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

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Abstract

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

Keywords: Family engagement, preschool, leadership

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Theoretical Approaches and Literature Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Early Childhood Leadership

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ethics of Care in Leadership

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

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

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

Family Engagement and Early Childhood Leadership in the Pandemic
While the body of work around family engagement and leadership during the pandemic is relatively small, it reflects both challenges and opportunities created by the unprecedented global situation. In reflecting on community-centered care and school leadership during the pandemic, Alvarez Gutiérrez et al. (2022) identified how leaders and immigrant families co-constructed new meanings of home-school relationships, noting the following:
We found that the conditions and crisis imposed on education by COVID-19 brought new challenges, as well as *aperturas* for school leaders to navigate school-family relationships to support holistic aspects of student learning. Thus, examining "shifts" in leadership actions and perceptions in this context would offer implications and possibilities for community-centered leadership (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022, p.4).

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

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

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

Theorizing Pandemic as Portal

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

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

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

Methods and Data Sources

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

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

Attending to siblings and fostering intergenerational learning opportunities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

now that we forget that this person is a person and that they have feelings. We don't consider that, and I cut you to the quick. . . . You look at the student as a kid, as a person who has feelings.
 Over the years, she remembered this story of Carl, not only in talking about Nikkia or other students' experiences of elementary school but also in reflecting on her relationships and how she treated family members and older siblings.

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

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

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

As shown above, the extended relationships at Daia lasted beyond the bounds of preschool, as former families were welcomed back to the center as a safe place for their elementary-aged children to go during the day. While the foundations of these continued relationships were developed before the pandemic, as evidenced by Nikkia's story and the continuous engagement of former students and older siblings as part of the community, practices during the pandemic reflected Souto-Manning's (2021) call for greater familism and interdependence, particularly the question "How might [educators and researchers] better attend to siblings and foster intergenerational learning opportunities?" Home–school practices during the pandemic positioned older siblings, who are often overlooked stakeholders in home–school relationships, as vital members of the community. Thus, these relationships represent a rupture in normative home–school practices, illustrating relationships that extend beyond the limitations of the Western school year and beyond the walls of the school to build an intergenerational learning community that includes former students and older siblings.
While the rupture from normative practice might have begun before the pandemic, the foundation of the relationships helped sustain them during the pandemic, a theme that will be demonstrated throughout the findings. Thus, the pandemic did not necessarily function as a shift in practices (Alvarez Gutiérrez et al., 2022) but provided an opportunity to reflect on how Lisa was already cultivating an intergenerational learning community, and how these practices can continue past the pandemic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Collaboration(s)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion

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

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

Siblings and Intergenerational Learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Repositioning Parents and Caregivers in School Communities

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

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

Looking Ahead

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

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

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

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

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