practices) is an integral part of empowering readers and making texts relevant. We plan to conduct a separate analysis of family interactions in the discussion sessions, which we hope will offer further insights into the influence and dynamics of that space.

Shifts in Social Hierarchies

In addition to a shift in knowledge authority with the text, caregivers shifted their perceptions of their children's knowledge and their own authority of knowledge. Like the teachers in Well's (1990) study, caregivers realized that their children had a deep well of knowledge and a capacity for critical thinking. They used text extension activities to explore these understandings with their children. They described many of these interactions by expressing awe at their children and their own lives. This was a significant shift away from seeing their children as lacking reading or writing skills and in need of tutelage. Rather, caregivers saw the assets that both they and their children brought to the table. These findings suggest that fostering co-learning positionality among family members may serve to support community education programs seeking to take a more asset-oriented approach to family literacy work.

Implications

We used a culturally sustaining family literacies perspective to examine the role that shared text experiences played in RMP family literacy activities. This revealed the ways that families enacted textual agency to adapt, re-make, and extend texts to connect with their lived experiences and that certain features of texts supported the development of textual agency. We observed transformations in relationships between family members and between families and the texts they used when the participants enacted textual agency. Here, we offer implications for theory-building in literacy research and next steps for research and practice.

We have highlighted connections between two key concepts in a critical family literacies framework: how texts are critically engaged with (including analysis and reflection) and how families' everyday practices and languages integrate texts and literacies. Centering families' approaches to analyzing and making sense of texts offers scholars a different lens on the nature of critical text engagement, shifting away from school-centered notions towards everyday home pedagogies and practices. It demonstrates how families both engage the languages and literacies they already have and try out new ways of engaging with texts, as the families in this study agentively engaged with texts and recognized their home practices as important and legitimate (Lewis Ellison & Solomon, 2019). While family literacies theory has done much to help scholars and practitioners understand families' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), there is less known about the connections between funds of knowledge, agency, and families' analytical literacy practices. This study demonstrates how families' everyday practices contribute to their critical engagement with texts and the development of agency. In so doing, it builds critical connections between several fields and deepens our theoretical understanding of culturally sustaining family literacy practices.

The concept of textual agency raises new possibilities and questions for critical family engagement and literacy scholars. First, more empirical research on this concept is certainly warranted, including more examples of textual agency, the contexts in which it arises, and perhaps contexts in which it is stifled. Second, as many caregivers in this program were surprised at the agency they could have over texts, we wonder what factors (e.g., previous school experiences or media messaging) influenced their initial mindsets. This question, too, deserves study. Third, while our study focused primarily on the role and use of texts, we noted that discussion among caregivers about their approaches to literacy practices at home was also important in introducing alternative approaches to critical text engagement. We see this aspect as the "reflection" aspect of the praxis of critical transformation. We plan to continue our inquiry into this aspect in later studies, and we hope others will as well.

Textual agency can also inform program design. As we have learned, textual agency can be influenced by text choice. Culturally and linguistically relevant texts, wordless books and/or books that explicitly make room for families to insert their stories, and books that integrate with or speak to everyday family routines and rituals all support families to take up greater textual agency. They work as mediational artifacts (Baker-Doyle, 2023; Engeström, 1996) in fostering relationship-building and community and are central components of the larger landscape of material and social context (Zapata et al., 2018) in which learners may agentively engage with, extend, and remake texts as they read themselves into the world (Freire & Macedo, 2005). The texts used in this study were chosen to be relevant to families' experiences as bilingual, primarily Black and Latinx, and urban families. However, our understanding of culturally sustaining family literacy means that we do not assume any text is or is not relevant or sustaining; rather, that potential depends on the connections that families make with and to the texts themselves. We recognize that Black and Latinx urban families are not monolithic; some families may have Indigenous roots or speak Indigenous languages not represented in this

selection of texts. Further research has the potential to select different kinds of texts that are potentially relevant to different families' lives in different ways. In addition, our study offers some initial insights on important reflection topics that spur textual agency, including family storytelling, agency in questioning, making personal connections, and play and making. Overall, we hope this study begins to open new conversations in research and practice about how programs can support families in engaging in textual agency during shared reading and storytelling.

Endnotes

1. Here, we use the term "caregiver" to encompass all adults who care for children in the home.

3. All names are pseudonyms.

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Appendix A: Contents of Read, Make, and Play bags for Sessions

Books Provided in English to families that requested English and in Spanish to families that requested Spanish
Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Peña
The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
We are in a Book by Mo Willems

Bilingual Books
¡Todos a Comer! By Dr. Ma. Alma González Pérez
Why is Everyone Wearing a Mask? By Debbie Qiu*
What Can You Do With a Rebozo? By Carmen Tafolla*
Family Pictures by Carmen Lomas Garza
Imagine (Wordless) by Raúl Colón

Books in English only
Ten, Nine, Eight by Molly Bang
The Neighborhood Mother Goose by Nina Crews
Hello Nature: Draw, Color, Make, and Grow (coloring/activity book) by Nina Chakrabarti
Anna Banana: 101 Jump-Rope Rhymes by Joanna Cole
Ruby Finds a Worry by Tom Percival
Guts by Raina Telgemeier
The Lightning Thief (graphic novel version) by Rick Riordan

Toys/Games/Craft materials
Notebook
Bananagrams word game
Egg shaker
24 pack of crayons
6 packs of crayons
Sidewalk chalk
Go Fish card game
Scissors
Glue stick
Pen
Pack of multi-colored construction paper
Paper bags
Jump rope

*Book not included in first cohort bags.

Seesawing (Dis)connections: Digital Parental Involvement in a Culturally Diverse School Community

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Abstract
As digitization of home-school connectivity continues apace, nuanced understandings of the digital capabilities of parents are essential. However, there has been considerable homogeneity in the representations of parents, and deficit understandings of digital parental involvement with schools, especially in schools serving diverse and disadvantaged communities. This study addresses the limitations of the extant research by examining how families in a case study school are oriented to digital technology, how cultural and linguistic resources impact home-school connections, and how a learning management system impacts digital inclusion in a diverse school community. Parent interviews were facilitated by interpreters, enabling participation of a culturally and linguistically diverse parent cohort. Parents' and teachers' diverse perspectives were also analyzed. Informed by Actor Network Theory, connections between humans and humans, and between humans and non-human actors (digital and material) were mapped onto a network diagram. Findings show considerable digital engagement and aspiration on the part of parents, which was frustrated by English-only communications from teachers despite Seesaw's multilingual affordances. We report teachers' disappointment with low parental uptake of the digital learning management system, and the deficit thinking that led them to assume a lack of digital skills or knowledge. We suggest that such deficit thinking should be challenged by a critical approach that might involve teacher-parent dialogue. Although a learning management system is a technological actor, that actor must be understood within the full context of school-home connectivity, in which schools serve communities and have a responsibility for cultural and linguistic inclusion.

Keywords: parent involvement, digital technology, cultural diversity, linguistic diversity, home-school connection, digital inclusion, digital equity

Introduction

Enlisting parents' support for children's learning has long been an avowed aim of many education systems, particularly in the early and elementary years. However, the range of connection strategies available to schools may be limited and the complexities of families' circumstances can pose challenges in achieving the desired outcomes (Harry, 2008; Luet, 2017). Digital technology had already begun to shift the terms of engagement between families and schools prior to the COVID-

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19 pandemic that ushered in the widespread implementation of home-based online learning and the intensification of digital home-school connections. While research undertaken during that time often treated parents as a homogenous category, sufficient evidence emerged that families' social, economic, and cultural circumstances considerably impacted the implementation of online learning and how parents were digitally involved in schools. There is a need to develop a much greater degree of understanding of the impacts of diversity – in all its dimensions – on the uptake and use of educational technologies and associated home-school connections.

Deficit thinking has long been identified as a problematic and limiting perspective on communities whose members are economically, socially, and/or culturally other than the so-called mainstream (Tett, 2001; Schutz, 2006; Bertrand et al.; 2018; Fricker et al., 2023). In relation to parental involvement, deficit thinking manifests as the belief that "parents who are not from the dominant culture are … lacking the necessary skills and knowledge to help their children succeed in school" (Luet, 2017, p. 677).

When the "necessary skills and knowledge" encompass educational technology, the potential exists for deficit thinking to be extended to the domain of digital literacy. Indeed, Ellison and Solomon (2019) identified the existence of "incorrect, discriminatory, and deficit-view perspectives of what African Americans are capable of digitally producing" (p. 229). Reinforcing this concern, Pavlakis et al. (2019) have reported that teachers have expressed doubts about the technological capability of parents, particularly in diverse communities (Pavlakis et al., 2019).
The perception that certain groups of people are less capable of using digital technologies than others is often based on biases and can lead to unequal access to digital opportunities and resources. It is also necessary to consider digital exclusion and inclusion as elements impacting the experiences of families in different circumstances.

The *Australian Digital Inclusion Index* (Thomas et al., 2023) comprises three dimensions of digital inclusion: *Access* to digital networks (e.g., telecommunications infrastructure); *Affordability* of high quality and reliable connectivity (e.g., data, Internet-connected devices); and *Digital Ability* (digital skills and literacies). Measurement of digital inclusion using the index has consistently found an inverse relationship between measures of social disadvantage (e.g., education, poverty, and employment) and digital inclusion on all dimensions. That is, the more socially disadvantaged the group, the less likely they are to be digitally included. Addressing barriers to digital inclusion is crucial for reducing the digital divide.

Educational technology and the promise of parental involvement

Among the promises that providers make about their educational technology is that such products support parent involvement. Multiple tools, applications, and platforms have been developed which have aimed to "increase parental engagement," for instance, by "providing parents with access to information about their child's homework, progress, attendance, and behavior" (Lewin & Luckin, 2009, p. 751). Marketing materials draw contrasts between the old-fashioned crumpled note in a child's school bag and the digital app at the ready on a parent's mobile device. Features such as the integration of translation functions are also claimed to support the involvement of parents for whom English is not a first language. An example, pertinent to this study, is Seesaw.
When launched in 2016, Seesaw was described as an app that would "allow teachers to capture, collect, and review student work with incredible ease." In terms of home involvement, the promotional material promises immediate connections between parents and their children:

> Seesaw's immediate, visual updates **actually** get seen by parents, provide encouragement for students, and cross language barriers …
> (https://www.educationworld.com/a_news/digital-portfolio-tool-seesaw-announces-premium-version-after-successful-first-year-784852097; original emphasis)

Note the claim to 'cross language barriers'; this is a reference to the integration of a translation tool into the platform functions. Furthermore, teachers are assured that parents' digital involvement is positive for children: "parents … can view their children on their learning journeys at school and leave words of encouragement to continue to inspire them (https://oceanviewresources.com/blogs/news/going-paperless-with-seesaw-app).

To understand how digital connectivity between parents and schools works in practice, we undertook interviews with parents, teachers, and children in three school communities. This paper focuses on one school, Hakea, which serves a community that is highly diverse culturally and linguistically, with a substantial population of newly arrived immigrant and refugee families.

Aligning with critiques of digital deficit thinking, our work explores the proactive, resourceful, and strategic ways that parents in a culturally diverse community engage with digital tools to manage everyday life and support their children. Interviews with members of the school community helped us to understand parents' actual uses of digital technology in their everyday lives, how parents engaged with the school on and offline, and the impact of a specific digital learning management system (LMS)—Seesaw—on home-school connectivity.

Literature Review

Much of the literature on parent involvement in the context of digital technology treats parents as a homogenous category. When this is the case, it is hard to gain information about the impact of sociocultural context on involvement. For the larger project of which this study is a part, we conducted an extensive literature review (citation removed). For this paper, we have specifically focused our attention on studies in which parents' or families' sociocultural contexts are centered. Some of these studies were conducted in school communities or districts that are characterized by cultural diversity, and others involved comparative analysis across multiple contexts that casts light on sociocultural aspects of parents' digital involvement.

Overall, the studies indicate that schools serving communities characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly in combination with immigrant/refugee status and low income, face multiple challenges when attempting to integrate digital technology into their operations. Mac Iver et al. (2021) investigated the implementation of a parent portal in a school district in which more than half of the students were from "diverse racial backgrounds" and 20% spoke a language other than English at home (p. 15). Data analytics showed that while 82% of White students' parents logged in to the portal in its first year, this was much less for Asian (39%), Hispanic (31%), and Black (25%) students' parents (Mac Iver et al., 2021, p. 16). The first step to access the portal required the parents to register their email address, and overall this step had only been completed by 38% of the students' parents. School leaders noted that many parents did not use email but preferred to text, and some families did not have Internet access.

Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2019) examined "virtual participation" of parents in three different types of schools: suburban, urban, and rural. The first of these was located in a "stigmatized" neighborhood and served racial minority families. The researchers found that while some families in the urban and rural schools engaged in virtual participation, in the suburban school such engagement "did not seem to work at all" (Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2019, p. 217). In turn, the suburban school abandoned the attempt to integrate virtual participation with parents and instead focused on increasing opportunities for face-to-face interaction. However, integration of digital technology into children's learning continued; therefore, the parents who were not digitally connected were less able to support their children academically.

Digital access and inclusion are made more difficult when families are "multiply marginalized," for instance on grounds of minority and economic status (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020, p. 67). An example of intersectional disadvantage is explored by Kim and Padilla (2020) who interviewed parents in a majority Latinx community living in a mobile park to discover how

technologies were used at home for educational purposes. Internet access amongst mobile park residents was much less than in the rest of the city (76% compared to 92%). Furthermore, 36% of homes with Internet access were limited to small screen mobile devices (primarily smart phones), and although a district policy provided laptops on request, this opportunity was not taken up by all families. The researchers note that completing homework on a small screen device was virtually impossible," therefore, children in such circumstances had to do their homework at school or a public library (Kim & Padilla, 2020, p. 503).

Moreover, Heath et al.'s (2015) study of a "low-wealth urban school" shows the complexity of integrating digital technologies in conditions of sociocultural diversity and economic disadvantage. The principal of this school was committed to supporting parents' participation across a range of digital and traditional channels. The additional labor for leaders and teachers in accomplishing this aim included sending communications in three community languages, assisting parents to access refurbished computers at a low cost, and providing staff with time to tutor parents in the use of technology—not only for supporting children's education, but also for their daily lives. Given these demands on teachers, it is perhaps not surprising that examples like this are rarely reported in the literature.

A common assumption is that parents in low-income and immigrant communities have lower levels of digital literacy. However, studies of immigrant families point to the importance of digital tools in sustaining transnational family networks and describe the efforts of parents to access digital devices and learn applications (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2019; Gonzalez & Katz, 2016; Machado-Casas et al., 2014). Positive views towards digital technology are reported in these studies. For instance, immigrant parents in one ethnographic study identified many advantages of mobile devices, describing them as "affordable, portable, lifelike, instant, highly efficient, and resource rich" (Chen et al., 2019, p. 4). The desire to support their children at school has been a motivating influence on immigrant parents' self-directed technology learning (Al-Salmi, 2015). Fostering children's learning and retention of the home language has also been a driver of parents' quest to access digital resources (Al-Salmi, 2015; Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Tour, 2019).

These forms of competence do not appear to be visible to educators (Ellison & Solomon, 2019). Pavlakis et al.'s (2019) in-depth ethnography of parent involvement in a technologically advanced school serving a majority Latinx community sheds light on this issue. Interviews with parents revealed their use of a range of digital resources to access educational information, including translation tools when necessary. However, teachers viewed parents as "digitally limited" and underestimated their interest in digital technology, despite focus group data showing that 100% of participant parents "expressed interest in training around different technology applications" (Pavlakis et al., 2019, p. 21). The teachers in the study, nearly all of whom were monolingual English speakers, also conflated linguistic barriers with technological challenges.

Several studies have pointed to the issue of monolingualism as jeopardizing digital inclusion of parents. Piller et al. (2023) found that English was the "exclusive medium" on school websites, which they examined from the perspective of prospective parents looking for enrolment information (p. 333). While most school websites had the Google Translate plug-in located on the home page, this option was not available on the versions accessed through mobile devices. The direction to "select language" was in English and linked the user to a list of 108 languages printed in small font. Testing of the machine translation also revealed its inaccuracy in relation to some languages. Similarly, in a study of school websites in Sweden, Gu (2017) found that only 25% provided information in languages other than Swedish. Furthermore, Shin and Seger (2016) found that English-only parents participated more than their multilingual peers in a classroom blog. This study and others also note that multilingual children often experience the additional effort of mediating home-school communication for caretakers whose English is less proficient (Rideout & Katz, 2016).

Much of the research on parents' digital involvement—whether concerned with cultural diversity or not—provides minimal details of the contextualized practices of parents and educational personnel connecting with digital tools. Indeed, the tendency to treat digital technology as a toolbox, in which the contents are neutral objects waiting for humans to pick them up and use them, has contributed to a degree of opacity regarding the nuances of operations and activities. Actor Network Theory offers a fine-grained approach to critically analysis of technological innovations, and this theory is applied to examine the impact of educational technology on school-home connectivity in the case of Hakea.

Actor Network Theory and Studies of Educational Technology

Actor Network Theory (ANT) offers a way to study parents' digital involvement by treating technological entities as actors, rather than as simple tools for humans to use (Latour, 1990; Law, 2009; Walz, 2006). Actor Network Theory conceptualizes networks as 'comprised of diverse materials' (Murdoch 1998) including the human and the nonhuman. This approach is interested in tracing movements and connections between all elements that make up networks (Law 1999). ANT has from the outset been interested in technology and, specifically, in opening the "black box" on technological innovation (Latour, 1990, p. 109). Analysis of innovations has traced how they are assembled and able to operate through associations between multiple social and technological/material actors. This kind of analysis has challenged the "hero" narrative which attributes innovation to "an individual human -usually male" (Latour, 1999, p. 5). While ANT has been critiqued for elevating non-humans to the status of network members, this stance is becoming less unthinkable with the increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into multiple systems used by humans (Arantes, 2023).

Educational researchers are accustomed to paying close attention to people—their learning and teaching behaviors, interactions, and beliefs. ANT asks us to look at the nonhuman elements in each situation and to think about what is being achieved by and through them (citation withheld). An early example is Clark's analysis of the adult education program Skills for Life in the UK (Clark, 2002). Clark utilizes the ANT concept of "enrolment" which is concerned with how network builders, such as the UK Department of Education in this case, attempt to recruit actors to the network, including individuals, organizations, and non-humans. Enrolment requires all these actors to be "transformed into manageable entities …," a process which can be fraught with complications that threaten both the smooth operation and the optimistic narrative regarding the innovation (Clark, 2002, p. 117).

Educational policy formation and implementation has been analyzed using ANT by Fenwick (Fenwick, 2011; Fenwick & Edwards, 2014). Such research has revealed that processes of network building and recruitment "'act to exclude, invite, and regulate particular forms of participation" (Fenwick. 2011b, p 721). While terms such as "invite" are often considered linked to social processes between humans, increasingly humans receive invitations mediated through, and even directly from, technological actors. A critical perspective attuned to power relations is also necessary to considering socio-technical actor-networks, as to human social relationships.

Since its emergence, ANT has been interested in deconstructing claims of scientific and technological innovation, to show the often-downplayed complexities involved when humans and non-humans form associations and negotiate with each other to get things done (Latour, 2005). In this respect, the distinction between *diffusion* and *translation* is particularly relevant (Latour, 1986). In the former model, the program, innovation, or tool "does not have to be explained"; instead, the goal is to implement it, as is (Latour, 1986, p. 266). When complications arise, explanations focus on the "slowing down or the acceleration … which results from the action or reactions of other people" (Latour, 1986, op. cit.). This kind of argument is echoed when teachers are accused of resisting change. The translation model, however, assumes that "the spread in time and space of anything—claims, orders, artefacts, goods—is in the hands of people" and, in this chain or network, "everyone shapes it according to their different projects" (Op. cit, pp 267 & 268). While

Latour (1986) here refers to human actors, he later made clear that non-human (e.g. digital) entities can also shape a process or program.

Importantly, the actor network in ANT is not the same as a computer network, or a technical network which is "strategically organized"; rather "it may be local, it may have no compulsory paths, no strategically positioned nodes" (Latour, p. 1996, p. 369). This inclusion of the local and contingent means that ANT can potentially assist researchers to better understand both the community and the system level of activities, such as school-home interactions.

The Project

This case study investigates the views and experiences of parents in a culturally and linguistically diverse school community regarding their and their children's interactions with digital technology. It is part of a larger study of digitally mediated ecologies of schools, students, and families (citations withheld for review). This project employed a multiple case study methodology, in which schools and their communities were constituted as cases through which to explore the impacts of digitalization of home-school interaction. Phase 1 of the project involved interviews with Year 5 children in which a network mapping activity was used, but this aspect is not discussed in this paper (Neumann et al, 2022; Soong et al 2024).

The case of Hakea, which is featured in this paper, is one in which a specific digital LMS—Seesaw—has been implemented in a school serving a highly culturally and linguistically diverse community. The makers of this LMS have made specific claims about improving parent involvement and inclusion in linguistically diverse school communities. This case study examines such potential from the perspectives of parents and teachers, and the findings contribute to the field of sociocultural studies of digital involvement and further the cause of digital equity. This case study analysis is guided by the following three research questions:

- How do families in a culturally and linguistically diverse community orient themselves to digital technology in general and specifically in relation to children's education?
- How do families' cultural and linguistic resources impact on their interactions with digital technology in general and specifically in relation to children's education?
- How does a digital learning management system impact on teachers' enactments of, and families experiences of, digital inclusion and exclusion in a school serving a highly culturally and linguistically diverse community?

The Focus School

Located in the northern side of Adelaide, Hakea Primary caters to a diverse linguistically and culturally diverse local community, and 53% of its children come from English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) backgrounds. Over 27 languages and/or dialects are spoken by students and their families, including Bhutanese Nepali, Khmer, Arabic, Hazaraghi, Dari, Russian, and Italian (school's website). This diversity reflects the attraction of the neighborhood for immigrant and refugee families.

Hakea Primary school has a strong sense of community and values the diversities of cultures, languages, and experiences of their students and families as a source of strength and knowledge. One of the key challenges the school faces is the rising effects of compounding economic disadvantage due to long-term unemployment, and as a result, many students have experienced complex vulnerabilities and additional needs. The Northern Plains (pseudonym) council district, in which Hakea is located, is considered socially disadvantaged, based on statistical comparison with the rest of the state and country. The district has more citizens in working-class jobs, fewer with tertiary education, fewer homeowners, and fewer families where both parents are working (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Nonetheless, the Hakea school community remains resilient and committed to ensuring the students are provided with opportunities to achieve their full potential.

While Hakea has integrated digital technology into its teaching and learning, this integration was less evident during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to schools serving more advantaged communities. Since Hakea school leaders could not assume families' ability to provide sufficient digital devices, Internet access, or parental supervision, they implemented a hard copy homework pack. This option was how many of the children in our study continued their education during the period of school lockdown.

Recruitment

All parents whose children had been involved in Phase 1 were invited to participate, as presented in Table 1. All those agreeing to participate were invited to be interviewed. Since this group was a small number, no willing participant was excluded from the case study phase. From Hakea Primary, six parents were recruited, and four of them were fathers and all were from immigrant families. Parent information was provided in two community languages in addition to English, and recruitment was supported by bilingual school services officers (BSSOs) who assist parents to navigate school information. All parent interviews were undertaken with an interpreter to enable parents to express themselves more fully in their stronger language. Six educators were also interviewed: five teachers of two Year 5 classes, and the digital learning coordinator.

Table 1

Hakea Parent and Teacher Participants

Parent	**Background**	**Language**	**Child's teacher**
Shoaib	Syrian	Arabic	David
Leki	Bhutanese	Nepali	Lisa
Haleema	Syrian	Arabic	Amber and Jay
Ibrahim	Syrian	Arabic	
Penjor	Bhutanese	Nepali	
Mariana	Iranian	Farsi	Bradley
			Digital Learning Coordinator: Damien

Interviews

The parent interview was designed to address a range of topics that have emerged as significant in the literature, but which are rarely covered in a single study. Interviewers asked the parent whether their child was "into" digital technology and about the parents' own digital technology practices. The interviews explored the parents' views about digital technology in children's education, as well as experiences of digitally mediated home-school communication. The parents were also asked about their experiences linked to home-based learning during the COVID-19 school lockdowns.

The interview questions were carefully worded to avoid communicating any sense of a preferred or "right" approach to the use of digital technologies. We deliberately avoided taking a risk-based focus, as this is often associated with parent-blaming (Jackson & Mannix, 2004). Communicating perceived judgement, particularly when participants are members of a marginalized group, can create discomfort and hesitation to share experiences. The interviews were semi-structured, so if parents' responses appeared to be at a tangent from the original question, the researchers assumed this was due to a valid reason and did not deflect. Educational personnel were asked about their use of digital technology in their work, whether and how their interactions with parents were mediated by digital technology, and whether they had ever offered or been asked to assist parents with school-related technology.

Analysis

Three rounds of analysis were undertaken on the interview data. First, data from all three schools was coded according to categories incorporated into the questions, and this coding system was then elaborated to identify sub-themes related to initial *a priori* categories. For instance, under the theme "views about digital technology in schools," the sub-themes "resignation" and "lack of awareness" were identified, amongst others. Second, cross-site analysis was undertaken from which emerged commonalities in parents' views and experiences across all three school communities, as well as aspects which were distinctive to a particular site. Hakea was distinctive in several respects related to the cultural and linguistic character of its community.

The third round of analysis, specific to Hakea, was a network mapping exercise focused on the use of Seesaw from the perspective of teachers and parents. This analysis took up Actor Network Theory in incorporating both human and non-human actors, and examining connections, disconnections, diversions, and the passage of resources around the network (Fenwick, 2011; Gourlay, 2015; Latour, 1999). Based on his analysis of the practices involved in scientific innovation, Latour argued, "[…] transformations undergone by actors are of crucial importance to us when we follow innovations, because they reveal that the unified actor ... is itself an association made up of elements which can be redistributed" (1990, p. 109).

To "open the black box" (ibid.) of Seesaw's operation at Hakea, we examined what teachers and parents had to say about their attempts (successful or unsuccessful) to use the application, what they did when they were unable to do so, and circumstances in which they decided to instead utilize a different method for communicating or interacting with others in the network. We also noted all the non-human entities involved in these processes, including digital devices (e.g., phones, laptops), applications (e.g., email), and other materials (e.g., hard copies).

As experiences were documented from transcripts, connections were mapped onto an evolving "Seesaw system" diagram. Once all relevant material was exhausted and the diagram was finalized, pathways, switch points, and disconnections became visible. At a "switch point," one pathway becomes impassable and another route is taken. First, the findings about parents' use and views of technology and teachers' perspectives on parents' digital involvement are reported. Then, the place of Seesaw in home-school communications at Hakea is discussed.

Findings

Parents' Uses of and Views on Technology

The six parent participants from Hakea were actively engaged in digitized ecologies and networks of everyday life. Mobile phones were the main device for digital connectivity; all reported that they had a mobile phone. One parent stated that they had access to a computer and two mentioned having a television.

The interviews provided insights into the multiplicity of digital tools (devices and apps) employed by the parents and the uses to which they were put. Haleema spoke through an interpreter about the activities she undertook using digital technology:

> Interpreter: She mostly uses the phone for calls and to pay bills and to see shopping offers… she's paying, for example, electricity bills. And to see what is available in shopping centers. And mostly to contact family.
> Interviewer: Overseas?
> Interpreter: Yeah.
> Interviewer: So just she makes phone calls or through WhatsApp, like, uh?
> Interpreter: Uh, it depends on the, on each person and which place he is in, but sometimes WhatsApp, Messenger, Facebook

Haleema was a particularly active digital user. Other participants named fewer and sometimes different apps. However, the sense that digital technology is integral to the participant's personal life, which is true for Haleema, is found across the Hakea data sub-set. This link to digital technology is illustrated by Haleema's response to a question about whether she uses technology for daily tasks, and the interpreter noted, "She cannot stay without her phone".

Other uses of digital technology mentioned by the parents included watching videos for entertainment either in their home language or in English—sometimes alongside their children as well as connecting with family and friends locally, for example to know their children's whereabouts.

Every one of the parents was active on social media—specifically Facebook— with some making use of Instagram and Messenger. Four of the parents said they viewed media digitally, naming YouTube and TikTok as their tools. Three of the parents spoke of making "calls" and also about being on WhatsApp. Google Text, Viber, Facetime and Imo were mentioned, as was online shopping. In short, digital tools, accessed primarily on mobile phones, were integral to the personal lives of the Hakea parents.

Parents' Observations of Children as Technology Users

The Hakea parents observed that the technological basis of childhood had changed. When asked whether his daughter was "into technology," Shoaib replied, "They are the generation of technology." The interpreter conveyed his response as follows based on a request for elaboration:

> Fatima using laptop almost seven hours a day. And, uh, television almost from one to two hours. And, uh, mobile, but not that much. And, uh, he's mentioning about laptop at school from two to three hours.

This sentiment resonated across the Hakea data sub-set. Ibrahim spoke of his son "being raised with technology" unlike himself, who acquired his first phone at age 30. By Ibrahim's estimation, his son spent at least a quarter of the day using technology, "the least amount of time to play with his technological tools, almost six hours." Haleema likewise contrasted her own experience with that of her child. The interpreter conveyed that "here, the technology is more embedded in children's lives and she's comparing that with her own life where she's saying that she got married and she was not having a phone". Drawing a contrast with herself, Mariana spoke of her daughter being "in the environment" of technology.

In describing the difference between their own experience with technology and that of their children, the parents signaled more than generational difference. There was a strong sense of social difference. Penjor was explicit about this. Asked if he had anything more to say, he drew attention to the differences in the material conditions in which he and his son had been raised: "I was brought up in the refugee camp so we—we don't have anything there… I don't have all the background of technology."

The Hakea parents described what they considered to be the limitations of their digital competences. Mariana said that people like her who had not grown up with technology "don't know how to use it" while her daughter "knows how to use a computer" and was able to help "find me something in my phone." Ibrahim spoke similarly of his son assisting him with Google searches for shopping, paying water and electricity bills online, checking the television guide, and using online banking. This assistance was not just technological but linguistic, because many of the sites and resources were in English. Haleema appreciated her children's competence and assistance: "it is a very good, especially that children are teaching adults… she's giving examples about buying things online. That is something that she learns from her children." Children were an important family resource, supporting parents' technological learning and progress.

Parents Mediating Children's Technology Use

Although learning about digital technology from their children, the Hakea parents still acted to shape and mediate their children's everyday digital experience. The interpreter conveyed Haleema's approach as follows:

> She is presenting that she is knowledgeable about it… She knows that her children are [more] knowledgeable than her in using technology, but also, she's presenting herself as knowledgeable, and the children need to have boundaries.

For example, Haleema discourages her children from watching violence, instead encouraging them to "watch something which is good." She described herself as "one of the mothers who will be checking the phones of her children every day and… who they were calling and with whom they were contacting or sending [messages to]" Given the TikTok videos he had seen on Facebook, Leki likewise said that he "regularly check his [daughter's] Tik Tok" for "bad videos or bad TikTok [content]." Shoaib also noted that his daughter's mother had insisted on Roblox being deleted because "there was like paedophiles" and "she was like getting asked questions by random strangers."

In addition, some parents set screen time limits. Mariana said that "we allow him … to play with the game or use the iPad only one hour a day… during the week, and three hours a day… on weekends." Penjor made similar comments about his son, stating that "if I think it is too much to play with the digital, then I just take him out [to visit people]." Leki delegated his older son with the task of ensuring that his younger son, Tika, was doing his schoolwork and not only playing online, and mentioned "his brother is solely responsible for that, so he set the time." Ibrahim, in contrast, "did not give any kind of restriction" on his son's screentime "even if he would want to spend 24 hours with the technology, is, is fine since he's learning something beneficial and he's not just spending time on games." In summary, five of the Hakea parents played an active role in regulating their children's digital experiences.

Parents' Experiences Interacting with the School

The analysis in this section is based on the interviews with four of the six Hakea parents. While Leki and Mariana both mentioned their interactions with teachers in response to a question about how their child was going at school, neither interview provided the necessary details for the analysis. Shoaib, Haleema, and Ibrahim were all explicitly asked whether they as a parent needed to access any specific technologies or platforms, such as Seesaw. All three provided an account of their experience with this LMS.

Ibrahim was uncertain about what the name of the LMS was. In the interpreter's words, "he didn't also remember exactly what is the name of the application." However, he mentioned that parents needed to download the LMS and also received links to it by SMS when the school wanted the parents to access content. By his appraisal, the LMS "is not something beneficial because it is in English," which, as the interpreter explained, was the "main reason behind that they're not downloading it, because it's not in Arabic." As noted earlier, Seesaw has a translation function that enables messages to be sent in dozens of languages and this feature is highlighted in Seesaw's marketing. Ibrahim was pre-literate in Arabic. Even if the written texts sent out by the school were translated into the languages of the home, written communication would not be sufficient to ensure school-home connection at Hakea. This finding highlights that parental literacy needs to be considered alongside the language of the home and digital competence.

In contrast to Ibrahim, Haleema, Shoaib, and Penjor had all downloaded the LMS. As stated by the interpreter, Shoaib said that "when he received it [the regular links from the school to Seesaw], he will check it, but he doesn't know how to reply because it is all in English." Nonetheless, Shoaib had a strategy for interacting with his daughter, Fatima, regarding the LMS. He had his eldest son translate the content on the LMS for him, and then would tell Fatima that

he had translated it himself with Google Translate. In other words, by using a traditional immigrant solution of treating a child as a language broker in transactions, Shoaib created (the illusion of) a multilingual digital fix to a monolingual problem of digitized communication between the school and home. This method seems to have enabled him to act authoritatively with his daughter as he monitored her schooling. Notably, Shoaib was a user who had skills in and experience using Google Translate. As explained by the interpreter, "he's usually using that program [Google Translate] for translating from Arabic to English, to translate any kind of SMS."

Penjor stated that he used Seesaw to assist his son, Pema, with his schoolwork: "I have what I downloaded for the school, so whatever the work Pema has to do, they send through SMS, so text, so yeah, just I am accessing it, and help Pema to do" Penjor did not indicate that he experienced any difficulties in this regard.

In contrast, although Haleema had downloaded the app, she rarely clicked on the links sent by the school. Through the interpreter, she explained that "everything that was sent in Seesaw, her child will bring as a handout." Therefore, Haleema relied on the print alternative to Seesaw. The printout was similar to a preschool newsletter with its mix of photographs and descriptions of the children's activity. However, the printout was sent home once a term whereas Seesaw notifications were much more frequent, with some teachers sending daily updates. Despite engaging with Seesaw, Shoaib also made use of the printout. Other alternatives to communication through Seesaw, utilized by all four parents were voice "calls" and face-to-face interaction.

These traditional means of contacting parents were more amenable to the use of translators than the digital system appeared to be. The school's multilingual support staff assisted with the translation of direct messages received by parents on their phones. In Ibrahim's experience, when "there is something sensitive or important, they will send it [a message] Arabic" by SMS. Such messages were sent by an Arabic-speaking "teacher" when a child took ill at school, or the school was to be closed the next day. Haleema made similar points. She said that while "everything from school is in English," nonetheless, "if there are something that is very important … the teacher who is speaking Arabic will contact them." Haleema's example was a call in Arabic to set up the interview for this study.

Finally, Shoaib spoke at length about a series of Friday meetings in which the school provided some settlement services for families newly arrived in Australia. These meetings provided opportunities for learning English, for instance, by taking guided excursions into the local community, such as to a coffee shop and the zoo. More recently, the school had begun using WhatsApp in services "for the whole families," especially those who attended the Friday meetings. Shoaib spoke of this approvingly, indicating that when he had been unable to attend the last two Friday meetings, he had been able to use WhatsApp to let the school know. Shoaib also indicated that the school had given newly arrived parents help with the "many mails in English … in their mailbox." Parents were invited to "bring those mail to the school" on specified days, and "some teachers help the parents with filling the forms." These are traditional means by which schools in multilingual communities in Australia reach out to families. However, it is notable that there had been some digitization of these activities, by utilizing WhatsApp, suggesting that even traditional communication methods were incorporating digital resources.

Teachers' Perspectives on Parents' Digital Involvement

When Hakea teachers were asked about how they connected with parents, they all mentioned Seesaw immediately. Seesaw was described as the main system for communicating with parents, as well as for undertaking multiple teaching and administrative functions. The enthusiasm of school management for the app was indicated by the school's IT coordinator, Damien: "We kind of threw a blanket rule over it and said 'this year everyone is going to use Seesaw.'" The teachers referred to Seesaw as "the main app that's used" (John), and "the only main one that I use" (Lisa), indicating that the push to use the app had been successful.

Hakea teachers saw Seesaw as offering many potential advantages to engaging parents. John appreciated that he could "message [parents] instantly, share photos and videos [and] communicate in a digital way … it works really well." Lisa echoed these comments: "I can post things that either particular parents I've selected or all parents can see." Amber spoke of "posting positive things on Seesaw and things to engage the families, whether it's student work or what they've done that was really kind that day."

However, teachers were also frank that actual take-up was less than they had hoped. For example, Lisa estimated that "maybe a third" of her students' parents used the app. John said "probably about seven families that really actively engage in it with me." Amber regretted that compelling parents to use the app was impossible: "Unfortunately, it is up to the family whether or not they respond or communicate." Lisa also mentioned that Seesaw operated as a place for teachers to merely "post things," and this level of activity seemed to discharge their responsibility for communicating with parents regarding basic administrative issues and class activities.

The teachers were also aware that the school's community included many immigrant families and that English was not the first language in many homes. Bradley acknowledged that parents were "not [from] a strong English-speaking background." He knew these parents did not use Seesaw, though he had clearly asked them to use the app. Bradley noted, "Families have told me, 'We looked at it. Like its nice.'" Such a response indicates that the parents attempted to give a polite response regarding an official school system that was not serving their needs.

Lisa attempted to cater to the parents' English proficiency by adapting her communication approach. She highlighted that "rather than, you know, creating big long spiels of written text, like I'll post lots of pictures of things, or like diagrams and things like that. Or try and keep text very short." Notably, Lisa had more success with parents joining and becoming active on Seesaw: around 18 of 22 families in her class participated in some way. This proportion indicates that reducing the English language processing burden supports parents' comprehension and engagement.

Children were inevitably drawn into the interaction between the school and their parents. Indeed, IT coordinator Damien spoke of the importance of "getting the students on board" in supporting parents' engagement with Seesaw. Children's services as translators appeared to be a given. Lisa said her students would "work out what I've written". This implied that children might be deciding whether communication would be passed on to their parents. In support of this impression, Bradley reported he would say to students: "Just if you want to, read it to your parent" (Bradley). This quote suggests that children might not be simply "reading" (translating) messages to their parents but also serving as the decision-makers in place of their parents, and this practice was acceptable to teachers.

Concerningly, it appears that when parents took the initiative of asking for assistance, the teachers perceived such requests as evidence of their lack of competence. As an example, Amber mentioned one occasion when she posted a link to an education department website on Seesaw and one parent asked, "How do I navigate the website?" Amber commented, "So, I mean like, it was the most easiest website to access and to navigate. … I have the skills to be able to navigate it, she clearly doesn't." The possibility that a teacher's "skills" were linked to familiarity with the language and structures of official educational discourse was not considered.

Moreover, parents' concerns about data privacy were dismissed by Bradley. He noted that "[S]ome of them thought the QR code was a government thing and blah blah blah … So they're not going to bother. Lovely parents, but it's just, that's the issue they're having." Parents' skills and experience in using digital technology in their daily lives, which were revealed in the parent interviews, did not seem to be visible to teachers.

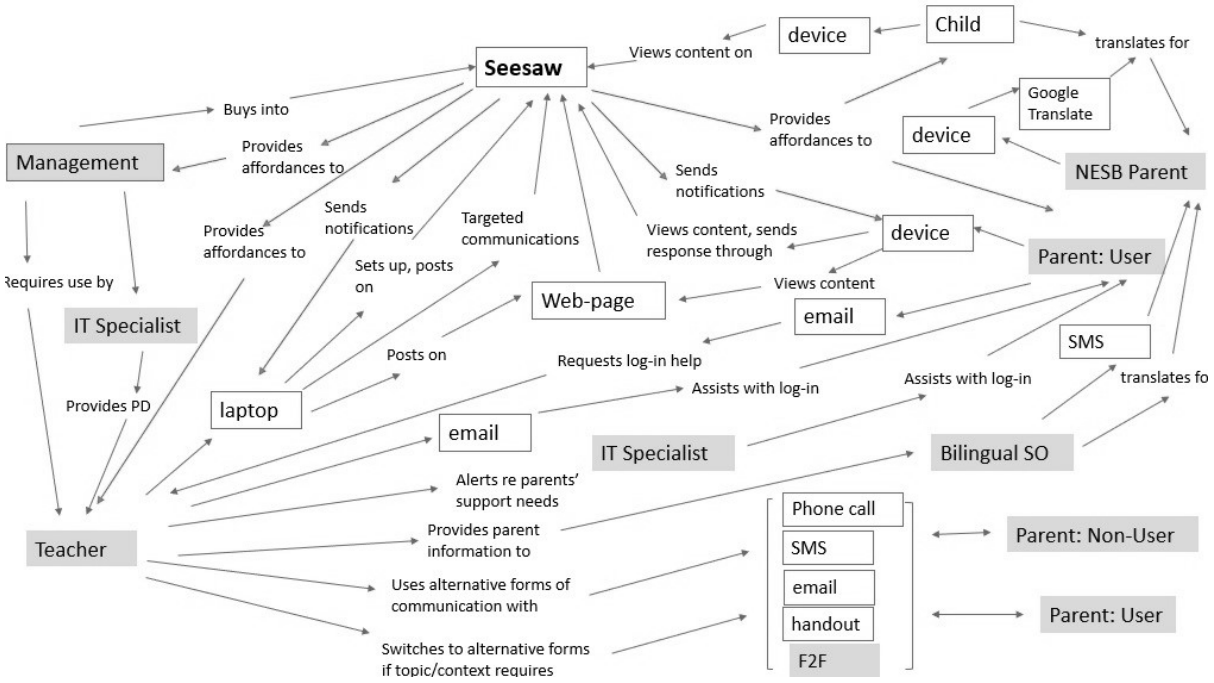
The Seesaw Network

Based on analysis of the interviews, in which every actor, action, and resource was identified, a snapshot map of the Seesaw network was produced. This map is not an exhaustive and definitive representation of every potential or actual interaction in the network, but it enables

a visual appreciation of the complexity of this system in action. Furthermore, the picture it creates is considerably different from the marketing descriptions of digital learning management systems. In the network diagrams, white boxes with black outlines represent non-human entities, which may be digital (e.g., apps, devices) or non-digital (e.g., printouts). Boxes filled in with grey and no outlines represent human participants, including educational personnel, parents, and children. Arrows indicate active connections between participants, whether human or non-human, as described by the interviewees.

Figure 1 represents a snapshot of the whole Seesaw network based on the available data. Figure 2 is the segment of this network most relevant to those parents for whom English was not their primary language, which was the case for all the study's parent participants. This group is referred to as non-English-speaking background (NESB) parents, rather than as a designation that refers to cultural difference or immigrant status because language emerged as a key factor that produced different experiences linked to the Seesaw network.

Figure 1
Seesaw Network

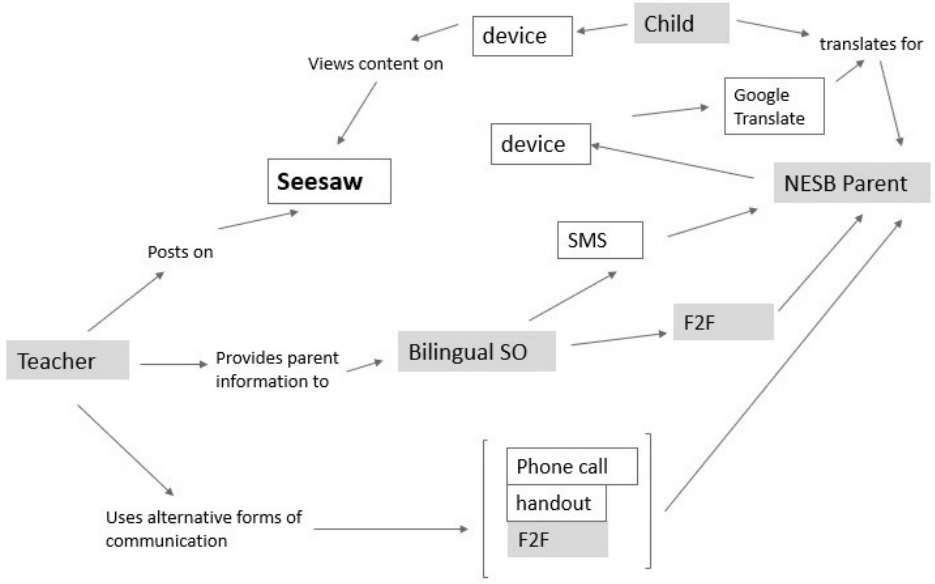


According to the participants, looking at the entire Seesaw network is a bewildering experience; any claimed simplicity of operation indicated in the promotional materials, is not an accurate description of what parents experienced in practice. Despite being promoted as a single solution to address multiple needs of a school, Seesaw does not operate alone. Rather, it relies on access to digital devices by human participants and to specific processes (such as registration and log-in) to enable interaction by humans with Seesaw. For instance, pathways exist from parents to teachers and the IT specialist who requests and receives log-in help. Requests for help are sent through emails and SMS, showing that the implementation of Seesaw relies on a supporting techno-social ecology.

Seesaw, despite its advantages, is insufficient to provide for the needs of participants. While educators continue to add content to the Seesaw platform so that it can be available to parents, they also maintain a suite of alternative communication processes for when Seesaw does not reach its target audience. Following the pathway from the teacher, these alternatives are bracketed together: phone calls, SMS messages, emails, hard copy print handouts, and face-to-face meetings.

These diverse practices are needed not just for parents who do not access Seesaw, but also for occasions when the issue to be addressed makes digital communication an unsuitable choice. For instance, the teacher may need to discuss a child's behavior with the parents, which educators consider as more appropriate for an in-person meeting if possible.

Figure 2
NESB Parent Seesaw Relay



The presence of NESB parents within the network necessitates a range of workarounds and diversions actioned by different participants (see Figure 2). To render communications comprehensible by parents, many players must be added to the network, including translation apps, bilingual children, and the bilingual school services officer. This complication inevitably creates delays in the parent's reception of the information contained in the message sent by the school. This more complicated relay challenges the representation of Seesaw and similar apps as enabling instantaneous communication.

Conclusion

Commercial providers of digital tools promise to enable enhanced connections between schools and parents, especially in linguistically and culturally diverse communities, with features such as translation functions and mobile apps. Seesaw, the recently implemented LMS at Hakea, exemplifies such a system. This study explored the impact of this digital technology on school-home connectivity in the Hakea community. The study was conducted from an ANT perspective that enabled fine-grained attention to the particularity of digital and other connections between school personnel and parents. The findings pointed to the heterogeneity of school-home connections at Hakea; Furthermore, they provided a nuanced understanding of the digital connectivities between human and non-human actors that serve several purposes crucial for reducing the digital divide between socially disadvantaged and advantaged groups.

The Use of an LMS for School-home Connectivity in a Linguistically Diverse Community
This analysis provides a snapshot of aspects of the transnational and multilingual digital lives of the parents. It also highlights the positive value parents placed on digital technology as a tool for their children's learning. However, the parents perceived a generational and social gap between them and their children. To some extent, this context might explain why some were apprehensive about their children's screen time and sought to have more control over what their children were consuming and producing digitally. The parents were also pro-active in monitoring and making

connections with their children's digital activities. However, there was heterogeneity even within this small group of parents in this regard, with one parent trusting that their child was using their unlimited screen time for learning.

The study provided insights into the sustained monolingual problem of digitized school-home communication confronted by parents such as the participants in the study. This analysis shows that the existence of English-only written communications from the school—in an LMS with translation functions for dozens of languages—prompted different responses from the participants. Older children and (feigned) use of tools such as Google Translate became part of these actors' networks. However, not all those who used the LMS created such a network. Moreover, using the LMS did not preclude the print-and-paper communications provided by the school being incorporated into a parent's network.

The findings about teacher perceptions of NESB parents' digital capabilities resonate with the study of Pavlakis et al. (2019). These researchers found that teachers in a technologically advanced school conflated the language barriers that Latinx parents faced with being "digitally limited"; in turn, these teachers underestimated the parents' digital capabilities. The monolingual English-speaking teachers failed to recognize the digital capabilities of parents in everyday digital transnational connections in a culturally and linguistically diverse community. This deficit perspective can lead to a misalignment between teachers' views of parents' digital engagement and the actual nature of their everyday digital capabilities. Such misalignment is further complicated and overlooked when teachers do not consider the limitations of how they make use of digital tools and how the parents may not use the translation function of the LMS in use at Hakea.

Based on the findings, connecting with parents should not be solely reliant on an LMS; rather, coupling the use of an LMS with a pedagogy of "authentic" dialogue holds considerable value (Goodall, 2018). Such a pedagogy is co-creative and requires that relationships be formed with the parents of different learners. Through such relationships, the multilingual and transnational digital lives of parents might become visible to school personnel, along with parents' digital support of and aspirations for their children. This approach is a means of developing alternatives to deficit representations of the capabilities of parents in digitized home-school connections.

The Potential of Actor Network Theory for Understanding Digitization of School-Home Connectivity

Theoretically, the use of Actor Network Theory (ANT) does help explain parents' digital engagement, and our Seesaw network analysis harmonizes findings from previous studies with the theory. The Seesaw network analysis shows how humans and non-humans are necessary network actors. However human actors are not only those that the digital system assumes and caters for. This study shows how some parents had to resort to other human actors (e.g., their older children or the school's bilingual liaison officers) to provide extra support that the LMS fails to provide. By expanding Fox's (2005) concept of a techno-social system, this study investigated the shortcomings of perceiving Seesaw as a "unified actor" (op. cit.) in facilitating digital engagements and connections between parents and teachers. Additionally, school personnel continued to bring non-digital human actors (e.g., the printed newsletters) into networks with parents who relied on these as alternatives or complements to the LMS. These networks in all their complexity, fragility, and even unexpectedness, trace translations through the hands of multiple human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005) in the Hakea school and its community. This context raises the question of how school personnel might act in the interest of enhanced equity in these processes.

The theorization and mapping determined from this study has several strengths in this regard. First, the qualitative analysis provides new perspectives in a research field that is increasingly focused on "non-human" actors. Second, the mapping integrates the fields of sociocultural studies of digital involvement and digital network analysis to promote digital equity. Such type of equity is proposed by Goodall's work (2018), which builds on Freire's (1994) critique of the current schooling system. Third, the identification of human and non-human participants

within the Seesaw LMS operation can help identify appropriate initiatives that teachers can adopt to better connect with parents. This approach is seen in Lisa's example of reaching out to her students' parents through the LMS. What else might teachers do if the parents were visible to them as actors in complex human and non-human networks? How might they leverage the potential actions of the non-human actors—in this case an LMS—differently? How might they make account of the non-digital non-human actors in these networks? What might they strengthen or add?

To conclude, the practical value of parental digital engagement to support children's learning rests on what theory-rich notions such as "digital connectivity" and "authentic dialogue" mean to teachers in practice. This understanding concerns the individual development of students in culturally and linguistically diverse school communities. More broadly, it concerns the "transformations undergone by actors" argued for by Latour (1990, p. 109). Of particular interest is whether these transformations enable a reduction of the digital divide between the socially disadvantaged and advantaged. However, the social and educational gaps in contemporary societies are unlikely to be solved through existing structures and practices that led us to the *status quo*. Therefore, school systems need to remain aware of claims that an LMS can improve parent involvement in schooling. It might render such success—but that is dependent to a considerable extent on the other actors in the network around the LMS and how they use the affordances of the LMS. Future research should articulate a *critical* perspective that explores the potential of authentic dialogue (Goodall, 2018) within the field of sociocultural studies of digital involvement and parental-teacher engagement more fully.

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Beyond "Engaged/Involved": Latina Immigrant Mothers' Negotiations of Family-Bilingual Program Relations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Based on expectations and behaviors associated with White, middle-, and upper-class families, U.S. educational institutions continue to frame racially minoritized families as inferior beings and as the causes for their children's educational challenges. Latinx families can be positioned in deficit ways even in dual language bilingual education programs (DLBE), often lauded for being culturally and linguistically expansive settings. Informed by Critical Race Theory in Education and LatCrit, this study presents counter-stories of two Latina immigrant mothers supporting their children's learning and development during the COVID-19 pandemic in states with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant legislative histories, Arizona and Massachusetts. Although the mothers were positioned as "engaged/involved" parents by the DLBE programs, their forms of care and support went beyond school-led behaviors associated with such labels. Leveraging community cultural wealth, the mothers shared a deep commitment to sustaining their children's bilingual and bicultural development and wellness. At the same time, they problematized static and constrained forms of engagement efforts during pandemic schooling and learning. As such, their counter-stories trouble deficit conceptualizations and false dichotomies within family-bilingual school relations and serve as a cautionary tale for educational programs framed as supportive of linguistic and cultural pluralism. We argue for the continued interrogation and reconfiguration of school-led forms of engagement to ensure that racially minoritized families engage in shared leadership and school governance and have their knowledge forms and language traditions elevated as crucial levers for catalyzing transformative learning in response to COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts.

Keywords: family engagement, COVID-19 pandemic, Latino/Latina/Latinx, mothers, families, dual language, bilingual

Introduction

Based on predetermined expectations and behaviors associated with White middle- and upper-class families, U.S. educational institutions continue to frame racially minoritized families as inferior beings and as the causes of their children's educational hardships (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Love et al.,

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2021). Latinx families may be positioned in deficit ways even in dual language bilingual education (DLBE) programs, which are often lauded as culturally and linguistically expansive educational settings (Valdés, 1997, 2018). In fact, the experiences of Latinx families in DLBE programs are often essentialized and presented as a basis for comparison with those of White middle- and upper-class families (Chaparro, 2020). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic led Latina mothers to redefine their caretaking roles in their children's education and flexibly respond to educational and social policies (Bruhn, 2023; Delgado, 2022). For instance, many of them assumed the role of teaching bilingually—in English and Spanish—through virtual platforms while protecting their children from contracting the COVID-19 virus within cramped living arrangements (Bruhn, 2023). Additionally, Latina mothers often shifted their educational aspirations for their children by prioritizing the children's physical safety and participating in local advocacy organizations to refute unclear, arduous school guidelines (Bruhn, 2023; Delgado, 2022). However, much of the reporting on these mothers has focused on single geographic locations and general education settings, only minimally reporting how these mothers supported learning and well-being across multiple modalities. Hence, the varied and sophisticated ways in which Latina immigrant mothers navigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on DLBE must be understood, as these experiences help mitigate deficit, essentialized orientations toward Latinx families, and inform mobilization efforts to reimagine schooling and learning in the aftermath of the pandemic.

To augment reports on the nature, priorities, and negotiations of Latina immigrant care work during DLBE pandemic schooling, we generated counter-stories from two multi-year ethnographic studies that focused on the experiences of families in DLBE programs occurring in two states with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant legislative histories: Arizona and Massachusetts. The counter-stories are grounded in the experiences of two Latina immigrant mothers, Lupe and Paloma (both pseudonyms), who represent critical cases due to their unique positioning as "engaged/involved" by DLBE staff members and programming. Specifically, we engaged in counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to answer the following two research questions: 1) How do two Latina immigrant mothers' counter-stories of DLBE family engagement contest dominant orientations toward Latinx family engagement in schools? 2) How do two Latina immigrant mothers rely on their community's cultural wealth to support the learning and well-being of their children in DLBE during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Leveraging various capitals of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), Paloma's and Lupe's counter-stories reveal a shared, deep commitment to sustaining their children's language and heritage practices, biliteracy teaching and learning, and socioemotional and physical wellness as they negotiated multiple constraints induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, these counter-stories challenge the deficit conceptualizations and false dichotomies within family-bilingual school relationships. Overall, we argue for the continued interrogation of superficial positionings related to school-led forms of engagement that aim to absolve schools from ensuring that Latina immigrant mothers engage in shared leadership and school governance, acquire various resources and opportunities, and leverage their knowledge forms and language traditions. Such commitments would help establish Latina mothers as critical catalysts of transformative learning and communal care within COVID-19 pandemic recovery efforts.

Review of the Literature

Dominant Approaches to Family Engagement in U.S. Schools

Educational institutions and their actors expect parents to conform to static and prescribed roles, behaviors, and knowledge traditions. Such normalized forms of conduct and relations include

attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering at school, participating in parent-teacher associations, and serving as chaperones for field trips (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Terriquez, 2011). These conventional forms of parent engagement in schools necessitate parents' physical presence, as well as constrained, hierarchical forms of communication between schools and families (Love et al., 2021). The school-based and -led determinations regarding legitimate forms of family engagement are often based on the behaviors, expectations, and knowledge of White middle- and upper-class families (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru et al., 2023).

Consequently, racially minoritized families experience racism in schools when these norms associated with White families are held as the desired standard and are leveraged to frame racially minoritized families as possessing deficient behaviors, knowledge forms, and perspectives (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru et al., 2014). Consequently, the legitimacy of White family norms within school-centric approaches to family engagement justify the denigration of racially minoritized families' contributions to their children's learning and development and exclude racially minoritized families from decision-making processes, resources, and opportunities (Fernández, 2016; Rodela & Bertrand, 2021). Such deficit positionings are often leveraged by educational institutions and actors to blame racially minoritized families for their children's academic underachievement and absolve these institutions from addressing the educational and social inequities experienced by racially minoritized families (Kohli et al., 2017; Love et al., 2021). Instead, educational institutions and actors claim that racially minoritized families require training and intervention to address their inherently deficient viewpoints, values, and behaviors (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; McCarthy-Foubert, 2022). These supposed behaviors often center around the languages and related heritage practices of racially minoritized groups (Alvarado, 2022; Baker-Bell, 2020; Li & Qin, 2024).

Latinx Families in Bilingual Educational Programs

In the context of DLBE programs, whose goal is to promote bilingualism and biliteracy, Latinx families are often perceived as having inferior language practices (Valdés, 1996, 2018) or, at worst, lacking language altogether (Rosa, 2016). These programs often expect their members to strictly separate and communicate in two standardized languages (Flores & García, 2017; Freire & Delavan, 2021). Flores (2017) refers to this language expectation as *bilingual hegemonic whiteness*, a hierarchy of bilingualism in which the language acquisition processes of White families are deemed as an idealized bilingualism that produces cognitive benefits. Consequently, DLBE programs frame the dynamic heritage and communicative practices of Latinx families who do not completely align with White-based, standardized language forms as indications that these families possess problematic behaviors and inadequate home learning environments to support standardized bilingual acquisition (Mena & García, 2021). In response, DLBE program educators and staff members may engage in authoritative, remedial, and race-evasive approaches toward working with Latinx families in meeting the demands of these programs (Chávez-Moreno, 2023; Olivos, 2006). These approaches often include pressuring Latinx parents to separate their English and Spanish language use, recommending the parents take adult English classes, and expecting them to comply with tasks and roles mandated by school staff (Freire & Delavan, 2021; Hernández, 2017). If Latinx parents do not conform to these expectations and behaviors, they find themselves at risk of being viewed by school actors as not contributing to and even obstructing their children's education—contradictory yet bounded tropes placed upon Latinx and racially minoritized parents across U.S. schools (Fernández & López, 2017; Gaitán, 2004).

Accordingly, Valdés (1997, 2018) has continually advocated for deep, explicit examination of how issues of race, class, and language permeate the experiences of Latinx families in DLBE programs. In response, Shannon (2011) and Burns (2017) highlighted how the attention to the academic, personal, and professional goals and demands of White middle- and upper-class families overshadows the importance of Latinx families' sustaining their dynamic bilingualism and heritage traditions. These

scholars noted that this imbalance of influence over DLBE programming is exacerbated by White upper- and middle-class families' occupying school leadership positions, wielding tangible influence within DLBE decision-making processes. Muro (2016) warned that White middle- and upper-class families engage with Latinx families in "polite, surface-level interactions that are enjoyable, voluntary, and additive" (p. 517) while continuing to solidify racial stratification and racial prejudices. For instance, Muro (2016) reported that relationships and interactions between Latinx and White families in a DLBE program were polite and friendly but often brief, rarely transcending the school (Muro, 2016). Instead, parents participated in segregated parent organizations and spent time outside of school with their friendship networks, composed of families from the same race and class group (Muro, 2016). Further, Scanlan and Palmer (2009) and Chaparro (2020) identified how racialized ideologies permeate these surface-level, symbolic forms of integration, conflating the experiences of Latinx families in DLBE programs by primarily presenting them as a basis for comparison to those of White middle- and upper-class families. As such, these scholars, along with Olivos and Lucero (2018), argued for layered reporting on Latinx families' varied positionings, access to resources and opportunities, and lived trajectories in DLBE programs. Additionally, Kaveh et al. (2022) noted the limited reporting on the interests of Latinx families in supporting the learning and well-being of children in schools within states with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant policy histories.

Latina Mothering and Caretaking during Pandemic Schooling

The COVID-19 pandemic and related economic crises have influenced Latina immigrant mothers' increased responsibility in sustaining the learning, emotional well-being, and physical safety of their children. These mothers attempted to simulate traditional schooling at home as part of their children's transition to remote and hybrid instruction (Bruhn, 2023; Segel et al., 2024). Additionally, they leveraged their social networks and participated in community organizations to advocate for their children's access to educational resources and material supports and seek tutors who could facilitate their children's learning of content and skills expected in schools (Bruhn, 2023; Delgado, 2022; Segel et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the coalescence of socioeconomic inequalities and racialized, anti-immigrant policies often complicate such efforts. For instance, Bruhn (2023) reported how Latina immigrant mothers' economic instability often meant living in close, infection-prone living arrangements; feeling socially isolated from their friends; and being unable to financially or materially provide for their families. Acknowledging her focus on one Northeastern neighborhood, Bruhn recommended further study of Latina immigrant mothers in other educational settings to gain a nuanced understanding of Latina immigrant mothers' support of their children's learning and development during the COVID-19 pandemic in other geographic locations and schooling contexts.

In response, this study extends the nascent literature on Latina immigrant mothers navigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their children's schooling and learning. We do so by providing a layered and intersectional, power-laden analysis of the experiences of Latina immigrant mothers in an alternative educational setting, DLBE, across two state contexts and two modes of instruction (remote and hybrid instruction). Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic context, this study contributes to the literature on families in DLBE programs by examining Latina immigrant mothers' relationships with DLBE programs situated in states with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant policy histories and by showcasing Latinx families' enduring yet varied identifications with race, ethnicity, nationality, and language.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory and LatCrit

This article leverages critical race theory (CRT) in education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) to report how two Latina immigrant mothers supported their children's learning and well-being in DLBE programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. CRT in education helps explain how racial inequities in schools are "logical and predictable results of a White supremacist society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47) when making sense of the material impact of raced, classed, and gendered oppression. As an extension, LatCrit notes the persistent issues that Latinx groups face: immigration status, linguicism, and nativism (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Three key tenets that permeate LatCrit and CRT scholarship inform our study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001): a) the intersectionality of race and other forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); b) the importance of centering the lived experiences of racially minoritized groups through counter-stories that speak to dominant, deficit narratives about these groups (Ladson-Billings, 2021a; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001); and c) the centrality of race, racism, and White supremacy within a sociopolitical and historical context (Ladson-Billings, 2021a; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Application of CRT and LatCrit Tenets for This Study

Informed by the above three tenets, this study reports on how the intersections of multiple forms of oppression (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, nationality) permeate school-based forms of family engagement, as well as Latina immigrant mothers' support of their children's educational experiences. We highlight how the focal mothers' lived experiences and perspectives help counter the problematic, dominant assumption that racially minoritized families will be valued and given access to material and social resources based on their positioning as "involved/engaged" parents and if they conform to school- and White-based forms of family engagement. Further, we note how the matrices of oppression experienced by the focal Latina immigrant mothers in their educational settings connect to socio-historical and political phenomena. One such phenomenon is the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on state and local educational programming, as well as material and social resources and opportunities available to families. The other phenomena are the anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant policy histories within the states in which the mothers and children reside: Massachusetts and Arizona.

Application of Community Cultural Wealth for This Study

Yosso and Burciaga (2016) argued that examining the lived experiences of racially minoritized groups through CRT and LatCrit as primary lenses illuminates the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks possessed and utilized by racially minoritized groups to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 2). These knowledge forms, cultural practices, and relationships are instrumental, sophisticated assets that have been preserved and passed down by generations of racially minoritized groups in their collective negotiations and contestations of oppressive conditions (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). Yosso (2005) referred to these interdependent, multifaceted assets as community cultural wealth. She identified six forms of capital within community cultural wealth, referring to them as "dynamic processes that build on one another" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The six forms of capital are as follows (Yosso, 2005):

1. Aspirational capital is the capacity to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite the presence of real and perceived barriers.

2. Linguistic capital is the intellectual and social skills embedded in dynamic communicative practices that extend beyond standardized languages and dialects.
3. Familial capital is the knowledge traditions passed down and nurtured among families, with responsiveness to flourishing and belonging to broader communities.
4. Social capital consists of the social networks, individuals, and resources that help confront the challenges accompanying forms of oppression.
5. Navigational capital is the skills to maneuver institutions and organizations strategically.
6. Resistant capital is the knowledge traditions utilized to oppose injustices and inequities.

We leverage Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework to highlight how the focal Latina immigrant mothers utilized and nurtured various forms of capital within their negotiations of the social, material, and educational effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We specifically note how the focal mothers utilized these forms of capital to complicate assumptions placed upon racially minoritized parents regarded by DLBE school actors and throughout programming as "engaged/involved." As such, we aim to interrogate the assumed connection between the label "engaged/involved" and access to leadership opportunities, decision-making spaces, and social and material acquisition in schools (Olivos & Lucero, 2018). Aligned with Yosso's (2005) claims about the interdependent and overlapping nature of the forms of capital, this study also describes how the focal mothers' actions, understandings, and relations are indications of several forms of capital.

Place and Participants

This research was generated from two multi-year ethnographic studies focusing on the experiences of families in DLBE programs in Arizona (2019–2022) and Massachusetts (2019–2022). In the Arizona study, Yalda supported administrators, teachers, parents/caregivers, and children in their DLBE program expansion in 2020. She conducted observations of DLBE department meetings between 2019 and 2021 and interviewed six teachers in 2020. The expansion of the DLBE model across all kindergarten classes and the shift to online schooling in the fall of 2020 led Yalda to focus on the kindergarten cohort of families through semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observations of online schooling during the 2020–2021 academic year. The three-year Massachusetts study (2019–2022) focused on understanding family engagement policy and the ways in which family-school relations are conceptualized within policy text and by different school and community actors within a K–5 DLBE school. The Massachusetts study included 50 participants, composed of administrators, educators, community affiliates, children, and parents/caretakers. Data generation in the larger study comprised semi-structured interviews; school, classroom, and participant artifacts; observational field notes; and secondary sources related to the school and neighborhood. This research study emerged from Jasmine's numerous conversations and meetings with instructional coaches, administrators, classroom teachers, and families during her time volunteering and substitute teaching at the school from 2018 to 2019.

The state contexts of the two studies, Arizona and Massachusetts, are critical for understanding the experiences of Latina mothers of bi/multilingual children. They were two of three states that passed state language policy legislation in the early 2000s that aimed to promote English-only education and eradicate bilingual programs. In 2017, Massachusetts overturned its English-only language legislation with minimal guidance for supporting the creation and maintenance of bilingual programs (Alvarado & Proctor, 2023). In 2019, Arizona passed a bipartisan legislative measure to cut back the 4 hours of mandated English instruction and allow students access to bilingual education (Kaveh et al., 2022). Since 2023, however, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne,

has been attempting to dismiss DLBE programs as valid educational models under the 2000 mandate (Bernstein et al., 2024).

Besides their history of English-only state language policies, the two states share several trends regarding racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic disparities. Based on the U.S. Census (2020), Hispanic/Latinx individuals comprise the largest, self-identified non-White population in both states (Table 1). Similarly, Spanish is the second most widely spoken language in both states. Given the significant number of Latinx people and Spanish speakers, particularly among youth enrolled in public schools, the anti-bilingual educational policies that were ratified and implemented in Arizona and Massachusetts were highly problematic.

Table 1

Demographic Information About the Participants' States and Neighborhoods

		Arizona		Massachusetts	
		Neighborhood	State	Neighborhood	State
Race/ Ethnicity %	Latinx	45.1	32.5	19.8	13.1
	White	27.9	52.9	61.6	69.6
	Black/African American	10.4	5.5	4.9	9.5
	Asian	3.8	3.9	10.8	7.7
	Native American	2.5	5.2	0.3	0.5
	Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	2.8	0.3	0.1	0.1
	Other	4.7	0.4	0.1	1.31
	Two or more races	2.8	3.2	2.3	2.7
Non-U.S. born %		20.4	12.6	25.1	17.6
Languages Spoken at Home %	English	52	73.4	69.5	75.6
	Spanish	43.9	20.1	14.9	9.4

	Other Indo-European languages	2.3	2.0	7.4	9.1
	Asian or Pacific Island languages	0.6	2.0	6.8	4.4
	Other languages	0.7	2.4	1.0	1.5
Median Household Income		$38,364	$78,845	$101,177	$112,534
Renter Occupied Homes %	City Data	82	32	57	37
	American Census Survey	43.9	34.2	50.2	37.6

While the general population of Arizona has a more significant number of Latinx individuals, the focal school districts in Arizona and Massachusetts both predominantly enrolled Latinx students from 2022 to 2023 (Table 2). Similar to the state trends, Spanish is the largest non-English language spoken by the residents of the focal neighborhoods. The student populations in the two selected schools reflected the state and school district patterns in terms of their racial and ethnic demographics, with the majority of the students in both schools identifying as Latinx (Table 2).

Although the two participating schools both had Spanish-English DLBE programs, they followed different educational models and methods for selecting students. In Massachusetts, the DLBE program is a 90:10 model, in which the amount of heritage language instruction (Spanish) decreases yearly as teaching in English increases, until there is a 50:50 balance of language in grades four and five. Since the bilingual program's formation in 2015, each kindergarten cohort of 50 students has been chosen by lottery, which is open to all families in the neighborhood, during the summer. School administrators and staff utilize parents'/guardians' answers to the following question on the home language survey to designate a student's dominant language: "What language did your child first understand and speak?" If a parent/guardian chooses Spanish in the survey, their child is coded as a Spanish speaker and potentially an English learner to later take a state-adopted language screener. The student's score on the screener determines whether they obtain the label English Learner (EL).

In contrast, the Arizona school implemented a 50:50 model for DLBE, which separates daily instruction into 50% English and 50% Spanish (García, 2009). This school has always offered two program pathways: a two-way DLBE program and a monolingual English program. Until 2020, the DLBE program was offered only to English monolingual and English-proficient bi/multilingual students due to English-only state educational policies that prohibited students classified as EL from accessing DLBE until they showed proficiency on standardized English language assessments. Following the 2019 legislation in Arizona, schools were allowed to teach English to emergent bi/multilinguals through DLBE and other research-based approaches (Kaveh et al., 2022). This

change allowed the Arizona school to enroll all kindergarteners, including ELs, in the DLBE program in 2020.[1]

Table 2

Student Demographics at the School, District, and State Levels

		AZ School	District	State	MA School	District	State
	Hispanic/Latinx	86.85	78.7	47.59	71	45.5	24.2
Race/ Ethnicity %	White	*	5.8	34.93	21	38.4	54.4
	Black/African American	7.35	10.1	5.6	4	8.5	9.4
	Asian	0	0.8	3.08	0	4.8	7.3
	Native American	2.71	2.1	4.2	0	.1	0.2
	Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	*[2]	*	< 0.2	0	.1	0.1
	Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic	*	2.4	4.16	4	2.8	4.4
Students Labeled as English Learner %		20	23	10	46	24.3	13.1

The two participants were selected from the larger studies through purposive and critical case sampling. The participants shared a few characteristics: a) they were caretakers/parents of children in the focal DLBE programs; b) they self-identified as Latina/x, Hispanic, and/or from a Latin American ancestry; and c) they were described by DLBE staff members and educators as "engaged/involved" parents. This unique positioning of "engaged/involved" led to the two focal participants representing critical cases (Hernández & Murakami, 2016). Although various scholarship on family-school relationships has distinguished the terms *engaged* and *involved* (Ishimaru et al., 2023), we highlight their interchangeable usage by participants from our larger studies.

Despite sharing common characteristics, these two Latina mothers also represented critical differences in their lived experiences and journeys as Latina immigrants. Below is a brief overview of each focal mother regarding the following characteristics: a) race and ethnicity; b) languages of communication; c) professional occupation; d) country of origin; and e) time of residence in the U.S.

[1] At the time of writing this article in 2024, the 2019 policy has been challenged by the new State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the DLBE program has been paused for a year.

[2] * When a group had 10 or fewer students, the data on the Arizona school used an asterisk to protect the individual students' anonymity. The MA school used '0' in those cases.

Paloma. Paloma referred to herself as a mother of three children. Two of her children attended the focal Arizona DLBE program and were in kindergarten and fourth grade. At the time of the study, Paloma identified as Mexican and Hispanic. She moved to the U.S. at a young age and had lived in the focal Arizona neighborhood for at least 10 years. Paloma learned English when attending Arizona's English-monolingual schools. She mostly communicated in Spanish with Yalda and her research assistant and considered herself bilingual in English and Spanish. She had a high school diploma and was mainly a stay-at-home mother, occasionally making and delivering food with her husband.

Lupe. Lupe referred to herself as a mother of two children, Michael and Carmela, both students in the Massachusetts DLBE program. At the time of the study, her children were 7 and 8 years old and were in the second and third grade. Lupe identified as Salvadorian, Latina, and Hispana. She moved to the U.S. when she was 21 and had lived in the focal neighborhood for 14 years. Lupe communicated with Jasmine in English and Spanish but did not consider herself bilingual. She was a school aide for the DLBE program during the COVID-19 pandemic. On Fridays and during the weekend, Lupe ran her business of making pupusas from her house.

Relationality with Place and Participants

Our experiences and relationships with the focal neighborhoods and participants shaped our interpretations of the topics of study and our presentations of the focal mothers' counter-stories. Jasmine describes herself as an Ecuadorian, bilingual, and Latina who lived in Massachusetts for 6 years. She considers herself a Breezer, a label that many of the participants from her larger study use to describe someone who did not grow up in the neighborhood but resides there and who may move to another place in the future. She cultivated relationships and consistently interacted with these individuals because she was a substitute teacher and volunteer at the school from 2018 to 2022 and could communicate bilingually in English and Spanish. The majority of the Latinx parents, like Lupe, who self-identified as being from a Central American country perceived Jasmine as a fellow member of this group. After several initial interactions, they asked Jasmine what country she was from and sometimes even directly asked if she was from a specific country, such as El Salvador or Mexico. Lupe and several other parents often contacted Jasmine via email or phone and/or invited her to their homes to seek clarification about the school's instructional program and initiatives.

Yalda identifies as a multilingual Iranian immigrant woman. She was first introduced to the school in 2019 through a colleague to help with the expansion of the DLBE program and increased use of Spanish in K–8 DLBE classrooms. Despite the differences in ethnoracial and linguistic identifications, she found shared experiences of racialization, linguicism, and identity development with the DLBE staff. Additionally, she recognized a sense of authentic *cariño* (Noddings, 1984) in her interactions with the DLBE team, which entailed "both interpersonal and institutional care" and a "dynamic interplay of familial, intellectual, and critical care" (Curry, 2016, p. 884). In consultation with the DLBE leadership and classroom teachers, Yalda focused on supporting the families and teachers of the kindergarten cohort when the mode of instruction shifted to online learning during the 2020–2021 academic year and the COVID-19 pandemic. She interacted with Paloma and the other mothers from the larger study through virtual classroom observations, read-aloud activities, and interviews. During the interviews, Yalda and the mothers discussed their shared experiences with immigration, living far from loved ones, and challenges living in the U.S. as racially minoritized immigrant women.

As co-authors, we acknowledge that our experiences are not universal and that different people may experience the same events differently. Further, we acknowledge our social locations as

researchers affiliated with higher education, which, as an institution, continues to encourage the extraction and exploitation of multiply-minoritized groups. In response, we conversed with participants to obtain feedback and interrogated our assumptions and experiential knowledge within our memos. Despite the conclusion of data generation and analysis, we continue to be accountable to our larger studies' participants through ongoing dialogue and mobilization with them about leveraging findings from our studies for their goals, priorities, and flourishing.

Methodology

This study was designed through the lens of counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to understand the complex life stories and personhood of two Latina immigrant mothers and contest damage-centered narratives pathologizing their identities and roles in their children's education and development. Rooted in CRT, counter-storytelling is a method of elevating stories from racially minoritized peoples whose experiences have historically been omitted in educational and societal discourse (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The various forms of counter-storytelling include comparative and complementary analysis, composite counter-stories, and thematic counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling is guided by the principles of "integrity, authenticity, sincerity, righteousness, and justice" (Atwood & López, 214, p. 1145). Accordingly, we portray the focal mothers' lives not as "settled discourses, but as portals of meaning that present new possibilities and solidarities" (Vossoughi, 2022, p.173). Specifically, we highlight how these mothers' diverse lived experiences and perspectives rupture traditional forms of engagement and the essentialization of Latinx families in schools, particularly in bilingual programs.

Data Generation

Data generation consisted of three semi-structured, in-depth interviews and verbatim interview transcripts (60–120 minutes each through place and virtual mediums); memos generated after participant interviews; and field notes from ethnographic observations in school-wide and classroom events (240 hours each for observations through place and virtual mediums). Our observation protocols comprised two columns documenting thick descriptions and our analytical thoughts during observations. Observational notes included a) conversations among participants and direct phrases from them; b) descriptions of location, modality, and time; c) artifacts used by participants; d) participation structures within the location (e.g., whole group, pair, small group); and e) whether certain participants were present or absent in activities observed as part of the larger studies. For the purpose of this paper, we analyzed observational notes involving the focal mothers.

The interviews covered the following topics: a) personal and educational histories, b) classroom and school events, c) interactions with school staff and members, and d) relationships and interactions with their children. However, these interviews were flexible in discussing concerns related to specific school or classroom-related events, the ongoing pandemic, neighborhood issues, and comments made by other educational or community stakeholders. Further, we discussed with the participants moments from observations we found significant or unexpected in relation to the topics of study. After conducting each interview, we wrote field notes and reflective memos. Within these notes and memos, we recorded impressions, salient themes, interruptions or unexpected events, and general interview milieu. The memos supplemented our understanding of the mothers' experiences and perspectives as we coded interview transcriptions and observational notes during the analysis process.

Data Analysis

The counter-stories were created through an iterative analytical approach. As two scholars who share similar research interests, we have served as thought partners for our respective larger ethnographic studies. Within our conversations, we noted similarities in the focal mothers' positioning as "engaged/involved" and negotiations of this bounded labeling within our two bilingual programs and state contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Having identified this critical similarity, we each returned to our individual data and used thematic coding (Saldaña, 2015) for the first phase of data analysis. In this phase, we documented instances in the interviews and observations in which we witnessed the mothers making sense of expected roles and responsibilities for parents in their bilingual program and the multiple forms of support and care available for their children during unprecedented schooling conditions (RQ1). The initial thematic coding was guided by CRT theoretical orientations, the literature on family engagement and bi/multilingual family planning, as well as our professional and personal experiences (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Examples of initial codes included the following terms: class/lesson and school-wide activities, forms of participation in class/lesson and school-wide activities, mothers' access to and support for their children's curricular and instructional programming, and opportunities to advocate and critique instruction and programming.

In the second stage of our analysis, we each composed one focal mother's counter-story based on the thematic analysis. We were intentional about answering our first research question by writing counter-stories that presented the mothers' experiences, priorities, and critiques as holistic narratives of people instead of categorized objects of data. As Cook and Dixson (2013) explained, "Individual experiences that people have with racism and discrimination cannot represent the collective experiences that people of color have with racism and discrimination" (p.1243). As we independently continued to refine key themes and excerpts for each mother's counter-story, we served as each other's peer debriefers (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985) and provided feedback on our analytical procedures, particularly our triangulation of multiple data sources.

In the third phase of analysis, we, as co-authors, collaboratively engaged in axial coding as we frequently met to identify larger patterns across our initial coding schemes, the mothers' counter-stories, and discrepant data (LeCompte & Schensul, 2012). During this process, we focuses on the six forms of capital the mothers leveraged to support their children (RQ2). The process enabled us to highlight the mothers' similarities and differences within their forms of support, care, and interrogations of deficit practices, understandings, and positionings. Furthermore, this comparative case analysis (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008) enabled us to leverage our individual expertise, compare and contrast cases, and generate enduring understandings of the topics and contexts of focus (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). The comparative case analysis also highlighted the six forms of capital that the mothers utilized to engage in their children's schooling and education: linguistic, social, resistant, navigational, aspirational, and familial forms of community cultural wealth. Throughout our fourth and final stage of the analysis and writing process, we refined our interpretations of the focal mothers' interactions, observations, and critiques that permeated their counter-stories by ensuring these counter-stories explicitly referenced the mothers' deployment of community cultural wealth.

Findings

The counter-stories reflect the experiences and relationships of two Latina immigrant mothers, Lupe and Paloma, in DLBE programs located in states with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant policy histories. Such policy contexts exacerbated the material, financial, and social constraints in DLBE programs aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including reduced school staff, limited curricular

and instructional resources, and rigid approaches toward content and language learning. Nevertheless, Lupe and Paloma shared a deep commitment to sustaining their children's language and heritage practices, biliteracy teaching and learning, and socioemotional and physical wellness. The following section first presents Lupe's counter-story, followed by Paloma's. Within each counter-story, we note how these mothers deployed various forms of community cultural wealth in their negotiations and resistance of various forms of oppression (e.g., racism, linguicism, nativism) that permeated their experiences and relations during dual language bilingual pandemic schooling.

Lupe

Lupe became a part-time school aide in the Massachusetts-based DLBE program two years after her first child, Michael, enrolled in kindergarten there. At the time, Lupe was working from home and running her *pupusa* delivery business. The school's principal regularly ordered *pupusas* from Lupe for the school staff, and after learning of Lupe's family's financial hardships and needing more staff who spoke Spanish, the principal offered Lupe a school aide position at the DLBE program. Besides this need for bilingual school staff, shared by DLBE programs across the U.S. (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2019), the DLBE program had limited resources and personnel as one of the few bilingual programs in the aftermath of the Question 2 ballot in 2002, which banned bilingual education programming across Massachusetts (De Jong et al., 2005). During one staff meeting, the principal explained Lupe's employment as a school aide and her rationale for this decision:

> Although Lupe has her *pupusa* business, she is in need of secure employment. So I have invited her to join us as a school aide. She will be really helpful because we are in desperate need of more Spanish-speaking staff. You know, since we are in a state with limited Spanish-speaking teachers and low recruitment of bilingual ones. (Staff Meeting Field Note, 11/3/20)

Thus, Lupe's employment at the DLBE program was made possible by her linguistic and social capital, which were reflected in her relationship with the principal and the school's need for Spanish-speaking staff.

Like most DLBE school staff, Lupe assumed multiple roles and responsibilities across grade levels. She explained,

> I always help every grade level. Although I focus on the grades where my children are, I help during lunch, recess, and school events. If other grades need someone for reading in Spanish, I assist. I am told that I am a very attentive and involved mother many times. However, I am not really engaged like some other parents who have lots of say in things. (Interview, 03/18/21)

In her commentary, Lupe noted how various school staff members and administrators explicitly viewed her as an "engaged and attentive parent." At the same time, she viewed other parents as engaged because of their tangible influence over the functioning of the school.

Although Lupe was invited to participate in parent forums and initiatives at the DLBE program, she explained her limited decision-making power in those settings:

> Other parents lead family events and are in other rooms with the principal and teachers. I have gone to some of those meetings, but as a member, to listen and see what is going on. I have not been invited to direct and say when or how they should take place. Like the time when the school had to decide on a new name, I was invited by another parent, a White parent. She was

> one of the parent leaders of the family teacher association. They already had, like, a selection of names to choose, though. (Interview, 5/2/21)

As Lupe mentioned, the elected leaders of the parent-teacher group, along with some teacher representatives, hosted two hybrid meetings, in English and Spanish, to choose a new name for the DLBE school (Meeting Field Notes, 03/25/21). The elected leaders of the parent-teacher group, mostly composed of people from White and middle-class groups, argued for the name of the program to be changed into one incorporating the name of a renowned Latinx person (Meeting Field Note, 03/25/21). Before the first meeting of this initiative, the principal disclosed the process of how this initiative came to fruition:

> Principal: I am still not sure that the name change is a big concern to Latino and the low-income families because it just came from the parent leaders.
> Jasmine: How did that start?
> Principal: They came to me and told me that the name should be about a Hispanic person due to the cultural roots of the program. I told them to create a way that would show that, like a voting process. They picked a group of names for the others to go vote, but the final vote would need to reflect the majority. (School-wide Field Note, 3/25/21)

The principal's remarks highlighted the expectation that the parent leaders would obtain a count of votes representing the majority of families composing the school. In response, one of the leaders of the parent-teacher group reached out to Lupe to persuade her to attend the meeting to vote on a new school name. Lupe's description of herself as a mere participant and the principal's skepticism about the school initiative being a priority for Latinx families demonstrate the severity of the prescriptive and asymmetrical nature within DLBE family initiatives and forums, in which racially minoritized parents' voices and perspectives are not consistently at the forefront in driving such programming (Rodela & Bertrand, 2021).

Lupe's constrained positioning remained the same despite multiple shifts in the modality of instruction and programming during the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless, Lupe displayed aspirational capital by welcoming opportunities to engage in various school-related forums and collectives where she could influence their time, structure, and focus. She elaborated, "If I had the opportunity to have more say about the school's priorities and when and what the programs and groups are for, I would be open even though we are in the pandemic" (Interview, 5/2/2021). However, she later expressed her concern about the separate and rigid language expectations within the bilingual program's committees and forums:

> It is that in a lot of those conversations and groups for parents, English rules, and I am not comfortable speaking only in that language. Even in Spanish I do not feel totally comfortable. Like here, it is a lot of Spanish from Spain or sometimes from regions of Guatemala. I am not from there. (Interview, 5/2/21)

Lupe pointed out how these forums, like the above school-naming initiative, upheld standardized English and particular varieties of Spanish. She exemplified her resistant capital to such norms when she communicated these concerns to the family-school liaison, Claudia, during a third-grade lunch period:

> *Lupe and Claudia (the family-liaison) are helping throw out the student trays. Claudia asks her opinion about the school-naming meetings.* Lupe says, "It's a great example of how strict language expectations

> are here. Like even in Spanish ones, Latino parents can't feel comfortable unless it's Spanish like from Spain or if you are Guatemalan."
> *Claudia nods and faces the floor.* Claudia says, "I'm sorry, Lupe. It's unfortunately an implicit rule here of having to speak the right English or the right Spanish like the Whites or Spaniards, or at least Guatemalan Spanish, still not all the other Hispanics." (School-wide Field Note, 4/08/21)

Claudia's and Lupe's commentary about the expected language norms at the school augments various warnings (Flores et al., 2020; Valdés, 1997, 2018) about how DLBE programs may delegitimize the dynamic bilingualism of Latinx families by enforcing the expectation that they compartmentalize their language into standardized, European-based forms of English and Spanish. Further, Lupe's concerns suggest how Latinx families' Spanish forms may be essentialized in DLBE programs through the premise that Latinx families communicate in one variety of the Spanish language. Consequently, Latinx parents, like Lupe, may internalize the belief that desired language practices are *elsewhere*, not within their communicative practices (Mena & García, 2021), or worse, that they are *languageless*, that they lack proficiency in any language (Rosa, 2016).

Despite these racialized and nativist framings about Latinx families' languages in the bilingual program, Lupe consistently leveraged her dynamic linguistic capital and navigational capital when the modality of instruction shifted to online and hybrid approaches during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, she often led class sessions online and in-person when teachers were absent and the substitute teacher did not speak Spanish due to the limited availability of substitute teachers in the school district (School-wide Field Note, 2/12/21; 3/21/21). When one third-grade teacher was absent, Jasmine noticed Lupe's preparation before the school day began:

> *The teacher is out sick, and the substitute teacher has yet to arrive. Today, the second half of third graders are coming for in-person instruction. However, I see Lupe already with the classroom laptop, looking at it as she puts the schedule for today on the easel and Google Classroom.*
> Jasmine: Do you need any help?
> Lupe: Hi, Ms. Jasmine! I'm good. I have the websites ready for the online kids and the materials for the ones coming. I would love your help telling the sub when she comes with something. I was told by the secretary already that she doesn't speak Spanish.
> Jasmine: Like what?
> Lupe: *Shows me in the laptop the groups for the children for small-group work for literacy and other activities in the day.* She says,"I would love your help with the sub putting them into these groups. I will probably lead most periods and read the books in Spanish. You are welcome to join." (Classroom Field Note, 2/12/21)

Through her agenda setting and literacy support, Lupe contested her positioning as a compliant school member with inferior language practices by facilitating learning across languages and collaborative meaning-making and interpretation among the entire class. As such, she supported various students' content and language learning in the DLBE program.

When a classroom teacher was absent for several days, Lupe disclosed how other Latina mothers asked her if she could give them updates about their children's socioemotional and physical well-being:

> Some mothers asked me to see how their children were in terms of their physical, emotional, or mental health. They wanted to know if they had time to drink water, walk, or go to the bathroom. If I was not in class with them, I would see the children during lunch or recess to

> check how they were and then talk to the mothers during dismissal or on the phone. That was more what they wanted to know. (Interview, 3/18/21)

In her remarks, Lupe described how she embedded time within her work schedule to connect with other children during mask break, recess, and lunch so that she could inform other mothers about their children's well-being, including their children's access to school spaces and routines promoting health and wellness. During one of Lupe's preparation periods, Jasmine witnessed Lupe conversing with another Latina mother over the phone regarding that her daughter's health and academic activities:

> *Lupe confirms with Claribel [one mother] that she was able to see her daughter during first grade's class mask break outside in the schoolyard. Today, Lupe was helping out mostly second grade, so she stepped out for a bit.*
> Lupe: She said they were learning about whales and the ocean during reading time.
> Claribel: That's great. Linda [daughter] likes the ocean!
> Lupe: She also felt her masks were too tight and the rest were dirty. So right before going back to class, I went to get some more from the nurse's office for her.
> Claribel: I'm so grateful for you. Ok, I will make sure to get some more masks later.
> (Classroom Field Note, 2/26/21)

Claribel's remarks reveal her appreciation of Lupe for not only being able to communicate about her child's learning but also for trying to proactively address her daughter's issues impacting her safety, comfort, and success during pandemic schooling. Indeed, Latina and racially minoritized mothers engaged in additional labor and form relationships to protect and nurture their children's minds, bodies, and spirits in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bruhn, 2023; Delgado, 2022).

Lupe confided her perspective about the emphasis at the DLBE program on recovering learning loss—particularly language loss—over the development and health of children during the global pandemic:

> We must ensure that children are well in all of their health and have activities at school to promote this. I know that one of the goals of this program is to be bilingual, but it's a lot this emphasis during the pandemic and not about being healthy. I say this opinion to the teachers, and almost all agree. (Interview, 5/2/21)

Although Lupe acknowledged that one of the main goals of a DLBE program is to promote biliteracy and bilingualism, she was concerned that this goal was overshadowing the importance of embedding activities to promote the health and well-being of the children, especially in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During one common planning period for third-grade teachers, Lupe inquired about opportunities for movement breaks and community walks:

> *Lupe is putting away materials in the classroom as the third-grade teachers meet for their lesson planning. They are putting intended objectives for each class period for next week's activities. As the teachers are brainstorming activities, Lupe inquires*, "Excuse me. I have a question. Are there breaks for the kids during the day?"
> Teacher: Yes, of course. We have scheduled in mask breaks and they have gym.
> Lupe: I think they need more chances to move around, like movement breaks with sing-alongs in English and Spanish. *Lupe takes out her phone and shows the teachers some videos on YouTube and some recorded by her and her children.*

> Teacher 1: I think we can put some 10–15 minute movement breaks too.
> Lupe: I can also ask the parents if they have recommendations of songs or dances.
> Teacher 2: That would be amazing!
> Lupe: One more thing. When we do mask breaks, we can extend those a bit to do mini-community walks? Like right now, they are doing lessons about how to participate in the neighborhood. You know, for social studies.
> *The teachers nod, and one of them says,* "Thanks, we will give that some more thought." (Classroom Field Note, 3/4/21)

In such a way, Lupe employs her resistant and navigational capital by disclosing these sentiments to several teachers and recommending that they integrate the students' home and community-centered activities, forms of familial capital.

However, Lupe was skeptical that there would be substantial changes to the teachers' planning and scheduling of lessons and activities across the school:

> But then I do not see anything has changed in the classes, although I tell them some things I do at home or I see other people doing. It is like the government wants us to continue as if everything is like how it was before, just focus on learning content and language. (Interview, 5/2/21)

Here, Lupe suggests that teachers' singular focus on learning standardized language varieties and key subject-area understandings is influenced by governmental entities' and policymakers' demands and expectations for teaching and learning across U.S. schools. Lupe's critique regarding teachers' pressure to return to the problematic normality of decontextualized, linear forms of education is a form of her resistant capital. This capital relates to Ladson-Billings's (2021b) recommendation of rejecting such a return because schools are continuously shielded from societal inequities while still being framed as quick fixes for these oppressions.

Nevertheless, Lupe remained hopeful that schools would move toward this re-set, as she continued to facilitate activities with the help of teachers and classes where she frequently participated. Lupe shared,

> The teachers that I work closer with have put more time for the day for children to dance, sing, or move, also how to make art, like drawing or building things. Other times meditation or how to breathe deeply. For mothers in the other classes, I try to give them advice where they can go, like library programs or names of organizations. Hopefully our schools can have these opportunities in the future as the norm. (Interview, 5/2/21)

Even when the DLBE program returned to full-time in-person instruction, Lupe continued to share flyers and contacts with other mothers for opportunities and organizations that would encourage their children's multimodal forms of expression, health, and wellness (Alvarado, 2024b). She leveraged aspirational capital to dream of another reality in schools in which children are holistically nurtured and can make sense of ideas through different modes of expression.

Paloma

Paloma enrolled her daughter, Lucia, in the Arizona DLBE program because she wanted Lucia to sustain her bilingualism like her two older children, one of whom attended fourth grade in the same

program. Paloma's aspirational capital is reflected in her choice of school for her daughter, in that she considered bilingualism to be an asset for Lucia's future:

> I really believe that speaking two or more languages, whether it's English and Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, or whatever, I think is very important. Speaking two languages or more makes anyone smarter, but it helps more, the more you know, you can develop more languages. I think it's going to be a big help. (Interview, 1/29/21)

According to Paloma, she and her husband mainly spoke Spanish at home, but her children, particularly Lucia, mostly spoke English with one another. Paloma first addressed this shift by trying to speak only in Spanish to her children. However, she observed an increased use of English at home as her children went through K–12 schooling. Subsequently, using her linguistic capital, Paloma decided to communicate across Spanish and English varieties to ensure Lucia understood her:

> I talk to them when they don't understand me. I speak more English with the little girl sometimes so that she understands what I'm saying because she doesn't understand me. But it's not like she has a long conversation every day in English (Interview, 1/29/21).

This expansive use of languages is *translanguaging*, which refers to fluid language practices that bi/multilinguals utilize to make sense of their relationships and experiences (García, 2009). Translanguaging is an everyday communicative practice across communities and contexts, such as bilingual households, DLBE programs, and even monolingual educational programs with bilingual students (García, 2009).

Besides responding to the language practices at home, Paloma observed and analyzed dynamic language practices in her daughter's classroom, which was enabled by online schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, relying on her navigational and resistant capitals, Paloma raised concerns over the under-examined, interchangeable use of English and Spanish by the teachers and students in her daughter's DLBE classes. Yalda's observations of classroom instruction and curriculum planning meetings with the teachers confirmed that they relied on translanguaging to ensure that all students and their parents understood the content, regardless of the assigned language of instruction (Kaveh & Buckband, 2024). During an interview, the designated Spanish teacher confirmed this stance: "If they ask me a question in English during Spanish lessons, I will respond to them in Spanish so that they can think in Spanish. . . . That's the goal—that they can go back and forth in English and Spanish" (Kaveh & Estrella-Bridges, 2024, p.13).

Paloma understood that the teachers had to translate content in both languages during designated English and Spanish time because some students had emergent proficiencies in standardized English and Spanish. She also acknowledged that her daughter was increasingly comfortable communicating in Spanish. However, her resistant capital, coupled with the aspirational capital of standardized bilingualism, convinced her that separating languages would be in her daughter's best interest since she worried that language mixing would lead to confusion:

> I feel like that's what's confusing her a little because it's not completely in English or completely in Spanish. Instead of saying a sentence in Spanish, she says one word in English and one in Spanish—the same way they talk at school. I think it is helping her because they speak more Spanish, but not in the way that I thought it would be for her. (Interview, 1/29/21)

Paloma's goal for her daughter was to compose sentences in Spanish: "Because she tells us, 'I want to come.' What I want is for her to tell me, 'Yo quiero comer,' or 'It's time to dormir,' she tells me. What I want is for her to speak [Spanish] completely" (Interview, 1/29/21).

Paloma's preference for language separation is rooted in ideologies of language purism, positing a singular appropriate and standard form of language (Martínez et al., 2015; Pontier & Ortega, 2021). Paloma's beliefs are not uncommon among bi/multilingual parents, particularly for those who are from racially minoritized groups. The language beliefs of these parents are shaped by their encounters with dominant language ideologies that permeate schools, which frame proficiency in standardized, White- and European-influenced languages as catalysts for elevating social status and socioeconomic mobility (Kaveh & Sandoval, 2020). Even in DLBE programs designed to promote bilingualism, the mandated separation of standardized languages contributes to ideologies of linguistic purism. Although Yalda observed Lucia's teachers resisting language separation in the DLBE program through translanguaging (Kaveh & Buckband, 2024), the impact of dominant societal and institutional language ideologies' favoring language separation dissuaded Paloma from accepting translanguaging during class instruction. However, Paloma embraced translanguaging at home during other non-instructional moments. Such misalignment between language decisions across the home and school is often the result of the school's communicating to families through *unspoken dialogues* (Kaveh, 2020) aimed to ensure that children acquire standardized languages expected at school while sustaining heritage-related and other language varieties.

Online schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic required Paloma, like many other parents worldwide, to replicate learning conditions similar to schools at home (Bruhn, 2023; Orellana et al., 2022)—in addition to her preexisting responsibilities. Yalda observed Paloma often in the background, supporting Lucia when she needed academic support. Even during her interview, Paloma was juggling multiple roles at home:

> Mom is in the kitchen on her phone on Zoom, cooking food while engaged in the interview. Behind her is a large refrigerator with pictures of children and stickers on it, as well as paintings/cultural pieces of art, which adorn the walls. Mom walks around the house to see what the children are doing while she is in the interview—highlights the continuing role of parenting during the pandemic. (Post-Interview Memo, 2/16/21)

During the interview, Paloma confirmed that being a stay-at-home mother allowed her to support her children's learning and well-being in multiple ways, including providing emotional support, supervising their time on tasks, emphasizing learning as a journey, and highlighting the importance of independence (Post-Interview Memo, 2/16/21). She observed that her position differed from that of working parents who could not provide the same level of support: "Many who work, I hear them say, 'Don't talk to me because I'm in a meeting'" (Interview, 1/29/21). Nevertheless, Paloma had to juggle other responsibilities, such as providing meals and snacks during lunch and recess breaks and managing her household.

Indeed, Yalda noted that the teachers began calling Paloma and all other parents and caregivers "co-teachers" during the school 2021–2022 year to signal that, more than ever, parents were partners in their children's education (Kaveh & Buckband, 2024). This framing of parents as co-teachers went beyond verbal affirmations, as the teachers regularly relied on parents' community cultural wealth for help regarding language use, technology (Zoom and online assessments), knowledge of content areas (including science and mathematics), and heritage traditions (e.g., Reyes Magos, Mexican Independence Day, etc.; Kaveh & Buckband, 2024). For instance, around Mexican Independence Day, Mrs. Trejo, the assigned English teacher, invited parents to share their childhood memories around this holiday or other national holidays from their countries of origin in the language of their choice.

When Mrs. Trejo invited Paloma to share in Spanish, Paloma initially said, "I don't have nice memories. . . . They brought us here when we were very young because my father died in Mexico. So there is nothing like something nice to remember" (Classroom Field Note, 9/16/20).

Affirming Paloma's childhood experiences in Mexico, Mrs. Trejo acknowledged that "life can be very difficult, but encouraged Paloma to think of any cherished childhood moments with her family" (Classroom Field Note, 9/16/2020). After some pause, Paloma shared, in Spanish, that as she grew up in a sea town in Mexico, her father caught and sold turtle eggs to support his family:

> The turtles came out of the sea, make a hole, lay their egg, and cover them. So people took care of them. When the turtles return to the sea, they uncovered the sand and took out all the eggs, and sold them as if they were chicken eggs. (Classroom Field Note, 9/16/20)

Mrs. Trejo translated Paloma's story into English for those who did not speak Spanish and reaffirmed her familial capital by highlighting her father's navigational capital:

> Wow, boys and girls! I had not heard about that before. I hadn't even thought about the turtles coming up and laying eggs. And then you being able to, like he would sell them. That's how he would make money because he needed to nourish his children. That's what parents and grandparents do: is they help their children. (Classroom Field Note, 9/16/20)

During several lessons near the winter holidays, Yalda observed families (including parents, siblings, pets, and stuffed animals) partaking in various festivities, which consisted of creating handicrafts, sharing Christmas stories and heritage traditions, and dancing along with music (Observational Field Note, 12/18/20). In fact, she noticed that Paloma and other parents maintained a strong sense of community-building in the virtual classrooms, in contrast to the traditional, hierarchical relationships between educational institutions and families:

> It is truly a family affair! I almost don't want schools to go back to normal because we lose special moments like this. The teacher's teaching during this year has established such a break from the definition of school as an imposing place (Observation Field Note, 12/18/20)

After the classes returned to in-person instruction during late spring 2021, Mrs. Trejo echoed this loss of community and support from parents like Paloma: "The thing I miss the most is the families. The 22 families we don't have in our lives anymore. I miss them. I grieve losing that. I miss having the parents who would help as co-teachers" (Planning Meeting Field Note, 5/5/21).

Paloma also appreciated this partnership with the teachers, as well as the increased communication and access to her daughter's virtual classrooms. However, she also noted that the sudden increase in family engagement had several ramifications, which included worrying about her daughter's overreliance on her as a co-teacher, being unsettled by her daughter's limited concentration during online learning, and navigating multiple parenting and co-teaching responsibilities while being concerned about the limitations of co-teachers' decision-making power and roles at school. During her interview, Paloma contextualized her concerns by revisiting her daughter's schooling experience in the previous year. Paloma recalled Lucia being a more proactive and curious learner in preschool. In contrast, she found her daughter to be less focused and more reliant on her during online instruction and programming:

> I think that way it is good that we help the children, but at the same time, the children while they are with the parents, do not give 100% because I have seen it. When my daughter was in preschool, she would come to me with papers made by her, with songs, with everything. . . . Now I'm here at home, being with her because if I don't sit down with her, she doesn't finish everything, or she tells me, 'Help me cut,' or 'Help me do it.' I think as a co-teacher, I am there with her, but in part, I feel that we are not doing good by her because they know that they have help from us, they do not give their 100%. (Interview, 1/29/21)

Here, Paloma challenges the common assumption about mothers' authoritative, hierarchical roles and forms of labor in supporting their children's education (Bruhn, 2023; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020).

While emphasizing agency and autonomy for her children, Paloma expressed being committed to remaining in close physical proximity to her daughter due to the unprecedented challenges created by online instruction for a DLBE program. For instance, she mentioned that learning Spanish on the screen was more difficult for her daughter because "the teachers would switch between screens and slides before Lucia had a chance to grasp the content" (Interview, 1/29/21). She believed that the large class size of over 30 students, each displayed through a small, square screen on Zoom, made it more difficult for all students to receive adequate attention from the teachers. During the year-long online class observations, Yalda noted that class size had become a grave issue because the English and Spanish teachers' homeroom classes were combined for 3 weeks while the English language teacher recovered from the COVID-19 virus (Classroom Field Notes, 1/15/21, 1/29/21). Yalda reported that there was disorganization within instruction and confusion among students during this time:

> Today seemed a bit disorganized; since the group was split up halfway through, there wasn't really any break time, so the kids got restless. I wonder why Ms. Martínez (the designated Spanish teacher) was teaching in English today? She did a good job of sticking to the primary language, as she always does, but I feel there was considerably less translation of instructions into Spanish than there is when she teaches primarily in Spanish. Wondering if the switch of teacher language is confusing for them? (Post-Observation Memo, 1/15/21)

Two weeks later, when Mrs. Trejo was still absent due to the COVID-19 virus, Yalda observed attrition in children's attendance: "There seems to be a lot of absentees. I wonder if that has to do with Ms. Trejo's continued absence?" (Classroom Field Notes, 1/29/21).

In response to the staffing issues and class disarray, Paloma frequently spent most of the school day with her daughter and her older children to ensure that they concentrated on their learning and received targeted, well-informed feedback from her (Post-Observation Memo, 1/29/21). During the interview, Paloma claimed that she frequently leveraged her co-teacher position to advocate for Lucia by "asking teachers to repeat content when Lucia did not understand it, or making sure she was present to help Lucia follow the lessons" (Interview, 1/29/21).

Nevertheless, Paloma perceived her co-teacher role as limited since the classroom teachers held the authority to decide on the nature and scheduling of instruction. Paloma stated that she would have configured the group structure differently to ensure every child's success:

> Most of the things teachers do, they just tell us, "Let's do this." If you say, "Teacher who—" Some people do [speak up], they do hear [us], but it's not like they tell you, "We're going to

> take a vote to do."[3] As I tell you right now that one of the teachers got sick, a single teacher lasted more than three weeks with two classes, which have about 20 children. Really if they had asked for their opinion, maybe we would have made different schedules so that all the children had attention. (Interview, 1/29/21)

In her commentary, Paloma identified promising efforts from her daughter's teacher regarding efforts to engage parents in decision-making processes. This was evident across several classrooms where teachers invited parents for class activities and referred to these parents as "co-teachers." Other mothers in these classrooms, most of whom were from racially minoritized groups, expressed that they were generally satisfied with the teachers' family engagement approach while acknowledging the challenges and limitations of online schooling (Kaveh & Buckband, 2024). However, Paloma was the only parent who explicitly problematized the nature of parent-teacher partnerships, emphasizing the need to avoid essentializing racially minoritized parents' perspectives on DLBE programs.

Discussion and Implications

The counter-stories demonstrate how two Latina immigrant mothers negotiated and resisted several fallacies within family engagement approaches placed upon Latinx families in DLBE programs. Paloma and Lupe leveraged various capitals within community cultural wealth to help their children survive and cultivate linguistically expansive learning experiences during dual language pandemic schooling. Paloma's and Lupe's multifaceted and distinctive roles as educational partners, mothers, and caregivers for their children challenged static labels and false dichotomies enforced upon racially minoritized families in schools, such as being engaged versus unengaged, satisfied versus unsatisfied, and cooperative versus difficult. Additionally, Lupe's and Paloma's care and support for their children's learning and well-being in their DLBE programs contested normalized deficit views of Latinx and other racially minoritized families possessing deficient knowledges, communicative practices, and values that hinder their children's development and education (Fernández & López, 2017; Flores & García, 2017). In this section, we further unpack these findings in response to the study's research questions.

In response to Research Question 1, Paloma and Lupe contested deficit and essentialized orientations toward Latinx family engagement in schools by pointing out the limitations behind their designation as "engaged/involved," demonstrating shared yet divergent heritage and caretaking practices, and committing to their children's flourishing beyond academic, standardized metrics and expectations in schools. For instance, Lupe noted that the parent forums and school leadership spaces were mostly composed of White and socioeconomically advantaged families. Utilizing the school-naming initiative as an example, Lupe explained how she was often invited to participate but not lead parent forums and school leadership spaces, even though she was an official staff member. Paloma noted that although she appreciated her designation as a co-teacher, she believed that this label did not guarantee equitable decision-making power in her child's education; instead, it overlooked her additional responsibilities as a parent. As Olivos and Lucero (2018) warned, well-intentioned educators' and researchers' overestimation of Latinx parents' level of contentment with the status quo may help silence parents' concerns and overlook their intricate hopes and dreams for their children. As such, this study suggests that asset-based labels and compliance behaviors do not necessarily indicate that Latinx parents directly influence the leadership, programming, teaching, and learning in DLBE programs. In contrast, this study, along with that of Olivos and Lucero (2018), demonstrates

[3] The first portion of this quote appears in Kaveh & Buckband's (2024) article about the DLBE teachers' practices.

the continual need for researchers, educators, and leaders to interrogate and examine how the superficial usage of asset-based terms and overestimation of parental satisfaction may reify the exclusion and oppression of Latinx families in DLBE education, especially in states grappling with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant sentiments.

Similar to previous research (Fernández & López, 2017; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017; Olivos, 2006), this study ruptures deficit orientations toward the Latinx families' care work and educational support by demonstrating Lupe's and Paloma's similar yet heterogenic, sophisticated forms of heritage and communicative practices within their arduous efforts to sustain their children's learning and well-being. This study also expands the existing literature by illustrating how parents' views shift based on their experiences and perceptions of children's interests in a particular context at a given time. For instance, Paloma viewed language mixing as a possible limitation for her child's acquisition of standardized language forms, which are often positioned as possible conduits for social and material advancement. However, she used languages fluidly to support her daughters' bilingualism, family and heritage relationships, and wellness at home. Thus, researchers, educators, and leaders must welcome expansive orientations to language that are entangled with the relationships, embodied and affective reactions, and identifications of Latinx families and the historical and contemporary conditions and processes that influence them (Kramsch, 2009). As part of these aims, Latinx families must be considered as agentive sociopolitical and historical actors, and their orientations toward languages must be regarded as *praxes*, which transform as living entities based on their contexts, audiences, and evolving purposes (Kaveh, 2023).

Lupe noted how the DLBE program implied standardized, European-based varieties of English and Spanish as a prerequisite for families to wield decision-making power and influence in school leadership groups, visioning processes, and programming decisions. Although Guatemalan Spanish varieties—those connected with the dominant Latinx group at the DLBE program—were sometimes present in school events and initiatives, Lupe noted that there were minimal efforts to welcome other Spanish varieties from other Latin American lineages. Such findings echo those of previous studies that advocate for the contestation of language and ethnoracial homogeneity that permeate the schooling experiences of Latinx families in DLBE programs (Chaparro, 2019; Segel et al., 2024). Additionally, this study suggests that this reporting on Latinx families in DLBE programs can occur without presenting the experiences, perspectives, and understandings of White families as essential precursors and bases of comparison.

Our findings highlight that Latinx families represent a range of knowledge traditions, forms of expression, identifications, and access to wealth and resources based on their multi-faceted responses to material and social ramifications from societal inequities. For instance, Lupe and Paloma shared similar identifications as Latinas/Hispanas from Latin American nations who live in states with anti-immigrant and anti-bilingual policy histories. However, they had varied responses across different modalities for supporting their children's language and content learning while prioritizing their children's socioemotional and physical wellness in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic's physical, social, and financial ramifications heightened Latina immigrant mothers' strategic approaches to sustaining their children's health and physical safety (Bruhn, 2023). For instance, Lupe's counter-story notes how mothers were attentive to their children's supply and quality of facemasks as an added, essential school and educational resource. In relation, it is crucial for researchers and other DLBE program partners to present Latinx families' agentive attempts to contest static orientations to Latinx identity without the dependency of the White gaze (Alvarado, 2024a). This study shows that such efforts to contest deficit orientations to Latinx family identity should challenge bounded conceptualizations of Latinx family engagement in DLBE programs that relegate the purpose and function of family engagement to merely supporting children's success in standardized metrics for biliteracy and content learning.

Regarding Research Question 2, Lupe and Paloma employed various capitals of community cultural wealth as they supported their children's well-being and learning while negotiating the social, physical, and financial constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Lupe's and Paloma's narratives highlighted their varied yet enduring aspirational capitals for their children. Lupe prioritized her children's health, safety, and well-being and questioned the overemphasis on standardized language learning in her DLBE program. Paloma was focused on her children's independence, academic success, and bilingual development. While she was present during her children's remote schooling and instruction, Paloma wanted her daughter and the rest of her children to engage in the tensions and transformative realizations inherent to the learning process. Additionally, Paloma desired that her children have access to standardized bilingual proficiency to gain potential social and material benefits, although she embraced her child's use of Spanish at home to sustain family and heritage connections.

Lupe's and Paloma's linguistic capital was integral to supporting their children in their respective DLBE programs. Since Paloma's children participated in online learning, she leveraged her language repertoire to communicate with the bilingual teachers and support her children's bilingualism and home and school routines, as they were interwoven during the pandemic. Paloma's language use at home was driven by her language beliefs and goals for her children's linguistic, academic, and socioeconomic advancement. Lupe's employment at the DLBE program was enabled by her linguistic and social capital because of her relationship with the principal, who needed Spanish-speaking staff due to limited, state-wide bilingual teacher recruitment initiatives (Alvarado & Proctor, 2023). Upon being hired, Lupe leveraged her dynamic bilingualism to support classroom and school-wide activities and assist teachers with Spanish literacy instruction across grade levels. Additionally, Lupe's linguistic capital helped her act as a liaison for substitute teachers to support them with classroom management, as well as language and content instruction across modalities. These findings extend previous literature on Latina motherwork in U.S. schools by highlighting how Latina mothers supported other children and parents, along with their own children, in DLBE programs (Ek et al., 2013; Flores, 2022). Lupe's consistent communication with several mothers about their children's health, safety, and academics during the school day echoes Collins's (2000) notion of *othermothers*, establishing that motherwork is often a communal practice and a collective form of survival.

Lastly, the two mothers' engagement with their children's schooling and their continual advocacy and care work were facilitated by their navigational and resistant capitals. Lupe was hired by the principal as a school staff member, and Paloma was designated as a co-teacher throughout online schooling. These roles heightened the mothers' exposure to their children's classrooms, enabling them to observe and gauge their children's schooling more deeply than in previous years. In fact, the focal Latina immigrant mothers provided nuanced critiques and recommendations for promoting culturally and linguistically expansive learning experiences and wellness-centered programming across digital and place-based mediums for DLBE education. For instance, Paloma explained how her daughter, Lucia, had difficulty learning Spanish because her teachers used Spanish and English fluidly while switching between different screens and PowerPoint slides on Zoom. This issue became more prevalent as the Zoom class size doubled due to teacher illnesses and absences. Meanwhile, in the context of hybrid instruction, Lupe recommended that DLBE teachers incorporate community walks and shared multimedia resources for possible movement breaks throughout the school day. With these findings, this study extends Bruhn's (2023) and Delgado's (2022) claims about Latina immigrant mothers' worries and dissatisfaction with remote learning by highlighting the specific observations of these mothers regarding the nature of multimodal instruction and its relation with language learning. Further, this study highlights how Latina immigrant mothers, such as Lupe, may proactively model

activities and present neighborhood resources to school staff as part of their attempts to encourage the holistic wellness of their children throughout the school day.

Implications

The hardships and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic are a portal (Roy, 2021) for educational leaders to reimagine how to critically attune and equitably partner with families beyond pre-pandemic configurations. Lupe's and Paloma's experiences highlight a need for continuous, reflexive dialogues between educators and families about their different beliefs and priorities for children's learning, language, and well-being. Educators and researchers should reflect upon the intersectional, power-laden language decisions in multilingual children's learning and ask themselves, Who makes key decisions? Whose interests are being served? and How are decision-makers positioned based on intersectional forms of oppression? (Kaveh, 2023). Specifically, teachers can reflect on these questions and their instructional practices through a *cyclical praxis of critical consciousness*, which is composed by the following elements: historicizing communities and themselves, practicing critical listening, embracing discomfort, interrogating power, affirming identities, providing accompaniment, and translanguaging (Dorner et al., 2022).

Expanding this critical reflection to family engagement, educators must reframe family engagement as a process beyond schools, disrupt hierarchical expertise that favors educators over parents in guiding children's learning, and embrace multiply-minoritized families' histories, forms of expression, and traditions. Embracing families' histories should also entail understanding racially minoritized families' lived hardships, including a global pandemic, evolving socioeconomic conditions, immigration policies, and state language policies. This will enable critically conscious pedagogy that is responsive to those realities to be enacted. Part of these efforts also include dialogue with children as language policymakers who negotiate expectations and roles within schools and families (Kaveh & Buckband, 2024). Such efforts would extend Ladson-Billings's (2021b) recommendations to leverage the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to re-set education and foster culturally expansive, liberatory forms of learning that aim to catalyze and join broader movements in neighborhoods and other public spheres dedicated to social transformation and political education.

On a broader institutional level, school administrators must take multifaceted approaches to ensure that Latina immigrant mothers, along with other multiply-minoritized parents/caregivers, have considerable influence over school programming, improvement, and visioning. Administrators must take an asset-based stance by assuming that multiply-minoritized parents/caregivers, like Paloma and Lupe, are already supporting the education and development of their children, irrespective of the modality or how often they physically engage with schools. Consistent with claims from prior literature (Green, 2017; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014) about school administrators' guiding the implementation of school mission and vision, the focal mothers, Paloma and Lupe, were positioned as needing to be *pulled into* (Rodela & Bertrand, 2021) pre-established priorities and routines for family engagement and school improvement. Indeed, family engagement and school improvement structures in the focal DLBE programs were often informed by the priorities, knowledge forms, and visions of DLBE school leadership and staff, as well as White upper- and middle-class families. In response, school administrators and staff in DLBE programs should advocate for *collective school visioning*, in which both its content and process address various matrices of oppression (e.g., race, class, language) that impact the education, well-being, and priorities of families.

This visioning would be an inclusive process with the entire DLBE school community to develop a vision of collective responsibility for the educational success, health, and safety of each student, with the knowledge, heritage, and language traditions and priorities of Latinx and multiply-

minoritized groups guiding the process (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Rodela & Bertrand, 2021). Furthermore, the DLBE school community, especially White families and DLBE school staff, would consistently engage in forums where they collectively study, reflect, and address dominant, problematic narratives they promote about Latinx and other multiply-minoritized groups. These types of forums would be part of DLBE programming that explicitly works to contest the essentialization of Latinx heritage practices, knowledge traditions, and communicative practices, acknowledging their temporal, malleable, and contextually-dependent nature.

As critical entry points into collective visioning, DLBE school leaders may leverage Green's (2017) *community-based audits* to learn from and listen to parents and community leaders and evaluate current participation spaces and structures. Through this process, DLBE school leaders would invite Latina immigrant mothers, like Paloma and Lupe, to serve on school and community leadership teams, who would then spearhead the formation of working agreements and communication norms necessary for monitoring and ensuring that racially minoritized families have tangible influence in collective visioning processes. They would be supported in their efforts to leverage resources and opportunities to further develop desired leadership skills and pursue interests, irrespective of whether such pursuits support children's acquisition of standardized academic metrics. Therefore, Latina immigrant mothers, like Paloma and Lupe, would be actively spearheading initiatives that aim to reimagine DLBE schooling and learning in response to realizations, experiences, and dilemmas faced by them and the entire school community during the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing political and socioeconomic disparities. This process would not be labor exploitative but mutually beneficial for Latina immigrant mothers, as they are holistically supported by other DLBE program members in their individual dreams, aspirations, and well-being.

Conclusion

This study reported how two Latina immigrant mothers contested and reimagined school-based and -led forms of family-DLBE program relations within states with anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant policy histories. While the focal mothers were often welcomed by DLBE staff members and educators, the mothers' priorities and goals were often in tension with the institution of schooling's control over their children's learning and well-being. This study serves as a cautionary tale for educational programs that position themselves as inherently linguistically and culturally expansive settings. Even in contexts where educational leaders intend to sustain families' community cultural wealth, parents may continue to be silenced and pressured to conform to the goals, practices, and routines in schools. To contest the social and material inequities that impact the everyday lives of families within and outside schools, we argue that educators and educational researchers must critically listen to families, especially those who are multiply-minoritized; design reforms that encourage multiply-minoritized parents' leadership and influence within school governance; elevate and sustain knowledge forms and language traditions as crucial levers for catalyzing transformative learning and relationship-building; and reconfigure educational institutions as public neighborhood entities dedicated to broader community mobilization efforts centered on social transformation and political and emancipatory forms of learning.

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Using Queen Sugar as a Lens to Counter Hegemonic Conceptions of Black Fathers' Involvement in P-12 Schools

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Abstract

The depictions of Black fathers and their relationships with their children on television sitcoms influence societal perceptions of Black fathers' parenting practices, Black families' configurations, and public policies on Black families. This paper sheds light on how excerpts of the show, *Queen Sugar* challenge narratives and images on Black fathers' relationships with their children, particularly their Black sons. Revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy are used as theoretical concepts to examine the interactions and experiences between Ralph Angel and Blue. Thematic analysis was employed to generate findings that examine the bond between Ralph Angel and Blue, Ralph Angel's support for Blue's toy choice, and his engagement in Blue's education. Implications of this work illustrate how excerpts of *Queen Sugar* can be used in specific teacher education courses to give pre-service teachers multiple opportunities to learn about the dynamics of Black families, Black fathers' parenting practices, and contributions to their families and communities.

Keywords: Black fatherhood, masculinity, teacher education

Introduction

Traditionally, in the United States, the characteristics, lifestyle, and practices of white, cis-gender, affluent, and heterosexual men have been figuratively and literally deemed the standard of masculinity and fatherhood (Wallace, 2023; Wesley, 2015). This standard is known as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity depicts a narrow perspective of masculinity that values men who are economically wealthy, competitors, emotionally detached, and likely to display physical strength and aggressive behaviors. Racism, patriarchy, and sexism are infused into hegemonic masculinity. Regardless of how oppressive systems negatively impact both individual men and their communities, Black and non-white men and boys are expected to aspire and adopt ideologies and practices associated with hegemonic masculinity to be recognized as masculine. Hegemonic masculinity has been unattainable for many communities and has also justified the subjugation of women, children, Blacks, and people of color (Wallace, 2023; Wesley, 2015). Collins (2022) shows how hegemonic masculinity was perpetuated in the U.S. labor market in the early 1900s. During this time, the U.S.

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workforce was segregated by race and gender, exploiting Black men and women and impacting their pathway to advance economically in society. Collins (2022) emphasizes how Black men who were employed in low-skilled manufacturing positions typically received wages higher than the wives but were vulnerable to being terminated from the workforce due to directly competing with white[i] men in the workforce. Since the early twentieth century, depictions of hegemonic masculinity can be found in western American films and commonly portrayed in white nuclear family configurations in television shows. These depictions of masculinity in the mainstream media discourse exclude Black men, influencing views on their fatherhood, their contributions to the household, and their relationships with other family members. Consequently, in the early twentieth century, deficit perspectives on Black fathers were generated and used to justify Black children's underachievement in schools, impoverished living conditions, and harsh discipline while disregarding the historical and contemporary systemic and structural disparities that impact Black communities (Brown, 2011). Using images, print, and television, mass media have historically contributed to society's conceptions that Black families commonly experience absentee or uninvolved Black fathers (Moody-Ramirez, Clemmons, & Boddie, 2024). However, the depictions of Black fathers, their socioeconomic status, and marital or domestic partnership status on television drastically shifted from the mid-twentieth century onward. To elaborate on how television networks started airing the multi-dimensions of Black fathers' identity and livelihood, we first provide a description and analysis of several shows that were frequently viewed from the mid-twentieth century until the early twenty-first century.

The *Jeffersons* was televised on a primetime network that challenged gender and socioeconomic representations of Black fathers and families in contrast to the shows that historically utilized controlling images to present Black fathers as impoverished, absent in caregiving, hypersexual, suffering from chronic illness, or violent (King, 2017; Kumah-Abiwu, 2020). In the *Jeffersons*, Sherman Hemsley plays the role of a Black father, committed husband, and accomplished entrepreneur who resides in a racially integrated residential community. While this show has largely been credited to Norman Lear, a white man, the initial writer of this sitcom, as well as multiple sitcoms premiering Black families during this time was a Black man, Eric Monte (Harriot, 2023). According to Harriot (2023), Normal Lear follows the pattern of many white artists and executive producers who benefited from a legacy of narrating Black experiences and "telling their stories without employing Black people as storytellers." The scripts and airing of this show occurred when African Americans were mobilizing economically, and white people heightened their resistance to desegregate schools, residential communities, and various labor industries.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the depiction of Black fatherhood continued to evolve on primetime networks such as American Broadcasting Company (ABC) and National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Shows such as The *Cosby Show* and *Family Matters* presented Black families as middle class, with Black fathers involved in heterosexual relationships with wives or a woman partner and residing with their children in the same household. While these shows challenged the stereotypes about Black fathers and families by illustrating how their educational attainment and/or occupation contributed to the advancement of society, they also portrayed Black fathers' care and nurturing practices in their child's educational and extracurricular activities. These practices countered hegemonic masculinity (Brandt & Kvande, 2018). Both *The Cosby Show* and *Family Matters* illustrated the ways Black fathers interacted and participated in their children's extracurricular activities and the ways their children's friends admired them as role models, seeking advice from them. Both shows offered a positive depiction of Black families but were critiqued. For instance, the *Cosby Show* was written and directed by a Black man but functioned with a race-neutral lens, which conveyed a subliminal message to the audience that social progress for Black people was based on an individual's responsibility. This show never addressed the institutional, structural, or systemic race and gender issues that have discriminated against and marginalized Black people from accessing rights, opportunities, resources, and wealth. In

contrast, *Family Matters* began introducing the audience to the ways in which Black parents help their children cope with racial prejudice and discrimination. However, the systemic and structural issues presented in the sitcoms were resolved by the end of each episode—in 30 minutes.

Shows like *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, All of Us, Smart Guy, One on One,* and *Sister, Sister* elucidated the livelihood of Black fathers who were single, surrogate, or divorced but sustained a healthy co-parenting rapport with their ex-wives to raise their children. As the multi-dimensional representation of sitcoms on Black fatherhood in families continued in the mid and late 1990s, the number of Black men and women who were writers and producers for the narratives of family dynamics shown in these sitcoms increased. For instance, Rikki Hughes contributed to producing episodes for the *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *All of Us* was written and directed by Will and Jada Smith, *One on One* was written and produced by Eunette Boone, and Kim Bass produced the show *Sister, Sister*. The script of these sitcoms focused on Black fathers' relationships with their Black biological and non-biological children and their role in helping the children to recognize and cope with race and gender-based disparities.

As the depictions of multi-representations and stability of Black families strengthened, the accessibility of these sitcoms decreased for the public. By the late 1990s and 2000s, the multi-dimension of Black fatherhood and families was diminishing on primetime television networks and began airing only on cable networks, such as Black Entertainment Television (BET) and United Paramount Network (UPN), which were targeted to predominantly Black audiences, and later on streaming networks, such as Netflix or HULU. Primetime network channels have always been free and accessible to the public, while consumers are required to pay to access the cable and streaming networks that generally showed sitcoms of diverse Black family configurations and Black fathers' relationships with family members and community, as well as their caregiving practices.

Today, the storylines and images of Black fatherhood have reemerged on primetime networks, such as NBC, while remaining accessible for viewers to see on cable and streaming networks. The storylines about Black fatherhood on these networks acknowledge the intersectionality of their social identities and diverse experiences of upbringing, family dynamics, and parenting biological and non-biological children. In addition, several TV sitcoms, such as *This Is Us* and *Unprisoned,* do not depict a quick-fix solution for Black actors and actresses when structural and systemic inequities are addressed in the plot. Rather, the producers and screenwriters of these shows illustrate an accurate depiction of Black people's feelings of disappointment and hardships when they face disparities while simultaneously showing the ways in which they persevere. The evolution of Black fatherhood on television and its mass consumption are influenced by critical theory and radical feminism. The representation of intersectional identities created a platform for viewers to credit screenwriters' perspectives and challenge long-standing stereotypes that have stigmatized Black fathers and their relationships with their family members (Stamps, 2021). These sitcoms have also collectively challenged public policies, such as the Moynihan report, and societal rhetoric framing Black fathers as economically and socially irresponsible or absent during most of their children's lives.

The purpose of this paper is elucidate how a popular culture television sitcom called *Queen Sugar* humanizes and restores the images and perceptions of Black families, particularly the relationship dynamics and support between Black fathers and sons. This paper encourages teacher educators and pre-service teachers to utilize a critical race media literacy approach when selecting and viewing media and texts to analyze Black parents' experiences and recognize the ways in which Black fathers support their children's education in and beyond the school context. The authors suggest that presenting excerpts of *Queen Sugar*, specifically the interactions between Ralph Angel's (father) and his son Blue, are relevant in teacher-education courses and other disciplinary programs that focus on children's well-being. Excerpts of this show can counter the generalized perceptions pre-service and in-service teachers possess regarding Black fathers and boys. Ava Duvernay, an African American woman who is the executive producer of the show *Queen Sugar*, intentionally portrays a multidimensional

representation of the images, roles, and behaviors of manhood among the actors (Jefferson, 2019). Similarly, Bell Hooks (2015) states, "Erasing the realities of Black men who have diverse understandings of masculinity, scholarship on the Black family puts in place of this lived complexity a flat, one-dimensional representation" (p. 89). *Queen Sugar* represents popular culture and highlights the various dimensions of the configuration of a Black family in Louisiana. This show is widely accessible to the public since it is consumed on mainstream cable networks and video-streaming services. Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) argue that utilizing popular culture as text in teacher education contributes to knowledge in the curriculum that responds to student-centered learning. Considering media as an analysis tool is important for understanding the development of Black people and their livelihood (King, 2017). Popular culture serves as cultural resources accessible to students. The following research questions guide the analysis of excerpts from *Queen Sugar*:

1) In what ways does the show *Queen Sugar* counter stereotypes on Black fatherhood and conceptions of hegemonic masculinity as it pertains to Ralph Angel's parenting practices and his relationship with his son, Blue?
2) How can teacher education courses employ popular culture as a resource to inform pre-service teachers' perceptions about Black fathers' parenting practices?

This work signals the importance of challenging narratives and imagery regarding Black fathers' relationships with their children, particularly their Black sons. It disrupts the public imagery that has commonly been presented in policy reports and delivered by former U.S. presidents to determine the root of social, economic, and political problems faced by Black families. This work also aims to improve interactions between teachers and administrators and Black fathers and boys. Finally, this paper contributes to the growing body of scholarship that examines the engagements and experiences Black fathers have with their children (Allen, 2016; Wilson & Thompson, 2022).

Consistent with the focus of fatherhood, we acknowledge how our fathers were physically and emotionally present and served as the protectors and providers in the lives of our families and residential communities. We are teacher educators at postsecondary institutions. The first author identifies as an African American woman who was a committed viewer of the show *Queen Sugar* during the time it aired. She was raised by her mother and father and remembers witnessing her father assuming the responsibility of domestic household and child-rearing duties. She also witnessed her father working alongside her mother for a local community organization to provide support and advocate for residents on social issues in the community. The first author's father worked multiple temporary jobs to consistently supplement income for his primary job. The flexibility among these jobs granted him the opportunity to participate in child-rearing practices that are traditionally socialized for women in the family (White, 2006). The second author was born and raised in Zambia and moved to the United States in the 1990s. She was also raised by her mother and father, and both parents played a critical role in raising her and her siblings. Additionally, the second author experienced care from other people in the community to ensure she and her siblings experienced a healthy and protected environment. The second author teaches a course that utilizes various genres of films to examine educators' and administrators' interactions, dispositions, and instructional practices. Both authors found that the narration of Ralph Angel and Blue was unique and disrupted several stereotypical beliefs and narratives regarding the relationship between Black fathers and sons. The narrations of the show are meaningful and relevant to present to pre-service teachers, as the show will help teachers conceptualize Black fatherhood regarding the intersections of their identities and illuminate their involvement in caring for their children. As authors, we found the depiction of Ralph Angel's humanity, masculinity, and role as a father in juxtaposition to longstanding, dominant images

and narratives that failed to portray Black men as delivering acts of care with no external motives or demonstrating secure attachment to their family and friends.

First, this paper addresses how Black families and diverse parenting practices that support school involvement are narrowly discussed in the curricula of teacher-education programs. Next, revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy are considered as theoretical lenses to examine the interactions and relationship dynamics between two characters on the show *Queen Sugar*—Ralph Angel and Blue. The authors argue how intentionally selecting these sources challenges racist and sexist perspectives regarding Black fathers' parenting practices and the ways they provide support for their children's education. Third, a detailed context of the show *Queen Sugar* is provided. Fourth, we argue that examining the relationship dynamics between Blue and Ralph Angel and Ralph Angel's parenting practices serve as a counternarrative of Black fathers' being absent or practicing irresponsibility in their children's lives. A description of themes that were generated based on viewing, transcribing, and analyzing excerpts of episodes from Seasons 1–5 is provided. Finally, the authors provide recommendations on how excerpts of *Queen Sugar* can be infused in specific teacher-education courses to provide pre-service teachers multiple opportunities to learn about the dynamics of Black families and Black fathers' parenting practices and contributions to their families and communities. This type of knowledge eliminates the single narrative about parenting and parental involvement in schools. These recommendations are designed to help educators recognize the ways in which Black fathers are committed to raising their children, are involved in their education, and provide a safe and loving environment for their children to thrive.

Contextualization of Black Families and Black Fathers' Parenting Practices in Teacher Education Courses

Historically, Black parents have played a pivotal role in advocating for and supporting their children's education and that of Black children in the community (McGee & Spencer, 2015). Bolgatz et al.'s (2017) ethnographic study echoes the work of McGee and Spencer (2015) by showing the ways in which Black parents advocated for their children's education when they experience implicit racial biases from educators at predominantly white, independent schools. However, studies have revealed that Black parents' experiences and testimonies are commonly underreported in social science research (Love et al., 2019; McGee & Spencer, 2015; Reynold et al., 2015; Wallace, 2023). Societal interpretations have also isolated Black families from involvement in school-related activities and contributing to the development of the school's curriculum (Marchand et al., 2019; Reynold et al., 2015). In teacher-education courses, the topic of parental involvement focuses on the degree of parent presence in schools (Butler, 2021). This perspective normalizes white middle-class values, heteronormative family structures, and gender roles and behaviors by framing the mother as the primary parent for raising the children and being involved in their educational, social, and extracurricular activities (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Wilson & Thompson, 2022). Because whiteness is rooted in teacher-education programs, it has been used to define the criteria of normative family configurations, parenting practices, and parental involvement.

Pre-service Teachers' Interactions with Black Parents

Pre-service teachers are rarely given opportunities in teacher-education courses to interact with Black parents and families to obtain insights on how their knowledge and experiences contribute to their children's education in and beyond the school context (Marchand et al., 2019; Love et al., 2021). Consequently, pre-service teachers lean on their schooling experiences and the knowledge attained about parental involvement in teacher-education courses. However, the knowledge and experiences that reinforce traditional ideologies of parental involvement are deficit-oriented and accord preference

to the interests, voices, presence, and needs of able-bodied white middle-class or affluent parents. For example, Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) state that the Epstein Framework for Six Types of Parental Involvement is commonly used as a resource for courses in teacher-education programs to inform pre-service teachers about what constitutes parental involvement in schools. However, Latunde and Clark-Louque (2016) suggest that Epstein's framework operates on a colorblindness perspective by failing to acknowledge what parental involvement entails in school settings or how the intersections of a person's social identities, such as race, class, gender, language, and disability, can operate differently for understanding communication practices, volunteering, and opportunities to engage in school-based activities. Furthermore, teacher-education courses fail to examine how early childhood programs and school-related activities promote parental involvement but continue to exclude parents from specific diverse communities.

Surveillance of Black Parents' Child-Rearing Practices

Specifically, parental configurations and child-rearing practices exerted by Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) are frequently surveilled, critiqued, and viewed as a deficit rather than a strength for the children and their family (DePouw & Matias, 2016). In the episode "Fathers of the Movement" of the podcast *Into America* by Trymaine Lee, Tracy Martin, the father of Trayvon Martin, states, "But what happens when you have a 17-year-old or 18-year-old white kid going into schools shooting his peers—it's never said that it is due to bad parenting" (Lee, 2022). When experiencing the grief of a loved one in the Black community who died at the hands of state-sanctioned violence, Black boys and men are expected to remain emotionless to avoid being labeled as angry and aggressive. In the interview, Mr. Tracy Martin indicates the dichotomy of discipline, scrutiny, consequences, and empathy regarding the judgment of Black and white parents when their children encounter law enforcement. The child-rearing practices of white parents are not generally questioned or scrutinized by society if their young child commits violent crimes.

Black Parents' Voices as the Counter-Narrative

Scholarship utilizing Black parents' voices to serve as a counter-story or narrative to challenge historical and contemporary stereotypes about their parenting practices and active involvement in their children's education remains limited (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Marchand et al, 2019). Possey-Maddox et al. (2021) argue that anti-Black racism has historically influenced teachers' and administrators' perspectives about Black family's configurations and Black parents' parenting practices and decisions regarding their child's education. Love et al. (2021) interviewed four Black parents and utilized counternarratives as a methodology to illustrate the ways in which the Black parents showed proactive involvement in their children's education and resisted disciplinary actions that normalized the behaviors of white students and teachers and school personnel's delayed or limited communication practices. The Black parents in this study identified their experiences of questioning and challenging school personnel's academic and disciplinary decisions for their children, teaching their children to practice agency when confronted with discrimination from peers, and collaborating with school personnel and families beyond the school context. Bolgatz et al.'s (2020) study utilized counternarrative as a methodology to elucidate Black parents' communication experiences with educators, administrators, and school personnel at a private, predominantly white elementary school. Among the multitudes of parents' concerns regarding schools and the education of their children, the most consistent concern involved communication. Black parents expect direct, prompt, and explicit communication about their children's academic progress and how they should support their children academically. Already apprehensive about being counseled out of school, parents feel a sense of urgency about their children's performance. When teachers and administrators do not match that urgency by being straightforward and prompt in communicating academic concerns, they contribute to parents' fears and inhibit parents' ability to support their children. By not providing clear reports of the children's status or direction about how parents could ensure their children's academic success,

"private school speak" not only burdens Black parents with the need to translate, but it represents lowered expectations of Black families (Rollock et al., 2015). This study illustrates how Black parents' actions debunked conceptions that they lack involvement in their children's education and have low expectations about the children's performance. Combating white dominance, therefore, requires that teachers and administrators demonstrate confidence in Black students and communicate their high expectations in ways that are timely and easy for parents to understand. Rather than making assumptions about what Black families want and need, teachers and administrators must seek out and listen to Black parents (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). In addition, supporting Black families involves cultivating additional spaces for networking.

Scholars of family studies and teacher education have argued that exploring the hegemonic conceptions of race, gender, and class are essential theoretical lenses to employ for examining the experiences of parents of color concerning school-based engagements, as well as those experiences contesting institutional and systemic disparities rooted in racial, gender, and sexual binaries (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Waters, 2016; Wilson & Thompson, 2021). Debunking the hegemonic conceptions of parenting involves recognizing that each family member upholds specific knowledge regarding the child, challenging the initial assumptions regarding family members of color and their role, and practicing pedagogical listening approaches to enable families of color to relate what they desire (Wilson, 2021). Whiteness remains centered when it comes to media showcasing diverse families' configurations, relationships, and household structures (Calvacante, 2015). Shows such as *Modern Family, Full House*, and *Gilmore Girls* represent diversity in family configurations; however, the protagonists are mainly white, upper or middle class, and able-bodied, failing to represent most viewers' experiences as people of color. In addition, these shows illustrate how the protagonists' features and lifestyles normalize assimilating into white American patriarchal cultural ideas and practices.

Theoretical Framework

Because this body of work utilizes *Queen Sugar*, theories related to post-structuralism were used to counter historical and contemporary generalizations of Black family configuration, Black boys and men, and the involvement and engagement of Black fathers in education and child-rearing practices. Two theoretical lenses inform this body of work: revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy. The theories are influenced by critical theory, which offers the opportunity for people to recognize, examine, critique, question, and challenge how inequities, domination, and exploitation occurred in sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts. Both theories depower the hierarchy and superiority of people based on social status and the underlying implications of their socially constructed identities, such as race, age, gender, class, and sexuality.

Revolutionary Parenting

Revolutionary parenting was coined in one of Bell Hooks's early works, the book entitled *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (2000b). Revolutionary parenting counters sexism and patriarchy, which challenge the domination that occurs in nuclear family relationships, same-sex couples, and child-adult relationships. This type of parenting emphasizes the child's rights to love and responsive care. It also debunks the notion of matriarchy, particularly as the biological mother's experience with pregnancy and childbirth does not immediately ensure she is better suited for raising a child. Rather, revolutionary parenting urges people to conceptualize men as equally participating in the role and responsibilities of parenting and child-rearing. Hooks (2000a) indicates that terms such as "tenderness" and "affection" have traditionally not been directly linked to fatherhood (p.137). At a

time when women are being surveilled and potentially criminalized for making decisions regarding their reproductive rights, revolutionary parenting is considered a political act for men and women to equally assume roles in raising a child.

Revolutionary parenting is driven by the belief that "it takes a village to raise a child." In other words, it is a collective practice that leans on the participation of a community of people, albeit immediate or extended family members, neighbors, community-based child care staff and educators, or educators at local schools to raise a child. Hooks (2000a) notes that regardless of a person's gender and marital status, the child-rearing process is not exclusive to adults or the women who have children. This practice informs the child that they are loved by people in the community. It also creates an opportunity for the child to develop relationships with more than one person as their caregiver, learning that more than one individual can be contacted and depended on to obtain love, safety, and security.

Revolutionary parenting is a feminist concept and liberating parenting practice that is pro-family, humanizing and empowering the parents and child as it encourages every family member to be their authentic selves by valuing and acknowledging their rights, voices, feelings, and well-being. The opposite of revolutionary parenting is authoritarian parenting, which represents patriarchy or matriarchy. Hierarchical parenting upholds a strict environment and primarily positions the child to be the recipient of information, expecting them to comply with the parents' assertions and directions. In numerous cases, children and women are deemed as property or possessions. Authoritarian parenting provides limited or nonexistent opportunities for the child to thoroughly communicate their thoughts and feelings to their parents.

Critical Race Media Literacy

Critical race media literacy (CRML) is informed by critical race theory (CRT) to examine how race and other socially constructed identities are portrayed in media and how these portrayals impact people's livelihoods (Yosso, 2002; 2020). Degand (2020) suggests the following tenets of CRT as relevant for critical examination and discussions on media:

(1) Racism is a dominant force that influences other forms of oppression and occurs covertly and overtly in media and throughout society.
(2) The messaging from mainstream media fits the interests of elites, conservatives, and white people, which warrants identifying and examining the gatekeepers of media (Kumah-Abiwu, 2020).
(3) Media has historically been a platform for constructing social identities, such as race, class, gender, age, ability, nationality, and language.
(4) Media produces and reinforces tropes and stereotypes about Black people and people of color.
(5) Counternarratives and counter-stories are opportunities to challenge ahistorical and inaccurate depictions of Black people and people of color.

CRML recognizes that the media are politicized and play a major role in serving the interests of able-bodied, affluent White people. Yosso (2020) notes that media are a "societal curriculum" (p. 8). Yosso (2020) further suggests that Hollywood producers and screenwriters are cognizant of how their work influences public perceptions. Because the media are one of the primary sources for society to access Eurocentric ideologies, norms, and practices, these factors have been the archetypes of success for society (Degand, 2020; Dixon, 2019). Media (photographs, songs, news, films, commercials, magazines, interpretations of court-released transcripts, social media, and television) have traditionally

influenced federal and state policies, statistical data on government and social science research reports, stock explanations, textbooks, and people's beliefs.

Because media has traditionally operated from a dominant ideology lens, the voices, knowledge, and experiences of Black people and people of color have been decentered, misconstrued, and silenced. Instead, the dominant narrative contributes to prejudice, discrimination, and inequities on an individual, institutional, and societal level. Media that depict the experiences of Black people and people of color but omit their testimonies, histories, and experiences in the development process intentionally produce inaccurate representations and a generalization of their collective experiences. In response to this, CRML creates a platform for Black people and people of color to shift the narratives and images portrayed in mainstream media by utilizing critical literacy strategies to examine subliminal and explicit messages conveyed in media outlets, question and critique the intention of the messages portrayed in the media, recognize the demographic interests the media serves, and discuss how the messages impact their community. Further, CRML encourages people to develop an awareness of how Black people and people of color are generally represented in various media outlets—questioning and critiquing the intention of the representation to privilege a specific narrative; utilizing a critical, conscious approach for consuming certain media outlets; and imagining and creating alternative images, texts, and scripts in media that humanize and present an accurate representation of their experiences (Degand, 2020; King, 2017; Yosso, 2002, 2020). For this paper, CRML is used to examine how the interaction between a Black father and son in *Queen Sugar* counters depictions of anti-Blackness and hegemonic masculinity.

Infusing CRML in teacher-education courses is designed to challenge longstanding generalizations and narratives regarding the experiences of Black people and people of color globally and in the U.S. To provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to be culturally competent and authentically collaborate with Black parents and parents of color, teacher educators must find cultural artifacts that serve as supplemental resources to challenge and transform stereotypes about Black families and families of color (Soloranzo, 1997; Yosso, 2020).

The Context of *Queen Sugar*

Queen Sugar is an award-winning television series directed by Ava Duvernay, an African American woman. The show is an adaptation of the novel *Queen Sugar*, which was written by an African American woman, Natalalie Braszile. In adapting the show, Ava Duvernay uses a feminist, sociohistorical, and political lens to connect the history of plantations during enslavement, disparities of land ownership and farming, and contemporary racial, gender, and regional politics. By making these connections, she elucidates how these factors impact the livelihood of Black people and people of color in Louisiana (McInnis, 2019). *Queen Sugar* ran for seven seasons, from 2016 to 2022 on a televised network owned by Oprah Winfrey, who was the executive producer of the show and identifies as an African American woman. Ava Duvernay featured Black women and women of color as leading roles in the show, and behind the scenes when it came to co-producing (Jefferson, 2017).

Queen Sugar contrasts the historical and monolithic images of Black families in mainstream media. Instead, it illuminates issues like race, colorism, class, sexuality, and gender and brings nuance to the dynamics of Black families. It also shows how intimacy and relationships are the core elements of the dynamics for the Bordelon family. This TV show features an intergenerational African American family whose origins trace to New Orleans, Louisiana. In several seasons, Ralph Angel's parenting practices for Blue are informed by various people: Darlaii, Aunt Violet, Hollywood (initially Aunt Violet's partner and then husband), his sisters Charley and Nova, and his nephew, Micah. Darla is Blue's biological mother. In the first season, she is estranged from Ralph Angel and the Bordelon

family due to her history of drug addiction. Her drug abuse led Blue to experience child neglect. When Darla's drug addiction and negligent parenting practices for Blue were brought to Aunt Violet's attention, the aunt legally took custody of Blue and assumed guardianship of him during Ralph Angel's imprisonment and Darla's ongoing recovery from drug addiction. Upon his release from prison, Ralph Angel lived with Aunt Violet to be restored to humanity and experience emotional and financial support to concentrate on developing a bond with Blue and fulfilling his identity in fatherhood.

As authors, we acknowledge the essential role Aunt Violet and Darla play in Ralph Angel's and Blue's lives. Several episodes illustrate how Ralph Angel and Blue lean on both Darla's and Aunt Violet's presence, contributions, and advice for support, fellowship, and affirmation, and vice versa. The bodies of knowledge shared and exchanged among the entire Bordelon family and their close acquaintances serve as an empowering practice to survive in a white capitalist, patriarchal society (Collins, 2022). We do not neglect to recognize here the value and role that Black women and mothers play in community-based child caregiving (Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2000b). As evidenced from both authors' lived experiences, we know that Black mothers play a pivotal role in shaping the cultural values and beliefs of their children and their moral compass. However, our focus in this analysis is to highlight the parental role of fathers, specifically pertaining to Ralph Angel and Blue. Through these collaborative experiences, Ralph Angel learns about the importance of creating possibilities for Blue that exceed Ralph's childhood experiences and imaginations. The collective child-rearing practice the Bordelon family provides for Blue directly reflects Hooks's work (2000b) on revolutionary parenting.

Ralph Angel is a formerly incarcerated Black man who is the youngest sibling among Nova and Charley. In the first season, Ralph Angel works continuously to restore his trust and relationship with Blue. Upon Ralph Angel's release from prison in Season 1, Aunt Violet allows Ralph Angel to be Blue's primary caregiver. However, she provides him with support by allowing Ralph Angel and Blue to stay in her house while seeking employment. Ralph Angel's presence and active involvement benefit Blue intellectually, socially, physically, and emotionally. Ralph Angel understands that the opportunity to re-enter society post-incarceration and reunite with Blue allows him to redefine his understanding of manhood and fatherhood. At the end of his parole, Ralph Angel is given the opportunity to provide mentorship to prisoners on progressing in life and living with purpose and aspiration during the parole period. In the latter part of Season 2, Ralph Angel discovers that Blue is not his biological son. However, Ralph Angel and his family continue to take care of Blue as if he were their biological family member.

Methodology

In this paper, we employ counternarratives to analyze and challenge racist and sexist narratives about Black families, specifically parenting and relationship experiences between Black fathers and Black sons. Here, counternarratives are derived from the works of critical race theory (CRT; Yosso, 2002; 2020). Because the production and writing of *Queen Sugar* were developed by Black women and women of color, the knowledge, experiences, and voices of Black people are recognized rather than assimilated to fit into the interests and rhetoric conveyed by white people (Dixon, 2017). Counternarratives are strategic paradigms that aim to disrupt whiteness and ahistorical narratives (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). This methodology promotes critical thought and engagement on the role of race, racism, and other forms of oppression that are interconnected and pervasive in society (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002).

For qualitative research, counternarratives are situated in four categories: personal narratives, biographical narratives, composite narratives or stories, and chronicles to empower the epistemologies people hold and to validate their experiences (Salcedo & Bohonos, 2022). Personal narratives or

testimonies are generally firsthand accounts and experiences shared by Black, Indigenous, and people of color on navigating historical and contemporary structural and systemic inequities, barriers, discrimination, harassment, and experience. Biographical narratives or stories are the accurate retelling of an individual or group of people's experience. This approach involves the narrator or researcher's establishing and sustaining genuine interest and trust with people in the community. Composite stories are a collection of narratives and stories of similar real-life experiences (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Finally, Milner (2020) refers to Ladson-Billings's and Tate's (1998) work to state that counternarratives are also framed as parables, chronicles, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories to counter ahistorical and dominant narratives.

Queen Sugar is a fictional story. The images and scripts of the show illustrate multi-dimensions of Blackness and intersectionality, which serve as an analysis tool to counter the historical stereotypes generated by Eurocentric ideologies about Black people's livelihood, Black family configurations and childrearing practices, femininity, masculinity, sexuality, class, and wealth.

For this paper, we utilized data collected from excerpts of *Queen Sugar* as counternarratives. Counternarratives explicitly challenge dominant narratives and highlight the stories of those whose experiences are generally overlooked and often remain untold, providing an alternative story to these dominant narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The least-told story in this paper's context is that of the Black father's role. The counternarrative, therefore, aims at disrupting the deficit perspectives of Black fathers in mainstream media.

Data Source and Analysis

To analyze the data, we employed the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a data analysis method widely used in psychology and a range of other disciplines. The term "thematic analysis" has also been used to refer to data analysis techniques in the social sciences. This method entails identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis provides procedures and processes that enable the generation of codes and themes from qualitative data. The smallest unit of analysis is known as the code. Codes are the building blocks of themes, which are larger patterns emerging from the data. Thematic analysis can be used for various forms of data, both large and small. Within this study, this approach was used to analyze seven transcripts.

Through analysis, we examined how the cultural and contextual representation of Ralph Angel's and Blue's existence and masculinity are presented, interpreted, and contested by different people belonging to various racial, gender, and socio-economic identities in *Queen Sugar*. The depictions of the scenes are designed to counter the dominant ideologies of race and masculinity. The data in this study were collected by reviewing and transcribing 18 excerpts from various episodes of Queen Sugar from Season 1 to Season 5. For this article, only seven transcriptions are presented. These specific seasons were considered, as they depicted Ralph Angel's development and sensemaking of fatherhood, his relationship with Blue, and changes in his relationship with Darla. English subtitles were used to confirm the accuracy of words and statements conveyed in each episode for transcription purposes. The first author initially watched all the seasons from 2016 to 2020. She began to make connections between Ralph Angel's character to Bell Hooks's books on *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity* (2004) and *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (2015). She invested in Hulu, revisited several of the episodes from Season 1, and continued watching the show until Season 7, Episode 13.

The initial coding process was conducted by reviewing selected scenes of *Queen Sugar* that directly reflected each transcript. We also engaged in close reading of each transcript and added brief comments next to excerpts on the transcripts, such as "Blue raises a question," "Ralph Angel hugs Blue," or "Responds to Blue's inquiries." As we reviewed different scenes that correlated with the transcript, we marked actions that occurred in the scene, such as Ralph Angel's picking up Blue to

give him a hug. Documenting this information contributed to the description of the category and themes and provided more context for readers who have not seen *Queen Sugar*. Axial coding was practiced by merging similar codes and generating preliminary categories, such as "advocating for Blue," "recommended toys," "expressing feelings," and "intimate conversations or dialogues." The preliminary categories were organized into themes that corresponded to the research questions and provided context regarding Ralph Angel's parenting practices and relationship with Blue. To avoid subjectivity and ensure the data responded to the research questions, the first author allowed an external reviewer to provide feedback on the manuscript draft, which at the time included the introduction, theoretical framework, literature review, data, and description of the themes. The external reviewer, who is a professor for a teacher-education program at a university, was recruited based on their expertise and extensive scholarship on Black male teachers' development and pedagogical practices and critical race theory in teacher education and PreK–12 education. Based on the feedback provided, changes were made to the theoretical framework, detailed descriptions of Ralph Angel and Blue, methodology, recommendations for analysis, and steps to ensure that the data are supported by the tenets of the theoretical framework.

Debunking the Emotionless Stereotype: Authentic Bond between Father and Son

This theme elucidates the physical and emotional connection Ralph Angel and his son developed and maintained throughout the series. Patriarchy commonly governs family systems in global society (Hooks, 2004); in particular, it constructs the identity of spouse and father. Therefore, it is important to understand how Ralph Angel's parenting practices extended beyond economic contributions and provided comfort and protection for Blue. Ralph Angel initially assumes full responsibility for parenting Blue until Darla recovers from substance abuse and shows interest in assuming equal responsibility. The distribution of Ralph Angel's and Darla's childrearing practices supports Hooks (2000b) argument that revolutionary parenting involves equal participation in parenting. Throughout the show, Ralph Angel's relationship with Blue shows multiple one-on-one bonding experiences grounded in love, care, trust, communicating feelings, and the ability to display a range of emotions. According to Hooks (2004), men's expressing their lack of knowledge and emotional vulnerabilities, such as sadness and depression, in response to experiences of disappointment does not conform to the "rigid script of maleness" (p. 12) and is in direct opposition to domination and patriarchy (Hooks, 2004).

Season 2 Episode 8 highlights Ralph Angel's and Blue's response to the shift in parenting practices between Darla and Ralph Angel. Ralph Angel and Blue are in the kitchen, eating breakfast. Ralph Angel notices that Blue appears sad and investigates what is bothering him. He states, "Now, you know we don't waste food, Blue. What's going on?" Blue responds by questioning why his biological mother, Darla, is not present during dinner time. He points out the difference in the context when Darla is at the house during dinner time by stating, "That was just me and Mommy, not you, me, and Mommy." He further asks, "Did I do something bad?" Ralph Angel immediately follows up, "No, you didn't do anything wrong. I don't want you to think that's okay." In this scene, Ralph Angel affirms Blue's feelings and voice by allowing Blue to express what is bothering him. This scene disrupts the image of stoicism that is often thrust upon Black boys and men, negating their emotions and experiences of disappointment (Hooks, 2004). Ralph Angel acknowledges the changes in Blue's behavior indicated by his not eating. Blue's disappointment is a response to the separation between Ralph Angel and Darla during that period. This dialogue shows that Blue felt comfortable raising questions to Ralph Angel about his separation with Darla, curiosities regarding whether he caused a

shift in the routine of dinner with his parents, and his desires for his parents to be together and residing in the same household. Blue's behavior also represents how the changes in parental configuration can impact children's emotional well-being (Cooper et al., 2020).

In Season 3 Episode 10, Ralph Angel and Blue are in Blue's room preparing for bedtime. Blue questions Ralph Angel about the police coming to the house. In this episode, the police officer and two representatives from the local Child Protective Services came to the house. The dialogue below shows Blue posing a series of questions to make sense of what occurred:

> Blue: Pop, why did the police come?
> Ralph Angel: (sighs as he looks at Blue) Just a misunderstanding. Them ladies wanted to make sure the house is good. That's all. I'm sorry if they scared you. I was a little scared myself.
> Blue: Is that why you yelled?
> Ralph Angel: Yeah. And I shouldn't have. (looks at Blue)
> Blue: What's a record?
> Ralph Angel: When I tell you not to do something (sits on Blue's bed) and you do it anyway. Then, I got to put you on time out. When you was a baby, I did something I shouldn't have. Had to go away for a little while. I think about what I have done. I was in prison, Blue. You know what prison is?
> Blue: It's where bad people go. Are you a bad person, Pop?
> Ralph Angel: No, I'm not a bad person. But I did some bad things. I took things that weren't mine. I need you to know something. I regret the things I have done. And I ain't never going to do them again. You understand?
> (Blue shakes his head)
> Ralph Angel: I ain't going to let nothing . . . ain't going to let nothing take me away from you. Never again. Come here. (Ralph Angel and Blue hug each other). Oh man, I love you so much, man.

This dialogue represents an emotionally vulnerable moment between Ralph Angel and Blue. It also supports Bell Hooks's work on reclaiming male integrity (Hooks, 2004). Although Blue is young during this season, he feels comfortable asking his father additional questions about his past life experiences. Ralph Angel does not choose righteousness or annoyance to diminish Blue's questions regarding his past but rather ensures he fully understood what occurred. Instead of lying or compartmentalizing this information and preserving it to be disclosed later in Blue's life, Ralph Angel tells Blue about his past when Blue raises the question regarding whether he was a "bad person" for going to jail. Ralph Angel acknowledges how he has changed and commits to never leave Blue again.

In Season 5 Episode 8, Ralph Angel and Darla return home early from their honeymoon to check on Blue in response to the police brutality and killing of George Floyd. In response to their concern, Ralph Angel and Darla believe it is imperative to have a conversation with Blue.

> Darla: Um, George Floyd was a man who . . . (pauses and looks at Ralph Angel)
> Ralph Angel: He got killed by some police officers. You know what Black Lives Matter means, right?
> Blue: Yes, but don't all lives matter ?
> Ralph Angel: Yeah, but everybody doesn't act like it. So we can't say that all lives matter until they act like Black lives matter. You understand?
> Darla: (touches Ralph Angel) Ralph Angel
> Ralph Angel: (turns to Darla) It's time. Blue, this world is filled with good people. Good things. And I want you to experience all of that. Everything the world has to

> offer you; I want that for you. You understand. The thing is, this world ain't all good. There's a lot of bad things out there. A lot of bad stuff.
> Darla: And bad people.
> Blue: My teacher says there's no such thing as bad people.
> Ralph Angel: Well, there is. I wished we lived in a world where everybody was nice and everybody was good. But bad people don't see you. They won't see you. (starts to cry) I wish I could be there to make sure everyone you meet in life will treat you right. But I can't. So I need you to know what to do when someone doesn't love you the way me and mommy do.
> Darla: You have to be extra careful if you are ever stopped by the police.
> Blue: But I'm not going to break the law.
> Ralph Angel: That doesn't matter. You will be stopped by the police, Blue.
> Blue: Why?
> Ralph Angel: Because you're Black. And that's just what happens to Black boys and men in America.

This scene represents the racial armoring Black parents commonly deliver when informing their young children regarding societal racial bias and the impact of state-sanctioned violence on Black people (Dilworth-Bart et al., 2021). Although these dialogues are informative for Black children at a young age, they also serve as a form of protection and highlight how Black children are racially socialized in society. Ralph Angel's urge to have this dialogue with Darla and Blue represents his fear that his son will experience systemic, institutional, and structural racial violence. He initiates the conversation by expressing his desire for Blue to experience living in a world of unlimited possibilities where his self-worth, dignity, and racial pride are intact despite people's biases. Ralph Angel shows his emotions of pain to Blue by crying when he states that will not be there to protect Blue when his son encounters experiences of prejudice and discrimination. Darla's recommendation to Blue to be "extra careful" if stopped by the police represents the longstanding impact of mass incarceration and deaths of Black boys when confronted by the police or neighborhood vigilantes. Ralph Angel and Darla affirm Blue by acknowledging that his authentic self is deserving of love and people seeing the good in him. This part of the dialogue represents revolutionary parenting, as it ensures Blue will continue to be himself. However, Ralph Angel and Darla also acknowledge that with his traits, people will perceive him negatively due to racism. Although Blue assures his parents that he will not break the law, Ralph Angel warns him about being stopped by the police because of his race.

Diverse Perspectives on Masculinity and Play

For multiple seasons, one of Blue's play choices, a doll named Kenya, offers Ralph Angel the opportunity to define his conception of masculinity and happiness for his son. He allows Blue to be expressive of his feelings and publicly play with his doll. From the first season, Ralph Angel supports and advocates Blue's choice of playing with Kenya.

In Season 1 Episode 11, Blue's teacher, Miss Valez, contacts Ralph Angel and Darla to schedule an after-school meeting in Blue's classroom to discuss a physical altercation that occurred between Blue and Jamal during recess. Jamal and Blue are Black boys who are peers in Miss Valez's class. Jamal's parents are also contacted by Miss Valez, and they attend the meeting. The earlier episodes of this season showed that Blue has been experiencing bullying from Jamal. Blue's experience with bullying counters the dominant narrative that frames Black boys as bullies in educational spaces instead of victims (Bryan, 2019). The dialogue shows how Ralph Angel's parenting practices are questioned by Jamal's father:

> Jamal's father (states to Jamal's mother): Isn't this the boy who plays with Barbie dolls?
> Ralph Angel: (voice gets louder) It ain't a Barbie doll.
> Jamal's father: Maybe if you bought your boy some appropriate toys, he'd fit in better with the other boys.
> Ralph Angel: (looks directly at Jamal's father) It ain't none of your [expletive] business what toys my son plays with.

In this scene, Jamal's parents are Black. The presence of both Black fathers in this scene counters the narrative that depicts Black fathers as uninvolved in their children's education and lacking concern about their children's well-being in school spaces (Allen, 2016). Further, this scene illustrates the ways in which Black men participate in policing the gender expression of other Black men and boys. Jamal's father utilized a hegemonic masculinity and cis-gender lens to judge Ralph Angel's role as a father and his adequacy in raising his son (Bryan, 2019; Hooks, 2000b; Wallace, 2023). Jamal's father classifies Blue's behavior as feminine to imply that Blue's choice of playing with the doll deems him unfit to play with other boys at school (Hooks, 2000b; Hooks, 2004). However, Ralph Angel immediately challenges Jamal's father's rationale regarding Blue's playing with Kenya (the doll) and his inability to make friends with other boys. This scene highlights how Jamal's parents' beliefs, regardless of their racial background, uphold anti-Blackness, specifically racist and sexist conceptions of play for Black children in and beyond the classroom spaces of schools (Bryan, 2019). The expectations for boys' behaviors and play are racialized and connected to hegemonic masculinity. Black boys' play is judged differently than that of their white counterparts and boys of other races (Bryan, 2019).

In season two, episode two, Ralph Angel, Darla, and Blue are at a diner. A waiter, who is a Latino man, approaches them to take their orders for dessert. In the dialogue, Ralph Angel allows Blue to use Kenya to verbally express his preferences.

> Waiter: Would you like anything else?
> Ralph Angel: Oh, we good.
> Waiter: Dessert menu?
> Blue: (holds up Kenya) Me and Kenya want desserts!
> Waiter: That's your doll?
> Blue: Uh huh.
> Waiter: You know, you should get a Transformer. Those are really cool.
> Blue looks sad. He holds Kenya close to his chest and looks at Kenya. Darla looks directly at Ralph Angel. Ralph Angel immediately coughs to clear his throat. He looks directly at the waiter.
> Ralph Angel: We're going to get two ice cream sundaes, all the toppings y'all got. One for my son (tilts his head to Blue) and one for his doll. You got me?
> Waiter: Not a problem.

This dialogue also illustrates how Black boys' play and Black fathers' parenting approach are revealed and scrutinized through a gendered lens (Bryan, 2019; Wallace, 2023). The waiter suggests Blue play with Transformers, a toy that has historically been marketed to boys (Reich, Black, & Foliaki, 2018). As the waiter is Latino, this interaction illustrates the ways men of color impose their expectations on boys of color to perform hegemonic masculine behaviors that are centered in male-to-male competitiveness, video games, sports, or engagement of "boy toys" for play (Bryan, 2019; Hooks, 2004). In this scene, Blue is aware that Kenya disrupts the societal expectations of toys for boys. His immediate silence and holding Kenya close to his chest signal a self-soothing technique that he has developed in response to interactions in which Kenya's presence is not accepted by others. Ralph

Angel challenges the waiter's actions of gender policing by not acknowledging his statement, looking at the waiter, and reinstating the order Blue made for himself and his doll. Ralph Angel's rebuttal challenges the dominant narrative on historic figments of manhood forced upon Black men to conform and appease their white counterparts (Wallace, 2023). The waiter's response, "Not a problem," indicates that his recommendation for Blue to play with a Transformer instead of a doll was not accepted by Blue, Ralph Angel, or Darla.

Ralph Angel's Active Engagement in Blue's Education

There were several episodes that showed Ralph Angel's visibility and involvement in Blue's education in and beyond the school context. The episodes presented in this theme connects to Marchand et al.'s (2019) definition of parental engagement, specifically considering the ways parents motivate and nurture their children's educational growth in multiple settings (p. 12). In addition, the data presented in this theme illustrate how Ralph Angel's involvement led teachers to inform him directly about Blue's activities and incidents that occurred at school and supported Blue's educational endeavors. Excerpts from various episodes of *Queen Sugar* presented in this theme counter patriarchal culture and further examine the meaning of a father's involvement in a child's education, which is often unknown or not considered when educators make meaning of their students' parental configurations. In addition, it elucidates the multiple ways in which Ralph Angel demonstrated home-based engagement practices with Blue, thereby contributing to Blue's academic success as well as his physical and social–emotional wellness in school. This theme also counters the narrative of Black fathers' not being directly involved in their children's education (Cooper et al., 2021).

In Season 1 Episode 10, Ralph Angel meets Blue to pick him up from his classroom at school after dismissal. When Blue sees Ralph Angel enter the classroom, he greets him by giving him a hug and sharing his excitement about going to the zoo.

> Ralph Angel: Whaaat! Going to the zoo! That's exciting. (Ralph Angel puts Blue down so he can pick up his backpack. He approaches his teacher.)
> Miss Valez: Hey.
> Ralph Angel: How's it going?
> Miss Valez: Good. So we're going to the zoo.
> Blue: (runs to Ralph Angel) You got to sign my permission slip, Pop.
> Ralph Angel: Oh man, no problem. Where do you want me to sign?
> Blue: Right there.
> Ralph Angel: Okay. I'll sign right . . . just like that.
> (Teacher looks at the paper and Blue. Blue claps his hands and passes the permission slip to the teacher).

This scene illustrates that Ralph Angel is physically and emotionally connected with Blue. The routine Ralph Angel establishes by taking Blue to school and picking him up serves as a space for Blue to immediately communicate his excitement about his current and upcoming experiences at school. This scene also allows the teacher, Miss Valez, to see the interaction and relationship between Ralph Angel and Blue. As Blue shares his excitement of going to the zoo, he informs Ralph Angel that he needs his father's signature on the permission slip, showing him where to sign his name. The dialogue between Blue and Ralph Angel is indicative of Blue's comfort in expressing his feelings to his father about school occurrences without being concerned about being condemned or questioned about his level of excitement. Blue's behavior debunks traditional hierarchical practices of parenting in which the parent and child have hierarchical relationships (Hooks, 2000a). Collectively, Ralph Angel's

initiative of having Blue reside with him and establishing and sustaining child-rearing routines signal that Ralph Angel is the primary parent at the time.

Another factor that reflects parental engagement outside the school context is school choices or placement decisions, which Black parents have historically made for their children since schools desegregated (Possey-Maddox et al., 2021). These decisions are typically informed by the parents' schooling experiences, context of the neighborhood, and opportunity in terms of resources, quality teachers, and affirming their children's experiences. In Season 5 Episode 9, Ralph Angel, Darla, and Blue acknowledge Blue's acceptance letter to an elite school in Washington, D.C.: Sidwell Friends. Although Ralph Angel and Darla are initially reluctant to let Blue relocate and attend this school, they consult their family members and give Blue a few days to think about his choice of attending Sidwell Friends. Black parents' consulting with family members and friends is a common practice used as capital to foster a support system for the child and tailor that child's educational experiences (Possey-Maddox et al., 2019). Ralph Angel piques Blue's interest in Sidwell Friends by stating, "You know, I've been thinking about that Sidwell School sometimes." Blue responds, "Me too. Sometimes." He further elaborates his interest and rationale for wanting to attend the school to meet new people from all over the world and train to be a leader. Being allowed to explain his decision to attend a school that suits his interests represents Blue's agency and affirms how he chooses to participate and contribute to society (hooks, 2015). The primary factor that inspires his decision is being intellectually stimulated to aspire to leadership and make a change.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aims to apply elements of revolutionary parenting and critical race media literacy in research focusing on race, gender, class, and media in teacher education. The themes presented in this paper illustrate how Ralph Angel's child-rearing practices counter anti-Blackness, sexism, and the patriarchal culture. Throughout the show, Ralph Angel's love and care for Blue is presented through several factors: being physically present in all aspects of Blue's livelihood, having his direct attention, and being emotionally connected to his son. Throughout the show, Ralph Angel consistently prioritizes Blue's needs and plays a role in influencing his son's decision-making. This type of parenting is radical in the sense that it counters the ideology of child-rearing responsibilities and the identity of fatherhood for men. Simultaneously, we argue that this type of parenting among Black men is not unique. Stereotypes about Black men as fathers have been generated and perpetuated in the media, informing policies that have impacted Black families (Love et al., 2021; Stephens, 2022). Black people encounter racialized experiences that are unique compared to those experienced by people of color.

Our findings also indicate how various experiences shaped Ralph Angel's understanding of masculinity and parenting practices. The representation of Black fatherhood in *Queen Sugar* responds to the paucity of research on how Black fathers' parenting styles influence their child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, and achievement in educational experiences (Harmon et al., 2022). The findings of this study also support a National Health Statistics report that stated that Black fathers' level of involvement and child-rearing practices with their children are higher than their white and Hispanic counterparts (Jones & Mosher, 2013).

In several cases, Ralph Angel's decision-making for Blue was indicative of revolutionary parenting, a social-political conscious approach—that is, an investment of love and care is prioritized for raising Blue. Because this type of parenting is anti-hierarchical, Blue's response to the parenting allows him to be expressive about his frustrations and happiness, choices regarding Kenya in public spaces and school, questions regarding institutional and systemic racism, and resolving family and societal problems. Although popular culture is the data source, it indicates the importance of

examining how African American parents' children respond to feminist parenting practices (White, 2006). Because white capitalist patriarchy is ingrained in our society, there are several episodes in which Ralph Angel still upholds the ideals of patriarchy, particularly when he interacts with Darla and she recovers from substance abuse, gains her independence, and begins advancing professionally and economically.

Schools uphold whiteness and hierarchy in accordance with people's socially constructed identities (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022). Eurocentric perspectives on parental involvement and engagement for schooling, parent-child interactions, and child-rearing practices are extensively covered in teacher-education programs. These programs utilize a deficit stance by "othering" non-white parenting practices and the support they offer to their children's education in home and school settings (DePouw & Matias, 2016; Morris et al., 2022). Offering opportunities for pre-service and in-service teachers to examine the ways K–12 schools have historically and continuously excluded Black parents from access to their children's education can create opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand Black parents' mistrust of the K–12 school system. This type of activity would also create space for pre-service teachers to examine how schools have traditionally centered the needs and interests of certain racial and gender demographic of parents to influence organizations such as the school parent teacher association (PTA) (Shah & Grimaldos, 2022).

As the student and family demographics in P–12 schools continue to become more diverse, exposure and engagement activities that understand the perspective of Black fathers', parents', and families' experiences with school, particularly their constraints and support, are critical to establishing and maintaining an equitable and trusting partnership that will benefit the child. To assist in this process, we recommend the following practices for pre-service teachers to engage in tenets associated with critical race media literacy and counternarratives about Black parents and families. *Queen Sugar* can be used as an analytical tool for several teacher-education courses.

The curricula in teacher education programs typically comprise a course that involves collaboration among teachers, families, and communities. An activity that might be implemented in the course is the use of a Venn diagram. In this assignment, the pre-service teachers would be engaged in conducting a comprehensive review and analysis of the following sources: a report by a policymaker and a documentary. Specifically, preservice teachers would indicate the name, race, and gender identity of the policy decision-maker or producer(s) and conduct a comparison analysis. With this practice activity, the pre-service teachers would be encouraged to initially view a policy report, such as the Moynihan Report, or the documentary *The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America,* and identify excerpts that pathologize and reinforce stereotypes of Black families today. Utilizing this information, pre-service teachers would then be encouraged to view and analyze excerpts of *Queen Sugar*, indicating the ways the sitcom reflects or counters the social pathologies and stereotypes of Black families presented in the Moynihan report or T*he Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America.* Comparing the excerpts of both sources will support critical race media literacy by using counternarrative as a practice for marking the differences from the storyteller's or narrator's perspective and explaining how specific sources challenge racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes about Black families, their child-rearing practices, and involvement in education. Pre-service teachers can also work on an asset-based mapping activity that focuses on acknowledging how Black families' and parents' traditions and cultural practices can influence content curricula at schools (Morris et al., 2022; Yosso, 2005). These course activities collectively reflect critical race media literacy, as pre-service teachers are encouraged to describe how rhetoric or narratives construct conceptions or images of race, specifically on Black families and Black parenting.

Another course that is common in teacher-education programs is child psychology and human growth and development. Because these courses cover several prominent developmental theories, such as Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory, excerpts of *Queen Sugar* that show the

impact of community-based child caregiving and Bell Hooks's work on revolutionary parenting could be utilized. Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory provides an opportunity to analyze how consistency in routines, interactions, and experiences the child has with parents, extended family, educators, friends, neighbors, or community stakeholders impacts their development and lived experiences on the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and/or macrosystem level. The pre-service teachers can refer to the bioecological systems framework when viewing excerpts of *Queen Sugar* to acknowledge spaces Blue felt safe or unsafe and the difference in his emotional state when Darla and Ralph Angel were separated versus when they were living together in the same household. Throughout the episodes in each season, Darla's and Ralph Angel's relationship strengthens, which eventually leads them to reunite and get married. As Darla's presence in Ralph Angel's and Blue's lives increases, Ralph Angel and Darla equally share the role of taking care of Blue. As their relationship evolves, however, their parenting practice reflects hegemonic masculinity (Brandth & Kvade, 2018). In addition, these courses address the levels of attachments: secure attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment, and disorganized attachment. Covering the different levels of attachment helps pre-service teachers to understand the importance of caregiver and child bonding and the ways it supports the child in progressing in their emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development. The findings presented in *Debunking the Emotionless Stereotype: Authentic Bond Between Father and Son* and Blue's interactions with Darla, Miss Valez, his immediate family members, and people in the community could be used for pre-service teachers to determine traits that reflect secure, anxious, avoidant, or disorganized attachment. From watching multiple episodes of Queen Sugar, pre-service teachers could also mark the number of times Ralph Angel parenting practices reflect secure attachment for Blue. This information can be used to counter hegemonic masculinity narratives that frame Black fathers as being emotionally detached from their loved ones.

Teacher-education programs include courses that encourage pre-service teachers to build an understanding of how the learning climate and environment in schools influence children's cognitive, social, and emotional well-being. In these courses, it is important to discuss how restricting classroom jobs, activities, toys, or class resources to students' gender reinforces hegemonic masculinity and femininity. The findings presented in *Diverse Perspectives on Masculinity and Play* illuminate how pre-service teachers can design and practice incorporating anti-racist and gender-neutral learning spaces. Schools are places that perpetuate racial hierarchy and value gendered and heteronormative behaviors. Therefore, course activities could also include pre-service teachers' constructing newsletters to inform parents about the importance of inclusivity and opportunities for children to play with gender-neutral toys. For pre-service teachers enrolled in early childhood or elementary teacher education programs, the National Association of Education for Young Children's Code of Ethical Conduct could be used to provide a rationale for establishing and sustaining an inclusive and gender-neutral learning environment.

Because the internet, mainstream television, and print have traditionally dominated and influenced society's perspectives about Black family configurations and caregiving practices (Moddy-Ramirez et al., 2024), Black mothers and fathers are aware on how they are perceived in school spaces as it relates to parenting their child. Regardless of society's image, the studies and excerpts of the show *Queen Sugar* illustrate how Black fathers and mothers are committed to their children's education and using their expertise to contribute to the school's infrastructure, curriculum, and logistics.

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[i] The letter, "W" in white and whiteness is lowercase throughout the article. This approach supports the work of Critical Race Theory as it recognizes the language in text and how it can reinforce racial hierarchy (Matias, 2020).

[ii] Darla is Blue's biological mother. She was initially estranged from Ralph Angel and the Bordelon family due to her experience of drug abuse. Throughout the show, she actively works to recover her abuse with drugs, reform her livelihood, and restore her relationship with Ralph Angel, Blue, and the Bordelon family.

The Black American Tree Project: Fostering Critical Dialogues in Communities

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Introduction

The Black American Tree Project (BATP) is a unique, participatory educational experience that seeks to foster understanding, respect, truth, racial healing, and reconciliation about the experience of Black Americans from pre-colonial Africa to the present day. The BAPT was developed in collaboration with Pan-African educators, artists, writers, and non-profit professionals, drawing inspiration from our collective experiences with various community organization. What follows is a first-person account of the experiences and ideas that helped shape the development of this project, an overview of the BAPT experience, and reflection on the impact and challenges of this work in local communities.

Foundations of the Black American Tree Project

The BATP began to take shape in the fall of 2019 while I was working at Starfire Council of Greater Cincinnati. I had been with the organization since 2010 as a senior community builder. Over the years, one of my most impactful learning experiences at Starfire revolved around Social Role Valorization (SRV), a theory developed by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger in the 1980s (Elks & Neuville, 2007). SRV helped me understand why people with disabilities are often devalued and how to improve their lives by fostering valued social roles. This concept became central to my work as I supported individuals in becoming more included in their communities by helping them establish meaningful social roles, improving their skills, and raising awareness about their contributions to local communities.

As I witnessed the transformative power of SRV, I began to wonder about its relevance to the Black American experience, recognizing the systemic dehumanization many Black Americans have endured. I was particularly curious about the intersection of race and disability, questioning how Black Americans with disabilities might face compounded devaluation. I explored this further, including discussions with local researcher Jack Pealer, who shared sobering data on the limited social connections available to people with disabilities. These conversations confirmed that there had been little research specific to Black Americans in this area, which fueled my determination to address it.

In the early fall of 2019, I partnered with Freda Epum, the program manager at Public Allies Cincinnati, to explore the idea of creating an immersive exercise focused on dehumanization and the Black American experience. Freda's willingness to collaborate energized me, and we drew inspiration

from The String Exercise, a powerful immersive activity I had participated in at Starfire. The String Exercise illuminated the dark history of institutional mistreatment of people with disabilities, allowing participants to embody roles and experience these narratives firsthand. I envisioned a similar exercise to confront the dehumanization of Black Americans and began to sketch out what this could look like.

At the same time, I began my involvement in UNDIVIDED, a six-week dialogue series on systemic racism hosted by a non-denominational church in Cincinnati. Participating in these intentional, ethnically diverse conversations deepened my understanding of racial inequities while also emphasizing the importance of personal reflection and action. I later became a facilitator for UNDIVIDED sessions, which strengthened my belief in the power of participatory dialogue. This experience inspired BATP's participant-led design, giving individuals the freedom to chart their own learning journeys.

Other significant influences were experienced during my time at the Toronto Summer Institute, where I learned about the history of Indigenous peoples in North America and was first exposed to The Kairos Blanket Project. At the institute, I also deepened my understanding of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), a model that focuses on uncovering and leveraging the strengths and assets within communities.

As Freda and I worked to develop a prototype of the Black American Tree Project we utilized these experiences and leaned into community engagement to inform our decision making (See Appendix A). This commitment to community engagement enhanced the development of the project over time. For example, one of the Artists Collective members, the late Cynthia Winston-Ford, recommended playing the song *Echo* by Sweet Honey in the Rock at the project's beginning and a brief snippet immediately after its conclusion. This addition brought in the element of sound and poignant lyrics, which helped ground participants in the experience more deeply. Even the name of the project has been influenced by the community. Initially conceptualized as The Black American String Exercise, community feedback led to the search for a more meaningful artifact that could represent the historical and contemporary experiences of Black Americans. The tree became the focal symbol, resonating deeply due to its dual representation of life, family, and community, as well as its darker historical association with slavery, lynching, and systemic violence. The tree's imagery reflects the rich ancestral legacies of African American families, often celebrated through family reunions, while also confronting the painful histories rooted in oppression.

The tree's symbolism was particularly compelling for me, as I've long been inspired by its natural forms and functions. The overstory, providing shelter and passage for animals, and the understory, with its complex network of roots communicating and nurturing the soil, offered profound metaphors for the resilience, interconnectedness, and vitality of Black communities. By anchoring BATP around the tree, the project effectively communicates the layered narratives of Black American life—celebrating heritage while acknowledging ongoing struggles for justice and equality.

Drawing from these diverse experiences, BATP developed as a project that invites participants to engage deeply with Black American history and identity while fostering understanding, inclusion, and advocacy. By weaving together SRV principles, participatory learning, cultural acknowledgment, and community strengths, I worked to create a tool that would inspire change and build bridges across communities.

Black American Tree Project Overview

Launching BAPT

In February of 2020, our project debuted at the a2ru Emerging Creatives International Student Summit hosted by the University of Cincinnati at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (NURFC). After a successful debut our plans to share the project with more groups was disrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. Thankfully, we were able to continue the project virtually with the support of organizers from the Toronto Summer Institute (TSI). The project was a part of the Virtual Toronto Summer Institute's Ideas That Matter series, which helped to further spread it to a wider audience and iterate new prototypes. Supportive TSI members stepped in to help us design a virtual expression of the project and through these new iterations, the project received international participation from people in England, Australia, Scotland, and Ireland. The early success of the project drew interest from funders in Ohio and BAPT was able to secure a total of $31,550 from the Ohio Humanities Council, including the CARES Act grant.

LPH Collective Members: L. Danyetta Najoli, Alicia Hilderbrand, Julia Bean, and Kachelle Davis

BAPT continues today as a Black women led project and since its inception BAPT has been hosted 31 times with over 758 participants from 9 states in America, 3 indigenous lands, and 5 countries. The project is now accessible both in-person and virtually with closed captioning and translation. Individuals with disabilities were able to participate through the physical presence of a direct support person or by receiving coaching tips from the support staff to prepare for the call, such as positioning the camera for optimal visibility. The project is flexible, allowing for one-time facilitation or multiple sessions to meet the needs of the host organization.

The BATP Experience

BATP is a participatory history lesson and immersive performance experience that involves kinesthetic learning followed by courageous conversations. Community-organizations (e.g. non-profits, schools, churches, and neighborhood groups) who partner with BAPT are responsible for the recruitment of participants, which can range in number from 10 to 30.

Within an organization, at least three hosts are identified to act as internal leaders championing the project. The BATP begins with a 45-minute orientation where we review the project description and

background, key project components, view a short film, and provide a content warning as some of the topics may trigger intense emotions. We also share what we have learned from previous iterations. The participants also have an opportunity to ask questions about what they will experience. This orientation is important because the project is considered iterative in nature and as we introduce the project to different participants, we learn more each time. Next, we open the project while everyone is seated in a circle so each participant can familiarize themselves with the hosts, facilitators, and one another. Ahead of time, we tape a one-dimensional tree on the floor with roots spread at the bottom and long branches. Chairs are stationed at the end of each branch and a pair of scissors are on the floor next to each chair. Next, we assign each of the participants a role and position them either standing on the one- dimensional branch or sitting around the tree depending upon their role. The roles pertain to 10 carefully selected vignettes and include a black person, a member of their family, and a person who represents the white institutional forces (see Appendix B).

Each participant is asked to read from a historically accurate script as they are led by the narrator. Although participants are reading from scripts, we do not want them to act out the scenario, but to focus on the power of the words. In each vignette, participants learn about the terrible impacts of racism from the first-hand perspectives of black and their family member. Near the end of the vignette, the white institutional force shares their sentiment that justifies their subjugation. In addition, they are instructed to sever the bonds (cut the black yarn) between the black person and their family, and to escort the black person to the edge of society. This edge of society is marked by a thick line of tape on the floor that each black person stands behind as each vignette ends. This area becomes a growing population filled with a black person from each vignette. The black family members remain on the one-dimensional tree with their severed bonds on the ground next to them. (See Appendix B)

Overall, the project explores the complex and nuanced nature of family dynamics when it comes to each of the vignettes. By placing the gaze not only on the Black American focus person but also the family members, participants are able to develop a broader understanding of the negative impacts of the American caste system based on race. The voices of the family members are lifted in this project in order to give space for them to be heard and for participants to realize the effects of generational trauma.

Upon completion of the narrations, people have the opportunity to organize into affinity groups hold what we refer to as Courageous Community Conversations (CCC). These are opportunities to discuss topics important to them, including issues of intersectionality and the impact of the American caste system based on race on the Black family.

These important conversations often facilitate the real-time discovery of new levels of awareness and affirmation, enabling individual action beyond the project to promote healing for the participants, those within their circle, and their communities. The goal of the project is that participants will be empowered to engage in courageous community conversation with one another.

Learn more about BAPT
• The Black American Tree Project Website • Black American Tree Project Introduction Video • Black American Tree Project Orientation Video • Inclusion Press – Black American Tree Project • Sample Virtual Breakout Group from BATP • WVXU article and radio clip about the project • Federation of State Humanities Making Meaning Pod Season 1: • Race and Racism Podcast Episode 5

The project hopes to raise awareness through embodied accounts of what it could be like for countless Black Americans living in America under the system of historic and current oppression and racism. We wanted to have a visceral impact that cuts to the core of a person and helps them to recognize their own ability to affect positive social change in majority-white spaces. But we also wanted Black Americans to feel a sense of truly being heard and seen in a country where there's not a singular collective and structural effort to make amends from the brutality and negative generational impact of American slavery.

The Courageous Community Conversations (CCC) allows for people to engage in authentic, healing, and oftentimes challenging/provocative conversations with people from different ethnic, socio-economic, faith, and cultural backgrounds. We want the project to offer immersive learning that is both healing and approachable for all people. There is an opportunity to engage with different people about the Black American's "shadow" experience in a psychologically supportive space. The project promotes full participation, inclusion, equity, literacy, leadership, learning, and an invitation to allyship for some.

Reflecting on the Challenges and Impact of BAPT

As we have conducted the project over time, we have increasingly recognized how cultural humility has been important to the project's continuance. The courageous community conversations are an exercise in cultural humility because they foster a sense of practicing self-critiquing and self-awareness among and across cultures. Cultural humility is what we don't know and are willing to learn about the person and ourselves. It considers the power imbalances that exist with any leader-member interaction, and it lends itself to a lifelong practice of self-reflection and personal critique. The concept of intersectionality is important in these discussions because many participants have important societal identities that overlap. The project aspires to develop a mutually beneficial partnership within the community, the people we support, and our community-based organizations.

We have found that in the previous iterations of The Black American Tree Project there have been some challenges when engaging in our courageous community conversations. For example, some white Americans become silent during a time when conversation is encouraged. We can only wonder if they are wanting to give Black Americans the opportunity to be heard and acknowledged as they participate in this project. On the other hand, we have found that some Black Americans feel compelled through self-induced pressure to speak on behalf of all Black people rather than speak from their own unique perspective. We can only speculate whether they are attempting to utilize this crucial platform to elevate the voices of those who are not present. Either way, we have learned to discuss racial group dynamics early in the process to create an environment of dialogue and critical thinking

from all participants about their own unique experiences.

What's Next for the Black American Tree Project

We continue to regularly facilitate the project at the University of Cincinnati in the Community Psychology fall and spring classes each year. We are exploring our connection with other museums and commissions locally and nationally. More colleges, artistic organizations, and museums are beginning to show interest in hosting the project in their institutions (See Appendix C for a list of organizations that have hosted BATP). We will continue to deepen the project's educational footprint to reach more high school students, college students, and museum patrons. Their level of engagement is ideal for the project's intention. The collaborative relationships sustained at Ohio Humanities Council, Pathfinding Outfitters, and The LPH Collective enable the project to thrive and reach new audiences. Future plans are to work with entities in Georgia and Florida.

Another area we want to explore is hosting the project with a predominantly African-American or BIPOC participant group. Freda and I came from non-profit backgrounds, one of which was a predominately white institution. We are also interested in adding more vignettes around the food industry, sports, religion, environmental, and corporate America. We are continuing to explore how cultural sensitivity and cultural humility are linked to the project. We plan to offer more expanded learning opportunities around those themes.

References

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Appendix A

The Black American Tree Project Community Partners and Founding Members	
Social Innovation Founding Partner & Fiscal Sponsor/Mentor	**Social Justice & Education Partners**
Starfire Council of Greater Cincinnati Public Allies Cincinnati Invest in Neighborhoods	All-In Cincinnati University of Cincinnati - Community Psychology cohort pilot
Artistic & Humanities Partners	**Virtual Development Collaborators**
The Lower Price Hill Artist's Collective Ohio Humanities Council	Pathfinding Outfitters Virtual Toronto Summer Institute
Co-Designers, Facilitators, Support Team of the Project:	
L. *Danyetta Najoli* Danyetta first conceptualized the BATP and wrote the narration for the project. She is a founding member of the LPH Collective.	*Freda Epum* Freda Epum was instrumental in co-developing the project by thinking through the various vignettes. Her writing background supported

	the project and helped guide it through its initial stages.
Kim McKinney Kim McKinney has co-facilitated the project since 2023. She supports the overviews and has co-facilitated in-person sessions in 2024.	*Julia Bean* Julia Bean provides audio and video support when we host the project virtually. She is also a part of the LPH Collective.
Alicia Hilderbrand A central part of our audio and visual support team. She is a founding member of the LPH Collective.	*Kachelle Davis* An artistic partner with The Collective. She was instrumental in the inception stages of the project and helped us shape the project into to what it is today. She is a founding member of the LPH Collective.

Appendix B

BAPT Outline and Summary of Vignettes	
The project's exercise components include: ● 45-minute overview along with a Q&A ● 90-minute interactive workshop ○ 10 Vignettes with three scripts each ○ Narration ○ Black American focus person ○ Black American family member ○ Person representing the institutional force ● 60-minute Courageous Community Conversations ○ Small groups that can include affinity groups based on race ○ Large group conversation ● Educates audiences about the legacies of slavery and after-effects in housing, the medical establishment, prison system, schooling, and other areas	
VIGNETTE 1: **PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA** Black American focus person: Villager Black American family member: Family of Villager Person representing the institutional force: Slave Trader	**VIGNETTE 2:** **SLAVERY** Black American focus person: Slave Black American family member: Family of Slave Person representing the institutional force: Slave Owner
VIGNETTE 3: **MEDICAL INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX** Black American focus person: Medical Subject Black American family member: Family of Medical Subject	**VIGNETTE 4:** **LAW ENFORCEMENT/** **PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX** Black American focus person: Police Brutality Victim Black American family member:

Person representing the institutional force: Doctor	Family of Police Brutality Victim Person representing the institutional force: Police Officer
VIGNETTE 5: **GOVERNMENT HOUSING CRISIS** Black American focus person: Homeowner Black American family member: Family of Homeowner Person representing the institutional force: Real Estate Agent	**VIGNETTE 6:** **ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY** Black American focus person: Black Minstrel Performer Black American family member: Family of Black Minstrel Performer Person representing the institutional force: Minstrel Club Owner
VIGNETTE 7: **EDUCATION** Black American focus person: Student Black American family member: Family of Student Person representing the institutional force: Teacher	**VIGNETTE 8:** **NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS** Black American focus person: Non-Profit Employee Black American family member: Family of Non-Profit Employee Person representing the institutional force: Employer
VIGNETTE 9: **MILITARY STATE ORDER** Black American focus person: Soldier Black American family member: Family of Soldier Person representing the institutional force: Southern Congressional Leader	**VIGNETTE 10:** **SOCIETY** Document 42: Citizen Black American family member: Family of Citizen Person representing the institutional force: White Vigilante/White Supremacist

Appendix C

List of Host Organizations:
The Lower Price Hill Artist's Collective
Community Matters/Education Matters
Starfire Council of Greater Cincinnati
Design Impact, Affinity group affiliate
a2ru Emerging Creatives International Student Summit, University of Cincinnati
The Neighborhood Summit at Xavier University, Special Event
Toronto Summer Institute/Pathfinding Outfitters – Virtual prototype host
Cincinnati Squash Academy
Miami University Honors English Class
Invest in Neighborhoods, Fiscal Sponsor
Public Allies Cincinnati
Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) - Margaret and Robert Garner Cincinnati Chapter
University of Cincinnati's Community Psychology Course - Cohort Pilot Model
Miami University's Community-Based Leadership and Change Course
Ohio Family Network
Impact 100 (women's philanthropy group)
Keystone Human Services + Keystone Institute
Walnut Hills High School - Ethnic Studies AA Course (4 in-person sessions)
B.Younique Soulistic Care (in-person)
National Commission on Black Art and Entertainment (NCBAE) – Peacemaking Cohort