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Requests for Manuscripts

The school can function as a thriving community. The *School Community Journal* includes articles related to the school as a community of teachers, students, parents, and staff. Family–school relations, site-based management, homework, sociology of education, systems theory, the classroom community, and other topics concerning early childhood and K–12 education are covered. SCJ publishes a mix of: (1) research (original, review, and interpretation), (2) essay and discussion, (3) reports from the field, including descriptions of programs, and (4) book reviews. The journal seeks manuscripts from scholars, administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, and others interested in the school as a community.

Editorial Policy and Procedure

School Community Journal is committed to scholarly inquiry, discussion, and reportage of topics related to the community of the school. Manuscripts are considered in the four categories listed above. Note: The journal generally follows the format of the *APA Publication Manual,* 7th Edition; when online sources appear in the reference list, we prefer direct links. Please make sure electronic links cited are accurate and active. Use italics rather than underlining. Do not use tabs to format paragraphs or tables; please use the Insert Table function for tables and the First Line Indent function for paragraphs. Color for tables or figures is acceptable.

Contributors should send the following to editor@adi.org, via email attachments (in Word):
1. The blinded manuscript, including an abstract of no more than 250 words in the same file, plus any tables or figures; and
2. A one paragraph description (each) of the author(s) and a mailing address, phone number, and email address where each author can be reached.

The accompanying email cover letter should state that the work is not under simultaneous consideration by other publication sources. A hard copy of the manuscript is not necessary.

As a refereed journal, all submissions undergo a blind peer review as part of the selection process. Therefore, please include the author's description and other identifying information in a separate electronic file. Further submission instructions may be accessed on our website:
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Contents

Editors' Comments and Call for Papers

We once again have an issue with a variety of articles related to our goal of building strong school communities. They go about it in myriad ways, and we hope you will find something helpful in each one. In planning for future issues, I invite you to ponder some questions with us and consider how this might spur future research, fieldwork, and journal articles.

Our journal has always focused on ways to help all students succeed in school and life by helping the adults around them, primarily their family and teachers, work together for their success. True collaboration among teachers, among parents, and between teachers and parents can be hard, but that is the essence of community building to support every student. As Sam reminds us, "Devotion to children they know, love, and call by name is a powerful motivation."

When SCJ began more than three decades ago, our concerns were homework practices and reading in the home. The articles and the activities the articles recommended flowed naturally from these and similar topics. Without looking away from the essentials like homework and reading, we must acknowledge that the most basic need for all children in all times is sufficient attention, guidance, and instruction from caring adults. Primarily, this is their families and their teachers and other school personnel, but of course it also means, for some children, adults in their churches and other faith-based or community groups and volunteers who come to school.

Recently we have been reminded in publications including Dr. Melissa Kearney's well-researched book *The Two-Parent Privilege* that the child's needs do not lessen when fewer adults are available to them, are available for less time, or are distracted by the hectic demands of their lives. Other research, including that from Harvard Medical School and the Center on Media and Child Health, suggests that children's time with caring adults is also stolen away by excessive screen time—the hours kids spend in front of computers, televisions, and smart phones.

Our simple question, and one that we hope will inspire a flurry of article submissions to SCJ is: How can a school better function as a community to do what other schools (that do not function as communities) cannot? This leads to other questions, for example: How can better relationships be built among adults to support each and every child? Can we systematically examine the amount and quality of attention each and every child gets from caring adults and devise ways to fill in the voids? How can we offer more effective support and practical advice for harried parents? What would organized, family-to-family assistance look like? How are people ramping up volunteer programs? Our imagination is limited, but the problem is great, and we know that SCJ readers and writers will respond to our appeal with stories of what school communities are already doing and ideas for what they could do.

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Lori G. Thomas, Executive Editor
Sam Redding, Editor Emeritus
November 2023

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Parental Involvement in a Low-Income Middle School: Influences on Student–Teacher Connectedness

Mitzi C. Pestaner, Deborah E. Tyndall, and Travis E. Lewis

Abstract

School connectedness is associated with a broad range of positive academic and mental health outcomes. A dimension of school connectedness, student–teacher connectedness, is related to improved academic progress and may be an important protective factor against risk-taking behaviors, particularly for low-income students and for those with limited parental support. The purpose of this qualitative secondary data analysis was to explore teacher perceptions of parental involvement in a low-income, rural middle school serving a diverse student population and the influence on student–teacher connectedness. Data were taken from transcripts from five focus groups comprised of middle school teachers, administrators, and clinicians (n = 26). Thematic analysis included first and second cycle coding followed by developing Venn diagrams to depict categories and patterns before reaching consensus on themes. Three themes were identified: (1) parental support of students; (2) parental modeling for students; and (3) parental interaction with teachers. Overall, teachers perceived a lack of parental involvement in this low-income diverse middle school which led to missed connections between students and teachers. This disconnect may be the result of multiple factors, including perceived low levels of parental support for students, differing expectations between parents and teachers, and perceived poor quality interactions between parents and teachers. When formulating strategies to enhance student–teacher connectedness, consideration should be given to the extent and importance of the role of parental involvement.

Key Words: parental involvement, middle school students, student–teacher connectedness, teacher perceptions, parents, teachers, low income

Introduction

School connectedness, defined as the perception by students that adults and peers within school care about them and their learning (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009), is associated with a broad range of positive academic and mental health outcomes (Datu & Yuen, 2020). Mental health outcomes, such as reduced suicidal thoughts and behaviors and lower levels of depression and anxiety, have been found in adolescents with positive perceptions of school connectedness (Carney et al., 2018; Datu & Yuen, 2020; Marraccini & Brier, 2017; Whitlock et al., 2014). Academic outcomes, such as enhanced school motivation, engagement, and achievement are associated with higher levels of school connectedness (Datu & Yuen, 2020). Each dimension of school connectedness—including student–peer, student–parent, and student–teacher connectedness—is associated with various facets of academic performance and behaviors (Datu & Yuen, 2020). The dimension of student–teacher connectedness is related to improved academic progress and less risk-taking behaviors, aggression, disciplinary issues, and internalizing symptoms associated with depression (Biag, 2016; Foster et al., 2017; Ramsey et al., 2016). Overall, students who feel more connected to teachers have a lower prevalence of mental health concerns (Jones et al., 2022; Malta et al., 2022).

Student–teacher connectedness can be engendered through enhanced parental involvement (Thompson et al., 2006). Parental involvement refers to the manner any parent or adult acting in a parental role works with their child and school to promote positive academic outcomes (Hill et al., 2004). Encompassing home and school, parental involvement includes parents' style of life; expectations, rules, and supervision at home; participation in school activities; interactions with school staff; and direct or indirect communication to their child about education (Caridade et al., 2020; Curtis et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2020). The intersectionality between parent and teacher has the potential to influence student–teacher connectedness with significant implications for student outcomes.

While high quality, recurrent parent–teacher interactions promote communication about students and their progress at school, perspectives may vary. VanValkenburgh et al. (2021) found disagreement between teachers and parents as many parents felt that they were not given guidance to assist students with learning at home or the opportunity to make decisions about student discipline or placement in courses. These types of conflicting views are concerning

as students' perception of a weak relationship between the parent and teacher may be a factor in whether the student has problems at school or may negatively influence existing school problems (Serpell & Mashburn, 2012). Studies have also found that teachers who perceived low levels of parental involvement were likely to appraise students as having problem behaviors, incivilities, and poor social skills (Caridade et al., 2020; Thompson et al., 2017) or contributed to mistrust between the school and families (Lasater, 2019). Teacher impressions about families from different socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds can significantly impact perceived levels of parental involvement and are predictive of student outcomes (Hilgendorf, 2012). For example, Luet et al. (2018) found that teacher beliefs that students in a high-needs school district with a racially diverse student body had difficult home lives sometimes informed and guided lowered academic expectations. This may be of particular concern in middle school when student–parent relationships may be challenging and there is typically a significant drop in parental involvement (VanValkenburgh et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that student–teacher connectedness serves as an important protective factor against risk-taking behaviors, particularly for low-income students and for those with limited parental support (Brooks et al., 2012; García-Moya et al., 2019; Nasir et al., 2011). While studies about school connectedness are vast and research exists regarding teachers' perceptions of parental involvement, more research is needed on the dimension of student–teacher connectedness, particularly in schools with diverse populations (García-Moya et al., 2019). To add to the current knowledge, this study aimed to expand understanding of teacher perspectives regarding parental involvement in a low-income middle school serving a diverse student population and how those perspectives may influence student–teacher connectedness. Understanding this association is important for the future development of strategies to strengthen relationships that facilitate student–teacher connectedness.

Bronfenbrenner's Social–Ecological Model of Human Development

The social–ecological theory of human development by Urie Bronfenbrenner (2005) guided this research and is an effective framework for studying student–teacher connectedness within the context of parental involvement. The main proposition of the theory is that the dynamic relationship between the child and the context, comprised of nested levels or environmental systems, establishes the human development process (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). While the multilevel contextual relations that occur are interactive and reinforce the effects of each other, the child is an active agent embedded within the system and contributes to the evolving process of development (Bronfenbrenner,

2005). These nested systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

The interactions between all systems are influential in indirectly predicting the contextual support of the child, but the microsystems of family and school independently and directly affect the developing child (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021). These person–context relations can be modified or altered in a manner that positively impacts the way the child develops (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), such as enhancing student–teacher connectedness by altering individual- and microsystem-level forces in the home and school (Allen et al., 2016).

The focus of this study is within the mesosystem in which parent–teacher interactions and relationships indirectly and directly intersect and may be influential in determining the quality of student–teacher connectedness within the school microsystem (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Crespo et al., 2013). Because Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasizes the significance of the interdependence between systems and how interactions within one setting can be shaped by the interactions in another, it provides an appropriate framework to explore the influence of parental involvement on student–teacher connectedness.

Purpose of Study

Previous research was conducted in a low-income, racially and ethnically diverse, rural public middle school to examine teacher perceptions of students' mental health needs and the use of student–teacher connectedness strategies to address these needs. While results from this research are reported elsewhere (Tyndall et al., 2022), it is important to note here relevant data that led to this secondary data analysis. Survey data from the primary study indicated the majority of teachers reported a lack of parental involvement as a barrier to positively connecting with students. Findings also revealed a theme of "Missed Connections" described as missed opportunities for teachers to connect with students. While the primary research focused on factors contributing to student–teacher missed connections, our team noted that *parental involvement* was an underlying theme which also affected student–teacher connectedness. As a result, a more focused secondary analysis was warranted to further examine this underlying theme. Therefore, the purpose of this secondary data analysis was to explore teacher perceptions of parental involvement in a low-income, racially and ethnically diverse, rural middle school and the influence on student–teacher connectedness.

Methods

To investigate additional questions not explored in the primary study, a qualitative secondary analysis was undertaken (Heaton, 2008). Specifically, a

supplementary analysis (Heaton, 2008) was used to conduct a more in-depth exploration of student–teacher missed connections within the context of parental involvement. This qualitative secondary data analysis was guided by the following research question: How do teachers perceive the influence of parental involvement on student–teacher connectedness in a low-income, rural middle school serving a diverse student population?

Primary Study Setting

In January 2019, co-author Deborah Tyndall participated in our university's Engagement and Outreach Scholars Academy (EOSA). During the academy, Tyndall developed a partnership with a rural, public middle school in the Southeastern United States. This Title I middle school served a student body (n = 430) of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students comprised of 56% African American and Black, 22% Hispanic and Latino/a, 17% European American, and 0.03% of two or more races (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). The majority of students (72%) were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, which was higher than the state average of 44% (State Department of Public Instruction [SDPI], 2018). For the academic year 2018–19, short-term suspensions, criminal acts, and incidences of bullying/harassment, were four to nine times higher as compared to the county and state averages (SDPI, 2019). Additionally, the school had a record of low literacy achievement on standardized assessments and has been challenged with constant teacher turnover. To meet Title I requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), the school hosts several parental engagement activities during the academic year including open house, use of school-issued technology events, and educational fairs on accessing community resources.

Study Participants

Teachers within the school were recruited to participate in one of four focus groups. Out of 22 teachers, 20 (91%) agreed to participate. The sample represented core teachers from the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade levels and teachers who taught electives. Teacher participants were mostly female (65%) and identified as White (n = 15) and African American (n = 5). Data from a fifth focus group with six school administrators and clinicians (i.e., counselor, social worker, school nurse) were included to provide additional perspective on parental involvement. Administrators/clinicians were mostly female (67%) and identified as White (n = 5) and African American (n = 1). Most participants (77%) were new to the school and had been employed for three years or less. Five participants had been employed in the school 4–5 years, with one participant employed in the range of 6–10 years. The majority of participants

ranged in age from 45–54 years (42%), followed by ages 35–44 (23%), less than 34 (23%), and greater than 55 (12%).

Data Collection

Data for the primary study were collected during August through November of 2019 after receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Data were generated from five audiorecorded focus groups, each lasting approximately 60 minutes, which were held at the middle school. Each of the focus groups consisted of 4–6 participants and was conducted in a conference room during teacher planning periods or team meeting times. A semistructured interview format was used to elicit participant experiences with students with emotional health needs. Sample questions included: What are your concerns working with students who may have mental health needs? What strategies do you use to manage mental health needs? As this secondary analysis was using an existing database to elaborate on a theme not fully analyzed in the primary study, additional IRB review was not warranted. Researchers involved in the primary study are the same researchers who conducted this secondary data analysis, which strengthens credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019).

Analytic Strategy

Six phases of thematic analysis were followed to establish trustworthiness: (1) familiarizing with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) reporting (Nowell et al., 2017). Using clean, uncoded focus group transcripts, data were reanalyzed to examine parental involvement as a contributing factor to student–teacher missed connections. A deductive approach to coding was undertaken initially to explore the theme "Missed Connections" from the primary study. First and second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016) was completed by the first two authors using a newly generated coding scheme, analytic memos, and peer debriefings. After second cycle coding, the third author joined the analytic process which began with extracting noteworthy data elements. Three noteworthy examples from each focus group were shared via Google Jam board, an interactive online whiteboard workspace. The iterative process continued with each researcher developing a trinity configuration using a Venn diagram to depict categories and patterns generated from the exemplars (Saldaña, 2016). Through continued dialogue and peer debriefings, parental involvement surfaced as a predominant influence on teachers' perceptions of their connectedness with their students.

Researchers' Positionality

At the time of data collection, the first author was in the role of graduate research assistant on the project. Both Pestaner and Tyndall co-led the first focus group, with subsequent focus groups being conducted by one of us with one to two undergraduate research students assisting with logistics and note-taking. For two years following data collection, both researchers worked on various other projects within the school using a community-engaged research approach. Additionally, we attended open houses at the school for the purposes of parent/student research recruitment which gave us an opportunity to meet and interact with parents. By the time of the final analysis phase, we had become familiar with some of the school's inner workings and challenges faced by administrators, teachers, and support staff. In an effort to assess potential influences of the first two authors' positionality on interpretation of findings, the third author joined the project during the analysis phase to bring additional perspective. Lewis's background includes practice and research experience in school counseling and school district leadership. The authors were all employed at the same university during the research analysis and are dedicated to community-engaged research and scholarship. While Tyndall is a past EOSA Scholar, Lewis and Pestaner are enrolled in the academy's current cohort. Tyndall lives in the same community as the middle school, and all of us grew up in surrounding counties and attended either low-income or rural schools in the public education system. While our practice experiences are different from those of our participants, there are some similarities. The authors have worked in service professions in public sectors, including nursing and school counseling, which may have influenced our position of interpreting participant experiences in under-resourced and short-staffed environments. While engaging with reflexivity, we dialogued about influences and potential biases of our experiences and employed investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1970) to bring about a comprehensive understanding of the data. Among the influences and potential biases noted is that all three researchers are White from middle-class backgrounds, investigating the involvement of predominantly Black parents with a school consisting of a majority White teaching staff. As such, our positionality should be thoughtfully considered by the reader with regard to the design of the study and the interpretation of findings herein (Holmes, 2020). We acknowledge that our positionality is shaped by our privilege, our biases, and our access to resources and spaces, thus undoubtedly influencing our research. We continually strive to be humble and seek to actively listen to those participants and colleagues with different lived experiences than our own.

Results

Teacher retention has been challenging for this Title I school, as noted in the reporting of the primary study (Tyndall et al., 2022). Notably, of the 22 teachers employed at the time of data collection, three retired and 10 resigned during the following two-year period. The authors feel it is important to note that many participants became emotional and tearful during the focus groups. Some expressed feelings of burnout and frustration with the lack of school and community resources to support students, as well as pressure to improve academic performance. While focus group questions were aimed to understand student–teacher dynamics, perspectives regarding levels of parental involvement emerged. Reanalysis yielded three themes where more parental involvement was desired by teachers to support student–teacher connectedness: Parental Support of Students, Parental Modeling for Students, and Parental Interaction with Teachers. Understanding teacher perspectives as presented in these themes was important in facilitating the identification of opportunities to enhance parental involvement at the mesosystem level to promote a more positive influence on the quality of student–teacher relationships at the school microsystem level. Still, the reanalysis of focus group data revealed that many participants viewed parental involvement through a deficit lens that may be based on values imposed by traditional educational power structures reflecting Eurocentric, White, middle-class notions of how parental involvement should be defined.

Parental Support of Students

As participants discussed the emotional health needs of students, they speculated that for many of their students there was a need for more parental support. Participants felt this lack of parental support resulted in some students coming to school with emotional baggage and displacing their emotional pain onto others. It was felt that the demands of work life resulted in parents teetering between no parental presence and an extreme parental presence. One participant perceived that some students were hurt individuals who inflicted hurt onto others in the school as a way of releasing suppressed anger.

> We do have some parents, especially mothers, that work a lot or work shifts where they're not home when their kids are home…and I think it ends up being like extreme parenting when they can. Where it might be [parents are] handling this issue, but then [they] don't have the time to do it consistently. It's more like "I'm going to fuss at you and punk you down"…but then, because [the student] felt that way, [they want

to] punk someone else down [to] show how big [they are] because that happened to [them]. Hurt people hurt people.

Participants sensed these students would come to school and "act out" and that their emotional pain was often substituted with being "mean to everybody." Teacher participants labeled "acting out" behaviors as disrespect toward others, verbal and physical aggression, and peer bullying. The school's bullying rates had been significantly higher than the state averages over the previous few years prior to the study, and several participants shared that "teachers also get bullied." Some referred to these behaviors as a "lack of empathy" toward others and thought them to be a continuation of a "behavioral cycle" originating from home life experiences. One participant questioned if student–parent relationships might have an influence on low empathy, which was contributing to teachers having difficulty making positive sustained connections with their students.

> I just wish the sense of empathy could be created in these students. I don't know the best way to create that understanding of what empathy is for others, but they don't have a connection. Whether it is social media creating that disconnect…or the disconnect between parents and [students]. How do you develop empathy in them? I don't know, but they're lacking it, and I think that's the root of a lot of their bad decisions.

Teachers reported that some of their middle schoolers had a transient lifestyle and were raised by multiple family members in different households. Other students lacked parental support, while others were exposed to forms of traumatic stressors, such as parental drug use and incarceration. Many speculated that students felt minimized or emotionally hurt by these parenting behaviors and were guarded toward others in school to compensate for their own hurt. One participant shared an encounter with a parent during a progress report meeting. She recalled it being a "devastating" moment in her career when she felt a parent could be contributing to a student's withdrawn behavior:

> We have a student…he was so quiet all the time, so I'd make an effort to constantly try to talk to him…or constantly praise him for doing stuff. And then when his mother came to one of our progress report nights, it was kind of just a light bulb moment. She was like, "Oh, I'm surprised he's doing well in piano, he's so stupid." I was like, this is why this child is behaving the way he's behaving…I think it's the way their parents talk to them which in turn is how they come to school and approach education in general, like their self-worth and mental [state].

In addition to the need for more emotional support from parents, participants felt support in the area of academics was also needed. Participants shared

how some parents at the school demonstrated a general disdain for or disinterest in schooling, which may have carried over in how students viewed and engaged in school. Further, examples were provided where parents did not seem to value all aspects of schooling. Others in the group supported a statement by their colleague who shared that a parent dismissed notification of their child having a C grade in one of their elective classes. The participant stated the parent's response was, "Well they don't need that to pass, do they?" This low regard seemed to seep into how children felt about school and approached learning. Participants speculated that the need for more supportive parenting hindered student–teacher connectedness as students' emotional needs impacted their engagement with learning in the classroom.

Parental Modeling for Students

Teachers indicated that some of their students struggled with conducting themselves in school in a socially appropriate manner, often resulting in disciplinary problems. The descriptions of this struggle seemed to relate to expectations by teachers of the students to utilize social norms for appropriate behavior within the school or classroom. Several participants provided insight into the struggle students had with perceived appropriate versus inappropriate behavior at school when they were expected to adhere to "two sets of rules." One participant perceived there was a lack of rules and expectations in the home, and when students tried to adjust to school expectations of behavior "it doesn't go over too well." Another teacher was empathetic, stating,

> You've got one set of [home] rules, but then we want them to walk through the door and completely shut those rules out and follow [school] rules, and we're asking kids who are still developing to do that. I mean, it's honestly just a struggle.

Although participants indicated that students conducting themselves in accordance with school norms and expectations was a skill the middle schoolers were still developing, they also felt that a lack of parental or family modeling and reinforcement of these behaviors may stunt skill development.

While behavioral norms were promoted through school rules and classroom expectations, not all parents seemed to be in congruence with the school in this regard. For example, several participants indicated that some parents have encouraged their students to fight, clearly in opposition to school efforts to teach children how to manage conflict peacefully. Participants had firsthand experience with "bully-like" behaviors from parents and felt students were learning these types of "survival behaviors" in their home environments and then bringing those coping behaviors to school.

Their parenting behaviors are what the students are emulating…and a lot of their parenting behaviors are bully-like behaviors where they get what they want by being very brash….That's where we try very hard as a school to break down and help them understand there's other ways to tackle issues and problems…so, I feel like I need to be modeling all of those positive behaviors.

The disconnect between parental expectations for acceptable behavior in the home and teacher expectations for acceptable behavior in the school exacerbated the divide between these two critical influences in children's lives and, ultimately, may have left students confused. This confusion may have created resentment and mistrust towards teachers, possibly impacting students' ability to build relationships with their teachers and vice versa.

Participants speculated that, for some of their students, the lack of ability to follow school norms and expectations when stepping onto school grounds was due to them functioning as "the adult" at home. One participant noted a misalignment with parent–child roles due to a lack of supervision, stating, "Some of these children that we're asking to listen to us are the parent at their home, and that's part of their problem." This misalignment influenced teachers' abilities to enforce socially appropriate behaviors in the classroom and likely created tension that presented barriers for student–teacher connectedness. Another participant referred to it as "self-policing among children" as she often saw students off-campus who were unsupervised and lacked structure. One participant elaborated with:

I hate to speculate on what somebody's home life is like, but it seems like at home, they're probably allowed to do whatever they want. Possibly, they don't really have anybody at home that is guiding them…so whatever feels good, they do it. And I think that [students] bring that in, and that struggle that we have of what [students] do at home is one thing, what you do at school is something else.

While a few participants considered the failure to follow school norms and expectations as a typical adjustment in adolescence, most thought that unacceptable student behaviors were from a "lack of being taught." Participants did acknowledge external influences that were most likely making it difficult for students to meet school expectations for behaviors. As such, there exists a misalignment among parents and teachers regarding a shared set of expectations for school behaviors and attitudes towards education.

Parental Interaction With Teachers

Participants felt that fostering student–teacher connectedness was sometimes difficult because there were parents who had a "distrusting relationship"

with the school. This lack of trust likely contributed to parents withholding information about their children's emotional and mental health, which in turn inhibited how well teachers could connect with their students. Participants noted that information sharing depended on what parents were willing to share. Parents did not always see the value of informing the school of situations impacting their child's well-being. One participant expressed frustration about two students who had mental health issues and the parents did not inform the school until several months into the academic year. The participant felt this information was critical because "we're going to handle this child a little bit differently because of the history." In other situations, parents seemed to avoid the school's attempts to reach out because of concern over a noted decline in the student's mental health.

> We called parents and they wouldn't even answer the phone. We would invite them and send mail; they would send back saying they aren't coming. They never showed up, not once. Mom had kicked him [the student] out of the house because she couldn't handle him anymore.

These examples of limited, or a lack of, communication resulted in participants feeling there was a need for better parental interaction with teachers.

Issues with communication between the parents and the school may have been influenced by a high teacher turnover rate at the school. Notably, the majority of teachers had been employed with the school for three years or less. Participants were not oblivious to the impact this was having on student–teacher connectedness. They recognized that relationship-building and trust was needed so students and parents would not see teachers as a "stranger" and for them to "see you as part of them…so they work with you." To engage parents, several participants identified strategies to improve communication with parents. For example, a few participants were creative in their approach to engage parents by using Class Dojo©, a classroom communication app. This communication app seemed to be a helpful strategy to connect with parents in an efficient manner "because it's like a text, which is much easier to do during the day than to stop and make a phone call." One participant commented on several features of the app:

> I use it for positive rewards and negative rewards, and…its' got a built-in translator so…this parent was non-English speaking, so she sent me a message in Spanish about an issue that her child was having.…If it is something more important, then it's also documentation that we can print later that's date- and time-stamped, of "we had this communication previously."

These participants felt such an app fostered parental involvement as it "helps parents feel comfortable" with communicating minor issues like students forgetting an assignment. The app was also used to denote positive and negative rewards based on student performance and gave parents the ability to see and comment on teacher posts.

Discussion

The findings suggest there are factors surrounding parental involvement within the home and school that may influence student–teacher connectedness. Teachers described their perceptions of student–parent relationships and circumstances at home that may have implications on how students interact with others in school, react to school expectations, and respond to teacher attempts to build relationships. Student capacity for relationship-building in school may be influenced by the quality of student–parent relationships (Crespo et al., 2013; Oldfield et al., 2016). As such, poor quality student–parent relationships may have a negative influence on the way students build relationships with others, including teachers, since student interactions with parents are often mirrored in student–teacher interactions (Chan et al., 2013; Crespo et al., 2013).

Participants described a lack of parental support and perceived some parenting practices as harsh. Living in impoverished neighborhoods may be challenging for parents due to unemployment, crowded housing, and decreased access to healthcare, resulting in higher stress levels relating to parenting and more tenuous relationships between children and parents (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Foster et al., 2017). While some teachers expressed negative perceptions of parenting practices, it may be that these perceptions are based on monolingual, White, middle-class values and not reflective of the low-income, diverse student body (Ho & Cherng, 2018). Approximately 78% of the student population are youth of color (NCES, 2019) compared to mostly White focus group participants. Similar to Henderson et al. (2020), White middle-class teachers may perceive the parenting abilities or involvement of socioeconomically and racially diverse parents as less than optimum (Ho & Cherng, 2018). White teachers may view Black students from impoverished backgrounds as lacking positive role models and proper supervision in the home or having parents that place minimal value on education (Hines, 2017). This framing of Black students with a deficit-oriented view perpetuates the assumptions that academic failure is the result of these deficits rather than the pedagogical or systemic practices within schools dominated by White cultural norms (Hines, 2017; Hyland, 2005). These perceptions may influence student–teacher connectedness since

negative teacher opinions about students have been associated with teacher beliefs that poor parenting practices adversely affect students' academic progress, particularly among families of color (Ho & Cherng, 2018).

Participants described the home situations of many students as disruptive, transient, or unsupervised. Since familial disruption negatively influences connectedness with others (Poland & Ferguson, 2021), discord within these students' home situations may also be influencing student–teacher connectedness. Participants speculated that homelife stressors, such as parental drug use and incarceration, and "bully-like" behaviors by parents were causing emotional difficulties for students resulting in displacement of those emotions onto others. Student emotional responses were described as disrespectful, verbally and physically aggressive, and bullying toward peers and teachers. Notably, the school's bullying and in-school suspension rates were both higher than the county or state average rates (SDPI, 2019). Students with higher levels of problem behaviors have been shown to have lower levels of connectedness with school (O'Connor et al., 2021); as such, behaviors that may be emanating from stressors outside the school and possibly rooted in emotional needs may be contributing to missed connections with teachers.

The findings of this study suggest that teacher expectations for student behavior and attitudes toward education are not supported and modeled by all parents. Parents' expectations and values regarding education that don't align with middle-class norms may be viewed as deficient resulting in a disconnect between parents and teachers about what should be considered appropriate (Hilgendorf, 2012). For teachers and schools to be successful, this disconnect cannot be ignored, given that parental attitude toward education is the most significant predictor of the behavior children exhibit in school (Bobic & Tosic, 2016). Notably, some parents may have had negative experiences in school themselves as children, which may carry over into how they view education and interact with teachers (Baker et al., 2016).

There may be conflicting views between teachers and parents about what is meant by high quality parental involvement (Chappell & Ratliffe, 2021), which may stem from misalignment of the values of White teachers with those of parents of color (Henderson et al, 2020). Henderson et al. (2020) found that teachers often perceived that parental involvement encompasses only in-school participation, without considering in-home educational interactions that may be occurring between parent and child as a valuable component of parental involvement. Parents may experience barriers that prevent them from being as involved with in-school participation as they desire, due to lack of resources or work commitments, particularly among low-income and racially diverse populations (Chappell & Ratliffe, 2021; Ho & Cherng, 2018). Additionally,

parents may be concerned that their absence from school activities is viewed as a lack of interest or involvement in their child's education, and this may diminish motivation to interact with teachers (Hilgendorf, 2012). Teachers in the current study discussed a lack of communication from parents about student issues that teachers perceived to be of importance, such as mental health needs. Just as there may be conflicting views about what is meant by high quality parental involvement, there may be a disconnect about what information parents feel they should share with the school. This divide between parent and teacher, particularly for youth of color, may result in parent–teacher misunderstandings leading to distrust of teachers and poor quality relationships (Henderson et al., 2020).

The mistrust between parents and teachers may be the result of factors emanating from both parent and teacher attitudes and actions. Teacher perceptions about low-income parents of color may emanate from a deficit lens that may influence their attitudes and involvement with parents (Lasater, 2019). The perception that parents place minimal value on education can further erode trust between parents and teachers (Lasater, 2019). Conversely, parents may only communicate with teachers if there is a problem with their child and may view teacher-initiated communications about their child as critical instead of supportive (Lasater, 2019). It may be that parents within the middle school were reluctant to communicate with teachers about the mental health needs of their child because of distrust of teachers or the educational system due to past traumas related to minoritization (Hine, 2022). Additionally, stigma often exists within rural communities, and parents and caregivers may prefer to deal with problems within the family (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). To enhance communication and trust between parents and teachers, parents must perceive that teachers' attempts to communicate with parents are genuine and authentic gestures of wanting to support their child (Lasater, 2019). Accordingly, teachers must understand that as representatives of the school within the parent–teacher dyad, they may be perceived as the dominant force within the dyad, whereas parents may feel vulnerable and at risk for betrayal of their trust, particularly among low-income parents of color (Hine, 2022; Khalifa, 2018).

Another barrier to trust building between parents, teachers, and students may be the high rate of teacher turnover. Schools serving youth of color in areas of concentrated poverty, particularly in rural regions, are challenged to retain experienced, qualified teachers that are sorely needed in these schools with static academic scores and graduation rates (Orfield, 2013; Semke & Sheridan, 2012). Since most of the teachers had been employed at this school for three years or less, it may be that they had minimal, if any, experience working with students and families from low-income communities. Teachers new to the

profession are often placed in low-income schools and may not understand the strengths and needs of the student population and their families, particularly if they did not grow up in such a community (Luet et al., 2018). As such, they may lack understanding about the knowledge students and families bring into the school and may expect less from students (Luet et al., 2018), creating additional challenges between parents and teachers. High teacher turnover may be a source of constant disruption of relationships within the school (Ford & Forsyth, 2021). Since trust, an essential element of student–teacher connectedness, evolves over time (Brake, 2020), teacher turnover may have hindered relationship-building with students and may account for students' guarded behavior toward teachers and was likely also reflected in parent–teacher interactions. In schools that are already struggling and subject to state and district pressures to improve achievement through accountability measures and sanctions, such as those in impoverished neighborhoods with a majority of students of color segregated by race and poverty, the adverse effects of high rates of teacher turnover on academic success are more pronounced (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020; Orfield, 2013; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020).

Practice Implications

Similar to this low-income diverse middle school, many schools have difficulty connecting with parents (Dikkers, 2013). The home, the school, and the community are overlapping spheres of influence on the development of a child (Epstein, 2011). When parents are connected with their child's school, academic performance and engagement improve for their child (Rodriguez et al., 2013; Wolfe, 2014). Additionally, students' relationship with their parents has significant implications for the quality of relationships with others, including teachers (Chan et al., 2013; Crespo et al., 2013). Therefore, strategies to enhance parental involvement should start with schools supporting the student–parent relationship. Collaborating with the community to offer resources to parents or to facilitate school events focused on student–parent activities could be strategies to improve connectedness, particularly during the middle school years when student–parent relationships may be tumultuous (Foster et al., 2017; Joyce & Early, 2014; VanValkenburgh et al., 2021). While encouraging parents to become involved in school activities and extracurricular activities may facilitate connectedness, consideration should be given to more focused efforts among diverse school populations (Thompson et al., 2006).

Supporting students' emotional needs by providing teachers with relevant training and strategies may facilitate opportunities to enhance student–teacher connectedness. For example, creating a positive classroom environment com-

prised of supportive learning and social activities can foster connectedness with students while assisting them to build social–emotional skills (Midford et al., 2017). These skills empower students to manage and cope with stressors (Midford et al., 2017), such as the homelife stressors described by participants that many of these students encounter. School-based social–emotional programs, such as mindfulness training, have demonstrated positive outcomes including increased emotional control, prosocial behavior, and academic performance and decreased peer aggression (O'Connor et al., 2017). Similarly, supporting the development of peer relationships by facilitating opportunities for group work and cooperative learning may enhance prosocial behavior (Oldfield et al., 2016). One way to mediate the challenges resulting from a lack of parental involvement is to encourage cohesive peer relationships (2016). This may be particularly important in this school which is challenged with maintaining consistency among peers resulting from seven feeder elementary schools creating a new social dynamic in middle school. Since students with more numerous and positive connections with their peers transition more successfully from school to school as they matriculate (Kingery et al., 2011), this adds an additional barrier to developing student connections with one another and with the school overall. As such, policy changes to this relatively unique attendance pattern for a rural school should be considered when developing strategies to build positive social connections among students and between students and teachers. Consideration of such changes must be accompanied by policies to battle housing inequities and residential segregation (Lawrence & Mollborn, 2017) that otherwise lead to disparities in the quality of education a student receives based upon their race or ethnicity or income.

A partnership between families and schools toward supporting a student's learning by establishing agreed-upon expectations and a regular system of authentic and intentional communication is recommended (Lasater, 2019). Teacher agency, whereby teachers assist parents in overcoming obstacles to involvement in their child's learning, such as by using Class Dojo© or other supportive technology applications, is an important component of such a partnership (Hilgendorf, 2012). Using Class Dojo©, a practice referenced by several participating teachers, shows promise for establishing regular, efficient communication with parents. Informal communication facilitated by tools such as Class Dojo©, particularly in low-income schools, has been shown to be a more effective means to engage parents over traditional methods (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021). This family and school partnership should foster parent agency and engagement, rather than merely parent attendance or involvement in a teacher- or school-led information session (Epstein, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Identifying a parent liaison may be instrumental in bridging racial/ethnic differences and facilitating an approachable space for parents within the school (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Henderson et al., 2020). When school staff communicate effectively and create a welcoming environment for both students and parents, they establish the conditions necessary for positive parent engagement, which in turn builds relational trust (Constantino, 2016; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Weiss et al., 2018). Additionally, if parents are provided the space and encouragement to lead conversations with other parents around the schooling of their children while acknowledging the needs of teachers and schools to safely and effectively educate their students, distrust of school officials or educational systems may be mitigated. Such partnerships create a shared sense of responsibility for learning among educators, families, and the community at large (Epstein, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007).

Educators must also recognize the inherent power inequity between schools and parents (Khalifa, 2018). The social, economic, and cultural capital that individuals possess in terms of knowledge, assets, and norms are often gauged by those in positions of power (Crumb et al., 2022), which may influence the way teachers perceive parents. Parents with limited access to capital assets may not have the ability nor means to be physically present and participate with in-school activities (Hilgendorf, 2012). Parents of students that grow up in homes that do not fit within what some teachers may consider to be an appropriate family structure may be judged to be less supportive and involved with the student's education (Hilgendorf, 2012). While it is important for teachers to acquire knowledge about the lives of students outside of school and the strengths that each family brings to the educational process, it may be difficult for teachers to realize those strengths among students from socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds different from their own (Delpit, 2006). Therefore, it is incumbent upon teachers to reflect upon their perspectives and, instead of insisting that parents strive to procure school capital, to become more culturally responsive by seeking to understand the capital assets that parents can bring to the school and their child's learning (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Lynch, 2021). Cultural competency training may provide teachers with an understanding of how to effectively engage diverse parents and inform teaching strategies, as culturally competent professionals expect variations in student perceptions of safety and connectedness (Daniels, 2021; Henderson et al., 2020). While capable teachers are able to build strong student–teacher connectedness in the absence of a parent–teacher relationship, a parent–teacher relationship comprised of mutuality, reciprocity, and validation of the strengths of each party is ideal (Lynch, 2021). Perhaps, more importantly, educating teachers on potential biases about parental involvement may shift their perceptions of what

is considered high quality parental involvement and facilitate more effective parent–teacher engagement and improve student outcomes (Thompson et al., 2017; VanValkenburgh et al., 2021). While these strategies are important considerations, they require funding, and in rural and low-income schools, funding is often a barrier to implementing programs that may enhance parent-teacher relationships (Semke & Sheridan, 2012).

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations to this research. First, findings were generated from a secondary data analysis collected from a single setting. The setting represented one low-income, rural school serving 78% students of color, with high teacher turnover, and therefore, findings may not be transferable across other Title I middle schools. While we had a high response rate (91%) with teacher participation in focus groups, we acknowledge that this research only captures the perceptions of teachers within the school at one point in time. Since perspectives may vary between teachers and parents regarding levels of parental involvement, further research is needed to capture parent voices. A mixed-methods approach is recommended, in which parents complete surveys measuring the extent of parental involvement, such as the Parent–Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1991) or a similar survey, followed by focus groups to explore perceptions about parental involvement. Multiple perspectives would provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of parental involvement and student–teacher connectedness rather than a lone perspective (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). Finally, since the focus group data were collected prior to the pandemic, it likely does not capture the additional stress on schools and communities and its impact on parental involvement nor student–teacher connectedness.

Conclusion

Connectedness can be bolstered between students, parents, and teachers by instituting activities in the classroom that facilitate a supportive learning environment, providing school-based social–emotional programs, encouraging positive peer relationships, and ensuring that parents are aware of community resources and supports. Establishing family–school partnerships is an important tool for schools to build trusting relationships with parents. Such partnerships encourage teacher agency whereby teachers support parents' involvement with their child's education by meeting parents where they are situated and fostering parent agency so that parents can assume a leadership role in educating their children. Teacher training on cultural competency and

biases about perceptions of parental involvement may stimulate a recognition of the knowledge and strengths of parents to support the educational needs of their children in low-income, racially and ethnically diverse schools. These biases may have shaped teacher perceptions of parental involvement in this school system embedded with ideals that may differ from its low-income, diverse community members. Teacher perspectives about parental involvement were often viewed through a deficit lens. These deficit-based perspectives may be more problematic than the actual quality and quantity of parental involvement, particularly given the implications to student–teacher connectedness, when teachers believe that parental involvement is lacking. Unless perspectives are viewed through a lens of understanding and validation of the community and its members, there will continue to be a misalignment of parent–teacher expectations and values which will negatively impact student outcomes.

During our third year of partner engagement, we learned that the local Board of Education elected to close this Title I school. News outlets reported there were several factors behind the decision including a high number of reassignment requests, numerous staff vacancies, and underutilization by half of the school's capacity. This is unfortunate, as student–teacher connectedness takes time to build and is disrupted by school closures, which likely had a negative impact on many students. Funding to support the success of similar low-income schools at risk for closing should be prioritized at the local and state levels. While speculative, some of the factors that led to the school's closure may reflect disengagement by teachers and parents from each other, reiterating the significance of connectedness between teachers and the families they serve.

This article is not an easy read, because it addresses reality. Our intent here is not to be critical of these teacher participants or their stories, but to offer opportunities for dialogue in a safe, non-judgmental space as we are appreciative for their voices and how this research offers additional insight into student–teacher connectedness. Schools are made up of humans and their interactions—teachers, students, family members, administrators, countless other staff, and community members. Each of those people can and will make bad choices at times. We can blame the institution or the system or the individual, or all of the above. The question is, though, what can we do about it in the small window of time we have with any given student and parent/caregiver? How can we support the teacher to reach out to that parent, and whether or not that effort is successful, how can the teacher and the rest of the school community best support the student? Yes, we must work to improve the system, but policy and culture shifts take time, and students cannot wait (Redding, 2021). When formulating strategies to enhance student–teacher connectedness, consideration should be given

to the extent and importance of the role of parental involvement, as well as the influence of the broader systems surrounding the micro- and mesosystems on the contextual support of students.

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Augmenting Relationships Among Families With Refugee Backgrounds and Their Children's Teachers Using a Meeting Protocol: A Pilot Study

Shana J. Haines, Cynthia C. Reyes, and Gabriel T. McGann

Abstract

A necessary move to dismantle educational injustice for historically marginalized populations is to create equitable family–school partnerships built on trusting relationships. Inequitable practices and implicit norms and biases must be intentionally counteracted to establish trusting relationships. The meeting protocol described in this article, RAFT, was born through community-based participatory action research to instigate and provide time for structured, student-centered conversations to build relationships between families with refugee backgrounds and their children's teachers. This article describes the qualitative pilot study and the community-based iterative process for designing RAFT. All 12 families and 16 school professionals who implemented RAFT expressed satisfaction with it, and teachers without exception expressed eagerness to implement RAFT with more regularity and with more participants. Themes that emerged include: (a) the importance of focusing on the child/student and the care and commitment expressed by taking the time to focus on developing a relationship between educators and families; (b) the flexibility and freedom of RAFT not being tied to required parent–teacher conferences which have a rushed timeframe and set location; (c) the increased appreciation and knowledge of the student and each other, paving the way for further collaboration; and (d) the effectiveness of elements drawn from restorative practices. We include implications for practice and further research, including measuring RAFT's outcomes and scaling up its use to determine its effectiveness.

Introduction

Although collaboration and negotiation between families and their children's teachers are built into the structure of the U.S. educational system, the roles of families and educators in these relationships are not explicit (Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2020), and institutional norms that have resulted in historic marginalization shape educational practice relating to families (Herrera et al., 2020; Ishimaru, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Park & Paulick, 2021). The crux of the matter is that collaboration between families and teachers has the potential to increase equity in the education system, but educator practice geared towards families is typically based on mainstream cultural and implicit institutional norms and therefore often perpetuates and deepens inequity (Greenfield et al., 2000; Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg 2020; Ishimaru, 2020; Tadesse, 2014). In Ladson-Billings' (2021) call for a "hard re-set" of the U.S. educational system post-pandemic, she states that "families will occupy a central role in teaching and learning. This means that schools will need to negotiate with families and caregivers about roles and responsibilities for teaching and learning" (p. 75).

A necessary move to dismantle educational injustice for historically marginalized populations is to create equitable family–school partnerships. Building off Turnbull et al.'s (2022) definition of "trusting family–professional partnerships" (i.e., a relationship "characterized by an alliance in which families and professionals confidently build on each other's word, judgment, and wise actions to increase educational benefits for students and themselves," p. 9), we (the researchers writing this article) define family–school partnerships as reciprocal relationships between families and school personnel aimed at supporting student growth. We use "school" rather than "professional" in recognition that developing partnerships with families is a systemic school (rather than an individual professional) responsibility and the conditions for creating such partnerships must be fostered systematically. Actively strengthening family–school partnerships with historically marginalized populations is one step towards transforming the educational future to be more sustainable, holistic, and just (Haines et al., 2017; Haines et al., 2022; Harry & Ocasio-Stoutenburg, 2020; Ishimaru, 2020, Ladson-Billings, 2021).

In previous community-engaged research investigating the relationships between families with refugee backgrounds new to the United States and their children's teachers in New England, we found that participating teachers

and families had limited relationships (Haines & Reyes, 2023; Haines et al., 2022). Reasons for the limited relationships included schoolcentric practices shaped by rigid institutional norms, language differences, familial and teacher role construction, and assumptions about each other's priorities. The implicit institutional norms around appropriate and expected communication and responsibility/role construction emerged as impediments to family–school partnership formation. The findings of that exploratory study pinpointed the need to instigate organized meetings between teachers and families with refugee backgrounds—meetings that were dedicated to relationship building as well as discussing preferred communication methods and potential roles and responsibilities in schooling. To meet this need, we partnered with local educators to collaboratively design and pilot a tool to guide explicit conversations between teachers and families with refugee backgrounds as a step towards establishing family–school partnerships.

The purpose of this article is to describe the process through which we created this tool, RAFT (Relationships Among Families and Teachers), and then answer the research question: How do participants perceive RAFT? We first explore perspectives on the multifaceted dynamics of family–school partnerships related to families with refugee backgrounds. Then we describe our community-based participatory action research process (Maiter et al., 2008; Minkler, 2005) through which we developed and piloted RAFT. Afterwards, we share the results of the pilot study of RAFT by presenting participants' perceptions of its implementation. Finally, we discuss implications for practice and research stemming from this study.

Literature Perspectives

Understanding the phenomenon of refugee resettlement is crucial for developing intentional family–school partnerships with families who have experienced it. Refugee status is based on external circumstances that force individuals to flee, resulting in displacement from their homes (UNHCR, 2020). After the required paperwork for resettlement has been processed and assessment of families completed, resettled refugee families are permanently relocated to another country (UNHCR, 2020a). The determination of location occurs with little input from the individual or family unless they have family in a resettlement country (Mott, 2010). The resettlement process directs refugees to specific inviting municipalities who receive relatively significant numbers of newcomers into their communities (Bose, 2021). Once resettled, families with refugee backgrounds must navigate myriad new systems, including resettlement agencies, personal networks, social service agencies, and education systems. Understanding and appropriately navigating the education system is critical for

families with refugee backgrounds, yet resettlement agencies typically end their support within this system upon initial school enrollment. The move to U.S. schools is a significant transition for families with refugee backgrounds and one in which the implicit norms can be confusing (McBrien, 2011).

Developing meaningful relationships with families is a way schools can help families navigate the education system (Isik-Ercan, 2010). For such partnerships to blossom, they must be centered, appreciated, and attended to, and the conditions for partnership must be cultivated (Haines et al., 2022; Haines et al., 2015). A requisite step in creating partnerships is fostering an environment where educators and families get to know each other and appreciate each other's strengths. Simply put, families and educators need to build a relationship to effectively partner in support of students (Haines et al., 2017).

Although families with refugee backgrounds, like most families experiencing a new school system, are motivated to learn about U.S. school systems (Birman et al., 2001; Dachyshyn & Kirova, 2008; Haines et al., 2015; Tadesse et al., 2009; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009), such partnerships are still underdeveloped among this population. The most glaring reason for this lack of partnership is that the educational system has implicit expectations of families' roles, responsibilities, and linguistic and navigational skills that may differ significantly from the norms to which families with refugee backgrounds are accustomed (Haines et al., 2015; Koyama & Bakuza, 2017; Kupzyk et al., 2015; McBrien, 2005, 2011; Perry, 2009; Tran & Birman, 2019). In addition to varying conceptualizations of family–school partnerships (Haines et al., 2015; Lawson, 2003) and construction of roles in children's education (Georgis et al., 2014; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995), competing demands on educator time (Haines et al., 2015), lack of preparation for family–school partnerships (Francis et al., 2021; Kyzar et al., 2019), and the lack of intentionality around creating such relationships (Haines et al., 2022) also hinder family–school partnership development.

Educational policy in the U.S. articulates the rights of families to be involved in the educational planning for their children, but the operationalization of this policy is highly variable, and too often schools do not adequately plan or prepare to implement this policy with families who are not aware of or do not understand their rights (Haines et al., 2022; Mandarakas, 2014). Barriers to partnership exist for both educators and families. Studies have shown that teachers have minimal preservice training on how to develop relationships with families (Francis et al., 2021; Kyzar et al., 2019). Due to this lack of training and preparation, teachers often lack the confidence and capacity to partner with families (Haines & Reyes, 2023; Mapp & Bergman, 2021). There is also a historical lack of clarity around what a family–school partnership can

or should look like (Haines et al., 2017). This leads to a misunderstanding of expectations for both families and school professionals (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Ambiguity around the expectations of family–school partnership may impact families' motivation to invest time and energy in partnering, and the hierarchal power dynamics of family–school relationships create barriers to partnership (Koyama & Bakuza, 2017).

Families with refugee backgrounds may seek to be more involved in their children's formal education, but their efforts may not be recognized by the school system. Koyama and Bakuza's (2017) ethnographic study of refugee students in the Northeastern U.S. explored how their families and schools interacted. Through 230 semi-structured interviews with refugees, resettlement agency and support staff, school personnel, and community members, they found families with refugee backgrounds were engaged in their children's educational success through advocacy for their children and seeking collaborations with school and community members to understand the local educational system and culture. Participants also helped create safe spaces and policies, improving educational outcomes for students.

Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009) studied Sudanese refugee families and their children's teachers. They found that participating families, who were low-income and Black, believed teachers held prejudices against them and wrongly assumed that they were disinterested in their children's academic experience. Furthermore, Cun (2020) found that Burmese refugee families struggled to understand teachers and materials sent home but also sought and expected opportunities to be involved in school activities. Georgis et al. (2014) demonstrated that collaborating with families with refugee backgrounds in school improvement efforts surrounding family–school partnerships was a great way to strengthen family–school partnerships for participating families and others.

Theoretical Foregrounding

This project was grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory with a focus on the mesosystem, Paris and Alim's culturally sustaining pedagogies (2017), and community-based participatory action research (Maiter et al., 2008; Minkler, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development provided us with a holistic framework for examining interactions between families and schools, especially with their children's teachers. We expand on this ecological model by emphasizing asset-based approaches when working with families with refugee experiences, emphasizing the opportunities and resources that families bring into conversations about their children's schooling.

We drew upon culturally sustaining pedagogies because the concept promotes asset-based approaches for recognizing heritage practices of nondominant communities (Paris & Alim, 2017). Reframing the way some researchers viewed the literacy practices of youth of color, Paris and Alim (2017) asserted that educational research has mostly created an overly deterministic narrative of the ability of children of color, framing "access" and "equity" from a deficit perspective that focused on teaching working class and children of color how to speak and write like their White middle-class peers. Drawing upon Paris and Alim's envisioning of what scholarship and practice could look like by reexamining traditional pedagogies, we aspire to describe culturally sustaining family–school partnerships with families within refugee communities that is humanizing and embraces the perspectives of the families (Reyes et al., 2021).

In their community–university partnership study, Campano et al. (2016) made explicit the agreed-upon norms directing the ethical protocols of their study and the relationships that informed those protocols. They described a *professional* stance underlying their work that acknowledged the boundary crossing nature of community-based research and community organizing that "require a specialized theoretical and practical knowledge base that informs responsible, wise, and selfless judgement for the betterment of a greater good in the face of [uncertainty]" (p. 117). A similar principle guided the meetings in this study between community members and university partners as we developed a mutual understanding to support community wisdom and knowledge production.

Several fundamental assumptions drove the collaborative development of the RAFT protocol and pilot study. These included: (a) stronger relationships between families with refugee backgrounds and teachers can increase educational equity for students with refugee backgrounds; (b) a tool to guide conversations can ensure the conversation stays culturally sustaining and strengths-based since the questions are scripted collaboratively with a diverse stakeholder group; (c) the training provided to teachers, interpreters/liaisons, and families prior to using the tool can increase equity in participation as all participants know what to expect and their role in the process; (d) the elements of restorative practices embedded in the tool can increase equitable opportunities for participation because everyone has equal opportunity to share; and (e) the student's participation in the conversation can deepen the results.

Methods

Overview of Project

We partnered with two school districts to collaboratively design the tool to build stronger relationships between families with refugee backgrounds and

their children's teachers, which was a stated goal for both districts. We worked with school administrators and home–school liaisons to assemble an Advisory Council, which consisted of 10 school personnel (i.e., two administrators, three English learner (EL) teachers across grade levels, one general education teacher, and four home–school liaisons who were also refugee community leaders) from our partner districts. All Advisory Council meetings took place in a school after school hours.

Before meeting with the Advisory Council, we put together a draft protocol as a starting point. We modified the McGill Action Planning System (Vandercook et al., 1989), also referred to as Making Action Plans or MAPS. MAPS is a research-based person-centered planning tool that increases student self-advocacy and self-determination and builds trust between families and professionals as they learn about the student's background, family and student perceptions and expectations, and cultural variances between families and professionals (Haines et al., 2018; Vandercook et al., 1989). We also drew upon restorative practice, an Indigenous and First Nation's practice that emphasizes "justice philosophy and practice" (Mirsky, 2004, p. 1) and uses conversation circles to create an inclusive and relational community (Kervick et al., 2019; Pranis, 2005; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). These conversation circles are designed to promote equitable participation through the use of a talking piece, which each participant uses to indicate explicitly whether he or she wishes to speak. Holding on to the piece means the person wants to talk; passing the piece to the next person means they decline to talk. Using a talking piece in this manner enables a participant to choose to pass on speaking rather than needing to initiate entry into the conversation in order to share.

At our first Advisory Council meeting, we modified MAPS into a relationship-building tool appropriate for use with families with refugee backgrounds, which we later named RAFT. We drew upon the knowledge and expertise of the Advisory Council for deeper understanding of the cultural and linguistic heritages of the families to ensure that the tool was culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017). School-based partners expressed concern about time for implementation; paradoxically, we knew the tool had to be efficiently implemented in less than two hours in order to be successful, but we also know building relationships takes time. Therefore, the specific purpose of using RAFT was to begin to develop these relationships by enabling the teacher to learn about the family and the family's hopes and dreams for the student and for the family to learn about the teacher and the teacher's relationship with their child without taking up too much time.

The final version of RAFT, shown in Figure 1, involves bringing together a student, family members, and key educators to engage in a relaxed yet

structured conversation through which families can get to know their children's teachers and teachers can learn a tremendous amount about students and their families, including how values inherent to the U.S. educational system and processes may conflict with family expectations and experiences. All participants, including students, received training in RAFT before the meeting. Participants sat in a circle. A facilitator started the RAFT with an overview of agreed-upon norms. The facilitator made sure the interpreters had ample time for interpretation. Ideally, families chose a talking piece to be used. The facilitator, who did not participate in the discussion, asked each prompt. Each prompt was followed by as many rounds of the talking piece, which was passed around the circle, as desired by participants. Home–school liaisons participated as interpreters (interpreting so the family can understand what others say in English and also voicing the family's contributions in English) and also as participants themselves since they usually knew the families and students well. The facilitator took notes and provided a summary at the end of the RAFT meeting.

We used a community-based approach with a qualitative case study design to develop, refine, and pilot RAFT (see Table 1 for details). As explained above, the documented need for this project came from our longitudinal research within the two partner school districts (Haines & Reyes, 2023; Haines et al., 2022; Reyes et al., 2021; Reyes et al., 2023). The Advisory Council reviewed our initial protocol, provided input via survey, and participated in a structured discussion of each component of RAFT. We modified RAFT according to their feedback. The school administrators on the Advisory Council recruited three EL teachers to implement RAFT. In one school district, each of the three teachers (one elementary, one middle level, and one high school) implemented RAFT with three different families with a refugee background at three different points in the year (i.e., November, January, and March or April), and in the other school district, the three teachers implemented RAFT only once, in March or April, with three families with a refugee background. Of the 12 families, 11 chose to hold the meeting in which RAFT was implemented at their home. One family chose to hold RAFT at the school. After each round of implementation, we presented a case built around each participating student to the Advisory Council and sought their feedback on modifications to RAFT. This iterative process resulted in a refined tool after three revisions.

Figure 1. RAFT Procedure and Norms

Pre-meeting: Train teachers, liaisons, and families on tool use

Implementation Meeting:

Time: 1.5 hours total **Location:** Where families prefer (home, school, or community location)

Norms:

- **Talking Piece and Flag:**
  - We will use a talking piece, but the order of speakers might vary.
  - The talking piece will go around the circle clockwise.
  - Families or facilitators decide what to use for the talking piece.
  - Whoever holds the talking piece is the one who speaks. Everyone else listens.
  - When appropriate, interpreters will interpret, using the flag when speaking. This notifies everyone that the words are interpretations of what someone else has said.
  - Liaisons will participate in the discussion as individuals, as well, and will use the talking piece for that activity.
- **Child Role:**
  - Family decides if child is present, and we strongly encourage it.
  - If present, child participates.
- **Responses:**
  - Everyone has the opportunity to respond to all prompts, but they can pass if they choose.
  - A different person starts each response, so the responses are staggered (moving the talking piece each time).
  - At any point in time, any participant can withdraw from the study and process.
- **Facilitations:**
  - If disagreement occurs, facilitators will amend the questions to seek resolution.
  - For this round, researchers will facilitate the process.
  - Facilitators will summarize the meeting before closing.
- **Notes:** For this round, a researcher will take notes.

The purpose of RAFT is to build relationships so we can work together to support this child's success.

RAFT Prompts:

1. Who is _____?
2. Who should be involved in _____'s education and how?
3. What are your hopes for _____ in general, long-term?
4. What are your hopes for _____ this year?
5. How can we work together this year to make these hopes come true?
   a. What can the teacher do?
   b. What can the family do?
   c. What can the student do?
   d. What can others do?
6. How should we continue this conversation?
7. End with a summary of responses and ways forward.

Table 1. Major Activities and Methods

Activities	Participants	Objectives
Meeting w/ School District Reps.	o Principal Investigators o School district administrators	• Plan project • Generate sampling grid
Advisory Council Meeting	o 5 members of the refugee community, including 4 home–school liaisons o 2 school administrators o 3 teachers (2 EL and 1 gen. ed.)	• Design Tool
Pre-implementation interview	o 3 families o 3 EL teachers o 3 home–school liaisons (all members of the Advisory Council)	• Understand relationships and history • Learn about their goals for the student/child
Pre-implementation trainings (separate for all families; conducted in dominant language; conducted as groups for liaisons and teachers)	o 3 families (including children) o 3 EL teachers o 3 home–school liaisons (all members of the Advisory Council)	• Explain norms and process
Implementations	o Each implementation was led by a researcher, had a researcher observing, and included: o 1 family and child o 1 home–school liaison o 1 EL teacher	• Conduct the actual relationship-building conversation
Post-implementation interview	o Separate interviews with: o 3 families and children o 3 home–school liaisons o 3 EL teachers	• Understand participants' experiences • Solicit feedback on improving RAFT
Write up interim case studies	o Researchers	• Analyze experiences
Advisory Council Meeting	o Advisory Council	• Explain experiences • Seek feedback for tool revision
RAFT Revision #1	o Researchers	• Respond to feedback from participants and Advisory Council
Pre-implementation interview	o 3 families (including children) o 3 EL teachers (same as previous) o 2 general education teachers o 3 home–school liaisons (2 same as previous)	• Understand relationships and history • Learn about their goals for the student/child

Table 1, continued

Pre-implementation training	o 3 families (including children) o 2 general education teachers o 1 home–school liaison	• Explain norms and process
Implementation	o Each implementation was led by a researcher, had a researcher observing, and included: o 1 family and child o 1 home–school liaison o 1 EL teacher o 1 General education teacher (w/1 exception, as the student was not in gen. ed. classes)	• Conduct the actual relationship-building conversation
Post-implementation interview	o Separate interviews with: o 3 families (including children) o 3 EL teachers o 2 general education teachers o 3 home–school liaisons	• Understand participants' experiences • Solicit feedback on improving RAFT
Write up interim case studies	o Researchers	• Analyze experiences
Advisory Council Meeting	o Advisory Council	• Explain experiences • Seek feedback for tool revision
RAFT Revision #2	o Researchers	• Respond to feedback from participants and Advisory Council
Pre-implementation interview	o 6 families (including children) o 5 EL teachers o 4 general education teachers o 6 home–school liaisons	• Understand relationships and history • Learn about their goals for the student/child
Pre-implementation training	o 6 families (including children) o 4 general education teachers o 3 home–school liaisons	• Explain norms and process
Implementation	o Each implementation was led by a researcher, had a researcher observing, and included: o 1 family and child o 1 home–school liaison o 1 EL teacher o 1 General education teacher (w/2 exceptions, as 2 students were not in gen. ed. classes)	• Conduct the actual relationship-building conversation

Table 1, continued

Post-implementation interview	o Separate interviews with:
	  o 6 families (including children)
	  o 5 EL teachers
	  o 4 general education teachers
	  o 3 home–school liaisons
		• Understand partici-pants' experiences
		• Solicit feedback on im-proving RAFT

Write up interim case studies	o Researchers	• Analyze experiences
Advisory Council Meeting	o Advisory Council o Researchers	• Explain experiences • Seek feedback for tool revision • Plan future use of RAFT • Present summary and analysis of activities to be included in report
Publish final RAFT on website and make training materials in multiple languages	o Researchers	• Make RAFT publicly available
Compile data	o Researchers	• Receive transcripts of 62 interviews, all imple-mentation sessions, and all Advisory Council meetings • Enter transcripts and field notes in NVivo
Conduct initial cod-ing	o Researchers	• Code data with emer-gent themes • Refine and define codes
Conduct second-level coding	o Researchers	• Code all original data with revised codebook
Condense codes into themes	o Researchers	• Clump codes into themes
Present themes to Advisory Council and participating school districts	o Researchers	• Check accuracy and completeness with Advi-sory Council

Note. We also met as a research team every other week and additional times as needed.

Research Methods

Table 1 shows all data sources used in this study. In addition to imple-menting RAFT with each of the 12 families with a refugee background, we

conducted trainings and pre- and post- interviews with all involved. We conducted a total of 62 interviews; Please see Table 2 for student participant details. We conducted all interviews in English, and, when interviewing families and students, interpreters relayed the questions and responses in the appropriate languages in the moment. Pre-implementation interviews were aimed at understanding participants' backgrounds and relationships that existed between families and educators. These were typically carried out before the training in RAFT and lasted from 15 to 45 minutes. We audiorecorded all RAFT implementation meetings. We conducted interviews with all participants after implementation; typically, these interviews with families took place immediately following the implementation, while we were still in their homes or they were still at school. We sought to understand their perspective on participating in RAFT and how they suggested improving it for future use. These interviews included the students and families together and lasted between 10 and 30 minutes. Post-implementation interviews with educators and liaisons took place on a separate day. Due to time constraints, some teachers who participated in multiple implementations emailed us the answers to our interview questions after conducting a RAFT meeting.

In addition to these interviews, data collection included transcriptions from the RAFT implementation and Advisory Council meetings and field notes (Emerson et al., 1995) and jottings (Agar, 2005) from all events. Three undergraduate students served as research assistants and wrote observation notes during all meetings and interviews. We also collected the chart papers on which we took notes during the RAFT meetings.

Data analysis was ongoing and recursive. We met biweekly as a research team for case analysis meetings (Miles et al., 2014), which included a discussion of the trainings, pre-implementation interviews, implementation sessions, and post-implementation interviews. We referred to our fieldnotes during these meetings (which we recorded), and a research assistant took notes to ensure we captured salient discussions. We drew upon these notes to form interim case studies (Miles et al., 2014) of each participating student, which we presented to the Advisory Council. The within-case analysis we conducted for these examples informed our Advisory Panel's understanding of RAFT in process, and the Advisory Council deepened our analysis by asking questions and bringing forth new ways of interpreting data.

Table 2. Participants

Implementation	Site	Name (pseudonym)	Grade (age)	Dominant Language
First Round of Implementation: Fall	A	Sara	3 (8)	Kirundi
	A	Faneel	3 (8)	Nepali
	A	Sejum	7 (13)	Nepali
Second Round of Implementation: Winter	A	Anas	3 (9)	Arabic
	A	Ooma	4 (10)	Swahili
	A	Winona	5 (12)	French
Third Round of Implementation: Spring	A	Suleymaan	7 (13)	Mai-Mai
	A	Johari	4 (10)	Swahili
	A	Rayon	10 (16)	Swahili
	B	Ping	10 (16)	Vietnamese
	B	Juddah	10 (15)	Nepali
	B	Abiral	9 (16)	Nepali

Professionals or research assistants transcribed all audio files, including the Advisory Panel discussions. After the conclusion of the pilot study, we compiled the transcriptions, field notes and jottings, and research team and Advisory Council meeting notes into a database in NVivo. The first author reread all transcripts, coding all instances where participants explained their perceptions of RAFT implementation with the broad "Perceptions of RAFT" category to reduce the data. Next, she reread all data in this code and open coded it into child codes. After leaving the coding for a few weeks, she reread the child codes and their definitions and merged them into four broader themes in second-cycle coding (Miles et al., 2014). The second author then read all data and agreed with the codes. The resulting coding corresponds to the themes presented in the following section in response to the guiding question: How did participants perceive RAFT implementation? We presented these themes to the Advisory Council and wrote a summary report for the partner school districts with a request for feedback; no changes were requested but requests for follow-up implementation ensued.

Findings

RAFT's purpose was to instigate and provide time for structured, student-centered conversations to build relationships between families with refugee backgrounds and their children's teachers, and the pilot resulted in

positive perceptions by participants. All liaisons, teachers, and families who implemented RAFT expressed satisfaction with it, and teachers without exception expressed eagerness to implement RAFT with more regularity and with more participants. Themes that emerged include: (a) the importance of focusing on the child/student and the care and commitment expressed by taking the time to focus on developing a relationship between educators and families; (b) the flexibility and freedom of RAFT not being tied to required parent–teacher conferences which have a rushed timeframe and set location; (c) the increased appreciation and knowledge of the student and each other, paving the way for further collaboration; and (d) the effectiveness of elements drawn from restorative practices. Please note that all names used are pseudonyms.

Focus on Child and Family

Participants underscored the importance of taking the time to shine a caring light on the child (from the families' perspective)/student (from the teachers' perspective; hereafter referred to as "youth"). The mutual commitment to the youth's success helped them to feel seen and the adults to form relationships. Judy's (a teacher) statement summarized how many participants felt:

> I think this meeting helped to build our relationship a little more. This meeting with his parents helped me see how much Anas's parents value education. They commented on how lucky Anas is to have the educational opportunities in this country and wanted him to take advantage of it. I felt a tremendous amount of support from them. I hope they also felt that we wanted to work with them as a team, home and school, to help Anas learn the most he could learn. This meeting helped us become more of a team working together.

Youth were struck by the amount of time everyone spent focusing solely on them. Anas "was proud that we had come to his house." Constantine (Central African community home–school liaison) reported that "having the RAFT team to come in their [Winona's family's] home, that was uplifting for them. They felt like, hey, I think now my child is going to be successful." When talking about Sara, a quiet and unassuming 10-year-old, her teacher expressed seeing this. The teacher stated: "I think it was one of those experiences [when] the kids are like, 'Whoa!…Like who are these people in my house?'" Juddah explained that he felt the support and commitment from the adults involved in RAFT, and that the process "gave me a lot of boost, because they all support me to do work. I'm thankful for everyone to be here and help me." Johari was able to understand what his teacher had been trying to tell him in school when she told him at his house during RAFT implementation. He said:

I remember what my teacher said—that I wasn't focusing, and I was going from different places instead of focusing—when she was talking to my dad. So, I just got that, and I am going to change that.…Making sure that I follow her direction for what she wants me to do when we are reading, when we are writing.

Families were also impressed by the care and commitment teachers and liaisons expressed by the act of implementing RAFT. One father reflected:

What's striking me the most is the fact that you just left everything which you have to do today. You wanted to come here to talk to us, and that shows how much you care about these children. You want to know how they are doing. How are we going to help them? That is important for us.

This focus was also appreciated by the home–school liaisons, who are often rushed by the urgency of multiple tasks and too little time. Sinh (Vietnamese-speaking community home–school liaison) explained that he loved having the time allotted to focusing on just one specific youth. He stated:

There's a focus on Ping, and we have, we had over an hour to talk about Ping and to hear from everyone…and I think it's really powerful, also, the way that everyone gets a turn. And that there's no interrupting. And nothing gets missed.

Later in the interview, he came back to talking about the ability to have such a "deep conversation" focused on just one student. He said:

We know really well about Ping and his goal. And somehow with them, other students too, if we have another interview for all those students— you know? We can see them more, you know? Sometimes we're guessing more than interacting. We see Ping, his hope, very clear now. We can see his future pretty clear, and we see he's eager to reach to that goal.

Understanding teachers' commitment to the youth increased families' trust in them. One father explained:

In this process I just…see how much she loves, you know, my child. And I came also to learn that she is a good person. By speaking, by talking, you can feel that she is a good person. She cares.

Interviewer: Would you say you trust her more now?

Father: Yes.

Families felt that RAFT was an important use of their time, in addition, because they formed a relationship with the teachers through the spotlight on just their child and their family. After RAFT implementation, Suleymaan's mother asked the teacher and home–school liaison several questions about another

one of her children, demonstrating that she felt more comfortable and trusting of them. Sinh stated that the RAFT implementation could help others understand the importance of the connection between home and school: "We care about the relationship between families and staff at school.…This project will help other people see it's very important, the connection between school and families. So important." At the end of the implementation for Sara, her father spoke to the home–school liaison with enthusiasm. Constantine stated that the father was "sincerely happy," felt that he had an important role to play in communicating with teachers (instead of relying on the home–school liaison to communicate with teachers on behalf of the family), and invited us to come back to do RAFT again in the near future. In the past, this father wanted Constantine to attend school events on his behalf because he did not see the point in participating. Constantine further explained:

> You don't say come back just to make somebody happy. You know you could just say a thank you, but you know when he said come back, he was sincere, and this is a guy who remind me every time when we have parent–teacher conference—hey, Constantine, you are there for us; I am not there, you are there. You have to help the children so that they can learn, and if there is a problem, please, ask the teacher to invite me.

Flexibility in Time and Place of RAFT

Families had a choice of where and when RAFT implementation occurred. Of the 12 families, 11 chose to conduct RAFT at their homes, and all RAFT implementations occurred either after school or on the weekend. Family members said things like, "I like it at home. It's more comfortable for me." As mentioned above, youth and families were impressed by the care and commitment teachers expressed by making the trip to their home. Furthermore, we scheduled a starting time but not a finishing time for the RAFT implementations, enabling them to continue until finished and minimizing the pressure of time.

Teachers also expressed that meeting with families in their homes was helpful or "more beneficial" than meeting in the schools. A teacher explained that she thought Ooma was "very pleased to have me in her home.…This home visit and interaction will help me next year when I have her brother in my room—this is a beginning!" Another teacher explained that she learned so much more from the meeting because it occurred in the youth's home:

> I greatly enjoyed sitting in Johari's home talking with him and his family. It is so worthwhile and enlightening to sit in their home, chat about Johari, and see Johari from a different perspective. I had no idea he wants to be a pastor! It was time very well spent, and I wish I could do it for all.

Teachers and liaisons also expressed that going into families' homes for RAFT affected the dynamic of the meeting to be more family-centered. Kate (EL teacher) said, "It really is different when we come into the home." Constantine explained that youth may be more forthright in their own homes:

> Winona was kind of quite clear. "I don't like reading." And that was important. If she can be upfront saying that I don't like reading, that was something to show the teacher that, hey, maybe you couldn't get this answer if we had to meet in school.

Participants also expressed that RAFT enabled them more time to engage in deeper discussions. One participant stated, "The time at the home was not rushed, like it normally is at parent–teacher conference time." Judy (third grade teacher) commented:

> I really enjoyed this experience with RAFT and Anas's family. It was great being in their home and having time to hear ideas from all sides. We have met only during parent conferences this year, and the time is limited so I do most of the talking because they want to know how Anas is doing. I heard some of their concerns at that time, but this RAFT time provided so much more time to hear from them. This is important.

The deeper, multi-way discussion during RAFT implementation enabled participants to build on each other's thoughts. One participant observed that:

> People who were, "Oh you said that, and I agree with that, and I see that too." Or the teacher saying, "Oh he's quiet with these kids, or he's loud at school" and the families ask "What do you mean?" So I think just having it kind of organic…and just letting it unfold was helpful too.

Participants could ease into the RAFT process, facilitating their participation in the deeper discussions. Amina mentioned that Anas "said he was nervous at first, but as we all talked, he started to feel better and liked that we wanted to hear his ideas."

Increased Appreciation and Knowledge

RAFT resulted in increased understanding of youth, families, liaisons, and teachers. In addition, participants better understood dynamics between individuals. Participants shared examples of how their appreciation for each other grew through the RAFT process of relationship building. They also discussed that RAFT paved the way for further collaboration, and they expressed hope that collaboration would continue to grow.

Educators developed a deeper understanding of the youth by interacting with them within their family unit. One teacher stated that RAFT was "very

insightful into the quiet personalities of the family and that reflects so much on Ooma's personality and behavior." Serena (middle school EL teacher) noted that it was "very valuable for me to have the whole family here together. Because you get, I get to see how the family interacts with each other, and that also helps me get to know Sejum better." It was also insightful to learn how families talked about youth and how they expressed their hopes and dreams for their child's education.

Understanding the youth within the family context also highlighted important aspects of the youth's development. According to Serena, Sejum often appeared too playful and unfocused for the seventh grade. She reported he did not connect well with others at school, including his peers and teacher. During RAFT implementation, which was the first time both of his parents were present, Serena said that she had never seen Sejum "interacting eye to eye" with anyone the way he did with his parents. She "appreciated that perspective of him." Beth (high school EL teacher) commented on seeing how hard it was for Rayon, a 16 year-old, to self-reflect, especially when his parents were there with him. Commenting on the "Who is…" opening prompt of RAFT, Beth said:

> Hearing Rayon say I don't have anything good or bad to say…was, you know, that shows me…hmm…maybe we need to work more on that self-reflection piece, like being able to, you know, think about who I am as a person. And if I need to work on…or even be able to say something positive, like he couldn't even say anything positive about himself, which, you know, he has a lot of positive attributes.

Anas benefitted greatly from the increased appreciation and knowledge his family and educators gained through RAFT. He was described during RAFT as "quiet and sometimes argumentative, talkative, trying to figure out where to put down his feet." School professionals explained that he seemed tired and disengaged during school. Although he sometimes talked to the teachers in the morning, he did not often talk to other students, would stop talking during academic times, and did not complete most of his work. The liaison described him as lacking self-determination and only focusing on schoolwork when she sat with him and forced him to focus. During the RAFT implementation at the family's home, it emerged that Anas sometimes stayed up all night playing video games for "8–10 hours" with friends who were still living in Iraq (in a different time zone). We also learned that culturally, children are not perceived as needing as much freedom as they have in the U.S. and, in addition, his family had experienced so much danger during their time in Iraq and Jordan that they wanted Anas to stay safe inside, not playing outdoors or interacting with other children unsupervised. His dad said, "He is always quiet at home and always really busy with his Xbox and playing games, [we] don't see him when he

comes back [from school] from 3:30 until next morning, no one sees Anas." Amina (Arabic-speaking home–school liaison) continued:

> When they came here, its more secure to stay inside because he has no language, he has no friends, and it's kind of a pattern now: He has no friends. So, all dad does, really [is] buy him games, and he likes Anas to be inside of the house.

After the RAFT implementation, all participants remarked that Anas was a drastically different student both in school and at home. His family set a two-hour per day limit on his Xbox time and required that he read for 30 minutes before he was allowed to play. Anas worked with educators to set goals for himself, and he stayed motivated to reach those goals. He took ownership of his work and made significant progress. His educators worked with his mother and communicated via a home–school notebook. After RAFT, the literacy work educators started at school continued at home: "I have been doing that with Anas like since beginning of the year. We could see little change. But when the family [got] involved, that's when we make a big change." Three months later, Amina updated us:

> He take [sic] it seriously after the meetings, and we sit and we talk how to improve his academic and socials. And how important [it is] to listen to the teacher and to Mom and Dad. And they feel like, even so, during his meeting, one of us talk about it's really important to like what you want but to hear adults and consider their opinion. Because, "Mom and Dad don't talk English, I'm not going to listen to them. They don't understand anything here." But during the meeting we give Mom and Dad a big window to talk and say what they like for their child, and he is kind of, start listening to his parents more. It's really affect that part a lot, and he start sitting with his mom, daily hour.

Families also learned a lot about the youths through RAFT. Constantine highlighted that Winona's family members were surprised to discover her desire to learn more about mechanics: During RAFT implementation, "she ask Dad all these questions around, you know, mechanics…so [the] parent was learning her role." Suleymaan's mother stated, "It's great gift to get together this morning. It's through this interview, I know my son better. I know his goal clearly." Faneel's father also appreciated learning about the teacher's ideas for his son through RAFT. He said, "The consciousness about the children's attitude and behavior…the teachers were giving more suggestions about the child's future."

Participants expressed such positive outcomes associated with RAFT that they wanted to continue it and include more people. Constantine stated: "We need to do this project to every kid who is new to U.S. Even those who have

been here with us for three years, four years, we should do this…the families… are really comfortable. They are happy." Rayon's father expressed: "I want God to bless a person who is going to do a follow-up on this project." Johari's father exclaimed, "It's like God loves me, because he just sent you guys here." Sinh explained that he wanted more school personnel to participate. Specifically, he said, "I think if advisor here, I think it's good too. One more people. I think, to me, advisor is—or counselor…he should be here to see…who the real Ping is."

Elements Drawn from Restorative Practices

The elements from restorative practices we adopted included sitting in a circle, using a talking piece, being able to pass on responding to the prompt, having a facilitator, having a drawing done by the youth that included their picture at the center of the circle, and making the norms explicit. After the first round of implementation, we decided to make the drawing and picture of the youth optional because it caused some participants stress, which detracted from the process.

Sitting in a circle and passing the talking piece numerous times proved very helpful for inviting everyone to contribute to the conversation. Several educators expressed that they typically communicated only with the father of the youth. Especially when gender affected the women's participation, having the talking piece passed to them meant that, if they did not want to participate, they needed to take the initiative to pass on participation rather than sit passively. In other words, the talking piece served as an equalizer to enter the conversation. Constantine explained that, culturally for the families from central Africa, the mothers needed to yield to the fathers to talk with the teachers. However, we heard mothers' voices when we used the talking piece and could see the mothers become more and more comfortable talking as the conversation continued. Furthermore, using a talking piece resonated with some participants' cultures, as Sara's older sister, who was part of the RAFT implementation for Sara, explained. She commented that her father enjoyed the talking piece. She said that "in Africa we use the tool…like the same thing, like we did, in the elders meeting."

The circle format and ability to pass the talking piece numerous times enabled deeper discussion and brought participants together. The circle format kept the group focused on the student. Noni (elementary EL teacher) said, "And to have a circle that is focused just around one student, just around Juddah, I think it was really powerful. And helpful for the student, for the families, the teacher, liaison, everyone involved. And I really enjoyed it." Mary, an undergraduate student researcher, commented, "We went around the circle maybe like four times with that one question, and each time it changed a bit, and it got a little more in depth."

Discussion

RAFT's purpose was to instigate and provide time for structured, student-centered conversations to build relationships between families with refugee backgrounds and their children's teachers, and the pilot resulted in positive perceptions by all participants. Themes that emerged include: (a) the importance of focusing on the child/student and the care and commitment expressed by taking the time to focus on developing a relationship between educators and families; (b) the flexibility and freedom of RAFT not being tied to required parent–teacher conferences which have a rushed timeframe and set location; (c) the increased appreciation and knowledge of the student, paving the way for further collaboration; and (d) the effectiveness of elements drawn from restorative practices. This study demonstrates that RAFT is a promising practice for building relationships with resettled families with refugee backgrounds, a ubiquitous population whose needs should be addressed in an ongoing manner. Furthermore, RAFT holds potential as a tool for forming family–school partnerships with any family.

Family–school partnerships start with relationships and can lead to transformational change towards more equitable systems (Ishimaru, 2020), and home visits are a promising strategy (Sheldon & Jung, 2018) that must be thoughtfully designed to support the cultural and linguistic strengths of diverse families (Park & Paulick, 2021; Paulick et al., 2022). RAFT represents what Park and Paulick (2021) call for: "home visits that *are* culturally sustaining so that educators can have models" (p. 24). RAFT made norms and goals explicit, interrupted typical power dynamics by incorporating aspects of restorative practices and using an outside facilitator, and amplified family and student voice. Participants appreciated the time dedicated to building relationships and focusing on a specific student and family. RAFT successfully instigated relationships among the participants in our pilot study, and relationships are the foundation of family–school partnerships (Turnbull et al., 2022). The home visits also fostered conditions that enabled teachers to authentically and humanly engage with families. Both families and teachers were able to share a collective and more expanded awareness of the knowledge and strengths they perceived in the student. RAFT is significant in its potential to increase equity in the way schools and families relate to support student success.

RAFT is a promising part of what must be a comprehensive systematic change in how we conceptualize power, relationships, and outcomes of family–school partnerships. Participants in this study craved a follow up and wanted to include more participants. To effectively promote sustained partnerships between families and teachers, RAFT must be a part of a coherent system that

prioritizes collaboration and seeks to dismantle implicit deficit-thinking and power dynamics. As Mapp and Bergman (2021) assert:

> Such power dynamics have persisted because our sector has never prioritized authentic, solidarity-driven engagement. The vast majority of educators in America have never been exposed to equitable family engagement practices that emphasize the humanity and wellness of families and communities. Without training and exposure, many educators unsurprisingly do not see this type of practice as realistic. Thus, we have an education sector where many cannot imagine a world in which their work is inextricably tied to authentic partnerships with families. Models for effective family engagement have not been baked into our educational system. (p. 9)

As a relationship-building tool, RAFT is a perfect fit for building the "process conditions" specified in the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships (Version 2) because it is "relational, built on trust; linked to learning and development; asset-based; culturally-responsive and respectful; collaborative; and interactive" (Mapp & Bergman, 2021, p. 11). The "organizational conditions," however, must be in place. Specifically, family–school partnerships must be systematic, integrated, and sustained. Family–school partnership initiatives must take into account that relational trust takes time, and building it must be part of teachers' explicit workloads (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). There also must be a stronger focus on professional learning and preservice teacher preparation in family–school partnerships (Francis et al., 2021; Kyzar et al., 2019; Mapp & Bergman, 2021).

Although models of family engagement and family partnerships abound, there is limited research on specific strategies, protocols, or scripts to guide meetings with families, especially those who have refugee backgrounds. Specific strategies or protocols must ensure enough flexibility to be effectively nimble in a variety of circumstances yet have essential elements that can be implemented with fidelity in order to conduct research on their effectiveness. One such strategy is the Parent Teacher Home Visit model. This model has been widely implemented and has promising results (McKnight et al., 2022; Sheldon & Jung, 2018), yet it does not incorporate the elements of restorative practices or participant training that aim to level power dynamics, and it also does not follow a set protocol or make norms explicit. We propose that RAFT could potentially work within, and enhance, a home visit model that schools already have in place. Furthermore, although we piloted RAFT with resettled families with a refugee background, it could be a useful tool when working with any family, especially immigrant families whose children may feel resentful of or alienated from their families (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015).

RAFT represents a budding strategy of building relationships between families and educators that can be an important part of comprehensive family–school partnerships. More research is needed to determine how well it works, how it works best, and the feasibility of its implementation. Future research should also explore how schools make time for such rich conversation to occur. This study is limited by its small size of only 12 participating families and its reliance on only qualitative data. Future research should focus on developing an outcome measure for RAFT that can enable measuring its effect and determine how it fits into systematic family–school partnership initiatives.

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A Community-Based Organization in North Carolina: Facilitating Transitions From High School to College for Refugee-Background Students

Alison M. Turner and Jennifer C. Mann

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore how one community-based organization supports adolescents through the transition from high school to college, specifically looking at the experiences of three late-arriving refugee-background students who successfully gained access to higher education. Through the critical conceptual framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), we present this case study in hopes of ultimately sharing what community-based organizations can do to support schools and refugee-background students in their transition to higher education. We found that this organization helps refugee youth to (1) build social connections and a sense of community through mentoring and networking; (2) navigate a new environment by "walking alongside" students; and (3) bolster aspirations to go beyond by celebrating their successes. Additionally, we describe how the support is perceived by the students and how the support impacts them. Finally, we share implications for practice for the focus organization, other community-based organizations, and educators of refugee-background students.

Key Words: community-based organizations, refugee-background students, community cultural wealth, college access, higher education, educational attainment

Introduction

Daily, upwards of 100 students filter in and out of the small community classroom located in the heart of the apartment complex where "Coalition for Refugees" (CFR; Note: all names are pseudonyms) holds its many meetings. Staggering times between 2:30 pm and 8:30 pm on weekdays, kindergarten through college students come and go, seeking support from the dozens of volunteers who sit around crowded tables. Sounds of talking, reading, and laughing fill the small space as students receive help on their schoolwork.

In this study, we illuminate the experiences of refugee-background students during their adolescence and the support provided by CFR, a community-based organization (CBO) in a large metropolis area in North Carolina, to better understand the integral role it plays for students as they transition from high school to higher education. Given that only 6% of refugees worldwide currently attend college (UNHCR, 2023), CFR's support has been significant to the success of students. In this article, we focus on three late-arriving refugee-background students who have successfully graduated from high school and matriculated into college: Amora, an Afghan refugee from Iran; Sue Mar, a Karenni refugee from Burma; and Gabriella, a Congolese refugee from Burundi. All three of these young women arrived in the U.S. during their adolescence with minimal English proficiency. In conversation with these students, they have each attributed their success in part to their participation with CFR during high school which therefore is the focus of this current research study.

CFR began serving the community in 2007 and offers a variety of support programs for refugee and immigrant families including nightly homework help; early learning classes for three- to four-year-olds; the College Bound program intended to mentor junior and senior students through graduation and into higher education; ESL classes for adults; liaisons with local schools to facilitate communication between families and teachers; medical support to help transport patients to appointments and communicate needs to health workers; fellowship picnics and social gatherings; summer camp for school-aged children, among other services. Data provided by CFR indicate the success that their efforts have already made. From the 2020–21 school year, 14 of the 15 participants in the College Bound program went to institutes of higher education following high school graduation. In the 2021–22 school year, 15 of 15 participants graduated and went to college. Most recently, in the 2022–23 school year, another 15 of 15 participants graduated from high school and went to community colleges and universities. The program has consistently had 15 seniors, though there is no cap or stipulation on the number of students who can participate. The College Bound program currently has a total enroll-

ment of 28 students for the 2023–24 school year. The cumulative effects of going to college extends beyond the student to his or her family and has lasting positive effects, including breaking the cycle of poverty (Haycock, 2015; Streitwieser et al., 2020). Streitwieser and colleagues (2020) explain:

> The provision of higher education has significant implications for any human being, whether living in a developing country or in the so-called developed world. But learning opportunities beyond secondary school are a major component in successful societal (re)integration, where the employment market values and rewards higher-order credentials and specializations. (p. 205)

Therefore, we consider refugee background students' movement into higher education a success for them and their greater communities. Driven by the desire to extend and amplify the practices that have paved the way towards success for students and their families at CFR, we share the students' stories so that all refugee students can, as Gabriella remarked, "reach the goals…[and] win life."

Purpose of the Study

Author 2 spent more than a decade striving to provide the needed academic, emotional, and financial support to the newly arrived multilingual students in her English language arts ninth grade classroom and to their families. She felt committed to the community connections she had developed but felt unable to meet the needs of all of her immigrant and refugee-background students. During the routine home visits she made, Author 2 met Cynthia who began working to help settle newly arrived refugee families in 2007 and later founded CFR, a CBO in North Carolina. Partnering with her church, Cynthia recruited volunteers to assist refugee families and provide needed resources and educational support as they transitioned to the new country. Author 2 acknowledged that if CFR had existed when she was still teaching at the high school, the families who she worked with would have received more robust support. Retrospectively, Author 2 was motivated to better understand how CFR is now helping former students of hers and other refugee-background students navigate the educational terrain.

The purpose, then, of this study is to share how the CBO supports students as they transition into higher education so that it might be amplified and expanded into other communities with immigrant and refugee background families and students. Therefore, in this study we set out to explore the following questions: (1) What does CFR do to support high school students' success moving into college? (2) How is the support perceived by the students, and how does the support impact them?

In this article, our goal is to reduce barriers to college-going for refugee-background students by sharing stories from those who have successfully made their way to higher education. Secondly, we will present findings about the work of CFR and share suggestions that other CBOs and educators may borrow to better support refugee and immigrant students in the transition from high school to college. Lastly, we write this article as a demonstration of our resistance against deficit perspectives and low expectations of students from refugee backgrounds (Alford, 2014; Murillo, 2002; Shapiro, 2014).

Geographic and Social Context

North Carolina (NC), a new immigration gateway state, has seen a steady increase in immigrant and refugee families since the 1990s (Rong et al., 2017). In fact, at the pinnacle of the fourth-wave immigration to the United States, NC's foreign population grew at a rate of 625% between 1990 and 2000 (Rong et al., 2017). As of 2018, immigrants and refugees made up approximately 8% of NC's total population (American Immigration Council, 2020) and 18% of the total K–12 students in NC report a primary language other than English is spoken in the home (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022). In addition, NC consistently ranks tenth in the nation for refugee resettlement, with one in four refugees settling in the large metropolis region (Refugee Processing Center, 2022) which is served by CFR. This CBO is headquartered within the community center of an apartment complex where hundreds of refugee families reside. Originating from an outreach program within a nondenominational, evangelical church, today CFR partners with over 18 religious organizations and has as a part of its mission the commitment to "respecting the dignity and competence of everyone and supporting families as they continue to grow and flourish in a new environment" (organization website). Their presence now exceeds the walls of the community center. CFR rents apartments for increased program space and recently secured a lease on a large facility next door. Additionally, many staff members live in the apartment complex.

North High School, where most of the students attend and where Author 2 taught for 10 years, is close to the students' apartments. The school's student population is made up of 16% former or current English language learners and has the largest number of refugee students in the state (personal communication, ESL teacher). CFR works closely with North High School, particularly the ESL and sheltered-content teachers. The school–community liaison from CFR regularly emails teachers and visits families to share information from the school.

Theoretical Framework

We approach this study through the critical conceptual framework of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) with an eye on emphasizing the assets inherent in the refugee community and pushing back on deficit perspectives readily espoused about this population. The framework guided our analysis of the data collected, the findings, as well as the implications for future practice.

Community Cultural Wealth

Community cultural wealth centers knowledge and experiences possessed by culturally and linguistically diverse learners and pushes back on deficit perspectives, "one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Deficit perspectives focus on what the students lack rather on the strengths that they bring (Valenzuela, 1999). Recognizing, and perhaps more importantly, giving room for students to use and share their community cultural wealth, has the power to "transform the process of schooling" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70) by validating students' knowledge and experiences as worthy of inclusion at school. The goal should not be to change the refugee students to better fit school norms. Rather, the goal is to learn from and transform the educational institutions to better fit the experiences, skills, and needs of the students that enter the school doors. Yosso (2005) identified six categories of community cultural wealth that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds bring with them to school: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Jimenez (2020) added a seventh category of capital: migration capital (see Table 1 in the Implications section for more information on community cultural wealth types of capital).

In this study, we will use the lens of community cultural wealth to explore the "multifaceted portfolio of cultural assets and resources [which] facilitate the survival and resistance of communities of color" (Yosso & Garcia, 2007, p. 155), in this case, refugee communities. Cultural capital is "accumulated, like a deposit in the bank, but cultural wealth is meant to be shared" (Yosso, 2006, p. 77), making an important distinction between the individual nature of capital and the communal nature of wealth. Therefore, possessing, utilizing, and growing community cultural wealth enriches the entire community. For example, familial capital, one aspect of community cultural wealth, includes a "commitment to community well-being" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) and the desire to help others "transcend the adversity in their daily lives" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80), thereby shifting the focus from the individual to the collective. Community cultural wealth is also a valuable tool for viewing students through an asset perspective

because it identifies skills, strengths, and advantages that they already possess due to their life experiences. Bañuelos (2021) explained, "...community cultural wealth highlights the unique and valuable information, obligations, trust, and norms that pool in communities of color because and in spite of their historical marginalization" (p. 1).

Therefore, we will analyze the efforts of CFR through the lens of community cultural wealth, highlighting how the organization is focused on students' assets and supports students' transitions from secondary to higher education. We will also use community cultural wealth as a framework to examine elements that are missing or are underdeveloped in the CBO and propose ways to further strengthen its offerings and better support of the refugee community and, most importantly, help refugee-background students achieve their goals of attending college and pursuing their dreams.

Literature Review

Obstacles and Aids for Refugees Accessing Higher Education

Refugees come to the U.S. to escape violence, poverty, and extreme conditions (UNHCR, 2020). They also come with greater educational opportunities in mind for their children (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) and go to great lengths to ensure that their children have access to quality education. However, despite their interest and dedication to their children's educational achievement, there are many well-documented reasons explaining the struggles refugees face with schooling. First, the process of migration for refugees often involves emotional trauma and may result in post-traumatic stress disorder (Tuliao et al., 2017). Therefore, the loss, grief, and uncertainty that refugee students face may understandably distract them from their studies. El Yaafouri (2022) calls this "transition shock" to describe the multiple factors, including "persistent stress, transition-related anxiety, trauma, traumatic stress, high incidence of adverse childhood experiences, vulnerability, and culture shock," that affect children as newcomers to the U.S. (p. 2).

Another factor relating to lower academic achievement for newcomer students are gaps in children's formal education before and during the resettlement process (Daniel & Zybina, 2019). Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) have had at least two fewer years of schooling than their peers and have varying levels of formal education (Hos, 2016). One Haitian student explained how school was intermittently in session due to violence in the community: "You always have to ask when there is school. They are always doing something strange in the street—killing. You can't get an education. My father wanted me to come [to the U.S.] so that he can give me an opportunity

for tomorrow" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 30). In addition, many refugees who come from nonindustrialized areas may have limited technological skills and formal education (Tuliao et al., 2017), further complicating their ability to catch up to school-aged peers in the U.S.

In addition, adjusting to a new community is itself a difficult task, "situating oneself within a new context of language, culture, community, and shifting personal identities" (El Yaafouri, 2022, p. viii). Central to their adaptation is learning the English language which has been shown to take significant time (Daniel & Zybina, 2019; Hoff & Armstrong, 2021; Hos, 2016; Roxas & Roy, 2012). Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), language used in academic instruction, has been shown to take five to seven years to develop once immersed in English (Cummins, 1996). Yet, students are routinely put at a disadvantage in schools when they are denied the opportunity to translanguage (García & Kleyn, 2016), or draw from their home language, a practice shown to be effective for new language learners, and instead are forced to complete all assignments in English (Kleyn, 2016). Furthermore, refugee students often face mixed reception by community and school personnel (Roxas & Roy, 2012). While initially welcomed into the host community, hostility and resentment often grow after a few years in the U.S. (Roxas & Roy, 2012). Tuliao et al. (2017) explains the many competing demands on immigrants, "they are expected to juggle new roles while simultaneously learning English, adapting to a new country, finding a job or working, and studying" (p. 17). Teachers may not be aware of the circumstances regarding the students' migration experiences and may deem student work as demonstrating deliberate laziness on class assignments. For example, one teacher criticized a refugee background student when, in fact, he was "working relentlessly to finish assignments, but was overwhelmed" (Roxas & Roy, 2019, p. 479).

Overall, there is evidence of a continued deficit perspective held by teachers and administrators towards immigrant and refugee students and a subsequent lack of access to rigorous learning opportunities (Alford, 2014; Daniel & Zybina, 2019; Lau, 2012; Ngo, 2017; Ryu & Tuvilla, 2018; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Shapiro (2014) noted that refugees are often "presumed to be educationally deficient, not predicted to reach high levels of achievement, and therefore may not be encouraged to challenge themselves academically (p. 397)" (as cited in Daniel & Zybina, 2019, p. 351). There also tends to be a lack of sufficient ESL programs, qualified teachers, and translators (Roxas & Roy, 2012). Refugee students, like other English language learners, are often filtered into low-track classes that do not adequately prepare them for postsecondary opportunities, including education and work (Alford, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Shapiro, 2014; Valenzuela, 1999). Shapiro (2014)

explains that English language learners "spend much of their day in separate academic tracks, where the primary focus is linguistic remediation and not the learning of grade-level content" (p. 387). These factors contribute to isolation and rejection by peers and teachers at school and culminate in lower achievement on standardized tests and higher dropout rates (Barton & Tan, 2020; Juvonen, 2007; Nasir et al., 2011).

While there is much research into the barriers for young refugee students, there is far less research surrounding the factors that contribute to their successful completion of secondary education and enrollment and attendance in college. One factor that has been explored as playing positive roles in students' success is mentorship by a caring adult (Hos, 2016; Roxas & Roy, 2012; Stewart, 2015; Symons & Ponzio, 2019; Wooley, 2009). Hoff and Armstrong (2021) call this "ethical care," explaining, "building caring relationships with educators helped refugee-background students feel supported and encouraged" (p. 3). Likewise, El Yaafouri (2022) discusses the four essential pillars for working successfully with refugee-background youth: (1) connect—building and maintaining authentic relationships with students; (2) protect—cultivating trust and safety in the learning space; (3) respect—fostering student voice, choice, and collaboration; and 4) redirect—facilitating self-efficacy and sustainability.

Methodology

Through the use of a qualitative case study methodology, we focus on the nuanced situation of late-arriving refugee-background youth navigating college enrollment and the supporting role that one CBO, CFR, provides to these students (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Case study provides us with a robust approach to research that is best used in the pursuit of highly contextualized knowledge (Baxter & Jack, 2008, Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995). It explores a real-life, bounded system through a detailed and thorough collection and analysis of multiple sources and forms of data, and then subsequently reports the findings in a descriptive manner (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995). Our case study is nuanced, contextualized, and personal. It is bounded by the confines of CFR and makes use of numerous sources of data including semi-structured 1:1 and group interviews, data from the CBO, and documents such as letters from teachers, personal writings, and awards. Case study allows us to refine our understanding as we seek to closely explore alternate and multiple perspectives (Stake, 1995), also affording the opportunity to illuminate this specific case and provide in-depth insight into the ways CFR supports refugee youth during critical years of high school. In this study we focus not just on the

staff at CFR, but on three late-arriving refugee students who named CFR as a central factor in their success.

Data Collection and Analysis

This article reflects data collected from a three-year-long case study in which Author 2 first followed the trajectory of two of her former high school students, Amora (from Afghanistan) and Sue Mar (from Burma), as they moved into and navigated higher education. The case study was expanded to include a third refugee student, Gabriella (from the Congo), who participated in the College Bound Program at CFR and enrolled in community college in 2022. In this study we draw from multiple semi-structured interviews (1:1, group, and asynchronous) conducted with these three refugee college students as they reflected on their support during high school. We also interviewed the founder and director of CFR; the coordinator of the College Bound Program; the liaison with the high school; a mentor in the College Bound Program and former guidance counselor at North High School; and the community college liaison who has served as a facilitator for refugee students entering the community college. Other sources of data include document analysis of letters from teachers, personal essays, and school awards related to Sue Mar's high school work as well as an interview with the English teacher–researcher (Author 2). Data was also collected from CFR on student success in the College Bound Program (see the Appendix for the list of the data sources).

Interviews lasting 30–60 minutes were conducted with each of the refugee-background students and personnel associated with CFR between one and three times. The interviews were conducted and recorded via a video conferencing platform, providing a partial transcript of the conversation. The transcripts were then corrected by watching the interview and filling in missed and incorrect words. Using a video recording was helpful, especially with refugee students, because understanding the message was sometimes reliant on body language and facial expressions. The interviews gathered information on students' experiences at school and at CFR as well as other information about the process of applying to college and their future plans. Interviews with CFR support personnel focused on practices, goals, and outcomes of their outreach programs, particularly the College Bound Program.

A key strategy in data analysis was adding interviewer notes. These described the context of the interview and key parts where the data glowed and produced wonder (MacLure, 2013). Authors 1 and 2 hand coded the data for emergent themes independently of one another and shared our codes during meetings. Some codes that emerged at this stage were persistence, asking questions, mental fortitude, and educator support. Codes were clarified and condensed during subsequent readings of the data.

We used additional documents to help triangulate data from multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). For example, we used the documents collected to triangulate codes identified in Sue Mar's interview transcripts. Initial data collected in preliminary interviews directed subsequent data collection to clarify details during follow-up and asynchronous interviews.

In the second round of data analysis, we overlaid the types of capital identified by Yosso (2005) and Jimenez (2020) in community cultural wealth to analyze the data and identify ways in which the students, teachers, staff, and mentors in CFR recognized and made connections to student assets. Refugee-background students bring experiences and knowledge that are valuable to their lives and to the interactions in community spaces such as the classroom and school. The role of CFR is not to provide or give these students "missing assets" that they need. Rather, CFR serves as a conduit between the refugee-background students and the new context in North Carolina.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the ability to clearly delineate between forms of community cultural wealth is difficult given that they overlap and are reliant upon another. For example, a student may have navigational capital, understanding how to negotiate educational spaces, but also needs aspirational capital to move forward, especially in the face of adversity. Success for students, measured here as entry into higher education, is dependent then upon the harmony of multiple forms of capital working simultaneously. Therefore, we reviewed the transcripts for a third time for how students and refugee support staff described support from the school, other adults, other refugees, and CFR. This round of coding led us to insights about the role of the CBO in identifying and making connections to the assets that the refugee women possess. It also pointed out places where the CBO could strengthen its practices. Lastly, we analyzed the data a fourth time, using values coding (Miles et al., 2020) to determine the students' perceptions of the support and the impact on them.

Positionality

Author 1 is a White, bilingual educator in higher education. She has focused her work on understanding the impact of involving families and communities in K–12 classrooms to support teachers and their students. For example, as a high school Spanish teacher, she involved her students in the community by seeking opportunities to speak Spanish locally and interact with neighbors. Later, she connected Spanish-dominant and English-dominant parents at their dual language school through language classes and cross-cultural conversation time. She values the contributions of CBOs in facilitating these connections between school and home.

Author 2 is a White, monolingual doctoral candidate and researcher who has been an educator in North Carolina public schools for 16 years and has been deeply concerned with educational inequities since she first recognized them in her own life. Born to teenage parents in a low-resourced rural community, she recalls being cognizant of educational inequities as early as Kindergarten. These memories serve as a catalyst for her commitment to educational equity. She spent a decade as an English teacher, teaching sheltered English literature to classes of newly arrived immigrant and refugee adolescents, and later became an elementary English as a second language teacher, where she worked to help ensure greater academic access to curricular content for her students. Amora and Sue Mar, study participants, are former students of hers who have now gone on to higher education. Her aim has always been to create more opportunities for success for students for whom success did not feel guaranteed.

We, as researchers, approach this study placing great value on immigrant and refugee-background students' experiences and knowledge which they bring to the classroom and community. We see our work with them to honor and share their stories with educators and community members. We feel it is a privilege to be invited and welcomed into the lives and experiences of Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella and the work that CFR does in the community. These spaces have been generously opened to us.

Findings

In this section, we will share our findings on how CFR supported students' success moving from high school to institutions of higher education by recognizing and making connections to their community cultural wealth. Specifically, it was found that CFR helps refugee-background students (a) promote social connections and sense of community; (b) navigate a new environment; and (c) bolster aspirations to go beyond. We will also present how CFR's support was perceived by the refugee-background students and how the support has impacted them long-term. Our findings are presented with an intentional centering of all the participants' voices to honor the valuable wisdom and insight they bring to this research. This is essential, because in Ramsay and Baker's (2019) meta-scoping study of 46 papers on students from refugee backgrounds in higher education contexts, they found a stark lack of refugee-background student voices and issued a directive for researchers to "reduce the dominance of our own voices" (p. 81), and that is what we are seeking to do in this article by centering the voices of others.

Promoting Social Connections and Community: "It's Kind of Like You Are Family"

CFR offers important support to refugee-background students like Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella by promoting social connections and creating a sense of community among refugee families. The CBO hosts community gatherings frequently, often every week. Amora explains,

> Honestly, [the] community center, they always have parties or something. They invite all students and their families and kind of spend time with them. Which all of us gonna go, and, it's kind of nice. You talk with some of them. Especially moms…they all getting friends with each other.

Amora likewise described the role that these social relationships play for her mother:

> You can talk to them [refugee-background individuals who live at the apartment complex], and then some people also like learning the language and some words from them, which is nice.…They are always talking [about] what they want to do in the future.…My mom just learned from them and wanted to be friends with them. It's like you are family.

By facilitating relationships among refugee-background families, especially mothers who tend to be more isolated in immigrant and refugee families (Northcote et al., 2006), newer refugee families are supported by those who have been here longer. Kayla, in her role as liaison to the schools, explained how she noticed these connections when refugee families began to help newly arrived refugee families. While previously she would have been the first called by the school to pick up a child due to illness or to learn about a problem at school, refugee mothers and families began to help one another navigate problems at school.

> I ended up actually…passing it off to them and their friend, so one of their friends that worked as the translator for it, so, instead of me being the one that got a call. If she didn't show up or if something happened, I'm still on the list, but I'm now second. It's another family from the same country that's been there longer that is friends with them that is now the first contact because she can immediately call and translate everything to the parents.

The sense of community and shared purpose among refugee families provide an important support system for families who have just arrived in the United States. With their newly acquired English, families who have been here

a little longer can understand and translate the information to the home language of the other family. They can also serve as cultural mediators to explain how things are typically done in the U.S. schools and classrooms from their shared cultural perspective.

CFR also encourages students to look to other refugee-background students for models. For example, Cynthia, the founder and executive director of CFR, mentioned the effect of having other refugee-background students who had gone before into higher education as having a positive effect on the current students enrolled in the College Bound Program since they form a part of their shared community:

> So, I feel like it even expands beyond just the students that we work with…it's like a culture of…"I can do it." This [refugee-background student] did it…or this person did it…and so I can do it.

There is an aura of success at CFR and a buy-in that if others made it through the process, they could as well.

Sue Mar often spoke of the power of talking to or learning about the experience of a fellow refugee-background person. For example, she shared that she read the autobiography of former First Lady Michelle Obama but felt that, while impressive, she couldn't relate to Obama's personal life story since she is not from a refugee background. In contrast, when Amora met a dentist from Iran through connections made in the apartment complex, she was inspired to stick to her plan of becoming a dentist because he was a refugee-background student at one time and had achieved his dream, so she might, too. She explained, "[W]hen I went to the dentist they told me—the doctor was from Iran. So, I was talking to him, and he said that [studying to be a dentist] is not that long. He said, 'If you love it, just do it!'"

Help Navigating a New Environment: "Start Early—Walk With Them…[Walk] With Them Beyond."

CFR supports the entire refugee family in acclimating to their new environment. They help families navigate many practical necessities such as a place to live, a job, medical care, English classes, and education support for their children. CFR is integral in placing families in a furnished apartment and helping them get their bearings when they first arrive. CFR's support for students is extensive, including homework help, school supplies, and the College Bound Program which includes 1:1 mentors, academic skill nights, college visits, and career nights, in which a professional from the community shares about his/her profession. Amora explained the importance of homework help at CFR:

Honestly, that place [CFR] was really good though. Especially, like you when you are just getting to the country, and you need help, and then they have really nice people coming. Some of them are teachers or professors and then some of them are really smart people. And they come to help, honestly. They have different skill[s]—some for biology, or math, or English which is nice. They have a lot of volunteers to help the students.

In addition to providing nightly homework help, CFR was also a place to obtain school supplies. At the beginning of the year, school supplies including backpacks, notebooks, and pencils could be purchased at a minimal price. The center was also a place where students could print class notes, papers, and other documents needed for class. During the COVID-19 pandemic when classes moved to online learning, Amora regularly went to CFR to print slide decks from online lectures. She explained, "Mostly I'm gonna go there to print stuff because I have [an] online class which is—they [are] all on PowerPoint, and I have to print them and study." Having consistent access to needed materials for schoolwork helped ensure students could succeed even as instruction moved online. Additionally, Amora routinely went to CFR to receive help on college essays and yearly went for support with her financial aid application. Amora explained that the volunteer who worked with her did not just help her to fill out the documentation, but "he kind of teach [sic] me how to do it," resulting in her completing it for her siblings in subsequent years. In this way, the volunteer served as a literacy broker (Perry, 2009), helping bridge the cultural, navigational understandings that were hindering Amora's comprehension of the application. Access to these resources was vital for the students to sustain college enrollment, particularly during a tumultuous period.

Another key navigational component for student success is the mentor–refugee student relationship. The refugee-background students receive important advice from mentors, including how to navigate school procedures and policies, such as what to do when they miss school or struggle with class assignments. Kayla, CFR employee and liaison to the schools who also lived in the apartment complex with the refugee families, regularly counsels students regarding their academic work. She explains her role in helping students see the importance of addressing problems early on and in encouraging students to communicate directly with teachers:

When there's a week left of school…there's very little I can do to help you not fail the class, like that's not something that's possible, so I've been trying over the last year to really emphasize that, like hey, if you have a problem, come quickly, and teaching them to reach out to their teachers…and the ones that I've seen do that are improving a lot.

Students may be unaware of the fact that teachers are often receptive to student requests for help or more time on an assignment. Additionally, in U.S. culture, students are welcome and encouraged to speak up for themselves. Kayla helps them to better understand this two-way communication between students and their teachers, making a significant difference in their ability to perform at their optimal level.

Finally, the College Bound Program provides essential support for students as they make the transition beyond high school to higher education. Cynthia explained the origins of the College Bound Program after seeing the struggles students encountered after high school graduation:

> I think the reason I started the [College Bound Program] in the beginning was because what I was seeing in our community was…first kid in a family to go to high school, much less finish—like [graduation] pictures taken…whole family, teachers, anyone that they knew, just like pictures, pictures, pictures, and then at the end of the day when I saw the kids back in the community, it was just like this panic of what now? What do I do now?

Therefore, in effort to support students beyond high school graduation, the College Bound Program was put in place, according to Cynthia, to show "that commitment to walk with them for the long haul, and that you're not…going to leave them at the door of college. Start early—walk with them…[walk] with them beyond." When students join the College Bound Program, they are assigned to a mentor who meets with them regularly during their remaining years in high school and into college. They also have access to daily homework help, tutoring sessions, and academic skills nights. There are, in addition, evening informational sessions that include topics such as applying for financial aid and scholarships, writing college applications, and deciding upon majors and career paths. Ashley, the coordinator of the College Bound Program, expressed that college access was important because they witnessed that students "ended up falling into the same jobs that their parents did, which are not necessarily bad jobs, but they keep their family in a cycle of poverty" and helping them to navigate access to college was a way to change students' personal and familial trajectory. Kayla, the school liaison, explained the role of the College Bound Program, since it is unlikely that their parents have gone through this process before:

> We do college tours. We help with the college applications. We help with the FAFSA applications. We help with other scholarship applications. Just because a lot of times, like let's face it, we knew that there were scholarship applications because our parents were like, all right, well, it's

time to apply for this. You've got to make sure you get things in [by] this time, like those scholarships are going to close, and their parents don't know the American college rules.…They didn't go through our system, and it's difficult to kind of find them out.

Gabriella, a recent graduate from the College Bound Program, agreed that the program was instrumental in her decision to go to college because it introduced her to the academic programs and possible careers:

From the [College Bound Program], I should say they help us a lot. Like to make a meeting with somebody, to just share their knowledge with us. I can say, making appointments with people [who] work in [a local community college], [a local university], so we just meet many people here…we [are] just meeting the doctors; we [are] meeting the dentists.

An important part of the program was encouraging students to think realistically about their interests and strengths and what they might like to do with their lives. Often mentors challenged students to think about personal goals. Kayla explained the role of CFR in helping students navigate career choices and the pressures that might be placed on them by parents and family members:

The biggest thing that we do with I think in the [College Bound Program] is discussing reasonable goals and what is it that [students] actually want—helping them find a dream and a vision and a way of doing it, because a lot of times you have a lot of pressure from parents—you will be a doctor—and they want don't want to be, and it's very hard to be a doctor.

Mentors help students identify subject areas that interest them and help them find a career path that would align with their strengths. They sought to bring more information and resources to the students through guest speakers and mentoring to improve their ability to navigate the many career choices. For example, Cynthia recalled a student thinking about becoming a hairstylist or vet and thought that the two careers would require equal amounts of schooling. Therefore, the career nights have provided needed information to students about possible careers and their degree requirements. Cynthia explained the rationale behind career nights to highlight diversity of options:

We have career nights where we have different people come in and speak, and we've kind of tried to approach it like—nursing…a lot of women want to be a nurse. Okay, what is a nurse? And what are all the kinds of things you could do with a nursing background, you can be a CNA—low threshold, low pay. You could be a doctor's office nurse—more investment of time, but probably lower on the pay scale, all the way up to being

a nurse anesthetist or a PA. And then there's male nurses, and there are reasons that they need male nurses, and dental hygienists, and dentists.

Luis, the recruitment and outreach officer at a local community college, partners with CFR to facilitate the community college application process for their students. He provides campus tours and workshops on completing an application, applying for financial aid, and other skills. For example, he recently conducted a workshop on mock college interviews. Luis, however, acknowledged that for access to higher education, the biggest barrier for immigrant and refugee students is their life realities, which he describes as "competing against life." He realizes that for refugee students, the need to make money to provide transportation, childcare, food, and housing often supersedes the desire and aspiration to pursue a college education. Luis explained that most low-resourced students face "the cost of not knowing." Students feel badly asking for help. He explained that his role is to provide needed resources and information about navigating the community college without them having to ask.

Collectively, these individual players—CFR's director, the school liaison, other CFR staff, the homework help volunteers, the mentors, and the community college recruitment liaison work together to accelerate the refugee-background students' navigational knowledge. They help the adolescents to expand and apply their knowledge to a new setting, resulting in positive outcomes for the students and, ultimately, for their communities.

Bolstering Aspirations to Go Beyond: "[We] Provide…a Community of Hope"

CFR also helped support refugee-background students by reinforcing their aspirations for life. Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella demonstrated strong aspirational capital as they worked to meet their academic goals while also caring for their families by working part time jobs, helping with younger siblings, and serving as family language and literacy brokers (Perry, 2009)—translating during appointments, explaining important mail, and bridging the school–home connection for younger siblings. Amora has plans to become a dentist and is in her senior year of college. Sue Mar hopes to open a textile factory using environmentally safe methods in her home country of Burma and recently completed her bachelor's degree in fashion design. Gabriella expressed her goal to become a pharmacist developing new drug compounds in the lab and is in her first year at a community college. Gabriella's aspiration, hard work, and determination were clearly communicated, as well as her belief that her success depends largely on her own efforts:

> I want to reach the goals, because I want to win life, because many people want to win this life, yes, want to be [at] some higher levels, [but]

they don't want to do anything, so they [are] just sitting there, and they want to be [at] higher levels. So me, I want to walk by my power—I want to work by my energy. I'm going to spend my energy to get something by myself.

Unlike others that she might have observed, Gabriella feels compelled to act on her desires and not sit idly by, merely hoping.

CFR helped celebrate and bolster the aspirations held by refugee-background students and their families. They adopted a "culture of celebration"—celebrating all the good news in students' lives as they progressed towards their goals. Cynthia, the founder and executive director of CFR, explained how celebrating success had become central to their work:

[We have] kind of taken [it] on almost as a core value of celebration. Because it's so hard. What these families are trying to do is so hard, and so just to celebrate everything—we can celebrate every small movement, I think, it builds [more success] too…so, I think that if I boiled everything down…I think the thing that we do provide the best is just a community of hope.

With a "community of hope" firmly in place, CFR relies upon relationships between refugee-background families and volunteers to fortify their dreams. Cynthia explained, "You have to believe that someone really cares about you." Gabriella attested to this fact when she shared that her CFR mentor encouraged her to persevere: "[She gave] me some advice, like…keeping in school and standing by my decision. Just like she just told me to stand by my decision and do what is right for me." This advice gave students confidence that they were progressing towards a better future and that they were doing the right thing.

Tammy, a mentor for students at CFR and also a former guidance counselor at North High School, explained her role as a mentor to sustain and build students' aspirations:

It's been a lot of, let's talk about our classes at school, why are you not doing well in this class, how can we improve, and let's plan for college.… [Her mentee] wants to take classes at [a local community college] during her senior year, so [she] needs to go ahead and get a jump on it. So, we've talked about how to go ahead and get some college classes completed while she's a senior.

Tammy's insider knowledge about early college access for high school students allows her to counsel students on how to pursue "early college," taking college level courses without having to pay tuition, making it more likely that her mentee will continue this path to higher education upon her graduation.

CFR's invitation to Tammy to participate as a mentor was a strategic decision due to Tammy's 30 plus years as a guidance counselor at North High School and her established community connections.

CFR's explicit goal is stated in their motto: *that all may thrive*. The bolstering of aspirations is central to their mission and observable in their programs and among the refugee families in this "community of hope." Walking around the apartments and speaking with students and families, there is a sense of hopefulness for what is to come in this resettlement country.

How the Support Was Perceived by the Young Women

The support provided by CFR was perceived by the refugee-background women as helpful, kind, compassionate, and for Gabriella, the result of divine intervention. For example, through her participation in homework help at CFR, Sue Mar connected with an alum of a local four-year university. She filled out the paperwork for Sue Mar's transfer application from the community college and wrote a letter requesting financial aid for her. Sue Mar reflected on how helpful this was to her and how she felt excited and supported by the CBO in her transition:

> I'm really excited because she wrote them a letter…I was like, yeah! They need to help you because they help a lot of people, and they [are] not better… [they don't just] help only the *other* people, [they] will help you, too…she knows a lot of people, too. And she also went to school there. It is really helpful that she helped me.

The interactions the students had with CFR were consistently described as kind and compassionate. The perceived kindness and compassion are significant because, had the students not felt this warmth, then they likely would not have chosen to continue accessing these resources through the CBO.

Sue Mar described her interactions with volunteers from the community organization and the overall feeling of it being helpful and compassionate.

> Carrie is one of the refugee sponsors. She used to be my cousin's sponsor, but I got to know her through there. So, she was talking to my uncle and everybody there, and I go to her house, and that's how I meet her. So, she's supposed to not help me, but I go and ask her help.

Sue Mar found help from her cousin's mentor even though she had not been assigned to help her. Finally, in the week following her high school graduation, Gabriella attributed her success to divine intervention, claiming that God had brought CFR into her life and without this influence, she is not sure if she would know the career she hoped to pursue as she enrolled in the local community college the following semester: "I'm not yet success. But I should say

God because he just helping me to get…peoples [from CFR] coming my way, because without God to send them to me, I don't know who…who I might be." Overwhelmingly, the young women in this study looked at CFR as a vital resource in obtaining their future goals of higher education.

How the Support Has Impacted Them Long Term

The support from CFR has impacted each of the young women's lives in significant ways. Sue Mar has finished all the credits needed to graduate from her four-year university after successfully transferring from a community college with a degree in fashion design. However, despite being provided some financial assistance and scholarships, she has a small remaining balance, and the university is withholding her degree until they are paid in full. Sue Mar has been making monthly payments and will soon hopefully overcome this final barrier and be permitted to walk across the stage and receive her diploma after seven long years. Amora graduated in the Spring of 2023 from a four-year public university after commuting from her home to attend classes an hour and a half away, allowing her to save money. Gabriella is still considered a newcomer since she has only been in the U.S. for four years at the time of this writing. However, she has successfully graduated from high school and entered a pharmacy program at the local community college. All three women have expressed the desire to extend their schooling beyond a four-year undergraduate program.

Discussion

In many ways, the roles of CFR in this study reflect those in existing literature of CBOs who serve the needs of multilingual learners and their families and are aligned with the findings of 1) providing social connections and sense of community and 2) helping to navigate new environments. For example, Wong (2010) demonstrated the role that CBOs play in providing needed social and emotional support by providing a "sense of trust and caring, sense of ethnic self and identity, sense of home and safe space, serving as role models, and sense of being a teenager" by creating a new and hybrid third space between home and school (p. 710). Harris and Kiyama (2015), likewise, stressed the importance of community-based programs for establishing safe spaces built upon *confianza* (mutual trust) where relationships with caring adults were forged. Mentors in these programs played an integral role in the students' learning to negotiate school spaces and resulted in higher graduation rates for students. Culturally and linguistically diverse students' success in school is largely influenced by the social interactions that they have with caring adults by providing educational expectations, social support, and "academic press," that is pressure for students

to exhibit consistent effort at school (Woolley, 2009, p. 10). This study contributes to the existing literature in that it examines the role of the CBO in supporting refugee-background students in their move into higher education, which has not been an area of research. Once Cynthia, director of CFR, recognized that students involved in the programs were not going on to college, she began to emphasize students' progress beyond high school. The College Bound program provided by CFR, therefore, also focuses on bolstering students' aspirations to go beyond high school graduation, navigate the process, and ultimately, pursue further educational goals.

While the students involved in the CFR's College Bound Program all went on to higher education, this is not always the case. Many refugee background students do not go on to higher education (Streitwieser et al., 2020). Even within their own families, there are discrepancies between members of the family, some who clearly draw upon their community cultural wealth in this way and those that do not. For example, Amora and Sue Mar shared frustrations that they cannot convince their younger siblings to work hard in high school and to apply for college. They feel that their siblings who arrived in the U.S. at a younger age than them did not face the same challenges that they faced in acquiring English and also do not fully comprehend the struggle and the value of accessing college that they themselves have undergone.

We see that CFR is contributing to the success of students who enroll in its programs. It is important to note that we are defining success in this article as the ability to enroll in higher education. However, not only is data lacking on the effects on students and their families of this decision in the subsequent years, but it also fails to consider the importance of defining success more broadly to include students' ability to accept themselves fully including their cultural and historical background. El Yaafouri (2022) describes a former student who, in his opinion, achieved true success—combining elements of his home culture and the adopted western culture:

> I zoomed in on his picture and saw a confident, simple, Western-style business suit, and a Nepali *tilak* on his forehead. He'd made it. Let me clarify, though. By "made it," I mean that he'd not only managed resilience and academic accomplishment but also achieved integration. [My student] had learned to navigate the world of his new home without compromising the integrity of his personal and cultural identity. (p. 5)

In an effort to consider success more broadly, we looked for signs from the participants that they too have held onto their cultural identity while also expanding to adopt some features of the U.S. culture. Sue Mar demonstrates that she has "made it" in much the same manner El Yaafouri (2022) described

success as the ability to navigate and, in some aspects, integrate the new culture while still maintaining and holding fast to one's own cultural identity. Sue Mar explained that the Burmese military has been suppressing and seeking to eradicate her Karenni culture through banning their use of language, forcing cultural assimilation, and the genocide of Karenni people. Over time the Karenni people have begun to dress like Burmese people, despite having a distinct culture and dress. Sue Mar is pursuing a career in fashion design, so to reclaim her cultural dress and integrate it with American culture, she designs Karenni clothing and accessories which merge the cultures in such a way that honors both countries which are important to her identity as a Karenni American woman. In the dress featured in Figure 1 and Figure 2, Sue Mar draws on her culture with the traditional Karenni color of red as well as the scarf-like fabric drawn around the waist.

Figure 1. Sue Mar's Dress During Construction

Figure 2. Sue Mar's Dress on a Model

In addition to the complex nature of defining success, this study has revealed the multiple factors that interplay to determine the trajectory of students. Not only is the CBO essential to this process, but so are the actions and beliefs of the students themselves and the many teachers, coaches, mentors, neighbors, and parents that also influence the lives of young people. We may desire an

easy formula to follow to ensure the success of CBOs in helping refugee background students transition to higher education, but we have to realistically acknowledge the multifaceted nature of this situation. Success for each student will be manifested in different ways depending upon their journeys, dreams, and the relationships they form along the way (Mann & Turner, 2023).

Implications

When we set out to write this article, one goal was to push back on deficit notions that persist about refugee-background students and school achievement. We want to highlight that the refugee-background students featured in this case study, Amora, Sue Mar, and Gabriella, demonstrate personal strengths and assets including aspirational capital, social capital, and resistant capital that help them persist in their path to higher education. Ultimately, they are the main catalysts of their success. Yet, the work of CFR was instrumental in sustaining and helping direct their efforts from time to time to ensure their success. In this section of the article and in an effort to amplify refugee-background students' voices, we will share implications of our research for CFR, other CBOs, and educators.

CFR plays an important role in the success of refugee-background adolescents pursuing a college education by helping students build social connections and a sense of community, navigate the new environment, and dream to go beyond. However, an approach that is better aligned with a community cultural wealth perspective would involve more focus by CFR on the strengths that members of the refugee community possess, instead of what they may lack. Rather than attempting to stack on new knowledge and skills that are relevant and valued in the U.S. context, it would be more beneficial for CBOs to first identify the skills and experiences that refugee students and their families already bring with them from their past experiences and lives, and then apply those in the new context. For example, we learned that Sue Mar's father had been a teacher in Burma prior to their relocation and her mother was a seamstress who clothed many people in their village. Taking the time to know people's backgrounds and past expertise could help fulfill needs in the new community where they have been resettled. Sue Mar's father could be invited to assist with Burmese refugees' sustaining of their home language during afterschool tutoring sessions. Sue Mar's mother could assist others in fixing or altering clothing for families. Through interviews with the leadership of CFR, we learned that they are eager to help and feel pressure to rapidly move refugee families into places of stability. They could, however, more deliberately consider how the individuals might contribute to the caring and serving of other refugee-background families and CFR. The relationship between CFR and the

refugee families tends to follow a top-down transmission with the members of the CBO in control of programming decisions. However, refugee-background families are well suited to identify concerns and needs that they want to address for their community, and the opportunity to participate should be made readily available. Therefore, we recommend that CFR focus first on recognizing and tapping into the refugee-background students' community cultural wealth and then look for ways to shape or extend these assets to serve the refugee-background students' best interests.

Refugee students' resistant capital could be tapped into by looking for opportunities to involve refugee-background individuals in leadership and in decisions for the CBO. Currently, there are no refugee-background people employed at CFR; a few have worked as interns at times. Refugee-background individuals can shed light on practices at CFR that might contribute unknowingly to the discrimination and exclusion of others or reify deficit perspectives in the community. A better practice would be to hire members of the refugee-background community into leadership and advising roles in their organization. The refugees served by the CBO could vote or offer their opinion on applicants for positions within the organization.

Refugee-background families and students should be represented by someone who they feel understands their experiences and knows their concerns. As Sue Mar explained, while reading about the life and work of Michelle Obama was interesting and inspiring, it still was not the same as following the life example of a refugee-background person who has experienced similar experiences and challenges as she has. She said, "Cause if I see someone born in the U.S. do something amazing, it's like, that's amazing, but *that's not my life…* [Michelle Obama] didn't came from refugee, and she knew how to speak English when she was younger." CFR acts from a place of caring and love and could better serve the refugee-background families if they prioritize the inclusion of refugee-background individuals on their staff and board.

Additionally, refugee-background families and students could have regular opportunities to come together in a shared space, to openly discuss their experiences and identify concerns that they have as a community. Meetings could be organized according to cultural and linguistic groups to provide spaces in which participants could truly express themselves in their home language. The assistance of a leader in a paid position for each cultural/linguistic group would facilitate these meetings as well as amplify the voices of the community. Once key concerns are identified, CFR could invite leaders within the refugee community to help find solutions, centering the refugee community at the heart of its organization. Additionally, the cultural/linguistic liaison would work alongside the CFR staff to organize events based upon the needs

and preferences of the community they represent. This would shift dynamics and allow CFR to more fully lean into the community cultural wealth that is currently underutilized.

In order to build upon students' existing social capital gained through years of navigation of complex political rules, CFR could foster greater social networks among refugee students by more frequently inviting refugee-background students to the center who are visiting from college or have graduated from college and are in careers. They could share what they have learned about majors, career choices, and interacting with professors and classmates. If a large enough group of college students and graduates are invited, discussion groups could be created for each home language of the participants to better share intimate knowledge.

Finally, we provide resources for those serving in educator roles so that they may more fully recognize and bolster their students' community cultural wealth. In Table 1 below, we highlight the forms of capital, descriptions/definitions, examples from the current study, and suggestions for teachers to tap into and leverage these sources of cultural wealth in their multilingual students.

Table 1. Sources of Community Cultural Wealth, Examples from the Current Study, and Suggestions for Teachers who Work with Multilingual Learners (Adapted from Yosso, 2005 and Jimenez, 2020)

Form of Capital	Definition of capital by Yosso (2005)*	Example from Current Study	Suggestions for Teachers
Aspirational	"Ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77)	Amora dreams of becoming a dentist and, despite hardships of funding, difficult classes with native English speakers, and having to commute to school, she is succeeding at her goal.	-Take students to visit local colleges and universities in the area. -Have refugee background college graduates come and talk to students about their participation in higher education so that students can "see" someone like themselves in these spaces. -Have guests come to class to talk about career options. -Ask students to interview a family member or friend about professional or educational hardships they have encountered and overcome. -Have students create multimodal identity projects (Cummins et al., 2015) about who they are and who they want to become.

Table 1, continued

Linguistic	"Intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78)	Sue Mar hopes to one day open a fabric factory in her home country of Burma where she could provide quality employment for women of her country. She has maintained her linguistic and cultural connections to her home country. Gabriella speaks three languages: French at school in Burundi; Swahili at home; and Ngondi with friends (and is now learning English).	-Allow for and promote translanguaging practices (García & Kleyn, 2016) in the classroom and school. -Bulletin boards, word walls, entry ways should feature languages represented at the school. -School environments should be text rich and in multiple languages allowing students to draw upon their linguistic capital in the classroom. -Encourage students to complete components of assignments (research, pre-writing, discussion) in their home language or draw pictures to express ideas.
Familial	"Cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin), that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition… expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship" (p. 79)	Gabriella's father was a nurse in the Congo prior to their fleeing to Burundi. This influenced Gabriella's desire to study pharmaceutical development. Sue Mar's grandfather taught her mother to sew, and she sewed clothing for her family and many in their village. Sue Mar's mother taught her to sew when she was just five years old. She now wishes to pursue a career in clothing design based upon these skills developed at an early age.	-Help students see the value of their familial expertise by inviting family members into the classroom to share their experiences and knowledge about a topic in person or via video. -Conduct an oral history or record a StoryCorps of traditions that parents and extended family members practice.
Social	"Networks of people and community resources" (p. 79)	The refugee community at the apartment complex fortified Amora's desire to be a dentist because, through her connections there, she met a dentist who was a refugee from Iran. He told her, "If you love it, just do it!"	-Connect students with people in the community that share their interests and who might help them achieve their goals. -Provide opportunities for social gatherings where networking can occur among families. -Ask parents to share about their children in family engagement sessions.

Table 1, continued

(Social, continued)		CFR provided important access to networks of people in schools, health care, and employment to provide support and opportunities for refugee-background families.	-Help students make connections to the bilingual community—at church/faith-based, sports, or volunteer organizations, etc. -Use social media platforms including WeChat, LinkedIn, etc. to create extended groups of refugees that have graduated from the local school.
Navigational	"Skills of maneuvering through social institutions" (p. 80)	As refugees, parents have negotiated complex problems including securing refugee status and ensuring the health and safety of their family during migration. They may have developed ways to navigate government paperwork and gain access to food and health care for their children.	-Help students connect with older students and community members to learn from their experiences navigating past challenges by creating a buddy system in which graduates share what they have learned along the way. -Role play and share experiences in the classroom about successful navigation of institutions.
Resistant	"Knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80)	Sue Mar was told by a classmate that going to the university was not for her and that she should apply to the community college. This strengthened her resolve to apply to the university. Amora found that taking biology class with all native English speakers was a challenge due to differences in language knowledge. She decided to study biology as a major in college to show that she could master difficult things.	-Invite refugee-background students to be a part of the leadership team and to shed light on practices that are discriminatory and exclusionary at school. -Invite parents of refugee-background students to take part in leadership meetings and identify issues of concern for their families.

Table 1, continued

Mi-gration (Jimenez, 2020)	"Knowl-edges, sen-sibilities, and skills cultivated through the array of migration/ immigration experiences to the United States or its borderlands" (Jimenez, 2020, p. 779)	Sue Mar traveled by foot for months to reside in a refugee camp in Thailand for many years before permanent reset-tlement in the U.S. Gabriella lived for many years in a refugee camp in Burundi before her permanent reset-tlement. Amora lived with undoc-umented status in Iran for many years while her mother sought to obtain permission to relocate to the U.S. & was only granted permission due to her status as a widow. Their families navigated the complex legal process to apply for refugee status and perma-nently relocate to NC.	-Explore migration experiences through literature in the class-room by using a class text such as *When Stars are Scattered*; *Inside Out and Back Again*; *We Are Displaced*; *Enrique's Journey*; *My Diary from Here to There/Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá*; *We Are Not From Here/No Somos de Aquí* -Ask students to write about and share their family's (or a friend's) migration story. -Identify sources of strength and knowledge from these experi-ences.

Conclusion

Looking forward, future research could examine the role of other refugee role models in the lives of refugee-background students who are transition-ing from high school to higher education and from a community college to a four-year university. We have seen in this study evidence that the lives and ex-periences of other refugees are influential for younger generations in learning about overcoming barriers and acknowledging the hardships ahead.

We are also interested in exploring the characteristics of successful men-torships in the CBO. The majority of mentors at CFR identify as White, monolingual, middle class, evangelical Christians. They talk about their re-lationships with their mentees as being "like family." Mentees mention their mentors as playing a role in their ability to register for college but stop short of calling them part of their family. Is the relationship between mentors and mentees reciprocal? How do mentors connect with and influence their men-tees who differ culturally and linguistically from them? Are there aspects of a training program that might improve outcomes for the success of these re-lationships? Is there a way to support mentors so that they can sustain their efforts across multiple mentees and therefore, apply what they have learned in these collaborative relationships?

CFR and other refugee-serving CBOs have been grappling with many complex issues. It is our hope that scholarly research in the area of refugee com-

munities and educational outcomes continues to grow. Specifically, we hope to see many scholars from refugee backgrounds continuing to join this urgent work. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948) states, "everyone has the right to education." We, therefore, ask that higher education truly be made accessible to all, eliminating unnecessary barriers and challenges to those who want to seek higher education. In doing so, we can have a more prosperous society in which people's lives can be improved through educational opportunities.

It is with anticipation and expectation that we look to CBOs to continue making a significant contribution in the lives of refugee-background students and their families during their K–12 education. We hope to bring attention to these efforts so that we can learn from their example what works in supporting students' community cultural wealth and fostering aspirations in pursuit of higher education so that all refugee-background students can thrive in their communities and schools.

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Appendix. Data Sources

Name/Pseudonym	Role	Data Sources
Author 2	Teacher–Researcher	1:1 Interview
Amora	Refugee College Student who received support from CFR Pursuing a career in dentistry	Three 1:1 interviews One group interview One asynchronous interview
Sue Mar	Refugee College Student who received support from CFR Pursuing a career in fabric development and production	Three 1:1 interviews One group interview Documents including letters from teachers, personal writings, and awards
Gabriella	Refugee College Student who participated in the College Bound Program and received support from CFR Currently attending the community college to earn a degree in pharmacy	One 1:1 interview
Cynthia	Founder & Executive Director of the CBO, CFR	One 1:1 interview One asynchronous interview
Ashley	Coordinator of College Bound Program—a CFR program bridging the gap between high school and college	One 1:1 interview One asynchronous interview
Kayla	Staff member of CFR; Lives at the apartment complex and served as a liaison between families and the schools	One 1:1 interview
Tammy	Mentor in the College Bound Program & former high school student services counselor to Amora & Sue Mar	One 1:1 interview Two asynchronous interviews
Luis	Local community college recruitment liaison	One 1:1 interview
College Bound Program Data	# of students enrolled in the College Bound Program & number of students who go on to higher education	Data drawn from the years: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

"Now I Feel That the Parents Are Partners and Not Enemies": Training Preservice Teachers to Work in Partnership With Parents of Students With Disabilities

Alicia Greenbank

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine whether, following their participation in a relevant course, preservice teachers (i.e., undergraduate students) changed their perceptions and attitudes toward partnership with parents of students with disabilities. This unique course was the first to take place in Israel and incorporated meetings with parents of students with disabilities. A total of 22 fourth-year preservice teachers in the Department of Special Education participated in the course, which incorporated meetings with seven parents of students with disabilities. Changes in the preservice teachers' perceptions regarding partnerships with these parents were examined through reports that were written by the preservice teachers before and after every meeting with the parents and at the end of the course. The findings showed that courses that include preservice teachers and parents of students with disabilities could be very beneficial for teachers' training. The preservice teachers who participated in the course developed an awareness regarding the challenges and experiences that are encountered by these parents; the course also changed their perceptions about the place of the parent within such a partnership and provided participants with applicable insights into the importance of creating an atmosphere and communication channel that promotes partnerships with parents.

Key Words: partnership, parents, special education, children with special needs, students with disabilities, parents' involvement, family engagement

Introduction

The two most significant systems for the child are the familial system and the educational system (including the kindergarten and the school). Both systems play significant roles in the socialization of the child with regard to acquiring values, knowledge, and tools for individualization, which enables the formation of personal identity and self-utilization (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Research literature consistently points to the importance of the connection between the two systems, a connection which promotes the healthy development of the child. Cooperation and optimal communication between the educational system and the parents has an impact on the welfare of the student, on his motivation for learning and his academic progress, as well as on his social and emotional adaptation (Jeynes, 2022; Lusse et al., 2019; Park & Holloway, 2018).

Considering the importance of the connection between the familial and educational systems, the Ministry of Education in Israel has been trying in recent years to reinforce the connection and the partnership between them from the time that the child first enters the education system in preschool. In accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Education in Israel, the members of the educational staff are responsible for establishing methods of dialogue with the parents, for initiating dialogues, and for including parents in decision-making discussions (Ritvo et al., 2018). The Ministry of Education in Israel places the responsibility on the educational staff, even though staff often lack the skills to create and maintain contact with the parents. School and kindergarten teachers who lack knowledge and skills in working with parents will continue to treat parents in a hierarchical, traditional, and non-cooperative way (Murray et al., 2008). This situation could lead the educational staff to show concerns and lack of confidence in their work with parents and to develop negative attitudes towards parental involvement. Lack of preparation for working with parents might be one of the factors for teacher burnout and for the teacher leaving the teaching profession at the beginning of his professional path (Nygaard, 2019).

Partnership Between Educational Staff and Parents of Students With Disabilities

The connection between school and kindergarten teachers and parents of students with disabilities is a unique connection. This connection is long-lasting and intense compared to the connection of school and kindergarten teachers with parents of students without disabilities (Ferguson, 2008). The connection begins often at the preschool age when the child is placed in a special kindergarten and ends at the age of 21. Legislation on special education, which first

came into existence in the state of Israel in 1988, designates a significant place for the parents and defines them as full partners. This legislation requires the involvement of parents from the initial stage of making the decision regarding eligibility for special education services for the child and continues throughout the duration of the child's studies in the educational system. The new amendment to the Special Education Act, Amendment Number 11 (Israeli Knesset, 2018), even gives the parents the right to select the educational setting for their child.

In accordance with the new amendment, school and kindergarten teachers are required to include the parents in all stages of the placement process and educational–therapeutic interventions, to make accessible to the parents all the information about different committees, and to accompany the parents through the process of selecting the type of educational setting for their child. The discussing and decision-making process at the committees regarding the eligibility for special education services, determining the types of support and their scope, creating the personal program, and updating it regularly—all of these must be based on a respectful dialogue with the parents and in full cooperation with them (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2018).

In practice, even many years after the legislation came into effect, partnership between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff is rare and not easy to achieve (Mueller, 2017; Oranga et al., 2022). School and kindergarten teachers often find it difficult to maintain a partnership with the parents. The connection between the parties is loaded with emotions, which may lead to a power struggle and to mutual doubt regarding the ability of each of the parties to optimally handle the child and provide a suitable response to his needs (Kurth et al., 2020). The attempt to establish a partnership often leads to many conflicts. These conflicts are expressed in loaded relationships, judgmental attitudes, lack of trust and mutual respect, difficulties in communication, and lack of attention. This situation might damage the self-esteem of the parents and their ability to stand up in favor of their child (Gershwin, 2020). On the other hand, school and kindergarten teachers might feel that there is no sufficient appreciation by the parents for their investment, and their attitudes towards the involvement of parents might be negative (Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

Training Preservice Teachers to Work With Parents

On the one hand, research literature supports the need to train school and kindergarten teachers, even during their initial teacher training, to work with parents in general and with parents of students with disabilities in particular. On the other hand, there is an agreement that this training does not actually

exist, or it is very limited, and it does not provide tools and skills that will assist school and kindergarten teachers in their work with parents (Collier et al., 2015; De Bruïne et al., 2014; Kyzar et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2018).

Some research has found that preservice teachers changed their attitudes and developed more empathy following a few meetings with parents of students with disabilities (Broomhead, 2013; Forin & Hopewell, 2006). However, meetings in which preservice teachers and parents of students with disabilities take part and work together towards a partnership can only be found in a few programs documented in professional literature (e.g., Collier et al., 2015; Graff et al., 2020; Koch, 2020; Murray et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018). Collier et al. (2015) reviewed a program called Families as Faculty (FAF) implemented in a course for master's degree students in special education at a university in the USA. The preservice teachers met parents of children with disabilities during the visits they held in their homes. The home visits gave the parents an opportunity to tell their stories and gave the preservice teachers an opportunity to learn from parents in an authentic setting. Also, Graff et al. (2020) presented a qualitative study in which 22 preservice special education teachers experienced, wrote about, and reflected upon their perceptions of families of children with disabilities over a semester-long course built on the FAF model.

Another university program in the USA provides multiple opportunities to interact with parents of students with disabilities; for example, a professor and the parent of a child with a disability co-teach the class. In this co-taught class, parents participate in the class together with in-service and/or preservice teachers (Murray et al., 2008; Murray et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018). Koch (2020) also reviewed a program for preservice general teachers at a college in the USA; the data set for this research was reflection papers written as part of a class assignment after the preservice teachers participated in a discussion panel with parents of children with disabilities at an introductory special education course. The preservice general education teachers were asked, after listening to parents' stories and experiences, to consider the perspectives of parents, their role in the special education process, and the importance of their active participation.

In all the above programs, the courses for preservice teachers included meetings with parents of students with disabilities. Following the program, the preservice teachers reported a change in their attitudes towards the parents and reported that they had acquired tools for the creation and management of optimal connections with them. As for the parents, the program enriched knowledge, empowered their sense of belonging and their self-capability, and enabled them to hold close contact with members of the staff and to learn about their professional work. The researchers concluded that involving parents in training programs for preservice teachers empowers both the parents

and the college students, and it might lead to a more effective connection between the parties in educational settings.

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether, following their participation in a relevant course, preservice teachers changed their perceptions and attitudes toward partnership with parents of students with disabilities. The course is the first course in Israel in which parents of students with disabilities were incorporated into a course for preservice teachers in the field of special education. The current article focuses on changes the preservice teachers experienced following the interactions with the parents who took part in the course. The article examines the question of how incorporating meetings with parents of students with disabilities in a course for preservice teachers contributed to a change in preservice teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the partnership between educational staff and parents of students with disabilities.

Method

The research took place at the Giv'at Washington Academic College of Education in Israel. The course "Partnership Between Parents of Students With Disabilities and Educational Staff" is a semester-long course for preservice teachers during their fourth year at the Department of Special Education. The course included 14 meetings; each one lasted an hour and a half. The course included seven parents—six mothers and one father—of students in the age range of 5 to 21 (M = 9) with a variety of disabilities: cerebral palsy, learning disability, developmental– emotional–cognitive impairment, and the autistic spectrum. Approximately 70% of the students studied in special education settings: kindergartens or schools. The others studied in special education classes or were incorporated in regular classrooms in general education schools. The parents were recruited via an advertising pamphlet which was published on social media, in educational settings, and in local town support centers. Parents who were interested in the course voluntarily contacted the course organizer and took part in it without receiving any financial reward for their participation.

Participants

Participants included 22 preservice special education teachers at an age range of 23 to 33 (M = 25). The preservice teachers were in their fourth year of studies, which is their first year of working in an educational setting.

Ethical Aspects of the Research

The preservice teachers received an explanation of the study and expressed their willingness and consent to participate in it. Ethical approval was obtained before the study was conducted by the ethics committee of the college.

Process

The preservice teachers arrived as required to each of the 14 meetings in the course. The first three meetings took place without the attendance of the parents. These meetings were opening lessons on the subject of partnership with parents, during which the preservice teachers received an explanation about the course and its unique framework and reviewed subjects which they had learned in the past, such as the following: stages of coping of parents of a child with disabilities; the place of the family of a child with disabilities in the education system; and the legislation on the subject. During the first three meetings, the preservice teachers were required to write a report about their sensations towards working with parents of students with disabilities.

In the fourth meeting, the parents joined the course at the college classroom. The focus on this meeting was acquaintance and coordinating expectations. During the next meetings with the parents, there was a dialogue which focused on the causes for conflicts between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff and suggestions to improve the partnership. These meetings were based on discussing case studies, watching videos showing situations between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff, and conducting simulations.

All seven participating parents arrived at eight meetings. During the meetings with the parents, most of the work took place in class in small groups, which included both parents and preservice teachers. After each meeting with the parents, the preservice teachers were asked to write a reflection about their sensations, thoughts, and insights following the meeting. During those meetings which were not attended by the parents, the preservice teachers learned about the partnership between educational staff and parents of students with disabilities by reading current professional literature on the subject, presenting the different subjects, and discussing them. At the end of the course the preservice teachers submitted a summary paper which described the process they had undergone.

Analyses

Analyzing the data was based on a division into categories in accordance with the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research is effective in the study of attitudes, approaches, opinions, and beliefs of participants. Therefore, it is suitable to track and document responses and ways of learning and training staff in special education (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The analysis of the data was performed according to the constant comparison method developed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Kolb, 2012). This method

compares the data, matches them to categories, and formulates the categories and their characteristics.

During the work process, all reflections submitted by the preservice teachers after each meeting with the parents and at the end of the course were analyzed, as well as the reports which the preservice teachers filled in prior to the arrival of the parents to the course. Each reflection was analyzed separately in order to identify and code the main themes. Repeated readings of the reflections assisted in determining the categories in each theme. The categories and the analysis of the words of the preservice teachers were transferred, for the purpose of the reliability of the study, to be read by an associate researcher who specializes in analyzing qualitative data. Agreement between researchers is vital for a reliable analysis of the materials and for reducing biases which are the result of the attitude of the researcher (Hill et al., 2005). In situations of disagreement between the two researchers with regards to the attribution of the quotations to the themes, they held discussions, at the end of which an agreed list of categories for each theme was determined.

Findings

In order to examine whether there were changes in the awareness of the preservice teachers regarding partnerships with parents of students with disabilities and their desire to manage and promote this partnership, an analysis of all the reflections they wrote was carried out. In reading the reflections, the statements representing each one of the categories in each theme were located. The findings are presented in accordance with three themes: awareness of parents' difficulties; the perception of the parent as a partner; and insights for working with parents. All the names of the preservice teachers are pseudonyms.

Awareness of Parents' Difficulties

In this theme there are three categories: the experience of raising a child with a disability; parents' difficulties with the staff; and parents' struggle to get their children's lawful rights.

The Experience of Raising a Child With a Disability

Listening to parents' stories may help preservice teachers to have a better understanding of the real-life experiences of living with disabilities. This understanding may develop an appreciation towards the parents and a desire to create a positive atmosphere which will lead to an optimal partnership (Broomhead, 2013; Koch, 2020).

During the course, the preservice teachers were exposed to personal stories of the parents and learned about their experiences. An example for such learning can be found in the words of Ronit: "The course has exposed me to emotional moments, has enabled me to have an understanding of the copings that these parents go through." Anat wrote about her new vision of the parents and their experiences:

> The subject of parents of children with disabilities was for me like a dirty window. I am from one side, trying to see, to understand, to experience, but the window is not clean. And suddenly here I felt that I was seeing through a clean window, that I could truly see the parents.

During the meetings with the parents, the preservice teachers were exposed to the characteristics of the experience of parenting a child with a disability in general and to the personal unique experiences of the parents who participated in the meetings in particular.

Parents' Difficulties With the Staff

One of the most difficult tasks of parents of students with disabilities is working with educational staff members (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Research literature reports that many parents of students with disabilities feel that educational staff members do not understand the unique experience which is involved in raising a child with a disability and express frustration due to lack of appreciation and lack of respect that they experience due to the conduct of the members of the staff (Griffin, 2014; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013).

The preservice teachers were exposed to the difficulties of the parents with the staff during the course; an example of this is expressed in the words of Michal:

> I understood that being parents of a child with disabilities requires various daily copings with education staff. The education staff and the parents do not always agree regarding the child's needs, and oftentimes this causes frustration for the parent.

Similarly, Yael wrote: "I have listened to parents who have been talking a lot about the bad attitude by school and kindergarten teachers towards them, about the feeling that many times the educational staff does not understand them and does not want to listen to them." The words of the preservice teachers show that the meetings with the parents during the course helped them to develop awareness of the intensity of the difficulties experienced by parents of students with disabilities with staff members in educational settings and of the emotions the parents may carry over to their relationships with the schools and their children's teachers.

Parents' Struggle to Get Their Children's Lawful Rights

Many parents of students with disabilities often need to advocate, to fight, and even to exert power in order to receive what they want for their child (Goldman et al., 2020; Griffin, 2014). The struggle of the parents over the rights of their children was greatly discussed in the course and also came up in the reflections following the meetings, for example, in what Sarah wrote: "I was sorry to hear that there are a lot of problems with the rights of the children. There are students who do not receive what is due to them in the setting, and their parents must fight for the rights of their children; the parents must cope with the education system on a daily basis so that their child is provided with the best." Hannah related to the power of the parents in the struggle for the rights of their children: "the strongest insight from all of the meetings with the parents was that the parents of children in special education must be 'lions' and request from the system their children's rights."

The preservice teachers were exposed to the struggle of the parents for the rights of their children. The meetings with the parents allowed the preservice teachers to see the parents in a different way: parents who are "assertive" or "lions" care for the rights of their child and are often required to fight so that their child receives a response for his needs in the educational setting in which he studies.

The Perception of the Parent as a Partner

In this theme there are two categories: the parents as knowledgeable or experts, and the parents' desire for partnership.

The Parents as Knowledgeable or Experts

The parents serve as an important source of knowledge regarding the child, his skills, his difficulties, and his needs, information which could contribute to the creation of an educational therapeutic program which is adapted to the child (Adams et al., 2016). Educational staff members are not always aware of the knowledge of the parents and believe that the knowledge is only in their possession. Oftentimes parents feel that the staff members are not interested in including them or in hearing their opinion with regards to the methods they use to work with their child and may even feel that educational staff members disrespect their knowledge (Kurth et al., 2020; McNaughton & Vostal, 2010). The subject of knowledge and expertise of the parent with regards to his child was greatly discussed during the meetings with the parents. Dana referred to this topic in her words:

> One of the mothers said that parents know their child the best. She has experienced crises; she has been fighting for him her entire life. She understands better than any professional about her child's needs.

Tamar wrote:

> I have personally changed my line of thought; the parents know what is best for their child, after all, they are the ones who know him the best, his character, his strengths, and his weaknesses. Therefore, it is always worthy of incorporating and consulting with the parents and to know what they think is best for their child. The staff can learn from the knowledge of the parents.

The words of the preservice teachers reflect the change in their approach towards the expertise of the parent following the meetings with the parents during the course. It seems that the preservice teachers were exposed to the knowledge that parents have, and therefore the sense of importance of enlisting the parent as a significant and vital source in working with the child in the educational setting had increased.

The Parents' Desire for Partnership

The research literature found that parents of students with disabilities usually want to be involved in the education of their child, to hold a partnership with educational staff members, and to influence. When the staff members meet the parents and the parents feel that the education personnel are open to listening to their suggestions and respecting them, their sensation of capability is reinforced and their desire to be involved in the education of their child increases (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). At the beginning of the course, the preservice teachers misevaluated the strong desire of the parents in such a partnership, while during the course they changed their perceptions on this matter. An example of this change appears in the words of Hodaya prior to the course and after it; prior to the course, she said: "Many parents refuse to cooperate; they do not show an interest; sometimes I feel that the parents are a disruptive factor in working with the child." At the end of the course, Hodaya changed her attitude: "I have understood from the first meeting that all the parents want is to be included, to be accepted, and they have a strong desire to be respected and to have their opinion respected; it was evident that the parents are yearning for a partnership." The preservice teachers who initially saw the parents as indifferent, as not interested, and even as a disruptive factor for the work of the staff in the educational setting, have succeeded during the course to change their attitudes and have seen the parents as interested in a partnership.

Insights for Working With Parents

In this theme there are two categories: disappearing fears and increasing confidence in working with parents, and the importance of creating a positive atmosphere based on optimal communication with parents.

Disappearing Fears and Increasing Confidence in Working With Parents

The partnership with parents of students with disabilities requires educational staff to have empathy, acceptance, and support. However, studies have found that teachers working in special education show more negative attitudes towards the involvement of parents compared to teachers in regular education (Agam Ben-Artzi & Greenbank, 2023; Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012).

In the words of the preservice teachers, prior to the meetings with the parents, it was possible to identify sensations of insecurity and concerns and even negative attitudes: "I feel that working with parents is the most difficult and most scary thing" (Sarit); "I feel not experienced enough and lacking confidence to speak with the parents" (Liat); "I heard many negative stories about parents, and the word 'parents' has received a negative and threatening meaning" (Orly).

During the course, following the meetings with the parents, it was possible to notice statements which reflected a change in the emotions of the preservice teachers and in their attitudes towards the partnership with the parents. For example, Liat, who at the beginning expressed concern and insecurity about working with parents, reported following the meetings with the parents a better sense of capability for working with them:

> The tools I received have reduced a little of the concern that I had in working with parents. I think that the concern was mostly due to [the] lack of knowledge and lack of experience I had. Today I feel more confident; I feel I have the ability to start working with parents.

Even Sarit, who initially presented working with parents as a difficult and scary task, changed her attitude:

> In the past I would judge the parents and would be afraid of coping with them. During the course I understood that parents have a lot to cope with, I understood that I must respect, I am not always right; now I feel that the parents are my partners and not my enemies, from one meeting to the next with the parents I have become more empathetic towards them.

The Importance of Creating a Positive Atmosphere Based on Optimal Communication With Parents

One of the main sources for the conflict between parents of students with disabilities and educational staff members is related to communication. In many studies (e.g., Adams et al., 2016; Azad et al., 2021; Braley, 2012) it was found that many parents report communication that is not up front and not continuous with the educational staff members, and even many cases of lack of

communication, which leads to the parents avoiding arriving at the educational setting for meetings about their child, for example, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

The subject of communication was much discussed during meetings with the parents in the course. The preservice teachers stated their insights with regards to the importance of creating communication with the parents and managing it. An example can be seen in the words of Hani:

> During the work with the children, my dialogue with the parents is very short and oftentimes nonexistent; the meetings in the course have opened an opportunity and have also reflected the side of the parents and how we are supposed to act in order to create good and meaningful communication with them. I am now certain that it is important to hold ongoing communication with the parents, and I am hopeful that I will succeed in holding this kind of communication.

Orly added:

> Open communication makes it possible to bring up topics for discussion and to find solutions together. A parent must feel that he is also part of what goes on with his child. A nice atmosphere must be created with the parent.

The preservice teachers also referred to components of optimal communication with the parents. The various components were expressed in the words of several preservice teachers. Romi referred to sensitivity, understanding, openness, and trust:

> There is no doubt that now I will conduct myself with the parents with more sensitivity and understanding. I will be more open to hearing them, their opinions, and their insights; I will do everything in order to create trust with the parents and to keep it.

Miri referred to the ability to pay attention, understanding, and empathy:

> The parents require a lot of attention, someone to just be there for them, someone who understands them. Until now I have not understood the enormous power I have as a teacher, to be there for them, to contribute to them and not just to their children, to come from a place of humility and a positive outlook.

Maya emphasized the need of accuracy and clarification and lack of judgment: "I understood that I must take one more minute of thought before having a dialogue with the parent, to pick out my words better, do not judge them, and do not be sharp in decisions." It is therefore evident from the words

of the preservice teachers that they developed an awareness regarding the importance of holding an inclusive communication with the parents as the basis for an atmosphere which encourages cooperation and joint work.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether preservice teachers changed their perceptions and attitudes toward partnership with parents of students with disabilities following their participation in a relevant course. The course is new and the first known course in Israel to incorporate meetings with parents of students with disabilities. In light of the reports in research literature regarding the need to train school and kindergarten teachers for working with parents and in light of the lack of training which is actually performed (Collier et al., 2015; De Bruïne et al., 2014; Kyzar et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2018), it was decided to create a course with the purpose of preparing preservice teachers for a partnership with parents of students with disabilities.

The findings of the current research indicate the contribution of the course for the preservice teachers. The preservice teachers who took part in the course reported heightened empathy and more positive attitudes towards the parents, and it was evident that their awareness of the need to create a positive atmosphere with the parents increased. These findings are consistent with findings from previous studies which also reported about courses which incorporated meetings with parents of students with disabilities (Collier et al., 2015; Graff et al., 2020; Koch, 2020; Murray et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018).

In the current study the preservice teachers changed their attitudes towards working with parents following the meetings with them, they felt safer to work with them, and came to see them as interested in the partnership. Murray et al. (2008) stated that preservice teachers who acquired confidence during the training and felt more confident in working with parents planned to encourage activities for the promotion of the partnership in their own educational settings in the future. According to Murray and colleagues, it is not sufficient to develop awareness among preservice teachers regarding the importance of partnership with parents. Preservice teachers must see parents as potential partners and not be afraid to initiate communication to promote the partnership.

The meetings with the parents and the exposure to their experiences with their child assisted the preservice teachers in acquiring tools for optimal communication with the parents, for holding a significant dialogue, and for promoting a positive atmosphere. The preservice teachers reported new insights with regards to the importance of creating communication with the parents and managing it. These insights might promote positive relationships

between the parents and the staff members in the educational setting. Relationships established on security, on trust, and on empathy lead to a positive atmosphere, to mutual communication, and to an optimal partnership (Lusse et al., 2019).

Limitations and Recommendations

The first limitation relates to the findings that are based on reports and reflections written by the preservice teachers. It is possible that there is a component of social pleasing in their words, since they knew that the instructor of the course is reading what they are writing. Therefore, it is recommended in the future to add to the reports and the reflections a questionnaire which the preservice teachers will answer anonymously. Another limitation is related to the duration of the course. The course took place over 14 lessons, once a week, and the parents joined eight sessions. It is recommended to examine the effectiveness of a longer course and to also perform a follow-up study on the perceptions of parents and teachers several months after the course has ended and again one year afterwards. In the current study there were 22 preservice teachers; it is recommended to include a larger sample.

It is further recommended to expand the principle of incorporating the meetings with parents of students with disabilities in courses of regular education for preschool ages, primary school, and high school ages. Training preservice teachers in regular education is very important considering the amendment of the Special Education Act and the promotion of inclusion in the education system in Israel (Israeli Knesset, 2018), following which the number of students with disabilities in regular settings will continue to grow. School and kindergarten teachers in these settings who have students with disabilities incorporated in their classrooms also need to acquire tools for working with their students' parents in a collaborative manner.

The current study has focused on the changes which have occurred in the sensations and the attitudes of preservice teachers who have taken part in the course following the interactions with the parents who have taken part in the course. In the future, it is advisable to examine the changes in the sensations and attitudes of the parents who participate in this type of course, as well.

To summarize, the uniqueness of the current study is the result of the fact that it is based on the first course in Israel which was established in order to train preservice teachers in special education to work in a collaborative manner with parents of students with disabilities. The course was found to contribute greatly to supporting preservice teachers in formulating the approach and the attitudes which are required in order to create a positive atmosphere and an optimal partnership. Therefore, the importance of including such a course as part of

the student training is great. However, support is required not only during the training, but also during the first years in working in the educational setting. For that reason, it is important to create programs for novice school and kindergarten teachers so they can receive support in their work with parents of students with disabilities. These programs should encourage educational staff members to initiate activities with parents and to promote partnership with them.

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Exploring the Impacts of Community Services on Student Reading Achievement in a Title I School

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Abstract

Low-income families face myriad stressors and challenges that often negatively affect students' reading achievement. Although community partners are crucial in supporting K–12 students, there is little research on how different types of community services affect students' reading achievement in Title I schools. The present study aims to assess the impacts of comprehensive community services funded by a nonprofit organization on K–5 students' reading achievement. The study employed a two-phase post-hoc design to examine the reading achievement of 347 elementary students (ages 5–10) in a Title I school. Reading achievement was measured by the i-Ready assessment of overall reading scale scores and percentile rankings. Independent samples t-tests, regression models, and ANOVA reveal that students who received community services had higher winter percentile rankings than their peers not receiving community services. Additionally, students who received targeted in-school service demonstrated the most significant improvement in i-Ready reading during the winter semester, compared to afterschool service, holistic in-school service, and in-home service. Implications and limitations of the present study are discussed.

Key Words: community services, Title I school, low-income families, i-Ready reading achievement, impacts, in-school, afterschool, home

Introduction

Several underlying factors explain why students from low-income families are likely to underperform in school. One of the main factors is a lack of resources, which makes it hard for students living in poverty to obtain the same level of academic achievement as students not living in poverty (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Other factors include higher levels of stress, poor nutrition, reduced access to healthcare, and low psychological well-being (Claro et al., 2016). To help combat the unequal distribution of resources in schools, the Title I program provides federal funds through the state educational agencies (SEAs) to local educational agencies (LEAs) to ensure that schools with a high rate of students living in poverty will have a better chance to help their students meet the state's challenging academic content and achievement standards.

Despite the Title I funds, there are still teacher and resource inequities in schools (Luebchow, 2009). Many community partners thus are involved in supporting Title I schools in their local communities to offer free programs, services, resources, and financial support. The collaboration between communities and schools improves student success by affecting policymaking, allocating grants and personnel, and monitoring program implementation fidelity (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008; Lockwood, 1996).

School–Community Collaboration: What Has Been Found?

Epstein (2010) argued that developing a school–community partnership is a process, not a single event. In facilitating this process, timely, deliberative, and continuous communication among stakeholders is crucial (Badgett, 2016; Hands, 2005). Poynton et al. (2018) emphasized stakeholder training as a solution in which all parties stay up-to-date on intervention and project development. Forming an effective outline for training reduces miscommunication in planning, implementing, and assessing the service. With these factors managed according to the outline, schools could optimize the use of in-school and out-of-school resources to foster students' development and learning. Partnerships are essential for collecting information to understand students' learning needs and factors that may affect students' experiences in learning (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Gathering intervention outcome data and evaluating student performance benefit stakeholders' roles in their interventions and engage them in the co-development of programs.

Over time, the partnership has been extended to include families and universities to improve student academic achievement and behavior through various supports (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). For example, Berryhill et al. (2016) evaluated the Elementary Parent Leadership Academy's (EPLA) effectiveness, a

training program developed by the University of Alabama that equipped parents and educational leaders with tools to support students, particularly in low-income families. The 2014–15 EPLA report showed that EPLA participants demonstrated increased willingness to lead and positive attitudes towards collaboration, enhancing their leadership development and student achievement.

Types of Community Services

Community services can be grouped into (1) in-school services, (2) afterschool services, and (3) in-home services. It is important to note that because various community partners have different organizational missions and funding resources, each partner has different scopes and types of services, even if they may be grouped in the same categories.

In-School Services

There are different types of in-school services offered by communities. One example is intensive interventions of foundational reading skills such as phonics and word recognition. Research shows that early interventions influence students' later reading skills (Wanzek et al., 2018). Intensive reading interventions positively impact students' reading performance, especially after the summer when they lose ground in their reading performance (Rasinski et al., 2017). Furthermore, school-based mentoring programs also effectively promote positive youth development. Herrera and Karcher's (2013) synthesis of research studies showed that school-based mentoring programs promoted students' positive academic and social success.

A meta-analysis conducted by Ritter et al. (2009) of 21 research studies indicated that reading tutoring programs increased student achievement, particularly in writing, letters, word recognition, and oral fluency in Grades K–8. Additionally, Wanzek et al.'s (2018) meta-analyses of 25 reading intervention studies showed that early reading interventions resulted in positive reading outcomes for struggling students in Grades K–8. These successful tutoring programs shared common characteristics: (1) a high level of standardization in which students received structured reading interventions; (2) an emphasis on phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition, and fluency; and (3) sufficient intervention dosage or time with fidelity. Overall, intensive and explicit interventions appear to be an effective way of improving reading outcomes.

Afterschool Services

Afterschool services foster students' academic achievement, behavioral skills, and well-being through interventions and peer interactions (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2008; Hall et al., 2003). One challenge many afterschool services face is how to improve students' attendance, which is affected by transportation,

parents' work schedules, schoolwork, and funding (Nelson-Royes & Reglin, 2011). Students who consistently attend afterschool programs are more likely to improve learning outcomes. However, this cannot be achieved without collaboration among families, schools, and communities.

In-Home Services

Financial and social support to students' families also increases the likelihood of student success (Greene & Anyon, 2010). Family dollars can provide resources like computers, tablets, the internet, food, and clothes to students in low-income families. Research shows that such support positively impacts students' academic achievement and school improvement (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Financial supports and resources reduce students' stress and help keep them healthy, further supporting them to stay focused on their schoolwork.

Although community partners are essential in supporting K–12 struggling students, there is little research on how different types of community services affect students' reading achievement in low-income families. In collaboration with community partners and one Title I school, our research study thus aims to address the following questions:

1. Compared to students who did not receive any community service, how did students who received one or multiple services perform on the norm-referenced test?
2. Did students perform differently on the norm-referenced test because of the different community services they received?
3. How did students' achievement scores change over time, from fall (August) to winter (December) and from fall (August) to spring (May)?

Methods

Setting

A nonprofit organization organized four community partners to help students in a Title I school located in the state of Georgia. The school was selected for the present study because it was a pilot school that received comprehensive community support in and outside the school setting, which we believe would offer valuable experiences and lessons to inform community engagement in other Title I schools. The average of its student graduation score in the three years from 2019–22 was 59.37 out of 100, which was lower than the average district student graduation score (64.03) and the average state student graduation score (75.83). Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, we analyzed this Title I school students' reading performance over time based on whether or not they received community services and what types of community services they received.

Participants

The school had 347 students from Grades preK–5 (preK: 52, 1st grade: 68, 2nd grade: 65, 3rd grade: 53, 4th grade: 54, and 5th grade: 55) in the school year 2019–20. The ethnic and racial composition of the sample was 91% African American or Black, 2% Hispanic or Latino, 2% others, and 5% Caucasian. The school had 83% of students who were qualified for free/reduced lunch. In addition, 48% of the students were female, and 13% had IEPs. Among them, 115 students (33%), considered the most struggling students, were referred by their classroom teachers and the school social worker to receive community services under their parents' permission.

Procedures

Student assessment data was collected at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The school collected the i-Ready data and shared them with the project stakeholders under the school district's and parents' permission. The community partners further provided us with the lists of students who they served. We used statistical techniques to match different data sets, using student name identifier, gender, and state ID. The matched rate was nearly 85% between the data provided by the Title I school and the data provided by community partners due to the fact that these community partners served multiple schools, not just this Title I school. Fifty-one students who were not matched across data sets were deleted in the current analysis. For students who took the i-Ready test multiple times in each quarter, we used their earliest test scores to avoid the overestimation of the impact of the program. We also generated a dummy variable to explore the impact of multiple test-takers. Less than 4% of students ($N < 15$) were multiple test-takers each quarter. Among 347 students, 23 students had missing values in their spring i-Ready score (i.e., approximately 7%). Given the missing data occurred only for the spring score, this study reported the descriptive statistics using 347 students. Stata 14.0 was used to identify statistical relationships among the quantitative data within and across the comparison groups.

Dependent Variables

Two outcomes were used to measure students' reading performance, i-Ready overall scale scores and percentile rankings. Overall scale scores, ranging from 0 to 800, inform educators about students' reading performance, growth, and improvement needs during the school year. Percentile rankings, ranging from 1st through 99th, show students' reading performance compared to their peers at the same grade level. For example, assuming that Jessie is at the 34th percentile of the third-grade i-Ready reading test, this indicates that Jessie performs

better than 34% of her peers in the third grade who take the same norm-referenced test.

Independent Variables

There were three independent variables in the present study. The first one was *service recipients*, including non-service, one-service, and multiple-service recipients. The second one was *covariates*, including gender, ethnicity, and grade level. Each of them was coded with dummy variables. Gender was coded with male = 0, female = 1; ethnicity was coded with White = 0, Black = 1, Hispanic = 2, and others = 3; grade level was coded with K = 0, Grade 1 = 1, Grade 2 = 2, Grade 3 = 3, Grade 4 = 4, and Grade 5 = 5. The third one was *service types*. The community services were organized and funded by a nonprofit organization. Each service type is described in the following:

1. *The targeted in-school service* provided struggling students with systematic and intensive intervention implemented by teacher candidates from a nearby university's special education program. Each student received 30 minutes of reading interventions per day, four days a week. Each teacher candidate worked with one to three students using IXL, an adapted reading program to improve students' phonological awareness. IXL was closely aligned with students' grade-level English language arts standards. One university special program faculty member supervised the interventions daily from 7:20 am to 10:20 am. The intervention team discussed student learning performance for teaching improvement at the end of each day.

2. *The afterschool service* helped students build self-efficacy and confidence through social and emotional activities. Literacy was incorporated into these activities.

3. *The holistic in-school service* assisted school teachers through a full-time on-site staff person and other workers from a community organization. The additional personnel tutored students, provided them with eyeglasses, worked with the principal to develop parent education programs, and gave them birthday books to enhance their sense of belonging.

4. *The in-home service* aimed to increase educational access for low-income and disadvantaged populations. Wraparound service dollars were provided to families to pay electricity and utility bills and to buy food and educational materials for students, thus reducing financial stress.

Results

Non-Service, One Service, vs. Multiple Services

There were 44 students (12.68%) who received targeted in-school service, 45 students (12.98%) who received afterschool service, 44 students (12.68%)

who received holistic in-school service, and 7 students (2.01%) who received in-home service. On the other hand, 218 students (62.68%) did not receive any community service during the school year. Table 1 shows the mean and standardized deviation of i-Ready reading performance between students who did not receive services (N = 218, 62.68%), students who received one service (N = 115, 33.14%), and students who received multiple services (N = 14, 4.18%).

Before the intervention (fall semester), students whose teachers did not refer them to receive services had a significantly greater average scale score than students referred to receive community services. After the intervention (winter semester), the percentile rankings indicate that students who received one service had significantly higher reading percentile rankings in winter than their peers who did not (M = 46.43, M = 40.62, t = 1.72, p = 0.08). However, there was no significant difference in the spring semester's percentile rankings during the initial COVID-19 outbreak.

For one-service recipients, there were 115 students, approximately evenly divided across genders (44% female; 56% male). By grade level, there were 23% Kindergarteners, 20% first graders, 20% second graders, 13% third graders, 15% fourth graders, and 9% fifth graders. For multiple-services recipients, there were 14 students. By grade level, these included 21% Kindergarteners, 21% first graders, 43% second graders, and 14% third graders. We used ANOVA to determine whether two or more subpopulation means were different. In the ANOVA analysis, if the result is statistically significant, we could then conclude that at least one group is different than the others in terms of service types. To see which groups are different from the others, we further employed the Tukey's post-hoc test to make pairwise comparisons of students' mean scores.

There was a statistically significant difference in the i-Ready fall scale score across non-service, one service, and multiple services as determined by one-way ANOVA ($F_{(2, 344)}$ = 8.79, p = .000). These results are also consistent in i-Ready winter scale score ($F_{(2, 344)}$ = 6.89, p = .003) and i-Ready spring scale score ($F_{(2, 323)}$ = 8.77, p = .000). We further used a Chi-square test to examine the group difference in community service participation by gender, race/ethnicity, and grade level. Our results suggest that gender (chi-square (2) =2.02, p = .364) and ethnic/racial group (chi-square (6) =4.62, p = .594) in our sample does not differ significantly from the hypothesized values that we assumed. For grade level differences in the patterns of community service participation, the results indicate a significant group difference by grade level in participating in community service.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Non-Service, One-Service, and Multiple-Service Samples

	Non-service		One-service		Multiple-service			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	ANOVA[a]	p-value
Overall SS (Fall)	442.44	72.95	411.62	70.34	395.21	48.56	$F_{(2, 344)}$ =8.79	.000
Overall SS (Winter)	461.02	74.07	438.50	71.43	409.43	44.31	$F_{(2, 344)}$ =6.89	.003
Overall SS (Spring)	475.77	68.13	449.25	66.30	420.86	40.17	$F_{(2, 323)}$ =8.77	.000
Percentile (Fall)	30.95	24.34	26.60	23.52	23.71	15.87	$F_{(2, 344)}$ =1.64	
Percentile (Winter)	40.62	28.43	46.43	30.68	39.00	30.65	$F_{(2, 344)}$ =1.35	
Percentile (Spring)	38.30	26.04	38.31	26.58	30.57	23.49	$F_{(2, 323)}$ =0.58	
N	218		115		14			
%	62.68		33.14		4.03			
	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	Chi-square test	
Male	0.48	105	0.56	64	0.43	6		
Female	0.52	113	0.44	51	0.57	8	2.02 (df=2)	.364
White	0.05	11	0.04	5	0.07	1		
Black	0.89	195	0.94	108	0.93	13		
Others	0.03	6	0.00	0	0.00	0		
Hispanic	0.00	0	0.02	2	0.00	0	4.62 (df=6)	.594
Grade K	0.10	22	0.23	27	0.21	3		
Grade 1	0.19	42	0.20	23	0.21	3		
Grade 2	0.17	36	0.20	23	0.43	6		
Grade 3	0.17	36	0.13	15	0.14	2		
Grade 4	0.17	37	0.15	17	0.00	0		
Grade 5	0.21	45	0.09	10	0.00	0	26.67 (df=10)	.003

Notes. ANOVA was applied to compare the group difference by the number of service recipients. $^{†}p < 0.1$, $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

Types of Services

Table 2 shows the group difference in reading achievement between various service recipients. The results indicate a statistically significant difference in i-Ready scale score and percentile rankings between various service recipients

as determined by one-way ANOVA. For scale score results, a Tukey post-hoc test revealed similar patterns across fall, winter, and spring. Before interventions, non-service recipients had a statistically significantly higher scale score compared to the targeted in-school service recipients and the holistic in-school service recipients. In addition, results show that afterschool service recipients had significantly higher scale scores compared to the targeted in-school service recipients in the fall semester (M = 446.96 vs. M = 393.72; M = 470.93 vs. M = 420.98; M = 479.58 vs. M = 434.35). A similar situation was also observed in the pairwise comparisons of means with the holistic in-school service recipients (M = 446.96 vs. M = 384.50; M = 470.93 vs. M = 408.14; M = 479.58 vs. M = 418.32). The descriptive statistics reveal that afterschool service recipients had significantly higher scale scores. However, the percentile rankings show that the targeted in-school service recipients had a significantly higher percentile rankings in winter than the non-service recipients (M = 55.38 vs. M = 40.92). As indicated in Table 2, a Tukey post-hoc test for percentile rankings revealed similar patterns across fall, winter, and spring.

Changes in Achievement Scores Over Time

We used the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, a statistical technique for estimating linear regression coefficients to evaluate the relationship between one or more independent quantitative variables and a dependent variable. Table 3 shows the results from the OLS model using the overall scale score, suggesting one-service and multiple-service recipients had similar gains in the winter (Model 1) and spring (Model 2) i-Ready reading score, controlling for the fall reading score, grade level, race/ethnicity, and gender. We ran a similar model using the winter and spring percentile rankings. Model 3 shows that one-service recipients had significant gains in their winter percentile rankings, controlling for the fall reading percentile and other covariates. We found limited evidence for multiple-service recipients on their winter percentile rankings. Model 4 also shows limited evidence for both types of service recipients on their gains in the spring percentile rankings. Overall, results suggest students could gain greatly on the winter percentile rankings when they received one community service compared to peers who did not receive any community service. However, this reading improvement was observed only for the winter semester and seemed not to sustain in the spring semester after the winter break. It is worth noting that the spring semester's i-Ready assessment was implemented in February/March instead of May/June before the school closed and transitioned to remote learning due to COVID-19.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of i-Ready Scores With Demographic Statistics by Service Types

	Non-service		Targeted in-school service		Afterschool service		Holistic in-school service		In-home service		ANOVA p-value	pairwise post-hoc
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Overall SS (Fall)	442.44	72.95	393.72	52.90	446.96	67.97	384.50	63.89	409.43	60.06	.000	a, b, c, d
Overall SS (Winter)	461.02	74.07	420.98	49.00	470.93	70.34	408.14	62.80	422.14	95.33	.001	a, b, c, d
Overall SS (Spring)	475.77	68.13	434.35	44.75	479.58	63.81	418.32	62.28	433.14	70.41	.002	a, b, c, d
Percentile (Fall)	30.94	24.34	32.30	16.51	33.82	28.43	13.09	10.19	15.29	27.35	.000	b; d; e
Percentile (Winter)	40.92	29.84	**55.38**	**26.26**	48.73	31.53	33.57	28.68	22.57	34.59	.000	a; d; e
Percentile (Spring)	38.30	26.04	44.80	20.66	41.60	29.01	26.36	22.77	18.57	31.38	.000	d, e
N	218		44		45		44		7			
%	62.68		12.68		12.98		12.68		0.20			
			%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.		
Male			48.94	23	53.33	24	54.55	24	71.43	5		
Female			51.06	24	46.67	21	45.45	20	28.57	2		
White			8.51	4	4.44	2	2.27	1	0.00	0		
Black			87.23	41	95.56	43	97.73	43	100.00	7		
Others			0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0		
Hispanic			4.26	2	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0		
Grade K			29.79	14	13.33	6	29.55	13	0.00	0		
Grade 1			34.04	16	11.11	5	15.91	7	14.29	1		
Grade 2			23.40	11	20.00	9	27.27	12	42.86	3		
Grade 3			12.77	6	11.11	5	15.91	7	14.29	1		
Grade 4				0	31.11	14	4.55	2	14.29	1		
Grade 5				0	13.33	6	6.82	3	14.29	1		

Notes. SD = standard deviation of Diagnostic scores; Overall = Overall i-Ready scale score in the school year of 2019–20; Percentile = i-Ready percentile rankings in the school year of 2019–20. The *p*-value indicates Tukey HSD post-hoc homogenous subsets for samples where ANOVA shows a significant difference among types of services.

a. The Tukey post-hoc test reveals a statistical significance between non-service recipients and the targeted in-school service recipients at the alpha level of .05.

b. The Tukey post-hoc test reveals a statistical significance between non-service recipients and the holistic in-school service recipients at the alpha level of .05.

c. The Tukey post-hoc test reveals a statistical significance between the targeted in-school service recipients and afterschool service recipients at the alpha level of .05.

d. The Tukey post-hoc test reveals a statistical significance between afterschool service recipients and the holistic in-school service recipients at the alpha level of .05.

e. The Tukey post-hoc test reveals a statistical significance between the targeted in-school service recipients and the holistic in-school service recipients at the alpha level of .05.

Table 3. OLS Regression for Non-Service vs. One-Service and Multiple Service

	Model 1: Overall Scale Score (Winter)	Model 2: Overall Scale Score (Spring)	Model 3: Percentile (Winter)	Model 4: Percentile (Spring)
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
One-Service recipients (cf. non-service recipients)	0.068	-0.016	0.192*	0.040
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Multiple-Service recipients	-0.076	-0.183	0.069	-0.133
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.19)	(0.18)
Overall Scale Score (Fall)	0.827***	0.882***		
	(0.04)	(0.04)		
Percentile (Fall)			0.654***	0.733***
			(0.04)	(0.04)
Grade 1 (cf. kindergarten)	-0.179*	-0.041	-0.813***	-0.760***
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Grade 2	-0.121	-0.038	-0.976***	-0.807***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Grade 3	0.034	0.087	-0.843***	-0.668***
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Grade 4	0.018	-0.076	-1.004***	-1.016***
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)
Grade 5	0.337**	0.297*	-0.725***	-0.550***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Female	-0.017	-0.106*	-0.007	-0.165*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.07)
White (Ref. Black)	-0.091	-0.134	-0.283	-0.280
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Other	0.093	0.040	-0.118	0.180
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.29)	(0.29)
Hispanic	-0.212	-0.190	-0.275	-0.087
	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.25)	(0.23)
Constant	0.009	0.059	0.702***	0.738***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.11)
R-square	0.815	0.849	0.552	0.623
N	347	324	347	324

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

To further explore the effect of three types of services on students' gains in reading achievement between winter and spring, we conducted six OLS models shown in Table 4 and Table 5. Students who received different types of services have similar fall-to-winter gain scores to their counterparts, and students who received the holistic in-school service lost greatly in their i-Ready scale score from fall-to-spring (B = -0.152). This result is consistent with the findings in the ANOVA analysis. Other covariates, such as students' grade level and gender, also influenced reading achievement, particularly for the fall-to-spring period. Female students had significantly lower scale scores in spring, while first grade had significantly lower ones in winter, holding constant on other covariates. Furthermore, the fifth graders have significantly higher scale scores and percentile rankings for both winter and spring.

Table 4. OLS Regression of i-Ready Scale Score for Community Service Types

	M1A: Overall SS (Winter)	M1B: Overall SS (Winter)	M1C: Overall SS (Winter)	M2A: Overall SS (Spring)	M2B: Overall SS (Spring)	M2C: Overall SS (Spring)
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Overall Scale Score (Fall)	0.828***	0.830***	0.825***	0.890***	0.891***	0.875***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Targeted in-school service	0.101			0.028		
	(0.07)			(0.07)		
Afterschool service		0.063			0.027	
		(0.07)			(0.07)	
Holistic in-school service			-0.070			-0.152*
			(0.07)			(0.07)
Grade 1 (cf. kindergarten)	-0.198*	-0.201*	-0.210*	-0.062	-0.062	-0.078
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Grade 2	-0.165	-0.181	-0.176	-0.098	-0.103	-0.091
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
Grade 3	0.019	-0.002	0.002	0.056	0.051	0.063
	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Grade 4	0.016	-0.026	-0.018	-0.096	-0.109	-0.105
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)

Table 4, continued

Grade 5	0.327**	0.293*	0.292*	0.278*	0.268*	0.270*
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Female	-0.018	-0.017	-0.018	-0.100*	-0.099*	-0.099*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
White (Cf. Black)	-0.092	-0.077	-0.085	-0.105	-0.100	-0.117
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)
Other	0.080	0.076	0.061	0.049	0.050	0.039
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Hispanic	-0.227	-0.204	-0.223	-0.179	-0.170	-0.195
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Constant	0.032	0.054	0.072	0.063	0.068	0.092
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
R-square	0.815	0.814	0.814	0.847	0.847	0.849
BIC	461.633	462.816	462.689	379.473	379.480	374.429
N	340	340	340	317	317	317

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$ Given a small sample of the service D recipients, we dropped those students in the regression analysis.

In Table 5, the targeted in-school service recipients have greater fall-to-winter gains in their i-Ready percentile rankings (B = 0.260) than their peers who did not receive any services or received other types of services. However, we did not find similar reading improvement effects in other service recipients or the spring percentile rankings compared with non-service recipients. For other covariates, students' grade level and gender also influenced their i-Ready percentile rankings.

Table 5. OLS Regression i-Ready Percentile Ranking for Community Service Types (Continued)

	M1A: i-Ready percentile (Winter)	M1B: i-Ready percentile (Winter)	M1C: i-Ready percentile (Winter)	M2A: i-Ready percentile (Spring)	M2A: i-Ready percentile (Spring)	M2A: i-Ready percentile (Spring)
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Percentile (Fall)	0.651***	0.651***	0.653***	0.737***	0.736***	0.726***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)

Table 5, continued

Targeted in-school service	0.260*			0.068		
	(0.11)			(0.10)		
Afterschool service		0.130			0.060	
		(0.11)			(0.10)	
Holistic in-school service			-0.009			-0.112
			(0.12)			(0.11)
Grade 1 (Cf. K)	-0.852***	-0.857***	-0.863***	-0.806***	-0.806***	-0.827***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Grade 2	-1.020***	-1.053***	-1.051***	-0.874***	-0.883***	-0.889***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Grade 3	-0.875***	-0.917***	-0.918***	-0.718***	-0.729***	-0.742***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Grade 4	-0.998***	-1.088***	-1.071***	-1.038***	-1.066***	-1.082***
	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Grade 5	-0.745***	-0.818***	-0.819***	-0.578***	-0.598***	-0.627***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Female	-0.019	-0.014	-0.017	-0.164*	-0.162*	-0.161*
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
White (Cf. Black)	-0.300	-0.264	-0.265	-0.255	-0.244	-0.255
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.16)
Other	-0.150	-0.164	-0.185	0.181	0.184	0.174
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
Hispanic	-0.327	-0.272	-0.292	-0.083	-0.065	-0.092
	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
Constant	0.765***	0.818***	0.837***	0.772***	0.782***	0.821***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
R-square	0.560	0.555	0.553	0.629	0.629	0.630

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$ Given a small sample of the service D recipients, we dropped those students in the regression analysis.

Discussion

Among 347 students in this Title I school, 115 students were referred by their teachers, and the school worked to receive additional support from the

community partners. Our discussions focus on three aspects: (1) non-service, one service, vs. multiple services, (2) types of services, and (3) changes in achievement scores over time.

Non-Service, One Service, vs. Multiple Services

Students who received services, particularly for targeted in-school services, had a positive and statistically significant improvement in percentile rankings over those who did not receive services. This is consistent with the findings in the existing literature about the positive impacts of community involvement on student achievement (Dryfoos, 2000; Epstein et al., 1997; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Newman, 1995). Seeing that these struggling students performed significantly better after receiving community services is encouraging. This indicates that the community services can positively impact students' reading achievement in the Title I school and reduce the gap of educational inequality.

However, although students who received multiple community services had positive gains, there was no statistical difference in reading achievement between students who received one or multiple services. More data are still needed to explain why students who received multiple services did not perform significantly better than their peers who only received one service in terms of reading achievement. One potential reason is that some services did not focus on students' reading skills but on their social and emotional skills. In the future, if social and emotional performance data are provided, the analyses will be more inclusive, covering more than reading achievement. Knowing the data limitation is important and educational to community partners. It reminds community partners that documenting data associated with their services is needed for analyzing students' overall learning outcomes. Moreover, the number of students who received multiple services was too small to generate statistical power. This encourages all stakeholders to work more closely in the future when referring students to receive community services if they hope to see the statistical significance, whether positive or negative, to hold a degree of confidence that the results are reliable and not due to chance.

Types of Services

Both targeted and holistic in-school services were necessary and beneficial to students, but targeted reading interventions that were explicit and systematic had more positive impacts on the students' reading achievement. In the present study, the available data only allow the research team to examine students' reading achievement. Under this limitation, it is predictable that direct and targeted reading interventions would be more likely to increase students' reading achievement than indirect services like family dollars or social–emotional learn-

ing activities. This highlights the importance of deliberative communication addressed by Badgett (2016), which requires all stakeholders to be thoughtful and considerate, knowing what goals they want to achieve and what data are needed to measure progress.

Changes in Achievement Scores Over Time

Students who received services sustained the intervention effectiveness better from fall to winter than from winter to spring. Due to COVID-19, the spring scores of i-Ready were gathered in February/March instead of May/June as they would normally have been. In other words, students did not receive an entire semester of instruction in the spring semester when they took the end-of-the-year assessment. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the pandemic had negatively affected students' reading achievement. Numerous studies show similar outcomes: students' test scores were lower than those of same-grade peers before the pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). It is important to note the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires that when schools provide services to typical learners, they must also make these services available to students with disabilities. Under no preparation for the pandemic that caused an unprecedented disruption to the educational provision, the school decided to stop all instructional activities, including community services, for the rest of the spring semester. Because the pandemic affected all students who received or did not receive community services, the data were not skewed in that sense.

Although many educators are aware of summer learning loss (The National Summer Learning Association, 2017), our study indicates that winter learning loss might also exist because both groups of students in this Title I school, receiving or not receiving community services, had lower reading achievement after the winter break. This suggests that students in the Title I school may need continuous support even during the winter break. The data inform community partners to redesign their services beyond school semesters. Structured, creative, and enjoyable in-home or outdoor activities that students can do individually or with their families may keep up their learning over the winter break.

Conclusion

In summary, our study shows that students who received community services performed better on the norm-referenced test than those who did not receive any community service, even after the winter break learning loss and before the school closure due to COVID. Each community partner had a touchpoint with the students and families they served. However, there was no significant difference between students who received one or multiple types

of community services regarding reading achievement. The quantitative data from OLS models indicate that direct and explicit reading intervention is more likely to improve students' reading achievement than other services. Still, such results should not be overgeneralized to deny the value that different community services brought to schools and their students' lives. All stakeholders should communicate deliberatively to understand the specific value different types of community services create. Each community partner should view data collection as part of their responsibility to monitor the effectiveness of the services they provide to K–12 schools.

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The 2020–21 Future Forward Literacy Program: Implementation and Impact During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Future Forward is an early elementary literacy program which, through a family–school–community partnership approach, integrates one-on-one tutoring and family engagement to support literacy development at school and at home. In the 2020–21 school year, as part of an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Mid-Phase grant, the impact of a modified Future Forward on reading achievement was tested with a randomized control study of students in nine schools. In the context of COVID-19, implementation was modified to support virtual tutoring. Although consistent in magnitude with other studies, the modified Future Forward program was not found to have a statistically significant impact on student achievement. Sample size limitations and implementation challenges, both resulting from COVID-19, hindered our ability to measure an impact. Even considering these challenges, we still found evidence that Future Forward had a positive impact on the reading achievement of Black students (0.34 standard deviations, $p = .095$) and, even more so, Black male students (0.54 standard deviation, $p = .052$).

Key Words: tutoring, literacy, experimental research, Future Forward, family–school–community partnerships, COVID-19, implementation, impacts

Introduction

Future Forward is an early elementary literacy program that combines one-on-one tutoring with family engagement to promote student literacy development both at school and at home. In 2011 Future Forward was funded by a federal i3 grant to develop the program and test its impact in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Two randomized control trial (RCT) studies found the program had positive impacts on literacy, reading achievement, and school attendance (Jones, 2018; Jones & Christian, 2021). In 2017, Future Forward received an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Mid-Phase grant from the U.S. Department of Education to expand and test its impact on students in 14 schools across three states. As was the case across the entire education system, in the spring of 2020, Future Forward was shut down in response to COVID-19. To continue supporting students and families during the 2020–21 school year, Future Forward had to modify its program to allow for virtual instruction. This article presents the implementation and impact results of these efforts.

Tutoring Programs

There are a limited number of early primary literacy tutoring programs that have proven effective under rigorous scrutiny. The Evidence for Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) website (https://www.evidenceforessa.org/) lists only 13 tutoring programs that have, one of which is Future Forward. Tutoring programs generally focus on developing literacy skills in students behind in their literacy acquisition. Of the 13 validated programs included on the Evidence for ESSA website, seven use paraprofessionals or volunteers as tutors. Even using minimally trained college students serving as tutors has proven impactful on literacy (Lindo et al., 2018). There are some conditions of tutoring programs that are necessary for them to be effective, though. In their review of tutoring programs, Wasik (1998) concluded that successful volunteer tutoring programs are highly structured, have quality materials, and provide strong professional development and supervision to tutors. Future Forward meets these conditions and goes further. It is the only validated tutoring program included on the Evidence for ESSA website that supports literacy development at home as well as school.

The Future Forward Approach

Future Forward has a family–school–community partnership approach (Epstein, 2001) to promote student literacy development. An instructional coordinator, a family engagement coordinator, and tutors staff each Future Forward site. The instructional coordinator is typically a certified teacher who

manages one-on-one tutoring provided by paraprofessionals or volunteers. The instructional coordinator works with the school and tutors to develop a tutoring schedule. This involves identifying times students can be pulled out of class to receive tutoring and finding tutors who can work during those times. Students are tutored by the same tutor throughout their time in Future Forward. The instructional coordinator provides ongoing support, development, and supervision to the tutors. Each Future Forward student is scheduled for 90 minutes of one-on-one tutoring each week for one school year. Each tutoring session includes several phonics-based activities, such as Word Play (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016) and Making Words (Cunningham et al., 1998). Students use graphic organizers to build comprehension skills and write sentences connected to a Word Play activity. They may also use Elkonin boxes, which involve segmenting words into individual sounds/boxes (Keesey et al., 2014).

The family engagement coordinator, who is typically a community member or parent from the school, leads family outreach and communication efforts. Although family engagement can take many forms to meet diverse family needs, there are some structured activities within Future Forward. Sites send home a monthly newsletter, hold monthly family events, send books home to help build a home library and conduct home visits. Communications that surround these activities are consistent and frequent, validating literacy development activities already occurring at home (Nieto, 2012; González et al., 2005) and updating families about the progress of their student's literacy development. Future Forward works to reduce the unequal power relationship between the school, Future Forward, and the family that is assumed by families and teachers at the start of their participation. It creates opportunities for overcoming barriers to family engagement that result from mismatches between school and home regarding language, schedules, and expectations (Lopez & Stoelting, 2010). During COVID-19, tutoring was modified to be more flexible, as further described below.

Previous Future Forward Research/Evaluations

The current impact study is the fifth of Future Forward. The i3 grant awarded in 2009 produced two. The first was a pilot evaluation as the program was developed in six Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) during the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years. While Future Forward had a small but significant impact on reading, it did not impact school attendance. Almost all Future Forward students received a high or moderate amount of tutoring, whereas the family engagement component was still in development (Jones, 2018). The second i3-funded RCT study tested the impact of the full Future Forward program on low-income students of color in seven MPS campuses during the 2013–14

and 2014–15 school years. Implementation was strong, with 96% and 98% of students receiving the intended amount of tutoring and family engagement, respectively. This study found positive and statistically significant impacts on literacy development and school attendance (Jones & Christian, 2021). While no significant impact on reading achievement was found after two years of tutoring, the impact after one year, with a much larger sample, was statistically significant and positive. Further, in a five-year follow-up study, Future Forward was found to have significant, sustained impacts on school attendance and reading achievement, equal to approximately one-half year of academic growth (Jones et al., in press). Further, former Future Forward participants were less likely (.30 the odds) to be receiving special education services than students assigned to business-as-usual (BAU) literacy instruction.

The EIR grant has also produced two research studies. The first of these occurred during the EIR-funded program's pilot year as it was expanded to 14 schools during the first full year of the grant in the 2018–19 school year (Jones et al., 2023). Although a regression discontinuity study did not find a statistically significant positive impact on reading achievement or school attendance, low statistical power and inconsistent implementation during the pilot year limited the study's ability to measure an impact. The second EIR study used a RCT to examine Future Forward's impact on reading and school attendance during the 2019–20 school year (Jones & Li, 2023). The nationwide shutdown of schools in spring of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic limited the study to only testing its impact on school attendance. Future Forward was found to have a statistically significant, positive impact on school attendance. Overall, Future Forward participants demonstrated statistically significant improved attendance (1.4 percentage points), with greater impacts on Black students (2.4 percentage points), students with lower school attendance (2.3 percentage points), and Black students with lower school attendance (3.6 percentage points).

Current Study of Future Forward

During 2020–21, in response to school interruptions caused by COVID-19, tutoring was modified to be more flexible to the unique needs of families and schools. Sites had the option of tutoring students online or in person. Sites that chose the virtual option changed their scheduling to accommodate some of the challenges of virtual tutoring. Historically, each Future Forward tutoring session was scheduled for 30 minutes. However, virtual tutoring proved more time-consuming to facilitate. As such, sites using virtual tutoring scheduled two 45-minute sessions each week instead of three 30-minute sessions. Regardless of format, all students were provided access to the MyON online reading

platform provided by Renaissance Learning. MyON provided sites and families additional flexibility for engaging students in reading during COVID-19.

The decision to allow sites the option of providing online instruction was not made lightly. The 2019–20 and 2020–21 programs were to serve as the impact studies for the Future Forward EIR grant. Considering COVID-19 interrupted the 2019–20 program, modifying implementation during 2020–21 meant that the EIR study would end without any formal impact evaluation of the Future Forward program as it was designed. Future Forward was given the option of waiting until the 2021–22 school year in the hope that in-person tutoring and family engagement would be more acceptable to schools then. Future Forward chose to continue to work with students, though, to help mitigate (as best they could) the continued negative effects of COVID-19 on students, schools, and communities. Considering the school–family–community approach of Future Forward, program leaders felt they could not ethically put their programmatic needs above the needs of their partners.

In the current evaluation, we examine the implementation and impact of the modified Future Forward program on students in nine schools. While all nine participating schools reopened and offered in-person instruction, the implementation of Future Forward was modified to accommodate a variety of restrictions put in place by schools because of COVID-19. So while we originally planned to test the implementation and impact of Future Forward, the changes to the Future Forward model of delivery caused us to reframe our evaluation to be exploratory about the impact of a modified version of Future Forward.

Research Questions

- How was Future Forward implemented in schools during COVID-19?
- What was the impact of Future Forward participation on reading achievement?
- Did Future Forward have a differential impact on student subgroups?

Evaluation Methods

This evaluation study utilized an RCT design, with kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade (K–3) students randomly assigned to receive Future Forward or only BAU literacy instruction during the 2020–21 school year.

Study Eligibility

Eligible participants were kindergarten, first, second, or third grade students without an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and who were not English Learners. The specific number of students who were eligible is not

known because schools were instructed not to distribute consent forms to students who did not meet eligibility criteria. Those later referred for specialized services after assignment were excluded from analyses.

Informed consent was obtained from families for their students to participate in the study in the fall of 2020. A total of 464 students were consented for the study. Only students who participated in a fall reading assessment were eligible. This last eligibility criteria represented a significant barrier for students participating in the study. Of the 464 consented students, 297 completed a fall reading assessment and were enrolled in the study.

Random Assignment

In the fall of 2020, 153 of the 297 students were randomly assigned to Future Forward and 144 to the BAU reading instruction. Assignment was done within blocks, defined as grade levels within schools (each grade within a school was a block). Three schools included kindergarten through second grade students in the study, two included kindergarten through third grade students, two schools served first through third grade students, one school served first and second grade students, and one school only included two first grade students who had been attending Boys and Girls Club afterschool activities, resulting in 26 assignment blocks. The number of study participants per block ranged from 7 to 22, with an average of 11. The number of study participants within each block was twice the capacity of the program to serve, with half randomly assigned to Future Forward and the other half to BAU literacy instruction.

Participating Schools and Students

Nine schools participated in the study (see Table 1): four in Wisconsin, three in Alabama (one Alabama school included only two students who were Boys and Girls Club members), and two in South Carolina. These schools partnered with five local Boys and Girls Clubs. The three Alabama schools were located in an urban district, while the other six were in rural districts. Participating schools had a history of overall literacy performance that placed them in the lowest 20% of schools in their state or had a history of large reading achievement gaps between races or economic groups. Five schools that had previously participated in the EIR grant study were unable to participate in the current study because obtaining parent consent in these schools proved extremely difficult. The limited number of students consented was not enough to include these schools in the study. Table 2 presents characteristics of study participants. The backgrounds of the BAU and Future Forward assignment groups were similar. Among all the participants, most were economically disadvantaged (67%) and White (58%) or Black (32%).

Table 1. Participating Schools

	State	Community Type	Grades of Participating Students (26 Grades/Blocks)
School 1	WI	Rural	Grades KG–2
School 2	WI	Rural	Grades KG–2
School 3	SC	Rural	Grades 1–3
School 4	AL	Urban	Grades KG–3
School 5	WI	Rural	Grades 1–2
School 6	WI	Rural	Grades KG–2
School 7	AL	Urban	Grades KG–3
School 8	SC	Rural	Grades 1–3
School 9	AL	Urban	Grade 1

Table 2. Characteristics of Study Participants

		BAU	FF	Total
Grade Level	KG	26 (18.1%)	26 (17.0%)	52 (17.5%)
	1st	54 (37.5%)	58 (37.9%)	112 (37.7%)
	2nd	42 (29.2%)	46 (30.1%)	88 (29.6%)
	3rd	22 (15.3%)	23 (15.0%)	45 (15.2%)
School	School 1	11 (7.6%)	14 (9.2%)	25 (8.4%)
	School 2	19 (13.2%)	16 (10.5%)	35 (11.8%)
	School 3	13 (9.0%)	16 (10.5%)	29 (9.8%)
	School 4	21 (14.6%)	21 (13.7%)	42 (14.1%)
	School 5	21 (14.6%)	20 (13.1%)	41 (13.8%)
	School 6	21 (14.6%)	21 (13.7%)	42 (14.1%)
	School 7	24 (16.7%)	25 (16.3%)	49 (16.5%)
	School 8	11 (7.6%)	17 (11.1%)	28 (9.4%)
	School 9	3 (2.1%)	3 (2.0%)	6 (2.0%)
Race/ Ethnicity	Black	43 (29.9%)	52 (34.0%)	95 (32.0%)
	White	85 (29.9%)	87 (34.0%)	172 (57.9%)
	Other	16 (11.1%)	14 (9.2%)	30 (10.1%)
Gender	Female	72 (50%)	90 (58.8%)	162 (54.5%)
	Male	72 (50%)	63 (41.2%)	135 (45.5%)
Total		144	153	297
F/R Lunch	No	49 (34.3%)	49 (32.2%)	98 (33.2%)
	Yes	94 (65.7%)	103 (67.8%)	197 (66.8%)
Total		143	152	295*

Note. *F/R lunch data were missing for two students.

Instruments

Seven schools used Star Reading, a norm-referenced assessment for early literacy. Star is a short, online adaptive assessment with high internal reliability (0.95) and concurrent validity with other reading assessments such as AIMSweb, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and state reading tests more generally (Renaissance Learning, 2021). Two used the Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST) – FastBridge. The FastBridge reading assessment is also a norm-referenced assessment with strong evidence of validity and reliability (Christ, 2015). All nine schools administered assessments to students before Future Forward began serving students and again at the end of the school year.

Modeling Strategy

We used generalized linear models (GLM), which uses maximum likelihood estimation, with linear error terms and an identity link function to estimate the impact of Future Forward on reading achievement. Star Reading and FastBridge scores were standardized locally, separately within grade levels, and combined for analysis. Both measures are similar in how they assess student reading development and are nationally norm-referenced, so combining measures is justified. Combining the measures is further justified by the inclusion of block-fixed effects in the model below. What is important is that all students within a block were assessed with the same instrument. The IBM SPSS 26.0 statistical software package was used to conduct analyses.

Spring reading achievement was modeled using the following linear regression equation (1)

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(FF_{ij}) + \beta_2(Reading_{ij}) + \sum_{m=1}^{M} \beta_{3.m}X_{mij} + \sum_{j=1}^{J-1} \beta_{4.j}Block_j + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

Where Y_{ij} is the spring reading score for the ith student in the jth block; β_0 is the intercept; β_1 is the impact of Future Forward; FF_{ij} is a binary indicator for Future Forward participation; $Reading_{ij}$ is the baseline reading score for either the Star or FastBridge assessment; X_{mij} is the mth of M additional covariates representing demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, free/reduced lunch, and race); $Block_j$ is the fixed assignment block effect (grade by school); all Future Forward and BAU students within a block received the same literacy assessment (Star or Fastbridge); and ε_{ij} is the error term for student i in block j.

We used robust standard errors and fixed block effects (blocks are defined by grade levels within schools). We used fixed block effects rather than random effects to control for any unobserved block-specific factors. We also conducted

a robustness check of the results. For this, we stripped out all model parameters except block fixed effects and participation in Future Forward. Assuming a fixed program effect and 70% of the variance in outcomes explained by covariates, the current study, prior to attrition, had an 80% likelihood of detecting an impact of 0.187 standardized units. To test differential effects, we limited the sample of students included in equation 1 to students according to each gender, race, grade, free/reduced price lunch eligibility group, and baseline reading proficiency group. Although we typically only flag impacts that have a significance level less than .05, in the current study we flag differential effects with significant levels less than .10. This was done considering the exploratory nature of these analyses and the small numbers of students included in each analysis.

Attrition and Characteristics of Students Included in the Final Analysis

Of the 297 study participants, 267 remained at the end of the study. Nine students were referred for specialized services (five BAU and four Future Forward students) and excluded from the study. Of the remaining 288 students, 21 attrited (7.3%). These included three students who did not complete the spring assessment, and 18 who moved and changed schools. In total, seven BAU (7/139 = 5.0%) and 14 Future Forward (14/149 = 9.4%) students attrited. The combination of overall (7.3%) and differential attrition (4.4%) is within the conservative levels of acceptability as established by the What Works Clearinghouse (2020).

Table 3 presents characteristics of students included in the final analysis (after attrition). Differences in the demographic composition of the BAU and Future Forward groups were equivalent regarding gender (Ch^2 = .817, p = 0.366), race (Ch^2 = .023, p = 0.989), and Free/Reduced price lunch eligibility (Ch^2 = .016, p = .898). However, nine students (one Future Forward and eight BAU) received Tier 2 intervention during the academic year. Although schools were instructed to provide any intervention services regardless of assignment, one school treated Future Forward as a Tier 2 intervention and focused their intervention resources more on BAU students. This may have affected our ability to measure an impact in that school.

Table 3. Characteristics of Students Included in Final Analysis After Attrition

		BAU	FF	Total
Grade Level	KG	25 (18.9%)	26 (19.3%)	51 (19.1%)
	1st	50 (37.9%)	50 (37.0%)	100 (37.5%)
	2nd	40 (30.3%)	38 (28.1%)	78 (29.2%)
	3rd	17 (12.9%)	21 (15.6%)	38 (14.2%)
School	School 1	11 (8.3%)	14 (10.4%)	25 (9.4%)
	School 2	19 (14.4%)	16 (11.9%)	35 (13.1%)
	School 3	11 (8.3%)	12 (8.9%)	23 (8.6%)
	School 4	19 (14.4%)	19 (14.1%)	38 (14.2%)
	School 5	20 (15.2%)	16 (11.9%)	36 (13.5%)
	School 6	19 (14.4%)	20 (14.8%)	39 (14.6%)
	School 7	19 (14.4%)	23 (17.0%)	42 (15.7%)
	School 8	11 (8.3%)	13 (9.6%)	24 (9.0%)
	School 9	3 (2.3%)	2 (1.5%)	5 (1.9%)
Race/Ethnicity	Black	39 (29.5%)	41 (30.4%)	80 (30.0%)
	White	80 (60.6%)	81 (60.0%)	161 (60.3%)
	Other	13 (9.8%)	13 (9.6%)	26 (9.7%)
Gender	Female	69 (52.3%)	78 (57.8%)	147 (55.1%)
	Male	63 (47.7%)	57 (42.2%)	120 (44.9%)
F/R Lunch	No	44 (33.3%)	46 (34.1%)	90 (33.7%)
	Yes	88 (66.7%)	89 (65.9%)	177 (66.3%)
Total		132	135	267

Future Forward Implementation Results

To what extent was tutoring implemented as intended in spite of the disruption caused by COVID-19?

Future Forward expected to support students from October to May. As mentioned before, though, difficulties in consenting and assessing students in the milieu of COVID pushed the start date for sites further into the school year. Ultimately, two sites started working with students in November, three in December, and four in January. Five sites provided tutoring in person and four virtually. The delay represents a significant amount of tutoring not delivered during the fall of 2020 (see Figure 1).

A Future Forward participant who starts receiving tutoring in early October and continues until late May should receive at least 1,680 minutes (60 minutes

per week for 28 weeks) of tutoring. Students in sites that started in November missed approximately 240 minutes of that, which represents 14% less exposure to Future Forward. Students who started in December missed approximately 460 minutes of tutoring, representing 27% less tutoring, and students who didn't start until January missed 648 minutes, representing 39% less tutoring. As shown in Figure 2, the implementation delay resulted in very few students receiving the expected amount of tutoring (> 1,680 minutes).

Figure 1. Total Minutes of Future Forward Tutoring Provided Each Month
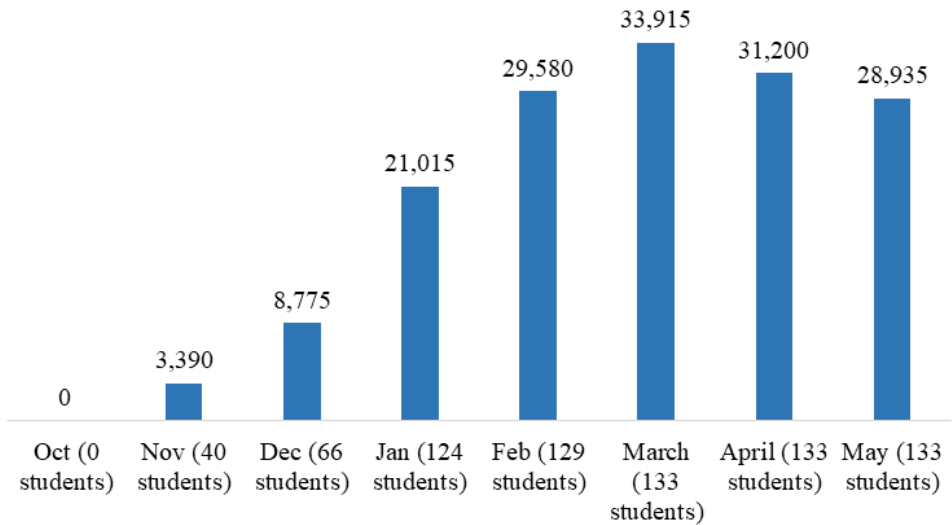
Figure 2. Total Minutes of Tutoring Received by Future Forward Participants
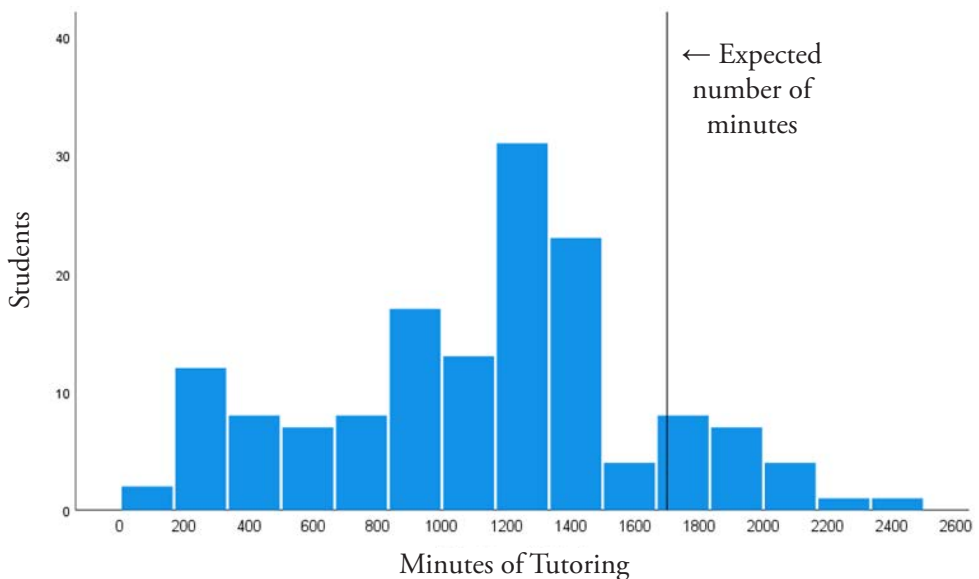
Once tutoring began, many students did receive the expected intensity of tutoring. Students at four sites received tutoring in person and were scheduled for three tutoring sessions per week (30 minutes per session). Students in the other five received virtual tutoring and were scheduled for two sessions per week (45 minutes per session). While historically, Future Forward provided most of its students with at least 60 minutes of tutoring each week, because of COVID-related challenges, it was not clear to what extent sites would be able to continue at this level of intensity. Ultimately, however, more than half (62%) of Future Forward students received at least 60 minutes of tutoring per week. Further, the average Future Forward participant received 64.3 minutes of tutoring per week (Table 4).

To what extent was family engagement implemented as intended in spite of the disruption caused by COVID-19?

Similar to tutoring, sites experienced a significant delay in their efforts to engage families, with very few family contacts occurring prior to January 2021 (see Figure 3). Family engagement was further inhibited by the lack of Future Forward staff presence in schools. Families of Future Forward participants are typically contacted at least two times each month. This adds up to 16 contacts during the typical program period of October to May. Again, mostly because of the delay in starting Future Forward and its virtual format, few student families were engaged at least that many times (see Figure 4). Once the program was ramped up in January, though, families interacted an average of twice per month, and 48% were contacted at least two times each month (see Table 4).

Figure 3. Total Successful Family Contacts Each Month
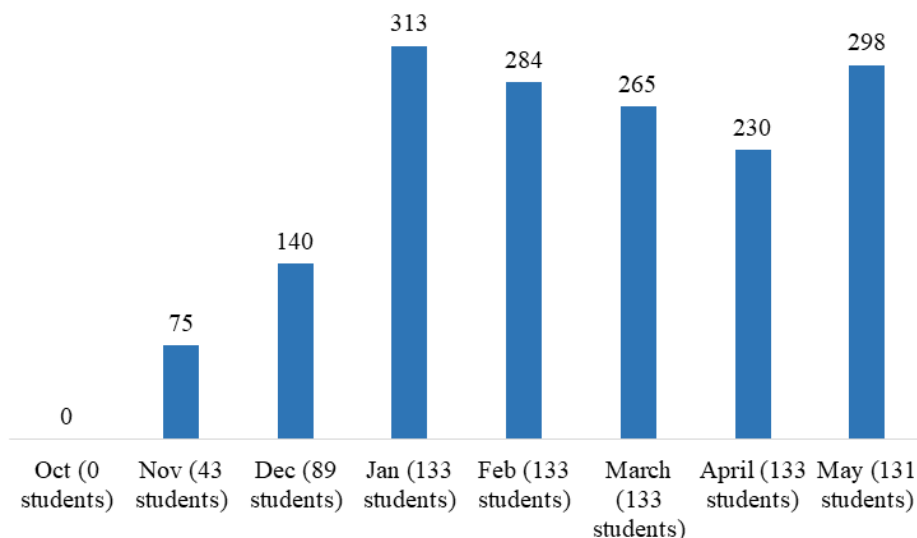
Table 4. Implementation

	First Month	FF Students	Online or In-Person	Minutes Per Session	Total Sessions (*SD*)	Minutes of Tutoring* (*SD*)	Contacts Per Family (*SD*)	Contacts Per Month Per Family (*SD*)
			Tutoring				Family Engagement	
School 1	Jan	13	Online	45	19.5 (4.4)	76.5 (17.2)	10.2 (7.0)	2.0 (1.4)
School 2	Jan	15	Online	45	18.1 (3.7)	71.0 (14.6)	5.1 (4.2)	1.0 (0.8)
School 3	Dec	12	In-person	30	32.4 (3.7)	63.1 (8.2)	23.0 (3.9)	3.8 (0.7)
School 4	Jan	19	Online	45	9.2 (4.9)	26.6 (14.1)	7.8 (5.9)	1.3 (1.0)
School 5	Jan	16	In-person	30	34.4 (3.6)	91.3 (9.5)	14.4 (8.4)	2.9 (1.7)
School 6	Nov	20	In-person	30	48.1 (7.0)	77.5 (11.4)	13.6 (6.7)	1.9 (1.0)
School 7	Nov	23	Online	45	25.6 (7.1)	61.3 (17.0)	11.7 (6.4)	1.7 (0.9)
School 8	Dec	13	In-person	30	23.0 (3.5)	44.5 (6.8)	12.9 (3.7)	2.2 (0.6)
School 9	Dec	2	Online	45	39.5 (3.5)	113.9 (10.2)	13.5 (4.9)	2.3 (0.8)
Overall		133			26.8 (12.9)	64.3 (24.1)	12.0 (7.4)	2.0 (1.3)

*Per Student Per Five School Days

Figure 4. Total Successful Family Contacts Per Future Forward Participant
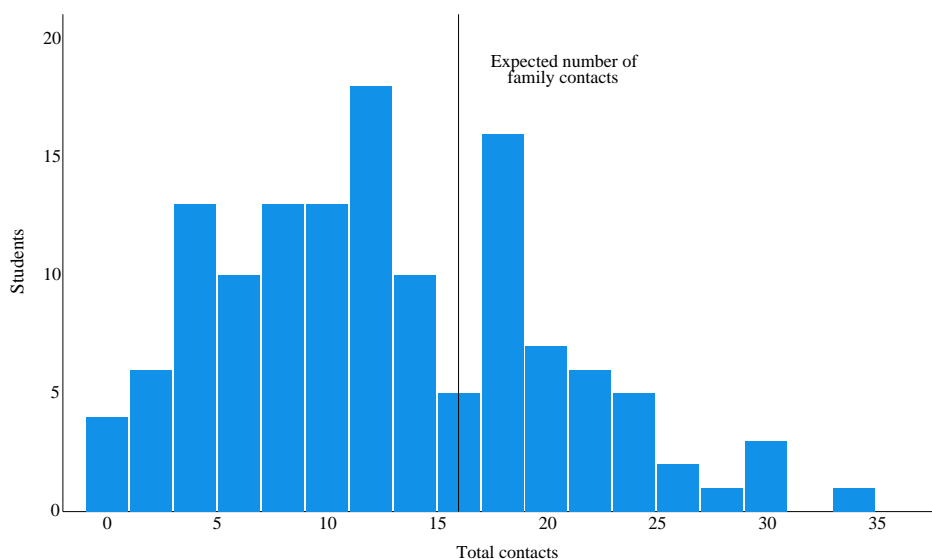
Impact Results

What was the impact of Future Forward participation on reading achievement?

Table 5 presents the unadjusted baseline (before participation) and follow-up (after) reading assessment results and benchmark information for students retained in the study. The reading achievement of Future Forward and BAU students was equivalent at baseline (β = -0.02, SE = 0.11, p =.836). At follow-up however, the reading achievement of Future Forward students had improved by 0.16 standard deviations in comparison to BAU students. This change did not correspond to a differential improvement in the reading benchmark status of students in Future Forward.

Statistical modeling was used to make a more precise comparison of spring reading achievement scores between Future Forward and BAU students. After adjusting spring achievement by student characteristics, baseline achievement, and assignment block effects, Future Forward did not have a statistically significant impact (β = 0.09, SE = 0.10, p =.378; see Table 6). A simple model (Robustness model), only adjusting for fixed block effects, measured a 0.10 standardized impact (β = 0.10, p = .401), which was also not statistically significant (see Table 6).

Table 5. Reading Achievement – Students Included in the Final Analysis

	At Baseline (Fall)				
	Standardized Reading		Reading Benchmark		
	M	*SD*	Above Benchmark	Below Benchmark	Students
BAU	0.01	1.00	48 (36.4%)	84 (63.6%)	132
FF	-0.01	0.98	50 (37.0%)	85 (63.0%)	135
Total	0.00	0.99	98 (36.7%)	169 (63.3%)	267
	At Follow-Up (Spring)				
	Standardized Reading		Reading Benchmark		
	M	*SD*	Above Benchmark	Below Benchmark	Students
BAU	-0.07	1.01	50 (37.9%)	82 (62.1%)	132
FF	0.07	0.96	52 (38.5%)	83 (61.5%)	135
Total	0.00	0.99	102 (38.2%)	165 (61.8%)	267

Table 6. Full GLM Model Testing the Impact of Future Forward on Reading Achievement

Coefficient	*β*	Std. Error	Wald Chi-Sq.	*df*	*p* value
(Intercept)	0.302	0.537	0.316	1	0.574
Group (BAU)	-0.089	0.101	0.778	1	0.378
Gender (Male)	-0.189	0.098	3.732	1	0.053
Race/ethnicity (Black)	-0.669	0.173	15.009	1	0.000
Race/ethnicity (Neither Black nor White)	0.138	0.162	0.730	1	0.393
Free or reduced lunch status (No)	0.205	0.124	2.762	1	0.097
Standardized baseline reading	0.423	0.063	45.335	1	0.000
Overall Model Effects					
	Type III Wald Chi-Square			*df*	*p* value
(Intercept)	2.729			1	0.099
Group (FF vs. BAU)	0.778			1	0.378
Gender	3.732			1	0.053
Race/ethnicity	17.817			2	0.000
Free or reduced lunch status	2.762			1	0.097
Standardized baseline reading	45.335			1	0.000
Grade by school fixed effect	77.561			25	0.000

The overall results are qualified by the low level of implementation due to COVID-19. Many students received less than the amount of tutoring a Future Forward participant would typically receive. To adjust for this, we used

Treat-on-Treated modeling. This approach allows us to answer the hypothetical question about what the impact would have been if students had received the expected amount of tutoring. In the context of this study, this is strictly a formative analysis. To conduct a Treat-on-Treated analysis, first, one models the amount of tutoring students assigned to Future Forward or BAU would be expected to receive. One then uses this expected value to estimate the impact of Future Forward on reading achievement. The Treat-on-Treated model results suggest a possible larger but still not statistically significant impact (β = 0.13, p = .364; see Table 7).

Did Future Forward have a differential impact on student subgroups?

Among the tested differential effects, only Black students were found to differentially benefit from their participation; Future Forward had three times the impact on Black students (β = 0.34, p =.095) than was found overall (see Table 7). Future Forward has roughly five times the impact on Black students with reading below benchmark at baseline (0.48 standard deviations, p = .062) and seven times the impact on Black students with reading above benchmark (β = 0.65 standard deviations, p < .001) than it did across all students. Future Forward had roughly five times the impact on Black male students (0.54 standard deviations, p = .052). Even considering the small number of students (n = 12), the impact of Future Forward on Black students with reading above the benchmark was statistically significant. The impact was eight times larger than the overall impact (0.74 standard deviations, p < .001). Together, these results suggest Future Forward likely had a positive impact on underserved students facing more challenges in learning to read (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Standardized Impact of Future Forward on Reading Achievement
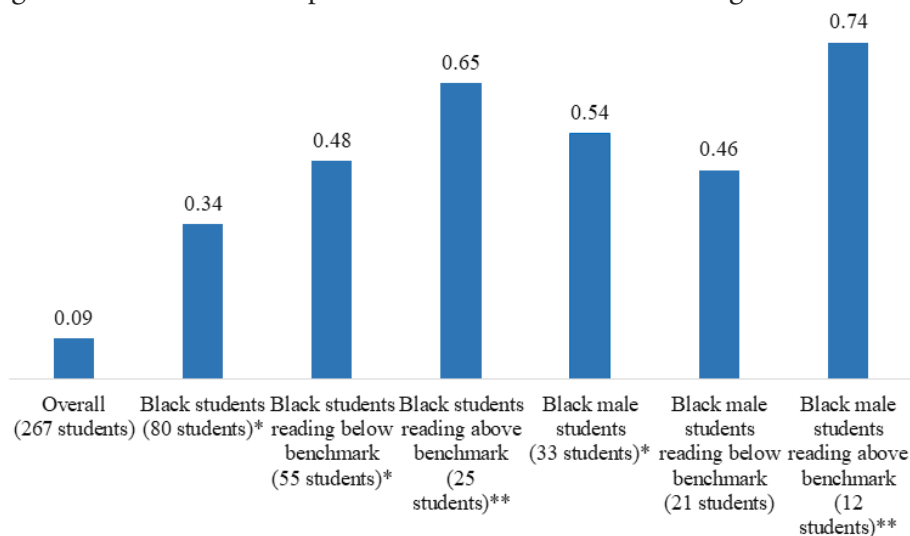
Notes. *Impact approaches statistical significance (p < .10). **Impact is statistically significant (p < .05).

Table 7. Results of Models Testing the Impact of Future Forward on Reading Achievement

	Impact (β)	SE	p	n
Full model with fixed block effects	0.09	0.10	0.378	267
Robustness model – simple model	0.10	0.11	0.401	267
Full participation effect (Treat-on-Treated model)	0.13	0.16	0.364	267
Differential effects				
Black students*	0.34	0.20	0.095	80
White students	-0.04	0.13	0.762	161
Female students	-0.01	0.14	0.963	147
Male students	0.09	0.13	0.474	120
Kindergarten students	-0.00	0.18	0.998	51
First grade students	0.14	0.17	0.425	100
Second grade students	-0.05	0.19	0.804	78
Third grade students	0.43	0.33	0.191	38
Students reading below benchmark	0.08	0.14	0.543	169
Students reading above benchmark	0.12	0.15	0.396	98
Black male students*	0.54	0.28	0.052	33
Black students reading below benchmark*	0.48	0.26	0.062	55
Black students reading above benchmark**	0.65	0.14	<.001	25
Male students reading below benchmark	-0.06	0.18	0.719	79
Male students reading above benchmark	0.15	0.17	0.376	41
Black male students reading below benchmark	0.46	0.40	0.248	21
Black male students reading above benchmark**	0.74	0.21	<.001	12

*$p < .10$, **$p < .001$

Conclusions and Discussion

The current EIR-funded study of Future Forward adds to the growing body of evidence of the effectiveness of the Future Forward program and its partnership approach to supporting student literacy development. This was a challenging year to implement any education program, let alone one attached to a multisite RCT. Future Forward decided to continue supporting students, even considering the difficulties, motivated by an awareness that COVID-19 was causing many students to fall behind in their reading development. Future Forward's goal was to provide as much tutoring to students and support to families as

possible. Although the disruption to schools caused by COVID-19 prevented many students from receiving the full tutoring and family engagement experience, the reduced amount of Future Forward students received seems to have still been beneficial to participating underserved students and families.

Even considering the implementation challenges and associated reduced power of the study, we found evidence that Future Forward had a positive impact on Black students. Future Forward had roughly three times the impact on Black students and five times the impact on Black male students than was found overall. These results echo what we found in our 2019–20 evaluation in which Future Forward had a large positive impact on the school attendance of Black students (Jones & Li, 2023). Interestingly, the impact of Future Forward on Black students was driven by its impact on the Black students meeting the reading benchmark at the start of the year. Even though only 25 Black participants (14 Future Forward, 11 BAU) met the reading benchmark at the start of the year, the impact of Future Forward on this group was large and significant ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < .001$).

The current study's findings are also consistent with the results of a follow-up study of the i3 Future Forward grant, which was comprised primarily of students of color (Jones & Christian, 2021). In that study, students who started Future Forward with above average literacy skills continued to benefit from their participation five years after finishing the program. Students with below average literacy skills did not. However, students with above average literacy, regardless of whether they participated in Future Forward, still tended to fall further behind in their reading development over time as they progressed through their schooling (Jones et al., in press). Students in Future Forward did not fall as far behind, however.

The results of the current study, the 2019–20 evaluation, and the follow-up i3 study suggest Future Forward can be part of a solution for helping Black students develop and retain their literacy skills. However, Future Forward is not enough to overcome inequitable school quality (Hanselman & Fiel, 2017; Merolla & Jackson, 2019), the impact of a pandemic (Pier et al., 2021), and a structurally racist and biased education system (Levine, 2020). Even considering the large impact on Black students meeting the reading benchmark at the start of the year, only seven of the 14 Future Forward participants remained above benchmark at the end of the year.

Investigating how and why participation in Future Forward was particularly impactful to Black students will be part of future research. Work on how schools underserve Black students informs programs like Future Forward's approach to school–family–community partnerships. Existing research demonstrates how the implicit bias of teachers negatively affects Black students as early as prekin-

dergarten (Gilliam, 2005; Zinsser et al., 2022). Teachers expect less success and more trouble from Black students (Gershenson & Papageorge, 2018). Non-Black teachers hold lower expectations for their Black students when compared to their Black colleagues (Gershenson et al., 2016). Witnessing a student's success in Future Forward may help overcome this tendency by helping teachers in their journey to humanize all students and families in ways often antithetical to modern-day race relations (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004; Legette et al., 2022).

The focus of Future Forward on engaging families has the potential to mitigate barriers to their participation in their student's school often experienced by Black parents. Black parents may have histories of negative school interactions, microaggressions, stereotypes, and methods of exclusion and intimidation from school staff (Koonce & Harper, 2005; Piper et al., 2022; Posey-Maddox et al., 2021). The school and community-centered exchanges facilitated by Future Forward with families potentially counter these ongoing barriers through contextual adaptation to authentic parent engagement and facilitating collective decision-making in a student's educational experience (Huguley et al., 2021). Ultimately, all parents want to be treated with respect by teachers (Lindle, 1989), and the Future Forward partnership approach may create space for that to occur. Future research on Future Forward will explore how the school–community–family partnership approach changes the ecology around students and may provide more clarity to the results of this and other studies of Future Forward.

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Mi Pequeńo Mundo: An Evaluation of a Pilot Montessori-Based Home Visiting Program for Families With Children 0–3 Years

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Abstract

This article describes the evaluation of a pilot Montessori-based home visiting program called Mi Pequeño Mundo (MPM) aimed at promoting optimal child development in Spanish-speaking Latine children from birth to three years old in Hennepin County, Minnesota. Phase I included World Cafés and interviews to gather Centro Tyrone Guzman (CTG) stakeholder feedback on program design. Thematic analysis informed the development of the program and implementation approach. Primary input included topics for curriculum development. Phase II included training three bilingual/bicultural community members for home visiting (Conectores), recruiting families, data collection, and family visits. Feasibility and acceptability measures plus pre–post assessment of knowledge, self-efficacy, mindfulness parenting, child assessment, and process data were collected. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative summaries highlighted themes from open-ended questions. Phase II included training of three Conectores who worked with 15 families for up to 20 weekly remote visits each (due to COVID-19 protocols). Participating families were 100% satisfied with the program and said they would recommend it to a friend. Program outputs/goals were met upon the completion of the pilot (Phase II) indicating the program was feasible and acceptable. The full implementation phase of MPM was modified based on the first two phases and programming was scaled to reach the broader Spanish-speaking Latine community living in Minnesota.

Key Words: home visits, early childhood education, Latine families, evaluation, Montessori-based program evaluation, Mi Pequeño Mundo, children

Background

The Latine populations in the United States have limited access to opportunities that optimize early childhood development, resulting in future social and health disparities (American Psychological Association, 2012). Successful early childhood development includes "nurturing care," meaning opportunities for learning, safety and security, responsive caring, good health, and adequate nutrition (Nurturing Care, n.d.). Positive early childhood experiences contribute to achieving developmental milestones such as language development and social–emotional regulation (Davies et al., 2021; Mendez Smith, 2020) and also have a positive impact on school readiness (Davies et al., 2021). Children who do not have the opportunity to receive nurturing care during their first three years risk missing key developmental milestones which may limit their full potential (Centro Tyrone Guzman, 2019).

Many Latine children in the U.S. enter kindergarten performing below the average compared to their non-Latine, White peers (Palermo et al., 2018) which increases the risk of low educational achievement (Quirk et al., 2016) and may increase the risk of poor health outcomes. In the state of Minnesota in 2021, 26.8% of third grade Hispanic students achieved reading standards compared to 56.8% of White non-Hispanic students (MN Compass, n.d.). In mathematics, 18.9% of Hispanic eighth graders in Minnesota achieved math standards compared to 46.5% of White non-Hispanic students (MN Compass, n.d.).

These disadvantages may be caused by barriers such as economic hardship, cultural stressors (Palermo et al., 2018), and traumatic immigration experiences lived by the students' parents (Centro Tyrone Guzman, 2019; Palermo et al., 2018). Other factors that influence early childhood development include maternal health, parental involvement, income, and family acculturation status (Bierman et al., 2021; Nix et al., 2018; Palermo et al., 2018). Educational attainment is itself a key social determinant of health and has an inverse and interconnected relationship with health and longevity (Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018). Consequently, promoting early childhood development in the Latine community is one strategy to reduce long-term inequities.

Ansari and Winsler (2014) showed that Latine children enrolled in Montessori programs increased their academic and behavioral skills after one year of enrollment. Its curriculum involves child-driven activities, individualized learning, and fine motor skill development while taking into consideration

cultural backgrounds (Ansari & Winsler, 2014). Therefore, further implementation of a Montessori curriculum should be evaluated as a means to promote early child development in Latine children.

About Centro Tyrone Guzman

Centro Tyrone Guzman (CTG) is a Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization that focuses on contributing to the well-being and full participation of Latine families through education, health, and wellness (Centro Tyrone Guzman, n.d.). The organization offers programs for all ages to carry out its mission. Their early childhood program focuses on improving maternal health and academically supporting Latine children ages 33 months to six years utilizing the Montessori curriculum. The maternal health program seeks to connect mothers to resources during pregnancy and thus improve maternal and child outcomes.

Mi Pequeño Mundo (MPM; translates as My Little World) was created in the summer of 2020 to expand CTG's early childhood and maternal health programs to the community. MPM is funded through the Community Solutions grant of the Minnesota Department of Health which aims to reduce disparities and improve child development in minority groups in the state. The purpose of MPM is to proactively support early childhood development in Spanish-speaking Latine parents with children between the ages of birth to three years old living in Hennepin County and rural counties in Minnesota. By doing so, MPM will help address the inequality in access and provide early childhood support to Spanish-speaking Latine parents and their children (Centro Tryone Guzman, 2019).

MPM program implementation was divided into three phases. Phase I (formative, Year 1) consisted of gathering community feedback to inform program design. Phase II (pilot, Year 2) involved piloting the program design and identifying room for improvement. The pilot home visiting program began in September 2021 and concluded in March 2022. Phase III (Year 3) began in June 2022, and its focus was on the full implementation of the program and expanding program access, which will be disseminated at a future date. The purpose of this current evaluation was to assess if the MPM program design during Phase I and implementation during Phase II was feasible and acceptable for the families and Conectores (which translates as Connectors) involved in the program.

Methods

The evaluation followed a formative evaluation design and mixed methods analysis using program data from the formative and pilot implementation

phases. Data collected during the program included quantitative data (visit lengths, assessments, and surveys) and qualitative data from focus groups and open-ended questions from surveys.

Participants

In Phase I, five CTG staff and two mothers from CTG programming were trained for five hours on how to facilitate World Cafés and phone interviews. After a practice World Café, two virtual World Cafés (October 9 and 23, 2020) were held with 24 community members. The first World Café had 10 participants and lasted 1 hour and 45 minutes, while the second World Café had 14 attendees and lasted two hours. Participants who attended the World Cafés included mothers ($n = 20$) and fathers ($n = 4$). Phone interviews with an additional five men, all fathers, lasted 30 minutes each.

Table 1. Demographics of Pilot Program Participants

Parent Demographics		
Total Parents	$n = 35$	
Mothers	$n = 20$	
Fathers	$n = 15$	
Average Age		SD
Mother	32	7.03
Father	35.9	7.76
Education Level	N	(%)
None	1	5%
Primary	6	30%
High School	10	50%
Associates degree	2	10%
Graduate or professional degree	1	5%
USA Residence Length in Years	N	(%)
Less than 5	6	35%
5 to 10	4	24%
11+	7	41%
Average	*8.8*	
SD	*5.9*	
Support Available *(Family Near)*	N	(%)
No	6	33%
Yes	12	67%

Families (n = 20) in the CTG community were invited to participate in the program for Phase II. Of these families, 15 completed the program. Most (n = 13) families completed 18–20 home visits, and two families completed 15–16 visits due to other commitments. The retention of the 15 families signifies a 75% retention rate. Table 1 summarizes who the families were.

There were 20 mothers (mean age 32; SD 7.03) and 15 fathers (mean age 35.9; SD 7.76) involved in program activities. The majority of parents reported having completed high school, have lived in the United States for over 11 years, and had family living nearby. Many (60%) of the families reported having a family size of four or fewer. Furthermore, 85% of the families reported that they had children under the age of three, and one (5%) family was expecting a baby at the start of the program. Additionally, 40% of the families indicated they have children over the age of three.

Formative Phase (Phase I)

The focus of the formative phase was to obtain feedback and input on topics that would be relevant and of interest to the target population and shape program design. An advisory board was convened to provide recommendations and feedback throughout the design and implementation of the program. It was composed of members of the CTG community including staff of the early childhood program, parents, members of the board of directors, an evaluation team, and a child health academic.

Five staff members at CTG were trained in administering World Cafés and phone interviews. World Cafés are a method of qualitative data collection that involve the participation of community members to highlight relevant topics within the community. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling within the CTG network and were over the age of 18. Out of the 16 Latine families and their children invited, 10 participated in the first World Café; 14 out of the 23 families invited participated in the second World Café.

The first World Café included families who were already part of other CTG programs, while the second World Café included families from the broader Latine community. The World Cafés had three discussion areas: (1) review an infographic of data on the Latine community and discuss what was surprising, what is needed to help children be healthy, what challenges exist, and what is being done to address the challenges; (2) after a description of MPM, participants were asked if the concept will be acceptable to the community, what topics the Conectores need to know, and what barriers and solutions may be present for Conectores; and (3) participants were asked about the feasibility and acceptability of home visiting and information that will be useful for the Conectores to understand. Each group then generated two to three key

messages and reported to the larger group. Phone interviews were also conducted to include more male perspective on the program and increase father engagement. During the interviews, four open-ended questions such as, "Do you think the use of Conectores will be acceptable in the community?" and "What strategies could be used to increase male engagement in the program?" were asked. Community members who participated in the World Cafés or interviews each received a $75 gift card upon activity completion. The findings from the World Café were compiled and used to develop the areas of training the Conectores needed to be prepared for MPM.

The training included topics such as breastfeeding, relaxation and mindfulness, maternal and child health, nutrition, community resources, home visiting basics, and how to create activities that align with the Montessori philosophy of child development. The training was designed to be delivered in six sessions in eight weeks during Phase II; however, this was expanded to 14 sessions due to content and time constraints. The structure and content of the training modules and program delivery were vetted by the advisory board.

Phase I was assessed by examining outputs including the completion of the World Café training, the number of World Cafés completed, the number of attendees, the training curriculum prepared, and the vetting by the advisory board at each phase. Documentation was done through secondary data checks such as advisory board meeting notes, meeting agendas, and notes taken during World Cafés.

Pilot Implementation (Phase II)

Year 2 (July 1, 2021–June 31, 2022) of the program consisted in training the Conectores, recruiting families to participate in the pilot, and implementing the home visiting program. The primary outcomes of the pilot were to assess family satisfaction and the feasibility of the program activities. Three bilingual and bicultural community members were hired by CTG as Conectores. The Conectores completed the training program that was delivered by CTG staff and community experts on the topics.

After the Conectores completed their training, they were in charge of the recruitment and consent process for families, and each was later paired with six to seven families. Families who are familiar with CTG were contacted for participation in MPM, and 20 families consented to participate in the pilot. The inclusion criteria included Spanish-speaking families who were expecting or had children between the ages of birth to three years of age. Participants received a $75 gift card upon activity completion. Due to COVID-19, home visits were no longer feasible. Conectores met with families via video conference, phone calls, or text messages. Families and Conectores met weekly

for 20 weeks (approximately 5 months) and worked together on goal setting, connecting families to appropriate resources, and completing assessments and weekly visiting forms.

The first weeks of working with families were structured to collect established assessments, set expectations, set goals, and connect families to community resources. After these were completed, by the third week, Conectores introduced families to the four Montessori principles and started planning activities that aligned with their goals. If the family was interested in having their child practice fine motor skills, Conectores would guide families in activities such as peeling an egg, coloring from bottom to top and left to right, or letting the child dress by themselves. Other activities mentioned were visual development, talking to babies with respect and practicing eye contact, and looking for Montessori educational resources for potty training. Conectores would follow up with families to check on the progress on the suggested activity.

Measurement Phase II

Program outputs included program satisfaction, percent that would recommend to a friend, and retention rate. To determine program satisfaction and recommendation, a satisfaction survey was created and disseminated at the end of the 20-week program via Google form and administered by the Conectores. In some instances, the families completed the form by themselves, and in some cases it was read to them by the Conectores. If a family did not have access to the internet, the family was provided with low-cost internet connection service or a hotspot. The survey posed questions including asking participants to rate the program overall and program convenience, then asked additional open-ended questions regarding how the program helped them in their role as parents. The program retention rate was measured by the percentage of families that enrolled and completed the program.

Baseline and endline data collection was implemented by the Conectores using Google forms as the interface for data collection. All forms were translated into Spanish and were also available in English. Several assessments were collected at baseline and follow-up over two sessions and used to assess changes in families and identify program gaps during the pilot phase. *Parenting Information Sources* asked whether parents receive their infant care information through formal or informal sources (Lee, 2016). The *Early Parenting Practices Index (EPPI)* is a 13-item scale that asks about parental practices relating to newborn care in questions such as "Does your baby sleep in the same room, and in which position do they usually sleep" (Lee, 2016). Meanwhile, the *Parental Self-Efficacy Tasks Index* is a 26-item tool that measures areas such as nurture and routine (Van Rijen et al., 2014) and was used for parents with

toddlers (1–3 years old). The *Karitane Parenting Practice Scale (KPCS)* was used to assess observed parenting self-efficacy in parents with newborns (Lee, 2016). This 15-item validated assessment utilizes a four-point scale—the higher the score, the higher the observed parental self-efficacy. The Spanish adaptation of the *Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (MIPQ)* measures parenting involvement and discipline through 28 questions with four response categories (Orue et al., 2020).

Finally, the *Ages and Stages Questionnaire, 3rd edition (ASQ-3)* and *ASQ Social–Emotional, 2nd edition (ASQ-SE-2)* were also used as tools to determine a child's developmental scores. ASQs were completed by parents or received from a recent visit to a care provider. Conectores documented each contact including date, mode of contact (phone, video, text), topics covered, referrals, and other relevant notations using Google Forms.

Phase II feasibility was determined through the following outputs: Conectores training outcomes (duration, competency, and training objectives), number of families recruited, number of families who completed the program (retention rate), number of home visits, number of referrals made, supervisory meetings and assessments, and surveys completed. Data for these outputs were collected through surveys and program tracking documents such as monthly and weekly home visiting forms completed by Conectores.

A virtual focus group was facilitated by CTG staff in Spanish and took place at the halfway mark (mid-December) of the pilot program to assess progress and make any necessary adjustments. Families were asked nine questions with respective probes that touched on why they wanted to be part of the program, their expectations before starting, what type of Montessori-based activities they had tried during the program, and their relationship with the Conectores. Notes taken during the focus group were shared with the evaluating team for translation and analysis, as a team member is bilingual. Finally, a seven-item satisfaction survey was sent out through a Google form to families to assess program satisfaction and whether they would recommend the program to other families.

Analysis

Descriptive statistics of the demographics, visit length, assessments completed per visit, the number of training hours, hours of supervision, and percent satisfaction were run. Open-ended questions were categorized and summarized under major themes. Excel was used as a tool to analyze the quantitative portion of the study, with data coded to find themes and highlight the relevant information. Validated assessments were collected and scored according to their scoring criteria and a comparison between baseline and follow-up was

done when appropriate (Lee, 2016; Orue et al., 2020; Van Rijen et al., 2014). A two-tailed paired *t*-test was completed using Excel to understand the differences between pre and post for the MIPQ assessment. This evaluation was deemed exempt by the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board.

Results

The two virtual World Cafés provided feedback on topics of interest to the community and expressed support for MPM implementation. The phone interviews were used to learn more about how to involve men in the program. Based on community feedback and expertise from the advisory board, the curriculum for the pilot phase was created. Some topics of interest and a few ways to involve men are noted in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Program Elements Provided by Participating Families During World Cafés and Phone Interviews

Program Elements	Preparation and tips for labor Information about pregnancy including hormonal changes Breastfeeding support Typical child development Montessori philosophy approach Healthy nutrition Mental health and social support Bonding techniques for women and men with infants (skin-to-skin) Sexual education Protecting the child from abuse How to access special education specifically for Latine children How to engage with your child's school
Opportunities for Male Involvement	Classes on emotional development Male household beyond financial provider Playing with child Opportunities for men to meet with other men to talk about being fathers General education of fathers on child development Value of men Strategies for couples to stay connected Attend classes with women

Feasibility

Curriculum Development and Delivery

The feedback received during the World Cafés and phone interviews indicated that families would welcome the MPM program and Conectores.

Participants also provided recommendations for topics to cover during the Conectores training and home visits. These comments were used to design Phase II activities and are described next.

Table 3. Summary of Training Modules for Conectores and Feedback for Improvement

Training Topics	Hours	Preparedness and Suggestions Summary
Pregnancy Training	7	Conectores felt prepared. Information was appropriately organized and disseminated. **Suggestions:** Focus on health services specifically mental health services.
Breastfeeding	4	Conectores felt prepared after training. Content and materials were appropriate. They appreciated the facilitator being available to them for questions. **Suggestions:** Have families meet with the facilitator of breastfeeding training as part of the program. Schedule time with this facilitator as professional development time so that information given to families is always accurate.
Technology Training	4	Conectores felt prepared and comfortable using Google Workspace. **Suggestions:** None.
Relaxation and Mindfulness Training	2	Conectores felt prepared after training. **Suggestions:** Review training every so often to remind Conectores of their own mental health. Include visual material on how to implement mindfulness during the program.
Home Visiting Basics	11	Conectores felt prepared after training. The training was well delivered, and the topics were relevant. **Suggestions:** Include ways to remind families that they should be committed to participating in every visit.
Community Resources Training	2	Conectores felt prepared and the facilitator of the training provided valuable information. **Suggestions:** None.
Nutrition Training	2.5	Conectores felt prepared after training. The training was informative and valuable. **Suggestions:** The training was long for only one session. Include recipe books in Spanish that families can use for meal planning.
Intro to Home Visit Pilot Program	7	Conectores felt prepared and are appreciative of the support provided by each other. **Suggestions:** Reduce the number of assessments to complete. Discuss Zoom features that can be used during home visits.
Montessori Philosophy Training	2.5	Conectores felt prepared for training however, there was mention of having additional training about the topic. **Suggestions:** Include more information regarding specific activities or concepts for ages 0-1 year in future training. Include hands-on material. Have a workshop delivered by a Montessori guide (ages 0-3).

Training for the Conectores was divided into nine modules over 14 sessions. Modules were delivered by professionals in their respective fields. Training took a total of 42 hours to complete across several weeks based on trainer availability. All Conectores completed 100% of the training modules. Post-training feedback from Conectores indicated that they felt prepared and also resulted in a few suggestions to improve training in the future. Table 3 summarizes the hours, comments, and feedback from each module.

The Home Visiting Basics training took the most time and included topics such as anti-bias training, domestic abuse, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) for bodily fluids. Although it was not possible to determine whether the training met the training objectives set at the beginning of the program due to data collection format, based on the feedback received, Conectores felt that the training was appropriate and well delivered. Additionally, the Conectores felt that they could ask questions and get support in areas where they felt less confident.

Table 4. Summary of 20-Week Mi Pequeño Mundo Home Visiting Program

Home Visit		
Total Families	$n = 15$	
Total Contacts	$n = 445$	
Time Spent on Families	N	(%)
Contacting	66	15
Follow-Ups	79	18
Home Visits	292	67
Home Visit Duration (Mins)	N	(%)
Less or equal to 60	199	68
60-120	90	31
More than 120	3	1
Average	58.1	
SD	23.1	

Home Visits

Due to COVID-19 safety precautions, the home visits occurred remotely. The home visiting program lasted 20 weeks with a total of 292 home visits. Each Conectore averaged 19 visits per month, and the average home visit duration was 58 minutes (SD 23.1). It is worth noting that Conectores spent 15% of the time contacting (calling/leaving voice messages, texting) and 18% following up (on home visiting items) with the families as seen in Table 4. The

majority of contacts were through video calls (40.7%). Phone calls (28.4%), text messages (13.3%), and a combination of all types (17.4%) were also used to connect with families.

Fathers' presence during the home visits was recorded a total of 16 times. Regarding referrals, a total of 87 referrals were made during the home visiting period. The most common types of referrals included healthcare (36%), breastfeeding or food-related (32%), and early childhood related (10%). Furthermore, out of the 87 referrals made, 77 (88.5%) of the referrals were followed up to ensure that families were connected to the resources needed.

Supervision of Conectores

Ongoing support was provided to Conectores during the home visiting period by CTG program administrators. Table 5 summarizes the support provided to Conectores through supervisor meetings. A total of 121 meetings included daily check-ins and individual meetings. Supervisory meeting topics ranged from connecting families to resources to developing Conectores' skills to improve contact or connection with families.

Table 5. Summary of Supervisory Meetings With Conectores (n = 3) From the 20-Week Home Visiting Program

Supervision				
Total meetings	n = 121	Total Hours	93	
Supervisory Meetings	#	**Total Hrs.**	Mean	SD
Daily Check-Ins	99	66.6	0.67	0.27
Individual Meetings	16	19.6	1.22	0.60
Meetings with New Staff	5	5.8	1.15	0.49
Misc. Meetings	1	1	n/a	n/a
Meeting Topic Themes	#	Examples		
Connect families to resources	35	Housing, utilities, immigration, and food		
Mental health support for families	3	Post-partum depression in parents		
Develop staff skills	4	Family communication, setting boundaries and gender-based violence		
Programming Support	5	Print materials & forms needed		
Supplies for families	4	Diapers & clothing		
Health topics for families	1	Asthma, COVID-19 & special needs		
About CTG Programs	2	Enrolling in Centro Programs		
Develop family skills	3	House management and de-escalation of stressful moments		

Assessments

Results from the survey assessments completed during baseline and endline are noted below.

ASQ-3 and ASQ-SE: The results for the ASQ-3 assessment (given at baseline only) indicated that the majority of children appeared to be on schedule in the areas of communication (93%, n = 13), gross motor (86%, n = 12), fine motor (86%, n = 12), problem-solving (93%, n = 13), and personal social (93%, n = 13). In the area of problem-solving, one (7%) had a score that fell into the category "professional assessment recommended." ASQ-SE scores had similar results to the ASQ-3 scores. Most children were on schedule (81%; n = 13). Two (13%) had a score that placed them in the "provide learning activities" category, and one scored under "professional assessment recommended."

Karitane Parenting Practice Scale (KPCS): (n = 20) completed at baseline only. Results indicated that 45% (n = 9) of parents perceived themselves as having a mild lack of confidence in parenting; 35% (n = 7) had strong confidence, 15% (n = 3) moderate lack of confidence, and 5% (n = 1) had a severe lack of confidence.

Parental Self-Efficacy: (n = 8) completed at baseline only with parents who had toddlers. Results indicated that parents scored low on discipline [Range 6–30 (mean 16.3)] and routine [Range 6–30 (mean 19.4)]. Nurture [Range 6–30 (mean 30.9)] and play [Range 6–30 (mean 25.8)] had higher scores.

Of the 15 families who completed the home visiting program, 14 completed the baseline and follow-up assessments. Results are noted below.

Parenting Information Sources: At baseline, the top five most common sources of information included pediatricians (n = 14), their parents (i.e., children's grandparents; n = 12), nurses at pediatric clinics (n = 12), partner or spouse (n = 11), and the internet (n = 10). At follow up, families indicated that they received information from parents (n = 13), pediatrician (n = 13), nurse at pediatric clinic (n = 11), internet (n = 10), and parenting classes (n = 10). For parents that indicated the internet as a source of information, YouTube videos (n = 7), Facebook (n = 2), and a Google search (n = 8) were the most common responses.

Knowledge Assessment: At baseline, families had indicated a need for or interest in gaining additional knowledge around multiple topics including health, nutrition, child development, and Montessori domains. During the follow-up period, families shifted from need and interest to strength in topics such as child development, community resources, and Montessori domains. However, health, housing, and transportation remained areas of need or interest.

Early Parenting Practices Index (EPPI): Baseline results indicated that parents were not 100% compliant in the areas of safety (sleep and car seat utili-

zation), development promotion, and feeding. Follow-up results demonstrated that families remained not 100% compliant, particularly in the areas of sleep (baby's sleeping position and where) and maintaining a regular schedule. An increase in compliance was seen in feeding habits (86% compliant) and car seat utilization (100% compliant).

Mindfulness in Parenting Questionnaire (MIPQ): Being in the moment had a significant (p = 0.002) increase from baseline (mean 54.0; SD 6.54) to the follow-up period (mean 60.0; SD 7.35). Meanwhile, a decrease in parental self-efficacy from baseline (mean 53.6; SD 29) to follow-up (mean 47.9; SD 15) was observed. However, results indicated that this decrease was not significant (p = 0.271).

Acceptability

Focus Group

Ten mothers attended the focus group facilitated by the program administrator. Major themes from the focus group included program design and satisfaction, qualities possessed by Conectores, and support received in areas such as early childhood development and health. Table 7 has quotes from focus group participants for each theme.

Satisfaction Survey

There were 16 respondents to the satisfaction survey. Results indicated that 100% were satisfied with the program, that their expectations were met, that they would recommend it to a friend, and they felt that the program provided tools for their day-to-day life as parents. Most (88%; n = 14) indicated that the program was convenient. Those who indicated that the program was not convenient stated that "calls were too long and my baby cries" and "I did not have enough time for the visits, but I wish I had enough time."

When asked if the program had helped them in their lives as parents, some answers included:

Gave me ideas about how to help my daughter enjoy food more. Gave me tools to develop her emotional health. I felt supported during motherhood's frustrating moments.

I learned many new things about pregnancy and breastfeeding, and now with my baby, I am learning new things about [early childhood] stimulation. I loved the program.

Finally, during advisory board meetings held during the program, all three of the Conectores reported that there were too many surveys to complete during the home visits. They also indicated that the home visit duration of 60 minutes was too long and that the frequency of once a week was too often.

Table 7. Quotes from the Focus Group of MPM Mothers

Program Design	"The first weeks of data collection were tough. I would suggest creating different methods to collect the data depending on the preference of the participant. For some people, it may be easier." "It would have been great to be able to have the visit in person to observe the behavior of the mother and daughter and to be able to give suggestions." "It is fine virtual and also once a week."
Program Satisfaction	"...I feel confident, a respectful relationship has been established [with Conectore]. The resources received have been useful. And I am satisfied with the resources received." "Of course, I will recommend it. Because it generates independence for the children."
Conectores Qualities	"It has been a good relationship with the teacher [Conectore]; she is respectful, friendly, and patient." "…she is very respectful, empathetic not only with the needs of the child but of the family in general. She is very consistent and professional."
Early Childhood Development	"Has received support in the knowledge of taking turns and different daily routines like food, learning and using the toilet, transitioning from diapers, and working with independence." "Implement independence such as dressing alone and differentiating the food's name and bath time. It is a challenge, sorting dirty clothes, or even gets confused with the fruits' names. More consistency because she also lives part of the time with her father."
Support Received	Maternal and child health: "…encourage breastfeeding and not focus on your previous breastfeeding experience. I feel supported." "I want to add that it has helped me a lot manage anxiety regarding the subject of food." Resources: "You are learning new skills to help and support the growth and learning of your children and your own. I also needed and received family support." "[Conectore] has explained to me the portions, the importance of respecting the autonomy of the body, and has helped me to investigate strategies for eating."

Discussion

Programs that support maternal health and mother–child interactions may promote positive early childhood development and promote academic well-being (Palermo et al., 2018). The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the

feasibility and acceptability of the Montessori-based home visiting program "Mi Pequeño Mundo." All of the outputs and goals for the formative and pilot phase were accomplished. This means that, based on program resources, a weekly home visiting program is feasible. However, based on program design feedback, home visiting frequency and duration should be modified to fit families' schedules. Additional recommended updates to the program included reducing the number of surveys and changing the program format (in-person vs. remote visits). Given the remote format, opportunities for male engagement may have been narrowed. Therefore, increasing father or father figure engagement in home visits should be an area of focus in future programs (Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

Baseline and follow-up assessments provided valuable information regarding program design. Parents look up to their own parents, healthcare professionals, and the internet as sources to learn more about parenting practices. This is consistent with other research in the Latine community (Criss et al., 2015). The Conectores could incorporate this information into their visits, utilizing the trusting relationships they build with parents to guide families toward trusted sources of information.

The knowledge assessment indicated areas of future program focus such as health, transportation, and housing which are factors that impact this community (Perez-Brescia, 2022). The knowledge assessment is consequently a great tool for program design as it allows Conectores to plan their visits based on family needs. KPCS, EPPI, and Parental Self-Efficacy are also useful tools to identify areas of support. Findings indicated that parents need support in sleeping practices, feeding, routine, and discipline. However, completing these assessments is time-intensive, and based on feedback, the number of assessments should be reduced to focus on other activities. Finally, results from the ASQs indicated that most of the children in the program are on schedule; these are great tools to assess a child's needs and allow Conectores to plan activities and connect parents with the appropriate resources.

Results from the MIPQ baseline and follow-up analysis indicated that there was a significant improvement in "being in the moment" in parents that participated in the program. Although parental self-efficacy decreased at follow-up, this change was not statistically significant. Consequently, no conclusions can be made as to why this occurred. A larger sample size may be needed to understand this change.

Community feedback was used to develop the Conectores training and inform the topics that would be covered during the home visits. By incorporating community feedback, MPM program design and Conectores were able to deliver desired resources and support to participating parents and children. Thus,

our program also provides a real-world example of co-designing programs with and for communities (Mapp & Bergman, 2021; Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2023). Overall, program participants were satisfied with the program, indicated that they had learned valuable information to promote their child's development, and stated that they would recommend the program to a friend. This indicates participant support for the program and speaks to program acceptability.

Limitations

The sample size was small, and the program duration was short; therefore, we could not assess long-term impacts. However, with the mixed methods methodology and feedback from Conectores and participating families, we were able to triangulate results that indicated that the program is feasible and acceptable in the target population.

Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made based on evaluation results. First, in order to improve program delivery, survey assessments should be revised to include surveys that allow staff to collect necessary information about families. For instance, baseline assessments such as the Knowledge Assessment, MIPQ, and ASQs could guide programming and areas of focus with families. These could then be re-taken at the end-line stage to assess program efficacy. Furthermore, baseline and end-line assessments along with proper documentation will assist in tracking family goal completion, something that was not part of Phases I and II but may be useful to assessing program success in Phase III.

Male family involvement in activities was not tracked in Phases I and II but is something that can be done for the full implementation phase. Tracking male involvement in program activities would provide more information regarding how and in which activities Latino fathers and father figures engage with their family and children thus informing activity development. Finally, it is important to consider the number of families that each Conectore can work with. For the pilot phase, Conectores did not provide feedback regarding the number of families assigned. If the program expands to serve more families, it will be necessary to evaluate this ratio.

Conclusions and Future Implications

All (100%) of the participating families in the pilot phase of MPM, a 20-week Montessori-based home visiting program, indicated that they were satisfied with the program and would recommend it to a friend. Families were grateful to have the opportunity to work with the Conectores and felt supported during their journey as future mothers or mothers of children between the ages of birth

to three. Furthermore, based on the resources available, most of the program goals and outcomes were accomplished, indicating high program feasibility.

MPM is currently in the full implementation phase. Home visits are still completed virtually, however, in-person workshops are being offered. The MPM program could be replicated and scaled to reach more members of this community, and then the impact of program activities in a wider setting could be evaluated. Programs that support Latine parents and promote early childhood development increase avenues of support to families and may reduce barriers and challenges faced, leading to more positive outcomes and reducing social disparities.

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Cultural Models of Parent–School Involvement: A Study of African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic Parents and Teachers in an Urban U.S. School District

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study explored cultural models of parent–school involvement. African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic parents, along with teachers, were recruited from an urban school district. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol based on Joyce Epstein's (1995) framework for parent–school involvement, and their responses were thematically coded. Statistical and qualitative analyses of responses revealed significant group differences in ideas about involvement and education across the domains of parenting, communicating, and learning at home, but not for volunteering. The findings suggest that conventional beliefs and practices of parent–school involvement in the U.S. are not universal among parents of different cultural groups, and discrepancies between parents' and teachers' ideas about involvement may therefore emerge as well. The implications of these findings for schools' efforts to involve parents are discussed.

Key Words: parent involvement, ethnotheories, culture, parents, teachers, cultural models, African American, Caribbean, Hispanic, families, urban district

Introduction

There is widespread agreement in the United States today that parents' involvement in their children's education is beneficial for children's success in school and beyond. Despite apparently general acceptance of this proposition, however, there is a surprising lack of consensus about what parental involvement actually consists of, or how much involvement is helpful. Definitions vary from direct involvement in activities at the child's school (Child Trends, 2013), to a variety of parent–child activities and interactions outside of school that are intended to support the child's successful development (see El Nokali et al., 2010). Feuerstein (2000) concluded, on the basis of his review of the literature, that parent involvement is a multidimensional construct, from which various lists of activities and perceptions can be derived. Similarly, Wilder (2014) comments that "parental involvement is a complex concept that encompasses various components, such as participation in school activities, homework assistance, and academic expectations for children" (p. 379). Regardless of exactly how parental involvement is conceptualized in various studies, however, Wilder's (2014) meta-synthesis of the results of nine previous meta-analyses found a consistently positive relationship between parents' involvement and their children's academic achievement across all grade levels and ethnic groups.

Reflecting this multidimensional conceptualization of parental involvement, Epstein's frequently cited model includes six types of involvement: parenting, communicating with the child's school, volunteering and participating in school activities, engaging with learning at home, being involved in decision-making for the school, and collaborating with the community to coordinate resources and services for families, students, and schools (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Epstein & Sheldon, 2022). Included in each of these types are practices in which families, schools, and communities can engage. It follows that such practices may not influence students' success directly, but they impact children's connectedness to school and ownership of their own success. It is important to note that scholars have made distinctions between involvement and engagement as they relate to parents' and families' roles in children's education and school experience (see Ishimaru, 2019). We use the terms involvement, engagement, and partnership throughout the manuscript, as all these terms are used in the literature on this general topic and since many of the ideas and behaviors examined in this study relate to all three constructs.

Epstein's model has been used for research in a variety of cultures and places; for example, researchers at Doha University in Qatar used it to explore Doha parents' and school staff members' perceptions of family–school relationships (Ihmeideh et al., 2020). Other research informed by Epstein's model of family–

school partnerships includes a study of parent engagement with their children's transition to high school based on a diverse national sample of schools that were mostly urban, with high percentages of minority and low-income students (Mac Iver et al., 2015). Some scholars have critiqued Epstein's model and similar traditional models and views of parent involvement as biased against nondominant families (e.g., low-income, cultural minority) and ignoring the inequality they can experience in the U.S. educational system; they have also explored and described ways in which such inequalities can be addressed to promote family engagement and equity for nondominant families (e.g., Fennimore, 2017; Ishimaru, 2019, 2022).

Nonetheless, there are wide socioeconomic and cultural differences in how parents from various backgrounds participate (or not) in their children's school. For example, in her 2000 book *Home Advantage*, Annette Lareau describes how parents in two California communities related to their children's schools. In the first, a middle-class town, parents brought a sense of self-confidence and even superiority to interactions with teachers and administrators, and they both promoted and advocated for their children's academic success. In the second, a working-class community, parents were reluctant to object to the judgments of teachers, and they believed that they could have little influence on their child's progress in school. Teachers generally were more satisfied with the middle-class parents (although some complained about overinvolvement); in contrast, they expressed frustration with the working-class parents, whom they perceived as either too busy or not caring about their children. Although Lareau's observations were carried out over 20 years ago, the realities that they portray continue to be recognizable in classrooms and communities today. In addition, continuing racial/ethnic disparities and the rapid increase of immigrant populations add to complexities regarding how to conceptualize parent involvement and how to promote its hoped-for beneficial effects (Curry & Holter, 2019).

In this article, we explore ideas and reported practices of parents in three diverse cultural groups—African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic—which, together, constitute the majority of families whose children attended the early grades of public schools in an urban New England school district; we also report on a sample of teachers of children of the same ages in the district. Our study is based on the premise that parents' ideas are influenced by shared cultural models of appropriate parental involvement, which are then (at least to some extent) expressed in practices. It is important to understand these diverse cultural models which shape how parents construct their role in their child's education, since they may help schools develop more culturally inclusive family–school partnerships and environments (see McWayne et al., 2022).

As defined originally by cognitive anthropologists, cultural models are understandings shared by members of a cultural group or subgroup that "frame experience, supplying interpretations of that experience and inferences about it, and goals for action" (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 6). Building from this concept, Harkness and Super (1996) have proposed the concept of parental ethnotheories as a theoretical framework that begins with general "all-purpose" cultural models, from which are successively derived particular ideas about aspects of children's development and parents' roles in supporting it, and finally (as modified by particular parent or child characteristics or circumstances) actual practices and developmental outcomes for both the child and the family.

The present article examines patterns of similarity and difference among parents of three cultural groups within one northeastern American city with regard to their ethnotheories and reported practices concerning parental involvement in their children's education. Additionally, we investigate the extent to which teachers employed in the same school district (although not teachers of the children whose parents participated in the study) may share distinctive ethnotheories concerning parental involvement. Although there is evidence of cross-cultural variability in teachers' ideas (Edwards et al., 2014; Harkness et al., 2007), we expected that teachers' professional training and immediate collegial environment would also influence their ideas about parental involvement, thus creating a common shared set of beliefs and practices in this domain. As Hill (2022) describes in a commentary on parental involvement in the U.S., school-based perspectives on parents' role in education are dominated by a U.S. cultural script, which may not capture the various ways that parents from diverse backgrounds conceptualize their role in their child's education. In addition, early grade public school teachers in the U.S. today are predominantly White, which could also influence their cultural models of family–school relationships (see McWayne et al., 2022).

In the U.S., teachers have the opportunity to build relationships with parents of many different cultural backgrounds, including those whose voices are less often heard. Exploration of the degree of "fit" between teachers' and parents' ethnotheories, thus, may contribute to greater insights into the challenges inherent in cross-cultural communication and to possible avenues for increasing meaningful parental involvement in their children's education.

Parental Involvement and Children's School Success Among Diverse Cultural Groups

Research has documented that parents in diverse cultural groups in the U.S. are involved in their child's school through a variety of different practices. For example, the African American parents in Jackson and Remillard's

2005 study were involved at home by assisting their children with homework and setting up learning activities for their children outside of school. In another study, Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008) found that African American parents of middle school children talked about assisting their children with homework, finding tutors for their children, participating in school decision-making organizations, and showing interest in and support for their children's education. Poza et al.'s (2014) study found that Latino immigrant families asked their children's teacher, as well as family and friends, questions about their children's progress and how to support learning; they also asked other community members how to navigate the education system and school. These parents talked about how they attended events at school and outside that helped them learn how to support their children's learning, and they tried to enhance and augment learning by enrolling their children in extra programs and finding ways to improve the quality of their child's education. Smith et al.'s (2008) study found that Hispanic parents believed they should supervise their children while they worked on homework, prepare their children for school, and motivate their children to work hard and behave well. These parents also mentioned several factors that inhibited their involvement, including limited communication from the school in Spanish, inability of the parent to speak and understand English, and a reluctance to challenge the school and advocate for their child. Parents' involvement in their children's elementary school has been linked to lower high school dropout rates and greater high school completion for African American and Latino adolescents (Barnard, 2004), higher GPA and standardized testing scores for African American children (Jeynes, 2016), and fewer social and emotional problems among English language learners (Niehaus & Adelson, 2014).

Several studies have also identified the ways that Caribbean parents are involved in their child's education. For example, teachers described Afro-Caribbean parents of children in their classrooms as engaging in more home-based involvement compared to school-based involvement (Calzada et al., 2015). Roopnarine et al. (2006) found that both Caribbean mothers and fathers (and extended family and non-kin) engaged in academic activities with their children, with mothers spending at least eight hours and fathers spending at least four hours per week in this way. Fathers' school contact, but not mothers', was associated with higher expressive and vocabulary skills. Additional research indicates that Afro-Caribbean parent–child communication about school progress is associated with secondary school achievement (Pinder, 2012).

Asian American parents' patterns of involvement in their children's school show a distinctive profile, including lower levels of contact with their children's schools but a high level of involvement in academic coaching at home, which

has also been found to relate positively to their children's academic success (Sy, 2006). As with the other sociocultural groups, it is important to keep in mind that there are strong subcultural and individual differences within the broad categories described above.

Despite the general findings on the benefits of parental involvement, parents in diverse cultural groups in the U.S. often face barriers to involvement, including limited family resources, contextual barriers such as ethnic biases, and communication barriers due to language differences. For example, Poza et al. (2014) found that time, financial resources, and instances of bias against their children were barriers to Hispanic parents' involvement. In addition, Hispanic families may face language barriers to being involved at school, resulting in needing to have their children translate for them. Similarly, Hispanic parents in Smith et al.'s (2008) study described how their children's school did not provide Spanish-speaking families with important documents such as letters to parents and newsletters translated into Spanish. Language barriers can also affect Asian parents (Cheng & Koblinsky, 2009; Collignon et al., 2001). The low-income immigrant parents in Cheng and Koblinsky's (2009) study reported that their limited English proficiency inhibited their capacity to be involved. Additionally, work schedules made it difficult for these parents to attend meetings at the school. Such socioeconomic factors can also play a part in involvement for other parents. For example, Calzada et al. (2015) found that parent education was positively associated with teacher-rated home-based involvement for both Afro-Caribbean and Latino parents, that income was positively associated with teacher-rated home-based involvement for Latino parents, and that marital status and living with a partner were also positively associated with teacher-rated home-based involvement for Afro-Caribbean parents.

Like parents, teachers have their own ideas about how parents and teachers contribute to the family–school partnership and about child outcomes of parental involvement. A majority of the teachers who participated in a survey study by Ramirez (1999) reported that they believed that it is important for parents and teachers to communicate about problems that teens were facing at home and for parents and teachers to have conferences. Some of the other ideas they agreed with were that it is important for parents to volunteer in school, assist their child with homework, and participate in parent organizations. Taliaferro et al.'s (2009) study showed that school faculty and staff primarily viewed parent involvement as consisting of at-school activities, but about half of the participants also recognized that parents can also be involved outside of the school. Other research has suggested that in some circumstances, low parental involvement may not be detrimental to their children's success in school. For example, Stormont et al. (2013) showed that students whose parents and

teachers had low contact but high comfort with each other (defined as quality of the parent–teacher relationship) were rated as having higher prosocial behaviors, lower disruptive behaviors, and higher emotion regulation compared to both those with high contact and high comfort and those with low contact and low comfort. Context makes a difference too: Bergman (2013) found that preservice teachers completing field experience at an urban school, compared to a suburban school, suggested more strategies for getting parents involved and more forms of communication with parents, such as phone calls, emails, in-person conversations, and home visits. Nevertheless, some teachers worried that their attempts to maintain successful relationships with parents might not succeed. Baum and McMurray-Schwarz's (2004) interviews with preservice student teachers revealed that they were concerned about the relationships they would have with parents and that they expected they would be in conflict with them. More recently, Lasater et al. (2023) interviewed U.S. educators in the context of demographic changes within their school communities. Based on their interviews, some educators expressed a deficit perspective, emphasizing how parents needed to improve and defer to the professional opinions of the school administration. On the other hand, another perspective expressed by other teachers was an understanding of the structural barriers and challenges that their diverse families experienced and an interest in learning from the families and establishing partnerships.

Current Study

As this brief review suggests, there are both sociocultural and role-related variations in ideas about involvement and parent–teacher relationships. This variation has important implications, as it suggests that there may be discrepancies between teachers' and parents' ideas, which can lead to misunderstanding and discord. As noted above, in the U.S., teachers have the opportunity to build relationships with parents of many different cultural backgrounds. Certain cultural groups may find it easier to be involved and build effective parent–school relationships if their ethnotheories of involvement match those of teachers, and the opposite effect may occur when there is discrepancy between the ethnotheories of parents and teachers. A further source of complexity is the presence of students from several different cultural backgrounds within single classrooms. Exploration of these ideas, thus, may contribute to greater insights concerning the challenges inherent in cross-cultural communication between teachers and parents from varied backgrounds (as well as among parents of varying backgrounds) and to possible avenues for increasing meaningful parental involvement in their children's education. The purpose of this study, therefore,

was to examine ethnotheories about involvement and parent–teacher relationships among African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic parents, as well as teachers, from an urban U.S. school district.

Methods

Participants and Setting

Participants in the study were 49 parents (20 African American, 9 Caribbean, 20 Hispanic) of children enrolled in prekindergarten through fifth grade and 20 primary school teachers involved in the public school system of a New England city (see Table 1). At the time of this study, there were around 20,000 students in the school district, 78% of whom were approved for free/reduced lunch; about 51% of the students were Hispanic, 31% were Black, and 12% were White. Although we had planned to sample Asian parents as well, these families made up only about 3% of the school district's student population, and they were not available through our method of recruitment. Thus, inclusion criteria for parent participation in this study were: (1) the participant was the primary caregiver of one or more children in Grades K–4 in the public school district where data were collected; and (2) the participant identified as African American, Caribbean, or Hispanic (or Latino/a). The 20 teachers were all instructors or supervisors for students in Grades K–4 in one of two schools in the same school district. Fifteen of the teachers were female, and five were male. Seven teachers identified as European American, six as Hispanic, and two as African American; the remaining five chose not to identify their racial/ethnic background.

Almost all the parents were recruited at a citywide school center where parents and primary caregivers could register their children for school, submit requests for transfer to other schools, set up bus transportation, and receive other school-related services. Family advocates were at the center to assist with issues of bullying, inform parents of their rights in the education system, and provide resources to families in need. Two parents were recruited during a school breakfast session at a public school. Teacher data were collected at two schools: 13 at a school with primarily African American students, and seven at a mainly Hispanic population school. Although the center was known to some of the co-authors through other previous projects, the first author had no affiliation or previous relationship with the participants, the school center, or the two schools where data were collected; this was also made clear to participants before data were collected.

Table 1. Participant Information by Group

Group	# of Participants	Participant Gender	Immigrant	ESL	Child Grade	Child Gender	Teacher Ethnicity	School Role
African American	20	20 female	0	0	5 prekindergarten, 10 kindergarten, 4 first, 6 second, 1 third, 2 fourth, 3 fifth	12 female 19 male		
Caribbean	9	9 female	7	0	1 prekindergarten, 3 kindergarten, 2 first, 1 second, 1 third, 2 fourth,	7 female 4 male		
Hispanic	20	18 female	4	8	8 kindergarten, 7 first, 3 second, 3 third, 3 fourth	13 female 7 male		
Teacher	20	15 female					6 European American, 2 African American, 1 Jewish, 6 Hispanic, 5 Other/ Did not answer	3 K, 2 1st grade, 2 2nd grade, 1 3rd grade, 3 4th grade, 5 bilingual/ ESL, 1 music, 3 special ed.

Procedures

Participant recruitment and data collection were carried out by the first author of this article, who was an undergraduate student that prospective participants would most likely perceive as a White, young adult male. He visited the center on weekdays from early morning to late afternoon. As parents waited to meet with center staff, the first author approached the parents and informed them that he was an undergraduate student enrolled in a nearby public university, explained details of the study and inclusion/exclusion criteria, obtained participants' verbal consent, and then initiated the interviews, which were audio recorded. For two Spanish-speaking only participants, one interview was translated by an onsite CITI-certified (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, required by the UConn Institutional Review Board) translator and for the other interview a family member translated the interview; and these Spanish interviews were transcribed directly into English by a bilingual speaker. In most cases, the interview took place before or after the parents' meeting if time permitted, in a private space to the side of the reception area. The two parents recruited at a school were present at the school's breakfast session, which parents could attend to volunteer or just be there with their children, and they were recruited using the same process as at the school center. The first author approached teachers in a public environment at the two schools or as recommended by school administration or by earlier teacher participants. The teachers were given the details of the study and inclusion criteria, and if they agreed to participate in the study, signed their consent form. The audiorecorded interview was carried out by the first author individually in the teacher's classroom when time was available.

After agreeing to participate, parents and teachers responded to several questions about their cultural background, including country of origin and primary language spoken at home, as well as the age, sex, and grade level of their children. A semistructured interview, based on Epstein's types of involvement (Epstein, 1995) and developed for this study, was used to explore participants' ideas and practices related to involvement and parent–school communication (see Appendix A and B for parent and teacher interview protocols). During the interview, the first author asked a series of questions from the interview protocol and, based on the participant's response, followed up with a request for clarification or elaboration. The interviews lasted approximately 15–20 minutes each, and participants were compensated for their time with a $10 gift card to a local grocery store or online shopping site of their choice. Interview recordings were later transcribed verbatim. All identifying participant information was removed from transcripts to ensure confidentiality. Data management was in accordance with Institutional Review Board procedures of the authors' university.

Analytic Strategy

The transcribed interviews were uploaded to Dedoose©, an online qualitative analysis software package (Dedoose, 2018). Based on Epstein's framework, the interviews were coded for themes and practices related to four domains: parenting, communicating, volunteering, and learning at home. Epstein's other types of parent involvement, community and decision-making, were not included as parents rarely mentioned parent organizations and community involvement was not assessed in the interview protocols. Codes for each type of involvement were identified inductively by the first two authors through reading the interviews and taking notes on which ideas kept recurring. Subsequently, codes were marked in Dedoose and their rate of occurrence in each interview was calculated. Codes that overlapped substantially were then combined into broader codes (e.g., the codes "Sets High Expectations" and "Parents Challenge Children Academically" were combined with the code of "Academic and Grade-Focused"). Codes that were rarely used across all groups were dropped from the coding scheme. The first author then recoded all the interviews using the finalized coding scheme. Codes were included in the final analyses if at least 20% of participants in at least one participant group had that code applied to their interview. Thus, the coding system, while organized by four of Epstein's categories of involvement, reflected parents' own ideas about their perceptions, goals, and experiences with school involvement.

Quantitative analyses of the coded data included examining differences among groups in their frequency of use of the codes in each domain. For each code, we calculated the proportion of participants within each group who had the code applied to a passage at any point in their interview. Higher proportions within a group indicated a more salient theme among the participants within that group. Fisher's Exact Test was calculated for each code, using the fisher.test function in the R statistical software (R Core Team, 2021) in order to identify statistically significant differences in code response rates across the groups.

Qualitative analyses of what parents and teachers actually said were then carried out in order to derive cultural models of school involvement and children's education for each of the parent groups and the teacher group. Given the small size of samples (especially the Caribbean parents), our interpretations of the data are meant to be suggestive rather than conclusive. This approach fits within a tradition of cross-cultural research on parents and children that has often relied on small samples (e.g., Harkness et al., 2007; Miller et al., 2002) to elucidate patterns of ideas and behavior that larger-scale approaches may miss. Our goal was not to highlight whether one group or another was better or cared more about their children's education, but rather to understand how

the participants' ideas may represent distinct cultural patterns in the ways that diverse parents and teachers think about family–school involvement.

Results

Discriminant Analysis

The three groups of parents and the teachers were in general agreement about some of the themes identified in interviews, but, in addition, each group tended to display some particular characteristics. In order to evaluate the distinctiveness of the cultural models evidenced by these four groups and before going on to describe these differences, we present the results of a discriminant function analysis using SAS Proc Discrim (SAS Institute, 2019), as shown in Table 2. We reduced the number of predictor variables (codes) to 19 by selecting codes endorsed by at least 50% of at least one group; these codes can be found in Table 3. Codes with less than 50% response across all groups can be found in Appendix C.

Table 2. Discriminant Analysis by Group

% Classified INTO Group % Classified FROM Group	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Other – not classified
African American *n* = 20	**70**	15	10	0	5
Caribbean *n* = 9	0	**100**	0	0	0
Hispanic *n* = 20	5	25	**65**	5	0
Teacher *n* = 20	0	20	5	**75**	0
Other – not classified *n* = 0	-	-	-	-	-

Values were recomputed for each individual to be the number of mentions of each code divided by the total number of codes mentioned by that individual. Because few of these predictors displayed a normal distribution, we used the nonparametric analytic option with $k = 3$, and calculated distances with the Mahalanobis method. The procedure was able to successfully assign 77% of the individual participants to their correct group based on the predictor variables, a result highly unlikely by chance (χ^2 (16) = 128.23, $p < .0001$). As shown in Table 2, however, there was considerable variation in rates of "correct" assignment of individuals to their own cultural group. The Caribbean parent group was most distinctive, with all nine members correctly assigned. In contrast, just under three-fourths of the African American parents were correctly assigned to their own group, with the remainder assigned to the Caribbean group and, less frequently, the Hispanic group (one parent could not be assigned to any

group). The Hispanic parents were assigned to their own group at almost the same rate as the African American parents; interestingly, most of the remainder were assigned to the Caribbean group. Three-fourths of the teachers were correctly assigned; again, most of the others were assigned to the Caribbean group.

Table 3. Percentages of Code Response Rates (For Codes with 50% or Higher Response) by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Parenting					
Academic and Grade-Focused	**0.85**	**0.67**	**0.60**	**0.85**	0.19
Check Children's Academic Progress	0.40	0.44	**0.55**	0.10	0.02*
Children's Behavior Is Important	0.20	**0.67**	0.35	0.45	0.10
Involvement in Children's Education	**0.50**	0.44	**0.55**	**0.70**	0.52
Parents Should Motivate Children	**0.80**	**0.67**	**0.60**	0.30	0.01*
Rules and Discipline	0.45	**0.89**	0.25	0.30	0.01*
Learning at Home					
Have Children Do Homework in a Distraction Free Place	**0.55**	**0.67**	0.40	**0.70**	0.26
Let Children Attempt Homework on Their Own First	**0.50**	0.22	**0.50**	0.10	0.01*
Parents Help Children w/ Homework	0.30	**0.56**	0.35	**0.70**	0.05+
Review Children's Homework	0.25	**0.56**	0.15	0.30	0.18
Communicating					
Both Parents and Teachers Should Initiate Communication	**0.50**	0.00	**0.55**	0.40	0.03*
Communication is Important	**0.95**	**0.78**	**0.75**	**0.85**	0.30
Cooperation is Important	**0.60**	0.33	0.45	**0.55**	0.54
Frequent Communication	**0.60**	0.33	0.40	0.10	0.01*
Talk about Academics	**0.65**	0.33	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.33
Talk about Behavior	**0.50**	**0.56**	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.76
Volunteering					
Volunteer to Get Info About Children and Education	**0.60**	0.44	0.35	0.35	0.34
Volunteer to Help School w/ Activities	**0.65**	**0.56**	0.40	0.40	0.35
Important to Volunteer in School	**1.00**	**0.78**	**0.95**	**0.90**	0.17

Notes. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

To illustrate how particular codes within each of the four types of involvement contributed to both similarity and differences across the groups of parents and teachers, Table 3 shows their rates of occurrence across the samples. As is evident, some codes were expressed with high frequency in all groups. These include being academically and grade focused, being involved in the child's education, and (for the parents but not the teachers) expressing the idea that parents should motivate their children to succeed in school. Almost all parents and teachers talked about the importance of parent–school communication, including talking about the child's behavior at school. A great majority of parents and teachers talked about the importance of volunteering at their child's school, with many in each group specifying various purposes of volunteering including getting information about children and education and helping with classroom activities.

In contrast to the similarities across groups with regard to some themes (codes), each group's profile of themes was distinctive in some ways. Looking down the column of codes for the African American parents, the high rate of academically related themes is striking, along with talk about all aspects of communication with the school and volunteering, especially in order to get information about their child and to help with activities. The Caribbean parents were notable in their high frequency of talking about the importance of good behavior, and relatedly, rules and discipline. These parents also frequently described themselves as being very present in their children's homework, both by helping their children and reviewing the children's work. The Hispanic parents were less distinctive in their talk about various themes, but they were often most similar to the African American parents' profiles, although with generally lower rates of occurrence of themes across the four types of involvement. One distinctive theme that was expressed by a quarter of the Hispanic parents was the idea of making homework interesting for children, which was mentioned by only one-tenth of the African American parents and not at all by the other groups (therefore not included in Table 3). Finally, the teachers focused most on being academic and grade-focused as well as the importance of parents being generally involved with the child's education; on the practical side, they also talked most about having children do their homework in a distraction-free place at home, and parents helping their children with homework.

Cultural Models of School Involvement

Although the frequencies of particular themes and their patterns of co-occurrence in the parent interviews suggest interesting differences as well as similarities across the four groups, it is essential to look at what parents and teachers actually said in order to derive some sense of the cultural models that

organized their thinking and actions. The following section provides some clues to the possible cultural models that were most prevalent in each group, keeping in mind, of course, that none of the groups were totally different from each other, and that larger samples would undoubtedly add further dimensions. The themes (codes) mentioned in this section can be found in Table 3 or in Appendix C.

African American Parents

The African American parents in this study talked about a parenting style characterized by strong expectations for their child's behavior and academic responsibilities, emphasizing that being strict is important to ensure their child's success. As one mother commented with regard to visiting her child's school to ensure that her child was not behaving badly:

> Like I said, I make it my business to go. I want to know who my son is dealing with, who I got to deal with for the next 180 days, because I tell my kids in a minute, I know they are not angels. That is one thing parents make a mistake at, is making their kids believe that they are angels. Only in God's eyes. Because when my back is turned, I know he ain't an angel.

Similarly, another African American mother stressed the importance of keeping track of children's school attendance and participation by staying in contact with the teacher:

> I think parents just need to know what their kids are doing overall…but a lot of them don't know if their kids are even in school. Some of them have just dropped their kids off, and their kids will not be there.…You are wondering why your kid is not improving in school, but you are not communicating with the teacher….They just leave it completely up to the kids, and I feel that should not be left up to the kids.

Of the African American parents, 40% said that it was important for them to check up on their child's academic progress and behavior with the teacher, and they talked about having their child do homework in a distraction-free place. However, some of these parents said that the materials that their children were currently learning were being taught differently from what they were taught as children, which made it difficult for them to help their children with homework. One mother commented about her struggle to help her child with homework:

> In this age, they are doing it a lot different than when I was in school. A lot different. Like my daughter, who is in third grade last year, she would have to explain to me how they do it, because when I showed her my way, she would be like, "Mom, that is wrong." And I would be like, "I don't understand that." It is complicated. Things have changed.

In addition to being involved with their children's education at home, the African American parents in our study expressed strong support for being in involved at school. More than half of the parents said that they believed volunteering was useful because it allowed them to gain information about what was happening in the school and what their child was learning. One mother described the benefits of her volunteering experiences, which included learning about education resources and networking with school staff and other parents:

> It depends on what type of volunteering opportunity it is. I could learn, like, a lot of different things. Like when he was in daycare, I volunteered a lot of that. When he was in school, I did a lot of educational resources and things like that, I learned a lot from it, so, it is just knowing who [is] in the school, the principal, the teacher, and other parents—just networking being important.

In general, the African American parents highly prioritized academics, and they overwhelmingly supported the idea that parents should motivate their children to succeed in school. Good communication with the teacher was perceived as essential by almost all the parents, and at least half of them also mentioned the importance of frequent communication about students' behavior and academic progress. Communication between the parent and teacher was invoked as a strategy for preventing the child from getting away with bad behavior:

> Just having the communication, and like I said, the child can see that my parent can contact my teacher, and the teacher can contact my parent. So I can't get away with not doing my homework. I can't get away with misbehaving. They are gonna be on me.

Caribbean Parents

The Caribbean parents in this study, overall, displayed a "no-nonsense" focus on behavior and children's social development, a responsibility to contribute to their child's education, and high expectations for their children's performance. As one mother described her expectations for her child's grades:

> No, I want "As" and "Bs," so if she comes home with a "C," then, ok, what happened? You know what I am saying…because you know what the answer is. Either you weren't paying attention, or you were rushing. That is why you got it wrong. It is not because you don't know, so I don't want to hear the excuses.

Consistent with this style, most of the Caribbean parents said that parents should maintain rules and discipline at home. At the same time, they supported active roles for themselves in children's learning, for example, by helping children with homework, providing a distraction-free environment for doing

it, and checking it afterwards. One parent described her role as a watchful monitor of quality; interestingly, she was the only parent in the study who mentioned recruiting an older sibling to share this role:

> I go over it, or I would ask one of their older siblings to go over the homework to make sure it is done correctly, make sure it looks appropriate. I do not like messy work. I don't like a lot of scribble on the paper. If you are erasing a whole bunch of times, I think your homework should be very presentable. Legible so the teacher can understand.

As this same mother explained, however, it was also important to allow the child a break before getting started with homework:

> I mean, she comes home, she gets a snack. She likes to unwind a little bit. Then she gets her homework started. That takes the stress off of it. She is just coming in, maybe a little bit fatigued. Put something in your stomach, and then you are a little bit energized because you had your snack. You can sit down. You can devote more time and energy and effort into actually reading the homework to make sure you understand.

Two-thirds of the Caribbean parents mentioned being concerned about children's behavior in school, and over half mentioned talking with the teacher about their child's behavior, more so than about academics. Although the great majority of these parents said they thought parent–teacher communication was important, fewer of them said it should be frequent, and none of them mentioned the idea of a close personal relationship between the parent and teacher. One mother expressed the necessity of communication between parents and teachers when either has a concern:

> I think with better communication, with like the teacher telling the parent, like, "This is what your child is dealing [with]" or with the parent going to the teacher with, "Why are my child's grades messed up, or what is it they need to work on?" No one is communicating, you know what I mean? I feel that communication would be the key to everything.

Hispanic Parents

Although the Hispanic parents' profile of themes was quite similar to that of the African American parents, one distinctive theme expressed by a quarter of the parents in this group was that it was important to make homework interesting for their children—an idea expressed by only two of the African American parents and none of the Caribbean parents or the teachers. One Hispanic mother described a variety of strategies she used to make homework an interesting and fun activity for her child:

Well I try to make it fun and creative so they don't get bored, and then I do it. So you know I try to, let's say here like, I put like snacks out. Cut some food up, because my kids love fruits and vegetables, too. So I have all that set up on the table; I will sit there. I will try to play the card games with them first—flash cards, showing them the pictures—the animals—and how to spell it, how to sound it out. We start like that.

Interestingly, *fewer* of the Hispanic parents talked about rules and discipline than did either the African American or (especially) the Caribbean parents; in this regard, the Hispanic parents' views were more similar to those of the teachers. However, like the African American parents, half of the Hispanic parents said that children should be allowed to try doing their homework on their own before being given help. As one mother explained, she did not immediately help her child with homework because she didn't want her child to be dependent on her for success in completing the homework:

I'm not going to be there giving you the answers. You need to know the answers. You need to figure out a way when I'm not there—when you don't have this there, then you need to figure out a way where you can do it yourself.

Again, like the African American and Caribbean parents, about half the Hispanic parents expressed the idea that they should be involved in their child's education, including checking on their child's academic progress. One mother emphasized this point, including moral as well as academic teaching:

It is not only the teacher's responsibility to teach, it is the parents' as well. The parent has to teach the child when it comes to work and school. You got to teach them right from wrong. You have to teach them as well.

These Hispanic parents, like all the other groups, talked about the importance of parent–teacher communication and cooperation, including children's behavior as well as academics. One father explained the roles of parents and teachers as a joint effort:

You know what, there is a saying that says it takes a village to raise a kid, and everybody has to work together. I mean as a parent, the parent has the main authority and the main responsibility to make sure their kid does well. But aside from the parent's power, the parent can't sit in the school with the child all day, so the teacher has to do their part as well to try to instill some educational background into that child. It starts with the parents, it starts at home, but at the same time the teacher has got to help this kid believe in themselves and show that they have a chance. The parent's influence and the teacher's influence together make for what the outcome is going to be, usually.

Teachers

Given the complementary roles of teachers and parents, it is not surprising that the teachers' concerns were quite different in some regards from those of the parents. In particular, a third of the teachers talked about the importance of basic care for children by their parents. Some of the teachers commented that students did not have proper clothing for being able to go outside for recess during the winter season or did not have a chance to have breakfast before school. One teacher recounted struggles she faced when she had students coming to school without having eaten beforehand, not having food for school hours, or enough sleep:

> Giving them support. Getting them here on time. The big one is breakfast. We do give free breakfast, but a lot of the ones that take the bus may not get here on time to get that free breakfast. You can tell which students have not eaten before they come in—they will be sleepy or grouchy, complaining of stomach aches, and there is only so much they can do. The nurse doesn't have food for 500 kids if all of them miss lunch or breakfast.

A related concern expressed almost exclusively by teachers in this study was how many parents in this school district were confrontational with the schools and teachers, which made cooperation and communication difficult. One teacher spoke of the importance of also talking about positive things going on with the child at school instead of only talking about negative things:

> But I always try to start off with a positive, because I have noticed the parents, if you start with a negative—they are always used to hearing so much negative that their defenses go up right away, and they are not hearing anything else you would have to say. But if you say something really good about their kids, I have one in particular that all her kids—it is always negative…and she is much more receptive because she is coming in with her guard up, already thinking I am going to say something negative, so I always try to say something positive.

The great majority of teachers stated that parents should be involved in their children's education and focus on their children's academic success, but fewer teachers mentioned the importance of parents' emotionally supporting or motivating their children. Surprisingly, only two of the 20 teachers said that parents should check their child's academic progress, and only a few mentioned the importance of parents talking with their child about school. In contrast, almost three-quarters of the teachers stated that parents should help their child with homework. As one teacher explained:

Definitely the parent should help, and that shows the child that there is interest in their education. If a parent isn't involved at least in that way, the child doesn't see a connection between the home and school, I think.

Almost all the teachers talked about the importance of parent–teacher communication, and they equally supported the idea of parents volunteering in the classroom. The following quote illustrates both a teacher's ideal form of parent helping and its hoped-for benefits:

I think it would be really nice for parents to go into classrooms to assist teachers and support by doing copies, which is so difficult in inner cities because it takes so much time. Things like that would be so wonderful to help teachers have more time for instruction.…I just think it is really important that parents be part of the educational process, and that is a way to get them in so they understand what is going on in the schools, in an unthreatening manner.…I think that it affords some understanding of what is really happening in the classroom and exposes them to materials that the children are learning or what their expectations are, because a lot of time they don't know.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to explore cultural variation in parents' and teachers' ideas about parental involvement and children's education in the context of an urban U.S. school district. Our results offer several new insights into parents' and teachers' ideas about school involvement. Unlike most other studies investigating parent involvement, this study compared three different parental cultural groups, as well as teachers. As a result, we were able to describe a possible cultural model of school involvement for each participant group. By using Epstein's (1995) framework to construct the interview protocol, this study also gathered data on parents' ideas across the four domains of parenting, learning at home, communicating, and volunteering. Our results show significant cultural variation across these types of involvement for this urban school district sample. Relatedly, this study indicated that these four types of involvement were an important concern for not just the parents in this sample, but for the teachers as well.

Despite the variations found here across the African American, Caribbean, and Hispanic parents in this study, there were also many similarities. Both the African American and Caribbean parents talked about using a strict parenting style. However, differences were found in that the African American parents were more academically focused, whereas the Caribbean parents spoke more

about children's social development. The Hispanic parents also indicated that they supported a variety of practices for being involved, especially regarding homework and—uniquely—making homework interesting and fun for the children.

The patterns of themes found in this sample concerning involvement and family–school partnerships are generally in agreement with the existing research literature. The African American parents in the present study, like those described by Howard and Reynolds (2008) and Jackson and Remillard (2005), talked about volunteering to gain information about their children's progress and stated that it is important for parents to be informed about the happenings of the school and their child's progress. Like the African American parents studied by Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2008), the African American parents in the current study emphasized the importance of having an effective parent–teacher relationship. Many of the Hispanic parents in the current study talked about ways to help their children with homework, as also found by Smith et al. (2008). With regard to the teachers in our sample, like the findings of Ramirez (1999), they expressed that they highly valued parents' involvement in their classroom.

Our study offers additional information on Caribbean immigrant parents' ideas about involvement and children's education. In particular, the Caribbean parents in the current study talked most about rules and discipline, about parent–teacher relationships, and about communicating about their child's behavior with their teacher.

Limitations and Implications for Future Directions

The current study has several limitations, indicating possible next steps and new avenues for future research on parents' and teachers' ideas about involvement. The samples of parents (especially the Caribbean parents) in this study were quite small. Future studies with larger samples, using quantitative self-report assessments based on the findings of the current study, could test the generalizability of the patterns we identified and cross-validate the discriminant findings. Another limitation was that the parents and teachers who participated had already shown support for school involvement by attending the center where they were recruited or being referred by other highly involved teachers; thus, they might not be fully representative of the larger population of parents and teachers in the city. The parents in this study were also mainly mothers; thus, fathers' ideas about involvement were underrepresented. Future studies should attempt to recruit fathers and harder-to-reach parents and teachers to assess their ideas about involvement. Our data show that all the parents and teachers in our study valued involvement and talked about their ideal

involvement strategies, in addition to ones they had already used. However, as some of these parents and teachers mentioned, many of the parents living in these urban environments do not have the resources, time, or knowledge to be involved as much as they would like. Future studies should further assess the impact of culture on parent involvement by identifying interactions that parental ethnotheories may have with socioeconomic status, age, gender, and family structure.

Another important factor to consider, which we could not with the small sample in our study, was the role of teachers' cultural background in the school–family partnership. Purposely sampling teachers within different cultural subgroups would allow for researchers to examine whether teachers' ideas about involvement differ meaningfully across cultural groups and whether a match or mismatch between the cultural background of the family and teacher matters for their communication and cooperation. Finally, this study was not able to take into consideration the history of family–school relations of the participating parents and teachers and how that may have impacted current relations. Future research may benefit from matching parent and teacher participants from the same schools in order to explore the history of those schools' relations with families and their impact on current relationships.

Regardless of these limitations, the current study sheds new light on educational involvement in a diverse community. We found both commonalities and cultural variation among the parents' ideas about children's education and parent involvement. The teachers also had unique ideas about parent involvement. Furthermore, the distinctness of parents' and teachers' ideas about involvement depended on the type of involvement: ideas about parenting were quite different among the four groups, whereas ideas about volunteering were mostly similar. Schools can utilize such findings to promote the cultural competency of staff in interaction with parents of underrepresented groups, potentially leading to more effective parent–teacher relationships in diverse communities.

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Appendix A. Interview Protocol for Parents

- Have you ever volunteered at your child's school? How so?
- Are you involved in any parent organizations at school?
- Do you help your child with their homework?

- Where does your child do their homework? Is there a special time for your child to do their homework?
- How do you find out about your child's progress in school?
- How often do you communicate with your child's teachers? What about? Who is initiating that contact?
- Is there a comfortable fit between people that share the same background as you and what teachers expect?
- How can parents help their children be successful in school? What are the most important aspects of the parent's role?
- How do you think parents and teachers can work together to ensure children's success in school?
- Do you feel that these views are shared among other members of your community?
- Are there any areas of parent–school communication where you think improvement is needed?

Appendix B. Interview Protocol for Teachers:

- Do you have parents volunteering at your school? What are they doing?
- What parent organizations are there at your school? Are they effective?
- Do you think parents should help their child with homework? Why?
- Do you think teachers should help parents organize or make suggestions for setting up a learning environment for children at home?
- How are you reporting your students' progress to their parents?
- How often do you communicate with your students' parents? Who is initiating the contact?
- How can parents help their children be successful in school? What are the most important aspects of the parent's role?
- Besides academic teaching, do you think there are any other things that teachers can do to help children be successful in school?
- How do you think parents and teachers can work together to ensure children's success in school?
- Do you feel that these views are consistent with the views of other teachers?
- Do you feel that your expectations for your students' parents agree with what they feel their role is?
- Are there any areas of parent–school communication where you think improvement is needed?

Appendix C. Additional Tables

Table C1. Percentages of Parenting Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Ca-rib-bean	His-panic	Teach-er	Fisher's Exact Test
Academic and Grade-Focused	**0.85**	**0.67**	**0.60**	**0.85**	0.19
Being Aware of Child's Needs	0.30	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.00[*]
Check Children's Academic Progress	0.40	0.44	**0.55**	0.10	0.02[*]
Children's Behavior is Important	0.20	**0.67**	0.35	0.45	0.10
Concerned About Social/Emotional Development	0.00	0.22	0.05	0.20	0.08[+]
Education is Parents' Responsibility	0.15	0.00	0.20	0.20	0.59
Emotionally Support Children	0.40	0.33	0.20	0.05	0.04[*]
Get Resources for Children	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.15	0.03[*]
Involvement in Children's Education	**0.50**	0.44	**0.55**	**0.70**	0.52
Parents Should Motivate Children	**0.80**	**0.67**	**0.60**	0.30	0.01[*]
Rules and Discipline	0.45	**0.89**	0.25	0.30	0.01[*]
Take Basic Essential Care of Children	0.10	0.11	0.00	0.35	0.01[*]
Talk with Children About School	0.20	0.11	0.20	0.30	0.81

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Table C2. Percentages of Learning at Home Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Ca-ribbe-an	His-panic	Teach-er	Fisher's Exact Test
Designate a Special Place for Children to Do Homework	0.05	0.22	0.25	0.30	0.20
Give Children a Break Before Starting Homework	0.20	0.44	0.15	0.40	0.19
Have Children Do Homework in a Distraction Free Place	**0.55**	**0.67**	0.40	**0.70**	0.26
Homework is Important	0.30	0.22	0.35	0.15	0.53
Homework is Reinforcement	0.10	0.22	0.00	0.40	0.00[*]
Let Children Attempt Homework on Their Own First	**0.50**	0.22	**0.50**	0.10	0.01[*]
Make Children do Homework Right After School	0.40	0.00	0.45	0.10	0.01[*]

Table C2, continued

Make Homework Interesting for Children	0.10	0.00	0.25	0.00	0.05[+]
Parents and Children Should do Homework Together	0.20	0.11	0.10	0.00	0.24
Parents Explore Children's Ideas While Doing Homework	0.05	0.33	0.25	0.05	0.06[+]
Parents Help Children with Homework	0.30	**0.56**	0.35	**0.70**	0.05[+]
Parents Learned Differently as Children	0.25	0.11	0.00	0.15	0.11
Parents Only Clarify Homework for Children at First	0.20	0.00	0.20	0.10	0.56
Review Children's Homework	0.25	**0.56**	0.15	0.30	0.18

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Table C3. Percentages of Communicating Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Both Parents and Teachers Should Initiate Communication	**0.50**	0.00	**0.55**	0.40	0.03[*]
Close Relationship	0.15	0.00	0.15	0.25	0.51
Communicate About Good and Bad Things	0.05	0.00	0.05	0.25	0.13
Communication Should be Initiated When Problem Occurs	0.00	0.22	0.00	0.25	0.01[*]
Communication Is Important	**0.95**	**0.78**	**0.75**	**0.85**	0.30
Cooperation Is Important	**0.60**	0.33	0.45	**0.55**	0.54
Frequent Communication	**0.60**	0.33	0.40	0.10	0.01[*]
Parents Can Be Confrontational	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.20	0.18
Parents Should Initiate Communication	0.25	0.44	0.30	0.15	0.41
Talk About Academics	**0.65**	0.33	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.33
Talk About Behavior	**0.50**	**0.56**	**0.50**	**0.65**	0.76
Teachers Should Initiate Communication	0.05	0.11	0.00	0.20	0.13

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Table C4. Percentages of Volunteering Codes Response Rates by Group

Codes	African American	Caribbean	Hispanic	Teacher	Fisher's Exact Test
Volunteer to Get Info About Children and Education	**0.60**	0.44	0.35	0.35	0.34
Volunteer to Help School w/ Activities	**0.65**	**0.56**	0.40	0.40	0.35
Volunteer to Monitor Children in School	0.25	0.33	0.25	0.00	0.03[*]
Volunteer to Motivate Children to Succeed	0.45	0.44	0.40	0.45	1.00
Important to Volunteer in Children's School	**1.00**	**0.78**	**0.95**	**0.90**	0.17

Note. Proportions of .50 or greater within each group column were bolded. Fisher's Exact Test *p*-values of less than .05 are denoted with a *, and *p*-values of .05 and greater and less than .10 are denoted with a +.

Museum Education and Yemeni American Children's Immigrant Identity From a Vygotskian Perspective: A Mother's Diary

Navaz Peshotan Bhavnagri and Hanan Taha Muhsin

Abstract

This is a report from the field, where an immigrant mother journaled about her Yemeni American daughters (ages 7 and 13, born and raised in the U.S.) visiting museums for the first time. Her diary documented how mother–child and sibling interactions in museum education contributed to building cognitive and affective skills required for academic success in formal schooling. Her diary entries included: (1) anecdotal observations, (2) interviews of her daughters and her immigrant father, and (3) reflective and photographic journaling. Her daughters' journaling and photo documentations further supported their mother's entries. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the conceptual framework for this project. The mother promoted her daughters' immigrant identity via visits to museums and activities related to the museum and the family's immigrant identity offered before, during, and after the museum visits. The project culminated with her daughters creating their unique family museum and dramatizing as docents. We recommend (1) museum-related interactive literacy activities, and (2) creating and dramatizing a family museum. We buttress these recommendations with research, Vygotsky's theory, and our evidence-based practice. We conclude that the daughters demonstrated the cognitive and affective skills required for academic success in formal schooling while simultaneously developing their immigrant identity. We suggest replicating this project to promote immigrant identity among other cultural groups. We lastly present an educational case study of the grandfather's immigrant experiences in the appendix.

Key Words: museums, Vygotsky, Yemeni American children, immigrant identity, cognitive, affective outcomes, informal, multicultural education, dramatization, literacy activities, family museum, reflective journaling, case study

Need: Significance of Yemeni Immigrants

The Arab American Institute (2022) reports that Arab immigrants began coming to the U.S. in large numbers in the 1880s, estimating that 3.7 million Americans now trace their roots to an Arab country. Harjanto and Batalova (2022) report that between 2000 and 2019, the immigrant population from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region doubled from 596,000 to 1.2 million. In 2019, out of the total 1,203,000 MENA immigrants, 822,000 (68.3 %) were from the Middle East, and the remaining 381,000 (31.7%) were from North Africa (Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). These numbers make Arab immigrants a significant group worth examining for educators. Amongst this increased diaspora, Yemeni immigrants comprise 59,000, and they are 4.9% of Middle Eastern immigrants (Harjanto & Batalova, 2022). However, among U.S. educators, little is known about Yemeni immigrant families and their children. Thus, there is a need to know more about their immigrant identity.

Yemeni immigrants rapidly increased after the 1965 Immigration Act. Prior to this act, U.S. immigration policy followed the National Origins Formula established in 1920, which primarily promoted immigration from Western and Northern Europe; the 1965 Immigration Act removed discrimination against Southern and Eastern Europeans, Asians, and other non-western ethnic groups (Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, 2023). Newly arrived Yemeni immigrants typically worked at farms in California, automobile factories in Detroit, or opened small family businesses in New York (Walker, 2023). They have multiple identities (e.g., Yemeni identity, Arabic identity, family identity, immigrant identity, Islamic identity). This project addresses the intersections of these identities in children born in America to Yemeni immigrants.

Mother's Journal: An Overview—Mother, Daughters, and Museums

The mother, who is the second author, is proficient in Arabic and English. She has received a Bilingual Bicultural Master's in Education. Her education exposed her to Vygotsky's theory, which provided her a framework for designing this museum project (i.e., planning activities for before, during, and after museum visits) to maximize positive benefits for her children. Additionally, this theory enhanced her understanding of how her social interactions contributed

to her daughters' cognitive and affective developments. (Not all parents are so fortunate to have this knowledge of how to plan theoretically grounded, educational, meaningful, and fun parent–child interactive activities for before, during, and after museum visits. Our hope is that such parents and the teachers, family liaisons, or other school or museum staff working with them may find this article helpful.)

This mother also had, at the time of the project, four years of work experience as an English Language Learner (ELL) paraprofessional, four years as an ELL teacher, and one year as ELL coordinator in schools which predominantly serve Muslim immigrant and refugee children from Yemen, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Turkey, and Bosnia. She kept a journal based on the advice of her academic mentor, who is the first author. The mother's journal focuses on her two daughters, Haneen, then a 13-year-old eighth grader and Leena, then a seven-year-old third grader. (Note: both parents and these daughters have given permission to use their actual names.) Both are above average academically, as assessed on standardized tests. They understand, speak, read, and write English at home, but they speak in a Yemeni dialect of Arabic with their grandparents. Haneen had been exposed to the standardized Arabic language through weekend Arabic learning school. Thus, she could read standard Arabic, but with limited comprehension. Leena only knew the Arabic letters and could read two and three letter words. They were born in the U.S.; their parents immigrated from Yemen in 1999. One of the daughters did visit Yemen when she was very young but does not remember her visit, while the other daughter has never visited.

The mother's rationale for undertaking this museum project was to address the following gaps in her daughters' background knowledge. First, they had never been to any museums. Thus, visiting a museum and participating in museum-related activities seemed like a highly worthwhile and novel experience for them. Second, they had no knowledge of their family's ancestral experiences in America nor in Yemen. Thus, this museum education exposed them to their ancestral family's immigrant experiences in America, and their traditional, historical, and cultural daily life experiences in Yemen.

To address the above gaps, the mother documented that she and her daughters visited the Arab American National Museum (AANM) four times, which focuses on Arab American immigrants (Arab American National Institute, 2022; Arab American National Museum & Kayyali, 2019). A composite and integrated picture of all four AANM visits are reported, to avoid mentioning redundancies across visits.

The mother kept a journal which focused on social interactions during museum visits and related activities contributing to Yemeni American families'

immigrant identity. The following question emerged, based on mother's journal entries: How can a museum, along with related activities, promote cognitive and affective outcomes that are required for academic success in formal schooling, while simultaneously developing immigrant children's family identity? This question is addressed in this article.

Our Conceptual Framework: Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

The mother used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as her conceptual framework because it considers social interactions and human activities with cultural and historical objects essential for promoting higher mental processes, such as language and cultural understanding (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Given that museum visits are social, cultural, and historical experiences, multiple scholars acknowledge Vygotsky's theory as a highly appropriate framework in museum education (e.g., Ash, 2003; Bhavnagri & Kamash, 2019; Coffee, 2007; Mayer, 2005; Pierroux, 2003). Thus, the mother interpreted her journal entries on the mother–child and sibling interactions during museum education using Vygotskian concepts: (1) interpersonal dialogue contributing to intrapersonal thought resulting in shared cognition, (2) scaffolding, (3) physical and cultural tools, (4) the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and (5) dynamic assessments. Given that each of these concepts are not mutually exclusive but overlapping and highly interrelated, we next briefly explain their interconnectivity and provide suitable examples from our project, as appropriate.

According to Vygotsky (1978, 1986), learning happens during social conversations (which he calls interpersonal dialogues) between an expert and a novice (e.g., mother and her daughters; older and a younger sibling; Wink & Putney, 2002) resulting in what Vygotsky calls intrapersonal thought (e.g., growth in cognitive skills/expansion of mental capacity in mother and daughters). Every child needs assistance with new concepts, which are first understood only within interpersonal dialogues, also called public speech or external speech (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) and called intersubjectivity between the expert and novice (Rogoff, 1990; Wood, 1980). It finally becomes internalized, an intrapersonal dialogue, also called private speech or internal speech. The neo-Vygotskian scholars call this process of dialogue impacting thought socially shared cognition, distributed cognition, co-construction, joint attention, and collaborative learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Finn & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2013; Povis & Crowley, 2015; Rogoff, 1990).

Scaffolding takes place during this interpersonal dialogue. Scaffolding is the process of an expert (e.g., an adult) assisting a novice (e.g., child; Jones et al., 1998; Rogoff, 1990), but then the expert gradually reduces assistance as the

novice gains competency (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Furthermore, Vygotsky purports that not only interpersonal dialogue, but also physical and cultural tools promote scaffolding.

Physical tools contribute to a mental tool, namely language (Newman & Holzman, 1993), thus scaffolding and expanding human beings' mental capacity (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Physical tools in this project included: (1) written materials, namely, white boards, notebooks, and labels related to artifacts; (2) children's story books on immigrants; and (3) technology, namely, a tablet, smartphone, and laptop used for informational research, photo documentations, and developing a video. Cultural tools in this project included: (1) museum artifacts documenting immigrant's cultural experiences through oral history, photographs, and legal papers; (2) objects in one's family representing their immigration and used to create a family museum; and (3) daughter's video to represent their family's immigrant roots. According to some scholars, museum artifacts are cultural tools because they communicate social and linguistic practices of a particular time in history (e.g., Coffee, 2007). Other scholars extend this further and state that these cultural museum artifacts are best understood by associating personal meaning, co-constructed through social discourse (e.g., Pierroux, 2003). For example, the daughters discussed the family museum artifacts and related them to their personal life experiences.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a distance between actual developmental level as determined by level of independent performance (i.e., lower ZPD), and level of potential development as determined by assisted performance from a more knowledgeable adult or peer (i.e., upper ZPD; Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978). For example, the daughters on their own had no real understanding of immigrants' stressors and resiliencies. Thus, that was their lower ZPD. Hence, when the mother read and discussed a story of an immigrant family, they expressed the immigrant child-protagonist's perspective, which was an indication of them having a better understanding than before. Thus, their empathetic responses to an immigrant child demonstrated that that they had a potential to develop this understanding with their mother's assistance, thus reaching their upper ZPD.

Vygotsky's dynamic assessment occurs when the child's abilities are evaluated both at the lower and upper ZPD levels and when teaching and assessment are integrated and not considered as two mutually exclusive tasks (McAfee et al., 2016). In informal learning settings, such as in daily parent–child interactions (Rogoff, 1990) and in museum education (Rogoff et al., 2016) where teaching and learning is integrated, this dynamic assessment can be nonverbal, such as silent observations, facial and hand gestures, body movements, and physical demonstration of an activity. The Vygotskian dynamic assessment is

examined further below; it includes the other four concepts mentioned above: (1) interpersonal dialog contributing to intrapersonal thought, (2) scaffolding, (3) physical and cultural tools, and (4) ZPD.

Vygotskian Dynamic Assessment: Museum and Yemeni American's Immigrant Identity

We present here the mother's teaching and assessment as an integrated activity taking place simultaneously and not as two mutually exclusive tasks; thus, it is a Vygotskian dynamic assessment, as defined above. Furthermore, the assessment was not a formal written test requiring prescribed true/false or multiple-choice responses. Instead, it examined informal social interactions during performance-based and context-specific activities; thus, this dynamic assessment was authentic in nature. It evaluated her daughters' cognitive and affective outcomes during relevant participatory activities. The mother's dynamic assessment was supervised and guided by her mentor, who is the first author of this article.

During this dynamic assessment, this mother used multiple action research strategies and methods. Action research also requires you to be dynamic and change as you observe, reflect, and record (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Thus, action research strategies and methods are a good fit to integrate in Vygotsky's dynamic assessment. Her action research strategies and methods included (a) observations and then taking detailed anecdotal notes, reflecting, and writing inferences using Vygotsky's theory; (b) audiotaping her daughters' thoughts (i.e., cognitive development) and feelings (i.e., affective development) by interviewing them in a conversational manner; and (c) documenting her daughters' learning outcomes (e.g., processes and products of learning) in her reflective journal, supplemented with her photographic documentation (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Besides recording her perspective, she encouraged her daughters to report from their perspective by documenting their thoughts and feelings in their journals after returning from museum visits and supplementing it with photographs of artifacts they liked at the museums using mobile technology. (Parents and daughters have granted permission for their photographic documentation submitted for this article.) These daughters' recordings were also used as assessment tools for this project. The social–interactive activities that were offered before, during, and after the museum visits to promote Yemeni families' immigrant identity are discussed next.

Before the Museum Visits

The mother scaffolded her daughters' learning through her conversations during the following activities, resulting in affective and cognitive outcomes contributing to their immigrant identity. She anticipated that these would be further reinforced when they later visited the museum.

Family's Immigrant Story

The mother audiotaped her interview of her father (i.e., her daughters' maternal grandfather) about his life experience because she wanted to preserve his story (i.e., their family's oral history on immigration) to develop her daughters' immigrant identity by emotionally connecting them to the hardships their grandfather faced as an immigrant to the U.S. and his coinciding resiliency and by cognitively enhancing their background knowledge of their family's immigrant history. Their grandfather's life history matches the types of jobs and the locations where nearly all Yemeni immigrants historically worked as we have described in the introduction of this article and reflected in museum exhibits. For example, he too, like the other Yemenis portrayed in the museum photographs, worked on the farms in California and in a small family business in New York, while his brother worked on the California farms and in the automobile factories in Detroit. (For details about his life in Yemen and the U.S., see the Appendix, presented as a mini case study.)

Haneen and Leena found it cognitively incomprehensible and emotionally disturbing as to what all their grandfather had to go through at a young age. Leena asked with concern and empathy, "How come my grandfather started working in the silver jewelry factory-shed when he was six years old? That is younger than me!" The mother then explained that their grandfather had to work as a child in Yemen to support the whole family because their great-grandfather's remittances from the U.S. were paltry and irregular. The transfer of money then was not electronic and immediate as is today. A Yemeni immigrant in the U.S. had to physically return home to Yemen to bring that money to the family, and those trips could be months or a year apart.

Thus, the audiotaped case study of the grandfather was a physical tool which provided the girls with the Vygotskian shared cognition of their family history. Sharing family stories has many potential desirable affective outcomes. First, it provided an opportunity for them to take their grandfather's perspective, that he had no choice but to work at a very young age. They felt empathy for their grandfather's trials and tribulations and a deeper understanding of the challenges the immigrant's family that is left behind faces when the breadwinner immigrates. Second, it provided an opportunity to heighten her daughters' social–emotional realization of the resiliencies of new immigrants like their

grandfather, such as surviving the stress of not having the best working conditions, and despite the immigrants at times not having a skill set for high paying jobs, they typically still save enough to send remittances to their impoverished family members living in abject poverty in their country of origin. Third, it provided an opportunity to increase their emotional awareness that despite earlier Yemeni immigrants also having limited financial sources, they selflessly provided financial support, hospitality, and shelter to the new arrivals like their grandfather. Thus, it provided an opportunity for the girls to be aware that an individual community member can contribute to a larger good by being altruistic, helpful, and accepting social responsibility towards others in need.

Sharing family history as an activity also had many potential desirable cognitive outcomes. First, it brought awareness of their family's historical roots within the larger sociocultural context of rural Yemeni society. For example, the girls began to understand that their grandfather's story represents daily life of a child brought up in Yemeni's rural, labor-intensive, and subsistence agricultural economy, which included child labor, hunger, poverty, and limited literacy. Second, the mother's accurate description with vivid details of her father's immigrant story helped her daughters to conceptualize their family's immigrant identity. Through the twists and turns in their grandfather's life, they began to understand for the very first time the trials and tribulations many immigrants face, for example, economic hardships, psychological loneliness resulting in homesickness, and inadequacies of not knowing the language and culture of the host country.

The mother explicitly recorded in her journal that her daughters had gained a deeper understanding of the challenges and resiliencies of being an immigrant (i.e., cognitive outcome) leading to empathy (i.e., affective outcome) for new immigrants. Thus, listening and discussing their grandfather's story had moved them to their upper ZPD because they had shifted in their social cognition, namely from an egocentric perspective based on their limited, comfortable, and relatively stress-free life experiences in the U.S. to a sociocentric perspective of what other immigrants go through.

Additionally, both daughters were informally learning about the social history of immigrants through this case study, thereby supplementing their formal learning of the immigrants' history as taught in social studies in schools. Since this informal learning about immigrants at home and at the museum was related to their own family, it resulted in a positive cognitive outcome of a meaningful and personal understanding of social studies, as reported by the girls during the museum visit. Furthermore, their cognitive learning fit perfectly within our Vygotskian conceptual framework because his theory has a cultural focus, thus named "sociocultural theory"; a social focus, thus also

called "social interaction theory"; and a historical focus, thus also named "socio-historical theory."

Thus, overall, these daughters received socially, culturally, and historically focused affective and cognitive learning, which were expressed later during the museum visits, after the museum visit activity, and in creating a family museum, all mentioned below. (To fully understand the above stated affective and cognitive outcomes for learners, see the grandfather's life story as reported as a mini case study in the Appendix. Additionally, his mini case study is a potential Vygotskian physical tool to teach about challenges and resiliencies of immigrants in social studies, immigrant history, and multicultural education courses in K–12 or higher education.)

Interactive Literacy Activity

The mother and daughters participated in interactive reading about Arab immigrants in a book titled, *Coming to America: A Muslim's Family Story* (Wolf, 2003). It was a joint collaborative activity of a bidirectional nature, emphasized by neo-Vygotskian scholars, mentioned earlier in our conceptual framework. The book was a physical tool that scaffolded her daughters to cognitively co-construct a deeper understanding of the acculturation processes encountered by immigrant family members and their immigrant child and to recognize that it is similar to what their grandfather experienced as a new immigrant. For example, they actively understood that economic hardship is a pull factor for many male immigrants to come alone, leaving their close family members behind. That was true of the father (daughters' grandfather) in this story. Leena constructed her own meaning when explaining that "he didn't want to leave his wife by herself with three children, but he had to come first to America to make money so he can bring them." Additionally, the daughters also reflected on their intrapersonal thoughts regarding the aspirations of immigrant parents during the acculturation process. For example, Leena eagerly identified that her grandfather's goal was "to have his own work and take his family to a bigger apartment." Haneen also clearly demonstrated understanding of his goals by saying, "to have his own business, to go to a bigger apartment, and be able to buy things that they are not able to afford before." Furthermore, the daughters co-constructed their knowledge that during acculturation, family support buffers the stress and strengthens the resiliencies of the family members left behind. For example, Haneen, said, "His wife's family were living next to them, so they helped her when he is in America."

The acculturation processes encountered by the immigrant child in the book also helped the daughters take the perspective of what the protagonist, Rawan, confronts in her new country. Hence, when the mother asked, "How do you

think Rawan feels about her life in America?", Leena responded, "I think that she likes it because she is with her family. She misses her friends and school in Alexandria, but now she is in a new school, and she made new friends." The mother next asked her daughters to imagine that they are Rawan and write a letter to their friend in Egypt about life in America as a newly arrived immigrant child. She was thus scaffolding them emotionally to their upper ZPD by taking the protagonist's perspective. Leena's letter expressed Rawan's positive integration and acculturation to the American way of life (see Figure 1), "School here is better, teachers do not hit you for not doing your homework." Haneen wrote (see Figure 2), "In America houses/everything is super expensive. Classes have only 25 to 30 children. Barely anyone knows each other." These letters reflected perspective taking ability of the daughters regarding the positive and negative aspects of Rawan's life in her new host country, as well as the daughters' intrapersonal thoughts regarding the Rawan's acculturation process when developing her new American immigrant identity. Thus, the collaborative reading followed by writing moved them to their upper ZPD, expanding cognitively as well as affectively.

Figure 1. Leena's letter.
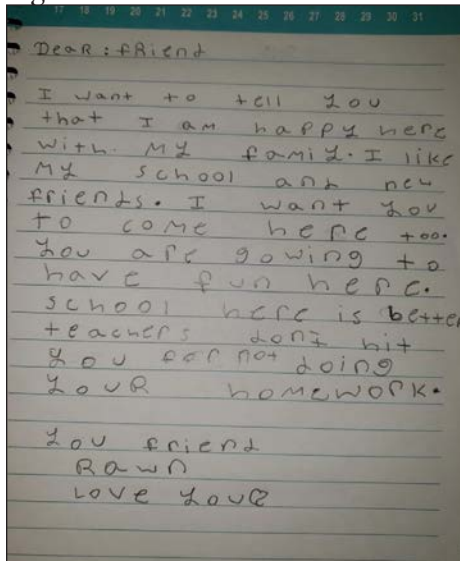
Figure 2. Haneen's letter.
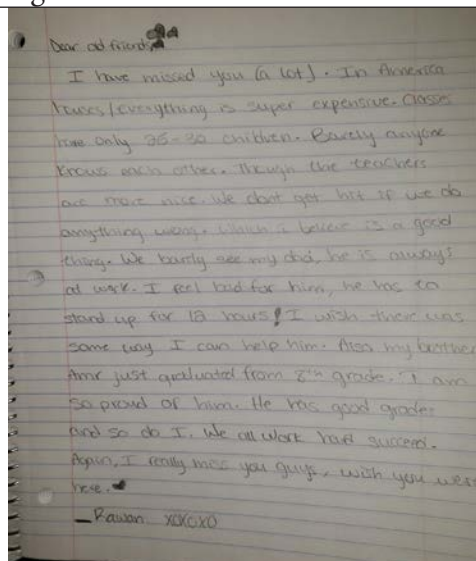
During the Museum Visit

At the AANM, the daughters examined artifacts related to Yemeni immigrants' experiences documented through their oral history, photographs, and legal papers. During this visit, they learned about their family's immigrant identity while also informally practicing cognitive and affective skills required for academics.

Both daughters heard the oral history of what immigrants were saying about their journey to America, thus practicing their focused listening skills. Additionally, they were silently solo reading the descriptions next to the photos. When they came across the Yemeni immigration photo exhibit, they were very excited, joyous, and engaged. Haneen immediately initiated explaining the labels to help Leena to comprehend the exhibit showing that, upon arrival, many Yemeni immigrants worked on the farms in California, in car factories in Michigan, and in small businesses in New York. This was exactly what Haneen had heard on her grandfather's audiotape about his own and his brother's immigrant experiences. Despite this, Haneen did not verbally connect the information at the exhibit to her grandfather's audiotape. Leena on the other hand immediately connected, for she chuckled and said, "I told you; this is talking about my grandfather. He went to the same places."

When Haneen promoted comprehension of semiotic labels next to the exhibits, she was the expert and Leena was a novice. On the other hand, Leena was the expert and Haneen was the novice when she activated Haneen's memory and expressed personal meaning by linking photos to their grandfather's experience. Thus, Haneen and Leena moved from solo silent reading to a dialogue, promoting Vygotskian collaborative co-construction of knowledge of a bidirectional nature. Additionally, they practiced cognitive skills (e.g., focused listening, reading, co-construction of knowledge, ability to explain, comprehension, memory, personal meaning making) that facilitate success in academics.

They also saw legal documents, such as citizenship tests, birth certificates, passports, and identification cards. Haneen connected those documents to her learning about immigration in her school. When examining a game with citizenship test questions, she particularly referred to a specific question on the test and said, "I learned these [citizenship questions] in my history class, but I don't remember this one [question]. If I was not a U.S citizen, I [would have] had to remember ALL of these history questions!" She thus expressed empathy for new immigrants who must learn a plethora of information (e.g., the constitution, its amendments, the Bill of Rights) to become a citizen.

After the Museum Visit

The mother suggested that her daughters jointly co-construct a common Venn diagram, classifying the similarities and differences between their grandfathers' immigrant journey and other Arab American immigrants' journeys as reported at the museum. Haneen used Vygotskian physical tools (i.e., audiotapes at the museum, her grandfather's audiotape, and the photos she had taken of the museum artifacts with informational labels) to jog her memory and assist her to classify information on their Venn diagram. While writing in the

Venn diagram, Haneen said, "Immigrants in the museum also came to America for the same reason [as grandpa]" and "I remember that the first immigrant we listened to said that he had to work right away, and my grandpa said that he had to do the same." Thus, after the museum visit, Haneen finally linked her grandfather's experiences to the audio exhibit at the museum although she had not spontaneously done so at the museum. Using purple magic marker, she wrote some similarities, such as they all are "Arab" who speak "Arabic" and "worked hard." She also inserted the differences, that the Arab immigrants who spoke on audiotapes at the museum came from "another country like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt" (see Figure 3). This Venn diagram is evidence that, unlike before, she could now notice some similarities and differences between her grandfather and other non-Yemeni Arab immigrants across Middle East. The Venn diagram thus documented that the museum visit, along with her mother's expertise, had scaffolding Haneen to expand her concept of Middle Easterners, thereby moving her to her upper ZPD.

Leena expressed her enthusiasm in this co-construction of knowledge by grabbing a black marker and hurriedly putting in her inserts, lest they ran out of space for her new ideas. She excitedly stated aloud, "I have another one [i.e., idea]. They [grandfather and his brother] travelled from one place to another. For better job." The mother scaffolded Leena by asking, "Where does your statement belong in the Venn diagram?" Leena replied with confidence, "In the middle of the Venn diagram because other immigrants did that, too." Thus, constructing this Venn diagram was an authentic dynamic assessment that documented that both daughters could classify and conceptualize (i.e., two academic skills) their family immigrant identity within the context Arab American immigrant identity.

Figure 3. Venn Diagram by Haneen (purple) and Leena (black)
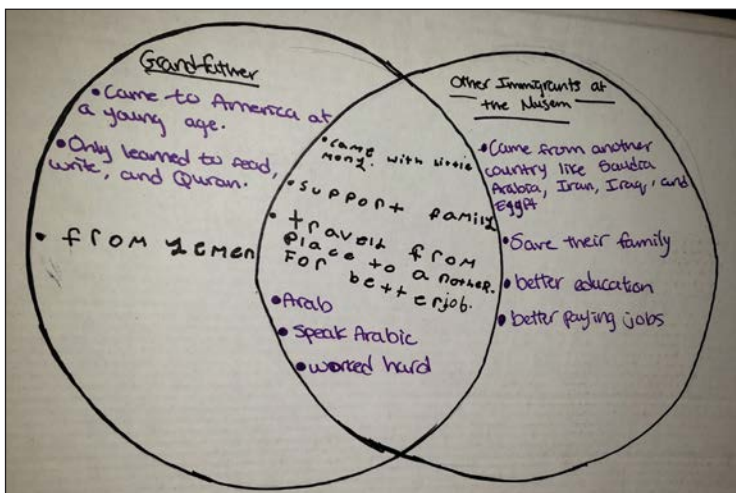
Family Museum Dramatization: Culminating Activity

The daughters created a family museum as a culminating experience where they then dramatized as docents who displayed cultural artifacts and conducted tours of their family museum. The mother and her daughter's definition of this family was not limited to a nuclear family (i.e., parents and their children). Instead, they held the traditional definition of a family amongst Yemeni people, which includes children's grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. What westerners may call extended family, they culturally view as their very immediate family. Hence, the artifacts displayed in their family museum also belonged to grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins.

Before Dramatization: Preparation and Planning

The daughters saw a western-style white wedding dress worn by an Arab American bride at the museum, and that reminded them of their aunt's (mother's sister) Yemeni and American weddings. Their aunt, who too is an immigrant to the U.S., had two weddings: a western wedding where she wore a similar white dress, and a traditional Yemeni wedding where she wore traditional Yemeni wedding clothes. The daughters had actively participated in both of these weddings. For the Yemeni-style wedding, they had decorated their hands using henna, wore traditional Yemeni clothes, and served Yemeni tea and food. Haneen was the bridesmaid and Leena was the flower girl at the western wedding. Their participation in American and Yemeni cultural wedding practices is evidence of their acculturation and furthering their American Yemeni immigrant identity. As a result, they immediately made connections between the museum artifact and their aunt's wedding without any scaffolding from their mom.

Given that they were so interested in the wedding celebration, upon their return from the museum visit, the mother showed them a YouTube video on her tablet titled, "*Traditional Yemeni Wedding*." It is a clip demonstrating traditional wedding attire with jewelry, ceremonies, and dancing, taken from a larger video titled, "*Yemen: Capital of Culture*" (TED Tiaz, 2014). This video was highly similar to their aunt's Yemeni wedding. The mother and daughters then made comparisons between Middle Eastern and Muslim wedding celebrations to the Western and Christian weddings. During this discussion, both girls demonstrated awareness of their immigrant Yemeni cultural roots. Haneen demonstrated pride, saying, "I am glad that we still have our traditional wedding as part of the celebration. So, our [Yemeni immigrant] culture is still there." The mother also had informal conversational interviews with them to assess their cognitive and affective outcomes. For example, she asked them,

"Why is it important to you both that a traditional Yemeni wedding dress is still kept as part of the Yemeni wedding celebration?" Haneen responded, "Because that is part of our culture, and we should be proud of our culture." Leena expressed, "If we don't do the traditional wedding, then it is not a Yemeni wedding anymore."

Both girls again wanted to wear the traditional wedding clothes they wore at their aunt's wedding and pretend that they were brides. Hence, the mother next dressed her daughters in traditional women's attire, jewelry, silver headband, and chiffon with traditional textile designs, like their aunt wore at her wedding and like the ones worn by the bride in the video. The mother recorded in her journal that they were very excited to dress up in the traditional Yemeni wedding attire. Later, the girls independently (i.e., without any scaffolding from their mother) came up with the idea of wearing their same wedding outfits and other Yemeni adornments when dramatizing as docents who displayed artifacts in their family museum. This is evidence of how a museum artifact was a physical tool which scaffolded them to generate independent new ideas on dramatization.

Haneen prepared for this dramatization by creating a video on her tablet of her grandfather's immigrant experiences. She expressed to her mother that her cousins, who will be visitors at their family museum, must know her grandfather's inspiring immigration story. Haneen narrated her grandfather's story on the video to match his childhood photographs with his family, his village, places he went to in America, and his most recent photographs. She narrated, "His children grew up in Sanaa, and among them was my mother. They went to private schools, and everything was provided for them. They grew up thinking that the luxury life they lived in was the same for their father. Little did they know that it was their father's determination, hard work, and perseverance that led to their happier upbringing." She ended the video by saying, "You are a true inspiration to all of us. Thank you, grandpa." Thus Haneen, on her own initiative, expressed her intrapersonal thoughts very creatively regarding her family's immigration history and cultural roots through this documentation. Her creative work product was almost a replica of the oral history audios and photos she had seen at the museum. Thus, those museum Vygotskian cultural tools scaffolded to her higher ZPD, evidenced by creating this video.

Haneen and Leena artistically displayed their family's artifacts which had personal meaning for them, depicting their immigrant roots. Furthermore, when arranging their displays, they kept in mind the messages those family museum artifacts would convey and the visitors (i.e., their adult relatives as well as their cousins) who were the intended recipients of those messages. Thus, they were accurately playing the role of curators who too must take on

the perspective of the museum visitors when arranging their displays. Leena helped by cutting and making labels for each of the exhibits, which were then placed next to the artifacts. The girls designed these labels to resemble the museum labels they had seen.

During Dramatization: Conducting Tours

Both girls seriously played their roles as museum docents, giving tours to their cousins (see Figure 4). They sustained their dramatization by taking turns and referring to the labels describing various Yemeni cultural artifacts. Most of these artifacts were brought by their grandmother when she first immigrated (e.g., blue dress with white floral print and platters; see Figures 4 and 8). Other artifacts were gifted to the grandmother and had special family memories associated with them (e.g., grandmother's eyeliner which she had for over 30 years, gifted to her by her mom, namely the children's great-grandmother, and calligraphy plaques gifted to her by her daughter, the children's aunt; see Figures 6 and 10). The few remaining artifacts were brought to the U.S. by other family members when they later visited Yemen (e.g., Leena's doll wearing their aunt's wedding veil; see Figure 9), or cultural artifacts sent as gifts from Yemen (e.g., Yemeni daggers gifted to their male cousins; see Figure 7).

The girls' scripts mentioned how each artifact was constructed, used in their family, and the cultural meaning behind it. This script was based on the cultural knowledge they had gained from their mother, other family members, and searches on the internet. When they began their participation, their mother scaffolded them to their upper ZPD by participating in their dramatization with explanations related to their family's culture, answering their questions as well as their cousin's questions, and asking provocative questions. However, when the girls were dramatizing as docents and giving museum tours to their cousins (see Figure 4), they were able to make connections of the artifacts to their family members' life experiences, without any further assistance from their mother. For example, they independently stated that: (1) this oud is played by our grandfather, especially during family gatherings (see Figure 5); (2) these festive Yemeni clothes were worn by our family members during our aunt's wedding; (3) our uncle wore a dagger at our aunt's wedding just like our cousins' daggers displayed here (see Figure 7); and (4) this silver jewelry was worn with pride by all the women at weddings. Thus, dramatization as docents and describing their family's immigrant roots is evidence of the girls expressing their immigrant identity. (Note: Parents of all children pictured have provided permission to publish the photographs appearing in this article.)

Figure 4. Leena as Docent

Note. Leena wearing traditional clothing, giving a tour of the textiles section displaying clothing and prayer rugs, pointing to a hand-embroidered traditional Yemeni dress, worn for any occasion, belonging to a cousin. Her boy-cousin Waleed and girl-cousin Jannah pretend to be museum visitors.

Figure 5. Family Museum Artifacts

Note. The display included the grandfather's oud (musical instrument) and a large, round, hand-woven, plant fiber mat on which pastry dough is kneaded, cut, and molded. Other items are detailed below.

Figure 6. Kohl Eyeliner Container

Note. The grandmother's eyeliner, a gift from her mom, the children's great-grandmother.

Figure 7. Daggers and Belts

Figure 8. Hand-woven Platters

Note. Made of dyed plant fibers, brought by the grandmother when she first immigrated, these are used as decorations and for serving foods on special occasions.

Note. Curved daggers with plastic sheaths and belts traditionally worn by men as a symbol of power and status, particularly at wedding dances. These belonged to their young male cousins.

Figure 9. Doll and Frankincense

Note. Leena's doll is wearing a traditional Yemeni wedding dress and a veil which their aunt wore at her wedding. On the right are two Frankincense containers, household staples. The bigger and more elegant ones are used for special occasions.

Figure 10. Calligraphy Plaques

Note. Two carved wooden Islamic calligraphic decorative artifacts, one saying Allah and the other Mohammed, used for protection and gifted to the children's grandmother on Mother's Day by her daughter (i.e., the children's aunt, sister of the author).

After Dramatization: Follow Up and Summative Assessment

Both girls asked if they could leave the family museum display for a longer time than originally planned, so that other family members who were unable to visit on the day of the invitation could still have a chance to see their museum exhibits. Furthermore, the daughters would also then have repeated and additional exciting opportunities to dramatize as museum docents. Thus, the display was extended in the home for two more weeks when additional family members attended. Her daughters finally reluctantly removed the exhibits given that out-of-town guests were arriving and needed that space. This entire dramatization provides evidence of the girls' (1) creativity, (2) pride in their grandfather's immigrant experience, (3) intense joy as evidence that they were not satiated even after extending the display for two weeks, (4) awareness of how household artifacts (like the museum artifacts) communicate their family's immigrant heritage and identity, and (5) understanding that it is typical for immigrants to bring objects that have special meaning to them.

After the daughters shared their video of their grandfather with their family and conducted the family museum tours, the mother interviewed Haneen and Leena and asked two summative assessment questions. The first one was, "What did you like about being a guide in the family museum you created?" Leena excitedly replied, "It was easy to place the cards with the written artifact because we wrote the descriptions and interviewed our family. I can't wait to be the guide. It was like I am the teacher, teaching my cousins about our culture

and everything you taught me." Haneen replied with a sense of accomplishment, "It was like a real museum, and I was the expert of all the artifacts. I liked when my cousins were asking me questions and I was able to answer them." This summative assessment is clear evidence of the daughters' appreciation of their family's cultural roots contributing to their immigrant identity.

The mother next asked the second summative assessment question, "What did you like about the video you all created about your grandfather?" Leena replied, "I really liked seeing the pictures of my grandfather, and it was easier to understand because of the pictures." Thus, Leena who is the younger in age compared to Haneen, self-reflected that her comprehension was enhanced (i.e., scaffolded) via pictorial documentation on mobile technology, a physical tool, which moved her to her upper ZPD. When Haneen was asked the same question, she expressed with joy that what she liked best about the video she had created was, "seeing the tears of happiness in my grandfather's face and knowing that now all my cousins know his inspiring story."

Recommendations: Literacy and Dramatization Activities

We recommend offering interactive literacy and dramatization activities, which are developmentally appropriate practices for museum education. These recommendations are buttressed with: (1) scholarly and research evidence of best practices, (2) Vygotsky's theory, and (3) our practices, namely this project grounded in scholarly and research evidence.

Museum-Related Interactive Literacy Activities

We recommend the following developmentally appropriate practices for museum education: (1) to prepare for interactive literacy activities by selecting suitable literature and family stories, (2) then conduct those interactive literacy activities through collaborative reading, and (3) then have follow-up writing activities. We describe how we too implemented these recommendations in this project.

Children's Literature and Family's Stories

We recommend that children's literature which scaffolds the readers to easily understand the new immigrant's true humanity be selected and then connected to the artifacts displayed in the museum. For example, books on (1) the complexities and adversities immigrants face (Banks, 1997), such as immigrant children's stress, resiliencies, and coping strategies (Baghban, 2007); (2) where each immigrant has to make personal and at times very difficult choices to selectively acculturate on some dimensions and yet maintain his/

her own culture on other dimensions (Bhavnagri & Willette, 2011), and (3) how they feel living in a strange new country and how that immigrant's perspective changes over time (Freeman et al., 1997). Additionally, books should be depicting visual media and artifacts (e.g., riveting photographs, engravings, lithographs, drawings, paintings, other cultural objects) from an immigrant's viewpoint (Freeman et al., 1997). Mabry and Bhavnagri (2012) reported that the books they selected did depict visual media from a new immigrant's viewpoint and clearly messaged various aspects of immigrant's humanity as stated above. Mabry and Bhavnagri's book selection with follow-up activities was grounded in Vygotsky's developmental approach and resulted in social–emotional developmental outcomes, namely empathy and perspective taking towards immigrants, and the children moved to a higher ZPD on Selman's stages of interpersonal understanding (Selman, 1980).

Besides using published fictional stories, we additionally recommend that immigrant families share their true but unpublished stories of themselves and/or their ancestors immigrating to the U.S. This can be documented by audiotaping the narration and/or presenting a multimedia format, such as a PowerPoint with authentic quotes from immigrant family members, video clips, drawings, and photographs. Given that the museum artifacts are stationary objects, the content knowledge about these artifacts is more relatable and better understood and appreciated when embedded in personalized family history. This recommendation is based on the empirical findings of Palmquist and Crowley (2007) who examined the degree to which the parents exposed their children to books at home about the museum artifacts and particularly the content knowledge related to those artifacts. Their study reported that parents of the children who were "experts" on the content knowledge about museum dinosaur exhibits had provided their children with significantly more dinosaur-themed books along with multimedia, such as videos, websites, games, and toys at home, when compared to the parents of the children who were "novices" on the content knowledge regarding the museum dinosaur exhibit.

Collaborative Reading

We recommend that parents collaboratively read aloud with their children and have meaningful verbal interactions (Mason et al., 1986), thus co-constructing a connection between the experiences described in the children's books and the museum artifacts. This co-construction results in Vygotskian socially shared cognition (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Bodrova & Leong, 2007), also called joint attention (Rogoff, 1990). We additionally recommend that the same books be then taken during the museum visit to discuss their content as linked to the museum artifacts, based on Tenenbaum et al.'s (2010) research

findings. They reported that when books were used at the museum, parents and children spent more time at an exhibit and parents also asked more questions related to the exhibit when compared to a control group which had no books.

Reflective Writing

We recommend that the intrapersonal thoughts regarding the content of the book be further expressed, using appropriate follow-up writing activities. Theilheimer (2001) reported that immigrant and non-immigrant students successfully scaffolded each other's perspective by discussing the children's literature but, more importantly, because they followed it up by writing reflective journal responses to those books. Mabry and Bhavnagri (2012) reported that the content of the book was followed up by children writing reflective journal entries, letters to the protagonists, and recording immigrant's emotions on a class group chart. Additionally, Freidus's (2010) study used children's literature to build background knowledge before museum visits and then used follow-up quick reflective writing to debrief students after their return.

Our Project Grounded in the Above Scholarly and Research Evidence

As illustrated in our descriptions, the mother in this project also practiced the recommendations stated above, grounded in scholarly and research evidence. First, she linked research evidence on children's literature and family stories to our project. For example, the mother selected *Coming to America: A Muslim's Family Story* (Wolf, 2003) for it portrayed a Muslim immigrant family's humanity, stress, and resiliency as referenced by Banks (1997) and Baghban (2007)—for example, in the family facing economic hardship and child's stress of separating from her father and her friends—and their selective acculturation process as stated by Bhavnagri and Willette (2011), seen in their maintaining their Arabic identity and integrating into an American lifestyle. Additionally, the mother followed Freeman et al.'s (1997) recommendation in selecting this book because it was written from an immigrant's perspective and was visually appealing (e.g., authentic; colorful photographs; distinctive Islamic cultural details of family lifestyles). Besides the children's story book, the mother shared the children's grandfather's true immigrant story. The children, as a result, related the content of their grandfather's story to museum audiotapes on the immigrant experiences.

Second, the mother linked scholarly and research evidence on collaborative reading to our project. For example, based on Mason et al.'s (1986) study, this mother and her daughters had meaningful verbal interactions during their joint collaborative reading session, and they co-constructed connections between the immigrant experiences described in the children's book and the museum artifacts. Third, the mother linked scholarly and research evidence on

reflective writing to our project. For example, based on Theilheimer (2001), Mabry and Bhavnagri (2012), and Freidus (2010), her daughters participated in the writing activities (e.g., their reflective journals after each read-aloud session and after each museum visit; a letter to the immigrant protagonist's friend in her country of origin, and the Venn diagram comparing similarities and differences between all Arab immigrants and Yemeni immigrants).

We thus recommend that educators (e.g., K–12 teachers, faculty in higher education, parents, volunteers, docents, community members) who use museums for informal education: (1) select children's literature and/or authentic family's immigrant stories, which are Vygotskian semiotics, related to their immigrant identity; (2) co-construct knowledge related to museum artifacts when reading aloud collaboratively, which is also a Vygotskian approach; and (3), follow it up with writing wherein the learners make personal connections between themselves and the protagonist's thoughts and feelings. All of these strategies are developmentally appropriate practices.

Museum Related Dramatization Activity

We next recommend dramatization related to museum education at historical and classrooms sites resulting in positive cognitive and affective outcomes. According to Vygotsky, dramatic play "leads" (i.e., enhances) development (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Rogoff, 1990), and the dramatization strategies we recommend below have elements of dramatic play (e.g., role playing) and thus are developmentally appropriate practices. We then state how we too implemented these recommendations in this project resulting in positive cognitive and affective outcomes.

Historical Sites

We recommend empirically grounded dramatizing strategies as described below wherein participants role played real persons from the past at historical sites which are now museums and at a museum theater. Ruso and Topdal (2014) reported that through charade and mime within a game-like situation, museum staff undergoing drama training and their family members enacted the lives of characters living in Darves Pasa Konagi, a historical mansion from the Ottoman empire in Cyprus. The other drama training candidates and their family members then had to guess and discuss what exact activity (e.g., playing ancient games, miming the character's favorite dish, weaving by making noises of weaving tools and rhythmic body movements) and personality (e.g., posing like a statue displaying the characters' personality) was being dramatized. The participants reflected and opined that dramatization was "more effective, permanent" and an "instructive" experience for them; they said, "We improved

our self-knowledge and could easily express ourselves." (Ruso & Topdal, 2014, p. 631). Thus, it had positive cognitive outcomes. Additionally, they reflected that playing games while dramatizing was fun for them because it aroused their childhood memories. Furthermore, they could empathize with those who lived in the past; thus, it had positive affective outcomes, as well.

Davies (2001) too reported that dramatizing the roles of real persons at Beningbrough Hall, a Georgian mansion in the U.K., embedded within in a game-like communal setting was an effective strategy. Participants not only had to gain the greatest personal advantage within the rules of the game to "win," but, more importantly, they had to also demonstrate that their winning had to result in "losing" participants to still gain some possible great personal advantages as well. Thus, they were cognitively challenged to figure out a win–win strategy in dramatization, resulting in spirited debates, a deeper understanding of decision-making processes, and an improvement in knowledge. Affectively, in trying to design this win–win dramatization, it also heightened the participants' awareness that a personal advantage of winning could at times also result in negative outcomes for others, especially for marginalized groups with limited powers (e.g., social injustices, power-related conflicts, disenfranchisement, resistance, loss of communal ancestral property). Thus, they learned to take other's perspectives.

Nelson (1988) reported about a first-person interpretation in dramatization performed at a museum theater, located at a late 1880s settlement schoolhouse in the U.S. Each child reenacted a personal interpretation of a full day's happenings in the life of a real school child that was mentioned in one teacher's multiple diaries, archived at the local museum. This teacher was a student who had attended this settlement school and later taught at the very same school. This reenactment resulted in children achieving cognitive outcomes, namely, learning how to do historical research, use archival materials, and relate it to their personal experiences. Jackson and Leahy (2005) also had one-character story dramatization. They reported that during the museum visit, children were exposed to a museum theater where they met, listened, viewed, and interacted with one character, who dramatized her story from the past. She additionally interspersed her dramatization with children directly interacting with her character and participating in discovery-interactive activities with museum artifacts related to her character. Cognitively, they could then easily recall historical concepts because now they had a personal connection to it through dramatization. Affectively, children enjoyed it tremendously and felt a deep empathy because they were authentically transported to the situation in that time period which they dramatized.

Classrooms Sites

We next shift our recommendation from historical sites to classrooms where children's role playing and creating personal museums also results in cognitive and affective developmental outcomes. Singer and Singer's (2004) reported role playing and creating a "Museum of Immigration" for preK all the way up to fourth grade provided a cultural context for learning through (1) family artifacts, (2) family history, and (3) family stories. It transformed their social studies curriculum, strengthened family literacy curriculum, introduced multicultural education, and promoted culturally appropriate practice. As a result of the improvement in academic curricula, the cognitive outcomes included children attentively listening and better understanding the cultural similarities and differences. The affective outcomes included students' enjoyment in sharing their family's artifacts, pride in their family's stories, and values associated with family artifacts to be passed on to the future generation within their family. Hope (2018) reported that 4- and 5-year-olds, when creating their museum with everyday classroom objects, acted as though they were curators. For example, like curators: (a) cognitively, they learned to display objects in highly imaginative ways and perceived the properties of objects as sending personal messages and telling stories about their classroom culture; and (b) affectively, they learned to keep the perspective of viewers in mind. Singer and Singer (2004) and Hope (2018) reported on evidence-based practices, which were also developmentally appropriate.

Gupta (2008) recommended a Vygotskian approach to dramatization as a developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood classrooms, resulting in cognitive and affective developmental outcomes. She proposed that Vygotskian dramatization can be an adult-directed, guided participation (e.g., during initial planning) and child-initiated dramatization (e.g., when children are fully engaged in leading and suggesting to other children during high social interactions) at the same time. Her study found it resulted in cognitive outcomes, namely increasing children's creativity, and affective outcomes, namely intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem. Scharer (2017) recommended a Vygotskian perspective of dramatic play-learning environment, such as dramatization of a museum in an early childhood classroom. She proposed that when children are role playing in a museum setting, the adults need to scaffold children to collect materials for display; next children can discuss and decide (i.e., co-construct) how those materials (i.e., physical tools scaffolding dramatization) be displayed. Children can describe the exhibits on cards and read those cards when explaining the artifact to the visitors (i.e., cards as Vygotskian physical and semiotic scaffolding tools). Additionally, children must dress up for this dramatization (i.e., a physical scaffolding tool for

dramatization). Thus, Scharer (2017), like Gupta (2008), also suggested that dramatization can be an adult-directed and child-initiated activity. Since she did not report that she had implemented her own suggestions, the cognitive and affective outcomes of her proposed developmentally appropriate practices are not reported here. Gupta's and Scharer's recommended classroom practices are undergirded in Vygotsky's theory.

Our Project Grounded in above Scholarly and Research Evidence

We now shift our discussion to the dramatization of a family museum in this project, created by the daughters and undergirded by scholarly sources and research evidence. The mother in this project used the following Vygotskian teaching strategies recommended by Gupta (2008) and Scharer (2017). She scaffolded her daughters by providing (1) initial support for planning of the dramatization, (2) cultural objects for display, (3) her personal knowledge regarding those family artifacts that were eventually written up as labels and read by her daughters when explaining to the visitors, and (4) Yemeni wedding clothes for her daughters to dress up in when they role played as docents.

Her daughters played the role of docents, similar to what was portrayed by Singer and Singer (2004) and Scharer (2017), and conducted tours for their cousins and other relatives. Like in the study by Hope (2018), they also acted as curators, displaying the artifacts, keeping the viewer's perspective in mind, and perceiving that their artifacts were telling stories about their family's immigrant identity. This included the grandfather's oud; family members' clothing worn at their aunt's wedding; and the video, in which the girls were creating a family museum artifact as Haneen narrated their grandfather's challenges and resiliencies as a Yemeni immigrant, similar to the artifact at the AANM museum.

Our family museum dramatization resulted in the following cognitive outcomes, similar to previous scholars. First, the daughters expressed meaningful, cultural, and personal connections, experiences, and messages related to the family's cultural artifacts, similar to the findings reported by Jackson and Leahy (2005), Nelson (1988), Singer and Singer (2004), and Hope (2018). Second, the daughters expressed creativity by creating a family museum and by developing an original video as a museum artifact, an outcome similar to the findings reported by Gupta (2008). Third, the daughters were fully engaged and were actively discussing and deciding, exactly as Gupta (2008) and Scharer (2017) recommended, leading them intellectually to decide about their family artifacts display, descriptions to be written on cards, and how to use those cards as prompts when explaining their visitors, just like Scharer (2017) had suggested.

The family museum dramatization resulted in the following affective outcomes similar to prior research. First, the daughters expressed joy in dramatization and empathy for their grandfather when he was moved to tears,

reflecting the findings of Ruso and Topdal (2014) and Jackson and Leahy (2005). Second, they expressed pride in their immigrant family and cultural heritage, like Singer and Singer's (2004) findings. Third, they expressed heightened intrinsic motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem to be like a teacher and expert about their culture, similar to the findings of Davies (2001) and Gupta (2008).

We thus recommend that educators (e.g., K–12 teachers, faculty in higher education, parents, volunteers, docents, community members) who use museums for informal education encourage learners to dramatize historical, cultural, and social situations presented at the museums in various locations (e.g., historical sites, classroom sites, family's residence, community centers). This recommendation is supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, also called socio-historical theory. We further recommend creating a family museum and dramatizing as docents, when possible, for it promotes specific cognitive and affective developmental outcomes; thus, it is a developmentally appropriate practice.

Conclusion, Replication, and Modification: Cognitive and Affective Outcomes

To conclude: The children demonstrated the following cognitive skills (i.e., academic learning) related to formal schooling, while simultaneously developing the families' immigrant identity: (1) attentive listening skills (e.g., focused listening to audiotapes at the museum); (2) deeper comprehension of abstract historical concepts (e.g., immigration process learned in school but better understood by examining tangible museum artifacts); (3) activating memory by bringing personal meaning to objects and experiences (e.g., relating museum artifacts to their grandfather's experiences and their history class in school; relating family museum festive artifacts to family wedding in which the daughters participated); (4) organization skills (e.g., noting similarities and differences between grandfathers' immigrant experiences and other Arab American immigrants' experiences, using a Venn diagram); (5) co-construction of meaningful knowledge and creative self-expression (e.g., collaboratively discussing and creating a family museum and a Venn diagram); and (6) reading and writing skills (e.g., collaborative reading, writing letters).

They also demonstrated the following affective skills (social–emotional learning) related to formal schooling, while simultaneously developing the families' immigrant identity: (1) empathy and perspective taking (e.g., grandfather participating in child labor to survive; new immigrants memorizing immigrant tests to become citizens); (2) appreciation of immigrant's resiliencies when economically stressed (e.g., reported in grandfather's case study,

children's book, and museum exhibits); (3) being helpful and altruistic (e.g., earlier immigrants providing social network, economic support, and hospitality to new arrivals; extended family members supporting wife and children of immigrants left behind); and (5) pride in their ancestral immigrant experiences (e.g., grandfather's accomplishments; daughters' positive immigrant identity and self-confidence displayed as docents in family museum).

To replicate more broadly: Given that we are primarily a country of immigrants from all around the world, the selection of a museum can always be changed to address other immigrant families' identities. Regardless of the country of origin or the host country, the challenges and resiliency of being an immigrant is a shared experience amongst all immigrants and an integral part of an immigrants' family identity. Our immigrant-related activities also depict immigrants' challenges and resiliencies. Thus, if these activities are adapted, and then replicated, then they would be relatable to other immigrants.

To modify: If there is no nearby museum representing the family's immigrant experiences, we then need to modify by encouraging parents and children to participate in virtual tours of immigrant museums on the internet. Those museums could be in the U.S. or in some other countries (e.g., Australia, Germany, United Kingdom). Then the parent–child dyad can have an interpersonal dialogue by following the prompts presented during the virtual tours or can participate in their idiosyncratic yet meaningful personal dialogue about the artifacts as it relates to their family's immigrant experiences. They could also be engaged in participatory interactive activities, if presented during these virtual tours. Additionally, they could discuss children's informational and storybooks as well as videos on the internet on immigrants and then participate in activities related to those books and videos, but also related to their family's immigrant experiences. Here are some possibilities: (1) discussing family photographs from the country of origin and their life on arrival as it relates to books, videos, and virtual museum artifacts; (2) interviewing family members immigrant experiences, writing stories about it, supplemented with drawings, then converting those stories into scripts, and finally dramatizing family plays regarding their immigrant experiences; (3) making replicas of three-dimensional artifacts seen at the virtual museum, but also similar to what their ancestors brought as immigrants; (4) creating an ancestral recipe book and cooking those recipes as a family; and (5) creating a family museum similar to the one discussed in this article. If the children of other immigrant groups participated in a replication or modification of this museum education project, then they too could attain the cognitive and affective outcomes stated in the conclusion. This article has thus answered the question stated in the mother's journal.

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Appendix. Mini-Case Study: Daughters' Yemeni Immigrant Grandfather

This is the summary of a Yemeni mother's interview with her father whose name is Taha (i.e., children's maternal grandfather; he has given permission to use his real name and the real name of his father, Ali). She has documented Taha's immigrant experience to help her daughters, Haneen and Leena, learn about their family's immigrant history for them to develop a Yemeni American immigrant identity. This case study, when read along with the article, could be instructive in higher education courses (e.g., social studies, immigrant history, multicultural education) because it is aligned to the research findings and issues on migrant workers and immigrants' acculturation processes.

Grandfather Taha's Life in Yemen

Haneen and Leena's maternal grandfather, Taha, lived in poverty in a small village in Yemen with his mother (i.e., children's great-grandmother), a big brother, and a sister, but without his father named Ali (i.e., children's great-grandfather) from the age of 6 until the age of 12, because his dad had immigrated to the United States in 1955 to provide for his family. His father, Ali, was unable to send money as often as he would have liked because electronic money transfers were not easily accessible and almost unknown for public to use. Hence, his dad had to wait to send remittance to his family via someone from the U.S. returning to Yemen, which did not happen very often, causing financial hardships to the family back at home.

Therefore, Taha (i.e., the children's grandfather) had to work in a handmade silver jewelry workshed called a "factory" at the age of 6. He made beads for women's jewelry and also worked on his family's meager farm growing wheat and corn, which they

mostly sold, and only occasionally ate as their source of food. Since food was scarce, he typically ate only bread with tea or coffee for breakfast and dinner and had no lunch. Water shortage was another obstacle; so, he had to walk 2 miles to get to the water, enough for drinking and washing hands and face, but not enough to bathe or wash clothes. So, he went to the river to bathe and wash clothes. His dad, Ali, finally returned when Taha was 12, and things started to get better because Ali brought with him money.

Since Taha's village did not have a school, he did not get any formal schooling. However, he did learn how to read and write in Arabic along with religious teachings at Madrasa (i.e., a religious school). He had no school supplies such as books, notebooks, or pens at home. Taha had to make his own writing board from wood, his own ink, using extract from Saber which is a plant, and he used a small stick as a pen.

When his father returned to Yemen after staying in the U.S. for six years, his dad took him to Taiz, a city where—for the first time—Taha saw cars and tall buildings. Ali, his daddy, only stayed with them for a year; then he went back to America to continue working on the farms of California. Nonetheless, he worked in California for only five months and had to come back to Yemen because he was homesick, depressed, and unable to work. Ali told his family that he always heard their voices calling him. No one was able to help him with his mental illness because they didn't have access to doctors in their village nor enough money to take him to a doctor outside the village. Ali was the primary wage earner, but he could not work, and that led the family back to economic hardships. Hence, the girls' grandfather, Taha, now had to additionally go and work on other people's farms in Yemen to feed his parents and siblings and at the same time try to save money to get medical help for his dad. Despite working multiple jobs, the pay was not enough, so then Taha and his big brother applied for an immigrant visa to the U.S.

Grandfather Taha's Life in the USA

Taha's big brother immigrated first to America in 1970 at age 17 and worked on a farm in California to support their family. A year later, on June 7, 1971, Taha, at the age of 14, immigrated to the United States to also support their family with only the clothes he was wearing and a hirz (very small, sealed wallet with Quran verses and "duaa" which means blessings to protect him and keep him safe) that his mom gave him. He traveled from Yemen to New York with a group of people and stayed with them in New York until he located his brother. Taha's older brother came to New York to pick him up and take him to California. The family he stayed with in New York helped him with his forthcoming travel expenses. Taha's brother took him to the farm camp, but the farm owners refused to let him work because he was underage and weak. He then found work on another farm. Both the brothers worked for the same farm company that their dad had worked for when he had immigrated to the U.S. years ago. When he and his brother Taha reached a farm, they were placed in a camp site with about 30 other workers. Every morning they were all bussed to the farm site and returned to the camp at the end of the day. Thus, for two years, from the ages of 15 to 17, Taha had to move from farm to farm, picking asparagus, green peppers, ap-

ples, grapes, and peaches during harvest, and from city to city within California. Even though he belonged to the farm workers' union, the working conditions were terrible. He had to work in the rain, cold, and heat, and the landowners fed the farm migrant workers only soup and bread.

When Taha's brother moved to Michigan and got a job in the Chrysler factory, he joined his brother there. He worked in a restaurant as a waiter for two years. In 1975, he went back to Yemen, got married at the age of 18, then stayed there for a few months with his wife (i.e., children's maternal grandmother). He returned to Michigan and worked in the restaurant for another two years. Then in 1977, at the age of 20, he started working for Chrysler on the assembly line. He worked there for two years. When his brother moved to New York and bought a deli, he joined his big brother to work in that deli. Both brothers worked 12 hours every day. They saved money to buy a car in Yemen for transporting goods like oil and flour from the city to their village and then sell it, for that was one another way to earn money. One brother for a year would then stay in Yemen to drive the car and sell the goods, while the other brother stayed in New York for a year. Then they would switch; thus, taking turns to return to Yemen every alternate year. They continued to save money and were finally able to buy land in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. They eventually built a huge house in Sana'a, and then the whole family moved there from their village.

Their grandfather, Taha, continued to work in New York and sent remittances to his wife, their children, and the rest of the extended family. He decided eventually to bring his family to the United States because he wanted his children to have the opportunity that he never had, namely a better education and a good life. Thus, the mother who interviewed her dad arrived as an American citizen at the age of 11, and she studied in English in New York. Currently, the girls' grandfather Taha lives with his wife in a home of their own within the same city as his granddaughters, who visit him frequently. He is now happily retired, well-adjusted to his immigrant status, and yet clear about his ethnic roots and identity.

Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Parental Involvement and Practices in the Education of Students with Learning Disabilities in Greece

Dimitra Eleftheriadou and Anastasia Vlachou

Abstract

Parental involvement, as well as parent and teacher relations, have been considered as a significant factor that affects children's schooling. Still, in order to foster inclusion, parent–teacher relations need further investigation. This study explores parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement in the education of students with Learning Disabilities (LD) based on Epstein's (1995) parental involvement typology. Epstein's questionnaires for parents and teachers were administered to 151 mothers, 77 fathers, 232 general, and 126 special education teachers in Greece in order to investigate their perceptions of parental involvement types and practices concerning the education of children with LD. The differences among parent- and teacher-related sociodemographic characteristics were also examined. The findings reveal that the parents associate their involvement in the education of their children with LD more with Type 1-Parenting, whereas the teachers with Type 5-Decision making. Parents use more Type 4-Learning at home practices, whereas teachers employ Type 2-Communicating practices. Notwithstanding, there are a series of statistically important findings concerning parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement and practices in the education of children with LD by sociodemographic characteristics. Results are discussed in relation to their implications in promoting more inclusive and sustainable home–school partnerships.

Key Words: parental involvement, parent practices, teacher practices, Epstein's typology, learning disabilities, inclusion, Greece, Greek education

Introduction

Over three decades now, parental involvement, as well as parent and teacher relations, have dominated educational studies. Until now, researchers have placed emphasis on how home–school collaboration may be sustainable and effective for students (Epstein, 2010), including students with disabilities (Graham, 2020). The existing corpus of literature examines parent or teacher perspectives on parental involvement, as well as parent or teacher practices in different types of schools or areas (Erdener, 2013; Garcia, 2014; Giannikas & Nikitaki, 2022; Magouirk, 2015). Some researchers focus on parent–teacher relations or practices for inclusive purposes (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2015) in a dualistic way (Laluvein, 2010). It is notable that published studies on education during the COVID-19 crisis are limited, although the COVID-19 pandemic has shocked education systems around the world, being also a catalyst for parent–teacher relations in schools. Therefore, the question arises about a school's ability to respond effectively to emergencies (Haisraeli & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2021), as well as to all students' educational needs (Graham, 2020).

A voluminous body of literature about parental involvement indicates that home–school relations are complex and fraught with difficulties due to various reasons, such as poor school-to-home communication (Symeou et al., 2012), negative school climate (Moran et al., 2012), lack of teacher education in home–school partnerships (Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2020), low parental socioeconomic status or education level (Bonal & González, 2020; Magouirk, 2015), and parent and teacher attitudes and beliefs about children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). This study suggests that Epstein's theoretical model of parental involvement which emphasizes the role of the school, the family, and the community in comprehensive partnership programs, and proclaims six types of involvement practices in school and at home, may be employed as a tool by schools to overcome difficulties between families and schools, as indicated in the literature (see, Garcia, 2014; Erdener, 2013; Magouirk, 2015).

Additionally, the ethos for power-sharing between parents, schools, and agencies, especially in inclusive education, may cause additional complexities since much power still resides in the hands of education authorities and professionals. For instance, in the Greek context, insufficient emphasis is placed on the rights of parents of children with Learning Disabilities (LD) in school (Educational Law 4823/2021), which may prevent parents from being actively involved in their children's learning, since there is a lack of culture and infrastructure that may provide parents and teachers the conditions needed for reliable partnerships (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006) in an inclusive way.

Although the Greek law encourages the formal and legal dimension of parental involvement in schools—for example, a Parents' Association has been established in every school unit—home–school relations in a pedagogical sense are put aside (Giannikas & Nikitaki, 2022).

It has also been reported that true partnerships are disputable, because many schools lack effective mechanisms and resources to promote meaningful collaborations between parents of children with or without LD and their teachers in a collective social practice. This may be due to different, even contradictory agendas, expectations, and priorities, or even differences in parent and teacher perceptions of their involvement in school (Carrión-Martinéz et al., 2021; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). However, in order to foster inclusion in school for children with LD, sustainable home–school partnerships should be encouraged by policymakers, administrators, and school staff. This means that parental involvement should be adequately defined and understood by all stakeholders so as to include family resources that shape children's learning in educational contexts (Ainscow, 2020).

Parental Involvement in All Children's Education

Researchers have emphasized that children need the support of their parents if they are to maximize their potential from schooling (Savva & Symeou, 2019; Ulferts, 2020), especially at the preschool and primary school level (Gülhan, 2023). Parental involvement is an important predictor of children's academic success (Giannikas & Nikitaki, 2022) and their holistic development. It improves children's social, emotional, and character development; reduces school dropouts, especially in the secondary education level; as well as improving children's academic motivation, self-efficacy, and attitude towards school (Gülhan, 2023). Furthermore, parental involvement may increase parent–child interactions at home and in school, which may affect the responsiveness of the parents to the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of their children (Mata et al., 2018). More importantly, parental involvement may contribute to the amelioration and democratization of school (Desforges, 2003), more positive relations between schools and families based upon respect and mutuality, better understanding of a teacher's or parent's role in school, and it may be employed as a tool by teachers to better understand family culture and abilities (Epstein, 2010). All these reasons strongly emphasize the importance of parental involvement for children, parents, and teachers.

Although parental involvement is a highly researched topic in educational studies, yet, parent involvement may not be defined precisely in the existing literature, because the generic definitions and descriptions of its meanings and functions are often vague, referring to parents' multifaceted behaviors at home

and in school (Giannikas & Nikitaki, 2022). Still, it is essential to practitioners and researchers to answer questions that concern its meanings and functions in order to promote all children's learning.

Some researchers avoid a general definition of parental involvement, whereas they focus on specific involvement types (Boonk et al., 2018). For instance, Epstein has not defined parental involvement from a singular perspective, but has classified home- and school-related strategies of involvement into a six-type model of parental involvement. Epstein's model "describes parent–teacher relationships as based on communication and cooperation and parental involvement as malleable depending on the practices of teachers, administrators, other persons, and students" (Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018, p. 32). Based on Epstein's theoretical model of parental involvement, this study identifies parental involvement as those behaviors demonstrated by parents at home and in school settings in order to support the development of their children, both educationally and socially/emotionally (Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018).

Epstein introduces "school, family, and community partnerships" as a better term than "parental involvement" to recognize the importance of sharing responsibility between parents, teachers, and the community in students' learning (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). According to Epstein's model, parental involvement or better, "school, family, and community partnerships," is a multidimensional term, depicted in a six-type framework of involvement (Sanders & Epstein, 2005), each associated with different practices, comprising:

- *Type 1-Parenting*: assist all families to establish supportive home environments for children as students.
- *Type 2-Communicating*: create two-way communication channels between all families and schools about school programs and children's progress in a comprehensible manner.
- *Type 3-Volunteering:* recruit parent help and support for school functions and activities (e.g., organizing activities or celebrations).
- *Type 4-Learning at home*: involve families in children's academic learning at home and home-related activities (e.g., help with homework).
- *Type 5-Decision making*: include parents as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities.
- *Type 6-Collaborating with the community*: identify and integrate community resources and services to support schools, families, and students' learning with a sense of shared responsibility.

Parent responses to varied home–school activities are significantly determined by variables associated with the parent, the child, or the teacher. Researchers have put emphasis on parent perceptions of their roles and their efficacy in the education of children when involved in their children's learning (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Specific domains of parents'

self-perceived skills and knowledge, family socioeconomic conditions, as well as specific invitations, demands, and opportunities to be engaged presented either by the child or school may affect parental involvement and practices (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). In fact, higher self-efficacy levels on part of the parent are associated with increased classroom participation, more home activities, and fewer negative interactions with school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). Moreover, teacher positive beliefs of parent efficacy in children's learning may also define home–school practices, since teachers act to secure parental involvement according to their perception of parent efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002).

Further, among home–school practices preferred, it seems that homework or regular communication with school tend to be related more with parental involvement (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010). Poulou and Matsagouras (2007) found that "parent–teacher conferences at school" about parenting and children's behavior were the prominent area of home–school practices in Greece, as well as "parents' invitation into the classroom." On the contrary, activities such as "home–school journal," "family–teacher meetings outside school time," or "home visits" were less preferred by Greek parents.

Compared to the bulk of literature on parental involvement that focuses on parents' involvement, fewer studies have examined the involvement of parents of children with LD, presenting both the parent and teacher perspective, especially in Greece. Therefore, this study makes some important contributions to the investigation, analysis, and clarification of the meaning of "parental involvement" through parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement and practices to support the education of children with LD. Numerous studies, large or small-scaled, examine issues of parental involvement in predetermined educational activities, parent or teacher roles or practices, parent aspirations, as well as the impact of parental involvement upon students' achievements, attitude, or behaviors. In Greece, the existing evidence coming from mixed-method studies, rating simultaneously parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement or practices for inclusive purposes is still limited. The significance of this study is linked with the assumption that if parent and teacher perceptions regarding parental involvement and home–school practices when children with LD are involved can be ascertained, then the findings of this study may be used to ameliorate or introduce new practices in school so that the academic achievement of these children could potentially be increased.

This research, being part of a large-scale, mixed methods study on parental involvement based on Epstein's typology, was conducted to investigate parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement in the education of elementary school children with identified LD. Perceived practices employed by both

parents and teachers to support these children's learning were also explored. Additionally, we examined if certain parent-related sociodemographic characteristics (parent–child relation, education level, marital status, children's age), as well as teacher-related sociodemographic characteristics (general and special education teacher, gender, education level, teaching experience) may differentiate parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement and practices to enhance these children's learning. Specifically, based on Epstein's typology (1995), we explored:

1. How do parents of children with LD and their teachers perceive parental involvement (Types) in the education of these children?
2. What practices do parents and teachers report that they employ to support the education of these children?
3. Are there any differences among parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement, as well as parent and teacher practices, and the above-mentioned parent- and teacher-related sociodemographic characteristics?

Method

Research Design and Procedures

The present study took place between the years of 2018 and 2019, prior to the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. A written permission was acquired from Epstein to use Epstein et al.'s questionnaires, as well as from the Greek Ministry of Education. Directors, consultants, and heads of public elementary schools were informed by mail, phone, or personally by the researchers to obtain permission to solicit parent and teacher participation; 960 letters (500 for parents, 560 for teachers) were sent to 250 elementary schools in different areas of Greece, explaining to them the purpose of the study, soliciting voluntary participation, and affirming confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. The respondents choosing to participate were asked to complete a questionnaire that contained all data needed for this study at a time and place convenient to them. All questionnaires were returned in stamped addressed envelopes (parents, $n = 242$, 48.4%) (teachers, $n = 362$, 64.82%), the major part of which was collected by post. The researchers tried to communicate with the parents who did not respond, but without success.

Participants

The sample consisted of 586 participants (151 mothers, 77 fathers, 232 general, and 126 special education teachers) drawn from 120 schools located in urban and suburban areas in regions of Central Greece (Attica included), Peloponnese, and Thessaly. Specific inclusion criteria were set, such as: (1) being

state mainstream schools; (2) having pull-out programs/resource room units for students with LD; (3) the students' LD were identified according to the national identification procedure (Law 3699/2008, in which the KEDASY, an organization attached to the Ministry of Education, has assessed the students' LD and has provided useful guidelines to parents and schools in order to develop an IEP for the student; no other impairment was reported for the children described by their parents and teachers, as well as by the official diagnosis accompanying them); and (4) parents or teachers of children with LD should be willing to participate in this study. Anonymity was kept throughout the process of this research.

The respondent parents were mainly mothers (n = 151, 66.2%), between 41–50 years of age (n = 124, 54.6%), and married (n = 206, 91.2%). All parents reported having at least one child with LD. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the participant parents.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Parent Participants

Demographic Characteristics	Mothers		Fathers		Total	
	n = 151	%	n = 77	%	N = 228	%
Age						
20-30 years	4	2.7	1	1.3	5	2.2
31-40 years	67	44.7	21	27.3	88	38.8
41-50 years	74	49.3	50	64.9	124	54.6
51 years of age or more	5	3.3	5	6.5	10	4.4
Education						
Elementary school	10	6.7	3	3.9	13	5.7
Junior High school	12	8.0	13	16.9	25	11.0
Lyceum	81	54.0	28	36.3	109	48.0
University	35	23.3	23	29.9	58	25.6
Master's degree	3	2.0	3	3.9	6	2.7
PhD	-	-	1	1.3	1	0.4
Other	9	6.0	6	7.8	15	6.6
Marital status						
Married	139	93.3	67	87.0	206	91.2
Divorced	9	6.0	10	13.0	19	8.4
Single parent	1	0.7	0	0.0	1	0.4

As for the teacher respondents, the general education teachers (*n* = 232, 64.8%) participating in this study outnumbered the special education teachers (*n* = 121, 36.2%). The majority of the teachers were female (*n* = 245, 76.1%), less than half of them were between 46–55 years of age (*n* = 152, 45.6%), and some of them had either 21–30 years (*n* = 119, 36.0%) or 11–20 years (*n* = 107, 32.3%) in service. Some teachers reported that there were at least two children with LD or other disability in their class. Table 2 provides further details of the participant teachers' sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Participant Teachers

	Teachers					
	General Teacher		Special Education Teacher		Total	
Characteristics	*n* = 232	%	*n* = 126	%	*N* = 358	%
Gender						
Male	50	24.9	27	22.3	77	23.9
Female	151	75.1	94	77.7	245	76.1
Age						
25–35 years	53	25.7	23	18.1	76	22.8
36–45 years	59	28.6	40	31.5	99	29.7
46–55 years	90	43.7	62	48.8	152	45.6
56 years and more	4	1.9	2	1.6	6	1.8
Education						
School of Education	61	29.8	27	21.8	88	26.7
University degree	115	56.1	72	58.1	187	56.8
Master's degree	22	10.7	24	19.4	46	14.0
PhD	6	2.9	1	.8	7	2.1
Other	1	0.5	0	.0	1	.3
Years of experience as a teacher						
1–10 years	64	31.1	34	27.2	98	29.6
11–20 years	69	33.5	38	30.4	107	32.3
21–30 years	67	32.5	52	41.6	119	36.0
31 years and more	6	2.9	1	.8	7	2.1

Instrument

The *School and Family Partnerships: Surveys and Summaries* (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) was administered to parents in order to assess their perceptions of parental involvement, as well as their practices, when they are involved in the education of their children with LD. Some demographics were also required at the end of the questionnaire which consisted of five sections, 10 questions, and 90 items. However, in this study, we present data coming from the analyses of parent responses to the following sections:

- *The school's contact with you* examines parent perceptions of parental involvement in line with Epstein's typology, coded on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = well, 4 = never).
- *Your involvement* contains specific research questions about parental involvement behaviors at home or at-school practices. Parents were asked to report the frequency [every day or most days (1) up to never (4)] they were involved in their children's education with Type 2-Comunicating, Type 3-Volunteering, and Type 4-Learning at home involvement practices.

Table 3 presents more detailed information of the parent questionnaire.

Table 3. Sections–Scales of the Parent Questionnaire

Sections–Scales	Parts–Parental Involvement Types
Scale 1. The school's contact with you (15 items)	• Invitations to school (Type 3, Type 5) • Communicate information about child's progress in school (Type 2) • Encourage parent–child interactions on homework (Type 4) • Strengthened connections with community (Type 6)
Scale 2. Your involvement (15 items)	• Parental involvement at school (Type 2, Type 3) • Parental involvement at home (Type 4) • Parental involvement in reading (Type 4) • Parental involvement in math (Type 4) • Parental involvement in science (Type 4) • Monitoring schoolwork (general involvement at home, Type 4)

Also, the *School and Family Partnerships: Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades* (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) was administered to teachers. The questionnaire provides information on teacher attitudes about parental involvement, teacher practices to involve families, teacher perceptions of the parental role, some demographics, and open-ended comments. However, in this article, the data presented come from teacher responses, as follows:

- *Question 1* contains two scales that measure teacher perceptions of parental involvement (Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at home, and Type 5-Decision making), coded on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = I totally disagree, 4 = I totally agree).
- *Question 2* contains one scale that measures Type 2-Communicating practices. Teachers should estimate the average (0%, 5%, 10%, 25%, 50%, 75%, 90%, 100%) of Type 2-Communicating practices to reach parents (Most/Fewer).
- *Question 3* contains two scales that measure the use of parents as volunteers either in classrooms or in school (Type 3-Volunteering), offering a fixed group of answer choices to the teacher respondents who are asked to "check all that apply."
- *Question 4* contains four scales that measure what practices of involvement (Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Vollunteering, Type 4-Learning at home, and Type 5-Decision making) do teachers think that are important for their grade level, coded on a 4-scale Likert (1 = not important, 4 = very important).

Table 4 presents more details of the teacher questionnaire.

Each questionnaire was translated into Greek and pilot tested with 10 parents and 10 teachers, respectively. After minor phrasal adjustments, they were both back translated to ascertain that they captured the meaning of the original questionnaire in its Greek version.

Data Analysis

In both questionnaires, variables were tested for internal reliability (Cronbach's α; see Table 5 and 6). All statistical analyses run with IBM SPSS v.22. Descriptive analyses, the nonparametric test Friedman's Rank (x_f^2), the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality for independent samples, the Mann-Whitney U non-parametric test, Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test, as well as the χ^2 test (for Types with one item) were employed in order to analyze the data coming from the participants' responses.

Table 4. Questions and Scales of the Teacher Questionnaire

Question	Scale	Parental Involvement Activities (Types)
Question 1	Scale 1. Teacher Attitudes About Parental Involvement (6 Items)	Type 2-Communicating Type 3-Volunteering Type 4-Learning at home Type 5-Decision making
	Scale 2. Teacher General Attitudes About Parental Involvement (5 Items)	
Question 2	Scale 3. Teacher's Practices of Contacting Families (8 Items)	Type 2-Communicating
Question 3	Scale 5. How Volunteers Are Involved In Classrooms (8 Items)	Type 3-Volunteering
	Scale 6. How Volunteers Are Involved in School (9 Items)	Type 3-Volunteering
Question 4	Scale 7. Importance To Teacher of Type 2-Communicating Activities (6 Items)	Type 2-Communicating
	Scale 8. Importance to Teacher of Type 3-Volunteering Activities (1 Item)	Type 3-Volunteering
	Scale 9. Importance to Teacher of Type 4-Learning at Home Activities (7 Items)	Type 4-Learning at home
	Scale 10. Importance to Teacher of Type 5-Decision Making Activities (1 Item)	Type 5-Decision making

Table 5. Validity Results of Parent Questionnaire (Cronbach's α)

Sections	Sheldon & Epstein (2007)	Present study
Section 1.		
Part A. The school's contact with you	.81	.90
Section 2. Your involvement	.79	.92

Table 6. Validity Results of Teacher Questionnaire (Cronbach's α)

Teacher Questionnaire		Cronbach's α	
Questions	Scales	Epstein & Salinas (1993)	Present study
Question 1	Teacher attitudes about parental involvement (Types 2, 3, 4, and 5)	.72	.52
	Teacher general attitudes about parental involvement		.52
Question 2	Teacher's practices of contacting families	.69	.54
Question 3	How volunteers are involved in classrooms	.65	.67
	How volunteers are involved in school		
Question 4	Importance to teacher of Type 2 activities	.75	.60
	Importance to teacher of Type 3 activities	-	-
	Importance to teacher of Type 4 activities	.77	.79
	Importance to teacher of Type 5 activities	-	-

Results

The perceptions of parents of children with LD and their teachers' perceptions of parental involvement (Types) in the education of these children

Parents

Descriptive analyses employed calculated the means (M), standard deviation (SD), and the range (min–max) of each Type to determine which one is most/least likely to be endorsed by parent participants. Additionally, the non-parametric test Friedman's Rank (x^2_f) was used to compare between the related means of the involvement Types so as to indicate how they differ. According to the Friedman's Rank test (x^2_f), the analyses show that the difference of Type 1-Parenting (highest mean) with Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at home, Type 5-Decision making, and Type 6-Collaborating with the community is statistically significant [x^2_f(5) = 292.79, p = .000 < .001 for each Type]. Also, the difference of Type 2 compared to Types 3, 5, and 6 is statistically significant [x^2_f (3) = 128.29, p = .000 < .001 for each type] as well as with Type 4, compared to Types 3, 5, and 6, where x^2_f (3)

= 38.71, p = .000 < .001. As Figure 1 demonstrates, Type 1-Parenting prevails among other Types, whereas Type 3-Volunteering is the least preferred Type (see Table 7), as follows:

- Type 1-Parenting. M = 3.28 (high)
- Type 2-Communicating. M = 2.83
- Type 4-Learning at home. M = 2.66 (higher than the scale's average)
- Type 6-Collaborating with the community. M = 2.31 (value close to the scale's average)
- Type 5-Decision making. M = 2.24 (lower than the scale's average)
- Type 3-Volunteering. M = 2.14.

Figure 1. Mean Values of All Types of Parental Involvement
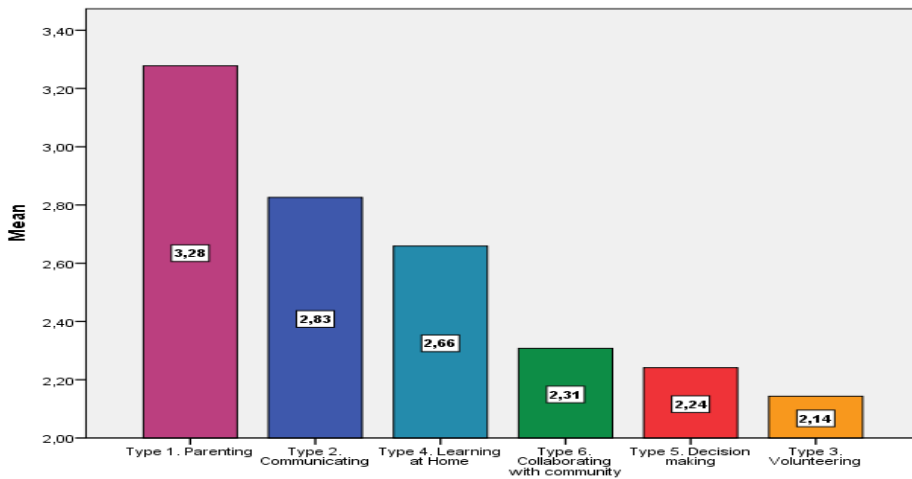
Table 7. Values of Involvement Types According to Parent Participants (N = 257)

Types	M	SD	Range
Type 1-Parenting	3.28	.82	1.00 - 4.00
Type 2-Communicating	2.83	.83	1.00 - 4.00
Type 3-Volunteering	2.14	.82	1.00 - 4.00
Type 4-Learning at home	2.66	1.13	1.00 - 4.00
Type 5-Decision making	2.24	.76	1.00 - 4.00
Type 6-Collaborating with the community	2.31	1.00	1.00 - 4.00

Teachers

All items of the teacher questionnaire (Type 5-Decision making) were tested for internal consistency (Cronbach's α). Descriptive statistics were calculated on each Type, as well as the means (M), standard deviation (SD), and the range

(min–max) to determine which Type is most likely/least likely to be endorsed by teacher participants. Additionally, the non-parametric test Friedman's Rank (x_f^2) was used to compare between the related means of the involvement Types, so as to indicate how they differ. The analyses reveal that Type 5-Decision making prevails among other Types examined, whereas Type 3-Volunteering follows. According to the Friedman's Rank test (x_f^2), the difference (highest value) of Type 5-Decision making with Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, and Type 4-Learning at home is statistically significant [$x_f^2(3)$ = 337.89, p = .000 < .001] (see Figure 2 and Table 8), as follows:

- Type 5-Decision making. M = 2.92 (higher than scale's average)
- Type 3-Volunteering. M = 2.32
- Type 2-Communicating. M = 2.15
- Type 4-Learning at home. M = 2.14 (the lowest value)

Figure 2. Mean Values of Involvement Types According to Teacher Participants
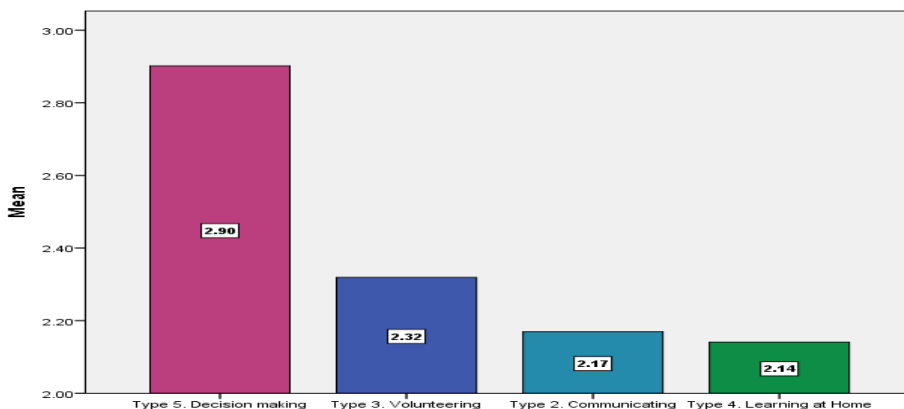
Table 8. Values of Involvement Types According to Teacher Participants (N = 334)

Types	M	SD	Range
Type 2-Communicating	2.15	.72	1.00 - 4.00
Type 3-Volunteering	2.32	.64	1.00 - 4.00
Type 4-Learning at Home	2.14	.58	1.00 - 4.00
Type 5-Decision making	2.92	.37	1.67 - 4.00

As it concerns the variable "Teacher general attitudes about parental involvement" (M = 2.96, Cronbach's α = .522), items such as "parental involvement is important for a good school," and "it's important for student success in school" were higher scored (M = 3.11), whereas items, such as "parent involvement

can help teachers to be more effective with more students" (M = 2.79), and "teachers need in-service education to implement effective parent involvement practices" (M = 2.78) were ranked with the lowest values.

Practices that parents and teachers employ to support the education of children with LD

Parents

As it concerns parental practices, all items were tested with Cronbach's α for internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were employed to calculate the means (M), standard deviation (SD), and the range (min–max), as well as the Types that are most and least likely to be endorsed by parent participants. Additionally, the non-parametric test Friedman's Rank (x_f^2) was used to compare between the related means of the involvement Types so as to indicate how they differ.

The analyses revealed that Type 4-Learning at Home is the most used practice, compared to Type 3-Volunteering, which is the least preferred one. According to Friedman's Rank test (x_f^2), the difference of Type 3 (lowest mean) with Type 2 and Type 4 is statistically significant [$x_f^2(2)$ = 122.52, p = .000 < .001 for each Type]. Figure 3 and Table 9 demonstrate the most/least reported Types of parental practices, as follows:

- Type 2-Communicating. M = 3.07 (higher than the scale's average)
- Type 3-Volunteering. M = 2.18 (lower than the scale's average)
- Type 4-Learning at home. M = 3.25 (higher than the scale's average)

Figure 3. Mean Values of the Involvement Practices According to Parent Participants
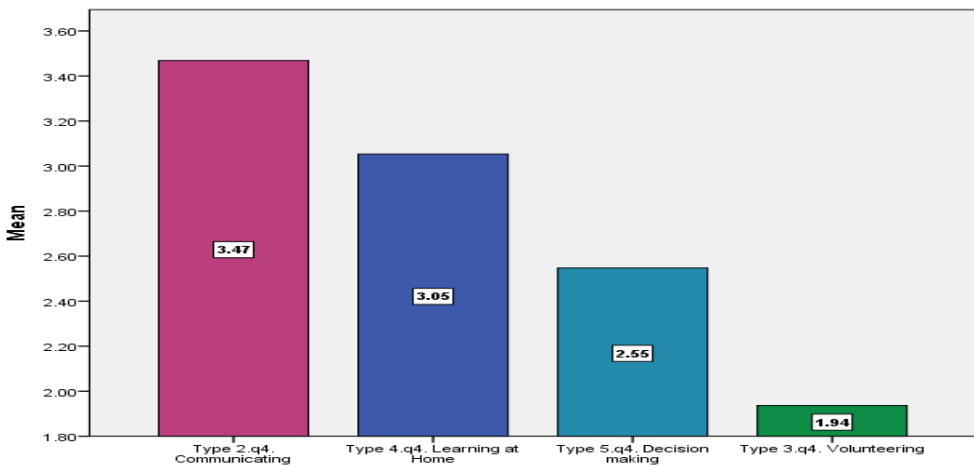
Table 9. Values of Types of Parental Practices ($N = 257$)

Types	M	SD	Range
Type 2-Communicating	3.07	.66	1.50 - 4.00
Type 3-Volunteering	2.18	1.04	1.00 - 4.00
Type 5-Decision making	3.25	.56	1.46 - 3.82

Teachers

All items of the teacher questionnaire [Type 2-Communicating (questions 2 & 4), Type 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at home (question 4)], were tested with Cronbach's α for internal consistency. Descriptive statistics were calculated on each of the assessing Type of involvement, as well as the means, standard deviation, and the range (min–max) to determine which Types are most/least likely to be endorsed by the teacher participants. The analyses revealed that Type 2-Communicating (question 4) prevails among other Types examined. Specifically, the Friedman's Rank test (x_f^2) revealed that the difference (highest value) of Type 2 (question 4) with Types 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at home, and Type 5-Decision making (question 4) is statistically significant [$x_f^2(3) = 528.49$, $p = .000 < .001$ for all three Types]. The same is valid for the difference between Type 4 (question 4) and Types 3 and 5 (question 4) [$x_f^2(2) = 256.08$, $p = .000 < .001$] and Type 5 (question 4) with Type 3 (question 4) [$x_f^2(1) = 201.32$, $p = .000 < .001$]. Data coming from the above-mentioned analyses are presented in Figure 4 and Table 10, as follows:
- Type 2-Communicating. M = 3.48 (higher than scale's average)
- Type 4-Learning at home. M = 3.07 (higher than scale's average)
- Type 5-Decision making. M = 2.56 (almost on scale's average)
- Type 3-Volunteering. M = 1.94 (lower than scale's average)

Figure 4. Mean Values of Parental Practices According to Teacher Participants
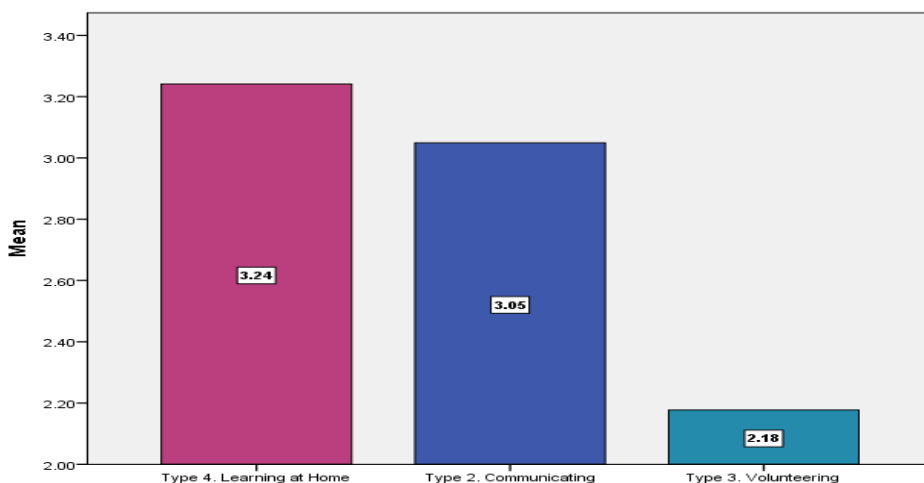
Table 10. Values of Teacher Practices (*N* = 332)

Types	M	SD	Range
Type 2-Communicating (Question 4)	3.48	.39	2.00 - 4.00
Type 3-Volunteering (Question 4)	1.94	.98	1.00 - 4.00
Type 4-Learning at Home (Question 4)	3.07	.56	1.71 - 4.00
Type 5-Decision making (Question 4)	2.56	.87	1.00 - 4.00

Differences among parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement according to specific sociodemographic characteristics

Parents

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality for independent samples, employed to calculate the differences among parent perceptions and parent sociodemographics (Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, Type 5-Decision making, and Type 6-Collaborating with the community), showed no normal distribution. Therefore, Mann-Whitney *U* non-parametric test was used for parent–child relation and parent marital status, whereas Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test was used for parent and child age groups and parent education level. For Type 1-Parenting and Type 4-Learning at home (one item each), the χ^2 test was used.

It was revealed that in Type 2-Communicating, there were statistically significant differences, when related with the parent–child relation. Specifically, the fathers (Mdn = 3.17) get higher rates compared to the mothers (Mdn = 2.83, the *U* criterion value = 4723.00, *p* = .035 < .05, and the effect size = -0.14; see Table 11).

Table 11. The Involvement Types According to Mothers and Fathers (Mann-Whitney U)

Type	Mothers	Fathers	U	*p*
	(*n* = 150)	(*n* = 77)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Type 2-Communicating	**2.83 (1.40)**	**3.17 (.92)**	**4723.000**	**.035**
Type 3-Volunteering	2.50 (1.00)	2.00 (1.00)	5110.000	.325
Type 5-Decision making	2.00 (1.33)	2.00 (1.00)	5023.000	.276
Type 6-Collaborating with the community	2.00 (1.75)	2.50 (1.50)	5283.000	.452

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Mann-Whitney *U* test, and the corresponding *p*-value. The statistically significant differences are noted with bold.

Also, in Type 2-Communicating and Type 5-Decision making, the students' age group differentiated parent perceptions of involvement (Type 2, H(3) = 11.41, p = .010 < .05; Type 5, H(3) = 8.89, p = .031 < .05). The post hoc test reveals that the parents of older students present statistically significant lower rates (Type 2-Communicating, Mdn = 2.33; Type 5-Decision making, Mdn = 2.00) than the parents of younger children (Type 2-Communicating, Mdn = 3.17, p = .005 < .01; Type 5-Decision making, Mdn = 2.42, p = .022 < .05; see Table 12).

Table 12. The Involvement Types, Related to the Students' Age (Kruskal-Wallis H)

Type	Up to 8 years	9–10 years	11–12 years	13 years and up	H (3)	p
	(n = 37)	(n = 62)	(n = 76)	(n = 37)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Type 2-Communicating	**3.17 (1.00)**	**3.00 (1.34)**	**2.83 (1.16)**	**2.33 (1.5)**	**11.406**	**.010**
Type 3-Volunteering	2.50 (1.00)	2.00 (1.00)	2.00 (1.00)	2.00 (1.50)	4.450	.217
Type 5-Decision making	**2.42 (1.00)**	**2.33 (1.00)**	**2.00 (1.00)**	**2.00 (0.83)**	**8.887**	**.031**
Type 6-Collaborating with the community	2.50 (1.50)	2.50 (1.25)	2.00 (1.50)	1.50 (1.50)	6.893	.075

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Kruskal-Wallis H test, and the corresponding p-value.

The data revealed that the mothers and the parents of younger children participate more in their children's education with Type 2-Communicating and Type 5-Decision making involvement activities, compared to the fathers and the parents of older children. For items related with Type 1-Parenting and Type 4-Learning at home (categorical variables), the χ^2 test took place, when these Types were compared with sociodemographic variables. No statistically significant differences are observed.

Teachers

The Shapiro-Wilk test employed to calculate the differences among teacher perceptions (Types) and teacher demographics in Type 5-Decision making showed no normal distribution. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney test was run for gender and the type of teacher, as well as the Kruskal-Wallis test for age groups, education level, and teaching experience. As it concerns Type

2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, and Type 4-Learning at home (one item), the χ^2 test was conducted.

Table 13 presents the statistically significant differences found in Type 5-Decision making according to gender. Specifically, the female teachers (Mdn = 3.00) had lower rates than their male colleagues (Mdn = 3.00, U criterion value = 9294.50, p = .045 < .05, and effect size = -0.11).

Table 13. Male/Female Teachers' Perceptions in Type 5-Decision Making (Mann-Whitney U)

	Male	Female	U	p
	(n = 84)	(n = 257)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Type 5-Decision making	**3.00 (0.5)**	**3.00 (0.33)**	**9294.500**	**.045**

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Mann-Whitney U test, and the corresponding *p*-value. The statistically significant differences are shown with bold.

Also, as it concerns the variable "Teacher general attitudes about parental involvement," teacher education level differentiates teacher perceptions [H(2) = 8.40, p = .015 < .05]. The post hoc test conducted revealed that teacher graduates of the Teacher Academy had lower rates (Mdn = 3.00) than holders of a Master's degree (Mdn = 3.00, p = .013 < .05; see Table 14).

Table 14. "Teacher General Attitudes About Parental Involvement" Variable Related to Teacher Education Level (Kruskal-Wallis H)

Variable	Teacher Academy	University Diploma	Master's or PhD	H (2)	p
	(n = 90)	(n = 204)	(n = 55)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Teacher general attitudes about parental involvement	**3.00 (.25)**	**3.00 (.40)**	**3.00 (.60)**	**8.402**	**.015**

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Kruskal-Wallis H test, and the corresponding p-value. The statistically significant differences are noted with bold.

The data revealed that teacher gender affected teacher perceptions of parental involvement in Type 5-Decision making among our participants, since female teachers associated less parental involvement with Type 5-Decision making compared to their male colleagues. Also, teacher education level affected teacher general perception of parental involvement, since teacher graduates of the Teacher Academy perceived parental involvement as less important compared to their colleagues that hold a Master's degree.

Differences among parent and teacher practices according to specific sociodemographic characteristics

Parents

The Shapiro-Wilk test employed to calculate the differences between parent practices (Types) and parent demographics (Types 2-Communicating and Type 4-Learning at home) showed no normal distribution. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney test was used for parent–child relation and marital status, as well as the Kruskal-Wallis test for parent and child age groups, as well as parent education level. For Type 3-Volunteering (one item), the χ^2 test was used.

The analyses revealed statistically significant differences in Type 2-Communicating and Type 4-Learning at home (see Table 15). Specifically, in Type 2, the student's age group differentiated parent practices [H(3) = 12.36, p = .006 < .01]. The post hoc test reveals that the parents of older students present statistically significant lower rates (Mdn = 2.27) than the parents of younger children (Mdn = 3.33, p = .005 < .01), that is, the parents of older students employ less Type 2-Communicating and Type 4-Learning at home involvement practices.

Table 15. Parent Practices Related to Student Age Group (*N* = 212; Kruskal-Wallis H)

Type	Up to 8 years	9–10 years	11–12 years	13 years and up	H (3)	p
	(*n* = 37)	(*n* = 62)	(*n* = 76)	(*n* = 37)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Type 2-Communicating	3.33 (1.00)	3.33 (1.00)	3.00 (1.09)	2.67 (1.00)	12.362	.006
Type 4-Learning at Home	3.54 (0.51)	3.57 (0.47)	3.54 (0.65)	3.08 (0.92)	17.095	.001

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Kruskal-Wallis *H* test, and the corresponding *p*-value. The statistically significant differences are noted with bold.

In Type 4-Learning at home, when parent perceptions of involvement practices were related with parent–child relation, parent education, as well as the student's age group, statistically significant differences are revealed. Specifically, the fathers (Mdn = 3.25) had lower rates than the mothers (Mdn = 2.54, the U criterion value = 4495.00, p = .004 < .01, and the effect size = -0.19). Additionally, parent education level differentiates parent practices [H(2) = 10.01, p = .007 < .01]. The post hoc test reveals that graduates from compulsory education present statistically significant lower rates (Mdn = 3.12) compared to

graduates from secondary school (Mdn = 3.48, p = .006 < .01), and university (Mdn = 3.54, p = .021 < .05). Also, student age differentiates parent practices of involvement [H(3) = 17.10, p = .001 < .01]. The post hoc test reveals that the parents of older students present statistically significant lower rates (Mdn = 3.08) than parents of other student age groups.

The data suggest that parent gender, education level, and student's age are strongly associated with parent Type 4-Learning at home involvement practices, since the fathers, the less educated parents, as well as the parents with older children all employ less Type 4-Learning at home practices as compared to the children's mothers, higher educated parents, and parents of younger children.

Teachers

As it concerns teacher practices to involve parents in the education of students with LD, the Shapiro-Wilk test employed to calculate the differences between teacher perceptions of parental involvement (Types) related to teacher demographics showed no normal distribution. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney test was run for teacher gender and type (general/special education), as well as the Kruskal-Wallis test for teacher age group, education level, and teaching experience. In Type 3-Volunteering and Type 5-Decision making (question 4; one item), the χ^2 test was conducted.

It was revealed that the teacher education level differentiated teacher perceptions of parental involvement practices in Type 2-Communicating (question 2) [H(2) = 8.66, p = .013 < .05]. The post hoc test conducted revealed that teacher graduates from tertiary (university undergraduate) education had lower rates (Mdn = 41.88) than their colleagues with a Master's or a PhD degree (Mdn = 49.38, p = .013 < .05). In Type 2 (question 4), male teachers (Mdn = 3.50) had lower rates than their female colleagues (Mdn = 2.50, the U criterion value = 8692.50, p = .010 < .05, and the effect size = -0.14; see Table 16). This means that the male and the less educated teachers, compared to their female and higher educated colleagues, employed less Type 2-Communicating involvement practices.

Similarly, in Type 4-Learning at home (question 4), statistically significant differences were noticed when related with teacher age and education level. Specifically, the teacher age group differentiated teachers' perceptions about parental involvement practices (question 4) [H(3) = 9.39, p = .025 < .05]. The post hoc test conducted revealed that teachers of 36–45 years of age had lower rates (Mdn = 3.00) than teachers 46–55 years of age (Mdn = 3.14, p = .043 < .05; see Table 17). Additionally, the teacher education level differentiated teacher perceptions about parental involvement practices of Type 4-Learning at home (question 4) [H (2) = 10.35, p = .006 < .01]. The post hoc test conducted revealed that teacher graduates of undergraduate higher education had

lower rates (Mdn = 3.00) than the holders of a Master's or PhD degree (Mdn = 3.29, p = .009< .01). This means that the younger and less educated teachers employed less Type 4-Learning at home involvement practices, compared to their elder and higher educated colleagues.

Table 16. Teacher Practices Related to Teacher Education Level (*N* = 349; Kruskal-Wallis H)

Variable	Teacher Academy	University Diploma	Master's or PhD	*H* (2)	*p*
	(*n* = 90)	(*n* = 204)	(*n* = 55)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Type 2-Communicating (Question 2)	**45 (20.63)**	**41.88 (21.25)**	**49.38 (16.96)**	**8.656**	**.013**
Type 2-Communicating (Question 4)	3.55 (.33)	3.50 (0.50)	3.50 (.50)	4.165	.125
Type 3-Volunteering (Question 3)	.06 (.12)	.12 (0.18)	.06 (.24)	2.904	.234
Type 4-Learning at Home (Question 4)	**3.14 (0.79)**	**3.00 (0.86)**	**3.29 (.71)**	**10.353**	**.006**

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Kruskal-Wallis H test, and the corresponding p-value. The statistically significant differences are noted with bold.

Table 17. Teacher Practices Related to Teacher Age Groups (*N* = 352; Kruskal-Wallis H)

Type	25–35 years	36–45 years	46–55 years	56 years and up	*H* (3)	*p*
	(*n* = 78)	(*n* = 110)	(*n* = 158)	(*n* = 6)		
	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)	Mdn (IQR)		
Type 2-Communicating (Question 2)	41.88 (23.13)	41.88 (18.13)	45.63 (21.71)	46.88 (13.13)	4.949	.176
Type 2-Communicating (Question 4)	3.50 (0.50)	3.50 (0.63)	3.50 (0.33)	3.83 (0.50)	4.366	.225
Type 3-Volunteering (Question 3)	0.12 (0.18)	0.09 (0.18)	0.06 (0.18)	0.09 (0.18)	2.370	.499
Type 4-Learning at Home (Question 4)	**3.00 (0.86)**	**3.00 (0.71)**	**3.14 (0.86)**	**3.57 (1.71)**	**9.386**	**.025**

Notes. The values refer to the Median (Mdn), interquartile range (IQR), Kruskal-Wallis H test, and the corresponding *p*-value. The statistically significant differences are noted with bold.

Discussion

Perceptions of parents of children with LD and their teachers of parental involvement (Types) in the education of these children

In this study, parental involvement in the education of children with LD was studied within Epstein's six-type theoretical model of parental involvement, defined as those home- and school-based behaviors demonstrated by their parents so as to promote their children's social, emotional, and academic development, which is in line with the existing literature on parental involvement (Roy & Giraldo-García, 2018; Teuber at al., 2023). Acknowledging the importance of parent participation in the education of children with LD, both parents and teachers of children with LD were invited to reveal their perceptions about parental involvement because, besides parents, teachers are the closest "important ones" for children and have impact on children's academic achievement, behavior, and the development of their social and emotional skills. Also, teachers and school play an important role in encouraging parental involvement in children's schooling (Yulianti et al., 2022).

The findings of this study align with the existing literature that both parents and teachers facilitate consciously and intentionally the development of academic, social, and emotional competences of children. As it concerns the participant parents, they most closely associate their involvement in the education of their children with LD with Type 1-Parenting. This finding was expected and partially aligns with other studies (Epstein, 2010; Garcia, 2014; Magouirk, 2015). Parenting, being a feature of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995), is highly related with parents' beliefs about their parent role (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995) and about how to support the education of their children with LD (Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2020). In fact, parenting and learning at home are considered as home-based parental involvement (Teuber et al., 2023), both associated with the parent role, illustrating all activities in which parents should be engaged so as to ensure educational/emotional support to the child, as well as home–school partnerships (Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2020). As part of their role, parents establish a range of "important" activities, for example, Type 4-Learning at home practices (Epstein, 2010; Magouirk, 2015), which are also a feature of home-based parental involvement and, in this study, were highly employed by parents so as to enhance their children's schooling.

It is noteworthy, though, that in this study, teachers considered that Type 5-Decision making was most closely related with parental involvement, which has no precedent in other studies we found. In fact, studies on the involvement of parents with children with disabilities in the education of their children

often indicate the exclusion of parents from decision making as a rather common practice for schools, for example, in IEP meetings, school policies, and so on (Love et al., 2017). However, should parents build a relationship with the teachers, then they may have some input in decision making, determining how to support their children's work or their child's class (Love et al., 2017).

Also, the data revealed that teachers view parental involvement as an important factor for children's education, which aligns with other studies that reported how essential parental involvement is during children's transition from pre-primary to primary school (Besi & Sakellariou, 2023) and from primary to secondary school (Teuber et al., 2023). Specifically, items such as "parental involvement is important for a good school" and "it's important for student success in school" were highly scored. This means that the teachers are open to teacher–parent collaboration, although they rated the item "parental involvement can help teachers to be more effective with more students" with low values. Still, in Greece, there are many steps to be taken in order for effective parent, teacher, and student relations to be established (Besi & Sakellariou, 2023).

Parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement practices in the education of student with LD

In the pandemic situation, learning at home and communicating were the main practices employed by both parents and teachers in the education of all children (Carrión-Martinez et al., 2021; Knopik et al., 2021). In this study, the teachers indicated Type 2-Communicating practices as highly employed to involve parents of children with LD, which agrees with the literature (Savva & Symeou, 2019). On the contrary, Type 4-Learning at home practice was mostly used by the respondent parents, especially of the parents of younger children with LD. This evidence aligns with other studies about learning at home in the early years of children's schooling (Magouirk, 2015). It may be related with a parent's perceptions of his/her role in the education of his/her child (Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2020). Also, it seems that the student's age is a determinant factor for parent's involvement and practices in their children's education, which is also supported by other research on parental involvement (Besi & Sakellariou, 2023; Magouirk, 2015; Teuber et al., 2023).

Differences among parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement, as well as parent and teacher practices, and parent- and teacher-related sociodemographic characteristics

Regarding the differences among parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement and practices related with parent or teacher sociodemographic characteristics, gender as well as education level seem to be related with parental

involvement and practices for both parents and teachers. In fact, the mothers and the female teachers associate more parental involvement with communication and learning at home than the fathers and male teachers, which is affirmed by the existing literature (Erdener, 2013; Garcia, 2014). Further, in parental involvement literature, the term "parent" disguises the gender of the person that, in main, undertakes the responsibility for children's schooling, that is, the mothers (Laluvein, 2007). It is most likely that the mothers get more involved in their children's education than the fathers, due to the stereotypes associated with the parental role in children's schooling (Eleftheriadou & Vlachou, 2020).

Suggestions

This study intended to examine parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement, as well as parent and teacher practices, when involved in the education of children with LD. It was based on Epstein's model of parental involvement, employing measures of parental involvement from Epstein's questionnaires for parents and teachers in general and special education. Since in recent decades there has been a major concern around school–family relations in line with children's development and education, as well as parental involvement in children's schooling being considered as one of the most prominent issues for educational research and politics worldwide due to its positive outcomes for students, schools, and families (Savva & Symeou, 2019), the findings of this study should benefit schools, teachers, parents, and administrators. However, future research would greatly benefit from quantitative data compared with experimental data within a multi-method framework. Also, researchers should take into account parental involvement as a broad construct and should measure all its different dimensions separately and in-depth, taking into account inclusion of children with disabilities.

To promote parental involvement in school means that teachers accept parent membership as equal in educational communities of practice. Strengthening active and effective parental involvement in educational systems is pivotal if aiming at achieving students' full potential (Savva & Symeou, 2019; Ulferts, 2020) throughout their learning pathways. All persons, including students with disabilities as well as their parents, have the claim to the right in education on the basis of equal opportunities (Graham, 2020). However, during the pandemic, parents of children with disabilities, compared to other student groups, were at a disadvantage in terms of education and support due to limited access of educational resources (Knopik et al., 2021), as well as to the lack of knowledge of appropriate pedagogies on behalf of the school or the parent (Carrión-Martinez et al., 2021) required for schooling at home. Therefore, as

the findings of this study suggest, it is imperative that policymakers as well as universities should plan effective teacher in-service education so as to prepare teachers for implementing successful parent involvement practices in all times, placing great emphasis on Type 2-Communicting and Type 5-Decision making parental involvement activities.

Also, policymakers should take into account that the LD population is the largest at-risk student population in Greek schools (Padeliadu & Botsas, 2007); however, there is a lot to be done so as to enhance their learning. The present study places forward the issue of increased parent training, for example, in parent schools, besides teacher training, since in this study the parent–teacher perceptions about parental involvement and practices in the education of students with LD demonstrated that it is pivotal to reconsider and introduce new school practices in a period that demands of policymakers, universities, practitioners, teachers, and parents to promote changes in pedagogy and in educational communities, so as to promote successful home–school partnerships for all students.

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Contributions To School-Related Risk and Protective Factors, Five Years After a Municipal Youth and Family Master Plan

David B. Tataw

Abstract

This study assesses the impact of five years of community level activities in the Pomona Youth and Family Master Plan (PYFMP) on four school-related risk and protective factors including academic failure, low school commitment, school opportunities for prosocial involvement, and school rewards for prosocial involvement. The intervention and assessment were guided by an integrated conceptual framework which combined social cognitive theory and the risk and protective factors approach. The study conducted same and independent group comparisons of school-related risk and protective factors in 2005–06 (N = 3,967), and 2009–10 (N = 2,693). Two-proportion z-tests were performed at an alpha of 0.05 in four methods of comparative analysis including the following: same students, inter-grade change, same grade, and overall 2005–06 to 2009–10 comparisons. Trends for both school opportunities for prosocial involvement and academic failure were positive on all methods of analysis. Results for school rewards for prosocial involvement and low school commitment showed both negative and positive trends. There is a likelihood the interventions contributed to observed variations between baseline and follow-up because parents, teachers, and students were participants in community intervention activities; there were no other major community initiatives; and there is a convergence of data patterns across methods of comparative analysis and assessed factors. Specific recommendations are provided for community intervention program implementers in Pomona and other poorly resourced communities.

Key Words: Collective impact, youth and family master plan, school youth and protective factors, participatory governance, risk and protective approach, social cognitive theory, academic failure, school and community partnerships

Introduction

The Pomona Youth and Family Master Plan (PYFMP) was implemented in a collective impact and participatory governance effort including youths, families, the school district, the city, businesses, community organizations, universities, health care entities, and more from 2005–06 to 2009–10 in Pomona, California, USA. Community impact initiatives (Collective Impact Forum, 2022; Kania et al., 2022) and participatory governance activities (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Mahmood & Muntane, 2020; Warren, 2014) can shape the context of individualized youth risks, as well as contribute to school-related youth protective factors (Jarrett et al., 2005; Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Rubens et al., 2020; Solberg et al., 2011; Top et al., 2017; White & Gager, 2007). However, the impact of mezzo (social networks or community level) and macro (society at large) intervention activities on individual school-related youth risk and protective factors when there are no accompanying micro level interventions targeting family, teachers, or students in the school environment is not always consistent. The scholarship on school-related activities (Jarrett et al., 2005; Kahne & Bailey, 1999; White & Gager, 2007) in support of low-income urban youth at risk of negative academic outcomes (Grant et al., 2014) assumes the integration of individualized family, school, and community activities for optimal impact on youth risk and protective factors (Cook et al., 2020; National Institutes of Health, 2000; O'Connor & Daniello, 2019; Walker et al., 1996). The range of findings would suggest that ideal interventions to prevent youth risk factors should combine multiple factors at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels (Fairchild et al., 2019; Marsiglia et al., 2019; Singh & Azman, 2020; Wu et al., 2020).

This article contributes to the literature on school-related risk and protective factors by investigating the impact of community-level, multidimensional intervention activities implemented through the PYFMP on perceived school-related risk and protective factors when there are no accompanying micro level activities which are either family or school based. School risk factors assessed include academic failure and low commitment to school, while protective factors include school opportunities for prosocial involvement and school rewards for prosocial involvement. In addition, the results should guide future new designs or modifications of existing school-related risk and protective plans in Pomona and other poorly resourced environments.

The study assessed trends in school-related risk and protective factors through self-report by Grade 8, 10, and 12 students in the Pomona Unified School District in California during the 2005–06 and 2009–10 academic years. The impact of PYFMP on school-related risk and protective factors was assessed within an integrated conceptual framework which combines social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 2004) and the risk and protective factors approach (Arthur et al., 1996; Arthur & Blitz, 2000; Hawkins, 1999; Hawkins et al., 1992). The purpose was to identify variations in school-related risk and protective factors between baseline and follow-up years within a Pomona Unified School District student sample that can be attributed to the PYFMP interventions.

The PYFMP was a response to the following three community-prioritized youth risk factors in the city of Pomona: (1) youth antisocial behavior, (2) academic failure/success, and (3) community disorganization (City of Pomona, 2006; Tataw & Rosa-Lugo, 2011). This study examined contributions to the academic failure/success domain of prioritized risk factors represented by school-related risk and protective factors.

The PYFMP data collection was completed in 2011, but analysis of the plan impact data was completed between 2016 and 2020 due to lack of resources to support evaluation. Though many PYFMP activities continue in the Pomona community as of this writing, this is the only evaluation of the PYFMP activities ever conducted. The use of PYFMP baseline and follow-up data for this analysis provides a unique opportunity for lessons to be learned that are as useful today as they were more than a decade ago. First, the data was collected in an empirical context which included all the elements necessary to assess risk and protective outcomes in the school environment when mezzo level intervention activities were implemented with no accompanying micro level intervention elements. The PYFMP relied exclusively on community-wide activities with high school teachers, administrators, and students as participants alongside other community members. The Pomona Unified School District has the only high school in the city of Pomona, and all youths and teachers who participated in the PYFMP activities were from the Pomona Unified School District. Second, the demographic and epidemiological profile of Pomona has not changed significantly since 2005. From 2005 to 2022, there were minimal fluctuations in the high levels of poverty, high prevalence and intensity of childhood disease burden, low academic performance, intractable gang violence, high teen pregnancy and teen substance abuse, low levels of health prevention resources, and barriers to care access (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2010, 2018; Pomona Unified School District, 2005, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020, 2022). Third, many underlying socioeconomic factors remain unresolved in Pomona (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020, 2022), suggesting

a need to understand the impact of five years of PYFMP activities and to use the evidence in reframing or continuing current community organizing around school, youth, family, and community, both in Pomona and elsewhere.

Impact of Mezzo Level Intervention Strategies Youth Risk and Protective Factors

Community strategies have been key in efforts to reduce risky youth behaviors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020), yet the nature of their impact on individual risk and protective factors is neither consistent or predictable. Some research suggests that perception of risk at the community level did not always appear to have a significant relationship with risk or positive behavior and that prevention efforts at the community level per se may not help unless the youth, their friends, and their families internalize the negative perceptions of risky behavior (Wu et al., 2020). On the other hand, some macro and mezzo level interventions have been impactful, particularly when they include multiple social levels and integration of youths in research and social action (Giannotta, 2014; Valdez et al., 2020) as have community-wide intervention activities (Kim et al., 2015).

Many mezzo level interventions are community-wide initiatives which adopt both school-related and non-school-related activities (Jarrett et al., 2005; Kahne & Bailey, 1999; White & Gager, 2007) in support of low-income urban youth at risk of negative academic outcomes (Grant et al., 2014). The National Institutes of Health (2000) recommends integrating three stages of prevention, including: (1) primary prevention strategies that aim to enhance protective factors on a schoolwide or community-wide basis; (2) secondary prevention with individualized one-on-one interventions; and (3) third-stage prevention which involves connecting youth and caregivers to appropriate community-based social service agencies. Schools are ideal settings to access in order to develop at-risk youth, particularly with the support of families and communities (Cook et al., 2020; O'Connor & Daniello, 2019; Walker et al., 1996).

The PYFMP was made up of multidimensional community strategies which focused on primary prevention and third-stage prevention strategies in the community. There were no individual-level interventions in the PYFMP as all interventions were community-wide, and students, teachers, parents, and school administrators participated in community-wide activities along with other community members.

Collective Impact, Participatory Governance, and Social Change

Mezzo level interventions in the PYFMP were driven by collective impact, participatory governance, and social change initiatives. Collective impact is

defined as "a network of community members, organizations, and institutions who advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and system level change" (Community Impact Forum, 2022, para. 2; see also Kania et al., 2022). Most successful efforts usually have five conditions: common agenda, backbone support organization, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and shared measurement systems (Collective Impact Forum, 2022; Greater Cincinnati Foundation, 2014; Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Kania et al., 2022).

Participatory governance is a collective impact strategy which both shapes the social context of risk factors and drives social change. Participatory governance is not only integral to community development, but it democratizes planning and promotes social justice by allowing all citizens, especially disadvantaged groups, to influence and legitimize policymaking (Bekemans, 2018; Elstub & Escobar, 2019). Participatory governance implies the involvement of organized and nonorganized mobilizing to improve the quality of democratic governance (Geissel, 2009) with the state and society jointly responsible for political decisions and services (Mahmood & Muntane, 2020).

The PYFMP was a participatory governance effort including youths, families, the school district, the city, businesses, community organizations, universities, health care entities, and more. The PYFMP was also a community organizing initiative geared towards having collective impact through the building of community social capital to reduce youth risk factors and enhance youth protective factors.

Pomona Youth and Family Master Plan

Plan Development and Implementation

The PYFMP was developed through a partnership between the city government and the Pomona Unified School District, working in collaboration with other community stakeholders including faith-based organizations, businesses, institutions of higher learning, community-based organizations, the chamber of commerce, parents, and the youth of the city. About 20% of the planning partners were youths or parents who were not experts. In the implementation phase, about 40% to 50% of Community Advisory Board membership was made up of parents and youths. A plan was developed to address three community prioritized risk factors including community disorganization, academic failure, and favorable attitudes towards antisocial behavior. Academic failure indicators are risk and protective factors around the youth academic environment. The plan development and implementation have been reported in great detail elsewhere (City of Pomona, 2006; Tataw & Rosa-Lugo, 2011; Tataw & Kim, 2022).

Community Intervention Components

Pomona Unified School District parents, students, teachers, and administrators served on the PYFMP Community Advisory Board and attended PYFMP community activities from 2005–06 to 2009–10. Detailed intervention components have been reported in detail elsewhere (City of Pomona, 2006; Tataw & Rosa-Lugo, 2011; Tataw & Kim, 2022; Tataw et al., 2023). Brief summaries of key interventions are provided below, except for youth development activities which have been described in detail.

Establishment and Fostering of Collaboration and Partnerships

Activities in this strategy included quarterly partnership summits such as the sharing of information on partnership strategies, local and regional partnership opportunities, and success stories in the city and the region. Pomona Unified School District teachers, parents, and administrators were part of the 360 participants in six partnership summits from January 2007 to December 2009.

Development, Enhancement, and Coordination of Existing Programs and Services That Address the Youth Risk and Protective Factors

The focus was on creating a culture of well-being for youth in and outside school settings and ensuring that services rose to the level of tested effective practices. Program activities were supported by a youth empowerment task force, populated by youths from the Pomona Unified School District, who vetted service plans and provided consumer perspectives. Attendees included 65 teachers and parents from the Pomona Unified School District, members of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), and 30 nonacademic service providers.

Community Mobilization

This strategy ensured that the stakeholders including teachers, parents, and school administrators were actively engaged in the PYFMP decision making and implementation. It also ensured the community in general was aware of and involved in plan implementation.

Resource Brokerage

The PYFMP facilitated the availability of and access to youth and family resources impacting three prioritized areas: community disorganization, academic failure, and favorable attitudes towards anti-social behavior.

Youth Development

This strategy provided community opportunities for youths to overcome youth risk factors associated with academic failure/success and antisocial behaviors including the following initiatives:

1. Monthly youth and adolescent leadership workshops covering conflict resolution, overcoming peer pressure, harms of substance abuse, civic respon-

sibility, and leading peer mentorship programs in high schools. Around 1,200 Pomona Unified School District high school students attended leadership workshops from 2007 to 2009.

2. Gang prevention outreach case management using the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Model. This reached 120 Pomona Unified School District high school students from 2007 to 2009.

3. Strengthening Families is a program which served teens and their families. It provided training sessions using family systems and cognitive behavioral approaches to increase resilience and reduce risk factors to improve family relationships, parenting skills, and students' social and life skills. This program served 130 families a year in 2008 and 2009.

4. Across Ages program which involved elders mentoring youth, youth performing community service, youth participating in a life skills and problem-solving curriculum, and monthly activities for family members. This program reached 80 families a year in 2008 and 2009.

5. A Mock Trial Academy exposed youths to all aspects of the Juvenile Justice System; 105 Pomona Unified School District high school students participated in the mock trials from 2008 to 2009. Around 300 more youths attended as members of the audience. The mock trial was intended to improve critical thinking, reading, and public speaking skills among participating youths.

6. Annual and monthly academic achievement programs. These included the following: (a). Annual summer academic advancement workshops covering arts, reading, writing, and math for high school students in the Pomona Unified School district in collaboration with local universities and libraries. Events included annual science expo, summer arts academy, summer math program, and literacy week. (b). All-year monthly programs included BIG READ which provided a fun environment for students to enhance reading skills, accelerated reader home, home connect, parent connect, and teleparent calling to support students and teachers. There was also Project Grad, a mentoring program which matched at-risk high school students with mentors. A total of 700 Pomona Unified School District high school students participated in annual or monthly academic achievement programs per year in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

7. Annual youth achievement awards recognized youths for academic achievement, community service, and leadership. This included a scholarship awarded for students progressing to college and recognition of success stories from the Pomona community residents including people who are in college or have completed college, started a business, or have advanced in other careers. Youth mentors in various community programs were also recognized.

Conceptual Framework

The assessment of the impact of the interventions above on risk and protective factors in the youth academic environment were framed within two intersecting conceptual frameworks. The framework included social cognitive theory and the risk and protective factors approach, which together clarify the assumptions and factors that drive PYFMP intervention elements and shape planning, implementation, and evaluation. This conceptual framework also ties together collective impact initiatives and participatory governance, as well as their relationships to school-related risk and protective factors.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory is rooted in personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences working together leading to goals and behavioral change (Bandura, 1986, 2004). Social cognitive theory constructs include: reciprocal determinism, behavioral capability, expectations, self-efficacy, observational learning, and reinforcements. The constructs of relevance to this study are reciprocal determinism, behavioral capability, self-efficacy, and reinforcements.

Reciprocal determinism describes interactions between behavior, personal factors, and environment, and each influences the others. The individual and environmental factors inherent in reciprocal determinism are enhanced by the multidimensional community-wide intervention activities of PYFMP.

Behavioral capability states that, to perform a behavior, a person must know what to do and how to do it. Reinforcements are responses to behavior that affect whether one will repeat it. Positive reinforcements (rewards) increase a person's likelihood of repeating the behavior. Negative reinforcements may make repeated behavior more likely by motivating the person to eliminate a negative stimulus (Bandura, 1986, 2004; National Cancer Institute, 2005). Behavioral capability, self-efficacy, and reinforcements are enhanced by school protective factors and can be undermined by risk factors. This multifaceted perspective of social cognitive theory inherent in reciprocal determinism is relevant to both the personal and cultural dimensions that are part of the lifestyle and environmental factors in both the city of Pomona and the Pomona School District, which were considered in PYFMP intervention components.

Risk and Protective Factors Approach

This epidemiologically based, risk reduction approach to prevention planning (Arthur et al., 1996; Arthur & Blitz, 2000) collects and prioritizes data on risk and protective factors at the community level so that preventive interventions can focus on the most prevalent risk factors (Hawkins, 1999; Hawkins et al., 1992). This two-pronged prevention framework of reducing risk and

promoting positive social development is actualized via the Communities That Care strategy for preventing adolescent problem behavior (Hawkins et al., 1992). The framework is well-aligned to social cognitive theory because it uses multilevel analysis, social development, and considers environmental factors in youth development.

The two conceptual frameworks are tied together within an ecological perspective which provides the setting for identifying the relationships of the specific theories and their factors, their points of application, and the best practices for intervention implementation at multiple levels (Dahlberg & Krug, 2002; Elder et al., 2007; Geidne et al., 2019; Golden & Earp, 2012). Social cognitive theory considers the environment in which social outcomes occur and aligns well with the risk and protective factors approach which anticipates mediation from micro, mezzo, and macro factors on individualized risk outcomes when a community adopts evidence-based intervention strategies. The constructs from both models also align with the following context-related concepts that drive the planning, implementation, and evaluation of PYFMP: collective impact initiatives (Collective Impact Forum, 2022; Kania et al., 2022); and participatory governance and social change (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Mahmood & Muntane, 2020; Warren, 2014).

Hypotheses

There were two overarching hypotheses related to youth school-related risk and protective factors five years after the development and implementation of the PYFMP:
- H1: Participating youths will report increases in school protective factors including school opportunities for prosocial involvement and school rewards for prosocial involvement.
- H2: Participating youths will report reductions in school risk factors including academic failure and low commitment to school.

Expected Outcomes

This study focuses on youth perceptions of school-related risk and protective factors that were expected five years after the development and implementation of the PYFMP:
- Perceived increase in school opportunities for prosocial involvement reported by Grade 8, 10, and 12 students between 2005 and 2009 in the Pomona Unified School District;
- Perceived increase in school rewards for prosocial involvement reported by Grade 8, 10, and 12 students between 2005 and 2009 in the Pomona Unified School District;

- Perceived improvements in academic failure reported by Grade 8, 10, and 12 students between 2005 and 2009 in the Pomona Unified School District; and
- Perceived improvement in low school commitment reported by Grade 8, 10, and 12 students between 2005 and 2009 in the Pomona Unified School District.

Methods

Research Design

A pre–post prospective quasi-experimental outcomes evaluation design was built into the Youth and Family Master Plan's school-related assessment strategy (Holden & Zimmerman, 2009; Kapp & Anderson, 2010). There was a same group and independent groups comparison using both 2005 and 2009 Pomona Unified School District data. Longitudinal and cross-sectional trends in perceived school-related risk and protective factors among youths living in the city of Pomona and attending the Pomona Unified School District were assessed.

Four methods of comparative analysis were adopted in this study, including the following: same students (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009), inter-grade change (Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12), same grade (Grades 8, 10, and 12), and overall 2005 to 2009 comparisons. Same students analysis (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009) will provide a reasonable assurance that at both baseline and follow up some of the analysis will be focused on the same students. The comparison of both inter-grade change (Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12), and same grade (Grades 8, 10, and 12) observed in 2005 and 2009, allows for an assessment of the impact of contextual factors (i.e., PYFMP interventions). Changes in the community or school context might account for differences in both inter-grade changes and differences between same grades observed in the 2005–06 and 2009–10 academic years. Overall 2005 and 2009 comparison allows for an analysis of all student perceptions in 2005 (Grades 8, 10, and 12) versus all student perceptions in 2009 (Grades 8, 10, and 12). Differences could be attributed to mezzo environmental activities (PYFMP) that occurred between 2005 to 2009.

Population and Sample

Pomona Unified School District Population

The study intervention sample was drawn from the population of youths in the Pomona Unified School District. In 2005, the Pomona Unified School District reported a student population of 31,817, with 49% or 15,630 in Grades 6–12. The student ethnic composition was as follows: 80.1% Hispanic, 6.9%

African American, 6.4% White, 6.4% Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino, and 6.3% other ethnic groups combined. About 75% of Pomona Unified School District students qualified for the compensatory education program which is a remedial program for students who do not meet the minimum skills level for their school grade; 52% qualified for free or reduced lunch; 45% were English language learners; and the high school dropout rate was 29%, making it the fourth highest in California (Pomona Unified School District, 2005).

Demographic Characteristics of the City of Pomona

The PYFMP was developed and implemented in the city of Pomona, California. In the period leading to 2005–06 when PYFMP was developed, Pomona was afflicted by high levels of poverty, high prevalence and intensity of childhood disease burden, low academic performance, intractable gang violence, high teen pregnancy and teen substance abuse, low levels of health prevention resources, and barriers to care access (Pomona Unified School District, 2006; Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2005). Pomona had 900 juveniles on criminal probation as of January 2005, and the city ranked number one in gang homicides in the San Gabriel Valley Region of Los Angeles County as of 2003 (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2005). Of the children in the city of Pomona, 10% did not have health insurance in 2005; 46% of Pomona youth in 2005 were teen mothers; and prevalent diseases included heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and childhood obesity (Los Angeles County Public Health, 2005). The magnitude of youth antisocial behavior, including youth violence, involvement with the criminal justice system, and substance use (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2005), contributed to the development and the adoption of the PYFMP (City of Pomona, 2006; Tataw & Rosa-Lugo, 2011).

Table 1 shows the demographics of the city of Pomona for the years 2005 to 2022, revealing a city with stable trends in population distribution, education, poverty, and health. Pomona ethnic distribution and socioeconomic characteristics revealed a majority–minority population with high poverty and unemployment rates. From 2005 to 2022, poverty and unemployment rates in Pomona were higher than the U.S. population overall (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The city had a population of 161,257 in 2005 in a land area of about 23 square miles, compared to a population of 151,554 in 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020, 2022). In 2005, there were 56,972 children 19 years and under, or 34.5% of the population, compared to 24.7% in 2022. From 2005 to 2022 the city continued to be afflicted by high levels of poverty, high prevalence and intensity of childhood disease burden, low academic performance, intractable gang violence, high teen pregnancy and teen substance abuse, low levels of

health prevention resources, and barriers to healthcare access (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020, 2022; Pomona Unified School District, 2005, Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2005, 2010, 2018).

Table 1. Pomona 2005 to 2022 Population Characteristics

Year	2005	2009	2022
Population (*N*)	161,257	152,359	151,554
Sample Size (*n*)	3,967	2,693	N/A
Ethnic Distribution			
Total	161,257	152,359	151,554
Latino%	69	70.50	71.4
White%	11	12.5	10.34
Black%	10	7.3	5.9
Asian%	9	8.3	10.8
Some Other%	1	1.2	2.4
Gender (n)	161,257	152,359	151,554
Male	50.6	47.8	49.1
Female	49.4	52.2	50.9
Median Household Income ($)	41,146	48,973	67,549
Below 100% Poverty Rate (%)	16.1	17.7	16.4
Unemployment Rate (%)	8.7	11.7	5.8
High School Graduates	9.6	25	24.4
Lack of Access to Healthcare	25	23	12.5

In addition, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health 2018 city and community profiles for Pomona showed stable demographic characteristics from 2010–16, with a population of around 1.5 million and 85% of the children eligible for subsidized school meals. Characteristics compiled from 2010–16 data are as follows: 20% of Pomona residents were below poverty level compared to 17% for the county; the life expectancy at birth was 79.8 years compared to 82.3 for the county; there was a 50% preschool enrolment compared to 54% for the county; 27% of third graders did not meet California standards for language arts and literacy compared to 43% for the county. In addition, in the six years referenced in the community profile data, Pomona experienced lower levels of education, higher disease burden, higher levels of teen substance use, lower levels of health insurance, lower levels of employment, higher crimes and homicides, higher food insecurity, and easy access to

alcohol and other substances compared to the rest of Los Angeles County (Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2018).

Study Sample

The sample size for the Pomona School District Pride Survey in 2005 was 3,967, while in 2009 it was 2,693. The 2005 Pomona Unified School District sample demographics were as follows: White (4.1%), African American (5.9%), Hispanic/Latino (73.1%), Asian Pacific Islander (7%), Native American (0.6%), Mixed Origins (5.9%), and other (3.4%); male (48.2%), female (51.8%). The 2009 Pomona sample demographics were as follows: White (4.3%), African American (5.3%), Hispanic/Latino (71.3%), Asian Pacific Islander (7.9%), Native American (0.6%), Mixed Origins (5.0%), and other (2.3%); male (46%), female (54%).

Data collection

Data on risk and protective factors for Pomona were collected through the Pride survey risk and protective factor questionnaire (see https://www.pridesurveys.com/index.php/the-risk-and-protective-factor-student-survey/). The survey was developed and administered in collaboration with industry consultants, the PYFMP evaluation team, and a university-based researcher. Baseline data were collected in November 2005, and a follow-up survey was conducted in December 2009.

In November 2005, the Pride survey was mailed to 6,000 Pomona Unified School District students in Grades 8, 10, and 12; 3,967 surveys were completed and returned. Additionally, 123 returned surveys were not completed. In December 2009, a follow-up Pride survey was given to 6,000 Pomona Unified School District students in Grades 8, 10, and 12; 2,693 surveys were completed and returned. Additionally, 111 returned surveys were not completed. The total of 6,000 surveys mailed to students was about the total number of students in Grades 8, 10, and 12 in both 2005 and 2009.

The Pride Risk and Protective Factor Survey was given under the auspices of a passive permission approach whereby parent permission was not needed at the Grade 8, 10, or 12 levels. In addition, the students were given verbal and written consent instructions with the understanding that participation in the survey was voluntary. A general notice also went to the parents from the school district office regarding the survey before it was mailed to students. The confidentiality of the students responding to questionnaires was protected because the students were not allowed to write their names or any unique identifier on the questionnaires. Students were instructed not to include identifying marks. Any questionnaires with identifying marks were shredded and not included in the data. All instructors who explained the survey to or answered questions on

the survey from students or parents were trained in human subjects protection protocols. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Boards of the Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi in 2014 as an exempt study and Charles R. Drew University in Los Angeles, California in 2007 as an expedited study.

Measurements

School-related risk and protective factors including school opportunities for prosocial involvement, school rewards for prosocial involvement, academic failure, and low school commitment among a Pomona Unified School District student sample were measured using the Pride Risk and Protective Factor Survey instrument which is adapted from the Communities That Care youth survey (International Survey Associates, n.d., 2006, 2009; Pomona Unified School District 2006a, 2010). The Pride Survey questions related to youth risk and protective factors have been found to be valid (Metze, 2000; Reiland Consultants, 2018), to be reliable (test–retest coefficients from .814–.851; Metze, 2000), and to have a high interrater agreement (80%) regarding survey question content between survey responders (Craig & Emshoff, 1987). A comparison of the Pride Survey estimates with the Monitoring the Future survey found similar estimates between the surveys (Adams, 1994; Metze, 2000).

School opportunities for prosocial involvement were measured by six questions. School rewards for prosocial involvement were measured by three questions. Academic failure was measured by five questions. Low commitment to school was measured by ten questions. All four of these groups of questions can be seen in Table 2 and are described in the Results section.

Data Analyses

The Pride survey data was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and excel databases. Data analysis was performed by external consultants, the PYFMP evaluation committee, and a university researcher. External consultants and the PYFMP evaluation committee produced both raw data and descriptive statistics. Comparative statistical reports were produced as reported below by the researcher. The prevalence of school opportunities for prosocial involvement, school rewards for prosocial involvement, academic failure, and low school commitment were recorded from the Pomona Pride survey. The percentages were identified and described. Same group and independent group comparative analysis were performed.

Z Score Calculation

Z-tests rather than t-tests were performed because proportions rather than raw data were used. Though follow-up raw data was available, the baseline raw

data was not available and could not be located by the external consultants who collected the data and calculated prevalence percentages.

Two-proportion z-tests were performed at an alpha of 0.05 in four methods of comparative analysis including the following: same students (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009), inter-grade change (Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12), same grade (Grades 8, 10, and 12), and overall 2005 to 2009 comparisons. The test statistic z is:

$$z = \frac{\hat{p}_1 - \hat{p}_2}{\sqrt{\hat{p}_{pooled}(1 - \hat{p}_{pooled})\left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

where $\hat{p}_1$ is the proportion of successes for the second column of data and $\hat{p}_2$ is the proportion of successes for the first column of data; $\hat{p}_{pooled} = \frac{n_1\hat{p}_1 + n_2\hat{p}_2}{n_1 + n_2}$ is the overall proportion of successes for both columns of data combined. The excel formula to calculate the p-value is: = norm.s.dist(-abs(Z),true)*2.

Z Score Interpretation

For all z-tests, the p-value is the two-tailed probability of the test statistic z using the Standard Normal distribution. Where the p-values are less than 0.05, the data provide statistically significant evidence that the proportions of successes are different between the two underlying populations. For tests having a statistically significant p-value (< 0.05), a positive z-score would indicate that $p1$ is higher than $p2$, while a negative z-score indicates that $p1$ is less than $p2$. ($\hat{p}_2$ is subtracted from $\hat{p}_1$ in the equation for the z-score shown above.)

Results

Summary

The study results are presented in Tables 2–5. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics representing percentages of different school-related risk and protective factors in 2005–06 and 2009–10. Table 3 summarizes overall trends and highlights key findings in the study results including all four risk and protective factors and all four methods of comparative analysis. Tables 4 and 5 present detailed reports of statistically significant results from different methods of comparative analysis involving same and independent group comparisons covering all four risk and protective factors.

Descriptive Statistics of School-Related Risk and Protective Factors

Table 2 presents the prevalence rates for school opportunities for prosocial involvement, school rewards for prosocial involvement, academic failure, and low school commitment among Grade 8, 10, and 12 students in Pomona for the years 2005 and 2009. Table 2 also provides the descriptions of the different

measures of the four risk and protective factors being analyzed in this study and referenced in the methods section above. The proportions reported in Table 2 were used to perform z tests whose results are reported in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 2. Percentages of Youth School Domain Protective and Risk Factors 2005 vs 2009 Pomona

Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) Pride Survey								
	2005				2009			
Sample Sizes: **Measures:**	1,368	1,489	1,110	3,967	1,300	773	620	2,693
Protective/School Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement	8th	10th	12th	over-all	8th	10th	12th	Over-all
1. In my school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules. Yes	45.3	43.1	43.2	44	40.1	44.6	48.5	43.3
2. Teachers ask me to work on special classroom projects. Yes	36.9	41.2	43.7	36.9	42.8	41.5	45.3	42.9
3. There are lots of chances for students in my school to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside of class. Yes.	86	83.2	86.1	84.9	85.3	91	90.3	88.1
4. There are lots of chances for students in my school to talk with a teacher one-on-one. Yes.	77.8	74	7.4	6.2	75	74.6	78.1	75.6
5. There are lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities. Yes	70.6	72.3	70.6	71.4	67.1	76.2	75.5	71.7
6. How many times in the past year have you participated in clubs, organizations, or activities at school? 1 or more	64.7	65.1	69.5	66.5	62	67.5	69.7	65.2
Protective/School Rewards for Prosocial Involvement	8th	10th	12th	over-all	8th	10th	12th	Over-all
1. My teacher(s) notices when I am doing a good job and lets me know about it.	73	63.4	62	66.3	69.9	67.7	64.4	68.5
2. The school lets my parents know when I have done something well.	44.4	25.9	21.2	30.2	42.9	36.1	25.3	36.9
3. My teachers praise me when I work hard in school.	50.9	39.6	39.5	43.8	48.8	43.7	40.5	43.5

Table 2, continued

	PUSD 2005				PUSD 2009			
Risk/Academic Failure	8th	10th	12th	over-all	8th	10th	12th	Over-all
1. Putting them all together, what were your grades like last year? C and below	43.9	45	44.4	44.5	43.5	38.8	34.6	40.1
2. Are your school grades better than the grades of most students in your class? No	46.2	51.4	44.9	47.8	46.8	42.4	38.3	43.6
3. How many times in the past year have you been suspended from school? 1 or more times	28.1	27.6	16.9	15.6	32.9	14.4	8.2	17
4. Do you make good grades? Never, seldom, sometimes	44.1	51.9	43.9	48	43.7	41.8	30.2	41.6
5. Do you get in trouble at school? Yes, sometimes, often, a lot	38.9	28.3	14.1	27.9	39.7	22.8	13.2	28.5
Risk/Low Commitment to School	8th	10th	12th	over-all	8th	10th	12th	Over-all
1. During the last four weeks how many whole days have you missed school because of illness? 1 or more	36.8	44.9	48.1	43.3	37.1	37.5	48.3	39.8
2. During the last four weeks how many whole days have you missed because you skipped or cut? 1 or more	9.1	23.4	22.3	21.2	9.3	10.6	26.2	14.7
3. During the last four weeks, how many days have you missed for other reasons? 1 or more	27.3	38	44.8	36.2	26.5	27.1	35.6	38.8
4. How interesting are most of your courses to you? boring	32.6	36	27	32.3	36.3	32.9	24.4	33.1
5. Now thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you enjoy being in school? Never, seldom	14	15	17.6	15.9	15.8	17.2	15.4	15.9
6. Now, thinking back over the past year in your school, how often did you hate being in school? Often, always	25.2	31.9	25.2	28.9	28.3	25.8	29.4	27.8
7. Now, thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you try to do your best work in school? Never, seldom	5.1	7.2	6.3	6.3	5.6	5.9	7.4	6.1

Table 2, continued

	PUSD 2005				PUSD 2009			
8. How often do you feel that the schoolwork you are assigned is meaningful and important?	17	25.5	26.1	22.8	22.2	25.8	24	24.2
9. How wrong do you think it is for someone your age to stay away from school all day when their parents think they are at school? Not wrong	15.9	26	30.2	23.9	19.8	22.1	30.6	22.9
10. How many times in the past year have you done extra work on your own for school? Never	33.2	35.2	30.9	33.3	33.7	30.3	31.1	32.1

Trends in Risk and Protective Factors From Baseline and Follow Up

This section presents statistically significant results from the four methods of comparative analysis of baseline and follow up data on risk and protective factors including the following: school opportunities for prosocial involvement, school rewards for prosocial involvement, academic failure, and low school commitment measures. A summary of all results are presented in Table 3. Tables 4 and 5 contain details of z test results of all four comparative analysis methods.

Table 3. Tabular Representation of Overall Highlights of Key Trends in the Study Results

Measures	Methods of Analysis			
	Same Student Comparison	Inter-Grade Rate of Change	Overall, 2005 v. 2009 Comparison	Grade by Grade Comparison
Protective factors/School opportunities for prosocial involvement	Increased	Increased	Increased	Increased
Protective factors/School rewards for prosocial involvement	Decreased	Decreased	Increased	Increased
Risk factors/Academic Failure	Improvement	Improvement	Improvement	Improvement
Risk factors/Low school commitment	Lower	Improvement	Mixed	Mixed

Table 4. Comparison of Same Students and Inter-grade Rate Change 2005 vs 2009 (Same Group and Independent Group Comparisons)

2009–2005	Pomona		Pomona Grades 8 to 10		Pomona Grades 10 to 12	
	8th 2005 v. 12th 2009		2005 v. 2009		2005 v. 2009	
	Z-score	p-value	Z-score	p-value	Z-score	p-value
Protective Factors/School Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement						
1. In my school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules. Yes	**1.33**	**0.000**	-1.66	0.096	-7.41	1.22
2. Teachers ask me to work on special classroom projects. Yes	**3.55**	**0.008**	**2.24**	**0.03**	-8.23	1.8
3. There are lots of chances for students in my school to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside of class. Yes.	2.67	0.881	**2.86**	**0.00**	-16.62	4.48
4. There are lots of chances for students in my school to talk with a teacher one-on-one. Yes	**0.15**	**0.024**	-0.78	0.44	**3.39**	**0.01**
5. There are lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities. Yes	**2.26**	**0.029**	-0.75	0.44	-12.94	2.58
6. How many times in the past year have you participated in clubs, organizations, or activities at school? 1 or more	2.18	1.000	-0.62	0.53	-12.87	6.76
Protective Factors/School Rewards for Prosocial Involvement						
1. My teacher(s) notices when I am doing a good job and lets me know about it.	**-3.89**	**0.000**	0.81	0.42	-11.11	1.10
2. The school lets my parents know when I have done something well.	**-8.11**	**0.000**	4.02	5.77	**-2.05**	**0.04**
3. My teachers praise me when I work hard in school.	-4.30	1.000	1.31	0.18	-7.00	2.40
Risks Factors/Academic Failure						
1. Putting them all together, what were your grades like last year? C and below	**-3.91**	**0.001**	**-1.91**	**0.057**	-12.38	3.48
2. Are your school grades better than the grades of most students in your class? No	**-3.29**	**0.000**	**-2.60**	**0.0092**	-13.07	4.91

Table 4, continued

3. How many times in the past year have you been suspended from school? 1 or more	**-9.94**	**0.000**	-1.43	0.15	-11.99	3.84
4. Do you make good grades? Never, seldom, or sometimes	**-5.87**	**0.000**	**-3.60**	**0.00**	-14.66	1.17
5. Do you get in trouble at school? Yes, sometimes, often, a lot	-11.49	1.000	0.017	0.99	-7.54	4.73
Risk Factors/Low School Commitment						
1. During the last four weeks how many whole days have you missed school because of illness? 1 or more	**4.84**	**0.000**	**-2.68**	**0.01**	-10.96	5.74
2. During the last four weeks how many whole days have you missed because you skipped or cut? 1 or more	**10.05**	**0.000**	-6.82	9.05	-8.54	1.28
3. During the last four weeks, how many days have you missed for other reasons? 1 or more	**3.75**	**0.000**	-4.64	3.46	-12.82	1.22
4. How interesting are most of your courses to you? boring	-3.69	0.411	0.48	0.63	-8.46	2.52
5. Now thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you enjoy being in school? Never or seldom	**0.82**	**0.049**	1.73	0.08	-4.37	1.21
6. Now, thinking back over the past year in your school, how often did you hate being in school? Often and always	**1.97**	**0.042**	-1.02	0.307	-7.35	1.87
7. Now, thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you try to do your best work in school? Never, seldom	**2.03**	**0.000**	-0.70	0.48	**-3.05**	**0.00**
8. How often do you feel that the schoolwork you are assigned is meaningful and important?	**3.67**	**0.000**	1.75	0.07	-6.44	1.14
9. How wrong do you think it is for someone your age to stay away from school all day when their parents think they are at school? Not wrong	7.52	0.355	-0.43	0.67	-7.32	2.54
10. How many times in the past year have you done extra work on your own for school? Never	-0.93	1.000	-1.33	0.183	-8.47	2.28

Table 5. Pomona Comparison by Year and Grade (Independent Group)

Measures	Pomona		Pomona 8th Grade		Pomona 10th Grade		Pomona 12th Grade	
	2005 v. 2009		2005 v. 2009		2005 v. 2009		2005 v. 2009	
	Z-score	p-value	Z-score	p-value	Z-score	p-value	Z-score	p-value
Protective Factors/School Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement								
1. In my school, students have lots of chances to help decide things like class activities and rules. Yes	-0.57	0.570	**-2.71**	**0.01**	0.68	0.49	**2.12**	**0.034**
2. Teachers ask me to work on special classroom projects. Yes	**4.92**	**0.000**	**3.11**	**0.002**	0.14	0.89	0.64	0.521
3. There are lots of chances for students in my school to get involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside of class. Yes	**3.72**	**0.000**	-0.52	0.61	**5.05**	**0.000**	**2.54**	**0.011**
4. There are lots of chances for students in my school to talk with a teacher one-on-one. Yes	**58.57**	**0.000**	-1.70	0.09	0.31	0.757	**30.05**	**0.000**
5. There are lots of chances to be part of class discussions or activities. Yes	0.27	0.790	**-1.95**	**0.051**	**2.00**	**0.046**	**2.19**	**0.029**
6. How many times in the past year have you participated in clubs, organizations, or activities at school? 1 or more	-1.10	0.272	-1.45	0.148	1.14	0.253	0.09	0.931
Protective Factors/School Rewards for Prosocial Involvement								
1. My teacher(s) notices when I am doing a good job and lets me know about it.	1.88	0.061	-1.77	0.076	**2.03**	**0.042**	0.99	0.322
2. The school lets my parents know when I have done something well.	**5.71**	**0.000**	-0.78	0.435	**5.05**	**0.000**	**1.95**	**0.051**
3. My teachers praise me when I work hard in school.	-0.24	0.809	-1.08	0.278	1.88	0.060	0.41	0.684

Table 5, continued

Risk Factors/Academic Failure								
1. Putting them all together, what were your grades like last year? C and below	**-3.56**	**0.000**	-0.21	0.835	**-2.83**	**0.005**	**-3.98**	**0.000**
2. Are your school grades better than the grades of most students in your class? No	**-3.37**	**0.001**	0.31	0.756	**-4.06**	**0.000**	**-2.66**	**0.01**
3. How many times in the past year have you been suspended from school? 1 or more	1.52	0.128	**2.69**	**0.01**	**-7.07**	**0.000**	**-5.03**	**0.000**
4. Do you make good grades? Never, seldom, sometimes	**-5.15**	**0.000**	-0.21	0.835	**-4.56**	**0.000**	**-5.60**	**0.000**
5. Do you get in trouble at school? Yes, sometimes, often, a lot	0.53	0.593	0.42	0.672	**-2.81**	**0.005**	-0.52	0.602
Risk Factors/Low Commitment to School								
1. During the last four weeks how many whole days have you missed school because of illness? 1 or more	**-2.84**	**0.004**	0.16	0.873	**-3.38**	**0.001**	0.08	0.936
2. During the last four weeks how many whole days have you missed because you skipped or cut? 1 or more	**-6.69**	**0.000**	0.18	0.858	**-7.36**	**0.000**	1.83	0.067
3. During the last four weeks, how many days have you missed for other reasons? 1 or more	**2.15**	**0.031**	-0.47	0.641	**-5.18**	**0.000**	**-3.72**	**0.000**
4. How interesting are most of your courses to you? boring	0.68	0.494	**2.01**	**0.044**	-1.47	0.142	-1.18	0.238
5. Now thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you enjoy being in school? Never, seldom	0.00	1.000	1.31	0.192	1.36	0.173	-1.17	0.241

Table 5, continued

6. Now, thinking back over the past year in your school, how often did you hate being in school? Often, always	-0.98	0.329	1.81	0.070	**-3.01**	**0.003**	**1.89**	**0.058**
7. Now, thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you try to do your best work in school? Never, seldom	-0.33	0.740	0.57	0.566	-1.17	0.243	0.88	0.380
8. How often do you feel that the schoolwork you are assigned is meaningful and important?	1.33	0.185	**3.39**	**0.001**	0.16	0.877	-0.96	0.336
9. How wrong do you think it is for someone your age to stay away from school all day when their parents think they are at school? Not wrong	-0.94	0.345	2.63	0.008	**-2.04**	**0.041**	0.17	0.862
10. How many times in the past year have you done extra work on your own for school? Never	-1.02	0.306	0.27	0.784	**-2.34**	**0.019**	0.09	0.931

Highlights of Key Findings

Table 3 presents a summary of overall trends in the results of the four methods of comparative analysis on the four risk and protective factors in the study. Statistically significant z-test results within a *p*-value of .05 or less reveal overall progress being made in all four school-related risk and protective factors assessed despite limited negative trends in two risk and protective factors. Overall, after five years of the PYFMP, the results show reductions in every risk factor and enhancements in every protective factor. There was an increase in school opportunities for prosocial involvement across all methods of comparative analysis. However, results on school rewards for prosocial involvement were mixed, showing positive trends in the results of overall 2005 vs. 2009 comparisons as well as grade by grade comparisons but negative trends in same group and inter-grade rate change comparisons. In addition, there were positive trends in academic failure which saw reductions in perceived academic failure reported in the results of all four methods of comparisons. Further, results on low school commitment were mixed with improvements in inter-grade

rate change comparisons and some measures in overall 2005 vs. 2009 comparisons and grade by grade comparisons. Negative trends in school commitment were also observed in same group comparisons and some measures in both overall 2005 vs. 2009 comparisons and grade by grade comparisons.

School Opportunities for Prosocial Involvement

This section describes trends in school opportunities for prosocial involvement from baseline to follow up data in the PYFMP as presented in Tables 4 and 5. Results presented in Table 4 show increased school opportunities in same student comparisons (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009) and in the rate of change from Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12 in 2009 in comparison to 2005. In Table 5, results show increases in school opportunities for prosocial involvement in same grade comparison for Grades 8, 10, and 12 for 2005 and 2009 and in comparisons of overall rates for 2005 with overall rates for 2009.

In Table 4, z-test results show a trend of a statistically significant reported increase in school opportunities for prosocial involvement within a p-value of .05 or less for same student comparisons and inter-grade rate of change comparisons for 2005 versus 2009. Among same students, there was an uptick in reported school opportunities for prosocial involvement such as enhanced chances to help decide class activities and rules, work on special projects, talk with a teacher one-on-one, and be part of class discussion and activities. The inter-grade rate of change comparisons revealed enhanced school opportunities for prosocial involvement in 2009 compared to 2005 for students moving from Grade 8 to Grade 10, including working on special classroom projects and getting involved in sports, clubs, and other activities outside of class. The same is true for students moving from Grades 10 to 12 as seen in increased opportunities to talk to teachers one-on-one.

In Table 5, z-test results show statistically significant improvements in school opportunities for prosocial involvement within a p-value of .05 or less in 2009 compared to 2005 such as students reporting increasing opportunities to work on special class projects; getting involved in sports, clubs, and other school activities outside class; and talking to teachers one-on-one. For Grade 8 comparisons between 2005 and 2009, there was an increase in opportunities for prosocial involvement including working on special projects, helping decide classroom activities and rules, and being part of class discussions and activities. Grade 10 comparisons also showed statistically significant increases in school opportunities for prosocial involvement including getting involved in sports, clubs, and other activities outside class, and taking part in class discussions or activities. Grade 12 comparisons between 2005 and 2009 showed increased opportunities for prosocial involvement including helping to decide

class activities and rules; getting involved in sports, clubs, and other activities outside of class; and being part of class discussions and activities.

School Rewards for Prosocial Involvement

This section presents trends in school rewards for prosocial involvement which are documented in Tables 4 and 5. Results presented in Table 4 show decreased school rewards for prosocial involvement in same student comparisons (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009) and in the rate of change from Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12 in 2009 in comparison to 2005. In Table 5, results show increases in school rewards for prosocial involvement in same grade comparison for Grades 8, 10, and 12 for 2005 and 2009, and overall rates for 2005 with overall rates for 2009.

In Table 4 results, z-test results show a trend of statistically significant decrease in school rewards for prosocial involvement within a *p*-value of .05 or less in same students and inter-grade rate of change comparisons for 2005 versus 2009. Among same students, there was a decrease in reported school rewards for prosocial involvement such as in teachers not letting students know when they are doing a good job and the school not letting parents know when their children are doing something well. The inter-grade rate of change comparisons revealed reported decreased school rewards for prosocial involvement in 2009 when compared to 2005 for students moving from Grade 10 to 12 such as in the school not letting parents know when their children do well.

Table 5 shows statistically significant results of youth self-report, with a solid trend of increase in school rewards for prosocial involvement in both year and grade comparisons. There was an increase in school rewards for prosocial involvement in 2009 when compared to 2005, in the school informing parents when their children do well. Statistically significant comparisons of Grade 10 students in 2005 versus 2009 show perceptions of increased school rewards such as in teachers noticing when students are doing something good and the school informing parents when their children have done something well. There was also a perceived increase in school rewards for prosocial involvement in Grade 12 comparisons such as the school informing parents when their children do something well.

Academic Failure

This section reports on trends in academic failure from baseline to follow up. Results presented in Table 4 show improvements (reductions) in academic failure in same student comparisons (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009) and in the rate of change from Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12 in 2009 in comparison to 2005. In Table 5, results also show improvements (reductions) in

academic failure in same grade comparison for Grades 8, 10, and 12 for 2005 and 2009 as well as overall rates for 2005 with overall rates for 2009.

Table 4 results reveal a solid perception of improving trends in academic failure among participants. Among same students, z-test results show statistically significant improved perceptions of academic failure including students having higher grades compared to the prior year, having better grades compared to other students, decreasing reported suspensions from school, and overall good grades being achieved. In addition, z-test results within a *p*-value of .05 or less in inter-grade rate change comparisons for Grade 8 to 10 students in 2009 versus 2005, showed improvement in academic failure in the following categories: achieving higher grades than last year, having better grades than most students, and achieving overall good grades.

Results reported in Table 5 show statistically significant z-test results within a *p*-value of .05 or less on youth self-report which revealed overall improvement in academic failure in both year by year and grade by grade comparisons. There were improvements in academic failure in 2009 versus 2005 such as in students reporting higher grades than the prior year, better grades than most students, and overall making good grades in school. There was also a worsening of trends including an increase in reported suspensions in the past year in Grade 8 comparisons. Grade 10 comparisons results showed improvements in academic failure as students reported higher grades than in the prior year, better grades than most students, fewer suspensions in the past year, good grades overall in school, and getting less in trouble while at school. Grade 12 comparisons results also revealed solid reduction in academic failure as students reported higher grades than prior year, better grades than most students, fewer suspensions in past year, and good grades overall.

Low School Commitment

This section describes trends in low school commitment from baseline to follow up. Results presented in Table 4 show decreasing school commitment in same student comparisons (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009). However, there were improvements in school commitment reported in the rate of change from Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12 in 2009 in comparison to 2005. In Table 5, the results are mixed with some progress in same grade comparison for Grades 8, 10, and 12 for 2005 and 2009 and in overall rates for 2005 with overall rates for 2009.

In Table 4, statistically significant z-test results within a *p*-value of .05 or less on youth self-report among same students revealed evidence of lower commitment to school such as in students missing more days due to illness, skipped, or cutting, and for other reasons in the past four weeks. Also, students enjoyed

school less, hated schoolwork more, tried less to do their best work, and did not think schoolwork was meaningful. Inter-grade rate of change comparisons for Grades 8 to 10 showed higher school commitment rates reported as students missed less days due to illness in the last four months. There was also higher commitment to school in inter-grade change comparison for Grades 10 to 12 between 2005 versus 2009 as students tried to do their best work compared to the past year.

Table 5 documents statistically significant evidence of mixed results related to trends in low commitment to school in both year-by-year and grade-by-grade comparisons. Statistically significant z-test results within a *p*-value of .05 or less showed improvements in low commitment to school in 2009 versus 2005 comparison such as youths missing less days due to illness and for skipping or cutting in the past four months. Worsening low school commitment trends were seen in youths missing more days in the past four weeks due to other reasons. Eighth grade comparisons revealed a worsening in the reported rates of school commitment with youths reporting that their classes are boring and that schoolwork is not meaningful. However, Grade 10 comparisons showed improvement in reported school commitment with students missing less days due to illness, due to skipping or cutting classes, and for other reasons in the past four days. In addition, compared to 2005, students in Grade 10 in 2009 liked school more, thought it was wrong to be away from school without your parents knowing, and did extra work at school.

Discussion

This study assesses changes in school-related risk and protective factors including school opportunities for prosocial involvement, school rewards for prosocial involvement, academic failure, and low school commitment after five years of a Youth and Family Master Plan. The author performed same and independent group comparisons of school-related risk and protective factors in 2005 and 2009 among a Pomona School District student sample. Z-tests were performed for the following: same students (Grade 8-2005 and Grade 12-2009), inter-grade change (Grade 8 to 10 and Grade 10 to 12), same grade (Grades 8, 10, and 12), and overall 2005 to 2009 comparisons. The reported improvements in school-related youth risk and protective factors could likely be attributed to community multicomponent interventions of the Youth and Family Master Plan (PYFMP). This is due to the convergence of patterns across methods of comparative analysis and assessed risk and protective factors. Also, parents, teachers, students, and school administrators participated in community-level activities that could enhance school-related protective factors and

reduce risk factors. Further, there were no other major initiatives or community events going on in Pomona between the 2005–06 to 2009–10 academic years.

After five years of implementation, and as predicted by study hypothesis and expected outcomes, the students reported enhanced youth protective factors including school opportunities for prosocial involvement across all methods of comparative analysis and school rewards for prosocial involvement in 2009 when compared to 2005 and in grade-by-grade comparisons. There were also reported reductions in risk factors including improvements in academic failure across all methods of comparative analysis and higher school commitment in inter-grade rate of change comparisons and overall comparisons of 2005 to 2009. Perceived trends in youth risk and protective factors in the academic environment are consistent with existing research and scholarship which predicts and shows that community interventions through community impact initiatives (Collective Impact Forum, 2022; Kania et al., 2022) and participatory governance (Bua & Bussu, 2021; Mahmood & Muntane, 2020; Warren, 2014) can result in improvements in individual outcomes such as school-related youth risk and protective factors (Jarrett et al., 2005; Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Rubens et al., 2020; Solberg et al., 2011; Top et al., 2017; White & Gager, 2007). By suggesting an association between community-wide events and school-related youth risk and protective factors without accompanying micro level intervention activities, this study adds to contemporary scholarship which does not consistently anticipate community-wide interventions impacting individual youth outcomes without micro level intervention activities. Current scholarship assumes the integration of macro, mezzo, and micro activities in order to successfully address individual youth risk and protective factors (Cook et al., 2020; National Institutes of Health, 2000; O'Connor & Daniello, 2019; Walker et al., 1996).

In addition, the findings show significant convergence of patterns across all methods of comparative analysis for most measures of school-related youth risk and protective factors. Across same and independent groups comparisons in the study, statistically significant z-test results within a p-value of .05 or less showed general improvements reported in school opportunities for prosocial involvement and academic failure. Likewise, z-tests results on both school rewards for prosocial involvement and low commitment to school show similar trends of mixed results in which student perceptions reveal improvements among some measures in same and independent group comparisons. The consistency in these patterns suggest reliability in the measures, methods, and results, as well as a likelihood that the interventions contributed to observed variations between baseline and follow-up.

The complex patterns revealed in the coexistence of youth school-related protective and risk factors in this study are both a contribution to and a departure from current research which suggests that school-related protective factors always covary with school-related risk factors (Jarrett et al., 2005; Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Rubens et al., 2020; Solberg et al., 2011; Top et al., 2017; White & Gager, 2007). Findings in this study show enhancements in school opportunities for prosocial involvement and reductions in academic failure, coexisting with persistently decreasing trends in same group comparisons and persistently increasing trends in independent group comparisons related to rewards for prosocial involvement. The patterns above also coexist with mixed patterns exhibited in measures of low school commitment in both same group and independent group comparisons. The findings suggest that communities do not have to choose between enhancing school-related protective factors and reducing risk factors.

The data patterns in this study align with assumptions and explanations offered in the two models that make up the integrated conceptual framework. Consistent with the risk and protective factor approach, the findings in this study suggest an association between school-related youth risk and protective factors to mezzo environmental dimensions such as community factors implemented in PYFMP (Hawkins, 1999; Hawkins et al., 1992; Oesterle et al., 2018). Both the risk and protective factors approach and social cognitive theory recognize interactions between the personal factors such as youth risk and protective factors and environmental factors such as community intervention activities. In addition, social cognitive theory anticipates the role of negative or positive reinforcements from community contexts in the process of building behavioral capability and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 2004). Improvements in school prosocial involvement and school rewards for prosocial involvement represent positive reinforcements from either the school or community context. Reductions in academic failure and improvements in academic performance represent both behavioral capability and self-efficacy. The alignment of findings with the conceptual framework further supports the emerging evidence that community-wide interventions can impact individual youth risk and protective factors without micro level intervention activities.

The staying power of negative contextual factors appear to limit reported progress in school-related risk and protective factors as anticipated in both the social cognitive theory and the risk and protective factors approach. The persistent negative trends in school rewards for prosocial involvement (negative reinforcements) and low commitment to school (diminishing self-efficacy) seen in some same group and independent comparisons, despite improvement in protective factors and other risk factors, might be related to unchanging

and deeply enshrined contextual factors such as varying levels of relational and community risk and protective factors (Egeland et al., 1993; Masten et al., 1990, Solberg et al., 2011). Also, community risk and protective factors such as exposure to violence (Solberg et al., 2011) and deficits in community social capital related to youth development (Osborne et al., 2017; Scales et al., 2020) could be hindering progress in individual protective factors such as individual motivation and academic self-efficacy (Egeland et al., 1993; Masten et al., 1990; Solberg et al., 2011). Before and during the PYFMP, Pomona was afflicted by high levels of poverty, high prevalence and intensity of childhood disease burden, low academic performance, intractable gang violence, high teen pregnancy and teen substance abuse, low levels of health prevention resources, and barriers to care access (Pomona Unified School District, 2006; Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, 2005, 2018).

Study Limitations

The findings in this study should be interpreted within the limits of the intervention design and the implementation environment. Given the dynamic intervention environment and the absence of control or comparison groups in the study design, the author cannot significantly rule out other factors, independent of underlying environmental factors, which may have hindered improvements in persistent school-related risk factors and/or may be responsible for enhancements in protective factors and reductions in risk factors (Nickel et al., 2018; Shortell et al., 2002). Also, there were very limited staff level participation data which could have strengthened the evidence that ties community-level activities to school-based outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice

After five years of implementation, PYFMP made great contributions to school youth risk and protective factors in the Pomona community. The findings in this study suggest that community level intervention activities can shift school-related risk and protective factors even when there are no micro intervention activities at the school, family, or student level. Based on the findings and contributions of this study, the following recommendations are provided for school intervention program implementers in Pomona and other under-resourced communities. The primary recommendation is that Pomona and other poorly resourced communities which are limited in their ability to provide micro level interventions targeting family or school environments should continue to deliver community-wide, multidimensional interventions because they appear to be impactful.

Also, it would appear that the involvement of stakeholders in the design and implementation of the PYFMP, particularly schoolteachers, students, families, staff, and administrators might have helped in overcoming the barriers presented by the absence of micro level interventions. However, assessment of this impact was limited in this study because data on the participation of school administrators and staff was limited. Future work on school-related risk and protective factors in the context of community-wide interventions should include the collection of staff level participation data as part of the evaluation efforts.

As noted above, the absence of control or comparison groups made it difficult to rule out other factors affecting school-related risk and protective factors in the PYFMP. Future design and implementation modification of the PYFMP should integrate control or comparison communities in the design.

Further, persistent challenges in the social and economic environment in Pomona seems to have handicapped progress in some risk and protective factors, particularly school rewards for social involvement and low commitment to school. These persistent negative patterns in some reported protective and risk factors call for long term social and economic investments that would better prepare the community, family, and school environments for youth risk factors. Investments in school rewards for prosocial involvement and the reduction of low school commitment should be prioritized.

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Book Review—*The Heartbeat of the Youth Development Field: Professional Journeys of Growth, Connection, and Transformation*

Timothy D. Flewelling

The Heartbeat of the Youth Development Field: Professional Journeys of Growth, Connection, and Transformation (2023), edited by Georgia Hall, Jan Gallagher, and Elizabeth Starr, provides a timely, informative, and theoretically grounded exploration of youth development as a career, passion, and discipline. The information presented in this book applies to a broad audience. Researchers can utilize the theoretical framework and conceptual lenses when designing future studies. At the same time, policymakers and youth work professionals can apply the principles and perspectives when establishing and funding high-quality programs for staff and participants. Teachers, administrators, and instructors in K–12 and higher education can also benefit from this book when designing "youth-driven" spaces and leading conversations about out-of-school time (OST) activities and programs. The stated goal of this book is to: "bring forward the voices of practitioners who work directly with children and youth to build knowledge, inform practice, and influence policy in OST" (Hall et al., 2023, p. xx).

The text is organized into five sections: Theory, Pathways, Engagement, Transformation, and Equity. Each begins with a chapter on the respective topics, and sections two through four include related short essays written by OST professionals. Sections two through four are concluded with reflection questions. The book is structured to introduce the reader to a theory of youth development and expand upon that framework through discussions about career pathways and the transformative effect of OST.

Section One: Theory

Betsy Nordell wrote the first section and established Relational–Cultural Theory as the framework used in the structure of the text and as a guiding set of principles for youth work. Nordell identifies healthy and supportive relationships as the "heart" of the OST field. Relational–Cultural Theory promotes the idea that "expression and deepening of healthy relationships" indicate human growth and development, and disconnection from others is a primary cause of human suffering (Nordell, 2023, p. 4). Racial, cultural, and social identities can influence the relationships that people develop, and Relational–Cultural Theory can help guide the creation of inclusive OST spaces. The chapter concludes with the author detailing how Relational–Cultural Theory can be applied through the lenses of the coming topics, including pathways into the profession, engagement, and how to achieve transformational benefits in the pursuit of equity. This section should interest researchers and students looking for a theoretical framework to design studies or review existing literature.

Section Two: Pathways

Section Two and its chapter, "Creating and Supporting Pathways to Sustained Careers in Youth Work," by Nancy Peter, examines OST as a profession, including entry points and how career pathways can be strengthened and expanded. Support for current youth workers and detailed suggestions for professional development are outlined. This is a valuable chapter for those in higher education designing curricula or those at a management level responsible for developing programs and training staff. Peter defines "youth work" as "principles and practices that guide adult interactions with adolescents in structured settings outside the classroom" (Peter, 2023, p. 18).

Common pathways to a youth development career are via volunteer work, postsecondary education, and working within religious communities. All of these are explored through case studies in the text. Credentials are discussed as a way of professionalizing youth work, but there are disadvantages to this approach. While useful in establishing standards, credentials can also become a barrier to entry for those following nontraditional pathways into the field, as described earlier in the section.

Peter advocates for professional development designed around "child development," "positive youth development," and "core competencies" (Peter, 2023, p. 25). Applications of the principles of adult learning theory, reflective practice, emotional intelligence, and concerns-based adoption models are recommended as foundational practices to include when developing training. Finally, there are suggestions for establishing workshops, coaching, and professional learning communities with guidance on implementation. This section

is helpful for current and prospective OST professionals and leaders for its discussion of issues, including living wages, career development, and ongoing support. Researchers and policy analysts could also use this chapter to examine primary entry points and what is needed to strengthen them. The essays are written by professionals who entered OST through various pathways, which is beneficial for readers who may be familiar with OST but not positions and entry points into the field.

Section Three: Engagement

The third section, written by John Weiss and Thomas Akiva, centers on engagement. This chapter reinforces the importance of the trusting relationships emphasized in Relational–Cultural Theory. The authors use a case study of an effective youth development program, The Neutral Zone, to define three goals for developmental relationships to occur. Youth must feel safe, supported, and engaged (Weiss & Akiva, 2023, p. 60), and these factors are best nurtured in "youth-driven spaces." An important element of this chapter is outlining the "three pillars of youth-driven spaces," which are "intrinsic motivation, developmental needs, and building youth–adult partnerships" (Weiss & Akiva, 2023, p. 63). The remainder of the chapter is directed toward the importance of these elements in establishing healthy relationships. The authors provide information and clear guidance to strengthen each pillar. The benefits of a youth-driven approach are gains in social–emotional skills, professional satisfaction of staff, increased attendance with greater engagement, and passing on the lessons and morals to others (Weiss & Akiva, 2023, pp. 70–72).

Five essays in section three provide examples of successful engagement and the benefits that followed. The perspectives include those of program leaders, advocates for racial justice, youth ministries, mentors, and other passionate youth workers. The framework of youth-driven spaces is useful for program designers and researchers studying effective elements of OST environments. This approach could be adapted to classrooms, churches and other faith-based groups, youth groups, afterschool clubs, and sports. School districts and site administrators can also apply these ideas when leading initiatives and allocating technology, curriculum, and facilities funding.

Section Four: Transformation

A single chapter by Ingrid A. Nelson comprises the fourth section and concentrates on the transformative influence of OST. Nelson supports her argument by pointing to benefits such as increased academic achievement, stronger self-image, and positive school-related attitudes. This chapter identifies the mechanisms of OST that lead to transformational results such as

cultural and social capital, identity development, and supportive relationships with adults.

Nelson introduces a classification system of three types of influence: "auxiliary," which is when a participant has a positive experience but not lasting change; "distinguishable," wherein participants find something they are lacking elsewhere; and "transformative" influence, which involves immediate and long-lasting benefits from participation (Nelson, 2023, p. 111). These classifications can apply to researchers creating questionnaires and interview protocols to evaluate strategies and practices. Administrators, school districts, and grant-providing institutions could also use these when funding programs that seek to lead to transformative influence.

Five essays accompany the fourth chapter, each providing a tangible vision of what transformation in OST can look like. These include a librarian, youth minister, mentor, and program leaders focused on building positive self-identity and promoting representation through art and literature. Themes of dedication, creativity, and empathy resonate across the collection. Reading this section would benefit people in any position to learn about the background and influence OST opportunities can have on participants and staff.

Section Five: Equity

The final section, written by Jimena Quiroga Hopkins, is directed toward equity, defined as "each group or person having equal access to economic, social, and educational opportunity" (Hopkins, 2023, p. 155). In that pursuit, key elements of equity-minded OST programming are provided. The author discusses the potential difficulties of developing programs for underserved communities with diverse and changing needs. Hopkins recommends establishing general standards emphasizing academic disparities, equity, inclusion, professional development, reducing barriers to access, and affirming backgrounds and cross-cultural skills (Hopkins, 2023, p. 157). Social and emotional learning is highlighted as a critical element in developing equity, self-identity, and social capital. The need for pathways beyond entry-level positions for leaders of color to enter management in the OST workforce is an identified inequity that hinders increasing diversity. Suggestions for improvement include human resources policies, implementing professional development, and changing organizational structures. The author stresses the need for increased wages and benefits so staff can have extended careers within youth work. This chapter is applicable for leadership positions, both public and private, as well as for human resource directors making structural changes to improve equity.

Final Thoughts

The authors and editors who contributed to this book have done an excellent job explaining the OST field through the lenses of participants, staff, and leaders. The book's structure is well-designed and connects coherently to the principles of Relational–Cultural Theory. The only significant critique of the book is the absence of conversation about expanding access to OST for youth who are neurodivergent or have learning, emotional, developmental, or physical impairments. Furthermore, including youth and staff with impairments was not stated in the recommended core competencies. This was a surprising omission in conversations about engagement, transformation, and equity. While the ideas and suggestions presented by the authors can be universally applied, readers looking for information about the connections between disability, access, and OST must supplement these lessons with other sources.

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