JFDE

Journal of Family Diversity in Education

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Focus and Scope for JFDE

The Journal of Family Diversity in Education (JFDE) is hosted by the Institute for Community Justice and Wellbeing (ICJW) at Miami University's College of Education, Health & Society. In order to enact the mission of the ICJW to cultivate mutually beneficial, ethical, and transformative relationships among diverse community allies, this journal offers a rigorous exchange of new ideas, pedagogy, curricula, and activism in and around education endeavors.

The JFDE is committed to decolonizing and disrupting oppressive, deficit and racist ideologies by focusing on work that prioritizes schools, families, communities, scholars, and activists seeking to establish liberatory and humanized spaces.

The JFDE commits to:
- Featuring critical scholarship and the voices, experiences, and liberatory acts of historically marginalized families and communities with an emphasis on issues and concerns that impact the educational experiences of educators, students, families, and
- communities (i.e., anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies, racialized [i.e., anti-blackness] discipline and policing practices, housing insecurities, etc.)
- Creating and sustaining a JFDE leadership model that is inclusive of critically engaged, diverse scholars and community stakeholders.
- Supporting educators, community stakeholders, organizers, scholar activists and public scholarship by publishing and promoting timely work that advances social justice agendas.
- Offering a peer review process that is rigorous, transparent, and honors community voice.

We are pleased to offer a fully refereed, online journal that welcomes a wide range of innovative theoretical approaches. To support public scholarship, we are committed to providing accessible multimodal content. We encourage diverse scholarly and community contributions including research articles, podcasts, digital stories, essays and interviews, practitioner and community perspectives on practice, book and media reviews, and other interdisciplinary forms of scholarship or creative works.

History of JFDE

The Journal of Family Diversity in Education was started in 2014 by the Family Diversity Education Council. Under the leadership of the founding editors Dr. Tammy Turner-Vorbeck and Dr. Monica Miller Marsh the journal was initially hosted at Kent State University.

The founding editors developed the JFDE to honor those whose work attempted to shine light upon and oppose limited, hegemonic conceptions of families, particularly in the domain of family-school-community partnerships. The journal provided a much-needed outlet for scholars and practitioners working to analyze, critique, and redefine notions of family and the resultant implications for those partnerships.

The current editorial team seeks to carry on this legacy and commits to furthering this mission as outlined above in the focus and scope of the journal.

Journal of Family Diversity in Education

Editors' Note:

Featured Articles:

Editors' Note

The summer 2022 issue of JFDE features scholarship that illuminates the education experiences of several different historically marginalized communities and expands scholarly boundaries in multiple important ways. In this issue we are also pleased to introduce a new feature "Community Conversations" that seeks to make good on our editorial commitment to support, "educators, community stakeholders, organizers, scholar activists and public scholarship by publishing and promoting timely work that advances social justice agendas."

In the first article, Drs. María Isolina Bravo-Ruiz & Linda Flynn center the experiences of first-generation Latina/o/x parents "of children with disabilities navigating the special education system and how those experiences influenced their participation in the special education process." This work builds on earlier scholarship that centers Latina/o/x immigrant families by focusing specifically on the experiences Latina/o/x immigrant families have navigating special education systems and processes.

The second article also centers on an experience often overlooked in the literature – the role families, in this case HMong parents, play in supporting their undergraduate students. As Drs. Her and Gloria noted, "Because relatively little research exists about HMong parents' processes specific to higher education […], this exploratory study provides directives to university personnel in relation to parent and family involvement on campus and subsequent community-based engagement and programming." This study not only extends the work on HMong parents and families but it also moves beyond the K-12 schooling experience to discuss the importance of family support in the college-going experience of students.

The third article moves JFDE readers to consider the role that multilingual cultural assistants (MCAs) have as not only cultural brokers but as social justice leaders in and beyond schools. Through their collaborative work, Drs. Lewis Grant, Lee, Hoekje, and Escalante push us to broaden our preconceived notions of leadership by further conceptualizing the enactment of community cultural wealth from MCAs as a form of social justice leadership. As they note, "we challenge the traditional view of cultural brokers to reveal the leadership required to effectively advocate for and include multilingual families as valuable members of their children's school communities. Through social justice leadership […], MCAs in this study leveraged multilingual [community cultural wealth] in ways that expanded the traditional practices of schools."

Finally, we are proud to introduce a new feature for the JFDE, "Community Conversations." The JFDE editorial board strives to be an inclusive, affirming, and validating space for historically marginalized people, communities, and those working to resist oppressive policies and practices. Sometimes the issues facing these communities require a swift response and traditionally academic journals have been slow to respond. Of course, there is great value to be found in careful scholarship that has been through a rigorous peer-review process. But we also believe that the JFDE can be utilized

as a platform to help elevate diverse voices and address timely topics. To accomplish this goal, we are planning to occasionally include "Community Conversations" that seek to bring researchers, community members and activists into dialogue with one another about important issues.

Our first community conversation involved critical scholars and activists discussing the impact anti-LGBTQ+ policies are having on students, teachers, and building leaders. Over the last several years, we have seen a significant uptick in anti-LGBTQ+ policies across the nation. Such policies have, for instance, criminalized healthcare for trans youth, restricted trans students from participating in school sports, and restricted teachers' ability to discuss LGBTQ+ topics in the classroom[1]. JFDE readers will have access to the full transcript of this community conversation in this issue. We hope that after reading and gaining critical insights on the implications these anti-LGBTQ+ policies have on schools readers will feel compelled to act or to continue in their activism or advocacy work.

Collectively the work included in this volume challenges deficit and racist ideologies that perpetually surround historically marginalized families, parents, and communities. We hope that these pieces and community conversation serve as a reminder for JFDE readers to continue engaging in practices, research, and work that creates equitable, collectivist, liberatory, and humanizing spaces *with* and *alongside* historically marginalized families, parents, and communities.

In Solidarity,

Michael P. Evans & Érica Fernández
Co-Editors JFDE

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[1] ACLU. (2022, August 12). *Legislation affecting LGBTQ rights across the country.* ACLU. https://www.aclu.org/legislation-affecting-lgbtq-rights-across-country

Immigrant Latino Parents' Experiences and Participation in the Special Education Process

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Abstract

This inquiry examined the experiences of first-generation immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities while navigating the special education system and how those experiences influenced their participation in the special education process. The study included a purposive sample of 50 participants living in Louisiana homes where Spanish was the primary language. A researcher-created survey including Likert scale items and optional space for additional comments was used to collect the data. Quantitative data were examined using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data gathered from participants' comments were analyzed for patterns and themes. Although half of the participants had emerging English language skills, they communicated and often collaborated with school personnel. Most participants trusted professionals, had a positive perception of school personnel, and disagreed with statements suggesting that teachers knew best about their children's needs. Participation in the special education process was influenced by the children's disability and the parents' knowledge of the American education system, among other factors.

Keywords: Latino parents, immigrants, children with disabilities, parental participation, special education process

Parental involvement plays an essential role in the academic performance of students from all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jeynes, 2005, 2007). Parents can positively influence their children's academic achievement by helping them understand the purpose of education, teaching them effective academic socialization strategies, modeling and reinforcing desired school-related skills and behaviors, communicating their educational expectations, and supporting their children's educational aspirations (Englund et al., 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hong &

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Ho, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Stewart, 2008). If a child has a disability, parental involvement can also facilitate academic success by allowing parents to better understand their children's school-related needs and intervene on their behalf when necessary (McDonnall et al., 2010).

As Latinos become the largest ethnic minority group in the US (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), some educators may feel apprehensive about the potential intricacies of collaborating with Latino parents. Latino students attending American K–12 schools are at an increased risk of academic failure (Hurtado et al., 2010), presumably due to their emergent English language skills, lack of formal instruction before moving to the US, and low socioeconomic backgrounds (Abedi, 2004; Jimenez, 2004; Ruiz de Velasco & Fix, 2002). Although the positive role of parental involvement in the academic achievement of Latino students is clear (Jeynes, 2017; Kupermic et al., 2008; Marschall, 2006), some studies suggest that is a decreased level of parental involvement in the Latino population (Tinkler, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2009). Direct involvement in school activities allows parents to become familiar with schools' expectations for students and their parents. Thus, a lack of involvement in school activities—whether due to personal choice, contextual constraints related to parents' additional responsibilities (e.g., work schedule) and limited resources (e.g., lack of transportation), or the school's inability or unwillingness to support participation (e.g., not providing an interpreter) and accommodate parents (e.g., not making an effort to host meetings and events at a more convenient time)—may put Latino parents at a disadvantage when guiding their children in school-related matters. In the case of students with disabilities, when parents do not participate in school activities or formal meetings, there may be fewer opportunities for them to develop the social capital needed to build collaborative relationships with school personnel, and this may leave them without a voice in educational decisions made for their children.

Parental participation in the special education process encourages school accountability and increases the chance that students with disabilities will receive appropriate education and services (Trainor, 2010b). In addition to engaging in activities typically associated with parental involvement (e.g., assisting with or encouraging their children to complete school-related tasks), involved parents of children with disabilities can help educators better understand their students' strengths and needs and can lead to a collaboration with school staff to develop responsive educational plans. As such, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997; IDEIA, 2004) emphasizes the importance of parental participation in the education of children with disabilities, identifying parents as active participants in their children's educational decision-making process. However, participation in the special education process can pose significant challenges for many parents of children with disabilities (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). For many Latino parents of children with disabilities, the general challenges associated with participation in the special education process can be compounded by significant cultural and linguistic differences and immigration status. To facilitate these parents' participation in the education of their children with disabilities, including in the special education process, educators must understand immigrant Latino parents' behaviors and attitudes related to parental participation from a culturally responsive and responsible perspective that rejects stereotypes and considers the roles of all stakeholders in perpetuating or overcoming current challenges.

This study examines the experiences of first-generation immigrant Latino parents while navigating the American special education system and the impact of these experiences on their participation in their children's special education process. We developed a conceptual framework to help interpret findings from previous studies identified during the literature review within this context. We then used this framework as the foundation for the data collection tool used in our inquiry and for our analysis of the collected data.

Conceptual Framework

At the beginning of this study, we made four basic assumptions based on our general understanding and practical experiences with parents of children with disabilities, Latino parents, and immigrant parents in general. First, most parents of children with disabilities share similar experiences related to having a child with special needs; these experiences are independent of—although sometimes intensified by—race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and socioeconomic or immigration status. Second, many Latino parents share similar experiences when interacting with personnel at U.S. schools regardless of their children's disability status, although demographic characteristics might modify these experiences. Third, immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities share similar experiences with non-immigrant and non-Latino parents of children with disabilities. Finally, immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities may have somewhat different experiences when navigating the special education system than non-immigrant and non-Latino immigrant parents.

Based on these assumptions, our review of the literature targeted publications that addressed three main topics: (a) experiences of parents of children with disabilities while participating in the special education process, (b) issues related to Latino parents' involvement in their children's education, and (c) Latino parents' experiences with the special education process. A three-ring Venn diagram was used to compare findings on the selected topics and to facilitate our understanding of the conditions that might influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in their children's special education process. We identified four overarching categories: parents' knowledge of the American education system, communication with their children's school, perception of school personnel, and perception of their own role in their children's education. Figure 1 illustrates the resulting conceptual framework for understanding the factors that influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special education process.

Knowledge of the Education System

Recent Latino immigrants (or immigrants who entered the US as adults) generally lack information about fundamental aspects of the U.S. education system and how American schools function (Antony-Newman, 2019; Zarate, 2007). Consequently, when the time comes to enroll their children in school, many immigrant Latinos must learn how American schools function from scratch: how and where to register their child, school schedules, routines and subjects, lunch fees, necessary supplies, uniform rules, vaccination requirements, holidays, offered services, homework expectations, the school year's approximate start and end dates, and more. Consistent with having limited knowledge of these basic aspects of the American education system, it might be expected that most immigrant parents would also have insufficient knowledge of U.S. school policies and federal education laws. Parents' insufficient knowledge of school expectations, procedures, and policies makes it difficult for them to know the behaviors and skills they should cultivate to increase their children's and family's school-based social capital (Yasuike, 2019; Hill & Taylor, 2004). This can cause parents to miss some of the implications that school personnel's decisions and actions may have for their children's education (Al-Hassan & Gardner III, 2002; Bailey et al., 1999; Hill & Torres, 2010; Olivos, 2009).

For parents of children with disabilities, a crucial part of knowing the American education system is understanding the special education process, laws, and procedures. Parents who lack knowledge of special education laws typically feel less empowered and less confident when interacting with school professionals in regard to their children with disabilities (Burke et al., 2020). In comparison, understanding special education laws and procedures gives parents the tools they need to more actively participate in their children's education (Spann et al., 2003). For example, parents

who are knowledgeable about the special education process can analyze school professionals' actions and suggestions more objectively and can more quickly detect potential deviations from agreed-upon plans (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). As a result, they may feel more confident in their ability to contribute to their children's decision-making process and take a more active role during Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings (Fish, 2008).

Nevertheless, learning about special education laws and procedures can be an overwhelming task for parents. Even if schools dutifully offer parents written information about procedural safeguards and parental rights within the special education process, this information is typically written at a post-college level, which is not suitable for most parents (Mandic et al., 2012). Furthermore, Latino and non-Latino parents of children with disabilities have reported that professionals often tell them about what they need to know and then leave them to find the information on their own (Casillas et al., 2017). Immigrant Latinos' reduced knowledge of general features of the American education system can make it more challenging for them to access specific information about the special education process, laws, and procedures. Without knowing where to go for guidance, immigrant Latino parents may become frustrated and disempowered by their interactions with school personnel and their own inability to contribute to their children's educational decision-making process, as suggested by IDEA. For instance, in a study involving Latina mothers of children with autism spectrum disorders, Rios et al. (2020) found that only a few participants knew where to find information about special education despite believing that knowing more about the special education system would enable them to feel less stressed about participating in their children's IEP meetings. Immigrant Latino parents may need assistance accessing accurate information about what takes place at their children's school or what they need to know to support their children's academic progress (Wong-Villacres, 2019).

Parent-School Communication

Regular communication between parents and school professionals is an essential aspect of parental involvement in their children's education and is therefore very relevant to the academic success of children with disabilities. While communication is a two-way street, studies suggest that parents must be able to effectively convey what they know and share their concerns and suggestions regarding their children's educational program with educators and service providers before their children can benefit from any parent-school communication (Fish, 2006; Mueller et al., 2008). English- and non-English-speaking parents of children with disabilities have consistently reported facing tremendous challenges in communicating with schools due to school personnel's condescending attitudes, insufficient knowledge about how to teach children with disabilities, inconsistent attempts to communicate with parents about everyday incidents or essential aspects of their children's education, and unwillingness to consider parent input when making decisions about students' educational programing (Burke et al., 2021).

For immigrant Latinos, another factor that frequently hinders parent-school communication is language differences—specifically, parents' emerging English proficiency (Langdon, 2009; Salas, 2004). Latino parents of children with disabilities have often expressed a desire to maintain regular communication with their children's teachers and to collaborate with school personnel to support their children's learning and growth (Casillas et al., 2017). However, the failure of schools to provide information in Spanish to Latino parents with emerging English language skills perpetuates confusion about school procedures (Smith et al., 2008), blocking opportunities for these parents to voice their concerns or contribute to their children's educational decision-making process. In schools with no trained interpreters, bilingual staff (e.g., Spanish teachers, paraprofessionals) often function as "ad hoc interpreters" and are called to facilitate communication between parents and other school personnel as needed; however, the staff is rarely trained in official school procedures, instructional methods, or

special education processes (Colomer, 2010). Furthermore, parents may be forced to use their older children or other members of the family as interpreters (Orellana et al., 2003), despite them lacking the background knowledge and field-specific language skills needed to accurately interpret information about sensitive educational decisions and legal aspects of the special education process. In either case, inadequate interpretation services can create misunderstandings, further obstructing communication between immigrant Latino parents and school personnel (Cheatham, 2010). Finally, although Latino parents of children with disabilities assign great value to communication with school professionals (Casillas et al., 2017), ongoing financial stress and depression—among other challenges associated with the immigration process—may cause them to disengage from their children's academic activities (Gilbert et al., 2017). The roadblocks they face while attempting to learn about the American education system and special education regulations combined with the personal struggles that come with being an immigrant—especially during the first few years—may weaken some Latino parents' ability or willingness to communicate with school in the style or with the frequency educators might expect.
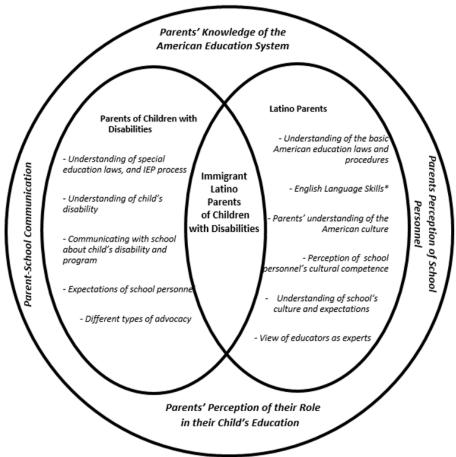
Perceptions of School Personnel

Parents' perceptions of school personnel are greatly influenced by their assessment of how school personnel treat children and their families and how well the services they offer to children with disabilities match parents' expectations (Hughes, et al., 2008; Wagner & Katsiyannis, 2010; Zionts et al, 2003). Among immigrant Latino parents, cultural beliefs and values may further shape their interpretations of educators' actions. Immigrant Latino parents' perceptions of school personnel's cultural competence, or lack thereof, might also influence their assessment of teachers' ability to understand and respect parents' expectations for their children (Harry, 1992; Hughes et al., 2008). In a study involving low-income Latinos, Miller et al. (2016) found that Spanish-dominant Latino parents have lower perceptions of American educators than non-Latino parents. This is likely related to previous findings suggesting that, when sensing disapproval of their cultural values, customs, and childrearing practices in teachers' comments and attitudes, immigrant Latino parents tend to develop a negative view of school and special education programs (Salas, 2004), which may make them less inclined to participate in the special education process. Likewise, immigrant Latino parents' understanding of American culture can shape how they interpret the decisions educators make for their children (Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Trainor, 2010a).

Perception of Their Role as Parents

Parents view their role in the education of their children with disabilities according to their general understanding of the expectations that the education system has of parent participation in the educational decision-making process as well as their own beliefs about what parent-school interactions should look like and their ideas about effective ways to advocate for their children (Trainor, 2010 a,b). Studies have identified some, presumably culturally based, attitudes and behaviors that are believed to shape Latino parents' perceptions of their role in their children's education. For instance, Latino parents' views of educators as experts (Hughes et al., 2008; Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001) may lead them to adopt a more passive role in their children's education than expected within the American special education system. Latinos' tendency to view the role of parents as "advisors" who supervise the completion of homework and encourage children to work hard and be respectful and well-behaved (Smith et al., 2008) may seem insufficient to many American educators, who may interpret this position as a lack of commitment to their children's education. For new Latino immigrants transitioning into a new socio-cultural context, the differences in expectations for parental involvement and advocacy may become overwhelming for both parents and teachers (Zarate, 2007). Traditionally, studies have shown that Latino parents view their role as parents as being responsible for ensuring that their children are respectful, responsible, and committed to their education (Cohen,

2013). They may be confused by the expectation that they be an active participant and partner in (academically) educating their children. Although these findings might be interpreted as cultural traits, it is important to keep in mind that the definitions of Latinos used in most studies are rather limited (e.g., all participants came from the same country of origin or shared the same ethnicity, had the same educational socio-economic status, or lived in the same geographical area) and may not represent the cultural, linguistic, and social diversity actually found in this subgroup. Still, research suggests that an increasing awareness of philosophical differences and a growing disappointment with the American education system based on their own educational experiences before moving to the US (e.g., Leidy et al., 2010) may cause some immigrant Latino parents to struggle to comply with mainstream expectations of parental involvement.

Figure 1
Framework for Understanding the Factors that Influence Immigrant Latino Parent Participation in the Special Education Process

By integrating information about the experiences of non-Latino and Latino parents with the American education system and special education process, this conceptual framework explores how knowledge of the American education system (including understanding of the special education process), parents' perceptions of school personnel, parent-school communication, and parents' perceptions of their own role in their children's education might influence the participation of immigrant Latino parents in the special education process of their children with disabilities. Although the factors included in this conceptual framework emphasize family knowledge and actions, it is also

important to consider the role that educational organizations and educators play in facilitating or hindering parental participation in their children's education. Understanding how the aforementioned factors influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in their children's special education process is essential for schools to develop and implement the supports that immigrant Latino parents need to be more actively involved in the education of their children with disabilities.

Methods

This study examines how the factors discussed in the proposed conceptual framework influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in their children's special education process. To accomplish this, we sought to answer the following questions:

- What experiences do immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities (ages 3–12) have when navigating the special education system?
- How do these experiences influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special education process of their children with disabilities (ages 3–12)?

Instrumentation

To date, most studies that target immigrant Latino parents' interactions with U.S. schools have involved only a few participants and have followed qualitative research designs focused on reporting anecdotal experiences shared by parents. To advance our understanding of the relevance and generalizability of current knowledge about immigrant Latino parents' experiences, this study sought to obtain and analyze quantitative data from a larger number of participants from a more extensive geographic location (i.e., multiple cities and school districts across the chosen state). To do this, a survey exploring the potential factors identified in the literature review and included in the proposed conceptual framework was developed. Because only one researcher was bilingual and most parents and parent advocates with expertise in the special education process in the region are English monolinguals, we prepared the first set of survey items in English. We requested feedback about the relevance of each item before translating them to the Spanish language. Two English-speaking parents of children with disabilities reviewed the survey questions for clarity. Changes were then made in response to their feedback. Next, an expert panel consisting of eight professionals from special education and parent advocacy fields assessed the face validity and appropriateness of the survey items. A combination of the back-translation method (Brislin, 1970; Tyupa, 2011) with decentering and multiple forward translations was then used to generate the Spanish version of the survey. This process allowed for culturally relevant changes and a more accurate representation of the translated constructs. The survey items were translated from English to Spanish and back multiple times by five proficient bilingual speakers originating from different Latin American countries. The first author reviewed the survey for translation discrepancies until consensus on a final version of the survey was reached. A panel of bilingual English-Spanish educators, counselors, and parent advocates assessed the instrument for face validity and cultural appropriateness. A group of immigrant Latino parents also reviewed the Spanish version of the survey for clarity. Adjustments were then made in response to reviews of both versions of the instrument. None of the parents who assisted in the construction of the survey (i.e., revising, providing feedback) participated in the study.

Instrument Description

Eight survey items where designed to explore the frequency and quality of parental participation in the special education process: (1) I visit, call, or send notes about my child to the school; (2) I tell teachers when I have a concern about my child; (3) I ask teachers about school activities and events;

(4) I speak with teachers about my child's progress; (5) I attend my child's IEP meetings; (6) I tell teachers when I disagree with their decisions about programs and services for my child; and (7) the teachers and I make decisions together about what is best for my child, and (8) 8- at IEP meetings, I let the teachers make most of the decisions about my child's education. The remaining 25 items collected information about factors that potentially influenced participation (see Table 1 for survey items). All items provided four answer choices (0 = Never, 1 = Rarely, 2 = Frequently, 3 = Always). A demographic information section was attached to the survey to collect data about parents and their children with disabilities. Space was provided at the end of the survey for participants to add (optional) comments about to their experiences with the special education process to ensure that participants had the opportunity to communicate any information they deemed relevant to the study and to compensate for important factors that the researchers might have unintentionally excluded from the survey.

Instrument Reliability

A reliability analysis involving a single-administration method was conducted to measure the survey's internal consistency. Initially, the survey items were grouped into six conceptual categories. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to measure the internal consistency of the scales (sets of items) to measure the potential factors that influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special education process as identified in the conceptual framework. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .70 were used to determine the statistical significance of correlations. Items that significantly lowered the alpha coefficient for a scale were eliminated. A high Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicated a high level of consistency in the scale, while a low Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicated weak correlations among the items in the scale; that is, these items were unlikely to measure the same latent variable and therefore could not be treated as a *factor* in further statistical analysis. Cronbach's alpha levels for parents' participation in their children's special education process ($\alpha = 0.86$), parents' knowledge of the American education system ($\alpha = 0.85$), parents' perception of school personnel ($\alpha = 0.71$), and parents' English language communication skills ($\alpha = 0.84$) indicated a strong correlation among the items in each scale. These scales were treated as *factors* in the inferential statistical analysis. In contrast, *parent-school communication* ($\alpha = 0.44$) and *parents' perception of their own role in their child's education* ($\alpha = 0.15$) were not included in the inferential analysis due to low Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which suggested a weak correlation among the items included in these scales.

Participants

Selection criteria for participants in this study included Louisiana residents who (a) were born in Mexico, Central or South America, or Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries; (b) were raised in Spanish speaking families originating from the aforementioned regions; (c) spoke Spanish as their primary language at home and with close relatives or friends; and (d) were parents of children (ages 3–12) with disabilities receiving special education or related services under Part B of IDEA. This study was designed and conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, most interactions with agencies and participants occurred face-to-face to facilitate communication and help strengthen the researchers' relationship with the Latino community in the region.

We submitted information about the study to school districts, disability-related agencies, and community organizations across Louisiana. Collaborating gatekeepers distributed an invitation to participate in the study to self-identified Latino and Hispanic parents of children with disabilities (ages 3–12) in their databases. We also disseminated information about the study through Spanish-language media; specifically, flyers were posted at local clinics, English-as-a-second-language learning centers, Latino businesses, and churches in areas with relatively high concentration of Latinos in the state.

We offered potential participants the choice to receive and return the survey via regular mail or to complete the survey during a face-to-face session with the first author or a trained bilingual staff member from the collaborating agency. Two weeks after mailing the surveys, we contacted participants to confirm that they had received the package, and we mailed written reminders to complete the survey four weeks after the first package was sent. As an incentive for participating in the study, we offered shopping cards for $20.00 and made surveys available to parents in both English and Spanish. A possible reluctance to participate in the study due to issues related to immigration status was addressed by assuring parents that information regarding legal status would not be collected. Survey-reading assistance in Spanish and English was offered and provided upon request during face-to-face meetings.

Sample

A purposive sample of 50 immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities living in Louisiana was used in this study. Of the participants, 46 were female, and four were male. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 51 years ($M = 35.8$, $SD = 7.4$). Half of the participants ($n = 25$) were originally from Central America, 16 (32%) were from Mexico, four (8%) were from South America, and four (8%) were from Spanish-speaking Caribbean countries. This sample distribution resembled the demographics of country of origin reported for the Latino population in the state. Twelve (24%) participants had completed high school, 11 (22%) had some college education, and 11 (22%) had completed college or more. Of the remaining participants (n = 16; 32%), one had had no schooling, 10 had had up to six years of schooling, and four had completed middle school. The number of years that the participants had lived in the US ranged from four to 43 years ($M = 13.18$, $SD = 9.12$). Data regarding their children's free or reduced lunch status was requested, but more than half of the participants did not provide it. Income information was not requested to avoid generating distrust in potential participants, as some of the surveys were sent home through school district personnel who served as gatekeepers.

Of the participants' children with disabilities, 35 (70%) were male, and 15 (30%) were female. The ages of the children ranged from three to 12 years ($M = 6.44$, $SD = 1.67$). The average age of the participants' children at the time of placement in special education was 4.06 years. Fifteen children (30%) had speech and language disorders, 13 (26%) had autism spectrum disorders, and 22 (44%) had other disabilities (specific learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, another health impairment, multiple disabilities, a hearing impairment, a visual impairment, or a traumatic brain injury). Nine participants (n = 9) had more than one child diagnosed with a disability. Three of these nine participants completed the survey focused on their child with language and speech disorders; three (n = 3) participants focused on their child with autism, and the other three (n = 3) focused on their child with other disabilities. Thirty-eight (76%) participants reported that their children qualified for free or reduced school meals. The participants' children received special education services in 11 different public school systems, including the districts that provide services to the largest percentage of Latino students in the state.

Data Collection and Analysis

Of the 50 completed surveys, 39 were completed during face-to-face meetings, and 47 surveys were completed in Spanish. Sixteen (n =16) participants wrote additional comments, and 19 participants verbally relayed specific experiences for the researcher to record. Survey data was entered anonymously in data collection sheets. The *Statistical Analysis System* (SAS; 9.2 version) was used to conduct the descriptive and inferential analyses of the survey data. The maximum missing number of responses per demographic variable was four, and the maximum number of missing responses per survey item was two. All missing data appeared to be random. Data was organized and analyzed

following the aforementioned conceptual framework for understanding the factors that influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special education process.

Frequency distributions were reported for all survey items. To answer our question regarding the experiences of immigrant Latino parents when participating in the special education process, we grouped the participants' answers into situations that they have experienced (Frequently/Always) and situations that they have not experienced (Never/Rarely). The numerical value attached to the responses was utilized to calculate means and standard deviations. A score of zero (0) was interpreted as the least desirable response, while a score of three (3) was interpreted as the most desirable response. For items regarding situations that were considered challenges, the scores were reversed to fit this interpretation pattern. Overall, measures of central tendency and variability were calculated for scales that showed adequate levels of internal consistency. Following procedures recommended by Creswell (2007), we segmented information collected in the *Comments* section and assigned it to emerging categories. Data was examined for contributing factors and contextual conditions that influenced the participants' responses to their experiences. We then grouped comments into thematic categories. Comments that did not fit under emergent themes were considered separately.

Inferential statistics were then used to examine the relationship between the parents' experiences and their participation in the special education process. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine statistical significance. To compensate for the relatively small sample size, we used adjusted squared regression coefficients (adjusted β) to determine the effect size (Ferguson, 2009). Two multiple regression models were developed. The first model measured how well parents' knowledge of the American education system, perception of school personnel, and English language communication skills predicted their participation in the special education process. The second regression expanded the first model by controlling for parents' level of education, number of years in the US, and children's disabilities.

We divided demographic variables into sub-categories: (a) parents' level of education (high school or less, at least some college), (b) parents' length of time living in the US (10 years or less, over 10 years), and (c) child's disability (autism, speech and language impairments, and other disabilities). Effect sizes for statistically significant relationships were then calculated.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the association between immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special education process and four items intended to represent presumed cultural experiences. Chi-square statistics were computed to test for associations between selected demographic variables and items found to have a statistically significant relationship with parental participation in the special education process. Due to the size of the sample, we divided participants into two groups: those who experienced the situation reflected in the items for all inferential tests (*frequently/always*) and those who did not (*never/rarely*). This allowed us to have a greater number of participants in each category, facilitating the statistical analysis.

Results

Findings from the data analysis were organized according to the specific research question they addressed.

Experiences of Immigrant Latino Parents When Navigating the Special Education System

On average, participants reported participating frequently and actively in their children's special education process (*M = 2.26, SD = 0.65*) and having a positive perception of school personnel working with their children (*M = 2.32, range = 1.00 - 3.00*). Participants believed they understood the American education system (*M = 2.13, range = 0.83 - 3.00*), including how schools function and other

processes related to the education of their children with disabilities. However, half of the participants (n = 25) reported having emerging English language communication skills (*M = 1.56, SD = 1.10, range = 0-3*). Table 1 summarizes the data reported by the participants.

Table 1
Immigrant Latino Parents' Experiences while Navigating the Special Education System

	Never/ Rarely		Frequently/ Always	
	f	*%*	*f*	*%*
Parents' knowledge of the American education system				
I understand how special education programs work.	13	26.00	37	74.00
I know about the special education services available to my child.*	15	30.61	34	68.86
I think I understand my child's disability.	8	16.00	42	84.00
I understand how American schools work.	18	36.73	31	62.69
I understand what I am supposed to do during IEP meetings.	8	16.00	42	84.00
Parent-school communication				
Somebody at school explains the information discussed at the IEP meeting in a way I can understand.	11	22.00	65	78.00
I have enough opportunities to communicate with my child's teachers between IEP meetings.	13	26.00	37	74.00
I receive invitations to visit my child's school for different events, not just IEP meetings.	11	22.00	39	78.00
Having so many professionals at the IEP meeting makes me uncomfortable.	47	94.00	3.0	6.00
I have problems understanding the information shared in the IEP meetings.	32	64.00	18	36.00
Parents' English language communication skills				
I speak with my child's teachers in English.	22	44.00	28	56.00
I use an interpreter to communicate with school staff during IEP meetings.	23	46.00	27	54.00
I feel uncomfortable asking questions because of my limited English.	26	52.00	124	48.00
Parents' perception of school personnel				
School personnel pay attention to my opinions about what my child needs.	9	18.00	41	82.00
School personnel have a positive attitude towards my child and my family.	5	10.00	45	90.00
I feel that the teachers speak down to me.	44	88.00	6.0	12.00
I trust all of the teachers working with my child.	4	8.00	46	92.00
The teachers and I expect the same things from my child.	5	10.00	45	90.00
The teachers understand my family's culture or lifestyle.*	24	48.97	25	50.41

The teachers give me suggestions about how I can help my child at home.	11	22.00	39	78.00
School personnel support my initiative to invite friends or relatives to my child's IEP meetings for additional support.	14	28.00	36	72.00

Parents' perception of their own role in their child's education

I believe that my child's teachers may think that I am interfering too much with their work with my child.**	37	77.09	11	22.67
I don't want teachers to think that I am being disrespectful.	36	72.00	14	28.00
I think that teachers know best about my child's needs.*	31	63.27	18	36.41
I find it difficult to confront school personnel about my child's educational needs.	37	74.00	13	26.00

Two major themes emerged from the comments section at the end of the survey. Participants' comments described either their favorable experiences with school professionals or the challenges they have faced while participating in their children's special education process. Most comments made by the participants referred to experiences not explicitly addressed in the survey. The participants (n = 10) described school professionals as helpful and expressed appreciation for the efforts that professionals have made to educate them about the special education process and include them in decision-making regarding their children's programming. Some participants (n = 4) specifically commented on teachers' pleasant personalities and loving attitudes towards their children.

Regarding challenges, some participants (n = 6) elaborated on how their inability to speak English has made it difficult for them to communicate with school personnel and help their children with schoolwork. A smaller number of participants (n = 4) reported having difficulties participating in school-related activities due to a lack of time or transportation issues. Other participants (n = 3) reiterated how their difficulty understanding their children's disabilities and IEP procedures has obstructed their participation in the special education process. Some participants (n = 8) complained about the poor understanding of disabilities exhibited by district administrators, principals, teachers, and service providers. Nine participants (n = 9) were dissatisfied with special educators' instructional skills and how special education programs are run. Some participants (n = 6) disagreed with instructional goals in the IEPs and felt that schools do not allow enough time for IEP meetings. A few participants (n = 3) discussed the challenges they have encountered during their children's evaluation and placement processes, while others (n = 3) commented on how their condition as immigrants has made it more difficult for them to participate in their children's special education process.

Influence of Experiences on Immigrant Latino Parents' Participation

In the first regression model, parents' knowledge of the education system, perception of school personnel, and English language communication skills explained about 33% of the variance in parental participation in the special education process ($R^2 = .327$, $F_{(3,42)} = 6.81$, $p < .001$). However, only English language communication skills ($b = .19$, $t = 2.19$, $p = .03$) significantly predicted parental participation in the special education process, showing a medium effect size ($F_{(1,42)} = 4.80$, adjusted $\beta = .11$). In other words, having stronger English language communication skills made parents more likely to participate in the special education process.

The second regression model ($R^2 = 0.57$, $F = 7.18$, $p < .001$) explained about 57% of the variance in parental participation in the special education process. Parents' knowledge of the American education system ($b = .35$, $t = 2.41$, $p = .02$) and their child's disability ($b = 0.7$, $t = 3.90$, $p < .001$) were

the strongest predictors of parental participation in the special education process and accounted for 29% and 15% of the variance, respectively. Further analysis regarding the effect of the type of disability showed that, while holding *other disabilities* constant, the regression was significant for autism spectrum disorders ($b = .70$, $t = 3.90$, $p < .001$). In other words, parents who reported having a child with autism were more likely to participate in the special education process. In comparison, having a child with speech and language impairments ($bi = -.05$, $t = -.27$, $p = .79$) resulted in a lower parent participation score than having a child with other disabilities. However, no significant statistical differences were found in the participation of parents in these two groups. Small effect sizes for the perception of school personnel ($b = 0.35$, $t = 2.25$, $p = 0.03$; adjusted $\beta = .07$, $F_{(1,38)} = 5.07$, $p = 0.03$) and English language communication skills ($b = .20$, $t = 2.06$, $p = .04$; adjusted $\beta = .05$, $F_{(1,38)} = 3.59$, $p = .06$) showed weak relationships between these variables and parental participation in the special education process. Despite being statistically significant, these two variables may not have significantly influenced parental participation in a practical sense. A positive ($b = .25$, $t = 1.55$) but not statistically significant relationship was identified between parents' participation in the special education process and the number of years they have lived in the US (adjusted $\beta = .04$, $F_{(1, 38)} = 2.42$, $p = .13$). Parents' level of education (adjusted $\beta = .12$, $F_{(1, 38)} = 8.45$, $p = .27$) contributed to only 1.2% of the variance in this regression and did not predict parental participation in the special education process (Table 2).

Table 2

Influence of Latino Parents' Experiences and Demographic Variables on Parent Participation in the Special Education Process – Test Results by Predictor

Predictor	df	Type III SS	MS	B	SE	Adjusted β	F	t	p
Regression Model 1									
Parents' knowledge of the education system	1	1.29	1.29	0.33	0.16	0.10	4.02	2.01	0.051
Parents' English language communication skills	1	1.54	1.54	0.19	0.08	0.11	4.80	2.19	0.03*
Parents' perception of school personnel	1	0.65	0.66	0.24	0.16	0.05	2.05	1.43	0.16
Regression Model 2									
Parent's level of education	1	1.92	1.92	1.91		0.12	8.45		0.27
Parents' time in the US	1	0.55	0.55	0.55		0.04	2.42		0.13
Child's disability	2	2.42	1.21	1.21		0.15	5.32		< 0.01*
Parents' knowledge of the education system	1	4.56	4.56	4.56		0.29	20.08	2.41	0.02*
Parents' English language communication skills	1	0.82	0.82	0.82		0.05	3.59	2.06	0.05*

Parents' perception of school personnel	1	1.15	1.15	1.15	0.07	5.07	2.25	0.03*

An ANOVA ($F_{(1,48)}$ = 4.15, p = .05) indicated a lower parental participation mean score for parents who had difficulty confronting school personnel about their children's needs (m = 1.96, sd = .80) compared to those who did not have this difficulty (m = 2.37, sd = .57). Conversely, the presumably culturally based attitudes and behaviors considered in our conceptual framework, such as worrying that teachers think parents were interfering too much in their work ($F_{(1,46)}$ = 2.35, p = .13), being concerned about appearing disrespectful to teachers ($F_{(1,48)}$ = .69, p = .41), and believing that teachers understand their children's needs better than parents ($F_{(1,47)}$ = .12, p = .73), did not affect parental participation in their children's special education process. Results from the chi-square test of independence suggest that participants were equally likely to have difficulty confronting school personnel about their children's educational needs regardless of their level of education (X^2 (1, N = 50) = 1.25, p = .26), time living in the US (X^2(1, N = 49) = .48, p= .49), or their child's disability type (X^2(2, N = 50) = 1.15, p = .56).

Discussion

Contrary to previous research showing low levels of parental involvement among the Latino population (Tinkler, 2002), outcomes from this study showed that most participants frequently engaged in activities related to their children's special education process. Parents of children with disabilities require increased support and a clear expectation of their participation in their children's education. Their unique circumstances may motivate immigrant parents of children with disabilities to seek information and learn about the education system, and this may lead to greater confidence and elicit more active engagement in their children's education. Therefore, the results from this study cannot be compared to earlier findings regarding parental involvement among the general Latino population.

The conceptual framework developed for this study included four overarching factors that influence immigrant Latino parents' participation in their children's special education process: parents' knowledge of the American education system, parents' perception of school personnel, parent-school communication, and parents' perception of their own role in their children's education. Consistent with the framework, this study found immigrant Latino parents' knowledge of the American education system to be a strong predictor of their participation in the special education process. Participants reported knowing about the American educational system and understanding information shared during IEP meetings. These findings were somewhat unexpected, as one-third of the participants admitted to often struggling to understand the information received at these meetings. Factors such as knowing general education protocols, understanding special education practices and procedures, and awareness of services available to children with disabilities seemed to empower participants to take on a more active role in their children's special education process and to act as decision-making advocates for their children. This outcome supports findings from earlier studies, which have suggested a connection between Latino parents' knowledge of educational services and their participation in special education decision-making (Bailey et al., 1999).

The second factor identified in our conceptual framework was parent-school communication. Previous studies have suggested that emerging English proficiency may restrict parents' access to information about the American education system (Langdon, 2009) and reduce networking opportunities with school personnel and disability-related agencies, both of which are essential for parents to learn about programs and services available to their children. Approximately half of the

parents participating in this study needed interpreting assistance during IEP meetings. Native English-speaking, non-Latino, and non-immigrant parents have also reported being confused during IEP meetings. Coming from immigrant parents, these findings are especially problematic because parents' ability or inability to communicate in English can shape the quality of their participation in their children's special education process. Participants' difficulty understanding information shared during meetings and when participating in the decision-making process may have resulted from poor-quality interpreting services (Cheatham, 2010). This explanation seems particularly likely for participants whose children attend school systems with small Latino populations where interpreting services are scarce and limited access to qualified personnel forces districts to rely on untrained interpreters with minimal understanding of the special education process and terminology.

Almost half of the participants were uncomfortable asking questions about their children's performance or the special education process due to their emerging English skills. Parents' sense of self-efficacy is associated with their ability to communicate with school personnel (Al-Hassan & Gardner III, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). When participation is expected to involve mastery of the English language and a knowledge of the special education system—which they may not possess—immigrant Latino parents may find it difficult to effectively communicate with educators, thus generating feelings of incompetence and discouraging them from participating in their children's special education process. Notably, while the outcomes of this study confirm the role of English language skills in immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special education process, the effect size for this variable was smaller than expected. Some of the participants' comments reiterated the challenges created by their emerging English skills (e.g., communicating with school personnel and helping their children with homework). However, the information shared was practical in nature and did not elaborate on the social-emotional repercussions these challenges have had on them as individuals or whether these challenges have affected their sense of identity. Unlike previous generations of linguistically diverse parents studied in educational research, today's immigrants have more options for accessing information or communicating with school personnel. Immigrant Latino parents often use platforms such as WhatsApp, Google translate, and YouTube to communicate with friends and family, complete daily routines, find information of interest, and even coordinate and communicate about their children's health care needs with professionals (Silverman-Lloyd et al., 2020; Wong-Villacres et al., 2019). The increasing accessibility of similar, relatively inexpensive technology may empower today's immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities to inform themselves about the special education process, thus helping them participate in their children's education more frequently and actively than their predecessors. The participants' relatively higher educational levels might also make it easier for them to use technology to compensate for their emerging English skills.

Perception of school personnel was found to be a significant predictor of parental participation in the special education process. Nevertheless, the small effect size suggests that it may not be as strong a motivator as other factors explored in this study. Despite almost half of the participants believing that teachers do not understand their families' cultures and lifestyles, most parents had a favorable perception of school personnel. They trusted their children's teachers, considered school personnel to be supportive of their children and families, believed that teachers share their expectations for their children, and believed that school personnel listen to their opinions about their children. Some participants even emphasized teachers' positive attitudes toward their children and attempts to help parents feel comfortable with the special education process. Collectively, these findings challenge the belief among some educators regarding the unarguable need to know the culture and native language of diverse families to develop partnerships with them. They suggest that immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities may not always view educators' cultural competence as an indispensable requirement for collaboration. Instead, attitudes towards children and families may have a greater impact on parents' perceptions of school personnel. This supposition

follows results from earlier studies in which (non-Latino) parents identified teachers' attitudes as critical factors in their assessments of the quality of special education programs (Fish, 2008).

While most studies exploring Latino parents' perceptions of special educators have been conducted in regions with a high concentration of Latinos (e.g., Marschall, 2006; Ramirez, 2003; Shah, 2009), Latinos constitute less than 5% of the student population in Louisiana. Participants may not have expected educators to know about their native culture and may have developed compensatory strategies. Moreover, earlier studies of Latino parents of children with disabilities often used much smaller samples than the one used in the current study, which could account for some differences in their results.

The final factor considered in our conceptual framework was parents' perception of their own role in their children's education. For this study, we created survey items that explored cultural values presumed to hinder the participation of Latino parents in the special education process. Notably, most participants disagreed with the statement regarding teachers knowing best about their children's needs. They denied being concerned about appearing disrespectful or the possibility of teachers thinking that they (parents) interfered too much in their work with their children. These responses contradict earlier suggestions of a tendency among Latinos to look up to special education professionals as "experts" (Hughes et al., 2008) and to defer to school professionals, thus limiting their participation in making decisions about their children's education (Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001). Even for the minority of participants who agreed with one or more of these statements, these presumably culturally based experiences did not appear to make a significant difference in their participation in the special education process. Instead, this finding is more consistent with recent studies that have described how some Latino parents have learned to successfully navigate the special education system and have intentionally developed strategies to participate more actively in their children's special education process (Angell & Solomon, 2017; Kervick, 2017; Poza et al., 2014)

The unique characteristics of the sample used in this study may assist in explaining these discrepancies. Because 44% of participants had at least some college education, one might conclude that having a higher level of education may have caused this group of immigrant Latino parents to feel more self-confident and be more assertive in their dealings with educators despite remnants of contradicting cultural beliefs. Furthermore, the overrepresentation of parents of children with autism in the sample may have introduced an additional bias, skewing the data and causing *having a child with autism* to appear as a strong predictor of parental participation in the special education process. Additionally, the effect of children's disabilities on parental participation in the special education process is likely to be unrelated to the diversity issues often emphasized in research on multicultural education. Many of the disability-related challenges experienced by immigrant Latino parents have also been experienced by non-immigrant and non-Latino parents of children receiving special education services in the US (Burke et al., 2021). Therefore, it appears sensible to say that the participation of immigrant Latino parents in the special education process is influenced by many factors, some of which transcend cultural and linguistic differences and immigration status.

Finally, the length of time immigrants have lived in their host country is associated with the acculturation and language acquisition processes (Leidy et al., 2010), both of which may affect all four factors included in our conceptual framework. The unexpected non-significant relationship between the length of time living in the US and parental participation in the special education process identified in this study might, in part, be explained by the fact that most participants had lived in the country for a relatively long time.

Like parents from other cultural or linguistic groups, immigrant Latino parents' perceptions and actions regarding their children's education are likely to be influenced by many variables that go beyond the traits that most non-immigrant and non-Latino American educators might first notice when interacting with these parents. To facilitate immigrant Latino parents' participation in the special

education process of their children with disabilities, educators must remain open-minded and regularly reassess their ideas about Latinos in the US. Additionally, researchers can help to eliminate stereotypes about immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities by designing studies that look beyond the obvious and consider additional variables (e.g., level of education, time in the US, country of origin, child's disability, family composition) that might influence immigrant Latino parents' behaviors and experiences with the special education process.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, a random sample could not be selected due to the nature of the population. Additional limitations included the use of a newly created survey and the potential biases involved in developing a bilingual instrument. Additionally, all participants lived in a single state with a small Latino population. Because not all subgroups of Latinos were present within this population, the experiences of the parents in this sample may not represent those of immigrant Latino parents whose children with disabilities receive special education services in other areas of the country.

Another limitation is that only three disability categories (speech and language impairment, autism, and other disabilities) could be drawn from the sample. Studies including larger samples are needed to further examine the effects of the explored factors on the participation of parents of children with disabilities included in the "other disabilities" group. Additionally, the combination of responses into binomial categories in the inferential tests to facilitate the statistical analysis of the data might have introduced some bias in the data and reduced our understanding of participants' true experiences.

A third limitation of this study is that all participants had children who attended traditional public schools; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to immigrant Latino parents of children with disabilities who attend charter or private schools. Likewise, the fact that recruitment focused on parents of children who were already receiving special education services left out the voices of parents who had been unsuccessful in securing a special education evaluation for their children with diagnosed disabilities or parents whose children had participated in the special education process (e.g., special education evaluation) but had not qualified for services. Adding these parents to the sample would likely modify our findings. Finally, the survey did not collect information about family composition; we did not consider factors such as single-parent status and did not differentiate parents from legal guardians.

Conclusion

The participation of immigrant Latino parents in the special education process of their children with disabilities is influenced by the type of disability their children have and by the parents' knowledge of the American education system, their perception of school personnel, their ability to communicate in English, and their ability to confront educators about their children's needs. Further studies using samples representative of immigrant Latinos across the US are needed to continue exploring the effects of Latino parents' level of education and length of time in the US on their participation in their children's educational decision-making process.

To continue to advance our understanding of this topic, comparative studies must be conducted to examine the effects of the factors identified during this investigation on the participation of parents from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds in their children's special education process. Meanwhile, schools could ease the restrictions on parental participation by hiring

more bilingual and bicultural qualified staff and by searching for alternative ways to support communication with immigrant Latino families. Schools must develop plans to systematically educate immigrant Latino parents on the American education system—in general—and on the national, state, and local laws and procedures pertaining to special education. Most importantly, educators must dismiss stereotypical ideas regarding Latino parents' lack of involvement in their children's education and realize that many immigrant Latino parents are eager and able to participate in their children's special education process despite cultural, linguistic, and immigration-related challenges.

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Yog peb txoj kev npau suav: HMong Parents' Knowledge, Support, and Confidence to Assist their Undergraduate Student

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Abstract

Through brief conversational interviews with 26 HMong parents (16 mothers and 10 fathers), this qualitative study examined their knowledge, support, and confidence in assisting their student in higher education. Using a multi-step qualitative approach, five meta-themes emerged: a desire or dream for the future, *rau siab* (hard work), specifics about schoolwork, help with everything, and advice or encouragement. This study's findings added to a small, yet growing collection of literature based on HMong parents' engagement in their child's postsecondary education, with the findings aligning with and extending previous scholarship. In particular, the findings underscored the immense cultural influence and involvement that HMong parents have on their undergraduate students' educational lives.

Keywords: HMong parents, higher education, college knowledge, support, confidence

Who are HMong?

HMong are an ethnic group from Southeast Asia (Livo-Cha, 1991), many of whom relocated to the US between the 1970s and early 2000s as refugees of the Vietnam War (Yang, 2003). HMong were recruited by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) during the 1960s to gather intelligence about the North Vietnamese movement in Laos (Yang, 2003). Following the departure of the US from Laos and the end of the Vietnam War in the mid-1970s, HMong were persecuted and tortured (Livo & Cha, 1991), and many fled to Thailand. As refugees, HMong were pushed out of their home countries, resulting in most feeling that they had little to no control over their lives (Pernice & Brook, 1994). With no option to return home, many resettled in Western countries (i.e., US, France, Canada, and Australia), with the largest population resettling in the US (Yang, 2003). Relocation to the US changed a myriad of major life aspects for HMong clans and communities.

One major change was to the HMong family structure (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). Traditionally, HMong elders are placed in authority roles, and men are considered to be higher on the

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hierarchy than women (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). In addition, fathers are responsible for providing for the family, while mothers take care of the home and children (Faderman & Xiong, 1998; Moua, 2003). However, in the US, it is common for both parents to work, leading to HMong fathers experiencing a loss of familial leadership and mothers gaining a new role as financial contributors (Lor, 2013). Moreover, because most HMong parents have no formal education and limited English fluency, they often rely on their children to serve as translators, causing children to adopt adult-like responsibilities (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). These language barriers have also made it difficult for parents to assist their children with school activities, further shifting the parent-child relationship and family structure (Her et al., 2019).

HMong Parents and Education

In Laos, HMong were farmers who lived in remote villages with limited access to education (Inui, 2015) and little to no exposure to Western ideas (Chung & Lin, 1994). Only a few families could provide their children with education beyond elementary school, and this was often limited to only male children (Inui, 2015). In the refugee camps in Thailand, children could attend Thai elementary school, and adults could attend English and vocational-training classes (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). However, the HMong language remained their primary language (Faderman & Xiong, 1998). As a result, many HMong arrived in the US with low levels of formal education and literacy, which has limited their economic opportunities and has resulted in many HMong living in poverty (Hones, 1999; PEW Research Center, 2021). According to the PEW Research Center (2021), 57% of foreign-born HMong have a high school degree or lower, and only 43% indicate having English proficiency.

Due to these limited opportunities, life in poverty, and difficulty navigating U.S. systems, most HMong parents believe that obtaining an education will provide a way out of poverty (Vang, 2003), and they therefore strongly encourage their children to earn an education (Gloria et al., 2017; Her & Gloria, 2016). The PEW Research Center (2021) reported that among HMong individuals over 25 years old, 46% have a high school or equivalent degree, 31% have received an associate degree or have attended some college, 17% have received a bachelor's degree, and 6% have obtained a graduate degree. However, although HMong are gaining increased levels of educational attainment for a new immigrant group, they are still performing below other Asian groups in the US (PEW Research Center, 2021).

Theoretical Approach

This study's major questions align with the psychosociocultural (PSC) framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). As a meta-model, the approach emphasizes the context and interrelated and contextualized dimensions of psychological (self-beliefs), social (relationships and connections), and cultural (values and context) as the basis of understanding undergraduates' educational experiences and persistence processes. By focusing on students' non-cognitive educational processes, the dimensions collectively and individually interact to inform students' contextually-based processes (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The three dimensions are conceptualized as interrelated and intertwined, as they equally and simultaneously inform each other. Although the model originated as a counseling approach for Latinx undergraduates (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000), the framework has also been successfully implemented with Asian American and HMong American undergraduates (Gloria et al., 2017; Sengkhammee et al., 2017). Extending the model to key stakeholders for HMong undergraduates, the model serves as the theoretical basis to qualitatively explore HMong parents' understanding of their students' educational experiences (Her et al., 2019) and quantitatively examine HMong parents' self-efficacy beliefs, expectations, and cultural values in relation to their

encouragement of their undergraduate students (Her & Gloria, 2016). To develop the current study's interview questions, we used the PSC approach to better understand HMong parents' knowledge (cultural context), support (social) and confidence (psychological) in assisting their children in higher education.

HMong Parents' Knowledge, Support and Confidence regarding Higher Education

HMong parents care deeply about and strongly emphasize the importance of education, particularly in terms of its relation to their children's ability to have a "good life" (Her et al. 2019). Because they want their children to have more than the difficult life they have experienced, they strive to support them by doing everything they can as parents. However, what they know about college, how they provide support, and how confident they are in successfully supporting their undergraduates warrant continued focus and are therefore addressed below to set this study's context. It is important to note that existing knowledge on the supportive roles and processes of HMong parents is mainly taken from information provided by HMong undergraduate students (e.g., Gloria et al., 2017; Juang & Meschke, 2017; Lor, 2008; Xiong & Lee, 2011; Xiong & Lam, 2013) and HMong parents who are involved in primary and secondary education (e.g., Lamborn & Moua, 2008; Lee & Green, 2008; Vue, 2020; Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002). As such, there remains a paucity of research on HMong parents specifically.

What HMong parents know about college (cultural)

HMong parents often do not know about what going to college entails or have little "college knowledge," as that their children are frequently the first in their families to attend college (Gecewicz et al., 2015). As such, having HMong parents take an assessment of *niam thiab txiv txoj kev txawj ntse* (parental wisdom) about college is a tangible way to create a culturally responsive and inclusive approach to support HMong parents and their children (Her et al., 2019). More specifically, HMong parents' cultural and contextual perspectives and knowledge warrant just as much emphasis as the practical elements of what college entails (e.g., credit loads, declaration of major; Her et al., 2019). It should be noted that HMong parents often emphasize that college is the path to a better future for one's family and community (Lamborn & Moua, 2008; Lee, 2007; Vang, 2003) and that education is a privilege that many HMong parents were not afforded (Her et al., 2019). For example, the authors found that HMong parents expressed a strong opinion about what college can mean and provide for their children (e.g., to have a different life than their own, to not need to suffer hardships). However, it is still important to explore HMong parents' knowledge and perspectives of college and the subsequent ways in which they support their children.

HMong parents' support of their child in college (social)

Many HMong parents do not have a formal education and often doubt, downplay, and minimize their own role in their child's education (Her et al., 2019). Yet at the same time, they desire to know more about and to have an increased involvement in the educational setting (Her et al., 2019), which are processes aligned at the primary and secondary educational levels (Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002). In qualitative interviews with 18 HMong parents (eight sets of parents who were married and two single mothers) with a child or children in college, Her et al. (2019) found that mothers and fathers reported doing everything within their capacity to support their child's education. Parents mentioned not knowing English, not having a formal education, and not having the monetary means to pay for college as significant barriers that they faced, yet they also stressed that they would cook, clean, provide transportation at all hours, and provide as much financial support as possible to clear the path of practical obstacles so their children could focus on studying. Specifically, "[t]he actions and efforts of the parents were clear and meaningful despite the parents indicating that even though they did not

know the detail of the school process, they knew how their children were doing in school" (Her et al., 2019, p. 58). Central to the parents' roles were providing connection to the values-based directives of *rau siab* (hard work), emphasizing familial capital (Yosso, 2005), and keeping their children close to the "pedagogies of the home" (i.e., teaching, values, and beliefs that stem from family and culture; Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 109). However, more knowledge about how HMong parents define their roles, how the roles are understood, and their confidence in successfully engaging with these roles is still needed.

HMong parent's confidence in supporting their child in college (psychological)

Parents' belief in their ability to successfully perform parenting roles is known as parental self-efficacy (Wittkowski et al., 2017). This process stems from the concept of self-efficacy, which refers to one's confidence in completing a task, which can be increased by learning through the experience of others (i.e., vicarious learning) or by watching others perform the task (i.e., modeling; Bandura, 1977). Recent systemic reviews state that increased parental self-efficacy is related to an increase in the health and well-being of both children and parents (Albanese et al., 2019; Wittkowski et al., 2017). For example, in a study of 121 HMong parents, Her and Gloria (2016) found that HMong parents' self-efficacy to parent successfully positively informs their educational encouragement of their children. Similarly, in Albanese et al.'s (2019) review of 115 studies addressing parental self-efficacy – mainly in relation to infants, young children, and high-school students – parental self-efficacy was found to have positive health and wellness outcomes. However, only one quantitative study to date explores the self-efficacy of HMong parents and its relation to the provision of educational encouragement for college-aged children. Ultimately, more knowledge about HMong parents' sense of confidence in successfully engaging with tasks and behaviors that can assist their children across educational levels, particularly in college, is needed, particularly as HMong students increasingly enter higher education.

Study Purpose

This study's purpose is to extend the current PSC understanding of HMong parents' role in supporting their children in higher education. Although third-party observations (i.e., reports from HMong students) about HMong parents are helpful in terms of providing insight and understanding, little research has directly consulted with parents about their processes. As such, this study is based on conversational interviews with HMong parents in an attempt to understand their specific roles, knowledge of college, and confidence in successfully supporting their children. In particular, this study seeks to address the following questions: (1) what do HMong parents know about college (cultural context), (2) how do HMong parents' support their children in college (social context), and (3) how confident are HMong parents in their ability to support their children in college (psychological context)? Because relatively little research exists about HMong parents' processes specific to higher education (e.g., Her et al., 2019; Her & Gloria, 2016), this exploratory study provides directives to university personnel in relation to parent and family involvement on campus and subsequent community-based engagement and programming.

Methods

Setting and Participants

The interviews were conducted at a large university campus in Wisconsin. The participants were parents (mothers and fathers) attending a day-long college information event at the university. The university has a well-known Asian American Studies Certificate Program with an emphasis on HMong American Studies and an active HMong American Student Association. However, it is also

well-known among HMong communities that the HMong student population at the university is small (i.e., approximately 250 HMong undergraduate students), with several discriminatory incidents against the HMong student community taking place on campus.

A total of 26 HMong parents (16 mothers and 10 fathers) with a child soon to enter or currently in college participated in the interviews. The parents resided in the same county as the university or in neighboring counties and had an average age of 46.28 ($SD = 9.59$). A majority of the parents were born in Laos ($n = 22$), with the remaining being born in Thailand. Furthermore, a majority of the parents had lived in the US for 16 to 36 years ($M = 22.20$, $SD = 6.09$). When asked about their level of education in their homeland, almost half (n = 12, 48%) of the parents indicated that they had no formal schooling, with four having some grade school education (16%), six having an eighth-grade education, and only one having a high school education or GED (4%). Two parents (8%) did not provide this information. Finally, the parents reported having two to 14 children ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 2.69$), with most parents having at least one child currently in higher education.

Procedures

Before conducting the study, appropriate study approval was secured. Notably, all study interactions with the participating parents occurred in the HMong language (White dialect). The parents completed the necessary paperwork at the start of the event day, with clear directives and ongoing reminders that their interview responses had no bearing on their event day participation. Because the parents were on campus between program events, team members who also served as event hosts asked them three core questions about their knowledge, support, and confidence as a parent in the support of their child in higher education. All team members were introduced at the start of the event.

As part of the day's introduction, the parents were informed that a team member would approach them to listen to their narrative. Tapping into the idea of *niam thiab txiv txoj kev txawj ntse* (parental or elder wisdom), the brief and conversational interviews implemented core HMong values of respect. The interviewers engaged the parents by acknowledging their own role as HMong scholars, students, and *peb cov hluas* (the young people) who are expected to advance families and communities through education (Lee, 2007; Lor, 2008) and as children interested in learning from the expertise of parents. The parents' experiences were specifically honored as important cultural and familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, through these conversational interviews, the parents were individually sought out and welcomed as members of the university community. Three interviewers, who asked the same question of each parent, documented the parents' responses. The questions were structured to elicit a short relay of information, and the interviewers were trained to write down the main ideas and actions described. This process is aligned with the HMong language process of linking verbs or serialization (i.e., connecting multiple verbs to describe a single event; Jarkey, 2015). Additionally, the interviews were completed early within the program day, and each interviewer was a native HMong language speaker who was also able to write in HMong. The responses included no identifying information about the parents except for whether the individual was a mother or father.

Protocol Questions

Each parent was asked three questions regarding their knowledge, support, and confidence in assisting their undergraduate student in higher education. The questions were as follows:

o *Koj paub dab tsi txog koj tus me nyuam txoj kev kawm ntawv qib siab?* (What do you know about your child's education?)

o *Koj txoj kev pab koj tus me nyuam txoj kev kawm ntawv qib siab yog dab tsis?* (What support do you provide for your child's education?)

  o *Koj ntseeg npaum cas tias koj pab tau koj tus me nyuam txog kev kawm ntawv qib siab*? (How confident are you in assisting your child in higher education?)

Statement of Positionality

Acknowledging our research positionality is of the utmost importance for this qualitative study. Research positionality refers to the researchers' worldview and the position they adopt in regard to a particular research task or topic (Holmes, 2020). It also influences what the researchers choose to investigate, how the study is conducted, and its outcomes, as researchers are not separate from the social processes that they explore (Holmes, 2020). As researchers, we have a vested interest and collective focus regarding HMong scholarship. We hold the perspective that HMong parents are unrecognized sources of wisdom that can help facilitate the success of HMong undergraduates. The first author identifies as HMong and a refugee; grew up in the US in a two-parent, lower-income household; and has parents who have emphasized the importance of education throughout her life. As a result, she developed a keen interest in understanding cultural and familial factors of the educational success of underrepresented students. The first author has an emic or "insider" position (Holmes, 2020). She is part of the HMong community and recognizes that the behaviors and actions being studied are meaningful to her culture (Holmes, 2020). The advantages of an insider position are the ability to foster and form trusted relationships with the research participants and the ability to understand their lived experiences (Holmes, 2020). The second author is a Latina whose parents have emphasized education and the collective value of *familismo* (familial emphasis) throughout her life. When arriving in a high-context HMong setting and learning that their educational needs and concerns have been largely unaddressed, the second researcher expanded her research to include a focus on Hmong community strength within higher education. The topic of the current study is outside her cultural context, and her previous research has mainly focused on Latinx undergraduates' educational wellness, creation of academic families, and desire for spaces of wholistic belonging. She therefore holds an "outsider" position in relation to the HMong community, but she has an emotional connection to, scholarly interest in, and advocacy for HMong educational experiences given the mentoring and professional relationships she has formed (Holmes, 2020). Given our collective beliefs, insider and outsider positionalities, and scholarship on HMong educational experiences, we sought to balance our perspectives across all study elements.

Qualitative Approach

To analyze the HMong parents' responses, we used LeCompte's (2000) 5-step qualitative content analysis. First, the interviewers, who were bilingual, transcribed, translated (Hmong to English), cleaned, and de-identified the information. Next, the translated information was reviewed by the bilingual lead team member to ensure clear translations, particularly checking for terms and phrases that were figurative versus literal. Once audited for accurate translations, items were identified through careful line-by-line coding. The lead team member audited this unit of analysis, and the team worked to gain consensus on the items. In particular, a few items had a nuanced cultural meaning that needed team consultation and were therefore clarified through consensus. Next, groups and categories based on the line-by-line coding were used as the basis of the taxonomies of item sets. The fourth step involved determining emergent themes and patterns from the item sets. Finally, the researchers created meta-themes based on emergent themes and patterns. These processes were completed for all parents and then specific to mothers and fathers.

The researchers addressed the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through various processes. First, the researchers openly discussed biases and assumptions related to their own personal values and lived experiences throughout each stage of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Second, to ensure data accuracy and dependability, two research members transcribed and reviewed

all transcriptions. In particular, HMong-to-English translations that were culturally nuanced and did not have literal translation were discussed. The first author then completed a final audit of the transcriptions before the data analysis began. Third, the team worked individually and collectively during each stage of the analysis and reached a consensus before proceeding to the next stage. Finally, to address data transferability, the team included all parents who were at the event to represent a range of educational experiences with children at various educational levels (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Study's Emergent Meta-Themes

In setting the context for the emergent themes, we acknowledged the nuances of the HMong cultural value of humility in relation to achievements and its effect on interpersonal interaction. Specifically, our study's HMong parents responded in ways that evidence the core value of collectivistic interactions that emphasize family, community, and clan welfare among HMong community members and individuals (Tatman, 2004). Many HMong adults and elders have had limited access to education, with many having no formal education (Yang, 2003), as was the case for the parents in our study. The study's questions were forthright in asking about the parents' knowledge, actions, and confidence in assisting their children, and it was clear that these nuanced processes would inform how the respondents expressed themselves.

A total of five meta-themes emerged from across the three questions, and one theme emerged from the confidence question. For organizational purposes, the meta-themes and theme are presented in Table 1 and are discussed and elucidated with the parent narratives. It is important to note that a few single item concepts did not fit within any of the meta-themes or form themes. Each of these items came from different parents. The items included "recommending that students tell their parents about the parent day programming so they could attend (K)," "asking how to help as a mother (S)," "not knowing where to find financial assistance for school (C)," "being a good mother (C)," and "having to be both mother and father as a single mother (C)."

Table 1
HMong parents' meta-themes and theme

Meta-Themes	Narrative Examples
A desire or dream for the future (K, S, C)	I know that a child should work hard. My child must work hard in college so that they will live better than me. I support [my child] by telling them to work hard in school so that they will have a good life and not be poor. My child will have a better life than the one I have or my parents had.
Rau Siab or hard work (K, S, C)	[I have a] strong belief in myself because my child has gone far. [My child's success is] a reflection of my hard work and ability to support [them].
Schoolwork specifics (K & S)	For us, we don't go to school. College is hard, not easy because they teach fast. College is hard, very hard. Others can do it. So can you. If you don't understand something, then ask your teachers or your classmates.

Help with everything (S & C)	I help with money, buy them clothes, support, help them drive to school so they are not worried.
	I will not let them worry, be hungry, and if they want a computer, I will find one.
Advice and encouragement (S & C)	I don't know English, so I support [my child] by telling them to work hard in school so that they will have a good life and not be poor.
	I tell them all that I know. I want them to know and to be able to do it.
Theme	**Narrative Example**
Lacking confidence yet still providing (C)	I don't know [if I can successfully help], but I know I can help with money, fix the car if needed.

Notes. K = knowledge; S = support; C = confidence.

Meta-themes

A desire or dream for the future (K, S, C)

The first meta-theme that the HMong parents resoundingly emphasized was a dream for their child to earn a higher education. The HMong parents knew that school, specifically college, would allow their child to obtain a good job and to have a better life than their own. One mother stated, "I want my child to get done with college. I want her to work hard to have a better life. All parents think like that. I work a hard job." Although previous research has indicated that HMong parents want their child to not have a hard life like their own (Her et al., 2019), the component of a desire or dream emerged more fully in this study to contextualize how important earning an education is for the future. One father stated, "education is [the] future. Most valued dream for children is to be educated, to be different, so not like me." Similarly, a mother simply stated about education, "*yog kuv txoj kev npau suav*" (It's my dream). Notably, the HMong parents were confident in this dream and were confident in their child's ability to succeed. They consistently indicated that it was "important to believe as much as you can, believe that you can, and help as much as you can so child can achieve goal of education [for a better future]."

Rau siab or hard work (K, S, C)

Key to achieving the dream of education was the concept of *rau siab* or "hard work." *Rau siab* is a concept that is greatly respected and valued within many HMong families (Het et al., 2019) and consistently emerged throughout the three questions. As a central cultural value for HMong individuals, *rau siab* is steeped in notions of perseverance: "to never give up" or "to keep trying or going." This process of *rau siab* emerged with a nuanced differences for each question.

Within the knowledge question, the HMong parents stated that they know *rau siab* is needed for their child to do well in school and likewise that their child works and studies hard to reach their goals. As an example, one mother stated when talking about her daughter, "I know she works hard. She uses all her abilities." Similarly, another mother stated, "Child works hard to reach goal. My child studies very hard." Both mothers know that *rau siab* is needed for college, though their children's *rau siab* involves complementary yet slightly different elements. Within the support question, the HMong parents identified their role as encouraging or motivating their child, providing clear and poignant statements such as "work hard, work hard in school, and don't miss school even if not good

in school." Finally, when asked about their confidence about *rau siab*, the parents identified knowing that their own *rau siab* is evidence of their child's *rau siab*. For instance, one mother stated, "I believe I have done well because they have said that my children behave well and have furthered their education." Similarly, a father stated, "I am confident in my *rau siab* because my child has gone far in education." Furthermore, this confidence in *rau siab* was identified as others, such as the university or HMong community members, pointing out their child's hard work or "seeing" their child's educational accomplishments (e.g., going to college, getting good grades) as evidence of this process. This finding is aligned with the concept of family reputation being advanced by education (Yang & Solhelm, 2008).

Schoolwork specifics (K & S)

In response to the knowledge and support questions, HMong parents consistently identified that they did not know about what going to college entails given their lack of formal education. Nevertheless, they knew about the specifics of their child's education, schoolwork, and what is needed to manage schoolwork in general. They knew that college is difficult and particularly stressful during finals. They also knew that their child is often worried and anxious about performing well in school. To support this understanding, HMong parents stated that they knew their child must sometimes ask others, such as faculty or tutors, for help. One father addressed how asking for help is a key process that requires a willingness to learn: "College is hard, very hard...If you don't understand something, then ask your teachers or your classmates. Don't be shy. Open your heart and ask."

Notably, HMong parents indicated that one of their key supportive roles is knowing the specifics of their child's education and schoolwork. They identified asking about grades, homework, and whether their child needs a tutor to help them do well and graduate. Likewise, they knew their child's major, career interests, and university programming. One parent stated, "My child works with [program name]. Both my daughters wanted to be [in the medical profession] at first. One of my daughters switched her major, as she didn't like [it] anymore. My daughter decided she wanted to help students in [program name] instead. This daughter will go get her masters and then her Ph.D."

Help with anything and everything, except academics (S & C)

HMong parents' investment and emphasis in their child's education involves not only knowing and supporting their schoolwork specifics but also a willingness to provide anything and everything possible, as was indicated in their responses to the support and confidence questions. Their all-encompassing help involves giving what money they can, making purchases such as buying clothes or a computer, providing transportation at all times of the day or night, providing and cooking food, babysitting, and performing household chores so their child could focus on their schoolwork. Providing such assistance is aligned with previous findings regarding how HMong parents support their college child (Her et al., 2019). In particular, providing food or cooking for their child is considered a key way to provide support and is a central process in HMong experience (Vue et al., 2011).

When addressing their confidence in assisting their child, the HMong parents indicated having confidence in helping with everything except academics. This finding is consistent with previous literature regarding HMong parents' struggles with the educational aspects of their child's high school (Lee & Green, 2008; Ngo, 2008) and postsecondary (Xiong & Lee, 2011) experiences. One parent stated, "[I] can help up to 50% of their education but not with educational activities, help with money, ask teachers about grades and know how they are doing. Help with food." Another aspect of helping with anything and everything was that the HMong parents rely on their child to clarify the type of help they require. One mother stated, "I don't know [how to help], but I believe I can help with money, anything she wants, needs, and asks. [I gave] ideas to better [her] education and [to] protect herself. She needs to ask me too, but [I] can't help [with] education [college], homework."

Advice and encouragement (S & C)

Complementary to providing everything and anything, HMong parents specifically indicated that they are confident in their ability to provide advice and encouragement. Because they have high educational expectations of their child (Xiong & Lee, 2011), HMong parents frequently provide their child with school-related advice and share stories of their own hardships to encourage their child to attend school. The idea of HMong parents sharing stories of hardship and struggle (e.g., being poor) as encouragement for their child to stay in school is aligned with previous findings wherein parents equated education with a better life (Her et al., 2019). One father in the present study stated, "I am very confident that I can help, I tell [my] child every day, so that [my child] does not suffer like me." Likewise, one mother stated, "Support their strength with heart felt encouraging words, motivate them to have a better life." The HMong parents' advice and encouragement in relation to attending and staying in school was consistent and linked to the idea of their child having a better life than their own (e.g., a good life), a consistent finding in previous studies of HMong parents (Her et al., 2019; Juang & Metkse 2017; Lamborn & Moua, 2008; Vang, 2003).

Single Theme

Lacking confidence yet still providing

In addition to the five meta-themes, one theme emerged from the confidence questions. In describing their confidence to engage the roles, tasks, and energies needed to support their child, the HMong parents mentioned the process of *lacking the confidence to do something yet still providing or engaging the role.* For this process, HMong parents began some of their responses by stating that they "do not know how or if" they could successfully or confidently engage a necessary role for their child, but they also stated that they would do everything they could to provide support. In particular, they identified that because they do not know English nor have a formal education, they lack the confidence to support their child in certain ways but do as much as they can nonetheless. For example, one mother stated, "I do not know because I don't have a formal education, don't speak English, and need to wait for others to assist or help [with academics]." Similarly, another mother stated, "I believe I can help, but I don't have any idea. I know I need to be a good mom, I make food, wash clothes. [I] don't know the information but give what money I have so she doesn't suffer. I do what I can." Although HMong parents (both mothers and fathers equally) indicated a lack of confidence, their responses indicate that they still want to do everything they can, even with uncertain parental self-efficacy.

Discussion and Implications

This study yielded findings that align with previous research, provided an increased understanding of cultural nuances relative to higher education, and used a new approach of brief conversational interviews with 26 HMong parents. As evidenced by the responses, HMong parents possess a great deal of knowledge about what is needed for college and how they can support their children. However, given that their knowledge mainly involves "cultural home knowledge" that could be applied to higher education as opposed to "college-specific knowledge," they frequently undersold what they know. In other words, HMong parents have *niam txiv txoj kev txawj ntse* (HMong parents' wisdom) to assist in the process of supporting their child, knowing more than they think they do or even knowing more than what they are willing to admit. Furthermore, historical and contextual experiences of struggles, sacrifice, and perseverance are key to their parental wisdom. With this in mind, university personnel and programming should not underestimate or undermine HMong

parents' knowledge, roles, and power in assisting their children to succeed in college. Likewise, it is necessary to create programming and ongoing community partnerships that recognize the foundational role and function of HMong parents (Her & Gloria, 2017).

Although HMong parents' knowledge was caveated by "not knowing English" and not having the same level of education as their children, they indicated a strong conviction and determination to do everything they could for their children, even in moments and situations in which they do not feel able or lack confidence. HMong parents seek to support their children (even when they are uncertain that their child will succeed) by "clearing a path" so their children can focus on their studies and therefore be as successful as possible. From cooking food to fixing the car to sharing stories about their hardships to motivate their children's *rau siab*, the parents frequently referenced their cultural and familial capital (Yosso, 2005), power, perseverance, and vulnerability. In this same way, university programming that accesses and centers familial cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) as part of HMong students' processes is needed. In particular, it is important to assure parents that their "emphasis on the home and support of their children's daily well-being" (i.e., non-academics) are key component of their children's academic success. This could help to successfully increase HMong parents' parental self-efficacy in assisting their children's postsecondary education. Furthermore, because efficacy has been found to mediate HMong parents' expectations and encouragement of their undergraduate children's education (Her & Gloria, 2016), it is important to bolster the idea that HMong parents' parental wisdom and work toward their "most valued and desired dream of education" are critical and complementary processes rather than secondary and irrelevant to university support.

Finally, the finding of *rau siab* as a key element of the educational process aligns with previous qualitative research involving HMong parents (Her et al., 2019). Centering the value in parent programming and emphasizing the wisdom of community and family capital warrants further consideration (Her et al., 2022; Yosso, 2005), as it was mentioned consistently across the parents' responses. Parents are aware that *rau siab* is a necessary element for college and that their children's *rau siab* is key to their success. In this same way, parents are willing to put in *rau siab* for their children, doing anything and everything they can to be of assistance. Notably, an element of extension in which *rau siab* emerged was the process of reflection. That is, the HMong parents' *rau siab* is reflected back to them by their children's *rau siab* and educational successes, which add to their increased sense of efficacy as parents. For example, one parent stated, "I have strong belief in myself because my child has gone far. This is a reflection of my hard work and ability to support my child." The *rau siab* and educational advances of their children allow the HMong parents to stand tall and feel as equally important as other parents with each subsequent success (Yang & Solhelm, 2008). Because naming one's success is not considered culturally appropriate or a valued collectivistic process within many HMong communities (Her, 1998), it should be questioned whether the brief conversational interviews may have allowed for different cultural interactions and acknowledgement of their *rau siab* successes. Indeed, the interviews seem to have provided the HMong parents with an opportunity to take credit for their hard work as well as how their children's hard work has reflected back on them.

Limitations and Future Research

Although clear and important concepts and narratives emerged from this study, the interviews were not audio-recorded or in-depth. The interviews were casual and conversational, with parents providing short responses. Because the interviews were conducted when parents were walking on campus, the process likely did not allow for a full disclosure of their narratives. However, the rapid interactions allowed for a different level of disclosure, given that the cultural negotiation of interactions was addressed differently. In full narrative interviews with HMong parents in a home

setting, substantial cultural negotiation of roles based on gender, age, and clan would be needed (Her et al., 2019) as part of the information asked and provided. For instance, in Her et al.'s (2019) home interviews with HMong parents, the fathers often led the responses, and the mothers often deferred to the fathers' responses, processes which are consistent within HMong social systems and family structures (Vang, 2003). While the study interactions with each parent were shorter in the present study, there was an opportunity to gain both individual and collective responses with a convergence of information. To support the confirmability of this study's findings, it is important to note that the findings of this study are aligned with those of scholars who have conducted extensive interviews with HMong parents (Her et al. 2019) as well as undergraduates who have reported about their own HMong parents (Gloria et al., 2017; Juang & Meschke, 2017; Lor, 2008; Xiong & Lee, 2011; Xiong & Lam, 2013). This study yielded findings that extend the extant literature, but it is also clear that the information warrants continued exploration to deepen and expand the findings.

Because the parents were approached as early as possible throughout the day, those who were approached later may have responded differently given the context of the day. Furthermore, the parents may have had an increased sense of confidence about their ability to support their children given that they were visiting a university; however, the extent to which this informed their responses was unclear. Likewise, the parents may have provided socially appropriate responses that portrayed them as "good parents" who have worked hard, sacrificed, and persevered for their families and children – commonly-known values and processes that are highly esteemed within HMong clans and communities.

Finally, a parent's age, degree of education (from no formal education to high school education), and number of children in higher education may have informed their responses. For example, it is likely that a parent with one child will have a different amount of time, resources, and opportunity at their disposal than a parent with four children. However, the wisdom and cultural directives of the parents are likely to be the same, including the importance of *rau siab* and the desire to pursue education regardless of educational level. Because existing information about HMong parents' roles in higher education primarily stems from college students' third-person accounts (Gloria et al., 2017; Juang & Meschke, 2017; Xiong & Lam, 2013; Xiong & Lee, 2011) and parents' own accounts of their children's primary and secondary education levels (Vue, 2020; Wathum-Ocama & Rose, 2002), additional research and a scoping review of the literature addressing HMong parents' educational engagement and processes may be needed to provide direction.

Conclusion

This study's findings underscore the importance of elevating HMong parents' wisdom to ensure that their confidence in their knowledge is just as strong on campus as it is in a home setting. It is clear from this study that universities must bring HMong parents onto campus to allow them to see that they have power and a place on campus, with a central role in the success of their children's college education. Allowing HMong parents to be confident that what they know and impart to their children as well as what they do for their children is relevant and important to their educational success. Notably, this study provides an extension of extant information and insight into HMong parents' roles and processes in relation to assisting the educational success of their undergraduate children. It is undeniable that HMong parents are highly invested in their children's ability to achieve a higher education and hold it as core desire – *yog peb txoj kev npau suav [it is our dream]*– for their children; for their family, clan, and community; and for the future of HMong young people as a whole.

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Bridging Multilingual Families and Schools: Cultural Brokering as Social Justice Leadership Practice

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Abstract

School districts across the United States employ cultural brokers to help facilitate the involvement of multilingual families in their children's schools. These liaisons build bridges over the cultural and language barriers that limit educational access and opportunities for multilingual families and their children. Despite the central role that cultural brokers play in fostering equitable and inclusive schools, their leadership may be unrecognized. In this qualitative case study, we examine the cultural brokering work performed by multilingual counseling assistants (MCAs) in two K-8 schools in a diverse urban school district in the northeastern United States. The primary data are face-to-face semi-structured interviews with three MCAs from the Burmese and Spanish-speaking school communities. We provide examples of how MCAs leverage the families' cultural capital in various dimensions of social justice leadership. This study demonstrates the role of MCAs as social justice leaders in making schools more equitable and inclusive communities. This study argues that leadership can be a distributed practice within schools not limited to formal school administration.

Keywords: multilingual families; family-school engagement; multilingual counseling assistants; cultural brokers; community cultural wealth; social justice leadership

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"So I try for Spanish-speaking families to be proud about where they come from, to know that they are making a huge sacrifice for their kids coming here, not to feel embarrassed or ashamed about their own heritage. Sometimes in my own opinion, some parts of that heritage could be the key thing that this country and these communities need to get better." - Carlos

This excerpt is from an interview with Carlos, a multilingual counseling assistant (MCA) for Spanish-speaking families at Spruce School, which has one of the largest populations of English language learners (ELLs) in an urban school district in the northeastern region of the United States. At the time of the study, Carlos was in his third year working as an MCA and was part of a large team of MCAs that works out of the district's Family Engagement Office. Despite the important role that he plays in supporting multilingual students and families, he is employed on a contractual basis. Positions such as MCAs differ from other educators in that they are often not tenured or paid a salary (Theoharis & Toole, 2011). Despite being in a pivotal support role for student achievement, Carlos is never certain which school he will be assigned to for the subsequent academic year. The important work that MCAs do to support multilingual parents and their children is often overlooked.

The bridging work of cultural brokers like Carlos is especially important in helping culturally and linguistically diverse families acknowledge the value of community cultural wealth in their engagement with their children's schools (Ishimaru, 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Our concept of "cultural brokering" is adapted from Jezewski's (1990) work with healthcare workers, in which she defines it as "the act of bridging, linking, or mediating between groups or persons for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change" (p. 497). We are conceptualizing the cultural brokering work of MCAs as that of "bridging" multicultural families with the broader school community in order to support them in actively engaging within the life and culture of the school. However, in previous scholarship, bridging has not been understood as an interactive leadership practice. We argue that bridging should be understood as a social justice leadership practice that supports family-school-community relationships, particularly in schools that do not involve multilingual parents as equal partners or share decision-making power with them.

Under Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act, the English proficiency accountability framework requires districts to support non-native English learners. By law, multilingual students must be provided equal access to educational opportunities. Every local education agency (LEA) is also required to provide communication to families who are not proficient in English in a language they understand (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). This includes engaging multilingual parents in school- and district-level groups and councils that influence policies and procedures within the district. In addition to this legislation, researchers have identified a need for schools to create learning environments that are responsive to students' and families' cultural and linguistic assets (Banse & Palacios, 2018; Moore, 1998; Yosso, 2005). While, in theory, the federal and state legislation should have created inclusive, welcoming spaces for multilingual families, prior research (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007; Valdes, 1996) has suggested that these families continue to be marginalized within K–12 schools and that current school systems, policies, and engagement efforts cater to white, middle-class, English-speaking families and traditional notions of what "involvement" from parents and families looks like.

In order to improve the educational experience of ELLs, North School District (pseudonym) hired MCAs to serve as a bridge between families and schools. In this qualitative case study, we examined the roles of multilingual counseling assistants (MCAs) in two urban public schools with large, diverse ethnic and linguistic communities. These MCAs had reputations for supporting ELLs and their parents. We explored how the MCAs engaged in relational and reciprocal practices (Ishimaru, 2016) to forge bridges between families, schools, and communities and leverage the community cultural wealth of the families. We examined these actions in light of social justice leadership (Furman,

2012) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). This paper explores the following research question: What work do MCAs do that connects the community cultural wealth (CCW) of families with their children's schools, and can it be described as social justice leadership?

Theoretical Framework

Our work draws upon key tenets and concepts of CCW (Yosso, 2005) and social justice leadership (Furman, 2012). Community cultural wealth is a significant theory that challenges traditional conceptualizations of cultural capital. Community cultural wealth decenters Western conceptions of cultural capital as representative of white middle- and upper-class families and promotes the wealth of capital possessed by communities of color instead (Yosso, 2005). Social justice leadership involves replacing unjust practices with "more equitable, culturally appropriate ones" (Furman, 2012, p. 194). The integration of these two frameworks helps to position MCAs as social justice leaders whose cultural brokering practices build bridges between multilingual families, schools, and communities. With a keen appreciation of multilingual families' CCW, MCAs can help to make schools welcoming and inclusive spaces for multilingual families and empower these families to fully participate in their children's schools.

Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso's (2005) development of the CCW framework originated from her critique of Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural capital that evaluates a community's capital based upon their proximity and access to white middle- and upper-class knowledge and abilities. Furthermore, Bourdieu's ideas about cultural capital view communities of color through a deficit perspective in which they lack certain "social and cultural capital required for social mobility" (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 70). Instead, Yosso (2005) embraced tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) that recognize how race and racism intersect with various forms of oppression, for example, gender, sexuality, religion, and so on; acknowledge the diverse experiences of people of color; and reject a Black/white binary as the only way to discuss race. Specifically in the context of schools, Yosso (2005) argued that CRT critiques deficit views about students of color and their families that attribute students' academic performance to a lack of the knowledge and skills possessed by white students and assume that non-white caregivers lack support or interest in their children's education.

Yosso (2005) contends that culturally and linguistically diverse families do, in fact, possess multiple forms of capital, which she refers to as CCW. Community cultural wealth is "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). Yosso (2005) identified six "forms of capital [that] are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 77). These forms of capital are as follows.

- Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
- Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language or style of communication.
- Familial capital is cultural knowledge, nurtured among *familia* (kin), that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.
- Social capital refers to networks of people and community resources.
- Navigational capital is skill in maneuvering through social institutions.

- Resistant capital refers to the knowledge and skill fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.

Yosso (2005) asserted that students and families of color possess these various forms of capital and carry them with them whenever they are in school. There, educators can learn about the CCW of their students, families, and communities and use it to inform teaching, policy, and practices in schools.

Social Justice Leadership

Central to social justice leadership is the critical examination of power relationships and replacement of marginalizing practices (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2017; DeMatthews, 2015; Theoharis, 2017). That is, social justice leadership requires that school leaders identify, interrogate, and eliminate inequities in educational policies and practices. Furman (2012) proposed a framework that conceptualizes leadership for social justice along Freire's concept of *praxis*, which is the integration of both *reflection* and *action*. Considering educational leadership as *praxis* allows for examination of the way educational leaders both *think about* and *act upon* issues that arise in their schools. This is the essential quality of social justice leadership. Furman (2012) identified a range of domains in which social justice leadership operates: "the interpersonal, to the communal, the systemic, and the ecological." The personal is at the center of the framework and extends out to the four other areas. The dimensions are also nested and interdependent, meaning that a leader must acquire knowledge and skills in one area before moving on to the next one (Furman, 2012, p. 204).

Furman's (2012) development of the five areas of the social justice leadership framework was informed by questions about the reflective and action-oriented nature of what school leaders do. The personal dimension refers to the ways in which school leaders demonstrate "deep, critical, and honest self-reflection" (p. 205). Practices rooted in the personal dimension demonstrate individual values and beliefs. The interpersonal dimension is characterized by leaders who "pro-actively build trusting relationships with colleagues, parents, and students in their schools" (p. 207). The communal dimension relates to leaders who "work to build community across cultural groups through inclusive, democratic practices" (p. 209), while the systemic dimension pertains to school leaders "assessing, critiquing and working to transform the system at the school and district levels, in the interest of social justice and learning for all children" (p. 210). Finally, the ecological dimension relates to school leaders recognizing how social justice issues in a school are "situated within broader sociopolitical, economic, and environmental contexts" (p. 211). Praxis – reflection and action – are instantiated across each of the dimensions.

Integrated Theoretical Framework

Integrating CCW and social justice leadership provides a more nuanced consideration of the work of MCAs. Multilingual counseling assistants are not traditionally seen as school leaders. Further, marginalized communities have not been viewed as possessing cultural capital. These two perspectives points together allow us to highlight the work of MCAs as leaders within the school community on behalf of multilingual families. Their work involves interpersonal relationships and community-based activities and address systemic and ecological-level inequities. The social justice leadership framework makes these practices visible. The work of MCAs with marginalized communities allows the capital of multilingual families to become recognizable within the school community.

The work of MCAs has been referred to as cultural brokering. Using both frameworks enable us to understand the purpose and advocacy of MCAs and to see their work as not just assimilating multilingual families into schools. We challenge the traditional view of cultural brokers to reveal the leadership required to effectively advocate for and include multilingual families as valuable members of their children's school communities. Through social justice leadership practices as described in

Furman's (2012) framework, MCAs in this study leveraged multilingual families' CCW in ways that expanded the traditional practices of schools.

Literature Review

The framework and discussion that follow are grounded in three interconnected bodies of literature: (a) the school engagement of multilingual families, (b) the important role of cultural brokers, and (c) how social justice leaders work in schools. These bodies of literature provide an important backdrop to the complex relationship between multilingual families and school engagement, the role and importance of cultural brokering, and school leaders who approach their work through stances of social justice.

Engaging Multilingual Families

Over the past several decades, scholars have explored factors relating to parental involvement. Exemplary practices for teachers engaging the families of multilingual learners require multiple pathways for communication and family engagement. Researchers have long critiqued current initiatives around parent involvement as supporting the normative practices of white middle-class families (Lee et al., 2020; Greene, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Greene (2013) contended that traditional definitions of parent involvement have focused on children's academic achievement and that any parent who departs from this is viewed through a deficit lens. Epstein's (1995) framework described six types of parent involvement and somewhat broadened the notion of what engagement looks like, for example, including parents in school decisions, but it fails to acknowledge caregivers' "orientations to the world [that] include the multiple spaces of their lived experiences" (Greene, 2013, p. 4).

Johnson (2015) identified three bodies of literature on parent involvement: positivistic, ecological, and critical. Positivistic literature views parent involvement through the lens of western ideologies and views that are monocultural and static. Ecological literature focuses on how parents work with schools, but this literature does not include racial or cultural perspectives. Epstein's model has been cited as an example of an ecological model of parent involvement. Critical literature recognizes how current systems and structures have marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse caregivers and focuses on the "voices and experiences of parents and students of color" (p. 85). Gaitan (2012) included the community as an important part of a culturally responsive approach to connecting families, schools, and communities together because the community is where parents often find their social and cultural networks.

Research about parent involvement models and strategies in schools have often elicited troubling findings about how caregivers are perceived and treated that reinforce a monocultural belief about how families should be engaged with schools. Christianikis (2011) interviewed 15 elementary teachers of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds and revealed that these educators subscribed to a model of involvement that viewed parents as "helpers." The teachers did not have access to resources such as classroom assistants and invited parents to function as helpers by, for example, organizing materials for the teacher. The researcher argued that when parents were viewed as "the help," they were not treated as equal partners at this school (p. 164).

Ishimaru and colleagues' (2016) research on cultural brokers working with multilingual parents across three schools found that the cultural brokers' efforts to engage caregivers often "socializ[ed] non-dominant families into school-centric norms, expectations, and agendas" (p. 864). We discuss the complicated and, at times, contradictory roles of cultural brokers in the next section, but the researchers' study revealed that initiatives supported by the schools were often created without the

input of parents and that the implicit assumptions behind some of the programs, for example, offering a workshop on the topic of behaviors that promote students' success in school, revealed deficit beliefs about the parents. Ishimaru et al. (2016) argued that what was absent in these initiatives were more "collective, reciprocal" (p. 865) ways of working with students' families.

Ladky and Peterson's (2008) research on school practices to engage immigrant parents provided another example of how well-intended but uncritical approaches to parent involvement can result in reinforcing dominant perspectives about how caregivers should be involved in schools. The researchers reported the practices that were supported by the school-parent partnership program, for example, having recently arrived immigrant parents work with their children on homework and providing informal or formal assistance in the classroom. In short, while previous research on family engagement in education has mentioned the importance of raising cultural awareness of parents' cultural backgrounds to school teachers and staff, tangible steps on how schools can achieve this cultural sensitivity have remained unclear (Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

Other studies have shown promising directions for parent involvement strategies and models that focus less on school-based expectations of involvement and instead center the social and cultural capital of caregivers. Karsli-Calamak et al. (2021) conducted a study of 14 teachers in Turkey working with refugee children and families in family math night sessions. Over the course of these sessions, the teachers developed meaningful relationships with the families and were able to identify different forms of the families' CCW. The teachers' initial impressions of the refugee families were transformed as a result of these relationships, and the teachers developed an appreciation for the families' histories and familial assets. Moreover, in Auerbach's (2007) research of 16 African American and Latino parents, she constructed an alternative typology of how these caregivers viewed their roles in their children's educations. Auerbach (2007) noted categories of involvement that often drew upon the socio-cultural capital of the parents. For instance, in the category of "moral supporters," the Latino parents' role was based upon the notions of "*educacion*" and "*consejos*," which Auerbach (2007) defined as "cultural narrative advice and teachings" (p. 263). Another category, "ambivalent companions," reflected parents who emotionally supported their children, for example, protecting and encouraging them even if they were not always on board with their children's postsecondary plans.

Research on parent engagement remains unclear in terms of what impact, if any, parent engagement has on family-school relationships. Critique of the historical conceptualization of parent engagement is reimagined in the context of this study and expanded to include the diverse and equitable strategies of MCAs to advocate for socially just relationships with families in an urban educational setting. Moreover, caregivers are involved in their children's educations in ways that are not always legitimized by schools. It is important to recognize the range of ways in which parents are engaged. In the current study, the MCAs recognized and leveraged the CCW of multilingual parents in roles that went beyond just academic or language support and helped to form relationships between members of the school community and parents.

The Roles of Cultural Brokers in Educational Settings

The concept of cultural brokership is described in Jezewski's (1990) research on the work of healthcare professionals who helped migrant workers gain access to healthcare services. She called these professionals "cultural brokers" and described their roles as "bridging, linking, or mediating between groups" (p. 497). In the context of education, cultural brokers navigate two worlds: the formalized organization of education and the informal connections between multicultural communities. Within educational systems and structures, the role of cultural brokership is taken on by different individuals such as teachers, instructional aides, school counselors, school or parent liaisons, community members, students and siblings, or individuals who are specifically hired for the work of cultural brokership, such as bilingual counseling assistants (Ishimaru, 2016; Jezewski, 1990;

Yohani, 2013). Cultural brokers, such as family liaisons who work with culturally and linguistically diverse families in particular, help to navigate parent and school relationships (Ishimaru, 2016).

Coady (2019) defined cultural brokers as cultural informants who possess the language skills and social capital necessary to serve as mediators between educational institutions and local families. Previous educational advocates have suggested brokering and building trust as tools for enhancing family engagement in schools (WIDA, 2017). However, multilingual children should not serve as cultural brokers as this can become a potential stressor for students (Orellana, 2009; Coady; 2019). The bridging work of cultural brokers is especially important in acknowledging the value of CCW in the engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families with their children's schools (Ishimaru, 2016; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Cultural brokers assume different roles when they work with multilingual families. Those roles can range from translating and interpreting mainstream educational systems to advocacy work with school administrators and teachers on behalf of families (Singh et al., 1999; Yohani, 2013). Cultural brokers mediate and counter longstanding deficit views of multilingual families by building upon the CCW that multilingual families possess, which is often overlooked because it does not resemble the valued forms of cultural capital associated with white middle-class families (Yosso, 2005). While scholars share differing views about whether it is important for cultural brokers to share the same cultural backgrounds as the families they serve (Lewis, 2004; Singh et al., 1999; Yohani, 2013), the bridging work of cultural brokers is vital to supporting a school's relationships with multilingual families.

Research on cultural brokers has shown a complex picture of the roles these individuals play in schools. In Ishimaru et al.'s (2016) study of 15 cultural brokers who worked across three school districts, the researchers found that the majority of the family liaisons utilized strategies that "socialize[d] non-dominant families into school-centric norms" (p. 864). The approaches that the cultural brokers used were characterized as "unidirectional" and "unilateral." They viewed school educators as the sole possessors of knowledge and encouraged parents to adhere to their behaviors and norms (p. 866). The researchers also found a few cultural brokers who worked more equitably with families. Their approach to brokering involved creating a welcoming environment for parents, building connections, and broadening parent engagement to connect families and communities together.

Moreover, in Martinez-Cosio and Iannacone's (2007) study of parent liaisons, the researchers described the challenging position that these liaisons often found themselves in as cultural brokers as they mediated tensions between parents and school staff, parents and school administrators, and parents and the school district. Inherently, the role of cultural brokers is that of institutional agents. While parent liaisons are able to use their unique positions to change institutional norms and systems, they are also part of the system that reinforces dominant cultural norms and practices in their work with caregivers (p. 365).

Finally, Yohani's (2013) case study of eight cultural brokers who worked with refugee families and children in Canada highlighted the important services brokers provided in terms of bridging students with educational activities and connecting families to mental health resources. While Yohani (2013) agreed that there are challenges with cultural brokering in schools, she recommended clarifying the roles and expectations of these workers within school systems and recognizing that their roles will change in order to respond to the evolving needs of families.

This collection of studies positions cultural brokering as central to the work of MCAs. Multilingual counseling assistants are institutional agents and, as such, represent the schools and districts that employ them (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Their primary charge is to translate and interpret for the multilingual families they serve in order to establish relationships between schools and the families. Multilingual counseling assistants often share the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the families they serve, contributing to their deep understandings of the language and culture of

multilingual families. This insider-insider status that MCAs occupy enables them to perform this role as cultural brokers. However, with this role comes important questions about their responsibilities, expectations, and power. Taken together, studies of liaison roles like MCAs paint a complex picture of the relationships and contexts that MCAs negotiate.

The Work of Social Justice Leaders in Schools

While a number of studies have examined the role of school leaders and family-school partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Vera et al., 2012; Wassell et al., 2017), only a few studies have explored the work of school leaders through the lens of social justice leadership (DeMatthews et al., 2016). In a majority of these studies, leadership is narrowly defined, and the participants are typically school administrators or hold other high-level leadership positions. In this section, we highlight several studies that used social justice leadership as an explicit lens through which to analyze how leaders enacted changes to existing school structures and systems and improved the ways they partnered with parents to support their children.

Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) conducted a cross-case analysis to examine how school leaders across three schools were able to create asset-based, inclusive services for ELLs and their families. They placed emphasis on understanding the beliefs, knowledge, and skills of the school leaders. The researchers found several commonalities across ESL reform efforts at these sites, including ensuring that ELLs received ESL services within their general education classes, making it a requirement for all general education teachers to include ELLs in their planning and curriculum, and offering school-wide professional development for teachers to create more inclusive classrooms for ELLs and engage families by improving systems of communication. Unlike the other studies reviewed in this section, the researchers did not focus exclusively on parent engagement reform and practices across these schools. The focus seemed to be primarily on the ELLs and improving the ways that schools were meeting their academic and social needs.

Auerbach (2009) drew upon qualitative data from two different studies that explored how 35 school administrators conceptualized school partnerships. She found that the administrators' leadership around these efforts fell along a continuum for supporting partnership work. The first type of leadership model was characterized as "Leadership Preventing Partnership," in which the administrators maintained a separation between their schools and the community and parents and there was no partnership orientation with parents (Auerbach, 2009, p. 749). The second type of leadership model was "Leadership for Nominal Partnerships." Here, the goal of partnership with parents was to increase achievement, and there was a one-way service-oriented relationship with parents (Auerbach, 2009, p. 749). The third type of leadership model was described as "Leadership for Traditional Partnerships." This was similar to the second model in terms of the partnership orientation, but the goals of the partnership also include improving communication with parents (Auerbach, 2009, p. 749). The fourth leadership model was described as "Leadership for Authentic Partnerships." The partnership goals had a strong orientation toward "social justice, parent advocacy, and dialogue" (Auerbach, 2009, p. 749). Auerbach (2009) argued that the first three types of leadership models hinder genuine collaboration between schools and parents and are typically deficit-oriented in how they view caregivers. However, in the "Authentic Partnerships" model, school leaders welcome equal partnership and collaboration with parents and clearly view parents through an asset-based lens.

DeMatthews and colleagues (2016) conducted an in-depth qualitative case study of one leader's enactment of social justice leadership in a private nondenominational Christian elementary school located in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. In this case, the participant, Ms. Donna, was one of the founding members of the school and helped to establish its mission. The findings from the study presented four important leadership practices that were enacted by Ms. Donna. First, Ms. Donna sought to learn about the "lived experiences of marginalized communities," and variables that

impacted the students' well-being (p. 784). Second, Ms. Donna found a way to address students' academic achievement while also addressing climate and cultural issues in the school, for example, the social and emotional needs of children and families. Third, Ms. Donna recognized that student success requires schools to work in solidarity with parents. Lastly, Ms. Donna recognized the importance of drawing upon the CCW of families in her vision of school partnership work with parents. The researchers also reported that Ms. Donna was constantly reflective about whether the school was meeting the expectations of the parent partnership work and sought to make long-term improvements in areas where it fell short of those expectations.

Brooks and colleagues (2007) expanded our understanding of social justice leadership as distributed leadership across a school rather than just formal leadership roles. They combined distributed leadership and social justice leadership frameworks by examining the practices of distributed leadership for social justice. In their study of an urban high school (Brooks et al., 2007), the researchers observed leaders throughout the school engaging in social justice leadership practices, including "bridge work," to connect students on an individual or group level to external sources "intended to help them overcome various forms of inequity" (p. 396). They conducted interviews with 42 administrators and teachers. The researchers found a range of ways in which leadership was distributed at the school. For instance, teachers and administrators were involved in various departmental- or grade-level task forces to address student retention rates at the school. They "initiated and engaged in countless impromptu exchanges about how to reach students with innovative teaching strategies" and helped students see how school was relevant to their lives (p. 391). The researchers also reported that there were occasions where teachers, administrators, and students approached leadership to raise concerns about instructional practices that did not serve all students equitably. The researchers noted that school leaders engaged in important "bridge work," meaning they connected individual students and groups to external resources and services. Brooks and colleagues' (2007) study revealed a much more nuanced view of leadership that is not only relegated to individuals with formal titles and roles in schools. Given the nature of how leadership can occur in organic ways and is often distributed across individuals, an organizational view of how leadership practices are performed affords a more comprehensive view of how social justice leadership is enacted.

Insights from these studies indicated that social justice leaders possess certain dispositions, qualities, and skills in their engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse families and students. These leaders "view language as a right, ... and work to provide [students and families] equal access to educational opportunities" (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011, p. 650). DeMatthews and colleagues (2016), after reflecting on the focal leader in their study, highlighted these practices as "a commitment to promoting socially just family engagement through school-community partnerships that draws upon cultural community wealth and prioritizes the needs of students, families, and communities" (p. 784). Lastly, Brooks and colleagues (2007) viewed social justice leadership as a "distributed leadership" effort among multiple individuals that affords a broader view of leadership practices and leads to transformational changes in a school setting. Our study contributes to the work on multilingual family engagement by showing how MCAs enact cultural brokering as a social justice practice that leverages multilingual families' CCW.

Methods

This paper is drawn from a larger qualitative case study of family engagement in two urban district schools during the 2019–2020 school year. We used an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2009) in which we purposefully sampled participants at each school to investigate the research question: What work do MCAs do that connects the CCW of families with schools, and can it be

described as social justice leadership? A case study design allowed for an exploration of the participants' social constructions of meaning and reality (Schwandt, 1994).

The research was conducted in two K–8 schools in a large urban school district in the northeastern United States. In a school district of over 15,000 students, approximately 12% were ELLs. Spruce and Walnut Elementary Schools were selected based on recommendations from administrators in the district's central office dedicated to family engagement and multilingual programming. During the 2018–2019 academic year, the ELL population accounted for approximately 22% of Spruce and 43% of Walnut.

For the purpose of this paper, we focused on three MCAs who served designated linguistic populations in these two district schools. Carlos was an MCA for Spanish-speaking families at Spruce. Ezra was an MCA for the Spanish-speaking families at Walnut School. Evangeline was an MCA for Burmese families at Spruce School. Table 1 provides information about each participant.

Table 1: MCA Participant Chart

Name	*Country of Origin*	*Gender*	*Language*	*Tenure as MCA at School Site*
Carlos	*Spain*	*Male*	*Spanish*	*3 years*
Ezra	*Puerto Rico*	*Male*	*Spanish*	*Less than a year*
Evangeline	*Myanmar (Burma)*	*Female*	*Burmese*	*More than 5 years*

According to the school district website, the main responsibilities of the MCAs included interpretation work, helping families with language barriers, building relationships, and helping multilingual families feel more engaged and comfortable at their schools. Their roles were not limited to language translation for schools and multilingual parents.

Data Sources

We interviewed multiple members of the school communities to gain a full understanding of the relationships between multilingual families, teachers, administrators, and community members. As a result of these interviews, we began to understand the centrality of the MCA role.

The primary data source for this paper was face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the three MCAs from Spruce and Walnut Schools. The interview protocol consisted of 11 questions that addressed topics such as communication strategies with multilingual parents, resources provided to parents by the schools, parent involvement in decision-making, and school engagement with the community to support families. The following are examples of questions asked.

1. How would you characterize your approach to being an MCA?
2. What strategies do you use to communicate with the parents/guardians of ELL students in the schools where you work?
3. How has your school and school staff tried to better understand the background, culture, and goals that ELL families have for their children?

Each interview was conducted by members of the research team and lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a transcription service and reviewed for accuracy by the researchers. Questions were developed in advance and approved by the university's IRB office.

Data Analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic coding (Braun & Clark, 2005). The researchers developed a codebook comprised of concepts in the CCW and social justice leadership frameworks. Data were coded for each of the six forms of CCW and five dimensions of social justice leadership. The researchers coded one transcript together to ensure consistency across our individual understandings and applications of the codes. We then revised the codebook to include agreed-upon examples of each code and used this in our subsequent coding.

We coded further interviews independently and then reviewed and discussed our coding to resolve any unclear aspects. During these discussions, the researchers identified patterns where the codes overlapped and co-occurred within the data. These patterns were then further analyzed and inspired the development of the integrated framework to help explain the work of the MCAs.

Findings

In this section, we first describe each MCA's background and key aspects of their work. We introduce the types of cultural brokering practices that the MCAs enacted. We present these practices in relation to the various dimensions of social justice leadership (personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological). At the same time, we examine how these practices helped the MCAs leverage the CCW (familial, aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, and resistance) of the multilingual families. This analytic approach allowed us to explore the data in terms of our integrated framework. Our findings show variation in the types of social justice dimensions and forms of CCW employed by each MCA. We consider the meaning of this in more detail in the discussion section of this paper.

Ezra

Ezra had been an MCA for Spanish-speaking families for the past two years. At the time of the study, he was in his first year as an MCA at Walnut Elementary School and another nearby school.

Ezra was bilingual. His first language was Spanish. He learned English after he arrived in the United States from Puerto Rico. He explained how his background with his own family informed how he supported the Spanish-speaking families in his school: "I remember that my grandparents said, "Hey, look, we didn't come here to waste our time. We want to give you a good future, and we need you to learn English but not forget Spanish." Ezra's family impressed the significance of language upon him. They valued Spanish.

Yet, in order for Ezra to take full advantage of the opportunities and possibilities of the United States, he needed to learn English. Ezra continued:

> I valued the sacrifice they made, so I learned English as quickly as I could, as best as I could. Then I was the one interpreting for them at doctor's appointments and – when they had to go on certain events or to the city or whatever, you know. So, that was ingrained in me, the importance of knowing how to do things the way things are done here [in the US], that we were not back in Puerto Rico, where Spanish was our first language. And we knew how to navigate there, but here, it's important.

Ezra witnessed the sacrifices that his family made in order to emigrate to the US. However, his family's language and culture were not to be lost but practiced, sustained, and cherished. His family valued and protected their linguistic capital. Ezra needed to learn English, but he drew upon his family's navigational capital in order to translate during appointments with the doctor, the city government, and other events. Ezra reflected, "I remember – I've never forgotten – how difficult it was for them to communicate in those first three years we were here. And it's something that is deeply ingrained, so I know how difficult it is, the culture shock." Ezra's personal experiences shaped his leadership.

Remembering his family's experiences, he could imagine the challenges confronting Spanish-speaking ELLs and their families.

Ezra leveraged the linguistic, aspirational, and navigational capital of the Spanish-speaking families that he served. He understood that preserving Spanish and becoming bilingual in English expands and enhances the families' linguistic capital. Moreover, Ezra recognizes the wealth of aspirational and navigational capital that families already possess, as demonstrated in their relocation to the US. Ezra sought to leverage these forms of CCW by helping families to understand the educational system in the US and the schools that their children attended.

When asked to explain his role as an MCA, Ezra outlined his duties to provide "interpretation, translation, and parent workshops for the district." He later elaborated, "We [MCAs] are their [multilingual families'] brokers. We're the ones who are in a meeting, we're interpreting. Documents, we're translating, but we're also advocating for them."

In his role as an MCA, Ezra exhibited the interpersonal dimension of social justice leadership. When Ezra was hired as an MCA for Walnut Elementary, he endeavored to get to know the families. During the weeks before the start of the academic year, Ezra went into the neighborhood to introduce himself to parents and families. He frequented churches, restaurants, laundromats, and community events. He explained his approach to meeting families at church:

> I knew where they congregated for their faith base. I went to their churches, and I said, "I'm [Ezra]. I understand that many families, their children go to [Walnut]. … May I have a minute to say who I am and what my role is and where I'll be?"

Ezra took the time to learn about the families. He learned about the specific regions of Mexico and South America from which the families originated. He learned about their journeys to the US and their hopes and dreams for their children. Ezra laid a foundation for building relationships with families during the school year:

> So, it kinda gave me a really nice segue. When school started, even if they didn't know me, they had heard of me from either one of the community events or church events, or they remembered me, saying "Hey, look, I'm gonna be there to support." And so, I had tons of parents. When we came in September, we had a relationship already.

Ezra expressed that "[it] was important to really immerse myself in the community," and he was intentional about "going to where I know they [Spanish-speaking families] felt comfortable."

Operating from the interpersonal dimension of social justice leadership, Ezra accessed the families' social capital. As a result of meeting families in their communities during the summer months, Ezra developed an understanding of the families' familial, aspirational, and linguistic capital, and he leveraged their CCW to open doors for them within the school.

In addition to working with interpersonally with individual families, Ezra also sought to build bridges between families and the school. During the school year, Ezra offered a monthly parent workshop series that introduced the resources available in the school, and he explained educational terms and school policies and procedures. Ezra described some of the topics discussed:

> We started off the first one really talking overall "what is in your child's school?" Principal Sanchez [gave] an overall presentation of what to expect this school year. Different grade teachers explained, "This is what we'll be doing in math. This is what we'll be doing in reading. This is what we'll be doing in science. When you see this come home, this is what to expect." We had the special ed unit come out to the parents and say, "Hey, this is what special education is. This is what being an English language learner is." Just giving them those tools to know what is it that their kids are exposed to, what is the building resource we have. ... So, we're keeping them informed. That information piece is very – it's crucial – for building that bridge.

In this instance, Ezra displayed the communal dimension of social justice leadership. With knowledge of the way schools work, parents can become more active in their children's educations and school

communities. He explained the school and educational system in a way that could activate families' aspirational, navigational, and social capital.

Ezra also interpreted the monthly Home-School Association meetings. Ezra negotiated a relationship with the president of the Home-School Association. Before each meeting, Ezra met with the president to review the agenda. When Ezra was available, he would sit with the Spanish-speaking families and interpret the meeting for them. On the occasions when he was unable to attend, he would call the Spanish-speaking families whose names appeared on the sign-in sheet to follow up, review the agenda, and answer questions. Ezra also offered a recap of important information from the Home-School Association meetings during his monthly workshop. Ezra noted that the president and other families in the Home-School Association, largely comprised of white and African American mothers, "express[ed] appreciation that the [Spanish-speaking] families [were] coming [to the meetings]":

> I love the fact the Home and School community is saying, "Thank you for coming," and the [Spanish-speaking] parents were like, "Wow, they said thank you for coming?" Yes. This has always been available to you. It's just been a perception. They've always wanted you here. They want you to be part of conversation. They want you to suggest. They want you to participate. They want you to be active.

By interpreting the Home-School Association meetings, Ezra opened the door for English- and Spanish-speaking families to discuss common issues and shared concerns as parents of children at Walnut Elementary School. As a social justice leader, Ezra made systemic changes to the way that the Home-School Association meetings operated and created new expectations around participation for all parents at the school. He worked to create inclusive contexts where families could meet to discuss school issues and events across languages.

In addition to breaking down barriers to meetings, Ezra also demonstrated the communal dimension of social justice leadership by making volunteer opportunities available to parents. In order to volunteer, parents at Walnut Elementary were required to undergo a background check and fingerprinting process. This posed a barrier to Spanish-speaking families' engagement in their children's school. Ezra addressed parents' fears that completing the paperwork would put them and their families in jeopardy. He was able to successfully facilitate the volunteer clearance process for the families.

On Martin Luther King Day, a group of Spanish-speaking fathers built a new garden for the school, painted, and made other minor repairs. Ezra attributed the involvement and contributions to the strength of the family-school relationships. He recounted:

> And the dads called me and thanked me – "Why? We're thanking you! You took your Monday off to help us!" But, they said, "Thank you for allowing us to participate." And they told the principal, "Anything you need. Our schedules are crazy, but anything you need." This is what we're talking about. Community. We build relationships beyond the people, and they – everyone has a role, a menu of ways of participating.

This is another example of Ezra's leadership at the systemic level. He demystified the volunteer clearance process and created paths of access for Spanish-speaking parents' involvement in their children's school.

In conclusion, in Ezra's work as an MCA, we see social justice leadership enacted in a nested continuum across the personal, interpersonal, communal, and systemic dimensions. Ezra brokered relationships between the school and Spanish-speaking families. He utilized his cultural brokering practices to help Spanish-speaking families access educational opportunities, participate in school meetings and events, and create an equitable, inclusive climate in the school. He recognized the CCW of the Spanish-speaking families and leveraged the familial, aspirational, navigational, and social capital of the families to facilitate their full participation in the school community.

Carlos

Carlos was originally from Spain and had worked as an MCA at Spruce School for three years serving Spanish-speaking families. According to Carlos, about 47% of the students spoke Spanish, and the majority of them were from Central America. He worked at the school five days a week.

Carlos' personal approach to his role as an MCA stemmed from his former work as a community organizer. He believed that the experiences, knowledge, and resources that immigrant families bring to the US make it a better country. He wants students to feel "proud of where they came from" and not ashamed of their heritage. He wants to ease families' transitions to living in the States by acknowledging the assets that they bring to the country: "I understand that when people come here, this is a new opportunity in their lives, but I want to acknowledge the experience that people bring."

He recognizes the familial, aspirational, and navigational capital that the families already possess as valuable resources for the school community. Carlos explains, "I'm a cultural broker, so I try to work with the school staff to try for them to understand the reality of Spanish-speaking families" – particularly the challenges they experience when they first arrive in the US.

Carlos' work was very much situated within the interpersonal dimension. He characterized his main responsibilities as working with school staff to better understand the needs of multilingual families. These responsibilities included helping families navigate the school and city systems, translating for families and the school, creating connections between families, and working with ELLs who often arrive from their home countries with trauma-related experiences.

Carlos stands outside of the school every morning to greet students and talk to their parents. After getting to know him, parents approached him with personal questions about school policies and processes that they did not understand, for example, the school calling a caregiver about a student's absence. A parent may also ask Carlos about non-school-related questions like finding a dentist or healthcare. Carlos described the way he connected with families in the following way: "I also put a lot of interest in building community among the families who come, because it's frequent the families come here and they feel alone; they don't have many friends." He leveraged the social and linguistic capital of the families by helping them create connections within the larger school community where they could meet each other and find a network of support and relationships among other Spanish-speaking parents in both formal (school-sponsored) and non-formal contexts. In addition, Carlos' work at the interpersonal level supported individual parents' navigational and social capital as they learned about services, resources, and structures to support their children and families within their communities.

Carlos hosted meetings for the Spanish-speaking families where he could address their questions and help them understand school routines and practices, for example, standardized tests, report cards, and so on. He explained school policies and practices to help the parents navigate a complex school district:

> So I try to have a workshop with families to explain what the [annual standardized test] is. When you get in a school, there's a lingo that you start using, and sometimes teachers talk to families, like yeah next week is [the test]. And people don't know what [the test] is but they are embarrassed to ask.

More than just translating English and Spanish, Carlos deciphered and explained educational terms and acronyms to parents in a comfortable environment. He also shared tips with the parents to help their children feel less anxious and more prepared to take the annual standardized tests.

As a Spanish speaker, Carlos helped the families feel comfortable expressing their concerns within the school space and supported the caregivers' navigational capital as they maneuvered through important school and district academic events. Carlos shared that the parents trust him: "It's not only about school, people want to talk to me, not because they want to know about me, but they feel

comfortable having this kind of role, liaison in the school." The parents not only sought out Carlos' advice – they also built relationships with one another in the workshops and other events that he hosted.

In one instance, Carlos described the Latin American school calendar to the teachers and counselors and explained that some of the families registered their children for school during the winter months. The teachers did not understand why they were seeing a pattern of families moving into the community later in the school year. Carlos told them that "in Guatemala and Honduras ... school usually is from January to October, so some people choose the fall to travel." The school calendar is different in those countries compared to the US, and this was the reason why the school saw an increase in student registrations during the winter. He shared this information with the teachers to dispel any false assumptions they might have about the families' reasons for registering their children later in the school year. In this way, Carlos emphasized the aspirational capital of the parents to the school staff to help them understand how the actions of the families demonstrated the hopes they possessed for their children in moving them to the US so they could receive better educational opportunities.

Carlos' actions within the ecological dimension of Furman's (2012) framework were particularly pronounced during the interview. He actively sought to help parents who experience societal challenges outside of the school. One critical issue that some of the parents approached him about related to their immigration status. The school frequently received families who were undocumented. While they were welcomed at Spruce, parents still worried about how their status would impact their lives. Carlos shared a story about an undocumented mother who was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE):

> There was a family here whose mom was taken by ICE, and she was in detention for two months and a half ... the dad came to talk to me, and I helped build like a community response for the family to support the kids, because there were two kids here coming to school in PreK and kindergarten, and of course, they were super traumatized by this, and to get some money for the family, because Dad needed to stop working for a few weeks for – somebody needed to take care of the [children], because [the mother] was not able to go to work.

Carlos took action when the mother was arrested and rallied support for the family in connecting them to community members who offered the family support while their mother/wife was detained by ICE. He leveraged the social and resistance capital of the community to advocate on behalf of the mother. As a result of Carlos' involvement and advocacy for the family, other undocumented parents at the school trusted him enough to talk about their own immigration situations and sought his advice about issues they encountered with ICE or with people in the community.

Carlos also worked as a mediator across different ethnic and racial lines, responding to issues arising from the larger sociopolitical context. While Carlos worked mainly with Spanish-speaking families, there were instances when cross-cultural tensions arose at Spruce that involved students and parents from different racial or ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Carlos witnessed situations where he needed to intervene when students or parents said derogatory or disparaging comments about students from other backgrounds:

> So there is a lot of tension – I wouldn't say a lot, but there is some tension – and a lot of the fights are between Spanish-speaking kids and African American kids. And that can, a lot of times start a lot of racist comments coming from Latino families, "Well, you know, African American kids, they are this way, or they will do that." And I always try, that's something that I try to [handle] with the Spanish-speaking families.

Carlos encouraged the multilingual parents to develop resistance capital in accepting cultural and linguistic differences between the African American and Spanish-speaking communities. Carlos extended his role as an MCA into the ecological dimension of social justice leadership to dismantle

prejudicial attitudes and behaviors between these two communities, and he commented on similar biases that he observed between different Spanish-speaking families as well. For instance, he offered an example of a student who was in conflict with another classmate from a different country. The student said, "Oh, but you know, they are from Honduras, like they're very dangerous." By dismantling these stereotypes, his work bridged racial, ethnic, and cultural differences among various sectors of the larger school community.

In sum, Carlos' work as an MCA revealed social justice leadership enacted in a nested continuum across the personal, interpersonal, communal, and ecological dimensions. His work leveraged the familial, aspirational, navigational, and social capital of the families in his community.

Evangeline

Evangeline had been an MCA for the local Burmese community for six years and worked at Spruce Elementary School four days a week. She also worked part-time with the state Migrant Education Program, making visits to support student education at home. The Burmese immigrant community in this large northeastern city was diverse, with multiple ethnic groups and languages.

Evangeline was Burmese. Her first language was Tedim Chin, and she learned Burmese as a child when her family moved to the country's capital – one of several moves before coming to the US. Her reasons for working as an MCA were deeply rooted in her own experience of immigration as well as her religious and family values of helping others:

> I myself experienced the hardship becoming, like, not able to speak the native language. When I was about fourth grade, my family had to move to the capital city of my country. Over there, they only speak our common language, which we call Burmese. But Burmese is not my native language – and I speak Tedim Chin – so I really can't forget about how it is really hard to be in the school and not speak the language.

Evangeline also emphasized her orientation toward serving and helping others, as shaped both by her beliefs as a Christian and her mother's example:

> I believe that God give me a chance, an opportunity, to show His love and care to other people through me. So that is one of the reasons that I really love being an MCA ... And because of my mom, and she used to tell me that if you can help someone else, don't say no. Just help them – and never forget where we come from. So, you know, whenever you can give a hand, give a hand to other people.

In her work as an MCA, these values and experiences served as the foundation for Evangeline's cultural brokering practices in recognizing and leveraging the CCW of her community.

Language interpretation and translation were key aspects of Evangeline's work. She interpreted in parent workshops, parent meetings, report card conferences, and other events, such as Back to School Nights or other school- and district-wide events. In addition, she translated documents such as monthly calendars or event flyers that are distributed to parents.

Her work was facilitated by trust and relationships at the interpersonal level. Evangeline lived in the community she served and the parents and families knew her very well, with some even going to the same church. Building on her interpersonal relationships, Evangeline showed leadership at the communal level as she worked to build bridges within and across the various families in her community. The Burmese refugee community encompasses diverse language and cultural groups, and Evangeline herself did not speak Karen or the Malay and Burmese languages of some of her families. Her community meetings brought in families across these various backgrounds, thus expanding the families' social capital. This could be a challenge for her, but she was committed to inclusion – when necessary, she used Language Line or even Google Translate to help with communication.

School policies and the cultural expectations of schooling were a large focus of her work. Evangeline organized parent workshops for newcomer students and parents where she could explain

school policies to the families: "We want to let the parent know the expectations from the school. It can be attendance policy – dress code, all those kind of things that we have to let the parents know." When Burmese families got a call from the school, they would contact Evangeline about what it meant:

> We try to go visit with the classroom and meet with the teacher. When the teacher reaches out to us, we explain in more detail because sometimes, of course, the teacher will [be] upset. Some teachers come and – when they need help, you know, they don't know what to do with a student.

Evangeline also helped the counselors and school staff "whenever our students have issue. It can be behavior issue or a discipline issue. We have to help our parents and students to communicate with each side – students, teachers, parents." Evangeline built bridges between Burmese families and their children's teachers. She facilitated communication between the two, allowing the families' aspirational capital to be expressed and helping the teachers to understand the cultural dynamics that might underlie behaviors or discipline issues.

Sometimes, she was called upon to explain cultural norms to teachers. For example, a parent might not come to a conference called by a teacher. Evangeline explained that families in her community are used to teachers having full authority to discipline a student. Thus, when a family is called because of a discipline issue, the parent might not come, either because of their work schedule or because they are not used to being called in on discipline issues. She said,

> And the challenge part is that, of course, in most of Asian culture, when the students and – the parents and the student choose the school, the teacher has full authority. I mean, like they can discipline. They can do whatever – it doesn't mean that they can, you know, they can abuse. It mean[s] that they can punish. So here, what's really challenge for me is that even sometime when I have to call the parents, because of their work schedule, or because they think that it is not important to be part of the school setting. It's not that they don't want to, it's just that they are not used to it.

As Evangeline concluded, "My main role is that I am bridging among the students, school, community, and the parents, so it can be culturally or linguistically – and, you know, not only the culture, and then, their backgrounds, and then the school system."

Evangeline helped families understand how to apply to preschool for their children or start the high school selection process. She explained what happens in standardized testing, and what the expectations are for parental participation in parent-teacher conferences. Beyond just "language," Evangeline knew how to explain special services such as speech therapy or special education or other school issues to parents: "so instead of just directly interpreting to the family, I have to use how the family can understand – the reason that I call them today."

We highlight here the role that Evangeline played in leveraging the CCW of her families with their schools. Without her bridging work, the families might not have understood school expectations of involvement, and schools might have characterized parents as uninvolved and uninterested in their children's educations. In fact, the families showed substantial aspirational capital by trusting the schools and teachers with the education of their children and giving them authority over their children in the schools. Inasmuch as Evangeline's work allowed immigrant and refugee families to be more actively involved in school practices and expanded teachers' understandings of values behind seemingly resistant behaviors, we see this work as part of the communal dimension of social justice leadership that leverages families' familial, aspirational, linguistic, and navigational capital.

Evangeline showed social justice leadership at the ecological level as well. With multiple roles in the school district and the Office of Migrant Education, she was knowledgeable about resources that could help support the families within the community:

> Other information that I provide can be like, education saving plan. And, as we all know, we all are immigrants, so I ask someone from USCIS to come and talk about Green Card

application, citizen application. And sometimes I have to communicate with other outside agencies that the parent can benefit from, you know, any kind of resources.

Evangeline emphasized her role in providing information to the families: "So the parent knows that it's not only me that they can come and depend, but there are other resources that we have in the community – so those kinds of information that I provided." Here, we see Evangeline leveraging families' aspirational, navigational, and social capital by providing connections to outside resources such as saving for college, citizenship application information, and other resources.

Evangeline's social justice work at the ecological level was grounded in her commitment to include families across the larger community (the communal level). She organized workshops and information sessions that might be of interest not only to her community, but to other community groups, and she invited the other MCAs to join her. As an example, she described how she invited representatives from the mayor's office to explain what the 2020 Census was, and invited the other MCAs:

So I know that this will be the first time for my community participating in a census, so I invited the people from the mayor's office to talk about this kind of event. And before I organized this kind of event, I spoke with other MCAs – "Do you think that your parents will need this kind of information?" "Do you want to join with me?" So then they made decisions, then we all have [the event] together.

It is clear that this work, in turn, relied on her close interpersonal relationships and commitments to inclusion with the other MCAs:

We work together, plan meetings together. If I'm not here, Carlos supports my families, and if they cannot help, they call me, "Evangeline, this is what happened. How can we help?" So this really makes us – not only the student, even the MCA and staff in the building – we feel like we are family.

Evangeline's social justice leadership found expression in her collaborations with other MCAs to bring together families across cultural and linguistic backgrounds to access information relevant to their shared experience as immigrants. By organizing a session with representatives from the mayor's office, Evangeline helped the families to activate their social, navigational, and aspirational capital to access their right of participation in larger civic life.

In conclusion, Evangeline's work as an MCA showed social justice leadership across the personal, interpersonal, communal, and ecological dimensions. Her efforts at the ecological level were especially notable in her interview. Her work leveraged community cultural wealth in developing the linguistic, familial, aspirational, navigational, and social capital of the families in her community.

Discussion

While cultural brokering has been understood as a practice of facilitating communication between schools and diverse families, it has rarely been understood as social justice leadership. Our study revealed the ways MCAs work as social justice leaders through their practices at various levels. Fundamentally, the three MCAs in our study were committed to inclusion and equity for their families through their own experiences and values and expressed their commitment as the critical foundation of their work. While these personally held values were their foundations, their practices as MCAs were rooted at the interpersonal level as they worked with individual families, teachers, and counselors to increase communication and understanding in multiple settings. The trust they built through these relationships and activities allowed them to work in larger group settings such as the Home-School Association and even address school systems and larger social structures.

Studies warn that cultural brokering can be a system-preserving, non-reciprocal practice in which families are required to fit into school practices (Auerbach, 2009; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Ladky & Peterson, 2008). Our study, however, highlighted the way that MCAs can work to expand rather than preserve the status quo by recognizing and leveraging the cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) of their families as a resource for the larger school community.

Our findings are limited to the examples that appear in these transcripts. Not every dimension of social justice leadership and not every form of CCW was seen to be activated by each MCA. However, as a group, the MCAs in our study expanded the linguistic capital of their multilingual families, emphasized their extraordinary aspirational and navigational capital, and leveraged familial and social relationships for the benefit of the entire school community. They also supported resistance capital throughout the school community when necessary to address social injustice in the larger society.

Expanding linguistic capital was fundamental to the social justice leadership of the MCAs. Language is the basis of the MCA job description, and linguistic capital allowed the interviewees entry into their communities. Through the MCAs connecting linguistically and not requiring families to move to "English only" (but rather, English-additional) communication, families' linguistic capital was sustained and encouraged across the school community. The MCAs relied upon the families' current linguistic capital to share information. By translating at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings and other school-based meetings and events, the MCAs opened the door for multilingual families to participate in discussions and decision-making processes that they could not have otherwise accessed.

The MCAs also emphasized the aspirational and navigational capital of their families. On personal and cultural levels, the MCAs understood the multilingual families' aspirations for their children through education, despite systemic inequities and structural barriers. The MCAs endeavored to support multilingual families by showing them how to navigate the educational system, starting with the policies and procedures of their children's schools. Through monthly workshops where the families were introduced to key school personnel and academic vocabulary, the MCAs translated what was said and, more importantly, the meaning of what was said. As a result, many multilingual families were able to better position themselves to access educational resources and partake in academic opportunities.

This was not just a one-way, non-reciprocal process, however. The MCAs worked to change the school system by debunking and demystifying stereotypes about multilingual families for teachers and school leaders alike. From explaining the influx of Spanish-speaking students mid-academic year to clarifying why Burmese parents defer to their children's teachers, the MCAs challenged deficit-oriented rationales for the families' cultural practices and expanded the school staff's understanding of the multilingual families in the school community.

The MCAs expanded the membership and involvement of families in the schools. They encouraged their families to participate as volunteers in school and made it possible for them to do so. They changed the process of the Home-School Association to offer multilingual families a seat at the table for discussions about school issues.

The MCAs also supported multilingual families in navigating systems beyond the school community. From learning more about resources for higher education to securing green cards, the MCAs acted as translators and advocates for multilingual families. They helped to organize the larger school community of teachers and parents when a member of their community was wrongfully detained by ICE. Working across the systemic and ecological dimensions of social justice leadership, the MCAs sought to transform their schools with the understanding that schools are embedded within the larger sociopolitical context of US society.

In short, this study shows how MCAs operated as social justice leaders in the school communities in ways that made their school communities more inclusive of multilingual families.

While most literature on social justice leadership has emphasized the role of school administrators as leaders, a few studies have shown that other members of the school community are also able to engage in leadership practices through forms of "distributed leadership" (Brooks et al., 2007; DeMatthews et al., 2016). Although this is beyond the scope of the current paper, we saw in our research that other members of the school community also played informal leadership roles in promoting equity and inclusion in the school community. Thus, we point out the need in our field for a wider view of leadership and leadership functions in school communities than that which has been taken up to now.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the study. First, we relied heavily on interviews as the primary data source. We did not have an opportunity to conduct observations of events or meetings led by the MCAs. The COVID-19 pandemic cut short our data collection period. While we received rich information from the current data, we recognize that having additional data to supplement the interviews would have offered a more nuanced understanding of the work of the MCAs with the families across each of the schools. Perhaps by collecting other types of data, we could have seen other dimensions of CCW and social justice leadership that were not evident in the interview data alone.

In addition, the research team members were outsiders to each of the school communities. Designing the study as a participatory action research study or collaborative study with MCAs would have positioned them differently in the research project.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study contributes to the research on multilingual family engagement by showing how MCAs served as social justice leaders within their school communities. Multilingual counseling assistants play an important role in building meaningful relationships with multilingual families, drawing on the assets and strengths of their CCW, and engaging multilingual families in their children's educations. Greater attention should be given to the roles of MCAs in promoting equity and inclusion in schools. We call upon school districts to revisit policies and practices for hiring, retention, professional development, and promotion for individuals in these roles.

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Understanding the Progression and Impact of Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation: A Community Conversation

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Introduction

The Journal of Family Diversity in Education (JFDE) strives to provide timely and insightful content for readers and the broader education community. However, the typically lengthy research and publication process in academia can make it difficult to respond to topical issues in a timely manner. In response to this challenge the JFDE is committed to facilitating periodic community conversations that seek to engage academic and community experts in dialogue pertaining to important issues.

What follows is a transcript of the first such community conversation focused on the recent progression of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. During the 2021-22 legislative session at least 15 states have considered or passed bills that would affect ways of discussing, addressing, or interacting with LGBTQ+ youth in schools. This legislation includes prohibitions of curriculum and instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity for students in kindergarten through 8th grade, prohibitions against school personnel providing gender-affirming care, requirements for parental consent for club participation (including LGBTQ+ clubs), requirements for parental consent regarding pronoun usage, the banning of books with LGBTQ+ themes in schools and libraries, and protections for teachers who refuse to use a student's pronoun that is different from their sex at birth. Our conversation focused on understanding the evolution of these types of policies and the potential impact on students, families, teachers, and school leaders.

The conversation took place on July 12, 2022 and was facilitated by the JFDE co-editors Michael Evans and Érica Fernández. The participants were invited based on their different areas of expertise (e.g., policy, curriculum, family engagement, school leadership), and experiences working with local communities. Readers can learn more about the participants' backgrounds by reviewing the bios at the end of this article. Participants reviewed the transcript to ensure accuracy and for our readers' convenience we have included footnotes with references to the articles, research and legislation referred to in the conversation.

A Community Conversation

Michael Evans: Stephen, perhaps you wouldn't mind starting us off. Have you noticed anything specific about the recent legislation in terms of how it is being framed or presented to the public that makes it different from past legislation that addresses these topics?

Stephen Russell: Yes, I will be interested to hear what others have to say about this too, but something very specific about the most recent legislation is the explicit target on children. We've had versions of anti-LGBTQ legislation and especially over the last 5 years anti-trans legislation. For example, in North Carolina and other places there were transpanic bathroom laws, but these laws were not successful.[1] I mean that they failed. So, the pivot was toward children directly. And where do we find children? In schools. I think what has been different is the explicit pivot toward schools and the home. I'll be interested in what the others see happening with the new policy waves that we're seeing.

Janice Kroeger: I want to note that although I am not up to date on all of the state laws, I know what is happening in Ohio. In Ohio, K-3 teachers are being singled out in a different way than they have been before.[2] For example, they're instructed not to use curriculum or instruction materials related to sexual orientation or gender identity and the language of the legislation says that in grade 4 to 12 these things can be discussed, but only in developmentally appropriate ways.

The part that concerns me based on my conversations with other people is that this is a discursive move that promotes fear about these topics. And at the K-3 level, it would prohibit teachers from even just discussing with parents that there are many, many types of gender expression, even intersex conditions, that might not be known when children are young.

It scares teachers out of using inclusive curriculum and representation. Even at the most simple level, like the visual, it also scares teachers to not be able to promote an appropriate environment for children who are developing their identities, and it talks them out of intellectually of doing any type of LGBTQ advocacy.

Bryan J. Duarte: I would add that the recent legislation we are seeing is not necessarily new if you look at "No Promo Homo" laws that have been on the books in states like Texas, where it's prohibited to really talk about homosexuality in school.[3] I think they are similar, but it's almost more intense

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[1] North Carolina repealed House Bill 2 in 2017 after facing tremendous political pressure.
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/23/us/north-carolina-transgender-bathrooms.html
[2] Ohio House Bill 616 was introduced in April of 2022. https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/2022/04/05/ohio-republicans-introduce-version-floridas-dont-say-gay-bill/9467432002/
[3] See https://www.equalitytexas.org/no-promo-homo-laws/ for a discussion of the background and history of these laws in Texas.

now. It's more targeted.

Everybody talks about Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, but the bills proposed in Ohio are even more terrifying because they not only censor speech about gender and sexuality, but about race as well[4]. And so, all of these intersectional, marginalized identities that exist in schools are *off* the table for discussion. When we think about the implications for queer youth that are racially minoritized as well, it's really, really problematic.

Alonso R. Reyna Rivarola: Absolutely. I would also add that 19 states have abstinence-only sex education, and that's something that has historically hindered how queer young people see themselves in the curriculum.[5] Part of the U.S. public education hidden curriculum *marries* abstinence-only education and heteronormative views on sexuality, which normalize cisheterosexuality. These public policies and classroom practices then shape how queer young people experience education and see themselves reflected—or not reflected—in schools.

Sarah Simi Cohen: The language and the rhetoric of the policies and the bills themselves have a complete misconception of what gender is. They are conflating biological sex and gender identity and expression in and of itself. That is a huge misconception that is embedded within the bill, and really gets at what Alonso was saying about normalizing just one sexual orientation and one gender identity. It's saying we can't talk about gender identity for trans people, but everyone has a gender identity and everyone has a sexual orientation. It's really confusing when you're reading the policies and bills if you understand that biological sex is completely different than one's gender. This confusion and conflation isn't uncommon, but is dangerous when we are trying to work towards providing safe and welcoming environments for trans, non-binary, intersex and genderqueer students. When people don't have that understanding it makes it very difficult to comprehend what they're trying to get at. When our politicians do so, it acts as a tactic to further confuse or scare people to promote queer and trans oppression[6].

Michael Evans: When I read this legislation, I wonder if some people in the general public who haven't spent a lot of time in the classroom are thinking about curriculum related to gender or sexual orientation in a way that it doesn't really exist in public education. I would argue that currently there are limited conversations taking place on these topics. I was a former second grade teacher and primarily topics in the classroom like these just come up organically through students sharing stories. What I worry about is that this legislation might end up hampering teachers' ability to connect with their students if they're unable to talk to students about the things that come up naturally in the classroom. If a student brings up their family, a teacher has to be able to engage with them to make sure that the student feels safe, secure and represented.

Are there any other misconceptions or misinformation that people have noticed in some of these bills?

Janice Kroeger: Yes, to go along with that idea of feeling safe and represented, I think that what

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[4] See https://www.honestyforohioeducation.org/hb-322--hb-327.html for a summary of the the proposed HB 322 and HB 327, and https://www.honestyforohioeducation.org/hb-6161.html for a summary of proposed HB 616.

[5] See https://siecus.org/state-profiles-2019-2020/ for an in-depth look at sex education policies in all 50 sttes.

[6] Farley, A. N., & Leonardi, B. (2021). Beyond Bathroom Bills and the Gender Identity Debate: Complicating the Policy Conversation About Supporting Trans Students in Schools. *Educational Policy*, *35*(2), 274–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820986770

these bills are doing is attempting to take back some progress that's been made at both the political and human rights level, and also on the discursive level. For example, the presence of gay, lesbian, queer and trans families raising kids in schools is normal, and teachers are just *now* getting over their fears of inclusion. The legislation is closing down an opportunity for the whole community to better understand and recognize this population in its own right. In some ways this legislation is not just politically powerful, because it has the chance of scaring people out of doing good and important inclusion work, it also has the potential to take back what progress has been made with young populations. Teachers are *still* scared about the simplest things, like reading a book, or showing a book with pictures of two moms or two dads, or children expressing non-binary gender, but those simple strategies are most often used and proven effective[7]. These ideas in the bills aren't about misconceptions so much as intent.

People are at the point where they know how to be inclusive by stopping and interrupting bullying, but they are only just starting to learn about the complex biology of intersex conditions, or the complex terminology of the differences between gender and sexuality, or some of those other kinds of discursive progresses that have happened, and accurate information that goes along with social change. With these bills, even if they don't pass, they still create fear in the public.

Stephen Russell: I was just going to add to what you said Michael and related to Janice's point that the incredible breadth and vagueness of the bills create a silencing. It reminds me of the "No Promo Homo", laws which have been around for decades, most of which were very limited in their actual implications. Like the law in Arizona where you can't present discussions about homosexuality that are positive *in the context of HIV instruction*.[8] But what happened is that teachers all over the state thought "We can't talk about other sexuality in schools, period". That was how it got framed for teachers and by folks who were proponents of that, and I spent a decade saying, "No, no, no, no, *only* if you're doing HIV instruction. So, all you have to do is step over here and not do HIV instruction and you will be able to talk authentically with students."

This silencing move worked in so many states where those laws were in place. And these new laws are so broad and so non-specific, especially the Florida law, that it's unclear what the scope is. The scary part is how might this be used against teachers and families and children.

Bryan J. Duarte: I agree with that, but in some cases the laws are very specific, which points to a misconception as well. Here in Indiana, there was a house bill proposed to ban trans female athletes from participating on girls' teams. And it is so specific I sort of laughed at the ridiculousness of it, because it's like if you really want to attack trans kids and prevent them from playing, why are you targeting only trans female students? This goes back to these misconceptions about what gender is, and also reifying a lot of the stereotypes around gender.

I listened to the four hours of testimony, and there were very few people that were in favor of the bill, but of the few folks that spoke in favor of the bill, their argument was that allowing trans girls to play

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[7] Kroeger, J. & Regula, L. (2017). Queer decisions in early childhood teacher education: Advocating for gender and sexual minority young children and families. *The International Critical Childhood Policy Studies Journal*: 6,1. 106-121. Special Issue Confronting and Countering Bias and Oppression through Early Childhood Policy and Practice. Eds. Farago, Swadener & Murray. http://journals.sfu.ca/iccps/index.php/childhoods/article/view/59

[8] For an overview of the history of this law in Arizona see https://www.acluaz.org/en/news/setting-record-straight-arizonas-no-promo-homo-law

threatens the integrity of girls' sports. When you unpack that idea, it comes from the belief that if you are assigned male at birth, you are very athletic and/or more athletic than somebody who's assigned female at birth. It's those misconceptions that are so rooted in patriarchal, stereotypical and gender representations, or really definitions of biological sex that are just inaccurate.

I think everybody on the panel understands gender as something that is socially constructed, so that doesn't make any sense to us. We read those bills and we're like this doesn't actually do anything and it doesn't actually make any sense in terms of how the students are presenting. Trans-girls who are playing on teams and who have had gender affirming care, for the average person in the bleachers, they're not gonna have any idea that that student was assigned male at birth.

So, what you're doing by having a bill like that is you're outing students, and it's very, very harmful for kids, but also it just doesn't make any sense and it's based on those misconceptions about what gender is.

Sara Simi Cohen: I am thinking about those misconceptions and just what the backlash has been and what people are saying about the policies and bills. Here in Austin, there was a newspaper article[9] that said trans ideology is essentially when you can turn into whatever biological sex and quote unquote "creature" you like. So, there are literally news articles saying that trans ideology, putting quotes around "trans", is a shift of biological sex and the ability to be a creature! I'm like, I had no clue that that was the possibility! There are these wild misconceptions out there that are being used to further a goal of trying to maintain gender binaries, maintain these traditional boxes, and continue gender oppression. It's quite reprehensible when we see these articles, bills, and politicians influencing their constituents to believe it as true while we have years of science, research, and most importantly lived experience with vital facts just being ignored and plagued as immoral or wrong.

Michael Evans: Thank you everyone. Let's transition from policy to impacts. What does the research tell us about the potential impact that these types of policies are going to have directly on students?

Stephen Russell: There are a couple of key things. There is now really good science from the last 5 years that tells us that these kinds of public debates get into the culture of schools, and are an invitation to harassment, discrimination, stigma, bullying. They affect the school climate through creating an environment where it's okay to express prejudice and discrimination that for many years we had been working against and creating positive, safe and supportive schools. It affects those kinds of interactions in the day-to-day which ultimately affect the kinds of well-being statuses that we know matter, that we know have been intractable for sexual and gender minority kids and all kids. So it affects things like belonging, attachment to school, academic performance and achievement, and ultimately mental health and behavioral health.

From a macro perspective, it undermines the laws, policies and strategies that we know make a difference. We now have a decade of evidence that we didn't have before. We know the supports and kinds of things that make a difference in schools: enumerated inclusive policies, training of teachers, access to resources and support in schools. We have really solid science on the way that those strategies matter in schools, and create safe and supportive schools for not just LGBTQ students, but for all

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[9] Webster, K. (2022, March 25). Texas school district tells 4-year-olds not to tell parents about sex ed. KPRC. https://kprcradio.iheart.com/featured/walton-and-johnson/content/2022-03-25-tx-school-district-tells-4-year-olds-not-to-tell-parents-about-pride-week/

students. What these proposed laws and policies are doing is undermining what we know actually makes a difference.

Janice Kroeger: I think one of the things that this does is it sets up a perfect storm for litigation. It used to be that Title IX was the only recourse that students had to join activities of their preference, and that ability to join activities of their choice supported them intellectually and socially. So, in creating a climate of fear these laws make it harder for students to leverage Title IX, as that gender affirming national policy that allows them to choose and pick what they want and need to be safe and happy in the school community. If a boy wants to join cheerleading, he's allowed to do that just by virtue of Title IX, which some teachers or school leaders really don't understand either. But it sort of pits the states and the federal laws against each other so that teachers and parents themselves may not understand how to leverage policies to create a climate that their child can live with and be happy in their school. These new policies are forcing us to interpret differently some of what we've used in the past as leverage to support gender expansive, gender fluid expression in school.

Michael Evans: I'm most familiar with the research that organizations like GLSEN have done and I use that in my Teacher Education classes.[10] I'm curious if there is also a body of research out there talking about how this is going to impact all students in public education, including those who don't identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community?

Stephen Russell: Absolutely, I think that there's really good data from statewide surveys, like in California for example. The California Healthy Kids Survey shows that the kinds of safe schools, policies, and strategies that we know make a difference: things like having a gender sexuality alliance (GSA) club at the school, or having teacher training.[11] These things affect the whole school. In fact, there's some evidence that the effects are stronger for the cis and hetero kids. They feel safer at school when everybody is safe. There's really good evidence that creating safe, supporting safe and supportive schools for queer kids creates a positive impact for everyone in the school environment. Really, thank you for asking about it, because it's a crucial point. I think so much of the focus is on, "the queers" who of course, we *should* focus on and support and care and love, but the irony is that these very strategies create a holistic, positive environment for *everyone* in school.[12]

Michael Evans: Thank you very much. Some of our panelists have had personal experience navigating public education, either as a student or as a parent and I was wondering if anybody would be interested in sharing some of their personal experiences, and how they think that these policies would have impacted them when they were navigating school?

Alonso R. Reyna Rivarola: I grew up in Utah, which is a very conservative state. Actually, before I continue, I need to acknowledge that we are on unceded Indigenous land and that we must understand schools as extensions of a larger settler-colonial project. In my work, and personal life, I question how homonormativity and homonationalism relate to one another in our understanding of queer lives and

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[10] See https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey for the most recent GLSEN National School Climate Survey

[11] Day, J. K., Ioverno, S., & Russell, S. T. (2019). Safe and supportive schools for LGBT youth: Addressing educational inequities through inclusive policies and practices. *Journal of School Psychology*, *74*, 29-43.

[12] Baams, L., & Russell, S. T. (2021). Gay-straight alliances, school functioning, and mental health: Associations for students of color and LGBTQ students. Youth & Society, 53(2), 211-229.

sexualities.[13] Homonormativity means the normalization of cisheterosexual relationships, values, beliefs, and norms in queer life, while homonationalism represents the positive association between queer people and the oppressive ideologies of the settler-colonial nation-state.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, I grew up in Utah, a very conservative, red state with abstinence-plus sex education legislation where the public education curriculum is very much grounded in Christian faith—in other words, white, cisheteronormative, patriarchal, and I will add nationalist epistemologies. The context in which I grew up informs how I made meaning of my own sexuality. As a young person, I knew I was queer and forced myself into silence because I was literally taught, I should hide and even hate myself. These policies, sadly, continue to systematically school queer young people into being ashamed of themselves. And that is awful. Eventually, I came to terms with my sexuality and said, "You know what... I am not who my parents, church, school, teachers, books, and the state tells me I am or need to be. And that is absolutely OK."

Growing up illegalized also added another layer to how I came to terms with my sexuality and what I was willing to hide and publicly embrace.[14] As new anti-LGBTQ legislation continues to unfold; I wonder how these further oppress queer students with multiply marginalized identities. For example, these policies impact undocuqueer students heavily because they're not only fighting oppression from the state concerning their immigration status but also their sexuality.[15] Additionally, undocuqueer people are generally people of color, so, again, I ask, how does anti-LGBTQ legislation affect the mind-body-spirit of queer young people with multiply marginalized identities?

Janice Kroeger: One of the things this gets me thinking about is that a lot of the laws threaten to take away public funding, which is often used for poor children. So, it really kind of pits one population of people who have experienced historical marginalization against another. And I do acknowledge with Alonso that intersectionality is really crucial because a lot of the teachers who are LGBTQ or BIPOC are going to experience this legislation very differently, and it's interesting that these laws impacting the LGBTQ community are being considered in states at the same time as laws about culturally relevant pedagogy and critical race theory.

Bryan J. Duarte: I can share too. This story has been told in a publication that's in the *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership.*[16] It's funny because when it was initially published the Supreme Court had ruled that someone couldn't be fired for being out as an employee. But of course, now everything is in question. One of the reviewers at the time asked, "is this even relevant anymore"? And it is still relevant, because, geographically, things are so different!

I think it was Janice who mentioned earlier that sometimes teachers don't necessarily know what things mean or what actions they can take when a "No Promo Homo" law is on the books or when they're hearing that trans girls can't play. They might ask, "how exactly does this apply to me"? Teachers

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[13] Shange, S. (2014). A king named Nicki: Strategic queerness and the Black femmecee. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory, 24*(1), 29-45. https://doi.org/10.1080/0740770X.2014.901602

[14] Reyna Rivarola, A. R. (Forthcoming). So, how exactly do I "bring my full self" to the profession? Queer, Latino, and undocumented in student affairs. In A. Duran, R. Miller, T. J. Jourian, & J. Cisneros (Eds.), *Queerness as being in higher education: Narrating the insider/outsider paradox as LGBTQ+ scholars and practitioners.* Routledge.

[15] Reyna Rivarola, A. R., & Cisneros, J. (2021). Undocuqueer. In K. Strunk & S. A. Shelton (Eds.), Encyclopedia of Queer Studies in Education (Vol. 4, pp. 750-755). Brill.

[16] Duarte, B. J. (2020). Forced back into the closet: A (queer) principal's attempt to maintain queer erasure. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 23*(4), 20-34.

have too much on their plates right now to keep track of everything that is allowed or not allowed. In some cases, it is a blessing, because it creates an opportunity for teachers to kind of shut the door and do what's right by kids, but conversely it sometimes causes teachers to just not discuss things at all because they're not aware that they actually can. Steven mentioned this confusion earlier related to the "No Promo Homo" laws.

When I was a student, I grew up in Massachusetts, and everybody thinks it's a very blue state, and it is, but its politics are also very geographically dependent and I did not grow up in Boston. I'm a child of Portuguese immigrant parents and I went to a school with predominantly first-generation Portuguese-American students like myself. I had Portuguese American teachers and no one was out. The message that was sent to me as a kid was that this is a part of you that you need to suppress or it needs to be private. And so, when I became a teacher in the same state, I went to a district that was in a more progressive city then the town I grew up in, and I felt comfortable, and it was pretty much a non-negotiable that I would be out with students from the first day of school.

Because it was damaging to my mental health as a kid. My grades suffered as a result of not feeling like I could be my authentic self, or who I was supposed to be.

It worked out very nicely. The kids were super respectful, and I think my openness not only affirmed queer kids in the classroom, but also challenged some homophobia that straight students had or were bringing to school from home. All of the students liked me and so it was really great until I moved to Texas.

Ironically, I was living in a city in Texas that is bluer than the county that I grew up in in Massachusetts. It was very clearly a political bubble and it was also a predominantly Latinx community. It was similar to the demographics that I grew up around in terms of being predominantly first-generation.

I realized that there was sort of an unwritten rule that you could not talk about sexuality in school, and what was so odd to me is my principal told me before school started that I couldn't be out to kids. Essentially, this was nagging at me all year. But what was so weird is that I resisted it by putting a picture of my partner and I and my whole family on my desk. I purposely didn't pick a picture that was just he and I. So, one day the kids were asking about who's in the picture and they asked who everybody was except for my husband. It was like they knew not to talk about it.

I'm very expressively gay and so the kids all knew and were very happy that I was their teacher, but they also knew not to talk about it. Where I drew the line was when a student came out to me. I actually had 2 students come out to me. This is why the implications of some of these bills are so scary. Oftentimes parents are supportive, but sometimes they're not and so I had students that were coming out to me because they felt like I was really the only person that they could tell, and that it wasn't a safe place at home for them. At that moment I had to say, "this is a hill on which I am willing to die". I have to affirm to this student that it is okay.

And also acknowledge that I am in the same boat as them or else I'm just perpetuating this notion that they need to be closeted and their safety could be at risk if they are who they are. It's very scary for queer educators, but then also for students where school may be the only place where they can unpack or process these sorts of things with their teachers. That is what really concerns me is that we're just basically erasing queer people from schools. It has the potential to have a very drastic impact on student and teacher mental health. When my principal told me I couldn't be out, that was a rough

year for me.

Janice Kroeger: When I heard about these policies coming up in Ohio, I thought this is a large part of what I do in my Family, School, and Community Partnership class. Gender and LGBTQI inclusion is only one module among 10 other modules on important things like English Language Learners, working with immigrant families, and dealing with race and classism.

But even as a faculty member, this gave me pause. I'm tenured and my job is secure and I've been out as a professor, as lesbian-identified, but bisexual my whole career, this was on purpose. Bryan, I can really relate to some of what you're saying about the kind of disempowerment that is likely to happen with both straight teachers who provide support for kids whose families refuse to acknowledge their whole selves and also the LGBTQ educators who serve as those role models

Érica Fernández: I want to first acknowledge and recognize the level of vulnerability demonstrated by your willingness to share these stories, especially knowing that this is going to be distributed broadly.

I think this also is an opportunity for us to segue into the next part of our conversation, which I think to me is captured very much in what folxs have been saying regarding how schools can be humanizing, affirming, and safe spaces. But also, there's a tension there, because we know historically, schools have been sites where violence happens, where dehumanization happens, where students are perpetually marginalized and criminalized in their existence. So, the question that maybe we can kind of tackle together is what implications do these policies have for teachers and school leaders who must translate and implement these policies?

Sarah Simi Cohen: One thing that I've been talking to a lot of educators about, and it has been an *ongoing* conversation as these policies are not new, is what is your core purpose and desire for being an educator in the first place? Most people become an educator or a school leader because they care so deeply about students. So, to put a student in direct danger, or expose them to possible current or future harm and impose trauma on them, based on policies that you're supposed to implement may go completely against why you're there in the first place.

I work as a higher ed scholar, and although I worked in K-12 for 6 years, it's also really important for me to consider the impact that legislation has on the K-20 experience and that pipeline for so many students who enter higher education. In my work I look at trauma, especially mental health in Higher Ed, and it's impossible to look at trans student mental health without considering the impact that the K-12 experience has on students.

Thinking as educators, what do we do when we're put in a position where we're coming in with open hearts and as a queer educator myself it's hard when you're told that can't use your pronouns in the classroom? And so, there is a certain amount of disbelief that you get from being an educator, when you are being told that you can't support your students in the way that you want to, that's scary. That's not what being an educator should be and that's not why most people get into the field.

Stephen Russell: This is a minor point compared to Sarah's description, but one that I think is important because it is related to this moment that we are in and it has implications not just for education, but for child welfare, for families, for medicine is the mind-blowing interference with the institutions and the expertise of the people that are the leaders of those institutions.

The fact is that we have decades of educational research, knowledge, and practice directing us to do something different. For example, we have people who have dedicated their careers and lives to what is the right thing to do in education, medicine, child welfare, and then we have this political intervention that's so overreaching of that deep expertise and legitimacy. Sarah expressed the feeling of it and I am just thinking pragmatically how dare we override these field experts? We should trust educators to know how to educate.

Janice Kroeger: The thing that I think happens is it puts into action some of the strategies that we've had for a really long time, like to go into a stealth mode. You could still educate teachers about discursive strategies that aren't curriculum. You can still educate teachers about communication skills that don't involve a whole unit, or a particular piece of literature. I do agree with Stephen that it's a mind-blowing interference with the scientific expertise, and for families that want to advocate, for example, for kids who are gender nonconforming or gender expansive. There's two full sides to that. There is helping parents understand development and the complexity of gonadal sex and gender identity and and most teachers might struggle to understand that. But a physician would be able to explain that, and social workers and psychologists can help families provide a safe family life for children expressing gender fluidity. I think just in general moving forward we will require a more sophisticated kind of field for educating affiliated professionals. It's going to require a lot more advocacy and sort of ownership of taking control of networks that can speak back to the state in a timely way.

So, in Ohio the legislation was put out in April. There were four conversations on the legislative level, and only one of them included people who rebutteled. So, these are the kind of tools that conservative forces are using to quiet the voices of the advocates who know a lot and have been pushing these supportive agendas forward for gender and sexually diverse youth.

Érica Fernández: I think that's a good segue into our last two-part question, around what organizing initiatives are you aware of on the ground that we can elevate or point folxs to and what are some tangible actions that readers can take, or that allies can take as we seek to create affirming, humanizing spaces in schools and communities more broadly?

Alonso R. Reyna Rivarola: For me, one of the most empowering experiences is when I meet queer young people in middle and high schools who voice their struggles and demand change. I'm not going to lie; it sucks that they have to be bold in the first place because people should not have to fight for recognition, validation, and their lives. Nonetheless, as educators and policymakers, we *must* listen to young people. When adults make decisions, we have our own ideas about how we want change to happen; however, unless we critically step back and involve youth in the change-making process, we are bound to miss the mark on the change they want. We must listen *and* follow queer young people leadership; our responsibility is to assist them in shifting—or better yet, abolishing systems to make the world they deserve to live in a reality.

Bryan J. Duarte: Previously, you asked about leadership and it's been well documented in the literature that a lot of school leaders are resistant to having these conversations. A lot of school leaders feel uncomfortable having the conversation because they're worried about community backlash. They're worried about their job security and some of them will take a position and say that sexuality doesn't belong in school. right? That the topic is irrelevant and so that is very problematic, because legislation basically supports that position. It becomes very easy for leaders to just say, "Okay, great,

I don't have to worry about this because it's illegal now." I think in terms of moving forward we really need to push back on that. I know three of us on this panel prepare school leaders so it is our job to discuss some of the ways that they can navigate these policies and create spaces that are affirming for kids. I think of policy implementation. How can folks work within policies so they are not breaking the law, but they're able to do what's right.

I think of the viral tweet that went out about Florida teachers saying, "Okay, fine, if we can't talk about sexuality then I'm removing every book in my classroom that uses he or she.

We're not using pronouns at all. Or no one can talk about being married, ever".[17] Things like that sound a little ridiculous, but it points out the ridiculousness of the laws. It's a strategy called malicious compliance. There's a lot of organizing happening, and you could fill your entire calendar with going to protests and I think people kind of really need to.

I was at a very crowded protest at the Indiana State House, to keep abortion legal in Indiana, and previously the protest that was trying to prevent the anti-trans bill from passing, was not as well attended, but I believe that you know most of the people in the audience would also support that right? I think so often non-queer people think that they need to be invited to the party. You cannot wait for your invitation. We need all hands on deck at this point, and we need to make our voices heard.

It was successful in Indiana where the Governor eventually vetoed the bill, but then the legislature came in and overrode his veto.[18] It was a win but it wasn't enough, so we kind of wonder what would have happened if we had made more noise. We need to be engaged every day on the ground and really pressuring the legislature, besides just voting, well, we've been voting for decades and here we are.

Stephen Russell: I think we need to remind everyone that it's not an accident that the bans on critical race theory are happening at the same time, and that what we know from policy advocacy is that coalition work is how to develop support for inclusive policies. To paraphrase Mari Matsuda, always ask the other question: If you see racism, look for sexism.[19] If you see sexism, look for homophobia, and if you see homophobia look for ableism. It is a good reminder to all of us that we need to show up for one another, and that we cannot let these divide and conquer strategies work. We need to really think coalitionally about how we create a coalition around the safe and supportive environments that all students need in schools.

Sarah Simi Cohen: I cannot agree more with all of you in thinking about how oppression is intersectional. With that in mind how we are organizing as queer and trans people, Bryan, I really love your comment of about how allies think that they need an invite to the to the party. I think one thing that I'm seeing here in Texas, specifically in Austin is that our K-12 educators are still going strong, they're still holding their Pride flags, they're still attending Austin Pride, they're still going to a lot of things, and they're showing that we're not going to step down because of our own ethics and morals. I've been seeing this from a lot of queer and trans educators, and I think that it's important for our

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[17] For an overview the viral letter shared on social media see https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dont-say-gay-he-she-sabotage-teacher-letter-moms-for-liberty-florida_n_62489f02e4b0587dee6a3a1a

[18] See https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/us/indiana-legislature-transgender-sports-ban.html

[19] Matsuda, M. J. (1991). Voices of America: Accent, antidiscrimination law, and a jurisprudence for the last reconstruction. *Yale Law Journal,* 1329-1407.

allies to do the same and to understand that that we're not going to get there without that additional support.

Michael Evans: Yes, I also think school boards, previously looked at as kind of small, local government positions, have also emerged as powerful stakeholders. We're seeing what a powerful role that they can play and when school leaders know they have the support of their school boards and their communities it really helps. A simple way for people to get involved is to contact their local school board members, and tell them they support an inclusive curriculum, and that they want policies where all students feel welcomed and accepted.

Janice Kroeger: Stephen, you talked about building coalitions, and in some of the work that I did when the anti-bully policies for LGBTQ kids were not yet common across all states, in the State of Wisconsin one of the things that really pushed those policies over the edge, that allowed the districts to act on behalf of LGBTQ students, was the work of straight allies. A coalition with the straight parent community made the superintendents in those large urban districts change the language in those policies[20]. So, I just want to echo Stephen and Michael's point about how coalitions can influence school boards, and how that type of work really is the leverage that pushes community action over the edge.

Érica Fernández: We have run out of time, but I just want to thank all of the panelists for sharing your stories, experiences, and perspectives with us today.

Participant Bios

Bryan J. Duarte (they/them) - Miami University is an assistant professor of education policy in the Department of Educational Leadership. Their research interests take a critical (and queer) analytical approach to examining the complexity of neoliberal school reform policies. Bryan is a former eighth and ninth grade humanities teacher.
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Janice Kroeger (she/her) is Professor of Curriculum and Instruction and Early Childhood Education at Kent State University. She has conducted research advocating for inclusion of LGBTQI students and their families in school practice and policy throughout her career, contributing to the changing the landscape of discussions related to diversity & family-school-community partnerships & early childhood education. She has published manuscripts in academic journals about practice and policy for LGBTQI students in the Journal of Educational Change, Teaching and Teacher Education, The Urban Review, The Journal of Research in Childhood Education, and Young Children. She is author of forthcoming book chapter Queer bodies in early childhood: Gender and sexuality disruption(s) and impure feminisms to "Get us free" in the early childhood educator: Critical conversations in feminist theory. **https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/tlcs/profile/janice-kroeger-phd**

Alonso R. Reyna Rivarola (él/he) is Senior Director for Institutional Equity, Inclusion, and Transformation at Salt Lake Community College. Originally from Lima, Peru, Alonso migrated to

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[20] Kroeger, J. (2006). Stretching Performances in Education: Gay Activism and Parenting Impacts Identity and School Change. *The Journal of Educational Change, 7,* 319-337.
http://www.springerlink.com/content/q7j2316t2h67t443/

Utah when he was 11. His experiences growing up undocumented and queer in Utah have shaped his perspectives and inform his passion for supporting and serving historically marginalized communities while holding social institutions accountable. His research concerns PK-20 schooling practices and illegality in the United States. He has published numerous manuscripts in academic journals, including the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* and *Gender and Education* and the books *Educational Leadership of Immigrants: Case Studies in Times of Change* and *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Feminist Geographies*. Find Alonso on Twitter @areynarivarola

Stephen Russell (he/him) is Priscilla Pond Flawn Regents Professor in Child Development, chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, and Amy Johnson McLaughlin Director of the School of Human Ecology at the University of Texas at Austin. He is an expert in adolescent and young adult health, with a focus on sexual orientation and gender identity. His 2016 book, *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Schooling: The Nexus of Research, Practice and Policy*, won awards from the American Psychological Association and the Society for Research on Adolescence. He has served on the governing boards of the Society for Research in Child Development, National Council on Family Relations (and is an elected fellow), SIECUS: Sex Ed for Social Change, and the Society for Research on Adolescence (he served as President 2012-2014).

Sarah Simi Cohen (they/them) is a fourth-year doctoral student in Higher Education Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas at Austin. Their research agenda is informed by their experience as a first-generation, low-income, queer non-binary student and focuses on student experiences of trauma in higher education, neoliberalism within the university, and how the history of higher education impacts students today. With a specific interest in critical and liberatory theories and methodologies, first-generation, low-income, queer and trans (FGLIQ) college students, and the effect of capitalism/neoliberalism, their research aims to promote transformative and liberatory spaces in higher education and beyond. Sarah is a former K-12 educator of six years and centers the K-12 experience and K-20 pipeline in their work. **https://education.utexas.edu/student/sarah_cohen**