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Supporting Young Children of Immigrants in PreK-3

Introduction

Fabienne Doucet and Jennifer Keys Adair

Essays by

Ramón Antonio Martínez

Sandra L. Osorio

Max Vázquez Domínguez, Denise Dávila, and Silvia Noguerón-Liu

Alejandra Barraza and Pedro Martinez

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Occasional Paper Series 39 Apr. 2018

Bank Street Occasional Paper Series

Table of Contents

Introduction

A Vision for Transforming Early Childhood Research and Practice for Young Children of Immigrants and Their Families *5*
Fabienne Doucet and Jennifer Keys Adair

Intersectionality and Possibility in the Lives of Latina/o/x Children of Immigrants: Imagining Pedagogies Beyond the Politics of Hate *17*
Ramón Antonio Martínez

No Room for Silence: The Impact of the 2016 Presidential Election on a Second-Grade Dual-Language (Spanish-English) Classroom *30*
Sandra L. Osorio

Building Safe Community Spaces for Immigrant Families, One Library at a Time *43*
Max Vázquez Domínguez, Denise Dávila, and Silvia Noguerón-Liu

Administrators' Roles in Offering Dynamic Early Learning Experiences to Children of Latinx Immigrants *57*
Alejandra Barraza and Pedro Martinez

Rethinking "Parent Involvement": Perspectives of Immigrant and Refugee Parents *68*
Zeynep Isik-Ercan

Experiential Knowledge and Project-Based Learning in Bilingual Classrooms *84*
Adriana Alvarez

Over the Hills and Far Away: Inviting and Holding Traumatic Stories in School *102*
Lesley Koplow, Noelle Dean, and Margaret Blachly

Building Bridges Between Home and School for Latinx Families of Preschool Children *119*
Gigliana Melzi, Adina R. Schick, and Lauren Scarola

Building Bridges, Not Walls, Between Latinx Immigrant Parents and Schools *130*
Kiyomi Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove

Occasional Paper Series 39

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Editor's Note

Dear Readers,



It is with a great sense of pride and accomplishment that I have decided to step down as editor-and-chief of the Occasional Paper Series. I am delighted to announce that Gail Boldt, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Penn State University and senior OPS Board Member, will be succeeding me in July. We have been working closely together over the last year to assure a seamless transition in the journal's leadership.

When I became editor 18 years ago, OPS was a small publication of single essays that appeared at irregular intervals. Now an on-line journal of 9 themed essays that appears each fall and spring, it has grown from 300 print copies distributed primarily within the Bank Street community to an online, internationally recognized journal with articles that are downloaded more than 5,000 times a year.

Originally the idea Pat Wasley, then Dean of the Graduate School, and under the leadership of its first editor, Frank Pignatelli, OPS was designed to provide a venue for Bank Street faculty to publish work in the pipeline. Today it is a double-blind peer reviewed journal that receives submissions from around the world. Optimizing the affordances of online publication with photos, graphic essays, and podcasts, OPS has helped to expand conceptions of educational research and representation.

Over nearly two decades I have had the opportunity to work with outstanding authors and guest editors offering diverse expertise but a shared commitment to the principles of progressive pedagogy on which Bank Street was founded. I believe our signal accomplishment has been the creation a journal offering theoretically informed articles that are accessible to a broad audience of educators. With the intention of nurturing promising first time authors, we have privileged narrative styles that draw readers into compelling arguments about the state of education today and what it might become in the future. We have also tried to privilege richly textured essays that provide a vivid sense of the lived realities of children and their teachers. We have encouraged authors to show our readers what works and to be forthright in reporting what hasn't worked and in explaining why.

The success of the journal would not have been possible without the commitment of its working board, the Bank Street college communications team and, over the last 3-and-a-half years, the unstinting support of Josh Thomases, Dean of Innovation, Policy and Research. As I step down from the editorship, I am excited to be joining the largest, strongest and most diverse editorial board in the history of the journal and to be turning the reins of leadership over to the new editor-in-chief, Gail Boldt.

Warm Regards,

Jonathan Silin

Introduction
A Vision for Transforming Early Childhood Research and Practice for Young Children of Immigrants and Their Families

Fabienne Doucet and Jennifer Keys Adair

This special issue of the Occasional Paper Series describes practices and policies that can positively impact the early schooling of children of immigrants in the United States. We consider the intersectionality of young children's lives and what needs to change in order to ensure that race, class, immigration status, gender, and dis/ability can effectively contribute to children's experiences at school and in other instructional contexts, rather than prevent them from getting the learning experiences they need and deserve.

Our stance and challenge to the field of early childhood education as well as to the intersecting fields of child development; science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM); social studies; literacy; and public health is that our work should begin with a focus on children and community capabilities rather than on perceived deficits. We believe that if educational practices and policies begin with what the child lacks, what families are not contributing, or how the community is failing, all of our work will ultimately fail to improve the lives of children and their families. Simplistic and unidimensional approaches like accelerating school readiness or increasing parent involvement place the burden of transformation on children and families. How can a three-year-old child or a newly arrived immigrant family be expected to overcome longstanding, structurally created inequities by changing themselves or conforming to society's ever-shifting expectations, especially if those societal expectations are steeped in deficit-oriented thinking?

Recognizing the untenable ways in which interventions for immigrant children and families are typically conceived, this special issue addresses inequities, disparities, and "gaps" as *institutional* challenges rather than something that can be fixed by or blamed on families and children. Instead of insisting that children and families change to be successful in the U.S., we focus here on the structural changes that would make preK-3 more equitable. These changes include rethinking and/or improving dual-language programs, national and state funding, demographic labeling systems, public messaging, immigration

law, multilingualism and multi-literacy programs, school environments, community engagement, curriculum and pedagogical approaches, home/school relationships, early childhood teacher education, and administrator education.

Strength-Based Work with Immigrant Communities

There has never been a better time to root our work with young children of immigrants in strength-based approaches. As immigrant families continue to participate in and contribute to public early schooling, there is an opportunity to build upon their knowledges and practices. Approaching families and children through what they bring to the table means recognizing the richness of their lives and changing early learning systems so as to better support and honor culturally sustaining practices. (Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair, 2013; Genishi, 2002).

Over the past three decades, early childhood education has benefited from research by scholars of color working within communities that they identify with, as well as research by scholars using critical and culturally relevant framings to describe children and families in early schooling (see Arzubiaga, Noguerón, & Sullivan, 2009; Doucet, 2008; Genishi, 2002; Humphries & Iruka, 2017). This work orients pre-service teachers, practicing teachers, and researchers toward looking for what is good, promising, and important about children and families (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Genishi & Dyson, 2009). This work demonstrates that young children develop and learn through a range of inequitably distributed sets of obstacles and pressures formed in context and through historical discrimination (González, 2016; Martínez, this issue; Martínez, Durán, & Hikida, 2017).

Early childhood education also benefits from theoretical orientations that originate outside the field and that position critical, cultural, human and other-world ideas as lenses through which to see young children in rich and complex ways. Anthropological, culturally situated orientations have resulted in studies of young children's learning in multiple communities and nations (see Adair, 2014; Rogoff, 2014; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009; Tudge, 2008). This work demonstrates that children's learning and development is cultural – connected to experiences – as much as it is biological (Gutiérrez, Zitlali Morales, & Martínez, 2009). Theoretical frameworks that come from Black Feminism and Chicana/Latina Feminism (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017), Queer Studies (Blaise & Ryan, 2012), Indigenous Knowledges and New Materialism (Nxumalo, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2013) help explain how learning and development are impacted by power and often, inequality. Concepts such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), Third Space (Gutiérrez,

2008), translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014), and cultural brokering (Heath, 1983) clarify the ways in which young children develop and learn through multiple, inequitably distributed sets of obstacles and pressures formed in context and through historical discrimination.

Anti-Immigration Attitudes as Obstacles to Strength-Based Policies and Practices

Strength-based orientations are critical for early childhood education and can be transformative. Too often however, early childhood education is positioned as a tool of assimilation and an intervention that can effectively address the challenges of poverty. In ironic contrast to the liberatory visions or the transformative power of education advanced by scholars like Freire (1994) and hooks (1994), these myopic visions turn early childhood education into a tool for reinforcing the status quo, and a scapegoat for the state's failure to serve those with the least amounts of agency and power. Along with the other authors in this special issue, we advocate for a vision of early childhood education that recognizes the field's potential to nurture educational conditions under which all children have a rich foundation from which to flourish. Such a foundation demands accountability from institutions, in this case early childhood policies, programs, practices, discourses, and interventions for causing harm to families from non-dominant communities, particularly immigrant communities.

There are many reasons to be hopeful about the collective strides the field of early childhood education has made toward more equitable and just policies and practices. Yet we are living in a time that is threatening the progress made toward dismantling the chokehold of a heteronormative, patriarchal, White supremacist hegemony. Immigrant children and their families have been a direct target for decades, long preceding Trump's presidency. Bill Clinton's signing of the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRRA) opened the door for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants that persisted – and indeed ramped up – through the George W. Bush and Obama administrations (Chaudry, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2011).

As we face a bleak political landscape fueled by hate speech, fear, and xenophobia, it would be foolish to deny the impact the Trump administration is having on the lives of people who have been historically marginalized. The fear-mongering propaganda that has characterized Donald Trump's rhetoric from his campaign to his occupation of the White House has made xenophobic attitudes more permissible and public. From Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, to the ban on immigrants arriving from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Chad, and North Korea (Liptak, 2018, January 20), to the termination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, to uninformed

and cruel comments about immigrants issued by the President on a nearly daily basis, the official climate of the United States is unwelcoming. Immigrants are systematically positioned as problematic, threatening, greedy, illegal, or dangerous instead of being seen for their irreplaceable contributions of labor, ideas, and participation they and their children consistently offer the United States.

Avoiding the Temptation to Blame or Victimize

Deficit views of children and their families impact children's early schooling experience in multiple, negative ways (Colegrove & Adair, 2014). Deficit views mask institutional problems by blaming children, families, and communities for the struggles they face. Home visiting programs, parent-teacher conferences, and other parent engagement efforts, when done without the intention to learn from families, can easily push schools into further disconnected from parents and communities (Doucet, 2008; Doucet & Tudge, 2007). Deficit views justify programs that demand families change their ways of interacting and relating with one another in order to be successful in school (Valencia, 2012). These include programs aimed at improving children's vocabulary by insisting parents speak more words to their children face to face. The "word gap" argument, which claims that children from poor and immigrant households lack vocabulary when they reach kindergarten, has diverted attention from the systemic causes of hardship, immigration, and poverty (Adair, Colegrove, & McManus, 2017; Michaels, 2013). Instead, parents are told that they can fix their child's educational struggles by speaking to them using standardized forms of English (García & Otheguy, 2016). This orientation pushes families of color to act and speak more like White parents in order to be successful in schools (Michaels, 2013).

Deficit thinking sets in motion deficit-framing instead of thinking of children, families, and communities as capable, interesting, complex, and knowledgeable. Deficit views justify mistreatment, oversimplification, and stereotyping that devalue home languages and practices. Deficit views prevent us from seeing children experiencing trauma in compassionate and thoughtful ways. Too often, children of immigrants who have or are experiencing trauma are treated as if their problematic behavior is on purpose or threatening, when it is a call for support and care.

Focusing on young immigrant children from a strength-based and intersectional approach decenters whiteness. When we focus on immigrants as victims, we normalize whiteness because our actions are constituted as being always in response to the dominant, White, native-born other. What if we centered our efforts in our relationships with young children, families, and communities? What if we focused instead on carving new aspirations, recognizing that immigrant communities live and move

and thrive in spaces of their own making?

Advocacy for Children of Immigrants that is Rooted in Multiplicity and Strengths

The essays in this issue of the Bank Street Occasional Paper Series all grapple with the need to approach programs, research, and school practices with respectful, strength-based views of communities. They frame inequities, disparities, and "gaps" as institutional challenges rather than child, family or community deficits. Together the authors articulate an agenda of advocacy for young children of immigrants. Work that engages children and families in strength-based, asset-oriented ways should:

1. Recognize strengths and capabilities of children, families, and communities
2. Avoid programs, policies, discourses and practices that begin with deficit views of immigrant families and communities
3. See the children of immigrants as intersectional and complex
4. Create programs that begin from the expertise and experience of immigrant families.

The essays we have chosen address this agenda at the levels of public discourse, classroom, and school/community. Martínez sets the tone by asserting that advocacy for immigrant communities does not just mean focusing on children being part of immigrant communities but seeing the complex and dynamic nature of children's identities. He writes,

> *At the risk of minimizing the harmful impact of the current political climate, I wish to highlight an obvious fact—that Latinx children of immigrants are more than just victims, and more than just children of immigrants. Indeed, they are American children, Mexican children, Central American children, Caribbean children, and Indigenous children. They are bilingual children, multilingual children, and multiracial children. They are poets and polyglots. They are aspiring writers, mathematicians, scientists, artists, and athletes. And beyond a laundry list of these multiple identities and aspirations, these children are complex and resilient human beings who live rich and dynamic lives.*

In this issue we also try to locate some of the ways in which researchers, practitioners, and community members are seeing children's capabilities and multiplicities as foundational strengths on which to build. Osorio, for example, details the ways in which a teacher discussed President Trump's rhetoric about immigrants in her second-grade dual-language classroom. The rich examples of children's thinking demonstrate that often the best thing a teacher can do is become a learner welcoming students' funds

of knowledge into the classroom.

At the school/community level, there is a range of possible advocacy efforts that begin with strengths rather than deficits. Domínguez, Dávila, & Noguerón-Liu describe a community-based literacy project that made culturally relevant changes in order to better serve Spanish-speaking immigrant families. These changes included a home-like atmosphere in a community library to welcome and promote immigrant family expertise. Barraza & Martinez offer culturally sustaining practices for school and district administrators committed to early childhood education with immigrant communities. They argue that children of immigrants thrive when offered a broad range of learning experiences and a range of assessment options in order to mark their academic, social, and cognitive capabilities rather than their deficits. Isik-Ercan relays the experiences of Turkish and Burmese immigrant families attempting to make sense of family-school relationships. Arguing that schools need to reframe parents as experts on their children, Isik-Ercan identifies specific ways in which schools and school people can foster more reciprocal, culturally relevant, and respectful relationships with immigrant families.

At the classroom level, Alvarez describes how she engaged her first-grade bilingual class in project-based learning, an experience usually reserved for White, upper middle-class children. She worked with students to create projects that connected community knowledge and family experiences to academic learning. These projects provided a way for parents and children to connect through academic experiences. Koplow, Dean, and Blachly describe work with children who have experienced trauma during or because of immigration. Instead of avoiding difficult stories and experiences, Koplow and her colleagues argue that teachers can involve children in thinking about their trauma in safe and supportive ways through the arts. These engagements with the arts can help children value their own and their communities' knowledges in healthy ways. Melzi, Shick, and Scarola describe a program to help teachers include more oral storytelling in their circle times. Oral storytelling is meant to bring children's dynamic identities and real-life experiences into classroom spaces that often only understand or welcome White-centric ways of existing in the world. Lastly, Colegrove challenges teachers to think of parents as partners and to think creatively about building relationships with them, offering examples and recommendations specific to the classroom.

Collectively, this volume offers practices, policies, and attitudinal shifts that can positively impact the early schooling lives of children of immigrants in the United States. In dangerous and uncertain times for immigration and immigrants, we hope that this work will prompt teachers and researchers to begin or reinforce their commitments to strength-based classroom practices, programs, interventions, workshops, professional development and studies and to abandon the remnants of deficit frameworks

that rely on children and families to change. Building and documenting programs based on what children and their families bring to the table allows everyone to promote the systemic changes that will make it possible for young children of immigrants to reach their full potential.

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Jennifer Keys Adair is Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at The University of Texas at Austin. As a young scholar fellow with the Foundation of Child Development and a major grant recipient of the Spencer Foundation, she focuses on the connection between agency and discrimination in the early learning experiences of children and immigrants, particularly how systemic deficit views of families often translates into a denial of practice and experience in children's schooling. Dr. Adair has published in a wide range of journals, including *Harvard Educational Review*, *Teachers College Record*, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood Education*, *Young Children and Race*, and *Ethnicity and Education*. She has conducted research projects in the United States, India, New Zealand, and Australia as well as throughout Europe. Jennifer's work and expertise can be found in a variety of news outlets including *The Conversation*, *Washington Post*, *The Huffington Post*, *TIME*, *CNN*, and *National Public Radio*.

Intersectionality and Possibility in the Lives of Latina/o/x Children of Immigrants: Imagining Pedagogies Beyond the Politics of Hate

Ramón Antonio Martínez

I first met Alma[1] when she was five years old and a kindergarten student in a multi-age Spanish-English dual language classroom in southern California. Alma is the child of immigrants from the Mexican state of Oaxaca. Somewhat shy and soft spoken, she nonetheless had many friends and seemed eager to engage with her peers in class. In interviews with me over the first few years of a longitudinal study that I was conducting at her school, she spent a great deal of time sharing the details of her rich literate life. Among other things, Alma loved poetry. In addition to writing poems in her writer's notebook for school, she also kept a separate notebook in which she wrote poetry at home. Her face lit up as she told me that she often shared these poems with her father, who she said also wrote poetry. Alma seemed to have an especially strong relationship with her father, and much of the poetry that she shared with me focused on him. She also revealed that her father worked at an Italian restaurant, and that he would often teach her Italian words and phrases that he had learned on the job. She seemed proud of knowing them, and they sometimes popped up in the writing she did both at home and in school.

When I met Samantha, she was a first grader in Alma's multi-age kindergarten/first grade classroom. At six years of age, she was already very proficient in English, which she reported speaking with her older siblings, and Spanish, which she sometimes spoke with her mother and with some friends and teachers at school. In an interview that I conducted with her in second grade, Samantha told me that she also spoke sign language at home with a d/Deaf uncle who lived with her. This revelation alerted me to yet another impressive layer of her expansive linguistic repertoire. Yet being multilingual was not the only thing that stood out about this young child. In addition to being a polyglot, Samantha was also a very kind person and a precociously deep and critical thinker who seemed to be motivated by both genuine intellectual curiosity and a profound commitment to fairness and justice.

1 All participant names are pseudonyms.

While these details about Alma and Samantha can only begin to provide a glimpse into their rich and dynamic lives, I share them as a way of highlighting that the girls' identities are not coterminous with the label "children of immigrants." I want to suggest that their agency as human beings, although obviously constrained by broader systems and structures of domination, is nonetheless reflected in the various identities that they actively construct for themselves and the possible futures that they envision for themselves. Over the course of my ongoing study at their school, I have sometimes seen my own ideas about who these girls were (e.g., "multilingual children") come into tension with the ways that they were coming to see themselves. In some moments, literate identities, such as reader or writer, have seemed to be more salient to them. In other moments, relational identities, such as daughter or friend, have appeared to be more salient. And as they have moved out of early childhood and toward adolescence, these girls have shared other details with me about the people they are and the people they want to become. This process of becoming who they want to become and of foregrounding different dimensions of their identities at different points in time is a fundamental assertion of Alma and Samantha's agency. Over the past eight years, I have been reminded that children's agency is never entirely constrained by the broader systems that structure their everyday lives. Despite the undeniable influence of these broader systems and structures, who these children are—and who they aspire to become—is not limited to their immigration status, national origin, ethnic background, or any other macrosociological category. "Children of immigrants" is not where they begin or end as human beings.

Latina/o/x children of immigrants and the politics of hate

Yet despite the complex and dynamic nature of their identities, the fact that Alma and Samantha are Latina children of immigrants has become particularly salient in the current political moment. Indeed, these are perilous times for Latina/o/x children of immigrants living in the United States. The 2016 election of Donald Trump as president has served as a harsh reminder that we do not live, as some had begun to suggest, in a "post-racial" era. As Goldstein and Hall (2017) argue, Trump's campaign rhetoric "stoked a revived white nationalism while denying its racist content" (p. 402), and this "pro-white semiotics on the campaign trail has come to structure the material policies of the Trump administration" (p. 404). Trump's policy and rhetoric on immigration, in particular, have been blatantly racist and xenophobic (Giroux, 2017; Pérez Huber, 2016), unleashing hateful anti-immigrant discourse and racial violence (Bobo, 2017; Potok, 2017; Shafer, 2017) and threatening the health and well-being of children of immigrants (Cervantes and Walker, 2017). In early 2017, the Trump administration issued two executive orders that significantly expanded and intensified immigration policy enforcement. In

September 2017, the administration announced that it would rescind the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program, which had granted temporary protection from deportation to approximately 800,000 people who had entered the United States as minors, about a quarter of whom are themselves parents of young children. Then, in October 2017, the administration unveiled a list of its principles for reforming the immigration system, which emphasized further expansion and intensification of enforcement activities.

Latina/o/x children of immigrants are caught at the center of this historical moment. Across documented, undocumented, and mixed-status families, the Trump administration's policy decisions have created fear and uncertainty. As Cervantes and Walker (2017) note, "more than 5 million children in the United States currently living with at least one undocumented parent—4.1 million of whom are U.S.-born—are now at greater risk of having a parent or guardian deported" (p. 2). This increased threat of deportation poses a significant threat to the health and well-being, economic security, and educational access of millions of children (Cervantes & Walker, 2017). Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric also appears to have promoted broader racist and anti-immigrant sentiment, not only as manifested in recent white supremacist marches such as the one in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017, but also as reflected in everyday enactments of racial hatred and intolerance within public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Potok, 2017).

At the risk of appearing to minimize the harmful impact of the current political climate, however, I wish to highlight an obvious fact: Latina/o/x children of immigrants are more than just victims and more than just children of immigrants. Indeed, they are American children, Mexican children, Central American children, Caribbean children, and Indigenous children. They are bilingual children, multilingual children, and multiracial children. They are poets and polyglots. They are aspiring writers, mathematicians, scientists, artists, and athletes. In short, these children are complex and resilient human beings who live rich and dynamic lives.

I draw on my own experience coming to know Alma and Samantha over the past seven years to share examples of the rich and varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, identities, and experiences that Latina/o/x children of immigrants bring to school. I argue that these children are not best understood primarily in terms of their oppression within the current political context, both because such a perspective obscures the existence of forms of oppression beyond those related to immigration status and because it ignores the possibilities that these children imagine and enact for themselves on a daily basis. Understanding Latina/o/x children of immigrants, I suggest, requires that we acknowledge—but

also imagine beyond—the current politics of hate. We need to come to know their various intersecting experiences of oppression, and we also need to understand the agency that these children assert in the face of structural inequalities. Such an approach will enable us to imagine pedagogical possibilities grounded in and responsive to their intersectional identities, experiences, and aspirations.

Imagining beyond "children of immigrants"

One of the first things that I learned about Alma during her kindergarten year was that she was of Zapotec ancestry. The Zapotecs are an indigenous people who reside in the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca, as well as in the neighboring states of Guerrero, Puebla, and Veracruz, and in diasporic communities throughout the United States, including parts of southern California. Alma reported speaking Zapoteco, the Zapotec language, which she said her parents sometimes spoke with her and with each other at home; many of my early conversations with Alma focused on her experiences hearing and speaking Zapoteco. It was not until five years later that I learned that Alma was also exposed to a second indigenous language, Mixe, which is spoken by the Mixe people, another indigenous group from Oaxaca. In an interview that I conducted with her when she was in fifth grade, Alma revealed that her father was actually both Zapotec and Mixe, and that he spoke both languages. Although she reported not understanding very much of the Mixe language, she said that she would sometimes hear her father speak it over the phone when talking to his family back in Oaxaca. This belated revelation led me to develop an even greater appreciation for her very rich and diverse multilingual home environment.

Like Alma, Samantha, too, is the child of Mexican immigrants from the state of Oaxaca. And, like Alma, she is also of Zapotec ancestry. I actually learned that Samantha spoke Zapoteco before I learned that Alma did, and my early conversations with her informed my subsequent conversations with Alma. As Samantha began to sense my interest in Zapoteco, she began revealing more details about her experiences with the language. One day, in first grade, she opened up a spiral notebook that she had brought to class, telling me, *"Mire, mi mamá quiere que le enseñe esto."* ("Look, my mom wants me to show you this.") Written on the notebook page, in her mother's handwriting, was a list of Zapotec words alongside their Spanish translations. Apparently, her mother was happy to know that someone at school was interested in Zapoteco, and she wanted to share some basic vocabulary. Samantha proceeded to teach me some of these words and how to pronounce them.

Indigeneity and intersectionality

When we view children like Alma and Samantha exclusively or primarily as children of immigrants, we miss so very much of who they are, including their experiences of oppression and marginalization along other less visible axes. For Alma and Samantha, indigeneity is one such axis. Zapotecs are part of a larger group of indigenous Mexican immigrants that are often rendered invisible in the United States (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Machado-Casas, 2009; Mesinas & Perez, 2016; Perez, Vásquez, & Buriel, 2016; Vásquez, 2012). As I have described elsewhere (Martínez, 2017), this invisibility extends to educational contexts, and the ideological process of erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2009) is one of the mechanisms by which this invisibility is actively achieved. In US schools, indigenous Mexican children are often "positioned as part of a 'Latino' or 'Mexican' population that is assumed to be linguistically and ethnoracially homogeneous" (Martínez, 2017, p. 87). Because these children are "essentialized and racialized as 'Latino,' and imagined to be only bilingual" (Martínez, 2017, p. 87), their indigeneity and their indigenous languages are effectively erased.

Insofar as indigenous Mexican children are acknowledged in US schools and society, this recognition often involves overt forms of discrimination (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Machado-Casas, 2009). Beginning with the Spanish conquest of what is now Mexico, indigenous peoples have been murdered en masse, colonized, displaced, forcibly assimilated, and systematically relegated to a subordinate status in Mexican society (Batalla, 1987; Ruiz, 1992). Just as indigenous people have historically been—and continue to be—marginalized in Mexico, so, too, have their languages. For example, indigenous languages are often pejoratively referred to as "mere dialects" in Mexico, and many Mexican immigrants—both indigenous and non-indigenous—bring such language ideologies with them to the United States (Martínez, 2017). Even if it is recognized that students like Alma and Samantha speak indigenous languages, then, there is no guarantee that this will be viewed in a positive light. Their expansive linguistic competencies are easily dismissed or disregarded when viewed through a lens that devalues and degrades indigenous peoples and their languages.

Indigeneity is, therefore, a fundamental axis of marginalization and oppression that intersects with other axes of domination in ways that matter for Alma and Samantha in their everyday lives. These include not only their status as children of immigrants, but also their status as girls living in a patriarchal society and as working-class children in a capitalist economy. The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) helps us see beyond these girls' identities as "children of immigrants" and recognize the other identities that matter for their present lives and possible futures. It is not the case that immigration status does not matter for students like Alma and Samantha, but rather that these other

overlapping social identities and attendant systems of oppression also matter for the girls' present lives and possible futures—and that they matter in nuanced and powerful ways that make the category "children of immigrants" insufficient for capturing the totality of their experiences in the current political moment.

Imagining beyond the politics of hate

By highlighting these girls' agency and their experiences of oppression beyond the axis of immigration, I do not mean to trivialize the political climate in the United States today. To be sure, Latina/o/x children of immigrants and their families are currently experiencing various forms of marginalization and oppression along the various intersecting lines of identity and difference mentioned above. However, many of these experiences—including those related to immigration status—began long before Trump was elected, and many will no doubt continue to occur once his presidency is a bad memory. Indeed, ideologies, policies, and practices of racial exclusion have been foundational to European colonization of the Americas and the subsequent history of the United States. More recently, after President Clinton approved passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996, federal immigration policy has systematically criminalized undocumented immigrants, focusing on enforcement while simultaneously eliminating previously available pathways to citizenship (Hong, 2017). During the Obama administration, the near-constant threat of deportations continued, although it was obscured by a kinder and gentler rhetoric. And even if there is a return to a less overtly racist rhetoric once the Trump administration has ended, structural racism will inevitably continue to shape immigration policy in this country. As Rosa and Bonilla (2017) observe, "focusing merely on present-day forms of racism, such as those that have gained attention in the wake of the 2016 election, does not allow us to see how contemporary US race relations articulate long-standing forms of coloniality" (p. 203). Precisely because white supremacy and anti-immigrant racism are not coterminous with the Trump administration, it behooves us to imagine beyond the current historical moment; we need to be prepared to recognize the myriad ways in which Latina/o/x children of immigrants will continue to experience oppression and marginalization even in a less overtly hateful political environment.

A related and equally compelling reason to imagine beyond the current politics of hate is that doing so will allow us to move beyond reactionary logics. When we view children like Alma and Samantha exclusively or primarily as "children of immigrants," we tend to frame them as victims and their circumstances as crises (Mariscal, Velásquez, Agüero, & Urrieta, 2017). This traps us unwittingly within the confines of a reactionary logic that focuses exclusively on critiquing current structures, systems,

and conditions of oppression and domination without providing a vision for alternative possibilities. Of course, critique is essential. We cannot expect to achieve meaningful social transformation without first engaging in a critical analysis of our present conditions (Allman, 1999; Freire, 1992). To echo a key tenet of critical pedagogy, however, we need to develop both a language of critique and a language of possibility (Giroux & McLaren, 1989; McLaren and Farahmandpur, 2005). We need to be able to imagine a better society for Latina/o/x children of immigrants, and we need to be able to prefigure the pedagogies that we envision as part of it (Allman, 1999; Zavala & Golden, 2016). In my view, enacting such pedagogies necessitates envisioning possibilities beyond both dominant and reactionary logics.

Imagining pedagogical possibilities

It is reasonable to ask whether it is even possible to imagine pedagogical possibilities outside the institutional arrangements and larger systems of oppression and domination that continue to structure our society and, indeed, social life in our world. Can we, in fact, imagine pedagogies outside the logic of neoliberalism, outside the logic of capital, outside the logic of white supremacy, outside the logic of cisheteropatriarchy, outside the logic of settler colonialism? I want to suggest that such political and pedagogical imagining is possible, but that it can only begin from within these intersecting systems of oppression and domination. And I want to suggest that one of the most effective and organic ways in which we can nurture and expand our political and pedagogical imaginations is by looking to young Latina/o/x children of immigrants and engaging dialogically with their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations. Despite the overwhelming structural and institutional constraints that obtain in schools, I want to assert that they can become sites for articulating alternative logics and imagining alternative pedagogies if we commit to collectively imagining a better society along with young children. As hooks (1994) notes, "the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility" (p. 207).

I want to end by humbly suggesting a few pedagogical implications that I think stem from what I have come to learn from and about Alma, Samantha, and the other Latina/o/x children of immigrants at their school. First and foremost, because our envisioning of alternative political and pedagogical possibilities must begin with a critical assessment of our present material conditions, it is essential to acknowledge the current political moment. Teachers should not shy away from discussing the harmful policies and hateful rhetoric that characterize today's political climate. As we know, even very young children are capable of engaging in critical dialogue around sensitive and controversial political topics, especially when those topics overlap with their lived experiences (Souto-Manning, 2013; Vasquez, 2014). Indeed, we need to deliberately engage with what Gallo and Link (2015) call the "politicized

funds of knowledge" (p. 357) that Latina/o/x children of immigrants bring to the classroom based on their experiences within this current context of immigration policy enforcement. We can do this by engaging them in critical dialogue and by making curricular connections to the issues that directly impact their day-to-day lives.

However, we should enter into such spaces of dialogue recognizing that, because of their intersectional identities and experiences, Latina/o/x children of immigrants will not all experience the current political moment in the same ways. As Mangual Figueroa (2017) has shown, "students' legal citizenship status affects what they feel they can disclose about themselves and their families" (p. 514), and even pedagogical moves intended to support students can have "the unintended consequence of silencing rather than facilitating undocumented students' expression in school" (p. 515). Rather than framing discussions in ways that single out undocumented students, we can approach such issues with foresight and sensitivity, allowing for multiple forms of participation and multiple levels of disclosure.

As Alma and Samantha's experiences reveal, immigrant parents play a fundamental role in the lives of their children and have tremendous influence over who these children are, what they experience, and who they aspire to become. Any efforts to enact transformative pedagogies for Latina/o/x children of immigrants should, therefore, involve meaningful engagement with their parents. We can and should see them as necessary allies in the collective work of imagining and creating a better world for their children. This requires, however, that we rethink who immigrant parents are, what they think and know about education, and how they support their children (Adair, Colegrove, & McManus, 2017; Colegrove, This issue; Doucet, 2011; Gallo, 2017; Nava & Lara, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2006; Valdés, 1996). And, of course, given that some of these parents may be among those most directly threatened by current anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, we should approach them with sensitivity and discretion. Although we should not assume or insist on disclosure with respect to their immigration status, we should be prepared to connect them with relevant resources, including local and national immigrant rights organizations. Advocating for and supporting our students' parents is one of the most concrete ways that we can support our students themselves.

Finally, we can provide spaces and opportunities for young Latina/o/x children of immigrants to articulate, enact, and imagine their own experiences, identities, and aspirations. Insofar as immigration status mediates their experiences and the experiences of their families, these children are the experts on what such experiences mean (Gallo, 2014; Gallo & Link, 2015). Because immigration status is not the only dimension of their lives that matters to these students, however, we need to anticipate and

allow for the expression of their intersectional identities and experiences, and we need to let these inform our pedagogy. Some students, like Alma, might be poets who live rich literate lives both in and out of school. Some, like Samantha, might be polyglots with amazing linguistic repertoires. And some, like both Alma and Samantha, might be of indigenous ancestry and have important related experiences. We should let students decide who they are and who they want to become and let them share with us as much or as little of that as makes sense for them at any given moment. Coming to know who Latina/o/x children of immigrants are by listening to and learning from them over time will enable us to imagine and enact pedagogies that are grounded in and responsive to their intersectional identities, experiences, and aspirations.

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No Room for Silence: The Impact of the 2016 Presidential Election on a Second-Grade Dual-Language (Spanish-English) Classroom

Sandra L. Osorio

"¡Quiere sacar a todos los suramericanos! Quiere quedarse con solo los blancos,"[1] shouted second grader Salvador[2] to his classmate Victor. They were supposed to be reading *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin, but somehow the conversation had turned to the then presidential candidate for the Republican Party, Donald Trump. That was how Trump and his rhetoric entered our dual language classroom.

Far too often, the voices of students of color, their experiences, and their lives are not validated in the classroom. When Salvador and Victor's conversation about Trump erupted, the teacher and I—the teacher researcher in the classroom—knew we had to bring this topic to the forefront. If two students were discussing it, the chances were that it was on the minds of many. As Costello (2016) explained, Trump's words and actions during the campaign impacted classrooms throughout the United States because "the [presidential] campaign was producing an alarming level of fear and anxiety among children of color and inflaming racial and ethnic tensions in the classroom" (p. 4).

This article examines how the teacher and I implemented culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in our classroom in response to Trump's rhetoric about immigration. I focus on how the students, who were distressed by that rhetoric, discussed what Trump was saying about immigration, as well as on how we worked together to support them.

Professional Dyads and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

This study took place during the 2015–16 school year. I had applied to be part of a professional dyads and culturally relevant teaching (PDCRT) program organized by the Early Childhood Education Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English. The PDCRT program sponsors partnerships

1 He wants to take out all the South Americans! He wants only the whites to stay. [Note: throughout the paper, the Spanish is presented verbatim as spoken or written by the students, including errors. The English translations are corrected grammatically in order to ensure clarity of meaning.]

2 All student and teacher names are pseudonyms

between a teacher educator and a classroom teacher who work together to research and develop culturally sustaining practices and implement them in the classroom. I had met Natalia, the teacher with whom I worked, several years earlier when I was transitioning out of classroom teaching, just as she was beginning her career at the school.

The Importance of Culturally Sustaining Classroom Practices

Culturally sustaining practices "seek to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (Paris, 2012, p. 93). They require teachers to "support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). CSP has four key features: (1) *a critical centering* on dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledges, (2) student and community agency and input (*community accountability*), (3) *historicized* content and instruction, and (4) a capacity to contend with *internalized oppressions* (Paris & Alim, 2017).

While there is more and more research focused on CSP, it has tended to center on middle school and high school classrooms. However, some scholars have demonstrated that this work can also be done with early childhood students (McNeela, 2017; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016). It was important for us to use CSP because it allowed us to tap into students' lived experiences and use their discussions to support the development of the students' critical consciousness (Freire, 1970). This study adds to the research on CSP in early childhood settings by focusing on multilingual Latinx second graders in the hostile and fearful political environment during the election for the 45th president.

The Classroom

The classroom was part of a 90-10 dual-language[3] (Spanish-English) program. In second grade, students received 70% of their instruction in Spanish and 30% in English. There were 24 students in the class, 15 native Spanish speakers and nine native English speakers. All but four of the native Spanish-speaking students were of Mexican descent. The others were from Central America and South America. Six of the native English speakers were White, and three were biracial. Two of the biracial students had one Latinx parent and one European American parent, while the other had one African American parent and one White parent.

3 A 90-10 dual-language program is where in kindergarten students receive 90% of their instruction in Spanish and 10% in English, and then each year continue to decrease in Spanish and increase in English until instruction reaches 50-50.

Getting Started with Literature Discussions

After Victor and Salvador talked about Trump's desire to have only White people in the United States, Natalia and I met to discuss how to respond. We wanted to find an appropriate way to bring the topic of Trump and immigration into our classroom in order to support not only Victor and Salvador but also other students who we knew were struggling with current events in US politics. Natalia recalled that I had practiced literature discussions with my students in the past (Osorio, 2015). She suggested we do similar work with texts that focused on immigration. I thought this was a great idea and agreed to look for appropriate books. Since literacy instruction in the class was in Spanish, the texts had to either be bilingual (Spanish-English) or Spanish. I was disappointed that I was able to find only one non-Latinx immigrant experience story in Spanish, *Mariama, diferente pero igual*[4] by Jerónimo Cornelles. I wanted students to be able to see various immigrant experiences from a wide range of countries. The other texts chosen were *Al fin en casa*[5] by Susan Middleton Elya, *Un mundo nuevo*[6] by D. H. Figueredo, *La mariposa* by Simon Silva, and *Super Cilantro Girl/La superniña del cilantro* by Juan Felipe Herrera. Students were able to choose which book they wanted to read and discuss.

However, to demonstrate the process we would be using in literature discussions, we decided to start with a book we could discuss as a whole class, *From North to South/Del norte al sur* by René Colato Laínez. We specifically chose this book to support students' discussions about immigration and separation. In the story, José, who lives in California, finds out that his mother has been deported. Readers then follow José as he travels across the border along with his father to visit his mother in Tijuana. While some teachers may feel uncomfortable bringing these issues into the classroom, we knew that immigrations and separation were a part of the children's lived experiences and that our students needed to have a space to talk about them and express themselves. The children were never forced to share their experiences or asked specific questions about their family or immigration status, but we considered it important to give students the opportunity to do so, if they wished.

We quickly learned that the students possessed a wealth of knowledge regarding the citizenship process as well as about what it meant to have "papers" versus not having them. The students had funds of knowledge—"the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005,

4 Mariama, Different but Just the Same
5 *Home at Last*
6 *When the World Was New*

p.133) —that had not been previously welcomed into the classroom. Their funds of knowledge about immigration, documentation, and citizenship were vast and rich, even though those topics had not been formally covered in class, because those issues were directly related to many of our students' everyday lived experiences.

We also used *From North to South/Del norte al sur* to model fat vs. skinny questions. Fat questions were open ended and allowed for discussion, while skinny questions usually required only one-word responses. We wanted students to develop fat questions to ask later in discussion groups. I helped Natalia prepare for the read aloud and discussion by typing up examples of fat and skinny questions and pasting them throughout the book. That way, Natalia had model questions to ask and talk about with students while she read to them.

As the class listened to *From North to South/Del norte al sur*, Tomas, one of the students, revealed his knowledge about its topic when he stated, *"Los papeles son importante porque si no vienes con los papeles* you don't have rights."[7] Another student, Adan, asked, *"¿Un papel, por que un papel* is so *importante?"* [8] As the conversation continued, Adan shared, *"No importanta tu* skin color *o dónde vivas . . . si quiere vivir aqui para buscar algo mejor."* [9] As Salvador reiterated later on in the conversation, *"no importante que raza eres solo eres persona."* [10] He was stating something that many of the students felt, as could be seen through their shared conversation. They didn't think that anyone should be treated differently because of where they come from, what their background is, or which language they speak.

While students in our class had varying degrees of knowledge about citizenship status and what it means to be documented, one topic to which everyone could relate was that of family separation. Most students had experienced what it feels like to be separated from their parents, although for different reasons and lengths of time. When Natalia read the part in *From North to South/ Del norte al sur* where José crosses the US-Mexico border to visit his mother, the students connected on a human level, across social, economic, and racial lines, with how it feels to be separated from a parent. They shared how sad this made them feel. They could empathize with the character in the story as well as with their classmates because each had felt this pain before. This was precisely the reason I had decided that *From North to South/ Del norte al sur* would be a good book to bring in; I had used it with a previous class and

7 Those papers are important because if you don't come with papers you don't have rights.
8 A paper, why is a paper so important?
9 It doesn't matter what your skin color is or where you live . . . if you want to live here to find something better.
10 It doesn't matter what race you are, you are a person.

had seen how it opened up a space for students to safely connect to their lived experiences and share them.

Some students shared that they now lived with only one parent because their parents had separated. Jairo said, *"Mi papá se fue a Washington. Me siento un poquito triste pero aun lo quiero mucho. Además tengo otro papá."* [11] Jairo took the opportunity to share that his parents had separated and that while he no longer saw his dad, he still loved him. Victor shared how his father was currently away in Washington, DC for four days. He said that he actually liked it when his father traveled because, he explained, *"mi mamá me deja hacer muchas cosas que mi papá no me deja."* [12] While both of these students understood what it was like to be separated from their fathers, the reasons for those separations were very different. Jairo wasn't able to see his father, who had left the family; Victor knew his father would come back and so could enjoy some freedoms while his dad was away.

All this sharing from a wide range of her classmates encouraged one of our quieter students, Soledad, to say, *"Mi papá está en Florida como cinco años."* [13] Soledad went on to share that she had not seen her father since then because he now had another family. This was new information to us, and it was important for us to know in order to better support Soledad. She mustered the courage to share her own story, no matter how painful it was, at least in part because we had created a space where personal narratives could be shared and emotions safely expressed.

Salvador and Victor's discussion about current issues and the stands that Trump was taking led us to provide the opportunity for the class to talk about other sensitive topics. Instead of silencing students, we openly encouraged the discussion of emotional and difficult subjects, such as separation, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Our goal was to support our students and to learn with them, and over time they felt increasingly comfortable learning about each other, supporting each other, and building stronger relationships. This also allowed them to discuss how policies that cause the separation of families are unjust, and learning and talking about oppressive structures nurtured the students' critical consciousness.

Students clearly understood that life would be different under a Trump presidency. During a whole-class discussion, Danilo said, *"Yo no quiere que Donald Trump sea presidente porque mi papá es del otro lado,*

11 My dad left for Washington. I feel a little sad but I still love him a lot. Anyways I have another dad.
12 My mom lets me do different things that my dad won't let me do.
13 My dad is in Florida for like five years.

no quiero que mi papá se vaya." [14] Here, Danilo expressed his fear over what life could be like if Trump became president. Iliana shared how it wouldn't affect her parents because they had papers, but that her aunt and uncle might have to leave if Trump were elected: *"Me siento un poco triste pero no tanto porque toda mi familia si tiene los papeles pero no mi tío y mi tía…Ellos no tienen papeles y no quiere que se vayan."*[15] She went on to explain how the deportation of her aunt and uncle would affect the family because someone would have to take care of their three children: *"Si se los llevan no sabemos con quien se van a quedar mis primos porque tengo tres y a lo mejor si los llevan se quedan con nosotros."* [16] The students realized that the deportation of one of their relatives would affect not only their immediate family, but their extended family as well.

As one of the classroom teachers, I had to be aware of the real fears that affected students' classroom behavior, attention in class, relationships with others, and learning. By providing a space for students to express their feelings and begin to process them, I demonstrated that I didn't have answers but was willing to immerse myself in the learning process with the students. Outside of school, many of them were regularly hearing Trump's discourse; inside the classroom, they had a space to freely express their fear, anxiety, stress, and uncertainty without being judged or questioned.

Infusing Art into Emotional Discussions

While reading *From North to South/Del norte al sur*, Natalia came up with the idea of having small groups of students draw what they imagined life would be like if Trump were to become president. Natalia is very artistic and creative and on many occasions tried to incorporate art into the classroom. She chose groups of about four to five students who worked on their drawing while the other students were in their literacy centers. The groups worked on their own, without any teacher input, for two to three days, and then another group was chosen to create a drawing.

In every group, the students depicted children and families as sad, sometimes even crying, because they were separated from someone they loved, whether a family member or friend. One group drew a police officer walking up to a man and woman and telling them, *"Tienes que ir a Mexico"* [17] (Figure 1).

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14 I don't want Donald Trump to be president because my dad is from the other side and I don't want my dad to leave.

15 I am a little sad, but not too much because all my family has their papers, except my uncle and aunt…They don't have their papers and I don't want them to have to leave.

16 If they take them, we don't know who my cousins will stay with because I have three cousins and probably if they take them they will stay with us.

17 You have to go to Mexico.

Another group drew a boy saying, *"Yo odio Mexico,"* [18] while a girl next to him cried (Figure 2).



Figure 1. *"Tienes que ir a Mexico"* / "You have to go to Mexico"

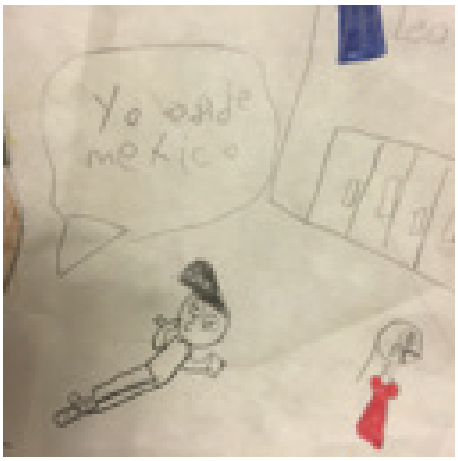


Figure 2. "Yo oido Mexico" / "I hate Mexico"

All the groups drew the wall that Trump said he would build to protect the United States from Mexicans. One group wrote the words *"visas papeles, no Mexico"* [19] across their wall. Many of the students drew things that were familiar to them, such as the local ice cream shop and a small Mexican grocery store, but showed that they felt these things would change under a Trump presidency. One group drew a Mexican grocery store closing down, while another drew it with nothing but American brands of candy left inside because, they imagined, it would not be allowed to sell anything of Mexican origin.

18 I hate Mexico.
19 Visas, papers, no Mexico

All the students believed that life would change significantly if Trump were president. One group drew a picture of Trump saying *"Soy presidente,"* [20] with a person next to him asking, *"¿Qué pasa aquí?"* [21] (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *"Soy presidente"*/ "I am president"

The students of Mexican descent used the drawings to represent the hate that Trump expressed toward them; one drawing included a sign that said, *"No me gustan los de Mexico, son malos"* [22] (Figure 4). For those students who didn't share these fears—either because they were not at risk for deportation or because they did not think a Trump presidency would affect them directly—the exercise helped them gain a better understanding of their classmates' emotions and of the political reality of Trump's campaign. The pictures were placed on the wall and each student wrote about their group's drawing and how they felt life would change if Trump were elected. This activity gave students the opportunity to process their feelings and discuss their thoughts and ideas freely. Students were able to learn together and think critically about Trump's rhetoric.



Figure 4. *"No me gustan los de Mexico, son malos"*/ "I don't like those from Mexico, they are bad."

20 I am president.
21 What is going on here?
22 I don't like those from Mexico, they are bad.

Taking Action

Hearing each other's stories and drawing how life might change under Trump's presidency made students want to do something, to take action. This is one of the final and most important steps in developing critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; Souto-Manning, 2010). Students decided to write letters to different presidential candidates, voicing their concerns about Trump. They wrote letters to Trump, Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton, and Marco Rubio. They also wrote to Ivanka Trump. Here we experienced how teachers can support students in the development of their critical consciousness by daring to use students' personal experiences to empower them in the struggle against oppression. Both of us were working and learning alongside our students while supporting their use of resources available to people living in a democratic society, such as freedom of expression.

In their letters, all the students explained, by connecting the election to their own lives, why they wanted a particular person to be or not be president. For example, one wrote *"Querido Hillary Clintan, Yo quiero que si esta en el eleccion se ganas porque Donald trump quiero que todos los mexicanos [muevan] en mexico y mis amigas son de mexico yo no quiero que se mueva."* [23] This was a sentiment expressed by many of the students, who all had friendships across racial and cultural lines. The letter writing was an opportunity for us as a class to rally around hope and respect.

Other students tried to reason with Trump by writing things such as *"Querido Donald Trump, Quieres llevar los mexicanos, cuando viven en otros sitios y tiene un color diferent. Porque es tan malo los colores de los mexicanos? Porque solo son colores de gente. Pero gente nacio con esos colores porque es tan mal los mexicanos tiene colores diferentes. Por ejemplo, si tu realmente comparas papel blanco con piel de persona blanco no son los mismos pues realmente el color de personas blancas es un poco café."* [24] Another student wrote, *"Donald Trump porque vas a poner un muro como te gustaria . . . que tal si te bieran separado de tu amigo o amiga pero te gustaria cuando seas bebe te gustaria que te qiten a tu mama cuando seas bebe."* [25]

Students in the class developed critical consciousness throughout this process. Through their letters,

23 Dear Hillary Clinton, I want you to win these elections because if Donald Trump wins, he wants all the Mexicans to go back to Mexico and my friends are from Mexico and I don't want them to move.

24 Dear Donald Trump, You want to take away all the Mexicans, when they live in other places and have a different color. Why are the colors of Mexicans bad? They're just the colors of people. But people were born with these colors, why is it so wrong for Mexicans to have different colors? For example, if you really compare a white piece of paper with a white person's skin they are not the same, well actually the white person's color is a little brown.

25 Donald Trump, why are you going to put a wall. How would you like it? . . . . What if you were separated from a friend, would you like if you were a baby and they took your mom away from you? *(I added punctuation to clarify meaning.)*

they questioned what was going on in society and what life could be like with Trump as president. They took action against oppressive structures. We teachers did not shy away from this process, but struggled right alongside the students, enacting CSP through *historicizing*—putting immigration issues into context through children's literature; *critically centering* students' funds of knowledge about immigration, documentation, and family separation; exercising *community accountability* through action; and creating space for contending with *internalized oppressions* (Paris & Alim, 2017). We did not ignore or suppress the initial conversation about Trump; instead we took it as an opportunity for our students to engage in dialogue. By exploring their feelings about Trump's candidacy together, the students both bonded as a group and developed new skills in processing and articulating their emotions.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented how two teachers implemented culturally sustaining pedagogies to create a space for dialogue for their students, who were navigating the daily fears and stresses caused by Trump's rhetoric on immigration. Salvador and Victor's exchange provided an opportunity to create a pedagogical response to a very difficult topic and became the impetus for having the entire class discuss issues of immigration and how those issues are directly connected to students' lives. Through this engagement, students were able to develop their own critical consciousness around their personal identities. The students' reaction to this pedagogical response demonstrates that children can successfully engage in a meaningful way around challenging topics.

It is important that we, as teachers, speak out when we hear anti-immigrant rhetoric, for our silence sends a clear message—the message that Latinx students are not valued or welcomed. In our classroom, instead of shying away from these difficult topics because they did not directly align with the standard school curriculum, we brought them to the forefront. Together as a group, teachers and students alike, we fought against Trump's oppressive discourse in order to build critical consciousness. We were able to do this because of the dialogic relationship we had built with our students, learning with and listening to each other. Teachers must work to promote the development of critical consciousness, and students have to learn to question everything around them instead of just taking things at face value. These are skills that all people need in order to be productive contributors to our democracy.

Implications

All students' lives and experiences are different and unique. What every teacher can do is position him- or herself as a learner and welcome students' funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) into the classroom. Teachers must be willing to create opportunities for students to share their lived experiences. Some additional ways that Natalia and I did this in our classroom were by including multicultural children's literature, inviting families into the classroom, having a Latinx author visit the classroom, and taking up topics students brought into the classroom (e.g., *La Llorona*,[26] Mayan legends, and immigration).

Engaging in CSP requires rethinking classroom practices and changing the curriculum to focus on students of color who are being attacked every day by the rhetoric and actions of our 45th president and his spokespeople and appointees. It is not acceptable for teachers to do nothing in the face of this. They need to ask themselves, "What am I doing to support the students of color in my classroom?"

26 The Weeping Woman

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Building Safe Community Spaces for Immigrant Families, One Library at a Time

Max Vázquez-Domínguez, Denise Dávila, and Silvia Noguerón-Liu

In today's political climate, supporting the needs of young children from Latinx immigrant families has become increasingly difficult at the community, institutional, state, and federal levels. This essay is about a group of Latinx families who participated in an innovative early literacy program at a county public library branch in the migration setting of the U.S. Southeast known as the New Latino Diaspora (Hamann, Wortham, Murillo, 2015). We describe the program and its role in building a safe and welcoming environment for Latinx students and their families. We include the voices of the librarian and parents who had never before participated in a family literacy series for Spanish-speaking immigrants. We conclude with a discussion about factors that foster an inclusive community space for educational experiences.

Creating Space Within the Public Commons

We, Denise, Max, and Silvia acknowledge the key role of the public library in building a healthy community (Cabello & Butler, 2017) as it tries to meet many of the needs of the individuals in the region (Morris, 2011). We view the library as a public common in which community members dwell in its communal spaces, share materials, and access a range of services (Didakis & Phillips, 2013). We agree with Cabello and Butler (2017) who argue that libraries can strengthen communities by connecting with individuals and families. As Latinx scholars of educational theory and practice, we collaborated with the main public library in our community of northern Georgia. With the support of the children's library staff, we initiated a bilingual family literacy program to create an inviting atmosphere at the library in which immigrant families might choose to spend time.

In the process of developing our family literacy program, *Cuentos para la familia* (Stories for the Family), we took an architectural stance toward building a safe, home-like learning environment that involved both material components (e.g., bodies, tables, books) and expressive components (e.g., language, symbols, gestures, postures) (De Landa, 2006). To try and help the library feel like a home, we thought through possible additive interactions that could build experiences between families and the architectural space so that the library could become "an extension of the inhabitant, absorbing preferences, customs and

rituals" (Heidegger, 1975 as cited by Didakis & Phillips, 2013, p. 308). Our objective was not simply to house a program for families but to foster an environment in which immigrant families might feel as though the library was an extension of their homes.

Building a Welcoming Environment at the Public Library

As residents and members of the local community, we learned there were few literacy programs serving Spanish-speaking immigrant families in our region of the state (Dávila, Noguerón, & Vázquez-Domínguez, 2017). We were disappointed for the families in our community. We knew that the recognition and inclusion of immigrants' funds of knowledge and home and community experiences in institutional spaces like schools and libraries provide a solid foundation for scaffolding children's learning (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Johnson, 2014; Zentella, 2005). We were aware that community engagement in immigrant children's formal and informal learning experiences has been essential to helping children to maintain their heritage languages (Rowe & Fain, 2013) and to cultivating a sense of community cultural wealth in the U.S. (Yosso, 2005). At the same time, the exclusion of immigrant families' cultural repertories of practice in learning (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) has proven to have negative effects on children's social development (Gill, 2014).

Nevertheless, we also understood that educational researchers have long advocated for increased school and library resources for immigrant families (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012) and for enhanced cultural awareness training for public school teachers of the U.S. Southeast (Wainer, 2004). We recognized that the paucity of publicly accessible resources for Spanish-speaking families was not exclusive to our region, but reflected the realities of the increasing diversification of the population in the U.S. Southeast (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo, 2015). Thus, we appreciated the opportunity to cultivate an early literacy program for immigrant families within the public commons of an institutional space in the New Latino Diaspora (NLD).

Within the sociopolitical landscape of the NLD, we endeavored to foster a safe informal learning environment in the institutional public commons. We tried to create a program that not only valued immigrant families' contributions to the local economy, but that helped advance multilingualism and multiculturalism as pillars of public education in a competitive global society (Skorton & Altschuler, 2012). We wanted families' funds of knowledge and repertories of cultural practices to be so integral to the library space that participants in our program would feel immediately comfortable.

Cuentos began when Denise and Max became the first bilingual facilitators for the national Prime Time Family Reading Time ® (PTFRT) initiative. The PTFRT program was originated by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH) and was locally subsidized by the library branch and the Georgia Public Library Services. The six-week program for families with children aged 6-10 provided participants with free transportation to and from the library, a healthy dinner, and childcare for younger siblings. To solicit participants for the PTFRT program, library staff asked local elementary schools to invite Spanish-bilingual families in which their primary grade children (K-3) were identified as being "at risk," struggling readers.

The school and library staff suggested to these "at risk" families that the PTFRT program was an extension of the children's school-based reading instruction and would improve their English language skills. In other words, they positioned the children and their parents as being deviant in comparison to other students and families. In truth, the local school district did not promote the kinds of pedagogical approaches that foster multilingualism and multiculturalism and help immigrant children and their families. Instead of providing bilingual instruction, immigrant children in need of linguistic assistance received "push-in" English Language Development services in which a para-educator supported them during regular classroom instructional time. The maintenance of the children's heritage languages was cast as an informal, familial activity outside the realm of public education. It was not valued for its significance to the children's emergent biliteracy development (Reyes, 2012). Although we were disappointed and dismayed, we were not surprised that the school and library staff promoted the PTFRT program as a remedial endeavor for immigrant children and their families.

The basic, six-week PTFRT program featured a weekly gathering, inclusive of complementary transportation, meal, and childcare in the library's large conference room, located in a corridor adjacent to the building entrance and reference/check-out area. Prior to each weekly gathering, families received a set of two picture books to take home and read together. During the library sessions, families participated in an interactive read-aloud of the picture books (Sipe, 2000) followed by a Socratic discussion intended to prompt open-ended, intergenerational conversations about the narratives and illustrations of the books.

After completing the first PTFRT six-week series, we recognized that while engaging, the PTFRT protocol did not yield the home-like environment we had envisioned for immigrant families. We knew we had to shift the physical space, change the books and stories we presented, and develop new activities in order to facilitate the kinds of experiences that build affection, meaning, and emotion

between the families and the library space, services, and materials (Didakis & Phillips, 2013). Our first step was to coordinate with the library staff to invite families into the heart of the library where the children's collection and activity room were located. We all agreed that the conference rooms, while more spacious, were impersonal and disconnected from the library's materials and services for families. We committed to arriving early each week to transform the activity room, which had glass windows and a view of the children's area, into an inviting space for family dining, activities, and discussions.

Second, Denise began to renovate the PTFRT program, materials, and activities to cultivate a more welcoming, home-like experience for children and adults at all levels of literacy and language proficiency. Having observed that some of the picture books provided in the PTFRT kit and some of the discussion prompts in the manual were neither inclusive nor responsive to immigrant families' experiences, Denise secured outside grant funding. She substituted many of the book sets with more culturally and linguistically relevant Latinx picture books in both Spanish and English. For example, in place of the PTFRT selection, *The Widow's Broom* (Van Allsburg, 1992), she purchased *Playing Loteria* / **El juego de la lotería** (Lainez, 2005). Denise paired this book with *The Upside Down Boy* / *El niño de cabeza* (Herrera, 2000) for one of the library sessions. As we have described elsewhere:

> In *The Upside Down Boy*, Herrera remembers his childhood experience of feeling marginalized as a linguistic/cultural outsider in a monolingual, English-speaking U.S. classroom. By contrast, in *Playing Loteria*, Laínez depicts an English-dominant boy's travel to Mexico to visit his grandmother, who also happens to be the announcer for a weekly game of Lotería. In the story, the un-named protagonist must mediate his feelings of segregation from his heritage language and culture when he visits his grandmother.
>
> The pairing of the two books provided a platform for the children to make visible their linguistic knowledge and resources and for the adults to discuss with their families and each other the significance of their language heritage. To help facilitate the conversation, we asked the children and parents to write a note to each of the boys in the stories and to offer some advice based on personal experience (Dávila, Noguerón, & Vázquez-Domínguez, 2017, p. 38).

In addition to replacing several of the PTFRT books and activities, Denise invited another bilingual colleague, Silvia, to join the team as one of the *Cuentos* facilitators. Denise garnered the help of local vendors and service providers to support other elements of the newly revised program. She met frequently with community members who valued the library's services and wanted to assist in fostering a welcoming experience to immigrant families.

The owner of the bus service offered a discount to Denise to accommodate her grant budget in providing families' transportation to and from the library. At the local supermarket, one of the clerks convinced her colleagues in the deli department – as a complementary service to *Cuentos* families – to prepare all of the foods Denise collected in her grocery basket. While Denise paid for aluminum trays, boxes of spaghetti, jars of sauce, and bags of salad, she left the market with a hot meal ready to serve dozens of children and adults. Without the support of individuals in the neighborhood, we could not have accommodated all of the families who participated in the program.

Co-constructing a Safe Environment for Latinx Families

Together, the three of us (Denise, Silvia, and Max) introduced the new *Cuentos* program to the community as a cultural celebration rather than a remedial program for struggling readers of English. We conducted the sessions entirely in Spanish, using English only when necessary. We collaborated with the library staff to revise the recruitment narrative for local elementary schools. The new *Cuentos* program welcomed children and adults to come together to read, share, and discuss stories that not only resonated with their experiences but also helped to foster a sense of community among Spanish-speaking families in an English-dominant region of the country.

The popularity of the *Cuentos* series spread by word-of-mouth. After a few sessions, little effort was needed to recruit new families. An average of 9-14 families with children ages 4-10 participated in each of the six-week series. In total, over the course of four years, the programs served nearly 60 families and more than 130 children ages 3 and above. Most parents were first-generation immigrants from rural regions in southern México and the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, and Estado de México. A few families were also from Honduras, El Salvador, and Perú. Most of the younger children (under age 8) were born in the United States, although some of their older siblings were not.

Our design and implementation of the *Cuentos* program was informed by scholarship, which demonstrates that bicultural and bilingual facilitators are invaluable to guiding and mediating meaningful dialogues with the staff and within the constructs of public institutions like schools and libraries (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012). We wanted families to feel as though their voices mattered so that we could build a reciprocal relationship based on trust and support (Alvarez & Alvarez, 2016). Thus, we used Spanish to foster a sense of familiarity and belonging among immigrant families who had few, if any, prior experiences at the local library.

Participant Reflections on the Cuentos Program

Via the *Cuentos* program, we learned that many Latinx parents in the community shared with their children stories from their everyday experiences intended to foster a sense of cultural identity (Villenas et al., 2006). We were interested in learning more about the families' backgrounds and experiences and wanted to evaluate the efficacy of our program. We conducted open-ended interviews in which we asked participants to tell us about their family histories, their experiences at the library, and the books they enjoyed reading with us. Here, we highlight excerpts from the interviews Max conducted with some of the families.

Rosa (all participant names are pseudonyms), a mother of two girls, immigrated to the U.S. with her two sisters from Michoacán, México. In 2005, she married and had her first child in Georgia. Rosa liked the *Cuentos* program not only because "está en español y no quiero que mis hijas pierdan el idioma / *it is in Spanish and I do not want my children to lose that language*," but because "No tengo la oportunidad de leer libros en español / *I do not have the chance to read books in Spanish*." She explained that where she lives in Georgia, "no tenemos libros con nuestras historias [de México] y el programa nos ayuda con eso. / *we do not have books with our own stories [from México] and the program facilitates that*."

> Rosa most enjoyed one of the culturally relevant picture books:
> de la Virgen de Guadalupe porque a mis hijas les gusta leer de ella y también participan en eventos religiosos para honrarla, por eso nos gusta que haya un libro de ella. / *about la Virgen de Guadalupe* [The Beautiful Lady / *La hermosa Señora: Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Mora, 2012)] *because my children like reading about her a lot and they participate in religious events to honor her, so it is great there is a book about her.*

For Rosa, having access to Spanish-language picture books that include familiar content is extremely important to sustain her children's primary language and cultural identity.

Magdalena, another mother of two children who participated during the second round of the Cuentos program, was also from Michoacán, México. When she first immigrated to the U.S., she started working with her sister and brother at different restaurants in Tennessee. She prepared Mexican and Tex-Mex dishes as well as Japanese and Chinese food. She decided to migrate to the U.S. because of the lack of opportunities in Michoacán and her familial connections in Tennessee. She subsequently moved to north Georgia for two reasons:

> Había la oportunidad de trabajar por más tiempo y ganar más dinero en la pollera que en Tennessee, y aquí hay más ayuda para mis hijos. / *There was the opportunity to work more time and to make more money at the poultry factory than in Tennessee, and here there is more help for my children at school.*

She reported that she liked the Cuentos program because "convivo con otros Latinos y porque me siento en familia, aquí en la biblioteca con ustedes y las familias. / *I interact with other Latinos and because I feel like family, here at the library with you and the families.*" In other words, she liked the home-like quality of the program environment.

As for the books, Magdalena added that the stories she enjoyed reading were "el cuento de los tamales porque mis hijos ven cómo se hacen y después quieren ayudarme. / *the tamales one [¡Qué montón de tamales!/* Too Many Tamales (Soto, 1993)] *because my children see how to make tamales and they want to help.*" Magdalena also shared that she and her children enjoyed reading "el libro de los luchadores porque a mis hijos les gustan las luchas y las máscaras. / *the one about wrestlers* [*Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask* (Garza, 2005)] *because my children like wrestling and the wrestling masks.*"

Each of these picture book stories features a child protagonist who engages with her/his extended family. During each session, we invited families to participate in an activity associated with the week's featured book(s). For example, on the night we discussed *Lucha Libre*, the children and parents designed their own wrestling masks (see Image 1). For many, as Magdalena indicated, engaging in the stories and activities offered a way to connect with other Latinx families around culturally familiar topics.



Image 1. Latinx children coloring their wrestling masks

Gabriella, who also attended the *Cuentos* program with her young daughter, was in agreement with Magdalena. She said that she enjoyed the program because it "reúne a las familias en casa y en la comunidad cuando vamos a la biblioteca / *keeps families together at home and as a community at the library.*"

Moreover, "Cuando leo con mi hija mi esposo también lee con nosotros y a veces mi hermana y mi mamá / *When I read with my daughter my husband joins us and sometimes my sister and my mother do too*." Gabriella also appreciated "los libros bilingües y el hecho que nos dieron de cenar porque ya no me preocupé de eso ese día / *the bilingual books and the fact that you provided us with food so we did not have to worry about dinner on that day*." For Gabriella, familial and community-building experiences were key to her family's participation.

Finally, Francisco, Miriam, and their three children, Juan, Julian, and Nancy attended the Cuentos program alongside Francisco's brother Ignacio, sister-in-law Linda, and their two children, Anselmo and Ada. Together, they immigrated from Michoacán, and the children from both families were born in the United States. Francisco liked the program because, he said:

> Yo les he contado el cuento de la llorona a mis hijos porque ellos no han ido a México y les dije que la llorona salía de noche y cuando leyeron el libro ya no salían de noche. / *I have told the story about the weeping woman* [La Llorona / The Weeping Woman, retold by Hayes (2006)] *to my children because they have not been in México and I told them that the weeping woman went out at night and then they read the book and did not go out at night.*

Ignacio added:

> Antes, yo leía los libros sin entender de qué eran y al final no sabía lo que traía el libro. Ahora leo con mis hijos y eso hace que sepa de qué es el libro, el interesarme por la historia. Ahora ya disfruto el libro, de lo que trata. Y el ver cómo leen los libros me motiva más a leer con mis hijos. / *Before, I read the books without understanding them and at the end I did not know what the book was about. Now, I read with my children and that makes me care about the story, we pay attention to the story. Now, I enjoy the book, the story. And to see how you read the books motivates me more to read with my children.*

For Francisco and Ignacio, having access to picture books with stories from their childhoods not only inspired them to read with their children but to model engaged reading for their children.

Collectively, the families' accounts of the *Cuentos* series validate the benefits of renovating traditional programs housed by public institutions to be more home-like and thereby inclusive of material and expressive elements that reflect the preferences, customs, and rituals of program inhabitants/participants. Next, we share the feedback from one of the children's librarians regarding the transformation of the PTFRT program to the *Cuentos* program.

A Librarian's Impressions of the Program

Robin, the director of the children's library section during the *Cuentos* program, shared the following feedback with us:

> I know very little Spanish, and I know that coming into the library can be extremely intimidating if you don't speak the language that the staff there speaks…. [T]he families attending… [the program] were sometimes quiet in the first session and many said they had not visited the library before. But, by the end everyone was friends and they appeared happy and excited to come to the library. I think… [the program] helps make the library seem more accessible and less intimidating. And, I think it made me seem less intimidating, too! I don't often think I come across that way, but, I think my being there so families could get to know me, and the families learning that I am there to help them probably made them more willing to come to the library and ask for help. I also noted that there were many families that I continued to see using the library regularly after… [the program] was over, and they would often come in to say hello when they were there.

As described by Robin, the library and the staff can be intimidating for immigrant families who are not proficient in English. However, the fact that the library staff valued the Latinx culture/practices and were fellow participants in the *Cuentos* program helped families to feel safe and welcomed in the community space, thus promoting confidence with the library staff and with the library services. Our findings correspond with the work of Alvarez & Alvarez (2016), who found that co-constructing safe and welcoming environments is necessary to building trust and confidence among immigrant families who participate in library programs.

Moreover, Robin's description reinforces the ideas of Heidegger (1975) and Didakis and Phillips (2013), which we introduced earlier. In order for a house to become a home, a series of interactions between the space and the individuals are needed so that the space absorbs the preferences, particularities, and the history of the individuals. Such interactions were possible in the *Cuentos* program because in each session, we welcomed and reinforced the families' linguistic and cultural repertories (Dávila, Noguerón, & Vázquez-Domínguez, 2017).

Although the *Cuentos* program was successful at our library setting and similar programs are successful in states with larger Latinx populations (see Naidoo & Scherrer, 2016), more public institutions need

such programs to demonstrate that immigrant families are valued members of their communities. As described by Robin:

> I am happy [the program] was offering a service to an underserved population…. [It] made them [immigrant families] aware of the services that are available to them, totally free. It also brought families together in a way they had not experienced often… Most of the families wrote in the initial survey that they "rarely" all read books together as a family before the program, and in the exit survey, almost all of them said they read books together as a family every day. Many of them added that they felt like reading together brought them closer together as a family. That made my heart really happy.

One of the main goals of the program was to encourage local immigrant families to visit the library and engage in bilingual activities. In the *Cuentos* program, Latinx parents and their children started forming a community in which their language and culture were valued and respected. This program is in accordance with the UNICEF (2007) framework for the realization of children's right to education, which affirms that every child has the right to an education that addresses the child's own culture. In order to fulfill the UNICEF framework, libraries and schools in general should be safe spaces for all community members and their children, and should be equipped with cultural resources representing the diversity of the population in the community.

Lessons Learned

The parents and children were consistent in their participation in the *Cuentos* program. As described in the interview excerpts, they saw many benefits. First, they had access to books in both Spanish and English for use at home and in the *Cuentos* program. Second, the Latinx stories/traditions in the books were culturally relevant, containing content the parents wanted their children to learn about their heritage. Third, at the *Cuentos* program families had the chance to meet and interact with other Latinx families, share their experiences, and create a sense of community. Finally, parents viewed the program as a resource for helping children to practice and maintain their Spanish-language abilities and for helping the adults to facilitate early literacy development by learning to read and discuss books with their children.

The opportunities and benefits identified by the families illustrate the significant roles libraries and literacy development programs play in fostering a sense of community and belonging among

immigrant families. Just as we adapted a nationally recognized family literacy program to support the needs of Spanish-speaking immigrant families in Georgia, our hope is that other libraries will use the *Cuentos* program as a blueprint for constructing a program that feels like home to the immigrant families in their communities. Just as building a house requires a dedicated plan of action, the process for constructing a home-like atmosphere in the library takes time and energy in connecting individuals, families, and their resources to other community members (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012). Didakis and Phillips (2013) suggest that, "An accumulative process of domestic time and experience builds hidden layers of meaning, affection and emotion between the space and inhabitant" (p. 308). The meanings, affections, and emotions we tried to co-construct with Latinx parents and children were always with the goal to form a home at the library.

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Administrators' Roles in Offering Dynamic Early Learning Experiences to Children of Latinx Immigrants

Alejandra Barraza and Pedro Martinez

Principals and school administrators play a critical role in creating learning environments that are sensitive to the needs of students from immigrant families. School administrators, particularly principals, are tasked with making decisions that directly and indirectly impact what happens in a classroom. They act as instructional and visionary leaders as well as resource managers and so they determine both the culture and pedagogy of the school. They determine whether the main focus of the early learning classrooms will be academic skill development (literacy, numeracy), cognitive skill development (social competence, behavioral self-regulation, problem-solving, and decision-making), socio-emotional processing (helping others, empathy, sharing), cultural development (positive identity construction, community connection, and values), physical development (gross and fine motor skills), or a combination of these domains.

This article outlines our approach both as administrators and as Latina/o immigrants ourselves who work within Latinx immigrant communities in San Antonio. Our identities as well as our experiences as superintendent (Martinez) and principal (Barraza) inform the ways in which we conceive of high-quality early learning for young children of Latinx immigrants. We would like to help principals recognize and think carefully about their influence on the culture and pedagogy of their early childhood programs (preK-2). To do this, we describe how one early childhood school serves Latinx immigrants as well as Hispanic and African-American families and consistently performs well above the state average for early learning benchmarks while offering children dynamic, agentic learning experiences.

By moving away from rote, academic learning strategies, Carroll Early Childhood Center has implemented seven early learning principles that prioritize children's curiosity while still meeting the requirements of state and federal standardized tests: (1) a welcoming physical environment, (2) a student-centered approach, (3) productive noise and chaos, (4) collaborative teaching and learning practices, (5) family engagement, (6) cultural sensitivity, and (7) holistic assessments. We believe that these principles can help administrators to balance multiple domains, work towards individual and collective academic success, honor communities and cultural backgrounds, and ultimately, treasure

the children for who they are. We discuss these principles in more detail below, but first we provide contextual details to help clarify the personal, philosophical, and conceptual underpinnings of our approach.

Our Positionality

The desire to move away from rote, academic learning strategies and prioritize children's curiosity and agency came from our own experiences as immigrants as well as our experiences as bilingual students and educators.

> I (Pedro) arrived to Chicago as a first grader who did not speak a word of English. My family emigrated from Aguascalientes, Mexico. I remember coming into the classroom and being thrown into the English-only environment without a transitional bilingual program. I was scared. The school really didn't know what to do with me. I was moved to at least three different classrooms because I didn't speak English. Little by little, because I was forced to, I learned English. It wasn't until I was in the fifth or sixth grade I realized, because the teachers told me, I was significantly below grade level. Helping students succeed and be proud of their language and who they are is personal as well as professional.

> I (Alejandra) understand the transformative power of education. My father was the first in his family to go to college, receiving a Ph.D. He arrived to the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s with limited knowledge of English. He has always shared stories of his times at UW and highlighted how the school and his professors always created a welcoming and nurturing environment for him. He was one of a few Latino students in the program and credits the support afforded to him by his professors as the reason for him completing the degree in three years. When I see my students and families who have emigrated from other countries, I always envision my parents as they journeyed to the US to obtain an education. Educating Latinx students and supporting the underserved families is personal to me.

These personal and professional experiences factor into our roles as superintendent and principal, respectively, in shaping high-quality early learning environments for Latinx families.

Administrators' Impact on ECE for Latinx Children

Superintendents are perhaps the most influential and authoritative leaders in a district. Their instructional leadership can support, push, and empower principals to create high-quality early learning environments that include dynamic, agentic learning experiences (Adair & Colgrove, 2014). Superintendents are charged with the responsibility to think carefully about meeting the needs of all students in their district and to appreciate the diversity and various needs of those they supervise at the district and school levels. For superintendents who have early childhood centers or schools with preK-2 grades, instructional leadership can be difficult. Many superintendents are not given sufficient, high-quality early childhood preparation in their certificate and degree programs (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Seeking a common understanding with building administrators and district staff who have expertise in early childhood education helps superintendents to develop a vision for early childhood and then share that vision and expectations with the district.

Superintendents, along with district administrators, benefit from learning about high-quality early childhood practices and strategies that can guide school-building administrators and their teaching staff to offer children a range of dynamic learning experiences (Barraza, 2017). The goal is to work with Latinx families towards a common understanding and commitment to the pedagogical practices that identify effective early learning environments, are sensitive to the strengths and needs of early learners from Latinx families, and position Latinx families in positive, rather than deficit, ways.

Principals also play a critical role in helping to create a learning environment that is sensitive to the needs of Latinx immigrant students. Principals are the primary decision-makers at the school level and their decisions impact the pedagogy and culture of the school. As such, they are the best-positioned people on a campus to lead the charge to ensure successful and continuous years of quality teaching for Latinx students. Often, principals have to work to find a balance between seeing young students as individuals who have personal interests and individual academic, social, and emotional needs and seeing them according to their academic progress as determined by test scores. It is important for administrators to understand that their leadership and influence set the tone for the experience of every child and every adult on their campus.

The role of administrators in creating positive, high-quality learning environments specifically for young children of Latinx immigrants is important because of what many children of immigrants are denied at school. Many immigrant families have come to the United States in an effort to improve the

lives of their children. For example, in the Children Crossing Borders study of over 200 immigrant parents in five U.S. cities (Tobin, Arzubiaga & Adair, 2013), parents almost always cited the desire to offer an education to their children that they did not have themselves as a motivation for migrating.

Latinx parents specifically spoke about the trust they placed in teachers and administrators because of their expertise and knowledge of early childhood education. This deep care and concern about their child's education as well as their trust in school leaders is significant. Administrators have the responsibility and the influence to make decisions that offer young children of Latinx immigrants the same range of dynamic learning experiences that their wealthier, native-born peers receive in their early childhood programs. To demonstrate the range of decisions that can offer young children from Latinx immigrant families' dynamic learning experiences, we first describe the geographic and demographic realities of Carroll Early Childhood Center. Then we detail each of the seven principles of high-quality early childhood education that has become commonplace at Carroll.

Carroll Early Childhood Center

Carroll is located in San Antonio on the east side of the city, where many of its students are at or below the poverty level and are recent immigrants to the United States. The school's population is two thirds Latinx students and one-third African-American students. One quarter of the students come from homes that speak Spanish.

The students from Carroll face significant challenges in their young lives. The district recognized that a thoughtfully implemented early learning program could have a powerful positive impact on the lives of the students, their families, and the community in which they live. With this in mind, Carroll was reopened in 2009 as an early childhood campus within the San Antonio Independent School District. Carroll offers a Head Start program to three- and four-year-old students and has recently added a kindergarten program that serves the previous year's Head Start graduates. We have worked tirelessly to make our school a happy, safe place where students matter, where learning is fun, meaningful, engaging, and culturally sensitive, and where families are welcomed and encouraged to participate in the education of their children.

Principle #1: Welcoming Physical Environment

When students and their families arrive at school, they see a well-maintained front lawn and grounds free of debris. This may seem like a small detail; however, our desire is to show families that we care about the cleanliness and presentation of our school because we recognize that our students will learn better in an environment that is warm and inviting, clean, and free of clutter (Maxwell, 1998; Rentzou, 2014). We want students to enter the school and feel that they are in a special place. Classrooms are filled with natural light, generating a peaceful aesthetic.

Teachers at Carroll are encouraged to experiment with arranging their classrooms in ways that will allow students freedom of movement, as well as provide creative and flexible learning spaces. Classrooms walls at Carroll are covered with vocabulary words and diagrams in English and Spanish and other images that reflect the students' languages, cultures, and experiences. The use of words and images related to immigrant children's culture validates what they bring from their own experience and recognizes it as an important part of the learning process (Martinez, 2013).

Principle #2: Student-Centered Approach

The hallways at Carroll are deliberately student-centered, with interactive learning walls that encourage the children to feel free to move their hands and touch their surroundings (Dodge, 1992; Maxwell, 1998; Read, Sugawara, & Brandt, 1999; Sanoff, 1995). When students are waiting in line for their turn in the restroom, there are books and eye-catching displays to capture their attention. Children don't have to walk in straight lines in the hallways. "Herding," or letting the children walk freely down the halls, is encouraged. The children also sing as they are walking down the halls, so the hallways are never quiet.

Classrooms are also meant to be student-centered. Teachers continually make changes and add items to their centers, depending on students' interests, so no classroom is the same as another. Teachers use everyday items to decorate the classroom and incorporate nature into their decor. They display students' artwork and projects throughout the room and do not use store-bought posters. Students participate in labeling areas with their own writing or by drawing pictures.

Principle #3: Productive Noise and Chaos

As a campus, we have collectively pushed back on the boxed curriculum approach. Instead, teachers use a number of curricula and approaches aimed at helping children engage in peer conversations, collective instruction with the teacher, and a range of learning experiences in which children are afforded opportunities to explore and learn. This kind of environment results in a noisier classroom. However, we believe that noise and even constructive chaos (Barraza, 2017) are important to our school culture. Children need educators who allow them to use their agency and provide input as to what, how, and when they learn. Given the appropriate space and agency, as well as a willing and thoughtful teacher, students as young as pre-kindergarteners can make appropriate decisions about the best ways for them to learn, based on their own needs and interests (Adair, 2014).

In order to support children's agency in their learning while still being accountable for children's academic benchmarks, we continuously document the interests of the children. We try to provide appropriate lessons that are of interest to them and we offer time each day for children to design their own research projects and engage with their peers in activities they choose. Teachers have the autonomy to design their own schedules around set meal and shared space times for library, music, and other kinds of specialty areas. This control over scheduling given by the principal to the teachers has allowed teachers to consider the interests and ideas of children in forming the schedule each day.
Principle #4: Collaborative Teaching and Learning Practices

Along with the autonomy to schedule, teachers have control over the materials, lessons, order of content, and uses of purchased curriculum. This type of autonomy allows teachers to engage children in collaborative teaching and learning practices. Children ask one another for help and engage one another in problem-solving, project design, writing, drawing, organizing, and a host of other skill sets as they work together on different projects with their teachers. Teachers work to create an environment that is conducive to collaboration, where all the participants share in the process of learning. Teachers also meet weekly to work in teams to plan, evaluate, and support each other and serve on committees that focus on different areas of school improvement.

Principle #5: Family Engagement

Family engagement that is based on cultural sustainability and parental knowledge and not deficit ideas is critical for long-term student success, particularly for children of immigrants (see Colegrove, this

volume). We invite parents to collaborate with us in the education of their children. We make certain we have staff who speak Spanish. All communications that go home are in English and in Spanish. A Carroll staff member stands at the door to welcome parents as they arrive at the school. Parents are encouraged to drop their kids off at the classroom. Classes and performances are offered for parents close to dismissal time, making it easier for parents to attend. All classes are offered in English and Spanish.

Parents visit classrooms and volunteer regularly at the school. For the past three years, the school has designated a weeklong "Open Classroom." The open classroom event invites parents to sign up for a 30-minute visit during instruction time. Parents can visit and observe the classroom in real time to see what their child does at school. Children enjoy sharing their learning space with their families.

When parents volunteer at the school, they decorate the stage for performances and plan for upcoming school projects and activities. All teachers are expected to have a communication app to show parents what is happening at school. Teachers are encouraged to start their communication with two positive observations before they give any negative information to the parent about their child.

The efforts to engage families also include encouraging parents to apply to be substitutes. Five of the instructional assistants we currently employ were parents of students who attended Carroll. We encourage each other to go back to school at Carroll. Several of our teachers are working on master's degrees together, our instructional assistants are going to school to become teachers, 10 out of the current 25 teachers were once instructional assistants, and the custodian went back to school and became an instructional assistant. The vision to "Grow Our Own" is based on supporting each other and pushing each other to go a step further professionally.

Principle #6: Cultural Sensitivity and Attention to Families' Realities

Children at Carroll come to school with a variety of experiences, situations, and relationships. These cultural differences are important to acknowledge publicly as a way to help families feel comfortable entering and participating in the school. The teachers at Carroll often come from the same linguistic, geographic, ethnic, and racial communities as the students. This comes from recruitment and retention efforts as well as our "Grow Our Own" program. Bilingual and multilingual teachers and staff are always available for parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles who are raising the children who attend Carroll. There is acknowledgment of important holidays, seasons, songs, stories, decorations, and

other cultural connections. Parents are encouraged to be with their children as long as they would like to during morning drop-off. Many teachers get to know grandparents and other loving caretakers who drop off and pick up children from school.

In addition to cultural sensitivity, we are trying to address some of the difficult realities children at Carroll face. Structural inequalities and continued injustices have taken their toll on many families. To consider and be sensitive to these realities, teachers are encouraged to get to know each child in their classroom without judgment or negative assumptions. Facing the reality of the children's lives has become critical to honoring the children and their families. Sometimes students come to school tired because they have been up late or up early because of parents' or relatives' work schedules, so students sometimes sleep in a quiet space in the classroom. Each classroom has some small mats for this purpose.

Sometimes children don't get to play outside when they are home, so we offer spaces outside of the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to go outside with children when they need to, not just when it is scheduled. They also have the option to have snack time, read aloud, or even a group lesson outside. At Carroll we have built a mud kitchen, yoga room, vegetable garden, tricycle trail, and various items on the playground where the children can play. We hold each other accountable in our interactions with the students by talking openly—not judgmentally—about the children's realities and how we can make school a place that shows respect and care for the children and their families. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to the positive learning experiences of the students at Carroll, including the office and custodial staff.

Principle #7: Holistic Assessments

The primary assessment practice that we use at Carroll is a twice-a-year feedback process called Learning Stories. Learning Story assessments come from New Zealand's Early Childhood Framework *Te Whāriki*. Learning Stories documents learning with photographs and narrative in ways that contextualize and demonstrate growth in a range of areas. This type of assessment focuses on the ways students have shown growth in their socio-emotional development as well as in academic and cognitive areas.

Teachers consider students' strengths and growth over a period of time. Then they write an individual story that includes photographs for each of the students, telling them how they have seen them grow. Learning Stories are shared with both the student and their caregivers. This focus of extending beyond

preparing students to do well on standardized assessments has resulted in the students performing well consistently on benchmark assessments required by state and federal mandates. For example, on the most recent Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment, kindergarteners at Carroll scored above the national average and well above the state average.

Final Thoughts

Latinx children of immigrants are the fastest growing segment of children in the United States entering public schools in the early grades. We believe that administrators and teachers need to create a school environment where students feel welcome, accepted, and respected. Administrators can empower teachers to encourage students to be thinkers and problem solvers and to take responsibility for their own learning. Instead of providing rote, academic-only experiences, administrators can help teachers offer dynamic learning experiences to children. As more and more school districts include early childhood programs and more schools include pre-K programs, it is important for administrators who have early childhood learners on their campuses to make decisions that can help all children have access to dynamic learning experiences and to environments that value them as families and communities.

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Pedro Martinez is the Superintendent of San Antonio Independent School District. Joining in 2015, Martinez has helped bring to the district a focus on improving academic achievement so that more students are performing at higher levels. In January 2016, he unveiled the SAISD Blueprint for Excellence: Target 2020, which outlines the strategies the district is using to achieve 10 academic goals by the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Martinez has more than 20 years of experience in the private, nonprofit, and public education sectors. He holds an MBA from DePaul University, a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and is a graduate of the Broad Superintendents Academy.

Rethinking "Parent Involvement": Perspectives of Immigrant and Refugee Parents

Zeynep Isik-Ercan

I arrived in the U.S. 15 years ago as a master's student in early childhood education after teaching in elementary schools in Turkey. Becoming a permanent resident in my new country and parenting my two Turkish-American boys fueled my scholarly interest in the experiences of immigrant communities with their children's early school years, specifically the ways they negotiate cultural and linguistic identities in educational settings. Among many encounters with my children's teachers, one is particularly memorable.

Shortly after Enis, my older son, began attending the campus preschool at age two, his teacher asked me to speak only English at home to help with his transition into preschool. I was informed that my speaking to him in Turkish was the reason he scored low in the language development section of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. Of course, as a doctoral student in early childhood/elementary education, I did not agree but thanked his teacher for the well-intended suggestion. Nevertheless, I do not remember being asked to be part of his classroom community or to bring in any expertise during that year.

Despite my experience and social capital as a scholar and teacher, I felt quite illiterate and vulnerable in my immigrant parent identity, dealing with a teacher who invalidated my cultural experiences and lacked interest in my family. Many memories later, my son, now a sixth grader, is a strong reader and writer and can write book chapters in both English and Turkish. Over time, I have learned to better advocate for my children, although my participation in school events has vanished over the years; admittedly, I still do not feel I belong, despite my perceived socioeconomic status.

Parent involvement has been widely discussed in the literature as an important factor in children's educational attainment and as one of the benchmarks for multicultural education (Banks, 2013). Although educational research has long focused on the collaboration between home and school (Epstein, 2001; Martin & Hagan-Burke, 2002), immigrant parents have been expected to follow

traditional frameworks for parent involvement that are aligned with White middle class cultural values and rituals. Thus, some school practices for parent involvement might actually be barriers to parents' engagement with schools (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Sohn & Wang, 2006) if they only include traditional methods such as physically participating in and/or organizing school events (Chavkin, 1996; Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Turney and Kao (2009), in their analysis of Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort, found that immigrant parents had more challenges in accessing and being involved in their children's elementary schools than White parents did, regardless of demographic and socioeconomic status. Moreover, in much of the mainstream literature, immigrant parents are represented and stereotyped as one uniform group lacking knowledge on child development and parenting (Bornstein & Cote, 2004), are unaware of how to teach their own children (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000; Doucet, 2011; Kroeger, 2014), or are unwilling to connect with schools (Becker, Klein, & Biedinger, 2013; Doucet, 2011). These deficit views of parents have shaped much work in parent involvement, assigning immigrant parents a subordinate role in school-teacher interactions.

Immigrant Parents as Experts

Immigrant parents and their children do have challenges in maintaining the connection between school and home and negotiating sociocultural backgrounds with new experiences in educational settings (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Doucet, 2011; Souto-Manning, 2007). As a result, educators must embrace the role of immigrant parents as experts in their children's lives with "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) to offer so that they can utilize these funds to build bridges between home and school through a reciprocal partnership (Souto-Manning, 2016).

Immigrant parents can be important resources for school leaders and teachers in guiding children's educational experiences in culturally responsive ways. For example, positive practices that utilize children's backgrounds – such as names or family histories – as the focus of curriculum inquiry honor identities and diversities (Souto-Manning, 2007, 2016; Doucet & Adair, 2013). Still, schools struggle to facilitate the potential role of immigrant parents as cultural mediators (Banks, 2013; Moll et al., 1992; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Ramirez, 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Souto-Manning, 2007) and as active agents of their children's learning despite the challenges they may face (Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Li, 2001). Immigrant parents' actual strengths and perspectives are rarely included in parent involvement

frameworks or curricula (Hughes & Mac Naughton, 2000). For example, Kroeger (2014) found that a Hmong refugee parent was reminded of his assumed deficiencies through encounters with schools despite his strong storytelling abilities and his vast knowledge of the Hmong community's rich preliterate histories and traditions, all of which could have been invaluable resources for the teachers. Over the course of the last several years, I have examined in two qualitative case studies the experiences and perspectives of Turkish-American immigrant parents (Isik-Ercan, 2010) and Burmese refugee parents (Isik-Ercan, 2012) on home-school relationships in two different U.S. Midwestern cities. In this article, I build from these earlier studies to provide examples for the interaction between immigrant parents and schools and parents' experience of parent involvement practices, either initiated by them or by the school. I begin with Turkish-American parents' perspectives on teacher-parent connections, their critique of the curriculum, their ideas on honoring children's identities, and their challenges in belonging to a school community as immigrant parents.

The Case of Turkish-American Parents

My study with Turkish-American parents focused on experiences with their children's early schooling in the U.S. All parents except one identified as Muslim. At the time of the study, Turkey was a stable democracy.[1] I conducted interviews with 18 Turkish parents from ten families about the connections they saw between home and school. Five percent of participants had graduate degrees while 75 percent of them had at least a bachelor's degree. Fifty percent of the parents had a household income of $100,000 or higher, and 80 percent had a household income of $45,000 or higher. Their children, at the time, were between the ages 7 and 13 but interviews specifically focused on their experiences with early years of schooling, from pre-K to third grade. Each interview lasted two to three hours. Parents referred to their current and past experiences in several different school districts.

Due to selective U.S. immigration policies, several of these parents had come to the U.S. with higher education in English and took academic or professional jobs in Midwest states, which tend to have a higher number of first and second generation immigrants. The Turkish parents I interviewed told me that academic rigor was important and expected. They found it difficult, however, to access curriculum resources and understand teaching methods in order to support their children. Schools did not have formal structures where immigrant parents could observe the curriculum approaches and methods. Some parents, such as Mr. Tekin, emphasized the importance of homework as a link between school

1 After a July 2016 coup attempt, the Turkish president overruled the constitution by emergency decrees, resulting in an authoritarian regime, human rights violations and lack of access to justice.

and home. Mr. Hisar, although he was a scientist, still felt uncomfortable assisting his son in math and science because he did not have the necessary tools and resources:

> He doesn't bring home any books or notes, he brings a few sheets for homework. When I ask where we can find the explanation of a concept in his homework, he can't access anything. For instance, even when we do simple division problems, I don't know about different symbols and systems that they learned to use in school.

Similarly, other Turkish parents in the study said that while they viewed themselves as resourceful and able to capitalize on their backgrounds and occupations, they were rarely asked to contribute to the school. Some Turkish immigrant parents, due to their own educational strengths, found an avenue to use their funds of knowledge in schools, at times without being asked. For example, Mrs. Deniz explained: "Turkish parents sometimes feel shy about approaching the teachers with our needs. We assume that we would be offered things and opportunities by default to mediate cultural differences, but we need to create the environment for these exchanges ourselves." It is interesting that while their socioeconomic resources and social class status provided these parents with a sense of self-worth, they were denied entrée to curriculum decisions and felt they were not viewed as resourceful by teachers.

Some of the Turkish parents, such as Mrs. Deniz, were more assertive and took on a cultural mediator role:

> **R:** How did you observe Zeki become aware of his own identity when he was attending preschool?
>
> **Mrs. Deniz:** He was usually happy in school. For a while, though, when I went to pick him up, he would not like me to talk in Turkish, he would say "don't talk like that."
>
> **R:** When did this happen?
>
> **Mrs. Deniz:** While he went to that preschool. Ironically, there were many international families there who would talk to their kids in their first languages. We would just start talking in Turkish and he did not like it. He also realized in the end of school year that he knew we had an accent, and he did not want us to speak to his friends in English either.

R: Why?

Mrs. Deniz: Because we have an accent…

R: How did you know he really felt this?

Mrs. Deniz: You just notice, he would say "don't say it," "you should not say," "don't say it like that." Anyway, when he was in preschool, there was something like that. We talked with his teachers.

R: What did you talk about?

Mrs. Deniz: I told her that I do not want my child to feel like that, I said: "you could help me by praising his culture and language at times."

R: So you actually asked them…

Mrs. Deniz: I requested that, they are usually very open and supportive about that issue. There are many international kids there. Saying things like "Wow, this is a beautiful word, how do you know this?" I think for a while they asked him to teach a few Turkish words to other kids. I think each student taught something in their own language. I don't remember in detail, but at least to honor the richness the children…

This quote is interesting in that parents offered their perspective on how to recognize a child's identity within a context of academic learning, thereby situating a child in a leadership position in the classroom. It is also interesting that the parent did not suggest assimilating into the mainstream culture of the classroom but rather embracing differences as a positive asset in the classroom.

Turkish parents, particularly mothers, negotiated access to their children's school by physically attending cultural events at the school. Some parents visited the schools and made presentations on Turkey and Turkish culture, while others offered their technical help in areas such as creating graphics or supporting the PTA. A few other parents in the study reported feeling nervous about not feeling welcome in schools in their Muslim identity, particularly wearing a hijab.

Some of the parents in the study wanted, and even expected, teachers to approach and inquire about the family's cultural and linguistic practices. Mrs. Ada explained: "Maybe during special holidays or occasions, I would like the teachers to indicate an interest and acceptance of their students' culture." Frustrated that the teacher failed to push her son academically, Mrs. Hisar voiced an expectation for rigor in content learning, which is part of her cultural experience as an academically oriented individual:

> I wish the teachers asked where we come from, and how the educational system is run in Turkey. They have no idea about education or culture in other countries. When I ask my son to study harder, he would easily say, "My teacher thinks this is sufficient." It helps if the teachers know my cultural expectations.

It is important to note that the typical elementary school structure in Turkey includes continuity of care, so a teacher typically begins with a group in first grade and continues in this role with the same group of children until fifth grade. Mrs. Gece explained the historical understanding of the teacher's role in Turkish tradition:

> The relationship between teacher and student is like a mother/father and child relationship which lasts for a few years in the same class. The teachers are the third authority figure in the children's worlds. The children love their teachers and see them as role models, even exceeding the authority of their parents.

Mrs. Gece was alluding to the cultural perspective that a teacher is expected to show the indication of care, which is a desire to build a personal connection with parents, and also expected to set up some individual goals for the child in their academic path. This helps explain Turkish parents' cultural perspectives on the role of the teacher.

Next, I focus on how newly arrived Burmese refugee parents talked about their challenges with the teacher-parent connection, their struggles in understanding curriculum, and their suggestions for how to connect to the school community as immigrant parents.

The Case of Burmese Parents

I interviewed 28 Burmese parents from 25 families in another Midwest city that has a big concentration of resettled Burmese from refugee camps in Thailand. They initially had to leave Burma (Myanmar) due

to a decades-long civil war. They settled in refugee camps in Thailand before coming to the U.S. Some of the parents began living in the camp when they were children themselves. I call the participants Burmese parents because they identified themselves as "from Burma" and would not necessarily elaborate on their subethnic groups with people not familiar with social patterns in Myanmar.

Semi-structured interviews lasted around one-and-a-half hours for each Burmese parent. Participants had multiple children in various stages of their education, but the topic of interviews specifically focused on their experiences with the early years of schooling, from Pre-K to third grade. Fourteen of these Burmese parents were Muslim, 13 were Buddhist, and one was Christian. None of the participant parents had English proficiency or a bachelor's degree. All of the parents had incomes lower than $30,000 a year.

Burmese culture historically places a high value on education and respecting teachers (UNESCO, 1986). The parents we interviewed had positive perspectives toward schooling in the U.S. They often referred to U.S. education as the "best in the world" and stated that providing their children a great education was the main reason for choosing the U.S. for their resettlement.

Despite the language challenges they faced, most of the Burmese refugee parents reported a keen interest in their children's education and displayed a desire to be more connected to school culture and to the teachers. Ms. Ma Chime reported: "When I go to school, they are welcoming to me, they respect me. I only went to parent-teacher conferences. It is hard to get to know the teachers. I would love to get closer and get to know them." All but one of the participant parents wanted the teachers to do home visits, which they said would help the teachers understand the child's family context.

Burmese homes and apartments tended to be located in the same neighborhoods so that the community could stay close together. Although hospitality is an important cultural value in Burmese culture, the school districts have not employed this practice of connecting to families. This sociocultural characteristic was a missed opportunity for the school to have district-level initiatives for home visits and potential after-school activities that could be created in collaboration with families.

While Burmese parents were not as quick to criticize schooling practices as the Turkish parents, they still struggled with a lack of connection to school staff and culture. Some felt they were not recognized as knowledgeable partners. Some participants showed fierce advocacy even within a system they don't understand and with which they are told not to interfere. Ms. ija's story of her son being placed in the

wrong class reveals some of the power dynamics parents face and how parent ideas might be ignored despite appeals.

Ms. Khatija: The children are so young right now, they fit right into their classes, so they don't have a lot of challenges. They are growing up and really learn fast. We came here in February. When my oldest child, Ye-Win started school, he started on third grade. He was then 6, but they put a wrong birthdate on his UN profile. In this profile, he was 9. That is why they put him in the third grade when he came. He began the third grade, but he did not know anything. ESL classes helped him a bit.
R: Did you explain the situation to school administrators?

Ms. Khatija: He was surviving third grade, but it got worse over time. I wanted to change it, but they said it would take so long to change his profile information. I told about this to the translator, but the school folks first did not change it, and they did not do anything. For so many times, I tried to explain his age is not correct, his grade should be different. But they were just looking at the documents and they asked for more documents proving my point. However, he was born in Burma and it is extremely hard getting documents from another country.

R: So they insisted he stay in the current grade.

Ms. Khatija: He spent that year in the third grade and next year he went to the fourth grade. But he began to fail in the classes. The following year, he was going to the fifth grade and it was mid-year, so they held a big meeting where we met with the principal. Then they decided to put him in the second grade last year instead of fifth grade. This is his fourth year in school and he is in third grade back again. He was very happy to be able to return to the second grade. The work was not hard and his social adjustment was good. Now back at third grade, he is still weak in reading and in other subjects, he is doing O.K. He regularly reads at home.

Despite multiple attempts by the parent, Ye-Win was placed in the wrong grade. His mother found it very difficult to confront the school about their policy, abiding by it until everyone recognized that the decision was detrimental to the child's growth. She was not seen as an expert on her own child, whether it was because of her immigrant status or economic status or language barriers. Her concerns – which turned out to be accurate and problematic – were not taken seriously by the school.

While teachers too often assume that immigrant parents are unable or unwilling to be involved in their children's education, all of the Burmese parents I interviewed reported that they attend parent-teacher conferences. They told me that these conferences were an important event for them, the only occasion that allowed them to communicate with the teacher because the schools had no other parent-teacher communication practices. Parents reported disappointedly, however, that parent-teacher conferences only lasted about 15 minutes and were often superficial and overly formal encounters.

Ms. Chesa commented on the limited communication opportunities with teachers, stemming from a lack of school resources:

> Her homework was the reason why we got a phone call from the school. The homework went incomplete, and the teacher called us for that. The translator explained how to do the homework on the phone and at times, they sent us Burmese letters. We fortunately have a translator in the school. But still, sometimes I don't understand the translator. At times, the translator does not speak clearly, his pronunciation might be different because of dialects. So, I could not always clearly understand the issues.

Other parents brought up the issue that during parent-teacher conferences, only one or two translators would be available for the many parents who needed them. While aware of their own lack of access to formal education in the refugee camps, the Burmese parents were very clear about what they required in order to establish better home-school connections. Several parents identified their need to be more knowledgeable about what their children were learning and how they were learning.

Teachers and school personnel who worked with the Burmese parents I interviewed seemed unaware of the important funds of knowledge these parents had to offer. For instance, all Burmese households had internet connections and the children were highly active in computer use, social media, and gaming, partially due to the Burmese diaspora's communication needs with family and friends in Myanmar and globally. This untapped resource for bidirectional information flow was never used, as parents always received documents and information on paper. In addition, each Burmese household had neighbors with older children who often informally guided their younger siblings' homework when parents could not understand the directions. A community organization had also arranged after-school tutoring programs that the teachers could have used more intentionally had the schools reached out to the communities.

A Comparison of Experiences of Turkish-American and Burmese American parents

These two studies indicate that socioeconomic and cultural differences influenced parent critiques of classroom and school practices and perhaps enabled Turkish parents to advocate more effectively for their children than the Burmese parents. However, there were missed opportunities and home-school disconnects in both cases. Most of the parents I interviewed wanted to be more closely connected to the schools by frequently visiting the school, communicating more often with the teachers, and supporting academic work at home such as by helping with homework. Yet Burmese refugee parents were virtually non-existent at their children's schools. They had great difficulty being present or involved in the traditional sense and keeping track of their children's progress, despite their desire to do so.

Turkish immigrant parents and Burmese refugee parents both faced barriers to their involvement in schooling even though they were eager to build relationships with teachers. One sentiment that was shared by both sets of parents was that communication between themselves and teachers was neither reciprocal nor satisfying. They believed that school policies and instructional practices were created with mainstream parents in mind and were not made explicit to newly immigrant parents. Both sets of parents had ideas for alternative forms of communication that were culturally important to them and that would honor their identities. Burmese parents struggled with understanding school policies, curriculum, and school culture. Turkish parents displayed a more critical view of school policies and curriculum and focused on the process of learning and methods. Burmese parents expressed a dissatisfaction with structural elements and policies put in place that became a barrier for their understanding curriculum and instruction as well as high-stakes decisions that impacted their children.

All of the parents I interviewed had funds of knowledge they could offer teachers and schools. Turkish parents seemed to capitalize on several opportunities, such as visiting the classrooms, volunteering, and presenting, although without being involved in decision-making bodies such as school boards or parent boards. While being physically distant from the schools, Burmese parents had access to neighborhood support systems such as older children who were relatives, social support, and internet connections that could have been utilized by teachers to provide children with educational opportunities and supports. The Burmese parents stated they would have been available to visit schools and volunteer had there been transportation opportunities. It seemed that the inflexible structures of traditional parent involvement models limited their potential contribution to their children's school experiences.

The Future of Parent-Home Interaction for Immigrant Parents

There are various ways immigrant parents' educational, cultural, religious, financial, linguistic, and demographic experiences interact with their relationship with schools and shape their expectations for educators (Guo, 2017). These immigrant parent experiences have important implications for school policies. For this reason, it is crucial for schools to initiate conversations with diverse parent groups about culturally relevant home-school partnerships (Adair, 2012). Teachers with immigrant backgrounds can play important roles in these partnerships (Adair, 2016). School leaders can shape policy that will encourage immigrant parents' communication, visibility, and physical existence in schools. Arrangements should be made for parents who would like to visit their child's classroom and informally act as classroom volunteers for a period to learn about the culture of the school, instructional methods, the use of curriculum, routines and rituals of school life, procedures and policies, and the style of communication used (e.g., jargon).

For the sake of routine, safety, and building classroom community, school policies do not usually allow parental visits outside volunteering. However, parents often feel intimidated by the abundance of information coming from their children without seeing firsthand the school context and a typical school day, including schedules, rituals, and pedagogies. Allowing parents to use the school bus or go to a space for parents in schools would be helpful in eliminating the anxiety about an unknown school context.

Immigrant parents' participation may not necessarily resemble conventional practices such as joining parent-teacher associations, attending field trips or school events, or volunteering as needed in the traditional sense. For instance, all but one of the Burmese parents and all Turkish parents wished to be in closer contact with classroom teachers in a personal fashion, such as through home visits or cultural exchanges. Therefore, schools should seek alternative ways to connect with immigrant parents, recognizing individual and group perspectives as they set developmental and academic goals for immigrant children (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016).

While immigrant parents face real barriers, such as transportation and language in the case of Burmese parents and time constraints for Turkish parents, these barriers can be overcome by school policies that are unconventio¬nal and out of the comfort zone, but beneficial to the school and children in the community. Classroom blogs, internet boards where parents can access information and samples of children's work, and have opportunities to translate information via translator applications would

allow parents to see curriculum and instruction more closely. Using photo and video to show what happens in each stage of the school day might support parents' understanding of the curriculum and open opportunities for conversations at home about the school day. Finally, this practice could support parents and children by empowering them to use technologies for academic success beyond entertainment and gaming.

We need to recognize that parents can only contribute to educators' knowledge about children and their communities if they have access to curriculum and instructional resources and the cultural knowledge about schools and classrooms in the U.S. (Ladky & Peterson, 2008). This way, they could be funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) for classroom teachers, who need to reach all learners but often are limited in their understanding of immigrant students' and parents' perspectives on education. My journey to explore smaller immigrant communities, the ways they negotiate their cultural identities and connect to or disengage from school, and the funds of knowledge they can offer will continue to ensure their voices are heard and honored in school practices. A stronger connection between teachers and parents can boost children's outcomes and honor the voices and identities of immigrant parents.

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Experiential Knowledge and Project-Based Learning in Bilingual Classrooms

Adriana Alvarez

Introduction

Culturally and linguistically diverse children deserve sophisticated and dynamic biliterate learning opportunities that integrate the children's life experiences and keen intellects. Dynamic learning in early childhood classrooms, including progressivist pedagogical approaches like project-based learning, has been shown to facilitate academic achievement as well as high-level learning capabilities including critical thinking, agency, problem solving, and negotiation (Adair, 2014; Bell, 2010; Hyson, 2008; Katz & Chard, 2000). Too often, culturally and linguistically diverse children are offered learning opportunities that fall short of helping students achieve their potential or of validating their life experiences (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). Instead these children receive reductionist instruction characterized by limited, dull activities such as drills, isolated tasks, repetition, and memorization of material (Banks, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010).

Culturally and linguistically diverse children not only receive low-quality instruction; in addition, integral aspects of their lives such as language, culture, and home experiences are often regarded as lacking and needing to be "fixed" (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; González et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997). These deficit orientations infiltrate and taint curriculum and instruction, harming and suppressing students' identities and learning opportunities (Delpit, 1995; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999). Most problematic is that these deficit orientations can be internalized by students, creating a harmful cycle, especially when it is the children's own teachers who have lowered expectations for them because of the students' cultural, familial, or linguistic differences (Delpit, 1995; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; McCollum, 1999; Romero, Arce, & Cammarota, 2009). Under these circumstances, it is more difficult for teachers to learn about students' lives outside school and about their families.

Using examples from a bilingual first-grade classroom in Colorado, this article details the ways in which teachers can both offer young children of immigrants opportunities for project-based learning and also attend to the students' specific linguistic strengths and needs. These examples are meant to show

how project-based learning in bilingual classrooms can be an alternative to reductionist instruction and create a cultural connection between homes and schools.

Project-Based Learning and Bilingual Education

Project-based learning is a pedagogical and curricular approach that is guided by students' inquiries and facilitated by the teacher (Bell, 2010), fostering students' agency through high academic expectations and rich engagement while providing spaces for creativity and interdisciplinary explorations (Bell, 2010; Hyson, 2008; Katz & Chard, 2000). In contrast with traditional instruction, project-based learning can be a transformative, sustainable praxis that effectively engages teachers, students, and families in bilingual classrooms in meaningful ways. As a result, learning becomes grounded in students' own experiences and interests (González et al., 2005; Hyson, 2008), creating spaces for possible connections between the classroom and students' families and communities.

Project-based learning seems ideal for bilingual students because of its ability to provide many opportunities for sophisticated literacy and numeracy experiences as well as to connect communities and schools. Historically, however, progressivist pedagogical approaches have been instituted in bilingual classrooms without attention to already understood effective bilingual instruction practices, including explicit instruction (Genesee & Riches, 2006; Goldenberg, 2013; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013; Tong, Irby, Lara-Alecio, & Mathes, 2008), scaffolded instruction (Dutro & Kinsella, 2010; Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Walqui, 2006), and meaningful interactions for developing oral language (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee & Riches, 2006; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013). Bilingual education scholars warn that pedagogical approaches developed within monolingual classrooms may leave out pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural considerations for emergent bilingual students, thus instruction in bilingual classrooms must remain authentic to the language of instruction and be tailored for bilingual learners (Escamilla et al., 2014; Gersten & Baker, 2000; Goldenberg, 2013). Consequently, bilingual teachers may feel hesitant to engage in such approaches, like project-based learning, concerned that those instructional choices may not be serving their students adequately. This article shows examples of how project-based learning can provide emergent bilingual students with deep learning opportunities that integrate research-based instructional approaches.

The concept of experiential knowledge (Solórzano, 1997) borrowed from Critical Race Theory (see also Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) offers a way to think about using active learning models, such as project-based learning, to support children's cultural knowledge and life experiences while strengthening the

early literacy capabilities that bilingual learners need. Experiential knowledge validates the experiences of students of color and views embracing those experiences as critical for understanding the complex societal inequities that affect and surround them (Solórzano, 1997). Experiential knowledge is especially important for children from immigrant communities who face the risk of having their loved ones deported or of witnessing discrimination aimed at their families. It acknowledges and includes those experiences by privileging classroom practices—such as storytelling and having students share family oral histories, *testimonios* (testimonial narratives), and *dichos* (popular sayings)—that illuminate the authentic life experiences of those who have been historically marginalized and had the power of their voices silenced (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012; Saavedra, 2011; Sanchez, 2009).

There are four salient, positive aspects of explicitly drawing on young students' experiential knowledge via project-based approaches: 1) it appeals to and fulfills children's desire for agency and for authentic and meaningful learning, 2) it integrates children's experiences into the classroom that are otherwise excluded from it, 3) it supports family collaboration, and 4) it challenges dominant ideology (Solórzano, 1997).

Biliteracy family projects that have experiential knowledge as a foundational pedagogical principle coupled with effective bilingual instruction intentionally create spaces where children use their own stories—the very parts of their identities that too often marginalize them—in classroom instruction. In addition, it can both provide teachers with a window into their students' lives and allow children to bring their cultural funds of knowledge and their experiences—even difficult ones—into the classroom to raise critical issues that are at the core of a social justice orientation to learning and teaching. Through the combination of inquiry and agency that project-based learning presents, students and families have the space to explore and co-construct the stories of their choice.

In order to demonstrate what an experiential knowledge-based project might look like in an early childhood bilingual classroom, the remainder of this article details two family projects in a first-grade bilingual classroom in Colorado that used a holistic biliteracy framework for instruction in a paired literacy model, in which students receive literacy instruction in both languages beginning in kindergarten (Escamilla et al., 2014). I provide a description of the projects and offer examples of how they allowed students to receive bilingual instruction while still honoring the children's agency, life experiences, and desire for sophisticated learning opportunities.

Elisa[1] and Her Journey

Elisa's small hand held a bright and shiny yellow pebble; her classmates huddled closer for a peek at a precious piece of the famous statue of *el venado* (the deer). As part of the first family biliteracy project in Elisa's classroom, her teacher, Ms. Diaz, had previously guided conversations regarding important events in her students' lives. For this particular project, children were connecting their classroom literacy activities with their lives at home and in their communities to create a storybook centered on an experience that was special to them. Elisa had decided to focus on her visit to Mexico with her mother, during which she had gone with her godparents to see the colorful and striking statue of *el venado* in the high sierra of Tuxpan in the state of Jalisco. The statue is artfully made with colorful pebbles to mimic the beads that characterize traditional Huichol craftwork. Elisa had picked up a pebble that had fallen off the statue, and she was very excited to show it to the class. Elisa's storybook project was not entirely joyful, despite her sharing happy experiences like seeing the statue of *el venado*, riding the bus, and feeding the chickens. It also revealed the sorrowful experience of traveling to see her dying grandmother, which was the main event that led Elisa to select her trip as the topic for the project and that motivated her inquiry, guided by her agency in deciding which elements of her journey to include in her storybook. Elisa's sharing both the joyful and difficult aspects of her life was prompted by the biliteracy book project, which included multiple phases.

Phase One

The first element of the project was having students explore possible topics through brainstorming activities that included opportunities for students to dialogue with each other. Children engaged in oracy activities that have been found to be effective with emergent bilingual students (Escamilla et al., 2014; Gersten & Baker, 2000; Tong, Lara-Alecio, Irby, Mathes, & Kwok, 2008). These activities included using sentence structures and collaborative dialogue structures modeled by the teacher and myself to give students adequate language supports and to prompt dialogue. Sufficient time was provided for students working together to change partners as they practiced the language orally that they would then use in writing with their families. Too often, educators give writing assignments without first allowing students the opportunity to process and engage vocally.

As the class engaged in the activities, we followed a gradual release of responsibility approach, beginning with whole-group instruction. These opportunities for authentic interactions alternated between

1 All names are pseudonyms

Spanish and English across sessions. After these initial discussions, students compiled a simple written list of the most important events in their lives, including their rationale for their choices.

Phase Two

During the second phase, students took their list home in order to narrow it down by interviewing their families to get additional information. This began a co-constructive selection process for their project; it became an interesting task because it involved parents sharing important events in their children's lives of which their children had no recollection. During the interviews, students used the same oracy sentence structures they had already practiced in the classroom. The children used the items on their written list as points for discussion with their families and then recorded the responses by theme on a graphic organizer, following a process that we had already modeled for them. Some students recorded the responses in words, some in sentences, and some in drawings. This tool was then used in the classroom the next day for an additional dialogue activity that provided students with a variety of linguistic structures to support them as they orally shared the information they had gathered from interviewing their families and as they responded to their peers.

Phase Three

The third phase of the project was a workshop-style gathering of students and families in the classroom to work on the project. This phase involved selecting two topics and then segmenting them into events to develop into storybooks (one in Spanish and one in English). We again modeled the process, using our own materials. Families and children employed another visual tool as a way to organize their decisions about how to both depict the events and draft their accompanying written descriptions. The students and their families negotiated the selections and the creation process, working mostly in Spanish; they also made an English version of the project based on a different experience. Together, they wrote and illustrated each page and then bound the pages into the finished storybooks.

Phase Four

The fourth phase involved students sharing their projects with their own class and reading them individually to children in a bilingual kindergarten class. In preparation for pairing each first grader with a kindergarten student, we once again modeled the process, including the kinds of questions students could use to engage their younger partners to prompt them to develop their own personal connections and insights.

The culminating event was a separate family gathering in the classroom. On that occasion, parents were guest readers of the books and guided brief conversations, adding to the information that the students had already shared through their storybooks.

How Did Children and Parents Respond to the Projects?

Some parents shared that these type of projects or assignments—especially in Spanish—were unusual at the school, and that they therefore felt nervous about the project at first. Elisa's parents had moved from the town of Bolaños, Jalisco, to the United States about ten years ago. Her father works in construction and her mother in a factory that makes desserts. Only two parents from the 21 families that participated in this study had lived in the United States their entire lives. One family had arrived recently; the rest of the families had lived in the United States for an average of 14 years. Mexico was the country of origin of all the families, but all their children, except one, were born near their school in neighborhoods surrounding the industrial area of the city.

Elisa's family stayed in close contact with relatives in Mexico, and her mother said that she was not surprised that Elisa chose the trip she made to Mexico when her grandmother became ill as the topic of her project:

> *Ella [Elisa] quería escribir de México, yo pienso que para ella fue muy importante…Ella quería mucho a mi mamá y mi mamá la quería mucho a ella. Ella estaba muy apegada con mi mamá. Mi mamá tenía muchas ganas de verla y pues desafortunadamente no la pudimos alcanzar con vida… Yo creo que todas esas cosas fue lo que la impulsó a ella [Elisa] a hacer el libro de ahí de México.* [She [Elisa] wanted to write about Mexico, I think it was so important for her…She loved my mother and my mother loved her. She was very close to my mother. My mother was looking forward to seeing her, but unfortunately, we didn't arrive in time to see her alive…I believe all these events prompted her [Elisa] to create her book about Mexico.]

Elisa's mother shared that the factory where she worked did not give her permission to leave when she first learned that her mother was ill. Consequently, when she later received word of the prognosis that her mother had little time left to live, she took Elisa out of school and set out on the long bus trip to Jalisco. It is important to note that families in this community often take their children to Mexico for extended periods of time. However, the school sees this practice as highly problematic; parents confided during interviews that the school often sent intimidating truancy notices to them or called them in to receive a warning from the principal.

Elisa's agency in selecting the topic for her project is profoundly significant and challenges the perceptions the school might have had about her experiences during her trip. From the school's perspective, going to Mexico interrupted Elisa's education by causing her to miss instructional days—instructional days that could be filled with phonics reading drills that include nonsense words and with written exercises using fill-in-the-blank booklets. However, by sharing her powerful experiences in Mexico, Elisa challenged the dominant ideology at the school that viewed families as irresponsible and indifferent to their children missing class time. Elisa's book project was evidence that, on the contrary, families' experiences in Mexico were rich in learning and facilitated the cross-generational transmittance of diasporic community knowledge (Urrieta & Martínez, 2011) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Via the family project, Elisa offered a counternarrative to the deficit assumption by using her voice and agency to depict her experiences. Accounts of many other experiences that similarly reflect a challenge to the dominant ideology emerged through the project.

For Elisa's mother, it was equally important that her daughter embraced her culture and traditions, an important counterweight to the district's history of discriminatory practices:

> *Para mí es muy importante que a la niña le interesa mi país. Que le llame la atención convivir en México, estar con mi familia, y compartir cosas que pues para mí son muy importantes. Pienso que esa es una de las cosas más importantes para mí, que mis hijos convivan con las tradiciones que se tienen también en México.* [For me it is very important to see my daughter's interest in my country. To see that she likes to be in Mexico, to be with my family, and share things that are important to me. I think this is one of the most important things for me that my children also coexist with the traditions from Mexico.]

In this sense, family projects not only integrated children's native language into their schooling but also fostered the children's cultural simultaneity (Alvarez, 2017). Parents perceived their responsibility to transmit their own culture within an adverse environment and understood their role as facilitators of the development of their children's evolving bicultural tapestry. These efforts by parents drew upon multiple forms of community cultural wealth in order to succeed in promoting their children's well-being in both daily and long-term endeavors (Yosso, 2005). The collaboration between parents and children around topics that were dear to them and reflected experiences that were not often integrated into classroom instruction was a salient aspect of the family project. Embracing experiential knowledge is an assertion that these very experiences must be validated and perceived as a strength to be cultivated during the teaching and learning process.

Using experiential knowledge and a project-based approach facilitated a unique collaboration between parents, children, and the teacher. Observing interactions unfold among parents and children during the process of creating the storybooks was fascinating. A linguistic analysis resulted in the following findings: 1) parents were concerned with fostering their children's agency and transferring responsibility to them during the creation process, 2) parents and children engaged in co-constructions from oral to written descriptions that followed a pattern of gradually increasing complexity, and 3) parents seized opportunities to embed life lessons in interactions during the children's projects (Alvarez, 2017). For example, Elisa's mother explained:

> *Yo le di a escoger y ella quería escribir de cuando fue a México. Le dije—bueno, ¿qué quieres escribir? Y ya ella me dijo que quería escribir de su madrina, de cuando fuimos a México que falleció su abuelita. En eso nos basamos para hacer el libro. Ya le iba yo más o menos escribiendo, yo escribí en una hoja, hice como el borrador. Yo fui acomodando ahí de cómo va a escribirlo y ella lo hizo.* [I gave her the choice and she wanted to write about her trip to Mexico. I told her—well, what do you want to write about? And she told me she wanted to write about her godmother, when we went to Mexico when her grandmother passed away. We focused on that to make the book. And so, I would write on a paper, I made like a draft. I organized on there what she wanted to write about and she created it.]

This description is representative of the cases analyzed; parents very naturally gave children choices about what they wanted to write and co-constructed written descriptions from the children's ideas—opportunities that are often absent in traditional instruction dynamics in classrooms that serve culturally and linguistically diverse students. Parents continuously transferred the responsibility for the project to the child in subtle ways, as can be seen, for example, when Elisa's mother said *"y ella lo hizo"* [and she created it]. It was important for parents that the storybooks were created by the children with their help, rather than the other way around.

The possibilities are extraordinary when classrooms facilitate choice, agency, and inquiry for children, just as their parents very genuinely did during the process of creating the books. There were also many rich conversations and much facilitation of the students' agency as parents and children collaborated on the projects. Figure 1 displays a few pages from Elisa's book about her trip to Mexico as well as a photo of Elisa showing her valued keepsake from statue of *el venado*, the pebble she brought to share with the class when she presented her project. The first page describes the reason for her trip to Mexico and is illustrated with a picture of the bus that took her there. The second page describes her day trip to the statue of el venado and includes an illustration of Elisa visiting the statue on the hill.

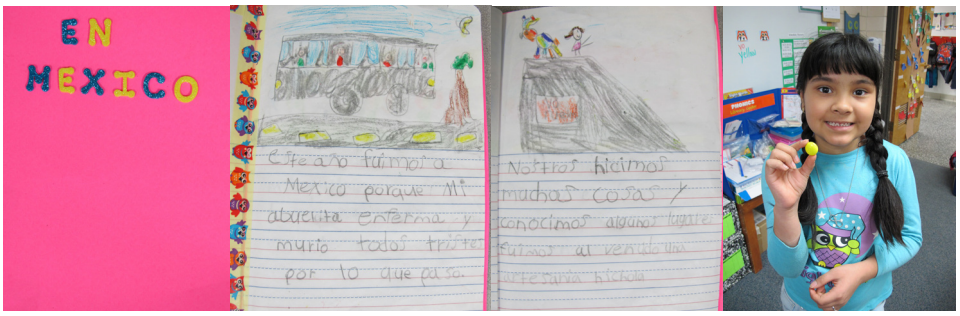


Figure 1. Sample of Elisa's book and her keepsake from the statue of el venado.

Why Were the Projects Important for the Children and Families?

Elisa's school is in an urban district that serves an immigrant community living in mostly low-income neighborhoods that encircle an industrial area of a city in Colorado. The district had eliminated bilingual education programs eight years earlier and had recently begun implementing bilingual education programs again. That was an important development in light of the effect that the restrictive and oppressive district policies had on families and students in this community. In addition, there had been multiple complaints of this district as a hostile environment toward Latinx students and families, as reported and investigated by the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education. The final report concluded that there were several hostile and discriminatory practices by the district directed at this community, including opposing the use of Spanish in school.

Elisa's mother was glad to hear of the district's recent reinstatement of bilingual programs and recalled how Elisa attempted to read in Spanish at home during her kindergarten year, undeterred by the English-only instruction she received at school. As a first grader, Elisa was finally receiving instruction in her own language. Undertaking a biliteracy family project that authentically combined family participation, children's agency, and families' experiences to produce an artifact that honored their language and lives became a process of validation and healing in Elisa's classroom.

The books that were produced highlighted the potential of project-based instruction to provide insights about families' daily engagement with their children, children's home knowledge, various aspects of children's identities, and parental strategies to navigate the school environment. For example, Elisa's mother shared stories about her job at the factory to teach Elisa about unjust situations; she boldly voiced criticisms, including of the time that she was not given leave to visit her ailing mother in Mexico, preventing her from arriving before her mother's death.

Some educators and institutions are unaware of how parents prepare their children for the challenges and inequities that the parents themselves have faced and anticipate their children will confront as well. Educators may also avoid discussions of children's experiences with immigration and border-crossing, for fear those topics may be too sensitive or controversial (Gallo & Link, 2016; Mangual Figueroa, 2016). It was quite significant that the family projects opened a space for children and families of immigrant backgrounds to voice the experiences, knowledge, and community capital used to survive and navigate these daily realities. This is of utmost importance, given the many negative views educational institutions hold of immigrant families and of their parenting skills, often trying to "educate" parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; López, 2001; Valdés, 1996). The artifacts created had a visible and symbolic space in the classroom and in instruction, in many ways challenging the dominant ideology and promoting a social justice orientation in this adverse environment.

Parents often expressed their happiness with the shift back to bilingual education in their children's district. They also noted that biliteracy family projects were uncommon, but welcomed. When asked about her daughter's experience creating the storybook about her trip to Mexico, Elisa's mother said:

> *Ella nunca ha escrito oraciones, había copiado cosas pero nunca se había puesto a pensar cómo hacer un libro para platicar mi historia. Se me hizo como muy interesante el hecho de que le dejaran esa responsabilidad a un niño de pensar cómo hacer un libro de cosas que a los niños les interesan y les llaman la atención... Yo creo que a la niña le ayuda a desarrollar un tema como persona. Le digo, a ella nunca le habían dejado una tarea así, ni contar una historia o algo de su vida entonces a mí me gustó mucho. Yo veo la emoción de ella por hacer su libro. Lo que más me gustó fue ver su cara de emocionada.* [She had never written in sentences, she had copied stuff but she had never had to think how to create a book to tell her story. It was interesting to me that they would leave this responsibility to a child to create a book about things they are interested in and that captivate them…. I think this is helpful for her to develop a topic as a person. I'm telling you, she had never been assigned a homework like this, or asked to tell her story or something about her life, so I like it a lot. I saw her excitement to create her book. What I enjoyed the most was seeing the excitement in her face.]

Elisa's mother offered a critical insight when she mentioned that Elisa's writing opportunities had been limited to copying material and that Elisa's own life experiences had not been taken into consideration before. This is an example of another salient aspect of integrating experiential knowledge in a project-based approach, noted earlier: it appeals to and fulfills children's desire for agency and authentic and meaningful learning.

The Next Project: *Les presento mi vida*

Biliteracy family projects are meant to have a prolonged use in the classroom, so that projects children create based on their experiences continue to be incorporated in learning and instruction throughout the school year. For the next project, families and children developed two timelines: one of the child's life, depicting major milestones or events, and another of the child's envisioned future, showing the major goals the child hopes to accomplish. The timeline project followed phases similar to the storybook projects, which included many opportunities for dialogue and exploration.

Elisa continued to share the importance of her family as she worked on her projects. She exhibited a deep-seated desire to maintain her connection to Mexico and her relatives there; for example, she included her longing to travel to Mexico to visit her grandparents as an event in her timeline of her envisioned future, as shown in the larger images of that timeline in Figure 2. Figure 2 also depicts the Spanish version of Elisa's project and the entry in her future timeline in which she expresses her aspiration to become a veterinarian and open her own pet clinic.



Figure 2. Elisa's timelines.

Better and more nuanced understandings of immigrant families and their life experiences can yield

meaningful relationships between schools and homes and increase reciprocal learning opportunities (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). The use of biliteracy family projects is a promising practical approach that integrates family engagement at the classroom level without compromising the quality of instruction; indeed, it enhances pedagogy. Additionally, such projects give students the opportunity to share their lives with each other in the classroom, contributing to a sense of community (see Figure 3). Elisa noted:

> *Siento que los niños van a escuchar muy bien mis libros. Esas historias son mis favoritas y yo creo que a los que van a México también conocerán ese lugar del venado y yo quiero compartir el lugar del venado con todos. Cuando voy a ver el venado puedo ver todo México.* [I feel that children will listen very well to my books. These are my favorite stories and I think that those who go to Mexico will know the place of the venado and I want to share this with everyone. When I go to see the venado I can see all of Mexico.]

Elisa predicts her classmates will enjoy her projects, and she is particularly excited to share her visit to the statute of *el venado*. She also acknowledges that some of her classmates, like her, travel to Mexico and suggests they visit *el venado*, expressing her knowledge about the shared border-crossing experiences of her classmates and extending her solidarity. This exemplifies the communal knowledge that children share regarding immigration, which is commonly excluded from the classroom. Through her project, Elisa reclaimed and integrated this important and much needed conversation.

Elisa was already planning her next project on the topic of *Día de los Muertos* to honor her late grandmother and the many supernatural stories she learned from her, including the legend of *la Nahuala*. It is evident that when children are given the opportunity to explore their experiences and use their intellect, guided by their agency, the outcomes are fascinating.



Figure 3. Sharing the projects.

The Key Place for Experiential Knowledge and Project-based Learning in Bilingual Classrooms

Immigrant children's lives are complex and comprised of experiences that are not confined by linguistic or cultural borders. Insisting on artificially separating the various aspects of children's worlds or crafting prescriptive curricula that treat children's experiences as peripheral to the classroom defeats the purpose of strength-based pedagogical approaches and a social justice orientation. Such educational equity efforts must begin with the children's experiences and be driven by their agency and self-directed engagement with their own learning. Project-based learning that draws on children's experiential knowledge and integrates quality biliteracy instruction is a powerful and promising pedagogical approach in bilingual classrooms.

In addition, as noted earlier, biliteracy family projects can offer analytical opportunities for educators to gain knowledge of the families they serve. There is a dire need to help teachers gauge such understandings in order to link strength-based pedagogical theories and inclusive family engagement perspectives to instructional practices. It is through transformative practices that educators can resolutely disrupt deficit views of Latinx immigrant families; project-based learning that involves families opens pathways to such opportunities.

To summarize, educators in bilingual classrooms should work to:

1) Create a dynamic process between the classroom and homes that involves children, families, and the teacher. View the creation process as a co-construction across settings and among participants.

2) Include plenty of opportunities for children to engage in discussions and express their ideas during all phases of a project. Plan effective approaches that focus on explicit language instruction and oracy development in both languages (see Escamilla et al., 2014).

3) Plan variations of a project in each language without duplicating. Think of ways to extend a project across languages that complement each other.

4) Take the opportunity to learn from and about students and families. Engage in thoughtful analyses of the experiences depicted in projects to guide future instruction and planning.

As I investigated the artifacts produced through these projects as bridges to integrate strength-based pedagogy and family engagement, I assumed a position of utmost respect and admiration for the families who participated, most of whom have endured restrictive language policies, hostility, and

adversities. My commitment to improve the educational experiences of immigrant children is deeply rooted in advocacy for educational equity and social justice for students and families from diverse backgrounds. In the current political climate that demeans diversity, the imperative to restore morale and embrace bilingualism and asset-based orientations is greater than ever.

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Over the Hills and Far Away: Inviting and Holding Traumatic Stories in School

Lesley Koplow, Noelle Dean, and Margaret Blachly

Thousands of young immigrant children enter school each year, bringing their immigration stories with them. They enrich the communities that receive them, bringing hope and new perspectives, new languages, and experiences of other worlds to share with peers. Sometimes their stories include experiences of loss and trauma in their lives prior to entering school. Studies estimate that more than 51% of immigrant families have experienced at least one traumatic event or loss, and at least 15% of immigrant parents and children present with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Aragona, Pucci, Mazzetti, Maisano, & Geraci, 2013). These traumatic histories can include difficult events and/or losses that occurred in children's countries of origin, during immigration journeys, or as part of the acculturation process, when poverty and regressive immigration policies often exacerbate existing vulnerabilities (Aragona, et al., 2013). Refugee children and families have an even higher incidence of traumatic history, with PTSD rates up to 75% (Rousseau, Measham, & Nadeau, 2013). Societal obstacles such as social and emotional isolation have been a common experience for immigrant families, who may have limited social networks, which increases their risk for depression and poor adjustment.

Young children who come to school with traumatic immigration histories may experience barriers to learning that may not be readily visible to their teachers. Children may be preoccupied, experience fight-or-flight reactivity to social challenges, or be hyperalert to the externals of the environment, causing them to be distracted from the school's academic readiness agenda (Holmes, Levy, Smith, Pinne, & Neese, 2015). In addition, difficult behavior resulting from trauma triggers may distract teachers from the underlying issues that fuel some children's outbursts and disruptions. Frequently, teachers and other school support staff react in frustration to children's difficult-to-manage behavior and then seek to remove the children from the classroom and/or school settings. Those children then find themselves further isolated and stressed.

This paper features an innovative school-based approach employed by the Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice (ERP) at Bank Street with groups of young children who have a traumatic history. In the cases documented here, the children had traumatic immigration stories and had experienced trauma and loss as a part of their immigration history. The purpose of the ERP approach is to have

foundations of child development as well as an understanding and appreciation of how children's life experiences inform classroom interactions. ERP tries to uncover the root of children's behavior and its connection to traumatic histories so that underlying issues of trauma can be addressed instead of ignored or dismissed.

ERP techniques are meant to change everyday classroom interactions and routines. They include using reflective language to heighten awareness of emotional states and using stuffed teddy bears as transitional objects to encourage attachment and enhance children's self-comfort capacity to buffer trauma (Koplow, 2008 Sadeh, 2008; Winnicott, 1953). Emotionally responsive curriculum includes pretend play, storytelling, and bibliotherapy that invites young children to dictate, draw, and write their traumatic stories as well as expressions of their fears, dreams, and fantasies. These techniques are woven into classroom practice. In addition, the program offers teachers and parents similar expressive outlets for their own trauma or for the secondary trauma that caring for traumatized children can evoke.

Traumatic Journeys Come to School

Because very young children are unable to comprehend the complexity of traumatic events, it is often assumed that they are protected from the effects of trauma. Research finds the opposite to be true. Very young children are the most vulnerable to insidious effects of trauma because they have not yet created the foundations for self-comfort, self-regulation, and stable identity development separate from the parent (Chu & Lieberman, 2010; Enlow, Blood, & Egeland, 2013). While older children may regress in the aftermath of trauma, infants and toddlers may fail to meet expected developmental milestones as a result of traumatic experiences, a phenomenon that can easily be mistaken for developmental delays of unknown origin when psychosocial histories are not provided or taken into account.

When young immigrant children enter pre-K, kindergarten, and first grade, their psychosocial stories may not have been communicated to school staff or may have been shared with a school social worker but made inaccessible to classroom staff due to confidentiality issues. This can result in young immigrant children who have experienced trauma becoming isolated with their traumatic immigration stories at school, leaving them feeling disconnected and distracted, as well as vulnerable to experiencing threat in the classroom setting (Kagan, 2010; Malchiodi, 2015).

Traumatized children may cope with the heightened perception of threat by becoming preemptively

aggressive or dissociated. They may be overwhelmed with high stress hormone levels while in the school building, enhancing reactivity and diminishing capacity for deep thought. Paradoxically, teachers who invite trauma narratives within curriculum can improve the young child's feeling of well-being in school, because the young child then no longer feels all alone with the traumatic events (Koplow, 2002, 2007). In highly attuned settings, the early childhood and early grade classroom can become a sanctuary for the young child's immigration story.

ERP work has taken place over several years with many groups of young children and parents. Here, two ERP practitioners, Margaret Blachly and Noelle Dean share vignettes from their work that demonstrate how the use of literacy, play, song, and art activities can foster the development of symbol and the creation of metaphor to communicate and hold traumatic immigration stories within the classroom. Each vignette is told from the point of view of the ERP practitioner who participated in the research.

Two Kindergarteners' Traumatic Journeys

> *I had my eye on Cristopher*[1] *from the beginning—he stood out. I described his behavior in these words in my notes from November: "Regular crying, wanders through school building, 'to look for mother,' or to find his cousin on third floor. Cristopher screams when he is brought back to his classroom by security guard. Tantrums at times; his mother has been called. He is a very recent arrival from Honduras, his teacher explained. There was a traumatic border crossing that he experienced with his mother who was detained for 2 weeks: left sisters behind."*
> —Margaret

I was a visiting practitioner in Ms. Ernesto's kindergarten class at a school where our ERP program had been contracted to help the community process trauma related to Hurricane Sandy. Soon after I began, I learned that several children in the classroom were recent immigrants, and that some had crossed the US/Mexico border on foot. Others had been detained at the border. These children had actually missed the natural disaster in New York City, but they arrived in the classroom haunted by their own stories and their own traumas.

I was glad to be able to bring teddy bears into this class as a way of providing comfort to children whose lives were impacted by the storm. I hoped I would find a way to use the comfort objects with the recent immigrant children as well. I hoped that I could invite the immigrant children's stories

1 All names of students and teachers throughout the vignettes are pseudonyms.

of leaving their countries of origin and traveling to the United States as part of the work we were doing about separation, fears, change, loss, and trauma that reflected the experience of local children endangered and displaced by the flooding.

This kindergarten class was a dual language classroom, with many children learning English as a second or third language. One day in early December, I decided to read Amy Hest's *Kiss Good Night* as a way to address fears of the dark, which had become extreme for many children after days, weeks, and months of no electricity after the hurricane. I planned to ask the children about their teddy bears' nighttime fears, and to invite them to create blankets for the teddy bears that would help the teddies feel safer if they felt afraid. I read the story in Spanish, hoping to engage more children. I showed the illustration at the beginning, which depicted trees and leaves bending and blowing on a dark and stormy night. I read the title in Spanish, *Un beso de buenas noches*.

Without warning, Cristopher offered up, *"¡cuándo me fuí a los Estados Unidos de Honduras, caminamos mucho por un bosque oscuro, y habían cocodrilos y serpientes!"* (When I came to the United States from Honduras, we walked through the dark woods and there were snakes and crocodiles!). Trained in the ERP approach, I responded reflectively and acknowledged his statement, saying that it sounded like a scary experience. I also told him that after we read the book, he could stay and tell me more about his own story, if he wanted. Internally, I remarked to myself on the power of invitation: this invitation had worked without my even having extended it. Simply by being in the presence of the teddy bears, being with a teacher who was talking about feeling scared, and seeing an image that triggered his memory, Cristopher took the opportunity to share his own experience.

When his classmates went to work on their blankets at the tables, Cristopher was eager to draw and tell his story (see Figure 1). Davíd, another child in the class, stayed nearby, moving around in a way that distracted me: I was initially flustered because I was so eager for Cristopher to tell his story and so anxious to be able to listen carefully to it. Ms. Ernesto was close by and asked, "Did you know that Davíd just arrived, too? He also crossed the border by foot." With the new information that Davíd, like Cristopher, was a recent immigrant, I quickly adjusted my plan and invited Davíd to join our small group. I gave him paper to draw on and slid the book Bear Feels Scared by Karma Wilson under the paper so he'd have something to lean on as he drew. He was captivated by the picture on the book cover (which depicts a bear with a scared expression on his face in a dark, windy, rainy forest) and said, "I want to read THIS book!" I promised him we would read it next week.

I hadn't noticed much about Davíd before now, except that he felt compelled to make everything neat and orderly. Davíd listened and responded to the text as I continued to read Kiss Good Night, both boys spontaneously offering up their own stories and responding to each other's. Cristopher described a train that rocked back and forth and was very crowded and made him sick. Davíd described crossing a river in a plastic boat and seeing another child's shoe fall into the water. He tried to reach it but he couldn't. Cristopher described a *"pirate"* on a boat he rode on, who looked scary but then treated him kindly. While Cristopher had come to the United States with his mother, leaving his sisters behind in Honduras, Davíd had left his mother behind when he came to the United States. He chatted matter-of-factly:

> *. . . mi tía estaba llorando por todos los días que se iba a encontrar con mi mami, pero no pudimos, porque nos vinimos por acá . . . pero tengo una mamá aca que me cuida.* (. . . my aunt was crying every day, [because] we were going to find my mother, but we couldn't, because we came here . . . but I have another mother here who takes care of me).

The boys continued to tell their stories, Cristopher drawing as he wrote, Davíd not drawing until the end when he copied the rainbow that Cristopher drew on his second page of paper. I asked them to take turns telling about their journeys and interjected a few questions or comments as they spoke. They were so engaged in this process of telling their stories that sometimes they were talking at the exact same time, finding it hard to wait for a break in the conversation. Their stories seemed primed to come out, and as Cristopher and Davíd responded to the invitation created by the book's imagery of a bear feeling lost and scared in the woods, the familiar Spanish words, and the comfort of the actual teddy bears that sat in their laps, their stories continued to emerge.

Figure 1. The Long Journey. A search helicopter overhead and a sad crocodile in the water.



When I looked back and reflected on my documentation of the conversation later on, I was struck not only by what felt like the children's urgent need for space to tell their actual stories, but also by the fact that the boys, in a developmentally sound way, had also begun to use *storytelling*. That is, at the end of their narrative, they had used fantasy to develop a joint narrative which provided wished-for solutions to the feeling of helplessness that their journeys had engendered. The image of a shoe floating away from a rubber raft was especially poignant, and Davíd returned to it, commenting that he had tried to reach the shoe, but had almost fallen into the water himself. Soon after, the theme of power vs. powerlessness, which is almost always found in the fantasy play of three- to six-year-olds (Koplow, 2002, 2007), entered his narrative (excerpted and translated below) with the boys in an empowered role:

Teacher (ERP consultant): Were you scared? (not being able to find mother)

Davíd: No . . . just a little.

T: I'm thinking that your aunt was probably scared.

Christopher: Yes, men don't get scared, and boys also don't get scared.

T: I would be scared.

D: And if there are men, and a gun, and they shoot it at the airplane . . . boom, boom, boom! and then the airplane is going to fall, it's going to land, and if the men come down and give us the airplane, and we go to Honduras, with an airplane!

C: I had a toy gun that really shoots, and I shot it at the crocodiles and they died! There were crocodiles very close . . .

T: I see that you drew the crocodiles here (see Figure 1)

D: Get out of the helicopter! They get arrested and I laugh at them! They stay there and say, "Hey! Give us our airplane and our helicopter!" "No, never!" So, then I go up to the helicopter and shoot at a police officer, boom! Then he will be in a dark forest with bears, and spiders, like tarantulas! And if there are people, they will kill them! A real monster there!

T: The forest is so scary. The next time I come, I will read a story about a bear who gets lost in the forest.

C: (showing his full paper) I'm not finished. (T gives him a second sheet of paper)

D: And look… we walked a long time, and there was a monster, and a bear . . .

C: (trying to break into D's narrative) And I'll show you where my house is . . .

D: (not to be interrupted) And then we killed all the police officers . . . trrrrr!

Watching Davíd and Cristopher enact their stories and listening to their tones of voice and the energy in their movements, it was apparent that through their storytelling, the boys were playing with feeling powerful. Davíd conquered the police, who did not represent safety in is immigration journey; he also returned to Honduras in a plane, exerting some imagined control over his destination. Cristopher's fantasy expressed power over the crocodiles that he uses to express danger. Cristopher focused on drawing, which may have kept him more grounded in the "real" story, while Davíd entered a narrative of dramatic play, bringing the scenes of action under his own control. The time and space the boys had for sharing their traumatic stories in the context of literacy and art allowed the developmentally salient capacity for fantasy play to lessen Cristopher and Davíd's feeling of helplessness and provide freedom from their preoccupied state.

As I ended the session, putting away the books and drawing materials, I saw that Ms. Ernesto had been sitting nearby. She had listened to the whole interaction and had a look of shock on her face. "I can't believe what they've been through!" she breathed, shakily. I nodded. "Those were big and scary stories," I said, reflecting the fact that our experience, as listeners, had been intense. We spoke briefly before I had to leave to go to my next class session. I could tell that something had shifted for Ms. Ernesto, but at that moment, it was hard for either of us to articulate it.

I asked myself, what difference would this storytelling session make in the long run? One observable thing that developed from it was Ms. Ernesto's attention, through social studies, to the children's countries of origin. She had the children bring in flags and artifacts from their native countries and frequently named the countries where each of them or their parents were from. Now respectful of the children's difficult journeys, Ms. Ernesto implemented a routine where the children held their teddy bears and wrote in journals when they returned from the cafeteria (a time when many of the children felt overwhelmed and disconnected, and thus, during which there were often behavior problems).

Ms. Ernesto had not had a lot of experience with ERP techniques before, but in learning the children's stories, she recognized the salience of the children's prior experience and now gave those stories a place in her classroom. She seemed to understand fundamentally that in telling the stories, these boys

were bringing their traumatic experience into relationship with their teachers and with one another and were then less alone with the fears and worries that seemed to previously preoccupy them. They were now able to be more present in the classroom. Through hearing stories, being read storybooks, telling personal stories, drawing, and creating play symbols, children shared traumatic experiences and established stronger relationships.

After December break, Cristopher returned to school still very connected to his teddy bear. He was trying to draw the teddy and was feeling frustration that he was not able to draw it the way he wanted to. I told him he could just tell his teddy bear's story without a drawing. He dictated, *"él tiene miedo en la oscuridad, y él se siente bien cuando está en su casa."* (He [the teddy bear] feels scared in the dark, and he feels safe when he is in his house.) Cristopher had made a house for his bear before the vacation break, using a shoebox decorated with images that would help his bear to feel safe. Before I left the classroom on my way to the next class that waited for me, Cristopher asked me to draw a heart on his hand and write, *"¡hasta pronto!"* (see you soon!). So easily upset by transitions initially, Cristopher was now able to use a symbol of connection to tolerate separation and to remain connected. Since the time that these events took place, Cristopher has been able to function well in school and maintain connections to adults and children. He is in third grade this year and is reunited with Ms. Ernesto, now his third-grade teacher!

Crying for Home

> *I felt really sad and frustrated in the classrooms during the fall months. Children would cry and scream, throw up, and pee on the floor, traumatically separating without the possibility of being comforted. No one was able to speak to them the few magic and consoling words they needed to hear: "mommy will come back," "you are safe here," or "you feel scared." Children who hear those words implicitly know that the adults understand them. This is the essence of reflective language.* —Noelle

Language as Mirror. Beginnings in early childhood classrooms are fraught times, primarily because children who are three, four, and five years old are acutely struggling with the task of separating. During the two years in which I worked in early childhood classrooms in one predominantly Chinese American neighborhood, I witnessed how recent immigration experiences compounded this developmentally common challenge. Referred to as "satellite babies" by Canadian researcher Yvonne Bohr, the children I met were part of a rising trend in transnational immigration patterns within the Chinese American community (Bohr & Tse, 2009). Born in New York City, infants are brought to China to be raised by grandparents or other family members as part of a culturally accepted three-generation tiered method

of child rearing. It isn't until children are old enough to begin going to school for a full day (sometimes until they are three or four years old) that they return to New York City to reunite with their parents.

While raising children through multigenerational, extended family structures is very common in traditional Chinese (and many other) cultures, it has mostly been implemented when grandparents live in rural villages and parents can easily work in cities while returning often to bond with their children. But now we are seeing this same practice on a transnational level, introducing new challenges to keeping parents and their babies connected. The result is a deeply felt dislocation: physical, cultural, and most vitally, emotional.

Here in the classrooms in which I worked, many of the children had arrived to the United States just days before the beginning of school. Families had become accustomed to giving their children American names when the children entered American schools with the hope that that might ease the difficult transition. However, this meant that children were addressed by a name many of them had never heard before, exaggerating an already felt sense of dislocation and invisibility. In essence, the self that they had inhabited their entire lives was meant to be left at the door of the school building. Making things worse, the teachers and assistant teachers rarely spoke the Chinese dialects (nor did I), leaving the children virtually alone in their sense of loss and worry about the unknown.

Knowing that what children urgently needed was to communicate their experiences, I contacted a Chinese graduate student to help with the initial phases of the project. She agreed to spend one day a week in one of the classrooms. She spoke the soft comforting words "mama will come back" all day long to tearful and terrified children. The student struggled with whether or not she did more harm than good being there because every time that she had to leave for the week, the children inevitably fell apart again. I encouraged her to stay. I felt that she offered them the greatest hope for comfort: to be understood.

Finally, after four weeks in the classroom, the student saw a glimpse of the important impact she had made on the children. Karl, a three-year-old who had grown very attached to her over the months, began to comfort other children around him. In Mandarin he would calmly whisper, "mama come back" to the other children as they cried. His ability to console the others was testament to the power of familiar words and culture.

Body Language: To Be Seen and Known. The very first reflective caretaker-infant dyadic conversations occur when primary attachment figures accurately read and mirror their baby's feeling states (Stern, 2000). Through these call-and-response body-based conversations, babies form the beginning of a sense of self. They are affirmed as they see a reflection of their internal selves in the faces of their caretaker.

Knowing that many of the children in this classroom had experienced profoundly disrupted attachments, I felt it essential to begin our work with a focus on supporting teacher/child attachment. With this early developmental phase in mind and with a lack of resources to fully communicate verbally with the children, I focused our beginning work on the intersection between body language and verbal language so that we could begin having reflective conversations, similar to those of the early caretaker-infant dyad. To do this, I decided to sing "If You're Happy and You Know It" with the children. We sang this song with affect variations, such as "if you're (sad, angry, scared) and you know it." We attached facial and body expressions to each feeling word and practiced over and over. We sang the song each week.

Through the embodiment of feeling words, we created a shared understanding of internal experiences. For example, we expressed sadness with sorrowful facial expressions and crying sounds, tilting our heads downward and pulling our shoulders inward. For months, children relied on the embodied experience of the feelings to communicate. This shared language gave teachers a window into knowing children more deeply and thus strengthened both the teachers' and children's capacity to be empathic. When a child named Hannah was brought to school midyear, new to the country, new to her parents, and new to the school environment, she was angry. She curled her brow, crossed her arms, and stomped her foot. The other children, who for many weeks had been singing the song and stomping their feet, almost in anticipation of this moment, would say "she angry!" And just like that, Hannah's experience was understood.

While the children took my lead in learning these rudimentary feeling words in English, the teachers and I learned to interpret the physical signs that expressed more complicated experiences. For example, when Danny came in as a new child midyear, he cried for about four weeks. He held his hand up to his ear and brushed it against his cheek as he cried, which for a moment reminded me of an infant's rooting reflex, but which I soon came to understand was his mimicking holding a cell phone. The assistant teacher noticed him and wondered if he was trying to tell us to call his mother. When she picked up her cell phone and pretended to call his mother and continued to "talk" to her about what Danny was doing at school, he took a deep breath and stopped crying. This game of pretending was an urgent metaphorical way of communicating. Three-year-olds were finding ways to express the vastness

of their fear through body language, and teachers, in turn, were able to communicate the primal message of safety and connection through their actions.

Creating Story Narratives: Going Away and Coming Back. One of the hallmarks of ERP is the practice of bibliotherapy, the use of books relevant to children's therapeutic needs (Betzalel & Shechtman, 2010; Montgomery & Maunders, 2015). Our belief is that children who find resonance with books are not only more apt to be organically interested and motivated to learn to read and write, but also more likely to feel emotionally connected to their teachers, their peers, and to school as a whole. By being read what we refer to as reflective books, children are given the chance to find themselves in the stories they hear. Often children feel validation in reflective books and comfort in being known by teachers. Read-alouds become opportunities to decrease children's feelings of isolation. Through class conversations around these books, children see that they are not alone in their experiences.

Finding reflective books for these classrooms was challenging. I could not find any that accurately mirrored the children's particular life stories. I also felt limited by my inability to read books in Mandarin or Cantonese, and so I mostly used toddler-aged books with limited language. One of the books I brought in was a simple rendition of the song "Five Little Ducks," which I chose because it spoke to the bigger issues related to the children's disrupted attachments and multiple goodbyes. They worried about their grown-ups returning, and so we focused much of our early work on the ideas around "going away and coming back." We sang "Five Little Ducks" and we read Five Little Ducks weekly for months:

> *Five little ducks went out one day*
> *Over the hills and far away . . .*
> *Mama duck said quack quack quack quack*
> *But only four little ducks came back.*

My hope was that the children would see themselves in the story of the ducks, and that they would learn language around their experiences of coming and going, of missing and being missed.

One day at lunchtime, right after we had read Five Little Ducks, four-year-old Lucy found her voice around the articulation of her story. Lucy's story was a slight variation of that of the children who had been raised by grandparents. While Lucy's mother worked in another state, Lucy lived with her aunt and her cousins. She rarely saw her mother, and sometimes referred to her aunt as "mama" and

her cousins as sisters. Lucy had been in the United States for longer than most of her peers (about a year) and spoke a limited amount of English. At her small table, as she picked at her plate of peas and carrots, she could be heard saying, "I don't have mommy. Mommy over the hills and far away." As she spoke, her hands gestured the familiar movement we had devised to accompany the words to the song, following the imaginary contours of a steep hill, and then moving across her forehead as she pretended to look out into a distant land.

Later that day, Lucy found a way to extend the expression of her story into the realm of literacy and self-narrative. We had brought teddy bears to the classroom at the beginning of our work together. As part of our teddy bear curriculum, children had used the bears in a combination of ways: as comfort objects when they needed to feel more secure, as transitional objects when they missed their grown-up attachment figure, and as self-objects (alter-egos) through which they could express parts of themselves with the safety of some emotional distance. Now that Lucy had found language to tell her story ("Mommy is over the hills and far away") and the knowledge that she was not isolated in her experience of missing someone (the ducks could relate), she was able to think about her story as a more integrated, coherent narrative. She had words she could use to capture her internal experience and imagery to use as metaphor.

Later, when I offered Lucy paper and crayons to draw bear pictures, the bear she drew had an expression of sadness (see Figure 2). When I came over to take dictation, I asked, "Can you tell me about your picture?" These were her words: "My teddy bear feels sad. My teddy bear don't have mommy. Her mommy still far away. She don't come back. Her waiting for her mommy. One day come back far away."

Figure 2. Mommy still far away



Lucy, Danny, and Hannah brilliantly found a way to tell their stories. Children are wizards at finding vehicles for communicating what is meaningful to them, even when that seems impossible. Communicating internal experiences through co-created language is an organizing and healing force. It is what lies at the heart of literacy.

Connecting the Dots

Early childhood programs and elementary schools often show ambivalence about their role in holding and addressing children's psychosocial stories. These stories are collected only when there are serious concerns about a child's academic performance, but they are rarely used to inform practice. Instead, schools typically lock children's psychosocial histories in a file drawer and focus on enhancing academic performance while targeting challenging behavior. Paradoxically, this practice leaves young children alone with their traumatic experiences. Trauma and unattended loss continue to interfere with attentional capacity, impair memory function, promote distractibility, enhance behavioral reactivity, and diminish the ability to think deeply, generally resulting in poor school adjustment (Cook, Blaustein, Spinazzola, & van der Folk, 2003; Fox & Shonkoff, 2012; Goodman, Miller, & West-Olatunji, 2012). It is often impossible for children to thrive academically and socially when they are overwhelmed by fear, traumatic memories, and grief. Immigrant children with a traumatic history are especially vulnerable to becoming isolated with these traumatic effects because social networks and supports may be minimal.

At the time of this writing, immigration policy is changing in the United States in ways that are unprecedented in recent history. Undocumented immigrants are being targeted for deportation even if they have children who are American citizens and even if being returned to their countries of origin would put them at extreme risk. These regressive policies often threaten immigrant children and families who have escaped danger in their native countries. Teachers of children in public school are hearing children talk about their fears of being deported, losing their parents to deportation, or having immigration police invade their homes and neighborhoods.

These two stories of immigrant children and their teachers capture the process of inviting young children to engage in symbolic avenues of expression as a way to voice loss and trauma. Through sharing stories, creating art, responding to reflective books, singing songs with meaningful lyrics, and creating representational play opportunities with transitional objects, the children were able to connect to others in the classroom around their traumatic experiences.

In each of the scenarios included here, the trauma and loss experienced by the children had initially resulted in adjustment difficulties at school. Several of the children could not manage the daily separation from their families; they screamed and cried, tried to run out of the room, and were inconsolable. Children as well as parents often seemed stressed, depressed, highly anxious, easily upset, disconnected and preoccupied. However, after participating in ERP activities including story sharing, storytelling, reading, writing, drawing, and creating pretend scenarios as a voice for trauma and loss, the children were more comfortable within the school setting, less emotionally and socially isolated, and more receptive and available for learning. This receptivity may have developed because the children were no longer alone with traumatic memories.

Schools that connect the dots between behavior, learning, and psychosocial history respect what they know about the power of children's and parents' life experiences and use it to inform their practice. They offer children a bridge to self-expression that can reach beyond any language barriers that exist. Instead of insisting that young children turn their attention away from the loss and trauma that claims their mental space and prevents social connection and learning, this approach allows children to weave their own trauma narratives into an expressive tapestry of literacy, art, and symbolic play within school-based relationships that are strong enough to hold their stories. In this way, children are able to connect with others as they work on integrating their own psychosocial stories.

The stories presented in this article are told by psychoeducational consultants and social workers from the Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice at Bank Street who were supporting the teachers in an urban community. However, as time went on, the classroom teachers themselves began to integrate some of the reflective techniques that these consultants brought into the classroom, and the relationships between teachers, children, and parents became stronger. Developing teacher capacity to hear children's immigration narratives is essential during this time of heightened insecurity for undocumented immigrant families. Children who can communicate their fears and anxieties through symbolic play and art activities do not have to act out to free themselves from pain and isolation. They have other viable ways of communicating within the classroom and they have their teachers as partners in holding their stories. These creative interventions help create classroom community and strengthen the protective factor of empathic adult-child relationships at school. When teachers and school leaders are able to listen to and acknowledge a child and family's traumatic immigration experiences, children feel held, and school becomes a safer place to grow and learn.

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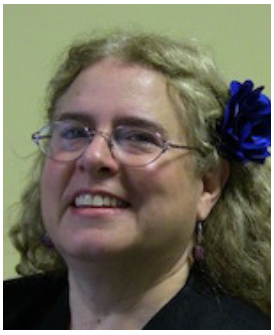
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Building Bridges Between Home and School for Latinx Families of Preschool Children

Gigliana Melzi, Adina R. Schick, and Lauren Scarola

All children, regardless of their backgrounds, enter the classroom environment with a set of cultural and communal resources known as funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Educators can support children's learning and achievement by incorporating these funds of knowledge – which include, for example, cultural and familial values and traditions, family activities, and home language – into classroom learning experiences. All too often, however, educators fail to take advantage of these resources, and instead draw on mainstream values, traditions, and practices that have historically been embedded into classroom culture and protocol. Even the most well-intentioned intervention programs seeking to support children from ethnoculturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds typically do so by offering parents training to help adapt their home activities and practices to align with those expected by and supported in U.S. schools.

We strongly believe that for intervention efforts to be effective, they must rely on an approach that acknowledges and integrates the cultural knowledge and resources of children and their families. Building solid home-school connections requires adopting a bidirectional approach – that is, initiatives should also target the school by bringing salient home and community practices into the classroom setting. In this essay, we share findings of an intervention program we developed and implemented to help teachers incorporate Latinx children's funds of knowledge into their everyday classroom routines. Our program trained preschool teachers to use cultural forms of oral language in the classroom as a way to support children's reading readiness skills.

The Importance of Home-School Connections

We begin with the story of Margarita, a four-year-old child from East Harlem who recently began preschool. Margarita lived with her parents, both of whom were immigrants from Puebla, Mexico. Margarita's mother described her as *una niña tranquila* (a well self-regulated child) who made friends easily and who readily adapted to diverse social situations. She was *obediente* (obedient), *cariñosa* (affectionate), and *occurrente* (fun and creative). Margarita's mother also shared that Margarita was muy platicadora (quite chatty), but mostly around speakers of Spanish, her home language. As she was just beginning to

learn English, she was a bit shy among English speakers. As we listened to Margarita's mother describe her daughter, it was evident that she was really proud of the way her daughter was developing.

The way Margarita's mother described her daughter was in contrast with the way her teacher described her. While Margarita's teacher was impressed by her self-regulation and social skills, and also noted her love for stories, she was concerned that Margarita recognized few letters in the alphabet and could not identify all the numbers between 1 and 10. Although Margarita could write the letter M, her teacher was worried that Margarita could not write any other letters in her name and did not show much interest in learning them. The teacher was surprised that Margarita did not draw or color much, as this was the favorite activity of most children in the class. So, while Margarita's teacher cared deeply about her and recognized her student's well-developed socio-emotional skills, her attention was focused on Margarita's less developed literacy and numeracy skills.

The teacher's expectations of what skills are important to bring into the classroom are endemic to the value the U.S. educational system places on a predetermined set of pre-academic skills over the strengths that individual children bring, especially children from immigrant, ethnoculturally, and linguistically diverse communities. The negative perceptions that result when children do not meet these expectations are exacerbated by the negative discourses around immigrants and immigration in the U.S., as well as by the deficit lens with which our society has historically viewed children from non-English speaking, immigrant, and low-income homes.

But the problem is more complex than failing to notice individual children's strengths. Early childhood educators, like Margarita's teacher, are trained to rely on cultural and linguistic continuities between the home and the school to support children's learning. However, these cultural and linguistic connections favor monolingual, English-speaking, middle-class White families.

Preschool teachers often encourage parents to look for opportunities to make connections between oral language and literacy within their everyday home life as a way to support early reading. Teachers might suggest to parents, for example, that when taking their child to the local supermarket to buy groceries (e.g., eggs), they should point to written signs to encourage the child to make connections between oral and written language, thereby supporting emergent literacy skills. When Margarita goes grocery shopping with her mother, she goes to buy "huevos," but sees a sign that spells "eggs." For Margarita, a different set of opportunities are afforded through this experience (e.g., that there are two different words for one concept), but these connections are not the ones encouraged or used as a foundation for the child's learning at school.

Current pedagogical practices are not designed to take full advantage of the rich cultural and linguistic experiences of children from immigrant and ethnoculturally different families. As a consequence, the default practice is to create programs that encourage Latinx families to change their practices and align them with those expected and valued by the U.S. educational system (Sheridan & Kim, 2015).

One way in which educational policies have attempted to bridge home and school disconnects for ethnoculturally and linguistically diverse children is to encourage family engagement. Family (or parental) engagement is understood as the multiple ways parents and other key family members support children's learning and development across home and school settings. Empirical evidence shows that high levels of family engagement support children's academic achievement and act as a protective factor against the negative effects of risks, such as living in poverty. As a consequence, many efforts at the national and state levels have been aimed at increasing families' participation in the activities shown to support children's academic success.

The New York City Department of Education, for example, has in recent years renewed its commitment to strengthening family engagement in children's schooling by creating welcoming environments at schools and district offices, allotting weekly times when teachers can meet with parents, having student-led parent-teacher conferences, organizing parent forums or inviting parents to curriculum committees, and rolling out initiatives to encourage parents from diverse language backgrounds to run for council seats. Though initiatives like these are clearly valuable, often underlying these efforts is the idea that there is one path to effective involvement: bringing families into the school.

While these efforts have been met with some success with regards to building teacher-parent communication and educating parents about school expectations, they fail to recognize that school-based activities, even those that are implemented in the home setting (e.g., increasing reading to children), might not be effective for all families. In fact, for Margarita's family and other immigrant families like hers, working multiple jobs to make ends meet and having long and inflexible work hours makes it difficult for parents to attend school events or meetings. Moreover, parents who are not documented might be reluctant to get involved in any leadership roles, as they experience fear of being identified, apprehended, and subsequently deported, especially in the current political climate.

These realities are further complicated by numerous other factors, such as language barriers, lack of familiarity with U.S. schools, and cultural differences in expectations about roles. Thus, participating in these and other recommended school-based practices are typically more challenging and require greater

effort for families like Margarita's than for families in middle-income communities. To strengthen home-school connections, especially for low-income, immigrant, and Latinx families, efforts must go beyond encouraging parents to participate in school and school-like activities.

Latinx Parents' Engagement in Their Children's Schooling

Research efforts employing sociocultural approaches have revealed the unique ways low-income Latinx families engage in their children's schooling (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Durand, 2011). In two recent investigations to uncover culturally relevant but generally overlooked engagement practices, we identified four components of family engagement unique to low-income Latinx families (McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy, & Mundt, 2013; McWayne & Melzi, 2014). Latinx parents' home-based involvement (typically captured among other cultural groups with a single component focused on ways of supporting pre-academic skills), was represented across three distinct components of engagement, and their school-based engagement was represented by one component, highlighting the importance of home-based engagement for Latinx families relative to their school-based engagement. These three home-based engagement components – foundational, supplemental, and future-oriented teaching – reflect both the cultural values and socio-economic realities of U.S. Latinx families from low-income communities. For instance, the foundational education dimension reflects the dual focus of the Spanish term *educación* (education) and cultural concept of being *bien educado* (well educated). Rather than seeing education as solely based on academics, *educación* and, in turn, foundational education, acknowledges both socio-emotional and basic academic skills as being important, but places higher value on socio-emotional abilities, as Margarita's parents do.

The supplemental educational dimension is in line with more mainstream and expected forms of engagement, such as reading with children and visiting libraries and museums. Finally, the future-oriented teaching dimension involves talking with children about the importance of education as a way to get ahead and *"ir por el buen camino"* (be on the right path). Thus, the unique combination of economic, cultural, and linguistic factors shapes the ways in which parents encourage and support their children's learning and educational success.

Recognizing and capitalizing on what parents do rather than on what they fail to do is a critical step in building meaningful home-school connections. We must also incorporate the knowledge, expertise, and traditions that children like Margarita and her family have into the classrooms, and do so in an authentic, integrated manner (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Indeed, there is increasing empirical

evidence showing that doing just that – bringing children's home knowledge and experiences into the classroom – is an effective way to encourage their learning (Rodríguez, 2013).

Capitalizing on Families' Funds of Knowledge

Luis Moll and his colleagues (1992, 2005) were among the first to propose a "funds of knowledge" approach to inform the development of classroom curricula. Their approach acknowledges that homes and communities "contain ample cultural and cognitive sources with great potential utility for classroom instruction" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 2005, p. 75). Funds of knowledge encompass a family's knowledge and expertise developed to function within their local milieu. By appreciating, understanding, and using the knowledge already available to students in both the home and the community, teachers can help establish meaningful and productive connections between this knowledge and the classroom curriculum. Often, however, educators neglect to build on children's funds of knowledge because they are unaware of these cultural and cognitive resources. Moreover, even when educators are eager and want to capitalize on children's funds of knowledge, they find few resources that model how to do so in an effective manner.

To fill this gap, we developed an intervention program that trains teachers of Latinx preschoolers to build on the cultural funds of knowledge the children bring into the classroom. *Reading Success Using Co-Constructive Elaborative Storytelling Strategies* (Melzi, Schick, & Scarola, 2017) supports young children's reading readiness by capitalizing on Latinx families' oral storytelling practices. The program also highlights the foundational role that oral language plays in children's reading development, especially higher-order reading skills such as vocabulary and comprehension.

Despite its increasing broadness, much of the research on young children's reading readiness has focused on the home literacy environment, especially caregiver-child print-related activities during the preschool years. As low-income Latinx families tend to engage in these practices less frequently than their more affluent and White counterparts, researchers have suggested a link between a more "impoverished" home literacy environment and children's poor preparedness for formal schooling (Padilla, Cabrera & West, 2017). Yet, whereas they might have less access to print at home, low-income Latinx children like Margarita are often exposed to rich extended discourse, another important predictor of reading and overall school success.

Among the forms of oral discourse shared in Latinx families are reminiscing about past experiences, personal stories that include *consejos* (advice), and stories marked by *dichos* or traditional sayings, such as

"Más sabe el Diablo por viejo que por Diablo" [The Devil knows more because he is old, not because he is the Devil], connoting that wisdom comes with age. *Dar consejos* or giving advice is a predominant oral practice that represents "a cultural dimension of communication sparked with emotional empathy and compassion, as well as familial expectations and inspiration" (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994, p. 300).

In Latinx communities, caregivers, and in particular mothers, use family and personal stories, *dichos* and *consejos* to transmit cultural beliefs, values, and attitudes from one generation to the next (Cortez, 2008; Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Espinoza-Herald, 2007; Sánchez, Plata, Grosso, & Leird, 2010). The sharing of these oral forms of discourse serves to help caregivers and children bond, but at the same time encourages children to learn to think critically and make independent decisions (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994), both of which are integral skills to preschoolers' development and continued school success.

Using R-SUCCESS in the Classroom

Our program, Reading Success Using Co-Constructive Elaborative Storytelling Strategies (R-SUCCESS), draws on these oral discourse practices by asking teachers to incorporate oral storytelling into classroom circle-time routines as a supplement to their book reading activities. It relies on the assumption that successful reading is built upon a strong oral language foundation that underscores that reading is about the creation of meaning (Snow & Matthews, 2016). To develop R-SUCCESS, we began by holding focus groups with teachers and parents in a partnering preschool located in a low-income Latinx immigrant community.

Although the majority of the teachers were of Latinx background, 80 percent indicated that they did not incorporate oral storytelling into their classroom routines. By contrast, and as expected, Latinx parents discussed their use of oral practices at home with their children, including *dichos y refranes* (sayings and proverbs) to impart knowledge, to teach, and to advise, and *cuentos e historias* (tales and stories) to teach children about life, to entertain them, and to reminisce about life in el pueblo (the village). The prevalence of these oral practices was then corroborated during follow-up home visits with a subgroup of the parents.

The structure of the storytelling in R-SUCCESS follows that of classroom book sharing. It comprises a pre-telling segment in which teachers build background knowledge and vocabulary, a telling segment in which teachers share the story with the children, and a post-telling segment in which teachers support children's comprehension and reflection of the story. Teachers are encouraged to seek parents'

assistance in selecting *dichos, consejos, cuentos,* and other forms of discourse on which to base the story to be shared with the class. During their training, teachers are provided with models of how to elicit information from families about common practices in their home or lessons they impart to their children. In addition, teachers have access to sample stories that have been collected from community members and are also given resources to help them find additional stories that draw on these practices or lessons.

R-SUCCESS was first implemented with preschool teachers who were asked to incorporate it into their classroom circle time routines, twice a week. Teachers met weekly with a teacher coach over a three-month period to learn the co-constructive elaborative storytelling strategies. After completing the training, teachers demonstrated their acquisition of these techniques by modeling an oral story with their classroom children.

Teachers who participated in the first waves of R-SUCCESS were appreciative of the resources that were provided to them, particularly a list of common *dichos* and sample stories, which facilitated the creation of the stories they used in their classrooms. At the same time, teachers went beyond the resources that were provided to them and independently sought out stories that matched their teaching units, either by eliciting stories from parents or, more commonly, through internet searches. At the end of the school year, teachers reported feeling better equipped to bridge home-school connections. Results of teacher surveys also showed not only that children were highly engaged in the storytelling routines, but that teachers saw an increase in the children's higher order literacy skills.

Teacher reports were supported by our initial direct assessments of children's language and literacy skills. For example, findings of an initial study comparing children in R-SUCCESS classrooms to children in business-as-usual classrooms at the same school demonstrated that children in R-SUCCESS classrooms had more advanced narrative skill, with significantly higher conversational autonomy, story grammar, and literate language scores at the end of the preschool year (Melzi, Schick, & Scarola, 2017). Results of a second study comparing children in R-SUCCESS classrooms to children in classrooms in which teachers were trained using Dialogic Reading strategies (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003) showed that R-SUCCESS was as effective as Dialogic Reading in supporting low-income Latinx children's receptive, expressive, and academic language (as measured by vocabulary diversity, conversational autonomy, story grammar, and literate language). R-SUCCESS was more effective in supporting children's overall ability to engage in successful storytelling (Melzi, Schick, & Scarola, 2017). Results of a third study, which focused solely on English-speaking Latinx children, showed that

children in R-SUCCESS classrooms produced more coherent and contextualized narratives than children in the Dialogic Reading classrooms. In addition, results confirmed prior findings documenting that R-SUCCESS supported children's vocabulary diversity to the same extent as Dialogic Reading. Furthermore, children in R-SUCCESS classrooms tended to use more unique sophisticated language than children in Dialogic Reading classrooms (Schick, Wuest, Scarola, & Melzi, 2017).

As early childhood programs in low-income communities often lack the funding and resources necessary to provide teachers with high-quality training or coaching, in our most recent research efforts with R-SUCCESS we have trained teachers using an engaging web-based platform and tested whether training using a series of animated videos was as effective as training with an individualized in-person coach. Results of these studies showed that our web-based training was as supportive of teachers' use of oral storytelling in terms of number and types of stories told and richness of discourse used as the in-person training (Melzi, Schick, Schneebaum, & Scarola, 2017; Schick, Schneebaum, Scarola, Petrolekas, & Melzi, 2017). These findings have led to a number of initiatives to scale-up the R-SUCCESS intervention, including an adaption for teachers of African-heritage preschoolers and for teachers of Latinx and African-heritage children in kindergarten and first grade classrooms.

Making Difference a Source of Strength

Strengthening the connections between families and schools has a significant effect on children's learning success. For low-income Latinx families like Margarita's, the combination of socio-economic, cultural, and language factors leads to a unique set of knowledge and family engagement practices that are largely invisible to teachers in U.S. schools. We must find ways to train educators to understand, value, and be prepared to make use of differences without placing value-laden judgments on existing practices. Culturally responsive educational efforts, such as those that capitalize on families' funds of knowledge and practices, build meaningful bridges between teachers and parents as they partner in their work of educating children. If these funds of knowledge are not acknowledged and utilized, even the most well-intentioned efforts will become prescriptive, and we will continue to recreate the educational conditions that marginalize children from immigrant, ethnoculturally and linguistically diverse, low-income communities. In doing so, we will fail in our efforts to provide all children with enriching educational experiences.

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Building Bridges, Not Walls, Between Latinx Immigrant Parents and Schools

Kiyomi Sánchez-Suzuki Colegrove

As a teacher educator and former bilingual teacher, I have encountered many teachers who have negative misconceptions about immigrant parents. These misconceptions prevent teachers from forming reciprocal and meaningful relationships with parents and even with children (Colegrove, forthcoming). Negative misconceptions impact teachers' abilities to be equitable as well as their willingness to offer high-quality learning experiences to children (Adair, 2015; Crosnoe, 2006) or to include parents in meaningful, educational decision-making (Doucet, 2011, 2008).

This essay addresses some of these misconceptions as they were articulated during a large video-cued ethnographic study of Latinx immigrant parents of young children in Texas and California. As part of the larger Agency and Young Children study (Tobin, Arzubiaga, & Adair, 2013), Dr. Jennifer Keys Adair and I interviewed 116 Latinx immigrant parents. I focused specifically on 55 Latinx immigrant parents who were from México, Perú, Guatemala, Venezuela, and Chile. I conducted group or individual interviews with all the parents after they watched a twenty-minute film about a first-grade classroom comprised mainly of children of Latinx immigrants. Parents were asked to respond to the practices in the film. The majority of the parents wanted to talk about their frustration about not being taken seriously by schools and teachers.

The essays looks at the parents' reactions to the film and their understanding of the negative misconceptions of themselves and other Latinx parents. It then offers some strategies for teachers to overcome these misconceptions and to work with Latinx parents to create reciprocal and meaningful relationships between them and schools.

Negative Misconceptions

The parents whom I got to know during this research had achieved educational levels ranging from fifth grade to master's degrees, and represented a wide range of socioeconomic status. Yet they all faced similar misconceptions from teachers and schools. These misconceptions included beliefs that teachers had about their parenting, their interest in education, and their abilities to help their children progress in school. Here are the five most common misconceptions shared by the participants I interviewed.

Misconception #1: Latinx immigrant parents believe teachers are responsible for all the teaching

The Latinx immigrant parents I interviewed understood that the role of the teacher was a role that teachers and parents shared. Teachers educate at school and parents educate at home. For example, Rocio spoke about the role of teachers and parents in children's education:

> En la escuela se encarga el maestro, pero en la casa nos encargamos nosotros, de verlo que los niños van a hacer. [In the school the teacher is in charge, but at home we (parents) are in charge, to see what the children are going to do.]

Teaching was not exclusive to the teacher. Parents knew that they were teachers at home and were expected to support the learning taking place at school. This is contrary to the idea that culturally and linguistically diverse families leave all the teaching to teachers and do little at home to support teachers' efforts.

Misconception #2: Latinx immigrants lack knowledge of U.S. expectations of parental involvement

Parents understood that there were pre-established expectations in U.S. schools that all parents should be involved in some capacity at the school. Parents knew that their involvement at home was important, but also that they were required to help and support the school's efforts. Immigrant parents learned these expectations from family members who lived in the U.S. before them, from neighbors, and from other parents at schools. They were also informed by teachers and parent support specialists. Some parents in California learned these expectations through educational advertisements on TV. These public ads provided ideas on how to help children at home and described the type of interactions that were expected at schools, including, for example, volunteering in the classroom, acting as a chaperone for field trips, or participating in school events and festivities.

Misconception #3: Latinx immigrant parents don't help with homework

During focus group interviews with teachers carried out as part of the larger study, a few teachers expressed frustration with parents, particularly parents of bilingual students, regarding homework completion. However, all parents in the study mentioned that helping with homework was crucial for the academic success of their children. Parents indicated that they helped with and checked their children's homework daily. Parents also reported approaching the teacher to ask for help when they

needed clarification with homework and seeking teachers' advice on how to better support their children at home.

Parents did encounter difficulties while helping their children, especially with homework in English. However, they sought help from their neighbors and family members. In some instances, they used a dictionary to translate assignments and understand them better. For example, Valentina in South Texas shared how difficult homework in English could be once her child started transitioning to English. Her strategy was to ask her neighbor for advice and help. Valentina said:

> Oh si mucho más difícil... yo empecé con mis niñas de aquí de primer año y luego les dejaban las tareas en inglés... y pues ahí voy con el vecino a preguntarle ¿Cuál?, ¿Cómo?, ¿Cómo le hacía?, porque yo no le entendía. [Oh yes, way more difficult…. I started school here with my girls since first grade, and they (the teachers) gave them homework in English… and well, there I went to the neighbor to ask Which? How? How did you do it? Because I couldn't understand.]

Like the parents Yosso describes (2005), these parents were wise and resourceful, seeking support and advice by using their community cultural wealth.

Misconception #4: Latinx immigrant parents lack the structure and discipline to create healthy learning habits

Contrary to this misconception, parent participants in my study fostered learning habits in their children, understanding that these skills were necessary for their children's academic success in school. For example, parents created routines. When children came back from school, parents provided a nutritious snack, determined a time for homework, and established bath time and bedtime routines. Rocio described the routine she created for her daughter:

> Pues yo le doy un tiempo, verdad, de que vea tele sus caricaturas, pero también le doy tiempo de que va a hacer su tarea y la mando a bañar temprano pa' dormir temprano para que ella al otro día este relajada su mente. [I give her time, right, so she can watch cartoons, but also I give her time to do her homework. And I tell her to take a bath early so she can go to bed early and the next day her mind is relaxed.]

Parents understood that routines and schedules help children to organize their time and create habits that later support them with their schoolwork.

Misconception #5: Latinx immigrant parents don't make the time to support learning for their children

Parents in the study knew about the curriculum their children were covering at school by talking to their children, asking questions, reviewing homework and tests, or revising school materials such as notebooks and worksheets that their children brought home. They reinforced the curriculum through such activities as teaching addition and subtraction and creating additional problems for their children for extra practice (Colegrove & Krause, 2017). Jazmin, a mother from the U.S.-Mexico border, devised new problems for her child. She would use dots and fingers as teaching tools for learning at home. She was very enthusiastic about the teaching and learning happening at home: "Así él va aprendiendo o le enseño como usar los deditos" [this way he is learning or I teach him using his fingers].

Most parents read with their children or promoted the children's own reading time at night before bed to help them develop a reading habit. Parents started these literacy practices as early as pre-kindergarten. Also, parents asked their children about their day after school or at dinnertime. This was a significant part of the day during which parents could hear about their children's daily experiences.

Strategies for Building Bridges

Latinx immigrant parents care greatly about their children's education despite the deficit discourses and stereotypes that mischaracterize their participation in U.S. schools. Parents understand that they need to be involved and participate in their children's education at home and school from early on in their children's school trajectory. However, there is a need to build a bridge between home and school that values respect and true collaboration (Doucet, 2011). This bridge needs to create spaces where families and teachers can listen to each other, with time and respect, and trust. The following are strategies that teachers can implement in their classrooms to better understand and communicate with families, and to build relationships that support children's learning.

Think of Parents as Partners

When teachers think of parents as their partners, they make the effort to be accessible. They want to bring parent and community knowledge into the classroom as much as possible. In my interviews with Latinx immigrant parents I often heard that teachers had a one-way relationship with them and where the teachers tried to keep them away from school. In one of the parent focus groups in California, for example, Mariana shared her frustration that many teachers build walls instead of inviting her into the educational process. Mariana was an immigrant mother from South America who has lived in the

U.S. for fifteen years. She arrived as a young adult and eventually earned an associate's degree at a local community college. She described herself as an involved and caring mother.

Even though she was formally educated, middle-class, and assertive when it came to her daughter's education, Mariana noticed that relationships with teachers seemed to be one-sided, particularly after kindergarten, when teachers became less and less approachable. She described this process as a "wall" being created between teachers and parents. All of the communication was through email. Mariana said that once a teacher approached her after dismissal to discuss her daughter's behavior, a problem of talking too much during instruction. Mariana wanted to speak with the teacher for a longer time, but was told she had to set up an appointment through email. Mariana was upset because the teacher felt free to approach her and address her concern at any time, even at pick-up time, which is stressful for parents. And yet when Mariana wanted to talk, she had to make an appointment. Mariana saw this as a major barrier:

> Mariana: Pero a mí me gustaría que, si se toma esa libertad, porque te ponen como una barrera ¿no?, sabes que, no, no este, con la profesora tienes que sacar cita, appointment si quieres hablar de algo ¿no?
> Kiyomi: Okay.
> Mariana: Si, porque así es, pero entonces que también para eso me saque appointment ella.
> Mariana: But I would like that if she takes the liberty, why do they set a barrier, no? You know with the teacher you need to make an appointment if you want to discuss something, right?
> Kiyomi: Okay.
> Mariana: Yes, that's the way it is, but then she needs to ask for an appointment with me too.

Mariana was not alone in feeling frustrated with the treatment she encountered from schools and teachers. Parents often felt like the relationship between home and school was one-sided, due mainly to language barriers between themselves and teachers. They tried to communicate with teachers and school personnel who only spoke English, but this type of communication was difficult. Parents told me that sometimes school staff pretended not to speak Spanish even when they were fluent in Spanish. Teachers also scheduled meetings at difficult times for parents, particularly those parents who worked two jobs or full-time jobs that did not end until the evening.

Latinx immigrant parents have a lot to learn from teachers and schools. And schools and teachers have a lot to learn from Latinx immigrant parents. Engagement that is respectful and meaningful is usually prompted by teachers. Teachers can send signals in various ways that they are interested in a reciprocal

partnership, not in a one-sided relationship. These ways include helping parents feel welcome in the classroom, initiating and maintaining ongoing communication with and listening to parents, and changing parent-teacher conferences from a formal discussion to a more conversational dialogue.

Make Parents Feel Welcome in the Classroom

At the beginning of the school year, teachers can invite families to visit the classroom so that parents and families get to know the teachers and staff as well as become familiar with the daily routines and curriculum. In addition to a specific, purposeful invitation, teachers can send home the class schedule in children's folders and invite parents to stop by and visit the classroom at any time.

Parents seem to feel more comfortable when the teacher invites them through a phone call or a face-to-face invitation at drop-off or pick-up. These direct forms of communication, rather than an email or note, are more personal to many parents and can communicate to families, from the very start, that teachers are willing to communicate with them.

Some teachers may prefer to invite parents to specific activities at specific times, such as to help during Centers Time. Centers are designated areas within the classroom that provides independent and self-directed activities for students to practice learning objectives. However, an invitation to volunteer in the classroom limits the time in which parents can come to the classroom and the activity they can see. I propose opening the whole school day, allowing parents to come during a work break or their lunch time. Parents in my study expressed interest in learning about their children's school day, and opening the classroom for visits anytime would be a way for parents to learn about their children's day-to-day experiences. Many teachers worry that this will produce chaos, but children get used to seeing their parents after a few minutes and they get excited about their parents visiting their classroom. As a teacher, I had an open-door policy and parents visited the classroom often. Some helped with whatever we were doing at the time. Others walked around and talked with students or read with them, and still others dropped off their children's lunches or stayed for lunch. The parents, the children, and I all enjoyed these visits.

One of the reasons I started these visits was because most of the parents in my classroom were immigrants and I wanted them to experience and learn about a typical day in my classroom and become familiar with classroom procedures. During these open or planned visits, teachers can be welcoming

by inviting parents to come in, offering them a space to drop their belongings, offering them a chair, walking them around, and providing non-verbal cues that show their excitement about their visit. This is especially important for teachers who speak a language different from the family. Parents know when they are wanted and welcomed and when teachers are making real efforts. Through these types of interactions, families will most likely start to feel more comfortable coming to school.

Listen to Parents and Communicate with Them

Parents are experts on their children and are the ones who know their children best. When parents visit the classroom, teachers can interact with them, engage in conversation, and gather information about the families. This type of informal communication is critical to bridging cultural gaps.

Conversation allows teachers to learn from parents. Shifting the role of the teacher to the role of learner (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) helps parents to see teachers as more supportive and open. Teachers can then use that knowledge to teach better and motivate students' learning and achievement. I found in my work that when parents felt that I was listening to them, they were more comfortable saying and sharing things about their child and about education. Teachers can open the conversation so parents can ask questions about aspects of schooling that concern them, or about which they are unsure.

Rethink the Parent/Teacher Conference

Parent-teacher conferences offer an auspicious time for teachers to build bridges with parents. During the first parent-teacher conference of the year, teachers can plan for extra time to talk with parents. In my own parent/teacher conferences as a teacher, I would talk to parents about my own family. I showed them pictures and postcards of my hometown. This small gesture seemed to prompt parents to talk about their own family and children. Teachers can also talk to parents as members of the community and ask questions about the larger community, asking parents for recommendations for restaurants or places to visit, for example.

Angela, a mother we interviewed in Texas, said how much she appreciated her first-grader's teacher, who showed interest in their lives and asked them questions about their lives outside of school. Angela explained:

> El maestro se involucraba mucho con los papás. ¿Señora cómo le ha ido? ¿Cómo está? ¿Cómo le va? 'Muy bien maestro,' y así como que daba la oportunidad. [The teacher gets very involved with the parents. How are you doing Mrs.? How are you? How are things going? "Very well

teacher," and that's how it gives the opportunity.]

These small exchanges show that teachers care for the parents and their lives.

Offering Latinx Children the Education They Deserve

Culturally and linguistically diverse parents historically have been positioned by the dominant group as lacking the necessary skills and abilities to succeed, or needing to change their approaches and practices to mirror those of the dominant group (Leonardo, 2009, 2015). As teachers and schools develop partnerships with immigrant parents and families, they will better be able to overcome, dismiss, or counter negative misconceptions. Moreover, teachers and schools benefit from assuming and recognizing that Latinx immigrant parents care about their children's academic achievement. When parents and teachers engage and interact, teachers can learn from parents about their deep interest in and care for schooling as well as the ways in which parents and families support children in their learning. As misconceptions give way to actual communication and partnerships with parents, transformation is possible.

It is my experience that as teachers change their perceptions of families and parents, they also improve their perceptions of the children. And when teachers see children in strength-based ways, they offer them better, higher quality, and more dynamic learning experiences. As teachers, schools, and the larger early childhood educational system adapt strength-based decision-making rather than acting on deficit and often false ideas about families, it becomes possible to offer all young children the dynamic and high-quality early learning experiences they deserve.

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