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FOREWORD: THE POWER OF *TESTIMONIOS* FOR EMPOWERMENT

Mahmoud Suleiman
Editorial Director

Last summer, I was invited to speak at the Fulbright Pre-Departure Orientation sponsored by the State Department and the Institute of International Education (IIE). The four-day event hosted the outgoing cohorts of Fulbright grantees. My sessions focused on my own experiences during my previous Fulbright scholarships where I completed my residency in two countries in the Middle East region. Typically, such meetings would take place in Washington, DC, but organizers from the State Department and the Institute of International Education felt it would be more fitting to hold the conference in Detroit, Michigan instead. So we gathered for a few days in Detroit for a series of orientations, workshops, presentations and related events that were held at Wayne State University campus. The activities also included field trips to landmark sites in the Detroit metropolitan area including a visit to the Arab American Museum. We went for a tour inside the museum and listened to presentations about the Arab migration into the states throughout history. We learned about the Arab American experiences and their plight, triumphs and tribulations, along with their survival especially during the times of heated conflicts that frequently erupt in the region they left many decades ago. More importantly, we were fascinated by the untold stories of Arab American heroes and heroines, science pioneers and inventors, historical figures, high profile officials in various branches of the United States government, and many influential figures whose names and stories seemed to have been written in water. Artifacts, photos, maps, artwork, historical documents, and other materials were displayed along with audio-recorded narratives that archive the journey of Arab Americans to the new world; the testimonials spoke volumes of the unheard stories about this unique group of Americans who have been invisible in many ways.

Although Michigan has the largest concentration of Arab Americans outside the Middle East, California has the largest Arab American population in the United States. In fact, last year the California State Senate unanimously adopted a Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) 22 proclaiming April as the Arab American Heritage Month in recognition of the Arab American contributions to the state of California and beyond. The resolution was authored by State Senator Ling Ling Chang, a representative of a district known as *Little Arabia*, who delivered a speech highlighting the great contributions of Arab Americans and called for combating and rejecting all forms of bigotry and hate.

Unfortunately, like so many minority groups, stories about Arab Americans are told by others rather than by their authentic testimonials. Images of Arab Americans have been incubated in the minds of the public based on stereotypical pictures and false perceptions which have made them visible in negative ways (Maleh & Maleh, 2009; Nieto, 2004; Suleiman, 2004; Suleiman, 2010). Their stories and voices have been tarnished and distorted in various media discourses and the Hollywood movie industries. Even before 9/11, the immigrants from the Middle East, including the already settled Arab American minorities, have dubiously become, according to renowned journalist and author Nicholas Von Hoffman (as cited in Orfalea, 1998), “the last ethnic

group safe to hate in America" (p. 5). This unpleasant status has reinforced Arab American silence (Orfalea,1998), especially in social, political, and educational institutions.

Their children continue to carry the burden of their identity and heritage. They feel left out of the American dream of their previous generation. They attend schools with clouds and cycles of ignorance circling around them. They look for a glimmer of hope that someday somehow affirmation might come their way in their interactions with people around them. In fact, this brings home a story of one of my own children. So let me share her story when she was in second grade many years ago.

One of my youngest daughters was an avid reader who was hooked on books and participated in incentive driven accelerated reading programs throughout her elementary school years. She used to spend a lot of time at the library reading books; she also always took advantage of the library book sales. Stories of peoples and places across the globe always fascinated her and fostered her human pride. Whenever she heard about book sales during weekends at the local library, she would grab a few empty shopping bags, go there and bring them back full of books.

One day, she came home excited and hastily wanting to share with me a book the teacher read to her class. She borrowed that book that day from the school library, and made sure to bring it home to share with me after school. The story book was about Columbus's journey to America.

"Dad, this is a special story," she said.

"All books and stories you have been reading are special, why this one?" I replied.

"No, this one is different and you are going to like it," she explained.

"I like the books you read… what makes this different?" I asked.

"Because it has something we like… and you will like it too," she said.

I asked her if she could read it to me? Then, she enthusiastically opened to the page she bookmarked and pointed to one word and said, look!

I said, "Okay, why don't you read the page to me?"

She repeated, "No! look!" as she zoomed in on the word "Arabic," stating, "I know you like this word and I like it too … and it's in this book our teacher read to our class today."

I asked, "why don't you at least read the sentence to me?"

She read, "… And Columbus had an Arabic interpreter on the ship?"

I asked, "why do you think he had an Arabic interpreter on the ship?"

She said, "I don't know… the teacher never told us," as she wondered "what is an interpreter?"

I translated to her the word and explained what an interpreter does. Afterwards, she became curious about why Columbus needed an Arabic interpreter on the ship. I explained to her about the spread of the vibrant and dynamic Arab and Muslim civilizations that dominated much of the African continent, the Middle East, central Asia including India, in addition to the several hundred years of reign in *Andalusia*, modern-day Spain. Historically, as Schwartz (2001) noted, "… east/west contact bore the most fruit wherever Arabs and Europeans lived or worked together" (pp. 68-69). For example, "Muslim Spain was one of the most cosmopolitan and multicultural societies in human history" (p. 68), and had experienced one of its most thriving eras which universally appealed to many other civilizations as a model to emulate. Arabic was the *lingua franca*, a language largely used in the international arena. Our conversation soon turned into a social science and history talk which instigated more intrigue and interest in my little child.

Seeing the excitement that only one word (the word Arabic) my child identified with in a story read in her class was amazing. Even without knowing the historical context about the place of Arabic as a *lingua franca* at the time, the impact was noteworthy. Although the teacher and the

curriculum did not address the significance of such socio-historical facts and the place of the Arab and Muslim civilizations throughout history, the word has uplifted her spirit and increased her motivation and pride. I could only imagine how much impact on my child and all learners who could see themselves in the curriculum and instruction process when the pedagogy is relevant and responsive to them building on their sociohistorical capital and contributions to human civilization. One can also imagine if the story or the school curriculum affirmed more of her cultural, ethnic, and historical being beyond one word. Unless the curriculum and instruction seek to intentionally affirm the physical, intellectual, linguistic, and cultural being of all students as a core element of culturally responsive pedagogy, students will continue to flounder about how their identity, heritage, voice, and pride are reflected in the school culture (Suleiman, 2020).

For thousands of years, stories and counter-stories have played a large role in portraying the world of reality around us. In particular, the power of *testimonios* has been acknowledged by past and modern scholars, educators, and researchers. For instance, the Platonic wisdom, which suggests, "those who tell the stories rule society" underscores the importance of needed social justice activism through authentic story-telling to empower all citizens so that they are engaged socially, emotionally, and culturally in the diverse society. As such, their authentic voices should be told and heard because, as Savi Sharma teaches us, *everyone has a story*!

Having this in mind, the Center for Leadership, Equity and Research (CLEAR) continues to serve as a platform to give voice to the voiceless through its mission and core research strand by committing to the publication of the newly adopted title for its journal: *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research (JLER)*. In an effort to broaden our reach, we have been extremely fortunate to have two renowned scholars who compiled this special edition focusing on themes that revolve around the power of *testimonios*, *cultural proficiency*, *emancipation* and other intricately related strands within the fields of social justice and equity. The guest editors Drs. Sophia Rodriguez and Gilberto Q. Conchas who have a remarkable history of *walking the talk and talking the walk* add richness to the center and its research agenda. As they pointed out in their introduction to this volume, this "special issue is a collection of theoretical, empirical, and practice/policy-based social justice studies in education and community-based settings" that have no boundaries. Readers of this volume will be engaged at the highest level of intellectual discourse given the depth and breadth of the various articles that have all sorts of appeal for anyone genuinely interested in social justice and equity. Moreover, the collections of articles contributed by the high caliber of authors and social justice advocates are thought-provoking and provide key ingredients for engaging anyone in courageous conversations around the issues of race and racism. Needless to say, these are by no means rhetorical pronouncements made by the contributors; rather, these are action-oriented research accounts that are deeply rooted in solid epistemologies and empirical experiences of people yearning for equity and social justice across the globe. In short, as Dr. Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar concluded in his commentary on this volume, "the work of this larger community of scholars is both ontologically and epistemologically diverse; that is, notable variations exist in theoretical perspective, research methodology, the role of research participants and the nature of their knowledge."

Finally, readers of this volume will find themselves compelled to act upon the implications of each article given their powerful and didactic appeal. Apart from learning from the content, they will find themselves learning about the authors and their unconditional commitment, caring, courage, and resilience to bring about desired change through research-activism in schools and society at large. I am reminded by Dr. Ken Magdaleno's words of wisdom that "*You don't do it to save the world… You don't do it to change minds… You do it because you* ***can't not*** *do it…"*

The guest editors, the contributors, as well as the reviewers for this volume reflect this selfless spirit and a non-neutral stance by sharing voices loudly and forcefully to give voice to the powerless!

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

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To illustrate the commitment of the Center for Leadership, Equity and Research, we came together to develop a theme for this special issue of the *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research (JLER)*. In some ways, this project reflects the broader issues of educational equity and social justice within our own scholarship and through this collaboration. Conchas (2001; 2006; 2012) has spent a better part of academia centralizing the experiences of minoritized communities and urban youth, and shepherding scholars along in academic spaces that are far from emancipatory or liberating—the central theme of the collection—to develop positive relationships as both a scholar and activist. Additionally, Rodriguez's (2017a; 2017b; 2018; 2019a; 2019b) scholarship and community-based research centralizes undocumented and transnational migrant youth and seeks to explore how schools and society and be more welcoming and promote positive identity development.

The intersections of our scholarship and as producers of knowledge with and about minoritized groups is evident in relation to themes of access, relationships and social capital, equity, and belonging (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001). Rodriguez (2012) wrote, "Instead of talking about our ethical role as education researchers let's live by an ethic of promoting justice through engaged, transformative research" in her research about how community-schools promote belonging for Latinx immigrant youth and witnessing activism of teachers and minoritized youth in Chicago Public Schools when the Mayor was threatening to close (and ultimately did close) several public schools in 2012. Similarly, back in 2006, Conchas stated in his first book on race and high-achieving urban Black, Latinx and Vietnamese high school students:

> I cannot hide the fact that I was less sympathetic to individuals that maintained the status quo. As a racial minority researcher, I strongly believe that schools should be places of fairness and equal participation. My critical stance, I hope, has allowed me to illuminate agents, those individual and group behaviors, involved in seeking to improve the quality of schooling for urban youth.

These moments, when we struggle as researchers and human beings in our communities to advance equitable processes, continue to be a site of struggle and transformation. And, we often turn to scholars in this communal effort like Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa instructed us to seek allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political bridges and communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice.

As social justice-oriented researchers, we often feel like we "straddle the worlds, walking a precarious and somewhat invisible line," between the knowledge production of academic labor and relational community-building with our participants (Rodriguez, 2012). It is from these spaces—what St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) call the "ruins"—of social justice and emancipatory hopes that we envisioned, as editors, how we could focus on how scholars are engaging in emancipatory methodologies and being reflexive about such processes.

The special issue is a collection of theoretical, empirical, and practice/policy-based social justice studies in education and community-based settings from Andean college students in Cusco, Peru, high school *pushouts* students in a school district in southern California, a public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States, and the impact of mayoral-controlled policies on Black and Latinx communities in a Northeastern school district. This internationally focused special issue offers insight through social justice conscious inquiry and methods that highlight the structures of inequality and/or enhance those that increase opportunity in distinct contexts through critical scholarship and reflexivity that pushes the boundaries of being and knowing in the world. We argue that "critical reflexivity" in research is especially powerful when we advance social justice and equity with and for minoritized communities and think about our shared desires and differences rather than what divides us (Rodriguez, 2019). Authors in this volume expand socially-justice approaches to educational research in order to give voice to minoritized communities and to hold researchers "answerable" to the communities we serve (Patel, 2016) and sustain a more humane and just world through unpacking the ethics and politics of research (Fine, 2018).

Finally, we are delighted to have Dr. Ricardo Stanton-Salazar, a highly cited author and scholar, alongside us for this special issue and his "Distinguished Scholar Commentary."

As Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) echoes: "We are ready for change. Let us link hands and hearts together find a path through the dark woods step through the doorways between worlds leaving *huellas* (footprints) for others to follow . . . *si se puede* (yes we can)." We hope this special issue contributes to the much-needed change in education research to give voice to the most marginalized in communities and educational institutions and advance social justice approaches.

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ANDEAN PEDAGOGIES INTERSECTING THE PHOTOVOICE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

For decades social researchers have explored indigenous knowledges and practices, yet decisive input by Quechuan peoples in the research process has remained minimal, nearly non-existent. This non-participatory approach to research about Quechuan peoples, cultures, and languages has reproduced asymmetric relationships between subject and expert, enabling a prescribed set of research which obscures Andean methodologies. For informative results which truly represent Andean pedagogies, couple decolonial thinking with photovoice, a visual participatory methodology rooted in Freirean thought. Participatory research prevents the disregard of cogent, pre-colonial ways of knowing.

This paper conceptualizes Andean pedagogies, indigenous-mestizo practices that emerged during a photovoice study with Andean college students in Cusco, Peru. Acting as collaborators as well as participants, these students helped determine the scope, goals, and actions of this work. Andean pedagogies such as *muyu muyurispa, tinku*, and *kuka akulliy* reconfigured this photovoice process and disrupted coloniality processes which obscure research with Andean peoples. The practice of decolonial thinking during participatory research projects disrupts asymmetric, deliberate, or unintentional power relations between participants and investigators.

Introduction

Although community-based participatory research is adopting etiquette such as cultural humility during investigations with Indigenous populations, practices informed by decolonial thinking expand this research and allow Indigenous participants to create and reshape the space for dialogue that dives deeper into communities' own pedagogies. Reflecting on my community-based participatory research field work with Indigenous Mestizo Andean peoples from Peru, I draw on their collective adoption of decolonial thinking that evinced Andean pedagogies during a photovoice study. As an insider-outsider who returned to her hometown with new assumptions learned in Academia, decolonial thinking revealed areas of potential reproduction of power dynamics between me, the Andean academic researcher coming from a U.S Institution, and the Andean community in Cusco, Peru.

The collective actions by the photovoice participants shifted my orientation: instead of focusing on participants as fixed subjects under the coloniality conceptualization, I saw them as a flux of subjectivities and inter-subjectivities. Concepts of decolonial thinking helped me identify the decolonial efforts displayed by these Andean peoples (photovoice participants) in diverse geopolitical settings (on campus, off campus, in Quechuan communities). Decolonial thinking helps both researcher and community partners transcend academic and political discourse: it urges disruption of deficit views of societies, knowledges, pedagogies.

The main goal of this paper is to explore how decolonial forces within a participatory methodology supported Latin American indigenous epistemologies in the form of Andean pedagogies. Participants not only adopted and adapted participatory photovoice methodology, they reconfigured it by enacting Andean pedagogies. Contributions of this paper fill a gap in the literature documenting Andean methodologies from a decolonial framework.

To achieve this goal, I introduce and discuss the major advancements that Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) achieves for conducting research with Indigenous communities. Freirean-influenced photovoice methodology will be also discussed. I emphasize to the reader that CBPR is works with community members throughout the stages of research and disrupts the vertical dichotomous practices in research that define the subject as an object of study, not an active participant. I will illustrate Andean pedagogies that intersected the photovoice aspect of this CBPR when practicing decolonial thinking.

In addition, I will review the scholarship about decolonial thinking to deepen our understanding of some colonial and decolonial complexities and promulgate a challenge to the hegemonic subjugation of Andean ways of knowing and being. In contrast to the inherited, extensive, persistent colonial forces in Andean regions, oppressive forces that establish and sustain vertical social relationships, a decolonializing counterforce works to disrupt modern stratifications based on coloniality. Lastly, I introduce the reader to the concept of participatory cultural humility, an approach that advocates for investigators to practice interactions with research participants and other community research partners by valuing, respecting, and focusing on all contributions.

Community Based Participatory Research with Indigenous Peoples

CBPR's ontological paradigm embraces a participative reality: it relies on an epistemology of experiential and participative knowing informed by critical subjectivity and participatory transaction (Israel et al., 2012). These ontological and epistemological stances speak to similar views from the Andean locus of enunciation. Reciprocity guides and resonates within Andean epistemologies (Flores Ochoa, 1988). Because CBPR incorporates reciprocal dialogues, it promotes access to the local knowledges by encouraging partnerships with community members to develop mutually meaningful communal contributions.

CBPR strives to link action to research with community members. It promotes the involvement of participating community members in the entire research process.
During my application of CBPR, I rejected the stance of education and research "for" Andean people that is designed and prescribed "by" persons outside the Andean community. CBPR helped me avoid those prescriptive practices that reproduce demagogic manipulation to promote servile instruction. I abstained from the using any assimilation models in a paternalistic manner. CBPR values local and indigenous knowledges held by marginalized groups as a basis for actions that will improve people's lives (Muhammad, Wallerstein, Sussman, Avila, Belone, & Duran, 2015). It promotes an appreciation of different representations of the world that all team members bring to the collaborative research endeavor. It works on issues requested by the community instead of bringing an agenda in which the community members participate. The community together with the researchers create the agenda.

Embarking on a CBPR project begins with a partnership with a community organization stabilized by a vision of a long-term relationship. In this study, I focused on identification of potential partners and partnerships through appropriate networks, associations, and leaders (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). My partnership with two Quechuan college students (Yexy Huillca Quishua and Wencelao Huayllani Mercado) was vital to begin this CBPR journey. The

critical next boost came from partnering with Voluntariado Intercultural Hatun Ñan, a proactive group of bilingual college students. Formation of these partnerships in CBPR initiated and sustained a community participation by "negotiating a research agenda based on a common framework of mechanisms for change, and creating and nurturing structures to sustain partnerships, though constituency-building and organizational development" (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

A core goal of CBPR: challenge researchers to recognize community partners as the experts in potential solutions to problems in their own communities. Ideally, CBPR researchers strive for reciprocal involvement of the community partnership in all phases of research wherein scholars and community members together negotiate which methods best fit the exploration of the identified research problem. This goal embodies cultural humility. By practicing cultural humility, the researcher is predisposed to recognize and appreciate different bodies of knowledge, often non-academic.

Photovoice in CBPR

CBPR scholars value accessible formats and methodologies that promote potential engagement of the community when considering outcomes of the research. As such, photovoice has become a preferred participatory method for visual engagement, data dissemination, and better engagement of the community.

Photovoice was created by Wang and Burris (1994, 1997). These authors draw on the Freirean orientation to achieve critical consciousness (Freire, 1973). Similar to Freire's use of images as catalysts for critical collective dialogue, photovoice pictures serve to engage participants in germane dialogues and discussions (Latz, 2017).

Wang and Burris proposed photovoice as a method for marginalized peoples to problematize their experiences and expand on the social and political forces that influenced those experiences. Because the level of group participation is paramount in photovoice studies, group discussions are an essential component to engage in critical discussions during all stages of the photovoice process –problematizing the social reality a community wants to transform, picture taking of those realities or metaphors that depict them, and preparation of a photovoice exposition led by the community members. In photovoice presentations, community partners visually represent and communicate their lived experiences. Photovoices, the photographs selected for an exposition, become a tool allowing participants to project their message to the public and provoke critical discussions. An exposition is led by the participants themselves, a vital component to achieve the ultimate goal of photovoices -- raising consciousness.

In my field work with diverse Andean college students, photovoice facilitated the sharing of their experiences as bilingual Quechua-Spanish students in contrast to standard practices on their campus which limit Quechua linguistic and cultural practices in higher education. My use of photovoice allowed me to collaborate "with" the students "for" their interests about implementation of Quechua-Spanish at the university as well as to explore ways to improve current limited sociolinguistic offerings. As a mediator then, my role became collaborative rather than prescriptive; a role that encouraged students' expressive, personal portrayals of their (often unjust) situation at the university.

Based on photo-elicited discussions about problems, strengths, and potential action towards social change to promote Quechua in higher education, participants encapsulated the main message of each selected photograph for their photovoice expositions. For instance, Nilda's photovoice shows the symbolic evidence of the Incan presence in her community: the flag of

Tahuantinsuyo (that name of the territory occupied by the Incan civilization), the colors of the rainbow. Although Nilda links the Quechua language with the Incas, she also claims to be aware that valorizing Quechua is not just about treating it as an object of folklore but also about planning for its permanence in new generations using concrete facts (Figure 1).

Original Title: Tupay Translated Title: Interlinking	
	Original Text: En algunas circunstancias solo utilizamos el quechua con otros fines sin darle el valor que se merece y a muchos que lo utilizan solo sus insultos en sus cantos carnavalescos o eventos folclóricos, pero esto no debería ser todo. Cuando el quechua se debería de difundir más para que nosotros como descendientes incas sintamos más orgullo de nuestra identidad y lengua. Translated Text: In some circumstances we only use Quechua for other purposes, without giving it the value it deserves. And many only use it for their insults, in their carnival songs or folkloric events. But this shouldn't be the end of it. Instead, Quechua should be spread more, so that we, as descendants of the Incas, feel more pride in our identity and language.

Figure 1. Photoivice of N. Conde Banda, 2017.

Decolonial Thinking

This section reviews the scholarship and theories about decolonial thinking proposed by Global South scholars, particularly focused on the work of the Andean Aymara researcher Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (1993). The following questions are pertinent to this review: What is the relationship between coloniality and decoloniality? What does the literature say about internalized colonialism? What does the literature reflect about the need to disrupt coloniality?

Coloniality

Many people, including Latin American scholars and activists such as Blanco (2003), Rivera Cusicanqui (1993), and Supa Huaman (2002), have been working to comprehend, memorialize, and challenge the complexities of current colonial forces following the historical decolonization of Latin America during the 19th century. For Rivera Cusicanqui (1993), these forces would be called *la larga duracion del colonialismo*, "the long-standing of colonialism;" for Quijano (1993), such forces are *colonialidad*, "coloniality." Cusicanqui and Quijano, important Andean scholars, were concerned primarily about inherited patterns of colonial domination in Latin America. Quijano explained the concept of coloniality as the socio-economic domination of the North over the South based on a perpetuated ethno-racial structure initiated by the colonial hierarchy elevating European ideology over non-European. This hierarchy gave privilege to 16th century European societies, a stratification retained as former colonies gained independence in the 19th century. In the words of Maldonado-Torres: "Coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism". (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 2)

Although Quijano would focus primarily on coloniality and socio-economic disparities as the main forces energizing asymmetrical relations of power upon which the New World was founded, his concept was expanded by the concepts of coloniality of being and knowledge proposed by Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2016). For Maldonado-Torres (2016) it is important to acknowledge that coloniality involves a radical transformation of power, knowledge, and being leading to the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being. Quijano utilized the term coloniality of power to characterize a pattern of global domination enforced since the beginning of the 16th century by a capitalistic Euro-centric system of domination through colonialization.

Following a Fanoian[1] tradition, Maldonado-Torres (2016) highlights the role of the subject as "damnés", subjects or objects that are located out of human space and time who were discovered along with the discovery of the land that they inhabited. Fanon (2007) uses the French word *damnés* "the wretched" to explain the psychiatric and psychologic analysis of the dehumanizing effects of colonization.

The damnés cannot assume the position of producers of knowledge and are said to lack any objectivity. Likewise, the damnés are represented in ways that make them reject themselves and, while kept below the usual dynamics of accumulation and exploitation, can only aspire to climb in the power structure by forms of assimilation that are never entirely successful (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p. 21). It is especially useful to address this concept of subject-as-damnés, which the coloniality of power-being-knowledge aims to perpetuate in the zone of "sub-humanity".

Finally, for Rivera Cusicanqui (1993), the efforts to identify the forces of domination are of little use if a resolution, action, or thought does not involve a real impact on daily colonial practices. For him, internal colonialism is the main force where the daily colonial mindset resides. Internal colonialism prevents the Andean peoples from embracing their mixed identities (indigenous and non-indigenous), instead internalizing colonial attitudes which exacerbate the shaming and devaluing of their Indigenous roots.

Decoloniality

Decoloniality as the subject of scholarship emerged in Latin America and expanded to the United States (Quijano, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Mignolo, 2009; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012). For these scholars, decoloniality emphasizes the need to move away from continuing coloniality which requires an epistemic decolonial turn. This epistemic decolonialization must transcend political-economical paradigms so that systems of oppression become viewed as interlocking (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 216). Grosfoguel believes that an epistemic decolonial turn is needed in academia since coloniality also operates as a mode of internal mental control guided by colonial epistemology, a control exemplified in the works of scholars who give privilege to Western theories and methods in academia.

Proponents of decolonial intelligence aim to separate their scholarly work from those who "produced studies about the subaltern rather than studies with and from a subaltern perspective" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 216). He criticizes scholars whose theories remain based in the North while the subjects under study are located in the South. Therefore, decolonial-centric authors encourage scholars to move the locus of enunciation from Eurocentric knowledge to Subaltern ones.

[1] Frantz Fanon was a revolutionary, psychiatrist, philosopher and Caribbean writer of martiniqués origin whose work focused on decolonization and the psychopathology of colonization.

I do question Grosfoguel's ambitious endeavor. How could scholars shift to Subaltern paradigms to acquire non-Eurocentric perspectives? Are not these cliques of theorists simply reproducing the coloniality of power when their theorizing goes far ahead of the experience of subaltern, non-academic peoples?

It seems that Maldonado-Torres (2011) has an honest answer when he proposes trans-modernity as a way to engage in: "critical and creative appropriations of selected modern ideas, along with multiple other conceptual frameworks that can contribute to forge a less oppressive future. It recognizes that liberation and decolonization can be told in multiple languages, with unique and rich meanings and conceptual bases, and therefore values south-south encounters and dialogues" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 7). Trans-modernity aims to be nurtured in a modern decolonial attitude which urges decolonial scholars to be open to "multiple languages and stripping modernity of its colonizing elements and biases" (Maldonado-Torres, 2011, p. 8).

Although decolonial scholars concern themselves about knowledge production that reproduces universalist and Eurocentric traditions, one cannot think naively that decolonial thinking is a theoretical framework that provides the extraordinary capacity to continually detect and resist epistemic domination. Regarding knowledge production from a decolonial aspect, we must recognize that all possible knowledge is embodied in subjects traversed by social contradictions.

In sum, the main objective of decolonial thinking is to interrogate and move away from colonial thinking. Colonial thinking is understood as a superior attribution assigned to Eurocentric-based knowledge (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Mignolo, 2005; Quijano, 2000; Rivera Cusicanqui, 2012; Walsh, 2007). Consequently, decolonial thinking evokes the subaltern knowledge that was *"excluidos, omitidos, silenciados e ignorados…. este silenciamiento fue legitimado sobre la idea de que tales conocimientos representaban una etapa mítica, inferior, premoderna y precientífica del conocimiento humano. Solamente el conocimiento generado por la elite científica y filosófica de Europa era tenido por conocimiento verdadero*." (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 20)

[excluded, omitted, silenced …silencing was legitimized on the idea that such knowledge represents a pre-modern/pre-scientific mythological stage of human knowledge whereas only the knowledge generated by the scientific frameworks from Europe was taken for "true" knowledge.]

Andean pedagogies disrupts Eurocentric-based knowledge that as they present decolonial actions. These decolonial actions do not imply a "cruzada contra Occidente en nombre de algún tipo de autoctonismo latinoamericanista, de culturalismos etnocéntricos y de nacionalismos populistas" (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 90) [crusade against the West in the name of some kind of Latin Americanist ethnocentric autochthonism and populist rationalism]. Rather, students focused on decolonial thinking as lenses for visualizing the knowledge, identities, and practices that have been relegated to the margins of a hegemonic system. They also practiced decolonial behaviors openly, either individually or as a group. These public gestures reinforced their commitment to decoloniality, and helped recruit more Quechuan speakers to join them.

Decolonial Gestures

An adjunct to decolonial thinking, the concept of decolonial gestures (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010) helped me collectively enact and examine decolonial praxis, practices which resist the perceptual and discursive structures of colonial "matrices of power" (Quijano, 2007). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui coined the term decolonial gestures as the actions, words, and thoughts that challenges the internal colonialism found in societies.

Decolonial gestures highlight the importance of one's stance when involved in decolonial thinking. Observing the decolonial gestures of everyone involved in this study, I appreciated them individually and collectively as dedicated activists and not simply discussants. Their decolonial gestures involved use of the Quechua language, physical demonstrations, student mobilizations, and symbolic presentations, all geared to disrupt the ever-present colonial hierarchy.

Rivera Cusicanqui (2010) utilizes the Aymara and Quechua terms *Ch'ixi* and *Ch'eqche*, respectively, as metaphors to explain decolonial gestures of Andean peoples. *Ch'ixi,* translates as "motley", that which "expresses the parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish but instead antagonize and complement each other" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010, p. 105). This *ch'eqche* force and its contradictions were critical during this study, particularly because photovoice participants and facilitators all practiced diverse types of Quechua-Spanish bilingualism, biculturalism, and trans-culturalism. Ch'eqche allowed us to combine our differences yet retain our separate identities, much like oil and water can be combined in an emulsion yet, no matter how small, each bubble of liquid retains its separate identity.

In her use of the term "motley," Rivera Cusicanqui emphasizes that decolonial gestures involve efforts of "ours" and excludes the efforts of "others." However, decolonial gestures are not exclusive to a collective "ours," rather they are "stained, and partially inhabited by *others*" (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, p. 92). My openness to a non-fixed "ours" guided by the students' decolonial gestures facilitated learning about Andean ways of knowing that are not exclusionary or strictly Quechuan, an appreciation that ultimately contributed to reshaping dynamics during the research . That openness also encouraged interactive involvement of the students and lessened their reluctance to engage fully, opened them to a participatory stance in this research, a community-based participatory (CBPR) approach. CBPR urges researchers to place the participants' perspectives at the core of the study and hopefully disrupt vertical power relations between them and this investigator.

Andean Peoples

In Perú, an Andean person is one who was born in the Andean mountainous ranges or whose heritage and ancestors are Andean. Commonly, Andean people speak any or all of the following three languages: Spanish, Quechua, or Aymara (and their diverse array of variations). Participants in the photovoice study were adult students who resided in an urban setting and attended the Universidad San Antonio Abad del Cusco (UNSAAC). These students identified themselves as Andean, or Quechuan, or place specific.

A particular space that Andean students identified as a place where they can nurture Quechuan knowledges and practice the Quechua language is the Intercultural Volunteering Hatun Ñan group (VIHÑ, Spanish-Quechua Acronym). This is a student group managed by students who self-identify as indigenous. With the exception of one, Photovoice participants were active members in the VIHÑ who collectively, constantly battle the colonial forces in higher education. Photovoice participants manifested that they wanted to be refer by their actual names in this study with the exception of PucaHuayta which is a pseudonym (Table 1).

Table 1
Photovoice Participants' First Language, College Major, and VIHÑ Membership Status

N°	Names	First Language	Major	VIHÑ Status
	Castilla Callapiña, Ronald	Quechua	Anthropology	Member
	Ccasa Aparicio, Carmen	Spanish	Law	Member
	Chino Mamani, Fructuoso	Quechua-Spanish	Law	Member
	Conde Banda, Nilda	Quechua-Spanish	Anthropology	Member
	Ccasani Ccossco, Edgar	Quechua	psychology	Member
	Flores Ramos Ana, Cinthia	Quechua-Spanish	Anthropology	Member
	Levita Pillco, Yolanda	Quechua	Anthropology	Member
	PucaHuayta	Quechua -Spanish	Anthropology	Non-member
	Quispe Huayhua, Gabriel	Quechua	psychology	Member
.	Tecsi Ayme, Yanet	Quechua	Agronomy	Member
.	Vargas Quispe, Yuly	Quechua-Spanish	Communication	Member
.	Ventura Aucca, Diana.	Quechua-Spanish	Anthropology	Member

I am an alumna of the same institution in Cusco, I identify myself as a *Surandina* or South Andean mother-child, a term used to refer people who live in the southern Andean mountain range. I grew up in the Cusco region of Perú where most of the population lives in rural areas and where sixty percent have Quechua as their mother language. I was born in the region's capital city, also named Cusco, and grew up both in the city and in the rural Sacred Valley.

Later, as a student and educator in the southwest U.S, I became aware of the relations of power and the need for building critical consciousness. I became interested in the perspective of Decolonial Thinking because it focuses on breaking the *status quo* of all forms of discrimination including those based on gender, sexual orientation, race, and religious belief. Additionally, I found it crucial to recognize the dynamics between research participants and those conducting the research, thus locating "bias" throughout social systems, not just an isolated artifact of a particular research situation.

I felt that the CBPR approach aligned to the collaborative and emancipatory actions promoted by Andean activists. As a researcher involved in CBPR efforts I acknowledge the effect of my identities, particularly regarding the potential impact that my positionality can have which may affect the goals of my research, interpretation of the data, and production of knowledge. Therefore, I found decolonial thinking to be a useful framework to use with a population, myself included, that has been suffused with a colonial experience and may reproduce colonial forces.

Andean Pedagogies to Engage in Practices towards Trust and Sustainability

In the subsequent text I outline the contributions from the community researchers' (photovoice participants and community advisory board members) and Quechuan peoples' participation that emerged when collectively applying participatory cultural humility during the process of the photovoice study. I am adding a decolonial turn to cultural humility due to the situated coloniality and decoloniality in the Andean macro culture reality. While cultural humility acknowledges that community members are experts, participatory cultural humility highlights the collective forces as decolonial praxis within that expertise. CBPR approach required me to practice cultural humility to nurture greater participation by community-based participants—the bilingual Quechua-Spanish university students; however, the sociohistorical configuration of this particular region required me to strive for participatory cultural humility as decolonial praxis.

I initiated cultural humility at the beginning of this research, since I was interacting with members of the Andean community with whom I share a similar sociocultural background (K-16 education, ethnicity, nationality, religion). As an alumna of the same university where the participants study, I held the status of insider to a certain extent; yet my experiences during 12 years in the United States positioned me as an outsider.

Learning from my first year of collaboration with Yexy and Wences (members of the community advisory board), I surmised that a different approach to research was required: a decolonial attitude was needed. I considered that Quechuan ontologies and epistemologies influenced our thinking because our topic connected directly to Quechuan language and culture.

Initially, I aimed to investigate the strategies these bilingual students (photovoice participants and community advisory board members) utilized to shape the photovoice methodology to attain the desired viewpoint: I practiced cultural humility. I did not assume cultural characteristics about them: I considered them the experts. I did not exercise my cultural capacity to understand Andean communities with different values, beliefs, and behaviors. Rather, I promoted participants' full expression, to understand better their perspectives rather than adhere to a pre-planned methodology. Throughout the process, the original methodological aim expanded due to the collective orientation of the bilingual university students who listened to and responded to other voices from the community (Quechuan women weavers, Quechuan *campesinos*, and urban Andean activists). Adhering to the study's decolonial framework, immediate analyses of responses stimulated me to identify the various Andean peoples' ways of knowing, an analysis that reconfigured the photovoice process.

I remained sensitive to the potential for their expertise being guided by colonial or decolonial ideologies due to internal colonialism. Cognizant of the above concerns based on personal histories of the participants and myself, I formulated the following question: *How did the participation of the Andean community members (photovoice students, Yexy, Wenceslao, and other Quechuan peoples) shape the implementation of this photovoice study?*

One primary answer to that question, promoting the use of the local knowledge of bilingual students as well as Quechuan peoples, determined the course of the research process and made it more significant for the participants. Emphasis on valorization surfaced immediately and explicitly. Overall, the Andean community partners played an active role in guiding the photovoice study using Andean *saberes-haceres*, "experiential knowledges", integral components of the local knowledge base.

Following on, I sought to capture an appreciation for the different representations of Andean *saberes-haceres* (Quechuan and Quechua-Spanish conceptions, practices, and imaginaries) that enriched and reconfigured our photovoice process during the implementation of

this study. Andean experiential knowledges particularly informed the building of collective trust and sustainability as follows:

- Engaging in Quechuan practices for Collective Trust
  - o *muyu muyurispa*—circular scenarios in motion;
  - o *tinku*—an exchange of information, plans, or experiences, which could be translated as an "experiential encounter";
  - o *kuka akulliy*—the act of chewing coca leaves and sucking their juices;
- Enacting Andean Agency for Sustainability
  - o *ayni*—a type of labor exchange that involves collective physical effort to benefit both parties;
  - o *student collective activism*—student participation in social and political activities at the university.

Engaging in Quechuan Practices for Collective Trust

Andean participants reproduced and reinterpreted key practices and concepts linked to Quechuan core relational ontologies and epistemologies that continue to imbue their subjectivities. Understanding photovoice as a participatory study, students engaged in collective orientations (*muyu muyurispa, tinku,* and *kuka akulliy*) linked to their Quechuan legacies. This section describes how the Quechuan practices indigenized the photovoice process by aligning the mutual collective trust necessary to proceed in a collective project.

***a) Muyu muyurispa*—Circular Scenarios in Motion**

These circular scenarios in motion are irregular in form: they played out during the first photovoice exercise (first field session in Tambomachay), middle (one session in Huayllapata), and last (photovoice exposition on campus). Andean peoples commonly associate such circular scenarios in motion with the universe because in Quechua, *teqsimuyu,* "the universe", translates literally as the "circular foundation". Collective gatherings of Quechuan peoples occur in circles so they can feel and identify the others around them. I interpreted the *muyu muyurispa* as a micro-human reproduction the "circular foundation", unconsciously reproducing the centrality of the collective motion, fusing not isolating individuality. During this study, photovoice participants would call out spontaneously in Quechua to make a *muyu muyurispa*. I would then join them.

Muyu muyurispa are very common collective activities in the Andean world. I emphasize this idea from an Andean worldview to acquaint the reader more closely with the southern Andean setting where Quechua resounds and where we find practices of "others" that extend beyond everyday urban life in Latin America. I interpreted this cultural expression as a manifestation that signals the creation of a collective reality, which some academics refer to as communality[2].

In general, circular spaces were present in two forms among the actors involved in the photovoice study: one, a circular configuration of conversations where everyone can see each other face-to-face and direct their attention to all, not just one person; and a second form, collective dance movements called *muyu muyurispa*. The facilitators –Yexy, Wences, and I – deliberately promoted the first form, circular configuration of conversations. The photovoice participants spontaneously self-organized two "circular scenarios in motion," and the sikuri music group, Apu

[2] Floriberto Díaz (1951-1995) an indigenous intellectual of the Mixe culture of Oaxaca introduced the term "communality" to explain the collective forces in contrast to "individuality." (Maldonado Alvarado, 2015)

Wayra, accompanied participants as they enacted the final *muyu muyurispa* of collective dance movements (Figure 2).

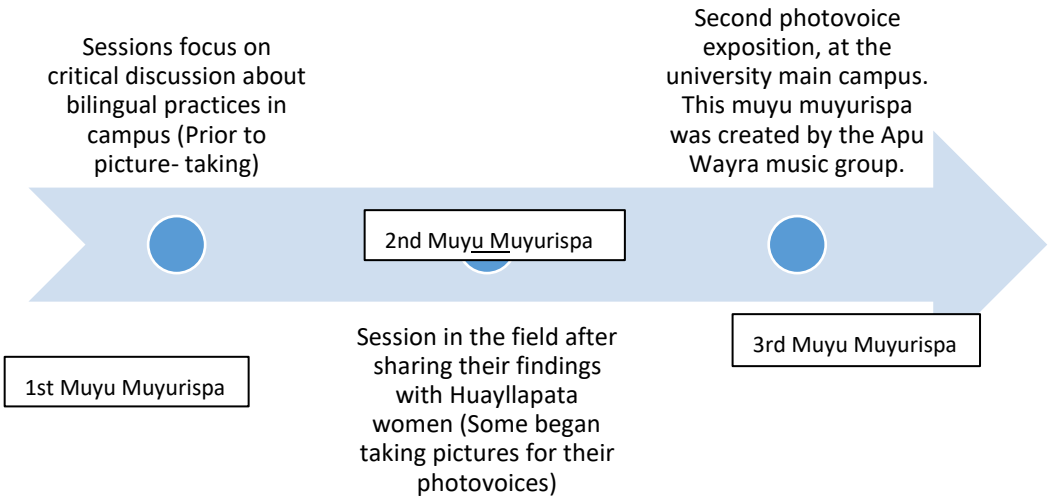

Figure 2. Sequence of *Muyu Muyurispa* during the photovoice process

These three *muyu muyurispa* occurred in open spaces, which I interpret as acts that promote strengthening of the collectivity and affirming their relation not only to the group but to *teqsimuyu* (the universe). Visualization of the circular scenarios in motion is readily apparent, as seen in Figure 3, a photograph taken at one of the initial photovoice sessions held on the outskirts of Cusco.

Figure 3. Muyu muyurispa in the Tambomachay area. Y. Kenfield, 2017

After a morning tour, the closing discussions in the afternoon culminated as students started a *muyu muyurispa*, they joined hands and moved in a circle. At the beginning, someone would put on radio music in the background; later, the participants gustily sang acapella, mixing Quechua and Spanish. The *muyu muyurispa* ended spontaneously with a poetic declaration in

Quechua by one of the photovoice participants, Ronald: "*kunantaq kaypi rikhuni qankunawan chay rumikunallan qhawarimuwan, kay allpaq sonqonpi pachamama uyarimashanchis rimasqanchispa, parlarisqanchista*." [Now here, these stones see us, we see you with us, in the heart of the earth, mother earth listens to us and speaks to us, and we speak to her.]

I interpreted this initial *muyu muyurispa* as enacting the collective commitment initiated in the photovoice session. Photovoice participants knew this study would take several sessions, and their willingness to participate was going to depend on how they identified as members of a group. They had signed consent forms weeks earlier, but in this spontaneous circular joining together, this *muyu muyurispa*, they declared openly that each of them absolutely consented to and committed to the photovoice process. Quechua is a language for not only for communicating verbally, but also through eye contact and body movements, a way of being that vibrates with fluid identities, enabling bilingual people to navigate between *muyus* and among the coordinates of altitude and latitude in the southern Andes.

The students would make another *muyu mururispa*, "circle in motion" (Figure 4), during a photovoice session held in the Quechua community of Huayllapa. This collective act, which occurred during the first half of the meeting, encouraged the village women to feel more confident with the students. The women responded by loaning students their traditional articles of clothing: *polleras* and *monteras*[3].

Figure 4. Muyu muyurispa of students with the village women's children. Y. Kenfield, 2017

After donning the borrowed clothing, the students continued their *muyu muyurispa* wearing the clothes of the women of Huayllapata (Figure 5).

[3] ***Montera*** is a Spanish word for a traditional hat, which varies in style; *Pollera* is a Spanish word used in the Andean region to refer to traditional skirts, which style depict the place of origin of the person who wears it.

Figure 5. Students doing a *muyu muyurispa* and wearing traditional women's *polleras* and *monteras*. W. Huayllani Mercado, 2017

***b) Tinku*—Experiential Encounter**

In Quechuan communities, *tinku* is a type of meaningful encounter in which people often exchange products and, most importantly, information. One important aspect of the *tinku* is that peoples ask critical, penetrating, deep questions to gain the most information possible. During a *tinku*, conversations often turn into opinionated confrontations, akin to a dialogue using a dialectical method. Tensions and contradictions during the makeup of the conversations are important in *tinkus*.

The continual migration and mobilization of urban or rural Quechua people promote the reproduction of *tinkus* in the Andean world. Photovoice participants related that, for young migrants to the cities, *tinku* represents more than a visit to their community; it creates a space to validate the use of their new experiences for individual and communal growth. For them, *tinkus* are experiential encounters that allow social, economic, and spiritual networking.

In this study, *tinku*s just happened, unplanned, not fully envisioned prior to the realization that we were actually participating in them. We, facilitators and photovoice participants, did not designate these encounters as *tinkus* initially; we called them *encuentros* in Spanish. I now interpret these *encuentros* as actual *tinkus* after revisiting my field notes and reflections. I realized that involving Quechuan peoples outside the university context of this photovoice study also created a space for dialogue in Quechua, a *tinku*, between the photovoice participants, facilitators and high mountain peoples. This photovoice study included two additional *tinku*s, significant experiential encounters for all involved. One *tinku* happened with the women from the weavers' association of Huayllapata, a Quechua community in Paucartambo. The second *tinku* happened between Quechuan members and guests of the Casa Campesina in the city of Cusco.

Following the students' logic that Quechua serves to create ties and mobilize people, the facilitators (Yexy, Wenceslao, and I) reflected on the need to leave the city and go out to the mountains during some photovoice sessions. As we discussed involving high mountain peoples, we considered visiting a Quechuan community. Wences suggested having conversations with Huayllapata women, weavers in their community, an endeavor that would involve a two-hour trip from Cusco city. Wences coordinated our visit with them through a nongovernmental association called Amhauta. We anticipated an informative visit to the Huayllapata community, eating with

and learning from the weaver women: we did not anticipate a *tinku*. We simply intended to share with the Huayllapata community a meaningful space for testimonial exchange. As the conversation became a *tinku,* however, the photovoice participants sought nourishment from the women's comments regarding reflections by the photovoice participants about their limitations and confrontations at the university because of their Quechua-Spanish bilingualism.

At the end of a meal, cooked by everyone, and after the photovoice participants shared their testimony about their limitations and plans to maintain Quechua-Spanish bilingualism, one young weaver, a bilingual teacher from the community school, spoke to the group (Figure 6).

She first congratulated the students for making this visit and for continuing to use Quechua. However, after these congratulations, she shared testimony about experiences with professionals from her community who had gone to the university and then appeared to forget their origins.

She mentioned "Universidadmanta yachaqkuna hamunqa niqtinku kusirikuni, Qankuna runa simipi rimayta qallariqtiykichis noqaykuwan muspharikuni, sorprendikuni. mayninpiqa Qosqo llaqtaman riqkuna kanku universitariokuna chaymanta paykuna profesional kaspanku corbatawan churakunku mañana rimayusunkichu qosqo llaqtapi tupaqtiyku." [When I was told that university students were going to come, I was happy, when you began to speak to us in Quechua, I was surprised. Sometimes those who go down to Cusco city and are university students become professional, put on their ties, they no longer speak to us. When we see each other in Cusco city, when they put on their suit they do not know you anymore.]

Figure 6. Weaver being part of a *tinku,* calls for reflection. Y. Kenfield, 2017.

Between the teasing and anecdotes, this interjection from the young woman within the circle was an appeal for the students to see themselves as future professionals who are going into other spaces relegated mostly to Spanish speakers. This warning, this authoritative criticism from the community voiced by this Quechua woman, became a critical moment defining this meeting as a something deeper than an encounter. By reflecting on her intervention, I understood that this was a real *tinku* between the Huayllapata women and us (the photovoice participants and facilitators).

A second *tinku* took place in the city of Cusco, at Casa Campesina, a project sponsored by the Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Andean and Amazonian Studies. Prior to the *tinku*, the photovoice participants visited the Casa Campesina project and its facilities, especially their dining hall for tourists. I subsequently rented this hall for a photovoice session in which the students collectively selected the photographs they would use in their upcoming photo exhibitions.

When the university students first learned about the Casa Campesina project, they became enthusiastic and decided to make a presentation about their photovoice results as a workin-progress at Casa Campesina. Specifically, students wanted this presentation to happen during the nighttime *tinku* called Campesino Tuesdays. Each week during Campesino Tuesdays, when people (mostly from Quechua communities in the highlands) come to stay at Casa Campesina, they hold a *tinku* in Quechua. After enjoying their first tinku at Casa Campesina (Figure 7), the students decided to create the first photo exhibition and present it at one of the Campesino Tuesdays.

Figure 7. Photo exhibition at Casa Campesina. Y. Huillca, 2017.

This decision by the students showed yet again that they were fully engaged, committed to making this project their own. I, of course, acquiesced to their wishes. The events at Casa Campesino revealed again that this photovoice study was a malleable process, introducing new techniques and applications for both participants and the investigator as they encountered novel experiences.

***c) Kuka akulliy*—Chewing Coca Leaves**

The Quechua experiential knowledge of *kuka akulliy* is the act of chewing and sucking on coca leaves—keeping them in one's mouth while extracting their juice, but not swallowing them. Andean peoples have likely practiced *kuka akulliy* for more than 8,000 years (Dillehay et al., 2010). Andeans perform *kuka akulliy* only with leaves of the coca plant. Coca is endemic to the Andean valleys; Quechua people consider it sacred and use it medicinally in holistic healing.

During the *tinku* at Casa Campesina, the Quechua rural villagers asked in the Quechua language to start *kuka akulliy* before the session begins (Figure 8). The coordinator of Campesino Tuesday quickly proceeded to pass the coca leaves around, before the community advisory board, photovoice participants, and I began sharing about our progress with the photovoice study.

Figure 8. People selecting coca leaves for kuka akulliy. Y. Huillca, 2017.

All people present engaged in *kuka akulliy* during this Campesino Tuesday following a specific protocol: one person invites others to take coca leaves by passing them in a circular, clockwise motion, sharing the leaf from a bag or fabric pouch and letting people take a handful of leaves to chew.

The protocol becomes more formal ceremonially and spiritually when the names of the spirits of the surrounding mountains as gods, apus, are pronounced in Quechua. Naming the spirits shows respect for the surrounding territory, a critical part of the relational ontology of Andean peoples. Although some of us, particularly photovoice participants and I, did not perform the ceremonial degree of naming the spirit of the mountains around us, many individually made blowing gestures towards the four cardinal directions, keeping the mountains in mind. Some Quechuan *campesinos* did mention the names of the spirits of the mountains such: "Sacsayhuaman", and "Huanacauri."

I learned that this sharing of coca leaves for chewing and sucking in a group, this *kuka akulliy*, signifies a commitment to start or continue a task, a collective task in which one asks for strength from the coca leaf so as not to stop in the middle. The *kuka akulliy* performed during Campesino Tuesday implied a petition to *mama coca* so that those present would be aware, alert, and correctly understand what the students wanted to communicate regarding progress on the photovoice study.

A group of about thirty people performed *kuka akulliy*, including some people who knew how to make "the ball" properly. Those who perform *kuka akulliy* more often can make a ball that creates a bulge in their cheek, as you can see in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Note "the ball" from the *kuka akulliy* of the young man standing. Y. Kenfield, 2017

The right cheek of the young man at the top of this photo is bulging due to the accumulation of coca leaves he is chewing without swallowing, showing that he is a experienced practitioner of *kuka akulliy*.

Enacting Andean Agency for Sustainability

This participatory methodology of photovoice sought to empower community members, not as "subjects", rather as co-researchers key to tackling challenges in sustainability. Collective activism by the student advisory board and photovoice participants accomplished this approach, a mirror of the Andean form of collaborative agency called *Ayni*. Coupling "reciprocal and collective work" (*Ayni*) and "student collective activism" maximized the efforts towards sustainability, empowered by Andean ways of collaboration.

***a) Ayni*—Reciprocal and Collective Work**

Ayni signifies a commitment to cooperate on a task that will primarily benefit one of the parties in the short run but will benefit the other party later by providing the same level of cooperation on a similar task or duty. Quechua communities perform a*yni* mostly to support agricultural or construction tasks. *Ayni* requires a verbal commitment that follows specific protocols, and it involves providing some type of meal while the work is being performed.

A good example of *ayni* developed between the students and the Quechua lodgers at Casa Campesina who were working to recover their Quechua skills. Both groups attended the first photo exhibition held on Martes Campesino forum. It is common to see university students or professionals attending these forums because they know they can practice their Quechua skills in an urban setting. Attendees included members of a *sikuri* group called Apu Wayra, a name that translates to "sacred wind." They learned about this presentation because they saw the flyer in the Facebook account of Casa Campesina. Members of Apu Wayra who were present expressed their desire to get involved with the photovoice study. As students presented their photovoice exhibits, members of Apu Wayra engaged in them in critical dialogues, *tinkus*, to both encourage the students and learn from them. Consequently, Apu Wayra proposed to perform *ayni* with the photovoice students. Apu Wayra agreed to create the musical background during the photovoice exhibit at the university campus.

We were delighted to hear Apu Wayra's proposal of *ayni*. It showed that the group trusted us and that they were enthusiastic about our project because it coalesced with their interest in ethnolinguistic awareness in Cuzco. The exchange that they expected in return from the bilingual

students was support in helping them improve their Quechua language. Apu Wayra saw the photovoice students as a source of help to continue their own recovery of Quechua. Subsequently, members of Apu Wayra and the Hatun Ñan Volunteer Intercultural Organization (VIHÑ) connected via Facebook to further support the recovery of Quechua. Also, the university students began to attend Apu Wayra's musical performances on Sundays in Cusco's Tupac Amaru Square.

Culminating this spontaneous mutual interest, a *muyu muyurispa* happened at our final photo exhibition on campus: the students performed a circular movement set to music by Apu Wayra (Figure 10). Sikuri groups similar to Apu Wayra are mainly associated with Aymara, not Quechua, communities, and use Andean instruments such as a drum called *tinya* and wind instruments called *sikus*.

Figure 10. Apu Wayra in the university campus during the photo exhibition. Y. Kenfield, 2017

b) **Student Collective Activism**

Student activism, a form of student *saber-hacer*, is understood as the manifestation of students' agency in exercising their rights in a collective manner. Students who participated in the photovoice study are active members of the federated centers of their university majors, as well as being members of Hatun Ñan Intercultural Volunteer Group and various study groups.

They demonstrated their commitment to student activism by their knowledge of resources and rights available to them as university students. They also initiated activities aimed at recruiting student fellowship and raising awareness of bilingual issues. For example, photovoice participants set up an interview at the local TV channel (Figure 11) to present their most important discussions about bilingualism at the university and invite members of the local public to attend their photovoice exposition on the university campus.

Figure 11. Photograph at the studio of a local TV channel in Cusco. Y. Kenfield, 2017.

Their activism contributed to the development of this photovoice study: they easily accessed university classrooms for photovoice sessions at night; they secured the use of the Federated Center of Anthropology and its sound equipment; they arranged permits to hold the photo exhibition. Using their collective agency, they guided us efficiently through several bureaucratic procedures. They organized the photo exhibition on the university campus. They requested sound equipment and panels for visual displays, obtained authorization to use Tricentennial Park to mount the exhibition, and wrangled permits to display the advertising poster for the photo exhibition on the university campus.

Figure 12. Wences next to the poster for the photo exhibition. G. Huayhua Quispe, 2017

The photo exhibition on the university campus was my last direct involvement in this study, but was not the last event for the other participants. The university students, as members of the VIHÑ, reproduced the exhibit at the national university in Huancayo as part of their participation in an intercultural student forum in August 2017. After that experience, members of the Hatun Ñan Intercultural Volunteer Group felt the need to include conversations about local and national

intercultural policies on their agenda and scheduled additional Quechuan meetings. In spring, 2018, the photovoice participants sent me a poster (Figure 13) about a forum organized by the members of Hatun Ñan Intercultural Volunteer Group, an event that took place at the university on January, 2018.

Figure 13. Informative poster about the event organized by the VIHÑ.

The Quechua-Spanish *saberes-haceres* of the participants continues to be mobilized into other geopolitical spaces. They remain committed and active in Cusco, Lima, and the mountain villages. They are recruiting more students and their families to their activities and becoming even more demonstrative in their decolonial gestures. They continue to engage collegiate administrators, requesting that more Quechuan-centric practices be included in the university culture. In the summer of 2019, at the Hatun Tinkuy, a conference –like event, several researchers gathered and presented their research in Quechua. Doctoral theses are now being published in Quechua. Commitment to enact Andean pedagogies remains strong among the original participants and their recruits.

From Cultural Humility to Participatory Cultural Humility as Decolonial Praxis

To better explore the participation of Andean students in this CBPR (Israel et al., 2012), the second part of this paper centered on initiatives of the participants that shaped this study. One major insight: CBPR investigators must practice a willingness to apply *cultural humility*, a contrasting stance to those researchers who assume a position of cultural superiority to their subjects in communities. *Cultural humility* guides the researcher's attitudes towards and interactions with research participants and other community research partners by valuing, respecting, and focusing on all contributions. Often during this CBPR, the photovoice participants and members of the community advisory board reconfigured the format of photovoice sessions, and, as an outcome of the collective *participatory cultural humility*, motivated us to practice selected Quechuan experiential knowledges initiated by Quechuan community members we met

during the photovoice process. The photovoice format thus became spontaneously modified by all involved.

An even stronger extension of cultural humility is *participatory cultural humility* (PCH) which expands the concept of cultural humility and evokes an active rejection of colonial stratification based on the intersection of race, class, and gender. I conceptualize PCH as a collective practice that engages all community partners and academic partners thus disrupting the long-lasting forces of coloniality implanted in cultural practices. This humility requires all people involved in a participatory study to embrace cultural and social practices that reshape the format of data collection, data sharing, and any research-related activities; all such malleable morphing designed to prevent mechanistic reproduction of Eurocentric practices. This does not necessarily mean the discarding of all Western practices: however it does emphasize a collective, deliberate effort to enact important practices from the Global South that might have been obscured under internal colonialism.

My and all participants' systemic application of PCH created an inter-active environment of collaboration ensuring diversified effort and input. The use of PCH illuminated discussions about non-Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies. During 2017, while working with Yexy and Wences, I realized that the practice of mere cultural humility was insufficient to fully promote the leadership actions from them and myself. I began shifting my thought to a more decolonial thinking framework. First, I reflected on how I was constantly focusing on being humble and flexible, showing my desire to learn more from Yexy and Wences' perspectives about planning the photovoice sessions. This initial reflection showed me that I was alert to each person bringing something different to the table. However, the expertise provided by Yexy and Wences would often reflect their Eurocentric college training. For example, Yexy preferred structured questions to guide discussions, a preference that limited the participation of the group. Wences seemed to accept most of my proposals and became a sort of translator of prompts to be used during our initial session. I realized then how we three college students, involved in a participatory research project, were setting an academic tone that seemed contrary to the decolonial framework in the Global South. I was directing: they were acquiescing. The predominance of the Western episteme permeates not only college students but all Latin American societies in general. In his influential work, Aníbal Quijano says that one of the elements that characterizes social situations arising from colonial experiences is Eurocentrism deeply rooted in the social, economic, and cultural conceptions of the postcolonial country (Quijano, 2000).

After this initial reflection, I explicitly conveyed to Yexy and Wences my thoughts and feelings about discovering shared visions for the photovoice sessions without reproducing subconsciously ascribed value to the knowledge holders in their collegiate, Eurocentric space. Together we decided to explore possibilities for drawing on Andean ways to combat our Eurocentric orientation during the photovoice process. For example, my initial thought of having sessions in historical pre-Hispanic sites that would activate our memories was shifted when I realized, thanks to Wences, that the mountains and their communities were just as important, maybe even more so, than iconic archeological sites. By arranging a session in Huayllapata with women weavers, Wences showed me the difference. During that session and while applying PCH by honoring the weavers' guidance and input, Yexy, Wences, and I became more honest about our own subconscious inclinations to ignore Andean ways of knowing.

Not wanting to reproduce the same situation in our team dynamics so Yexy, Wences, photovoice participants, and I all talked honestly about how our sociocultural multiplicities would play a role in our interactions. We committed to PCH towards others' culture but would constantly

be wary of the power dynamics that tend to infiltrate interactions via the matrix of coloniality. PCH also became relevant in our interactions with photovoice participants. During our initial photovoice sessions with twelve college students, Yexy, Wences, and I observed again how certain vertical practices, a hierarchical top-down stratification, were expected by most of the photovoice participants.

Our emphasis on PCH encouraged all participants in this CBPR to practice collective Andean efforts that would decrease the Eurocentric epistemologies prevalent in participants. For instance, facilitators became engaged constantly during sessions to lessen the vertical dynamics and create more democratic dialogues while Quechuan community members engaged in problem-solving discussions disrupting the often deficit-view attitude towards Quechuan communities and knowledges. Students joined with urban and rural Quechan community members as co-participants to access a broader view of Quechua outside the university. Inspired by Wences' initial suggestion to have a session with Quechuan women weavers in Huayllapata, student participants requested a session with Quechuan peoples in Cusco city at the Casa Campesina institution. These students were eager to hear insights from other Quechuan communities about their initial findings concerning bilingualism in the university. At the Casa Campesina meeting, a smile, body language, sitting together, dancing in a circle, critical discourse – all encouraged a sharing, a teaching, a learning, a true Quechuan encounter (tinku) where trust overrode unfamiliarity. Andean students desired to show locals that they had not forgotten their roots and respected the opinions of the urban migrants at Casa Campesina. In dynamic, interactive discussions with non-student Quechuans, students enjoyed honest critical dialogues while reinforcing their own Quechuan identities.

These participatory collaborations based on PCH reminded students to respect and honor their own *saberes-haceres Andinos*. They also emphasized the shortcomings of simple cultural humility when trying to promote participatory perspectives, perspectives which would prevent reproduction of a prescriptive framework that would silence Quechuan Andean peoples and communities. The reciprocal learning during these collaborative sessions revealed to the students that a sincere appreciation and knowledge of Andean culture along with collective PCH would empower their careers as they complete college and re-enter society as professionals.

PCH, fundamentally, urges the disruption of the epistimicidio—epistemic attrition (Santos, 2017) of Quechuan culture—by affording all participants equal footing, not in an egalitarian sense, but with genuine respect for everyone's personal and collective heritage. This disruption of coloniality progresses by practicing Andean ways of knowing such as the emergence of *saberes-haceres Andinos* (Andean experiential knowledges) during this study. Students not only spoke in Quechua, but engaged in Quechuan practices such as *muyu muyurispa*, *tinku*, and *kuka akulliy* [4], all made possible by the willingness of everyone to be open to learning from each other; to learn not only from their words, but actions, gestures and symbols. Practicing PCH enabled a decolonial read on the participation of all involved in this project -- myself, Yexy, Wences, the student participants, and all off-campus participants.

[4] *Muyu muyurispa* (circular scenarios in motion), *tinku* (experiential encounter), *kuka akulliy* (the act of chewing coca leaves and sucking their juices), *ayni* (collective labor exchange), and *activismo estudiantil colectivo* (collective college student activism).

Dismantling Epistemological and Ontological Injustice

If we are to work from a decolonial perspective, the concepts of epistemic and ontological justice must be accompanied by, indeed must transcend, epistemological and ontological engagements. Epistemological-ontological engagements are acts of decolonial advocates who engage in alternative relations with the world. Drawing from the concept of *Ch'ixi* (decolonial gestures), the dissociation of theory from application often reproduces coloniality among and within us. I would argue that decoloniality of being, knowledge, and power is an unfinished ontological and epistemic justice project. Without PCH, the objectives of decoloniality are tentative disconnected mental projections that lack epistemological- ontological engagements. In other words, if our aim is to work from a decolonial perspective, we, the researchers, can no longer be the sole arbiters of intellectual epistemic and ontological justice. Rather, we must practice dynamic epistemological and ontological engagements and enact the plurality of knowledge to be effective.

Change will not come solely from diversity but must be enacted by a collective of bodies that are committed to work towards dismantling such epistemological and ontological injustice. We may conceive epistemological and ontological engagements as *saberes-haceres*, experiential knowledges, similar to what Rivera Cusicanqui explains as "practice as a producer of knowledge" (2015, p. 96). Ideation and application must go together to valorize and sustain Quechua during a decolonial project.

I propose that epistemology and ontology not be separated from action; further, I believe that a fundamental touchstone for analyzing decolonial gestures is the collective memory of Indigenous-Western relations. These relations reflect the epistemological-ontological engagements beyond simplistic dichotomies such as the pure Quechuan, non-Western categorization of colonial mentality. Applying participatory methodologies oriented by decolonial thinking will augment and elucidate a more realistic appreciation of the similarities and differences of Quechuan and Western/European cultures. For instance, the Andean pedagogies discussed in this article diminished the colonial stratifications based on race and led to more respect for and less stigmatization of the Quechuan episteme. The collective practice of Andean pedagogies decreased the Eurocentric epistemologies often embodied by every person involved in the partnership. The participatory collaborations reminded photovoice participants of the need for a more profound respect for their own *saberes-haceres Andinos*.

In this article I portrayed the collective symbolic constructions that appealed to participating students during this photovoice study. Understanding the meaning of Quechua-Spanish bilingualism for Andean students using a photovoice methodology required considerations that exceeded an objectivity that refers to standardization of linear processes. Visual and auditory methods incorporated Andean expertise by necessity, thus allowing recognition of the existing strengths within this Andean student community by promoting an authentic dynamic of co-learning and balance of power (coloniality of knowledge and being). I, along with the participants, gained valuable appreciation for the adaptability of the photovoice process and its ability to allow creative, innovative modifications by researchers and clients alike.

As an Andean social researcher, I intended to promote integrative conceptualizing wherein Western science can connect to diverse forms of Andean knowledge production. Science and education must cease to be commensurate allies of vertical, colonializing models. Instead, research must blend the best of modern thought with the tremendous knowledge base of indigenous populations who have succeeded for thousands of years. Photovoice methodology is a perfect tool to advance this approach to participatory research, enabling the participants themselves to use their

capabilities of acquiring, storing, and disseminating data in visual and auditory formats. Outsiders, outsider-insiders, and even insiders must employ the methodology mindful of and sensitive to the purview of the participants, with emphasis on participatory as well as decolonial cultural humility. Cultural humility is larger than individual persona. It advocates a systematic level playing field. Coupling participatory cultural humility with modern technology such as photovoice enables researchers and participants alike to discover and transmit Andean cosmology by Andean people. Also, participatory cultural humility encourages the various Andean *saberes-haceres* to enliven decolonial gestures by the participants individually and collectively during the photovoice process.

All participants cannot commit individually to evaluation of self-colonialism or to fixing power imbalances without advocating within the larger participatory study. Andean pedagogies created the possibility of collective unlearning and learning, even transforming, cultural and social practices that open the door to counter hegemonic research practices. Certain strengths emanate from implementing a decolonial turn in Community-Based Participatory Research. It promotes resilient Quechuan epistemes which empower researchers and reinforce pride inherent in communities' legacies. Collaborative collection of, storage of, and dispersal of key social histories document current findings and provide critical data for future meta-analyses. Lastly, Andean pedagogies helps the researcher and community partners transcend academic and political discourse; it urges disruption of deficit views of societies, knowledges, and languages.

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"I WAS PUSHED OUT OF SCHOOL": SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL APPROACHES TO A YOUTH PROMOTION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we analyze the effects of Project GRIT (Generating Resiliency and Inspiring Transformation), a six-week intervention program that worked with a group of high school *pushouts*, students who were encouraged to leave school, in a school district in southern California. We interviewed thirty-nine former high school students who "dropped out," or were *pushed out* of school, 61.5% males (*n*=24) and 38.5% females (*n*=15). The mean age is 18.1 years and the sample consists of 27 Latino and 12 African American/Black youth. Findings indicate that an increase in healthy relationships with peers generates beneficial social and emotional skills, including increased communication, team-oriented thinking, projected self-actualization, trust, and development of self. We argue that storytelling is central to engaging and promoting at-promise students in the education system, providing them opportunities to overcome adversity, excel in academics, and expand their ability to build healthy relationships with others in their community.

Keywords: testimonios, dropout, pushouts, student voices, at-promise

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Ana Medrano. I'm excited to be here today. When I look around this room, I see myself in every single one of you. I am you! In fact, I was in this same room for the first time at seven years-old. Growing up in this neighborhood in the '90s was tough with gang violence, crime and limited resources in our community. We didn't have much growing up and my family lived in a room in my aunt's house. All five of us crammed into that small room. We didn't grow up with luxuries, but we had the basics. My parents couldn't give us many things, but they gave my siblings and I something better. They gave us a dream and told us that if we worked hard, we could accomplish that dream. -Ana Medrano, Project GRIT Volunteer (BA in Psychology, MA in School Counseling, PPS Credential & Child Welfare and Attendance Authorization)

Unlike Ana's testimony, *testimonios* such as these often do not find the light of day. These profound messages are regularly pushed to the fringes of our schools or systematically silenced in the crevices of the eurocentric curriculum. Students like Ana, once seen as "at-risk," are repeatedly robbed of promising opportunities. Interventions for "at-risk" high school students in particular have historically modeled a deficit frame of thinking by assuming that the implementation of one or more of the following mediations meaningfully compensate for what is seen as lacking in students' education: exposure to adult advocates, supplemental academic programming, curriculum designed to improve student's behavioral skills, and individualized instruction (Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, & Smink, 2008; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). As pragmatic as these practices may be, they are limited by failing to see these students as "at-promise," and thus educators fail to see the wealth of knowledge and experiences students bring to school (Yosso, 2005). Educators must attempt to harness and make sense of the rich experiences these at-promise students carry within by allowing their stories to do the healing and teaching (Gay, 2006). This paper argues that storytelling is central to engaging and promoting at-promise students in the education system by providing them opportunities to overcome adversity, excel in academics, and expand their ability to build healthy relationships with themselves and with others in their community.

The Importance of Storytelling

There is a vast body of research documenting the use of stories and storytelling in the education of Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color (Archibald, 2008; Banks-Wallace, 2002; Cajete, 1994; Champion, 2003; Hurston, 1935). According to Brayboy (2005), "many indigenous people have strong oral traditions…stories remind us of our origins and serve as lessons for the younger members of our communities; they have a place in our communities and in our lives" (p. 439). Indigenous stories, ranging from those examining moral questions to life events, can serve useful functions in learning and personal growth; they can both "[promote] community and understanding" and develop a "sustainable society" (Lawrence & Paige, 2016, p. 63 & p. 70). Many Indigenous scholars undertake and promote storytelling in research and education to build knowledge that is culturally relevant (Datta, 2018; Iseke, 2013).

African and African American communities also have a strong storytelling tradition (Asimeng-Boahene, 2010). Omolewa (2007) suggests that "the most significant information gathering exercise for the traditional African mode of education is the oral tradition, namely, the collective testimonies and recollections of the past inherited from earlier generations and transmitted in various forms of verbal testimonies" (p. 598). Some scholars argue these traditions extend today in the popular storytelling and educational functions of hip-hop music and hip-hop pedagogy (Chang, 2005; Emdin, 2016).

Traditionally marginalized communities such as these have not only embraced the wisdom behind storytelling but have used them to sow seeds of political consciousness and resistance. Counter-storytelling, overlapping in ways with Black and Indigenous storytelling, explicitly challenges dominant ideas in society through stories that "[open] new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that, by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). Counter-storytelling shares the stories of those on the margins to others on the margins of society; it also serves as an analytical tool to challenge dominant stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). To this end, it is also a pedagogical tool that "allows one to better understand and appreciate the unique experiences and responses of students of color through a deliberate, conscious, and open type of listening" (Delgado Bernal, 2002 p. 116). Scholars and practitioners have used counter-storytelling in a range of projects, from action research projects among facilitators and youth (Pech, Valencia, & Romero, 2019), to newspaper and documentary productions (Alemán & Alemán, 2016), and to early-career teacher reflections (Rodríguez, 2011). Sometimes it is a research methodology; and sometimes it is the data for research.

Testimonios, which can be traced to Central Americans challenging oppressive governments in the 1980s (Menchú, 1984), are specifically used as a tool for oppressed and marginalized people to center their knowledge and experiences (Huber, 2009). Similar to counter-storytelling, testimonios are methodological tools in research and education. Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona (2012) state that testimonios are also potential pedagogical tools because people use them to contextualize the "collective experiences of conditions that have contributed to oppression, as well as the agency of those who suffer under these conditions…we are able to hear and read each other's stories through voices, silences, bodies, and emotions and with the goal of achieving new *conocimientos*, or understandings" (p. 357). These cascading streams of consciousness, often oral, political reflections (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012; Garcia & Mireles-Rios, 2019) are personal stories that individuals share *with* their community. In telling them, however, they "do not speak for or represent a community but rather [perform] an act of identity-formation

which is simultaneously personal and collective" (Yúdice, 1991, p 15). Testimonios require "deep learning, necessitating an openness to give oneself to the other" (Alarcón, et al., 2011, p. 370), they create collective struggle and push people from recognizing individual struggle to recognizing collective struggle (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Scholars and practitioners have used them in developing curriculum with youth (Cruz, 2012), engaging graduate students (Prieto & Nino, 2016), and in conducting literacy projects with Latina immigrant mothers (Christoph, 2015).

Storytelling has served as a vehicle of cultural expression and preservation for generations of communities of color in the U.S, contextualizing their rich identities and traditions. Collective stories raise consciousness amongst community members and help fortify political strength and resistance from within as well. Through the various types of storytelling and testimonios that thrive in these communities, we are able to hear the voices of the most marginalized, those of our youth that have dropped out… or as we argue, *pushed out* of the educational system. Their counter-stories and testimonies serve as reminders of the systemic failures that consistently work to oppress and expel them.

From Dropout to Pushout

An increasing number of educational scholars have shifted the conversation from terming students who have dropped out of the educational system as "dropouts" versus terming students who have been pushed out of the educational system as "pushouts" (Fine, 1991; Morris, 2016; Tuck, 2012). The use of dropout stems from a deficit framework that primarily places someone's inability to finish school as a fault of their personal actions, behaviors, and attitudes (Tuck, 2012). Common explanations for dropping out might include pointing to a student's lack of desire to go to school, participate in learning activities, or complete work assignments. There is little, if any, blame attributed to the social, pedagogical, or political conditions of schooling (Anyon, 2014). When scholars, educators, community members, and students use pushout, on the other hand, it explicitly attends to these conditions; when people use pushout, they contend that when students depart from school, these broader schooling conditions are the most crucial units of fault and analysis. Pushout frameworks do not ignore what youth might do in schools, including not going to school or not doing traditional school activities. Instead, they question why schools ask youth to leave and what might make these behaviors inevitable for youth.

Penned as the "silent epidemic" by Bridgeland, DiIulio, Jr, and Morison (2006), the driving forces behind U.S. high school dropout rates have proven to be complex and multifaceted. After conducting a series of focus groups of people aged 16-25 and that self-identified as having "dropped out" of high school, Bridgeland et al. (2006) found that "while some students drop out because of significant academic challenges, most dropouts are students who could have, and believe they could have, succeeded in school" (p. iii). In 2019, the Institute of Education Sciences found that between the months of October 2015 and October 2016, over 532,000 15 to 24-year-olds left high school without obtaining a credential. The educational experiences and perceptions of youth that leave school, or "drop out," is materially different from those that do not (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Although 74.6 percent of continuous students felt a middle to high sense of school belonging in 9th grade, only 53.1 percent of students who dropped out felt the same. Similarly, 74.6 percent of continuous students felt a middle to a high level of school engagement in 9th grade, while only 56.7 percent of people who left felt the same. Latino youth and Black youth drop out at a higher than average rate of 8.2 and 6.5 percent respectively, with Native American youth reaching the highest dropout rate at 10.1 percent. In comparison, only 4.3 percent of White youth dropout, with Asian youth experiencing the lowest dropout rate at 2.1

percent (Institute of Education Sciences, 2018). Looking at various national studies, Doll, Eslami, and Walters (2013) found a general shift in the perception of factors contributing to these dropout rates; prior to the mid-1990s, students generally felt like they were pulled out of school by external factors such as familial and financial obligations, in contrast to more current trends identifying pushout factors as the main culprit.

Many pushouts experience hostile campus climates and overzealous disciplinary practices, often being pushed out as a result of complex processes and long-held feelings of alienation. It is never just a singular event resulting in a student's decision to leave school (Kotok, Ikoma, & Bodovski, 2016). School connectedness and school attachment are defined as "the extent students feel attached to at least one caring…adult at school" (Kotok et al., 2016, p.575). Therefore, in analyzing intervention programs that aim to close the achievement and discipline gap, Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) report that effective programs seek to increase school connectedness by fostering caring and trusting relationships between teachers and students. Without this perceived attachment to other students and teachers, pushouts are more likely to believe that their absence will go unnoticed, exacerbating feelings of isolation and alienation.

Serving as obstacles to healthy relationships, staff perceptions and school racial climates also contribute to the systematic pushout of students of color, leading to what Ladson-Billings (2006) calls the "educational debt," or the systemic inequity of opportunity between White and Black students. Additionally, "explanation for the over selection of certain students for discipline may include cultural mismatch, implicit bias, or negative expectations in classrooms and schools" (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 63). Cultural mismatch refers to a clash of cultures between an individual's ethnic identity and the culture established in the classroom by the teacher. "Cultural synchrony" within a classroom can be established with shared histories and lived experiences. Stereotypes may also contribute to teacher perceptions, which in turn influence actions propelled by implicit bias. These collectively act to impact the potential for positive relationships between teachers and students, thus, furthering school connectedness.

Teachers and staff often describe students who are pushed out as disengaged from school (Varela, Peguero, Eason, Matchbanks III, & Blake, 2018). Researchers have explored how school officials utilize harsh discipline to weed out students they consider disruptive and undisciplined (Peguero, Portillos, & González, 2015). Students who experience absenteeism are often caught up in harsh zero-tolerance policies and practices that end up suspending and expelling them for truancy (Marschall, Shah, Donato, 2012; Reyes, 2006). However, research shows that students first disengage psychologically and then behaviorally before being pushed out (Varela, Peguero, Eason, Matchbanks III, & Blake, 2018).

Theoretical Framework: Dignity Enhancement and Repossession

Eve Tuck (2012) argues that many urban youth of color who are pushed out of school experience school simultaneously as a site of dispossession and repossession. She traces the framework of dispossession to how indigenous scholars understand the roles of schools in settler-colonial societies. School is a site of dispossession to the extent that it disappears poor youth and youth of color; "their stories are not stories of mere pushout, but squeezed, kicked, punched, sliced out. Cast out. Stamped out. Erased" (Tuck, 2012, p. 61). For Tuck (2012), the youths in her study experience schooling as full of humiliating ironies, for example, being suspended for wearing a headscarf. These experiences are ironic because youth understand there is a difference between what schools say they value and their actions. They are humiliating because they happen over and over again. Students also participate leave school as a means of asserting their dignity (85). In this

way, she understands youth leaving school as a form of repossession, of youth reclaiming their dignity (85). Victor Rios (2011) discusses the systematic stripping of dignity that young Black and brown people experience when criminalized in school. He discusses how resistance and defiance become forms of dignity enhancement in the lives of these young people. Rios argues that in order to promote the well-being of at-promise young people through a *youth support complex* (2011) educator's must find ways to connect with through meaningful social-emotional approaches. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. The *Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL) is a trusted source for knowledge about high-quality, evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL). CASEL supports educators and policy leaders and enhances the experiences and outcomes for all PreK-12 students. Using insights from CASEL and applying culturally responsive approaches, the focus of the study is to understand how youth promotion programs can enhance young people's dignity.

Social and Emotional Learning and Promotion

One way to understand the role of storytelling in the lives of students pushed out of school is to conduct an intervention that identifies and addresses effective ways to motivate students and to develop social and communication skills that will benefit their future aspirations. However, a missing component when talking about supporting this population is addressing the emotional development that plays an important role in motivation and belief that they can succeed. By focusing on Social and Emotional Learning, abilities (e.g. showing empathy, managing emotions, healthy relationships with others) not measured through standardized tests, we can help develop these skills over time, especially through healthy relationships (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Heckman & Rubinstein 2001; Kraft, 2019). Recent research has shown that teachers can effectively enhance students' social and emotional abilities (Kraft, 2019). There is also evidence that mentoring, motivational, and dropout prevention programs aimed toward disadvantaged students are highly effective, primarily because they initiate social and emotional learning because they see someone like them that can make it through college (Heckman and Rubinstein, 2001; Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009). Given that it is difficult to track these students, there is a paucity of research on developing the social and emotional skills in students who have been pushed out of high school. Therefore, we developed an intervention, what we re-termed a *promotion* program, to assess the impact of a culturally-responsive, *testimonio*-based curriculum on high school pushouts. "Promotion program" focuses on the assets that young people have and attempts to break away from deficit perspectives in education. Adding a storytelling component to this promotion program allowed us to examine its impact on social and emotional development.

Although many youth mentoring programs focus on building and fostering positive relationships with peers and educators, more literature is needed on the effectiveness of school intervention programs premised on relationship-building (Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004). While some successful intervention models, have been implemented in a variety of urban and suburban contexts ranging from kindergarten to 12th grade, this model has consistently underscored the importance of positive and nurturing relationships to school persistence (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004), such programs, as critical as they are, do not address students who have already been pushed out.

A study conducted in 1992, following 102 middle-class dropout youth who were enrolled in an alternative educational program, documented the need for additional social support and psychoeducational interventions in their re-entry into school (Franklin & Streeter, 1992).

However, Aviles, Anderson, and Davila (2006) document that schools rarely have the resources and programs in place to meet the socioemotional needs of their students. Without community resources to aid in the development of these at-risk youth, especially for reentry into the schooling system, youth who experience an "emotional crisis" due to past and present traumas in their homes or neighborhoods, will continue to experience feelings of alienation. Furthermore, McPartland (1993) stressed the importance of implementing localized and customized intervention programs meet the specific needs of the student population.

Method

Context of the Study

The goal of this study is to analyze the effects of Project GRIT (Generating Resiliency and Inspiring Transformation), a six-week intervention program that worked with a group of former high school *pushouts*, students who were coerced to leave a school district in Southern California. Project GRIT originated from the idea that we must reframe the terming of youth from "at-risk" to "at-promise." This reframing is based on the idea that many youth engage in self-fulfilling prophecies in their lives, and that it is important for them to see examples of what they would like to become as opposed to what we don't want them to become. Rios and Mireles-Rios (2019) developed the idea of Educator Project Self-Actualization to explain how the critical-pedagogical intervention of an educator or mentor can support a young person as they pursue their aspirations and search for a thriving zone (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). A group of volunteers took to the streets of Los Angeles in the summer of 2013 to work with these young people and encourage them to return to school. Dr. Victor Rios and Dr. Rebeca Mireles-Rios, led a team of former students, altruistic friends, and caring individuals to help the youth improve well-being in mind, body, and soul through an intervention they named, Project GRIT. The project sought to challenge norms and spark a national conversation on how to motivate, educate, and prepare these youths to succeed in the 21st century. Our model sought to give each youth dignity, resiliency, respect and integrity, and most importantly, to treat them as human beings with the potential to succeed in school and the workforce. We facilitated a wide range of activities, including motivational presentations, college tours, self-reflection activities, team-building activities, a ropes challenge course, community college registration, historical presentations on the Watts community, a math and writing preparation workshop, a dress for success workshop. We knew the exercises were much needed in a community where these young people had been left behind by the conventional public school system. Watts, a 2.12-square-mile community in Los Angeles, was riddled with violence, drug abuse, and high incarceration rates among young people. The media often portrayed Watts as a no-man's-land dominated by drive-by shootings, senseless killings, and police chases. The three largest housing projects in Watts, Jordan Downs, Imperial Courts, and Nickerson Gardens, are infamous for appearing on local news, in hip-hop artists' music videos, and in movies. Our challenge was to teach participants how to strive rather than solely survive. With social and emotional support, the Project GRIT team sought to engage these youths, ages 15 to 21, to help them return to school and develop their inherent resiliency and grit to overcome adversity. We were convinced that these youths were not violent, gang-banging thugs uninterested in continuing their education and in conventional success. We saw them not as "at-risk" but as "at-promise," and it was up to the Project GRIT team to help each youth find that promise within. Specifically, this project sought to develop a program and study its effects in order to understand the lived experiences of these students who were pushed out of high school and to understand the impact of an intervention that focused on social and emotional learning through the sharing of stories. The

premise of Project GRIT was to engage in activist research by understanding the origins of inequality, working collectively with the students in the program to provide them the tools for transforming repressive conditions (Hale, 2001).

Participants

We interviewed thirty-nine former high school students who were pushed out of school. Our sample consists of 61.5% males (*n*=24) and 38.5% females (*n*=15). The mean age is 18.1 years and the sample consisted of 27 Latino and 12 African American/Black youth. All participants reported that they wanted to graduate high school, with approximately 85% wanting to graduate from some college (2-year, 4-year, or graduate school). Participants reported that 15% of their mothers completed a GED or high school diploma, and 20% of their fathers completed a GED or diploma. The remaining parents completed some high school or less, with 31% and 36% reporting that they did not know their mother and father's education level, respectively. All participants reported living below the poverty line and within the same surrounding areas; however, participants did report that they attended different high schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

We recruited participants at a community center in a low-income area in southern California. The director of the community program provided access to the center and the participants. Participants in the program had left high school and were either currently preparing for their GRE, enrolled in alternative schooling or trying to get back into a high school program. All participant interviews were approximately one hour and took place at a private office in the community center. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. A credentialed social worker was on location in the event that the interviews restimulated previous trauma. Participants received $20 for the interview. Human Subjects approval was granted for this project. Interviews took place post participation in the six-week intervention program, and we asked all participants the following questions: "*Tell us your experiences participating in the intervention? What did you learn from the program?"* In answering these questions, participants shared their life stories and, through probing questions, followed with examples and further descriptions.

Following the protocol, research assistants transcribed each semi-structured post-interview and then a content-coding scheme was used to examine patterns in the interview data (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2014). The first three authors read through the transcripts and identified key themes. Initial interpretations were made about the data through codes and preliminary categories. We utilized "focused coding", using the qualitative software program Dedoose, to generate dominant themes and eliminate inconsistent findings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). Together we resolved any discrepancies.

Researcher Positionality

Rebeca Mireles-Rios is a biracial, Chicana-Serbian woman with roots in the working-class Mission District of San Francisco, California. She was a 6th grade teacher for seven years, working with at-promise students. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Victor Rios is a Chicano from Oakland, California, where he grew up in poverty, then became a high school dropout and juvenile delinquent during his teenage years. He is currently a Professor of Sociology at UC Santa Barbara. He has committed his career to working with at-promise young people and finding ways to support them in their educational and civic engagement journeys. Trevor Auldridge-Reveles, is a biracial, working-class man from a rural part of California. He is a PhD student in sociology at UC Santa Barbara. He was never pushed out of school, although he has previous experience working with students who have been. He currently mentors working-class young people of color in both K-12 schooling (middle school,

high school, and adult education) and postsecondary education (undergraduate and rising graduate students). Marilyn Monroy is a first-generation Latina born and raised in Oxnard, California, and is currently a PhD student in Education at UC Santa Barbara. Isaac Castro is a Mexican/Portuguese California native and a lifelong attendee of the public school system; he is also a former educational administrator and a current PhD student in Education at UC Santa Barbara.

Results

Among our key findings of the intervention, we saw increased healthy relationships with both their peers and their self-esteem. At the conclusion of the program, participating students demonstrated improvement in a number of interpersonal skills: communication and relationship development, teamwork, recognizing shared community worth and struggle, and trust.

Curating Relationships with Others

Only a few students knew each other at the onset of the program, and none of the students knew the GRIT facilitators. One of the highlights of the six weeks was witnessing Project GRIT participants build relationships with others in the program in a supportive and safe environment. Students were able to listen to each other as well as recognize the struggles and strengths of their peers.

In the entry interviews, many youths in the program reported that they were motivated to participate because they thought they would learn how to develop their communication and relationship skills. One student was drawn to the program by counselors who said it would be much different than other types of activities they had participate in when in school:

> They told me it wasn't going be none of writing or like reading books or anything, it was going to be more of a program where we all would communicate with each other and get to know and see how our lives fit together. (Ernesto)

Students understood it was not about "writing or reading" but about communicating with people, familiarizing their self with other students, and finally understanding their shared connection with each other. In their journal entries throughout the program, they mentioned how they enjoyed communicating with other students, developing friendships that challenged and motivated them, while also learning to give and take advice from their friends. They had particularly poignant reflections on working through their personal struggle to tell their story to the group during one of the activities in the program. After initially feeling nervous, students eventually felt comfortable and supported by their peers. Upon reflecting on the lessons from the program, two students specifically mentioned how they felt they were able to develop relationships and communicate with the other participants:

> I met a lot of new people in the program and they're very helpful…I also learned how to talk to people, because I'm kind of shy…you have to learn a lot of stuff if you want to be successful and stuff. And you have to know to trust people and get to know them. (Emilio)

> [Dr. Rios] started telling me that to start talking and…being talkative with everybody 'cause everybody will pay attention to me, well not just to me but to each other. (Fernando)

For these students, part of the benefit of the program was the number of new people they met. Several of the students said they had felt isolated, shy, or wanted to be "alone" when in school as well as in other social settings with their agemates. Emilio was one of the students who communicated this feeling in the interview session. He shared that several of the program activities

encouraged him to communicate with other participants. He felt this program provided an opportunity for him to connect with people and work through his anxieties about talking to other people. Other students, such as Fernando, saw communication as a skill they already had. Contrary to students like Emilio, Fernando recognized he was skilled at communicating, though only as a means to "work teachers" in school--to his detriment. The situation was similar when he would "talk back" to his parents. For him, the program provided an avenue where he could communicate, building on one of the assets that he already had—communicating in a socially-constructive manner--by being encouraged by facilitators to talk as a means of creating group cohesion.

Many of the students were also grateful for the opportunity to participate in group work. Most had never been part of a formal group activity outside of regularly scheduled schooling, and at the onset of the project, they stated they wanted to learn how to work in groups. They felt that being part of teams could also teach them how to develop a shared sense of camaraderie:

I want to learn more about working in groups, and like a team. (Irene)

> I feel like it's going to make a bonding between us, the teams right here…to not critique or judge each other because we're in the same position where outsiders see us the same regardless of who talks to us. (Vera)

Upon reflecting on the activities that they participated in with their fellow classmates, several students said they had built bonds with peers they knew but had never talked to before. One student, who had struggled to find uplifting relationships in their adolescence, felt they could develop supportive and validating relationships with other students as part of a team:

> It was really fun because...we communicate a lot with the students even though we don't talk to them like that, but we try like to communicate. We talk like "oh hey, let's do this!" or we'd do that. Everybody'd be like "Ok, yeah, let's do this!" and "You're right!" or "They're right, and we've got to work as a team and connect and bond together. (Monique)

Several felt that they were able to develop a sense of collaboration. Apart from relationship-building, some students also reflected on something that drew them to the project and that they had learned in the course of the program: the collective struggle to change society.

One student articulated it succinctly:

> One thing that attracted me to program was…the values it offers. The values of independence, the value of…collaboration…they're teaching team work basically and team work is what we need to do, to change the way the system works and to change our communities, to change it because we need team work. Because if I go by myself and I try to change it this community and the way it is it's just not going to happen, but if I go with every single student and we try to make a difference, then there's a different story. (Jesse)

This student, who had been very active in the Occupy L.A. demonstrations in 2011, felt that the seemingly contradictory values the program was promoting: independence and collaboration. Although he felt the lessons he learned were more of a "review," he connected them to what he had learned in his activism at Occupy. That is, the experience of unity was "amazing."

Finally, students also built healthy relationships with their peers through developing a recognition of shared struggle. They came to see shared struggle as one of their strengths. In many instances, the recognition of struggle, and people's capacity to work through their struggles, served

as a framework to facilitate their pursuit of both individual and shared goals and aspirations. For some, this was an impetus to developing relationships because many times they had felt they couldn't develop health relationships with other people because of their own personal pathologies:

> I've learned…I'm not the only one with problems, I've learned other people struggle…but everyone is making an effort to actually move on with their struggles…this actually helped me like to actually like try to meet new people and make new friends. (Karen)

In other instances, youth participants demonstrated how they balanced their realization that people have similar, yet unique struggles at the same time. This was a reason for them to be comfortable in their own realities and comfortable in their identities:

> I've learned that we all go through the same things man…everybody kind of bleeds the same way…they bleed the same but differently…I learned that from being right here just be happy and be who you really are…don't be afraid to hide or show people that side of you. (David)

In other instances, they realized the shared struggle in and of itself could create an opportunity to care and be cared for among their peers. It also provided an opportunity to develop a sense of pride and confidence in themselves and in their community:

> I learned I'm not the only people that has problems and stuff and I can share about it, and there's people there that care about you and they will always have your back. (Irene)
>
> It's not only going to help me but everybody and it's going to help me be even more confident, be more proud and say hey, this is where I am from…I didn't choose the best place in the world, but it don't make me a bad person. (Valerie)

One of the struggles that all the youths shared was that they were pushed out of school. But beyond that, this experience was very much related to structural stressors that also adversely affected their mental health. This, coupled with their stigmatization in school, could potentially create a cycle of stress that could ultimately lead to a state of chronic *distress* after departure from school: exposure to repeated stressors in school and community impacts the student's performance in school and eventually leads to the student being pushed out; upon being pushed out, the student, already harmed by the distress experienced in school, is now exposed to new and different stressors that often lead to new patterns of distress. In this space, however, youth could activate and make sense of their shared stressors, attaching it to a broader project and history of resilience and resistance within their community.

Curating Relationships with Self

Students in the program also noted a healthy development of self that manifested in different ways. This often transpired through what Rios and Mireles-Rios (2019) refer to as *educator projected self-actualization* where those adults in a role of mentoring or teaching guide young people in developing a vision of themselves as self-actualized. Educators and mentors have the power of influencing a student's perception of self and future aspirations. By projecting an image for students of themselves in an affirmative and positive light, educators create the conditions for students to take the steps towards a positive self-actualization. Although educators don't have the power of *predicting* a better future, they do have the power of *projecting* a better future for their students. In this mentor projected self-actualization, students began to imagine positive examples of themselves in the examples of the adults, and other peers, in the program. It came, in many instances, from seeing shared struggle and then being able to imagine themselves

succeeding in similar positions, and being able to "take charge" of their lives. This, and the creation of relationships between adults and participants provided the opportunity to become motivated to take action in life.

Every workshop day included an autobiographical story from one from one of the facilitators, and the youth connected with them in seeing how they pushed through struggle. At times, it just meant that students could see that people were exercising agency in their lives. There were moments where these stories motivated students to discuss wanting to back to school. The stories from facilitators often engendered student reflection on their own lives, their own stories of self:

> It has helped me in realizing that…people have gone through a lot of struggles…I can relate to. And they've come out of that…they've gotten an education…a better life…they have charge over their own lives. (Amanda)
>
> This guy (Project GRIT facilitator) …came from absolutely nothing and became everything…rather than "if you don't do this, you can't be this. (Allen)
>
> Their stories are like our stories…like some of what they have lived, we have lived it…for some reason when you connect stories, you don't feel like strangers anymore. So it's like, OK, I'm gonna do it. I'm going to try it. (Dorinda)

Importantly, students saw the trajectory of the facilitators, many high school pushouts themselves, and connected their stories self-actualization, to the people around them. In seeing that "their stories are like our stories," students sensed a relational connection to the facilitators and the rest of the group. In blurring the lines between the different individuals in the group, the stories of self that people constructed often contributed to a broader, collective story of community.

Other times, they became motivated and hopeful for the future. Although many were interested in joining and participating in the program, students noted that remaining in the program served to keep them motivated.

> I've learned…to stay motivated, to do good and when you are falling down…I've learned from the stories that you guys told us that you know…it's okay to fall…I should keep living my dreams because I could accomplish the um same thing as you have…you guys are strangers to us, but you guys care about us, you don't want us to end up the way other people do…you guys bring a good vibe…that welcoming feeling…the things you guys went through…how you guys accomplished all that, how you guys through all that struggles makes me want to do the same (Crystal)
>
> You see them…their friendly faces talk about their stories and you're like…you just cannot believe it…that actually happened to them…I really appreciate hearing all that because it makes me motivated…similar to what they're going through and I understand. And…it really gets to me, you know. I was pushed out of school and never had these types of relationships. (Monique)

Students also talked often about the importance of trust and confidence in the context of relationship-building, whether that was for other people or themselves. In one instance, a youngster reflected on how they came to understand boundaries and the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries with people:

> I've learned…what kind of people to trust…where I should like put my walls down…and what places I should put them up. (Karen)

This was particularly important because she was able to recognize that there is nuance in trust: it may be equally harmful to trust every person just as it is to distrust every person. She

exercised agency through her "walls," deciding with whom she could share intimate details and relationships and for whom she shouldn't.

Many of the comments also focused on self-confidence, and one student specifically noted how closely the notions of trust and confidence were closely linked. Because she felt she could trust project facilitators, she came to believe that she was capable, and able to accomplish what she wished for in life. In her case, she came to realize things that were already true about herself:

> I overcome things that I couldn't do in the past. And now, it's like I could finally realize…I am a successful woman, I am powerful…I'm just going to keep it real to the fullest, because you can say that you can, you can't do this but if anybody else is telling you, "no, you can do it." Like, don't put yourself down like that…I came, it's because I feel like I can trust these people. (Quinn)

From the onset of the program, self-confidence was an important piece of what students wanted to get out of it, ranging from wanting to have more self-confidence in their ability to achieve their goals and to work through different obstacles in their lives. In the quote from the Quinn, we see that the increase in their self-confidence was heavily influenced by the trust the group developed among themselves.

Usually, other goals, such as improved communication skills and being able to imagine their futures, were intertwined with their desire to increase their self-confidence, their desire for increased "self-direction" and ability to embrace difficult challenges:

> I'm learning…how to communicate with people, have a better figure of life, how to be more responsible, how to have self-direction, and to work with others, and not to be scared to take opportunities that are given. (Arnoldo)

At other times, students spoke about the importance of self-confidence when dealing with new conflicts that would arise in their lives as well as the importance of learning how to work through their different traumas. In responding to whether they felt they could respond to conflict and personal issues better, one student responded:

> Not too long ago I used to deal with my problems…um, drinking, smoking…but now it's like the other day I just went for a run. (Jasmin)

For this student, the increase in their self-confidence came through what they imagined new and constructive ways to cope with external stressors, particularly family stressors that used to make them think they could only deal with it through drugs and alcohol. For another student, this was about the ability to work through stressors experienced in different peer-groups:

> Even if you're gang-related or you messed up a lot, even though your parents couldn't be there no matter what…we have to move on. We have to make them proud and become what we want to become in life. (Monique)

Overall, students related stories that helped them to re-imagine their individual lives: how they could live their life in a better way and do so successfully. This did not come through a recognition that they had not experienced trauma or would not experience trauma in the future. It came through recognition, reflection, and action to create and share their own stories.

Discussion

The idea of promotion rather than intervention is important in social justice framing. Instead of thinking that we are intervening in a problem we should think about how to promote the

young people's innate resiliency as well as the assets that they bring to the table. An example of shifting youth discourse to emphasize asset-based perspective is the recent At-Promise bill in California. In October 2019, California legislators changed the educational code to describe "at-risk youth" as "at-promise" youth (Rios & Mireles-Rios, 2019). The law represented an institutional commitment to thinking about youth and what they can become rather than as problems society needed to fix. However, in thinking about youth differently, Project GRIT also called into question how we could think differently about programming and enhancing students' dignity by helping them develop their communication skills and healthy relationships. Another set of youth programs call themselves prevention programs, therefore focusing on the things that community members do not want to become. Even intervention programming borrows its language from medicinal practices meant to improve the situation of people with "disorders." If we are to move away from pathologizing youth of color, it is also important that all program development move away from deficit-oriented labels. Indeed, instead of serving as a prevention program, Project GRIT was a promotion program.

In many grassroots organizing communities, there is a focus on storytelling, particularly the story of self and how that impacts the work one does (Ganz, 2009). In many Black, Indigenous, and communities of color, community members and scholars have advocated counter-stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), stories that people use "to challenge, displace, or mock" harmful narratives in society, like Latinx criminality (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: p. 43). In Project GRIT, facilitators and students developed counter-stories of self, that is, stories about their life trajectories that challenged and displaced harmful narratives about youth and people of color. By doing so, they asserted their dignity, taking it back from a system that had stigmatized them and marginalized their community.

Throughout the workshops and the interviews, a common commitment had gelled among all participants to sharing their stories. When referencing what they learned from the workshop, students regularly couched their responses in relating to existing stories, that is, to see how their personal narratives already existed in their community, and to see how their lives were reflected in those stories. They consistently reflected on the impact of other people's stories, on how they saw themselves in the stories of the workshop facilitators. They also reflected on their stories, the stories of the others, and their community's story.

The sharing of stories of one's experiences has the power to elicit feelings of fear, hope, despair, and faith. These feelings humanize narratives and fuel empathy, creating what Ganz (2009) describes as the necessary energy to inspire change. Ganz (2009) stresses the importance of sharing stories, especially for young people whom he describes as having the perfect ability to simultaneously recognize the world's injustices and the world's potential. The sharing of stories creates opportunities for youth to own their truths, trials, triumphs, and life lessons. By sharing these with one another, they realize we each "walk around with a text from which to teach, the text of our own lives" (Ganz, 2009, pp. 16-21). When youth see themselves in each other's stories, they are moved to generate hope in lieu of fear, love in place of anger, and agency instead of frustration. It is especially important to consider these forces when designing promotion programs for youth, which arguably, can harness a collective energy that can create positive feelings of belonging, purpose, and accountability. Such collective energy can fuel a sense of leadership within themselves, with each other, and within their communities. We found that storytelling was the first step in enhancing young people's dignity and in leading them down a path of civic engagement.

Students showed empathy for each other, worked on managing and communicating their emotions through written and oral storytelling and sharing, and were able to build healthy

relationships with each other (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015; Heckman & Rubinstein 2001; Kraft, 2019). As Monique mentioned above, she was pushed out of school and never had the opportunity to build these types of relationships in school. Given that teachers can effect students social and emotional abilities (Kraft, 2019), creating safe school and classroom spaces for students to share their stories, and have these opportunities to build relationships with their peers as a way to enhance dignity, must happen in schools before students are *pushed out*.

Many of the students in the program spoke about how they could "relate" to the facilitators in the program. Furthermore, students expressed a certain kinship with facilitators, noting that they felt like "family" and that the shared space felt communal. Many of the students felt especially drawn to one of the facilitators, Ana Medrano. Ana, whose voice we heard at the beginning of the article, grew up on the very block that the program was conducted. She told students her story about domestic violence and educational disparities. For instance, she discussed how her school was so poorly funded that she was asked to buy her own textbook for an honors course. She did not have the money to purchase the book so she stole the book from a bookstore. Ana told this story to demonstrate to students how their personal choices were often tied to societal issues such as lack of educational resources.

Some research suggests that all children benefit from having educators of color because they provide a diverse array of perspectives and motivation for students (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Some researchers suggest a "role model" effect among Black students, where having a Black teacher significantly increases students' chances of finishing high school and attending college. Several programs across the country focus on pipelining educators of color into schools. For example, Call Me MISTER, an initiative in almost three dozen universities across the country, provides full tuition and board to men of color who are interested in returning to their home districts to teach in the city of Chicago. Rather than aiming to create role models, they aim to create "soul models" that return to communities in which they have spent a significant part of their lives. Similarly, in Nebraska, the Indigenous ROOTS Teacher Education Program prepares American Indian paraprofessionals for teaching credentials in reservation schools. At the California State University (CSU) system, there are already several programs for graduate-level teaching that encourage students to pursue graduate degrees and then return to the CSU, such as the Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Program. Expansion of these Grow Your Own (GYO) programs has been shown to diversify the teaching pool, and it is recommended that these types of programs be expanded (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2018).

What would it mean for all educators--staff, teachers, and administrators--to develop a story of self? We imagine that it would be useful for all teachers to be able to present a story of self to students. This also pushes teachers from dominant communities to reflect on their own educational experience, including how they got to where they are professionally. In healing-informed spaces (Ginwright, 2016)—those spaces designed by educators to support students who have experienced adversity-- this also produces the opportunity for young people and adults alike to care for each other in reciprocal ways, indicative of an elevated relationship between facilitators and students that fundamentally posits them in *relation* to one another. In this manner, students who are going through a difficult time can see themselves in the educators they encounter. Ana Medrano consistently shares her story with the students she encounters, allowing her to share with students the importance of taking care of their mental and physical health, the importance of academics, and of taking care of their families and communities.

Limitations

Project GRIT may not have captured every reason students left school. It is important to note that we are reporting the stories from the perspective of participating students. Future research which takes on the issues addressed can incorporate the perspectives and stories of parents, teachers, counselors and other school personnel, thus contributing to our understanding of the various social contexts and interactions that contribute to a young person's premature departure from the education system.

Conclusion

By centering the testimonial approach to a promotion program that promotes social and emotional learning, young people turn their stories into tools for personal and social transformation. Project GRIT demonstrates how engaging in indigenous and counter-storytelling methods allows young people to reclaim a sense of dignity from an oppressive schooling system. Such pedagogical methods can serve to pull students back into their education, providing empowering social and emotional learning experiences.

Sharing personal experiences in school settings is an approach that is typically left to counselors and therapists. However, personal experience and storytelling must be seen as methods of teaching, learning and community building, and not just as psychological intervention. Resilient communities like indigenous populations and other populations of color have always centered knowledge production around storytelling. It is time for our education system to value storytelling as knowledge production, healing strategies, and community and social justice approaches. The work of social justice begins with a story. The work of transformative education must begin with the stories of young people in dignified conversation with the stories of others, including their teachers.

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE CASE OF EAVESTON SCHOOL DISTRICT: CORE VALUES FROM DEFICIT-BASED TO ASSET-BASED

Don't tell me what you value, tell me what you do and I will tell you what you value.
--Attributed to Malcolm X

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ABSTRACT

A growing body of research has linked educational leadership and student achievement; however, the oppression of students of diverse race, ethnicity, and social class has perpetuated inequities and educational gaps for decades across the United States. Some educational leaders who care deeply about equity and social justice are examining their core values, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as their organization's policies and practices to identify and implement knowledge and skills that disrupt the inequities producing educational and opportunity gaps. This article reports findings that are part of a larger qualitative descriptive case study that investigated the implementation and experiences of Eaveston School District's intentional journey to become a culturally proficient school district. For this article, the authors included findings related to (1) how the implementation of the *Cultural Proficiency Framework* influenced change, and (2) the challenges educational leaders face while implementing the work of Cultural Proficiency. The findings and conclusions of the study suggest that educators can lead organizational change and increase equity, access, and inclusion for all students by using the *Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency* to cause shifts from deficit-based to asset-based mindsets about students.

Keywords: equity, cultural proficiency, organizational change, core values, school improvement

Introduction

Parker's quote, "The greatest educational challenge of our time is upon us," as cited in the forward of *Culturally Proficient Education* (Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010, p. viii), embodies one of the most pernicious and intractable educational research topics in the United States – inequity and opportunity in educational practice and policy. While many believe that one goal of education is to prepare all students for success in the world, numerous researchers have shown the persistence of inequities within school systems and structures, with emphasis on the depressed educational outcomes among students from lower-social-class and racialized backgrounds (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Freire, 1970; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008).

Some leaders, like those from Eaveston School District, have engaged in a critical examination of their core values and their impact on educational practice. Included here are those *deficit-based core values* associated with negative beliefs and behaviors that focus on what is not working or what is wrong with the students, and *asset-based core values* that inform positive beliefs and behaviors and are focused on how teachers and leaders serve the needs of all students. In Eaveston, school leaders are applying the equity framework of Cultural Proficiency to address inequities and education gaps among student groups. Research related to evidence-based practice is essential for empowering leaders to initiate and sustain actions to change policies and practices that better support school effectiveness and fulfill the moral imperative of education in society (Fullan, 2003; Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2019). One approach to investigating and understanding complex social and educational contexts is through case study methodology.

This article reports findings and conclusions from part of a descriptive, qualitative case study that investigated one district's journey of becoming a culturally-proficient school district (Welborn, 2019). The methodology focused on using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency as a change initiative. It is important to note the purpose of the study was not to evaluate the Cultural Proficiency Framework, which was co-developed for education by one of this article's authors, but rather, to investigate the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States. In this article, the authors discuss behaviors and practices associated with deficit-based and asset-based core values related to (1) the ways in which implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework influenced change; and (2) challenges educational leaders faced while implementing the work of Cultural Proficiency. This research calls educational leaders to more closely examine and consider empirical research to inform their efforts in seeking knowledge and skills in designing equitable policies and practices within their districts, schools, and classrooms. Often, educational leaders depend on social justice-conscious inquiry methods to examine inequitable outcomes and failure. Attention to the research outcomes of this study may inform transformative change within organizations. With cultural, social, political, and economic contexts in mind, the urgency around leadership using an equity framework such as Cultural Proficiency to address inequities in education is needed more than ever, and leaders are called to rely on emancipatory methodologies, those that advance equity and transform marginalized communities, for social justice in education.

A Deeper Look: Eaveston School District

Eaveston School District, pseudonymous for a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States, was established as "A Place to Live, Learn, and Grow." With almost 6,000 students, Eaveston School District has one high school, two middle schools, one traditional school (PreK-8), five elementary schools, as well as preschool and alternative education settings serving students in grades 6-12. Eaveston School District stands among many businesses, factories, casinos, and an international airport in a metropolitan county of more than one million people. The district receives approximately 90% of funds from local sources, and its student population represents 78 different countries, speaks 48 languages, and demographically is 46% White, 34% African American/Black, 11% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, and 4% Asian. The intersectionality of cultural differences among Eaveston's students is coupled by nearly half of Eaveston School District's students who are living at or below the United States defined poverty line. District officials are proud of its rating as the most diverse school district in the state.

The Eaveston School District operates with a focus on its mission and core values. The mission, "That all will learn," relates to the district's asset-based core values, which guide

development and implementation of many practices and policies. Faced with challenges stemming from major geographical and economic changes in the larger community over the last two decades, as well as the diversity of the student body in terms of culture, race, and social class, the district has defined diversity as a positive contribution to the values and assets of the school district. Some district and school-site leaders identify themselves as transformative leaders using the Framework of Cultural Proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2019). Consequently, they believe their leadership actions have influenced the improvement in the district's accreditation status and student achievement indicators on state performance ratings and demographic group achievement. In past years, Eaveston School District has been recognized as one of the best school districts in the state, according to state rankings.

Eaveston's WHY for Cultural Proficiency

A key element of case study methodology is shaping "why" and "how" questions. The researcher collected and examined evidence from both questions: *Why is the work of Cultural Proficiency important, and how is the work being implemented?* Responses to the "why" question were found in documents and other artifacts as well as from interviews. As written in Eaveston's mission, student success for all learners is essential. The district's expressed core values of *Diversity, Knowledge, Commitment, Care, Safety, Learning, Interdependence, Contribution, Strength, Freedom,* and *Success*, guide the design, development, implementation, and revision of policies, practices, events, and programs in efforts to achieve the mission. So why did leaders in Eaveston commit to using the Framework for Cultural Proficiency? The rationale for selecting this framework included the need to:

(1) systemically address opportunity and educational gaps among students in regards to demographics such as race, ethnicity, and social class;

(2) manage the dynamics of difference from the high level of cultural, racial/ethnic, and social class diversity;

(3) provide stakeholders in the district with tools to examine current implementation and outcomes of practices and policies and to make changes to those adversely affecting student success;

(4) develop a common language around increasing school improvement efforts through opportunity, access, and equity, while building capacity among all district stakeholders to initiate and sustain significant changes.

It is important to note both authors, including the researcher, did not introduce the school district to the Cultural Proficiency Framework. In 2016, the district embarked on a journey to use the Framework, including two days of professional development, led by Corwin consultants, and the formation of the District Cultural Proficiency Committee. In 2017, at the superintendent's request, the researcher began working with a central office administrator and building administrator to plan and implement professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The period of data collection for this study was limited from August 2018 to May 2019, but Eaveston School District continues to implement the Cultural Proficiency Framework with plans to continue the work with administrators, support staff, and new teachers for the 2020-2021 school year. No incentives were provided to the school district or its employees aside from the researcher's gratis service to the school district.

Literature Review

Research on educational leadership, school reform, and student achievement is substantive. In fact, since Coleman's *Equality of Educational Opportunity* was published, as well as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), many scholars and practitioners have focused on educational reform (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Sarason, 1990). National, state, and local efforts to reduce educational gaps through initiatives, (i.e., Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind, 2002, Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015), have led to improvements. However, the commitment to equal opportunity of a quality education has failed to produce the intended outcomes for some groups of students. Many schools in the United States continue with systems, policies, and practices that largely reflect the values and behaviors of the dominant, most powerful groups in society. These practices and behaviors, guided by deficit-based core values, perpetuate inequities and educational achievement deficits for students of color and from lower-social class communities (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Friere, 1970; Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2006; Kendi, 2019; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Sarason, 1990).

Recently, literature focusing on culturally proficient leadership encourages educators to advocate for increasing educational access and opportunity for those students who have been historically underserved by school systems. Culturally proficient leadership focuses on using an inside-out process to examine individuals' values and behaviors, as well as the organization's policies and practices (Lindsey et al., 2019). Thus, school leaders are called to implement and sustain professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework for serving all students. The following sections address the literature focusing on: (1) the conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency, (2) the importance of school leadership in educational reform, and (3) the role of culturally proficient leadership for organizational change.

Cultural proficiency. Cultural Proficiency reflects a mindset based on social justice and equity, and the literature supported the development of tools for individuals and organizations to navigate cross-cultural interactions. The mindset is based upon the belief that all cultures are important and have assets that drive positive contributions to the school, community, and/or society. Educators whose values and behaviors align with the mindset of Cultural Proficiency are more likely to view cultural differences as assets on which to build educational programs, not as a problem to be solved (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

> Cultural proficiency is a mindset for how we interact with all people, irrespective of their cultural membership. Cultural proficiency is a worldview that carries explicit values, language, and standards for effective personal interaction and professional practices. Cultural proficiency is a 24/7 approach to our personal and professional lives. Most important, cultural proficiency is not a set of independent activities or strategies that you learn to use with your students, colleagues, or community members. (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 21)

Often, educators and school organizations that use the Framework of Cultural Proficiency intentionally utilize the interrelated set of four tools to increase access to equal educational opportunity and assist in practices related to developing and implementing school board policies, allocating resources, using assessment data, delivering curriculum and instruction, interacting with parents and community members, and planning and delivering professional development. Some authors suggested the use of the four tools may support changes to practices and policies leading to equal opportunity and equitable outcomes. Lindsey et al. (2009) suggested acknowledging deficit-based core values and how they present barriers to culturally proficient practice. Those

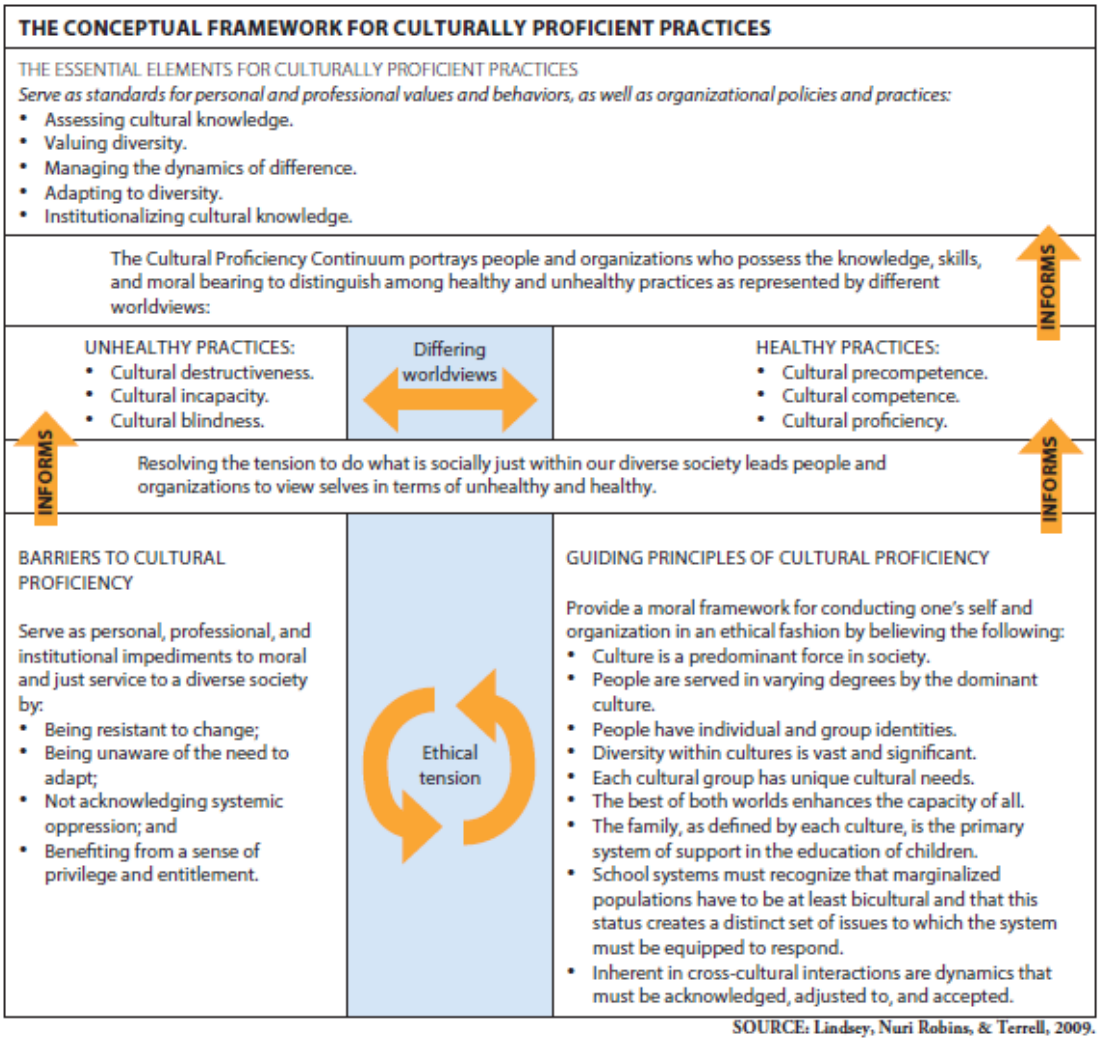
practices increase understanding of how to overcome oppressive systems and practices, as well as resistance to change in schools that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for students.

Conceptual framework. In research, a conceptual framework is a tool that aids in explaining the main concepts studied, such as key factors, constructs, and variables (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This qualitative study integrated constructs such as educational leadership, school reform, and student achievement with the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The equity framework of Cultural Proficiency (Figure 1) is an inside-out approach educational leaders can utilize to unpack inequities and educational gaps in student achievement and school improvement as well as to address the responses to diversity that are encountered in educational organizations (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs, 1989; Lindsey et al., 2019).

The Cultural Proficiency Framework has four unique Tools: (1) the Barriers, (2) the Guiding Principles, (3) the Continuum, and (4) the Essential Elements. Figure 1 displays how the tools work interdependently. Educational leaders may increase equitable outcomes by examining the Barriers that are guided by deficit-based core values, as indicated on the lower left side of the framework. The Barriers include being resistant to change, being unaware of the need to adapt, not acknowledging systemic oppression, and benefiting from underserved privileges and entitlements based on class, race, or gender. The Barriers inform unhealthy practices, policies, and behaviors that deny or reduce access to quality education for students. The Guiding Principles, as shown on the lower right side of the framework, include nine "values related to issues that emerge in diverse environments and when engaging with people who are not members of the dominant culture" (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 61). The Guiding Principles are directed by asset-based core values and inform healthy practices, policies, and behaviors that increase access to quality education for students and create conditions in which all students can thrive. The Barriers and Guiding Principles inform the placement of unhealthy and healthy practices, policies, and behaviors on the Continuum that are discovered through self-examination and case study.

The third tool, the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency, includes six points for recognizing and aligning practices, policies, and behaviors of a school organization. As individuals within the organization rely on their personal and organizational core values, they transform their thinking and practices to those that promote healthy practices, policies, and behaviors and effective cross-cultural interactions (as shown from left to right in Figure 1) (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009). The fourth tool, the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, is indicated at the top of the framework and provides five actions for increasing equity, access, and inclusion: (1) assessing culture, (2) valuing diversity, (3) managing the dynamics of difference, (4) adapting to diversity, and (5) institutionalizing cultural knowledge. The Essential Elements guide educational leaders to be intentional in their journey of creating goals and action toward increasing equity and access for all students. These standards of action become normal practice in making decisions about policy and practices that align with the core values the individuals in the organization profess, thus leading to increased equity in the organization.

Figure 1. Cultural Proficiency Framework.



The key strategies for effective utilization of the framework in cross-cultural situations are reflection and dialogue (Lindsey, Terrell, Robins, & Lindsey, 2010). For decades, scholars have written about the importance of self-awareness in the role of educational change agents. As educational leaders implement and sustain systemic, transformative organizational change in efforts to improve outcomes and increase equity, they may begin with intentional reflection and personal change before focusing efforts on the system (Dilts, 1990; Fullan, 1997; Gardner, 2004; Lindsey, et al., 2019).

The importance of school leadership in educational reform. Research regarding the relationship between school leadership and student achievement is substantive. Many educators rely on the literature to guide their responsibilities and practices regarding effective schools and closing educational gaps (Byrk & Schneider, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005). Often, cultural differences between educators and students influence student achievement outcomes in educational settings because differences in core values, deficit-based and asset-based, lead individuals to develop behaviors and implement practices.

In committing to the moral imperative of educational leadership, it is important to note that despite national, state, and local reform efforts, educational gaps in academic outcomes between African American, Native American, and Latino students, and certain White and Asian American peers, still persist (Hammond, 2015; Howard, 2010; Kendi, 2019; Kozol, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008). Fullan (2003) discussed the meaning of the moral imperative for educational leaders, with an emphasis on introducing new elements into the setting that are intended to influence behavior for the better. When introduced into the setting as assets, stakeholders with varying interests, economic situations, cultural origins, religions, ethnicities, and racialized group memberships are essential to educational reform. Since race and social class are complex issues for school leaders, no one approach will close educational and access gaps (Barton & Coley, 2009; Murphy, 2009).

However, Murphy (2009) suggested two ways educators can support or empower students on the lower end of opportunity and educational gaps. Leaders may use programs that target disadvantaged students and use strategies that can provide gains to all, but greater gains for those disadvantaged students. School leaders focused on closing educational gaps through educational reform efforts may engage in reflective practices and collaborative work to create organizational change and influence learning outcomes. Often, principals are those expected to launch initiatives and develop programs that are evidenced-based to raise student achievement and disproportionately advantage those performing on the lower end of educational gaps (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Fullan (2003) suggested, "At the school level – the moral imperative of the principal involves leading deep cultural change that mobilizes the passions and commitments of teachers, parents, and others to improve the learning of all students, including closing the achievement gap" (p. 41).

In educational reform efforts, it is necessary for the school leader to acknowledge the "what" of change and the "how" of change. The importance of school leadership in educational reform is the ability to build capacity with a focus on results. In order for large-scale reform to reduce educational outcome gaps, school leaders must develop a shared meaning with a focus on individual and organizational change in the complex social context (Fullan, 2016).

Culturally proficient leadership for organizational change. Terrell, Terrell, Lindsey, & Lindsey (2018) described culturally-proficient leadership as an approach grounded in the belief that leaders who are effective in cross-cultural settings have an understanding of their own assumptions, beliefs, and values regarding people and cultures different from their own. Furthermore, Fullan (2003) defined the moral imperative of school leadership as the individual's responsibility for all students. With the moral imperative, knowledge, and skills, effective educators examine their values, behaviors, and beliefs, as well as their organization's policies and practices (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Issacs, 1989).

Culturally-proficient leaders utilize the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, to acknowledge behaviors and values, as well as school policies and practices that have performance ramifications related to student demographics (Lindsey et al., 2018). Professional learning focusing on Cultural Proficiency supports leaders dedicated to changing systems that will effectively serve all students. For example, change is expected in education, and school improvement plans help guide organizations toward increased student achievement targets. Dilt's model of nested levels of learning details the importance of professional learning and collaboration necessary for organizational change to occur. The five levels of organizational change identified by Dilt (1990) included identity, belief system, capabilities, behaviors, and environment. Culturally-proficient leaders rely on perspectives and ideas of diverse stakeholders to be most effective in developing

policies and practices that produce the most equitable outcomes for students (Clark-Louque, Lindsey, Quezada, & Jew, 2020; Fullan, 2016; Lindsey et al., 2019). Overall, professional learning and collaboration are necessary components for educational change, hence the focus on reflection, dialogue, and action toward transforming one's mindset from deficit-based to asset-based in culturally-proficient leadership. Literature suggests it is essential educational leaders understand that organizational change begins with self (Dewey, 1938; Dilt, 1990; Gardener, 2004).

Research Methodology and Design

This research study was conducted using a descriptive, qualitative case study methodology to "reveal the multifaceted nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems, or people" regarding Eaveston School District's journey to become a culturally-proficient district (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). With the intent to investigate a district's why and how of the application of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, data from interviews, observations, and documents were collected and analyzed to determine findings and conclusions related to the research questions and conceptual framework of this study. The findings present rich descriptions and analyses of a contemporary set of events in a single, bounded system, Eaveston School District (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2018). Although case study does not allow for replication of a situation, process, or system, it is heuristic in the since that the case study "illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" and can be used to generalize experiences (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2018). Eaveston School District was selected for this case study because of (1) the school district's implementation of professional learning using the Cultural Proficiency Framework at the district and building levels; (2) the school district's high level of cultural, racial/ethnic, and social class diversity; (3) its increase in student achievement; and (4) its proximity to a metropolitan city with racial and social class implications on governmental, political, and educational contexts.

Purpose and Research Questions

The case study focused on the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States. This article provides findings and conclusions related to two research questions that were used to guide part of a larger case study:

1. In what ways do the school district's implementation plans and experiences influence changes associated with culturally-proficient practice to serve all students?
2. What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?

Population and Sample

The population for this case study research consisted of *leaders* in Eaveston School District who were involved in the implementation or experiences of the Cultural Proficiency work and/or participated in quarterly, full-day professional development related to Cultural Proficiency during the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years. The term leaders in this study included teachers, building and district administrators, staff, parents, and community members involved in the work of Cultural Proficiency. The population included three groups. Figure 2 provides details related to each population group. The first population group included 55 leaders involved in the work at the district level. The second population included 110 teachers, administrators, and staff from two middle schools in Eaveston School District. These teachers participated in whole staff Cultural Proficiency professional development during the 2017-2018 school year. The third population was from one middle school and included a group of 70 teachers, staff, and administrators led by

members of a building-level Cultural Proficiency Committee. This group formally continued their professional development using the Cultural Proficiency Framework during bi-monthly meetings.

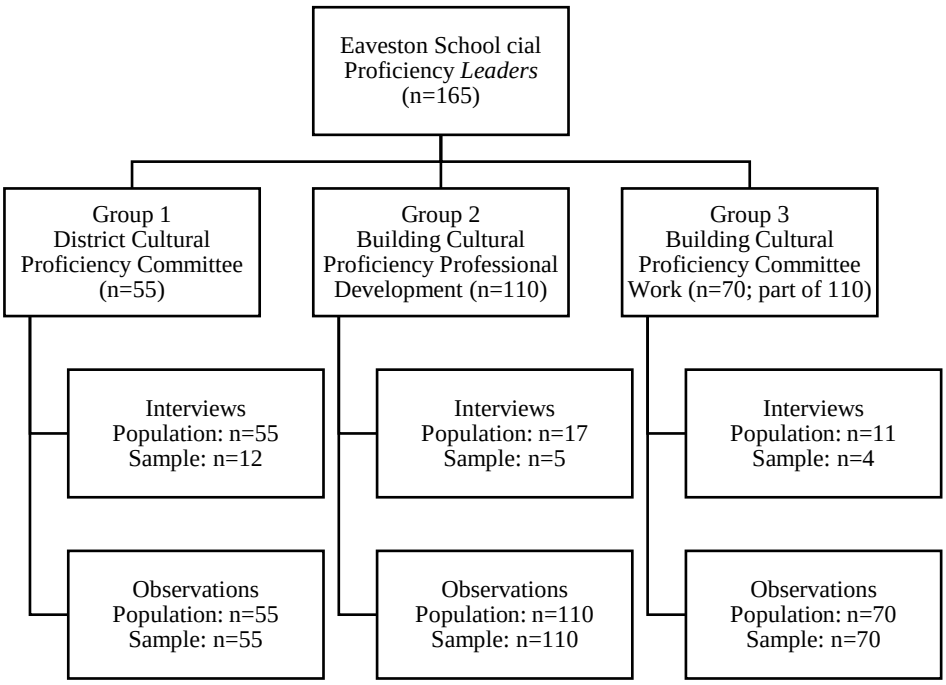


Figure 2. Population and Sample of Eaveston School District Case Study.

Sampling involves decisions for the researcher related to which people to interview and/or observe, which documents to mine for data, as well as settings, events, and social processes (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2020). Because of the conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency and the research questions, the researcher set boundaries within the settings, events, documents, and people involved in the work of Cultural Proficiency. The sample in this case study included 14 volunteers from the three population groups. Through purposeful sampling, the researcher selected the sample based on respondents' availability and desire to participate. Merriam (2009) suggested purposeful sampling to maximize findings in a research study. The researcher sampled from individuals who experienced the Cultural Proficiency work as part of one or more of the three groups included in Figure 2 (Creswell, 2013). Fourteen individuals responded to an invitation to participate, and the researcher conducted interviews with the sample group of 14 volunteers. Table 1 displays the interview participants' characteristics, population and group membership, and school level.

Table 1
Interview Participants' Characteristics

Role	Gender	Population Membership	Groups*	School Level
(1) Principal	Female	Building CPC	2,3	Middle
(2) Principal	Male	District CPC	1	Elementary
(3) Principal	Female	District CPC	1	Elementary

(4) Principal	Male	District CPC	1	Elementary/Middle
(5) Assistant Principal	Female	District /	1,2,3	Middle
(6) Teacher	Female	Building	1,2,3	Middle
(7) Sp. Language Pathologist	Female	District /	1	High
(8) Sp. Education Teacher	Female	Building	2,3	Middle
(9) Teacher	Female	District	1	Elementary
(10) Parent	Male	Building CPC	1	All
(11) Teacher	Female	District CPC	1	Middle
(12) Assistant Superintendent	Female	Building CPC	1	All
(13) Director	Female	District CPC	1	All
(14) Principal	Male	District CPC	1	Middle

Note. Group 1 District Cultural Proficiency Committee (CPC) Work; Group 2 Building Cultural Proficiency Professional Development; and Group 3 Building Cultural Proficiency Committee (CPC) Work.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed and utilized three instruments to collect data in this case study to better understand the implementation process: (1) an interview protocol; (2) an observation guide; and (3) a document retrieval form. In order to answer the research questions, an interview protocol was developed with ten questions to ask participants during the interview sessions (Creswell, 2014). The interview questions were designed using a semi-structured approach and addressed school leadership, educational reform, and culturally-proficient practice and policy. The data were used to produce perspectives about facts and feelings related to the work of Cultural Proficiency (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The researcher developed an observation guide to use during Cultural Proficiency events such as planning meetings and work sessions at the district and building levels. The observation guide included a T-chart to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes. Since participant observation can be subjective, the researcher observed in a way to address the research questions related to the application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency and challenges to produce trustworthy results. In addition, the observation guide included ways to collect data regarding the physical settings, participants, activities and interactions, and the researcher's own behavior (Merriam, 2009).

Similar to the observation guide, the researcher developed a document retrieval form to collect and analyze data mined from various district documents. The document retrieval form was designed as a T-chart to separate descriptive notes from reflective notes (Merriam, 2009). This instrument's purpose was to mine data from various documents in categories of school improvement (planning), description, and communication. To refrain from subjectivity, the researcher collected data in a systematic way to address the research questions, specifically focusing on the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency.

Data Collection and Analyses

The researcher collected data throughout this case study to answer the research questions and provide an example of one school district's journey to become a culturally-proficient organization by developing and implementing culturally-proficient policies and practices. Merriam (2001) and Yin (2018) provided details for the data collection phase in case study methodology. Typically, this process involves interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents. During the 2018-2019 school year, the researcher completed three phases of data collection. The phases do not represent chronological order, rather they focus on the source of collection. Phase I

yielded data from 14 interviews to build thick, rich descriptions of school leaders' perceptions and experiences of implementing the equity and access work. In Phase II, the researcher collected field notes on the observation protocol during building and district level Cultural Proficiency Committee meetings and professional development events. Descriptive notes were recorded such as descriptions of the activities and participants in the setting. The researcher utilized the T-chart to record behaviors and reflective notes to summarize the meetings and professional development events (Creswell, 2014).

Phase III included a collection of data from document retrieval forms using descriptive and reflective notes. Thomas (2011) explained the importance of finding the right documents in a case study. The researcher focused on documents related to the Cultural Proficiency work and reflected the espoused values and beliefs of the district, as well as the values-in-action. Therefore, data were mined from several available district documents such as vision/mission statements, policies, handbooks, brochures, a book chapter, school improvement plans, climate survey reports, electronic documents available on the district's website, newsletters, and social media posts.

In the final step of conducting this case study, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the collected data to answer the research questions and draw conclusions. The findings and conclusions in this article focus on the school district's use of core values in identifying Barriers, relying on the Guiding Principles, and changing practices and policies identified on the Continuum using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. The researcher conducted the analysis by preparing and organizing the data, and then reducing it into themes after using an *in vivo* coding process related to the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2014). The themes gathered from the three data collection instruments were triangulated to develop conclusions and implications of the study. Throughout the study and reporting of the school district's journey of Cultural Proficiency, confidentiality, reliability, and validity of the data collection and analysis processes were conducted with the highest integrity. The researcher used prolonged engagement in the field to build trust with the participants, learn the culture, and check for misinformation; as well as triangulation (Figure 3) to provide corroborating evidence from different data sources (Creswell, 2013). The school district and all employees' anonymity were guaranteed and protected to promote transparent responses in interviews and behaviors within observed professional development events.

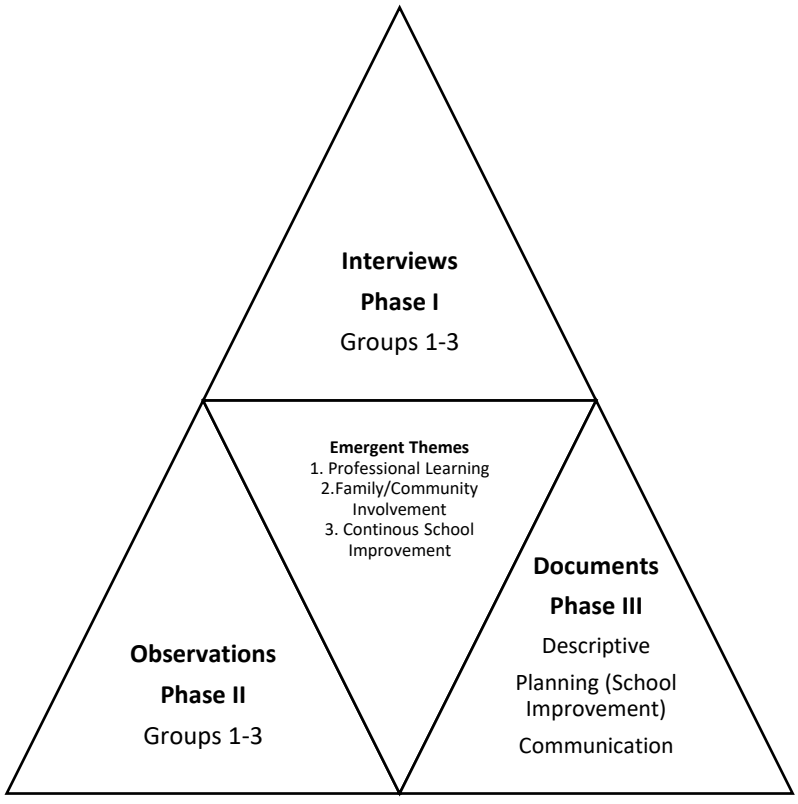
Limitations. As with any research study, this case study has limitations that affect the findings, conclusions, and implications for practice. The limitations include the sample size, the difficulty in replicating the study across all settings, and the researcher's role. The sample size of this study was small in relation to the number of employees working for the district. Therefore, generalizations made through the findings and conclusions are difficult to transfer across all buildings within the district and beyond.

In addition, the researcher played a role in the meetings and professional learning events by providing content and learning strategies related to the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Yin (2018) posited, researchers using case study methodology must understand the conditions of the case prior to the study. More importantly, the researcher must acknowledge that this knowledge is what can introduce bias and sway the researcher toward supportive or favorable evidence. The researcher avoided this bias by looking at all relevant data and being open to supportive and contrary evidence. Interviews and observations produced data that were both supportive of and contrary to the preconceptions of the researcher. Contrary evidence were supported through discussions about the Barriers and challenges of implementing and sustaining the work of Cultural Proficiency. Leedy & Ormrod (2013) suggested, "Good researchers demonstrate their integrity by

admitting, without reservation, that bias is omnipresent and may well have influence on their findings" (p. 219). The researcher was aware that the dual role of professional developer and researcher would influence the research design, thus limiting the findings and conclusions. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to acknowledge interfering biases, speculate effects, and interpret results in order to reduce bias (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Findings Related to the Tools of Cultural Proficiency

The descriptive single case study data were collected from participants through interviews, observations, and relevant documents and analyzed using the lens of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. Three themes emerged from the triangulation of data that are related to the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency in Eaveston School District: (1) professional learning through various professional learning communities; (2) diverse family and community involvement; and (3) continuous school improvement toward student achievement. Figure 3 provides details about the triangulation of data. The themes are presented in detail throughout the analysis. The report begins with the findings in relation to the conceptual framework (Figure 1) and concludes by answering two research questions, part of the overall study, as displayed in Table 5. The findings are organized with rich descriptive details by the Tools of Cultural Proficiency used by Eaveston School District leaders in implementing this work. Focus is given to how core values, both deficit-based and asset-based, can lead action toward organizational change. See Figure 3 below that illustrates the case study findings.



Barriers of Cultural Proficiency: Identifying Behaviors and Practices Informed by Deficit-Based Core Values

One tool used in the implementation of Cultural Proficiency is the Barriers. During Cultural Proficiency Committee meetings and professional development sessions, the three population groups engaged in a data collection process of using the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency. During the process, participants worked to identify themes among practices and behaviors on the left side of the Continuum, those that are informed by Barriers and function as deficit-laden core values, to set a direction to begin increasing equity and access for students in Eaveston. The emergent findings are displayed in Table 2 to explain ways Eaveston leaders identify and overcome four Barriers to Cultural Proficiency: (1) systemic barriers; (2) unawareness of the need for educators to adapt to the diversity of the community being served; (3) a sense of privilege and entitlement; and (4) resistance to change.

Table 2

Eaveston School District's Application of Cultural Proficiency's Barriers to District Core Values and Actions

Systemic barriers present in Eaveston's policies and prevalent practices to be addressed, minimized, and eliminated include: • Policies that perceived different norms, values, beliefs, behaviors as wrong (e.g., dress code that resulted in disciplinary actions and other negative sanctions against students of color); • A diverse student body in contrast to school administration, faculty, and staff who were White, middle class, and female; • Differing feelings of belonging to the school (i.e., historical implications due to parents' childhood school experiences, teacher/administrator relationships with families, past experiences of families coming to school – discipline, IEP meetings, celebrations, student awards); • Differing levels of support for family engagement (i.e., PTO, family attendance at events); and • Historical effects of stress between African American community and police in the area.
The manner in which Eaveston will overcome the identified barriers is: • Use data, communicate clearly about who is being left out or being denied access, then commit to action; • Review/revise policies using the Framework; • Review hiring practices through engagement with Cultural Proficiency Committee; • Extend and deepen Restorative Practices activities at school sites; • Extend and deepen school and family involvement/engagement; and • Use of Cultural Proficiency learning strategies to promote asset-based approaches to difference (i.e., Managing Conflict with our Core Values, Guiding Principles Discussion Starters, Listening and Hearing – Source: Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2009).
The Barrier - unawareness of the need for Eaveston educators to adapt to the community include:

- Well-intentioned adults who desire to do the work, but don't know how to initiate or sustain self-study;
- Differences in norms, experiences, behaviors, learning styles among educators and community served gives rise to culturally-based misunderstandings that too often lead to mistrust; and
- Educators' lack of knowledge and experiences related to the community's history and experiences of being oppressed.

The manner in which Eaveston will overcome internalized unawareness of the need to adapt to the community being served is:

- Work continuously toward equity and understanding, appreciating, and respecting differences in cultures – targeted resources;
- Implement Eaveston's Personalized Learning Initiative; and
- Maintain high expectations, assess needs, and focus on communication.

The Barrier - a sense of entitlement or privilege at Eaveston, include:

- Rejection of the term "privilege;"
- Historical "roles" of teacher vs. student as a power struggle; and
- Perspectives become some school members' reality in which community perspectives are often viewed as being wrong.

The manner in which Eaveston will overcome a sense of privilege and entitlement involve:

- Encourage family engagement strategies as a means for educators to gain healthy perspectives about communities served by Eaveston District.
- Implement personalized learning and competency-based curricula that utilize research-based strategies and scaffolding to support students realizing their full potential.
- Maintain high expectations, ensure discipline policies are equitable, expand use of Restorative Practices; and
- Honor individual stories of school members as well as community members.

The Barrier - resistance to change, at Eaveston include:

- Resistance against mandated Cultural Proficiency professional development;
- Resistance/avoidance by some educators and staff members due to fear, discomfort in addressing issues related to cultural differences; and
- Resistance because some believe there has been little progress, change, or sustainability in prior equity work.

The manner in which Eaveston will overcome resistance to change is:

- Focus change from individuals to our values and behaviors;
- Change the model and methods of professional development to focus on educator needs in responding to a diverse community;
- Utilize professional learning strategies of reflection, dialogue, and action to build trust, empathy, and relationships in professional development programs; and
- Provide opportunities for teachers and students to respond to contentious issues, to express feelings, and to support inclusive change processes.

Unfolding the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency as a means to embrace their historical negativity provided Eaveston's stakeholders opportunity to study, embrace, and adapt the inclusive Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency and guide the district from being school-centric to being

a community-centric district focused on the academic and social needs of Eaveston's diverse community.

The Guiding Principles: Eaveston's Core Values for Systemic Change

Eaveston school district leaders used Tool 2, the Guiding Principles, in the implementation of the Cultural Proficiency work. Participants identified themes among practices and behaviors on the right side of the Continuum, those that are informed by guiding principles and function as asset-based core values. Eaveston School District's Core Values have been summarized as:

Expressed Values - Diversity, Knowledge, Commitment, Care, Safety, Learning, Interdependence, Contribution, Strength, Freedom, Success

Underlying Values - Communication, Creativity, Curiosity, Teamwork, Growth, Hope, Quality, Innovation, Achievement, Service.

As a result of the district's Cultural Proficiency journey, Eaveston's expressed and underlying core values have been expanded through thoughtful consideration of the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency. Table 3 displays an analysis of data from interviews, observations, and document reviews regarding Eaveston leaders' adaptations of the Guiding Principles in a manner that deepens the district's expressed and underlying core values.

Table 3

Eaveston School District's Application of Cultural Proficiency's Guiding Principles to District Core Values and Actions

Culture is ever-present.
1. Eaveston is focused on building the critical mass of educators who are committed to the equity work, but recognizes that due to cultural values and behaviors, some are uncomfortable, some are critical, and some avoid the conversation all together. 2. Culture will bring in a dynamic of difference. Eaveston School District leaders are committed to continuous conversation and training, both informally and formally to promote growth and development related to cultural knowledge.
People have group identities and personal identities.
1. Eaveston is implementing personalized learning to help each child thrive and succeed in the learning environment. 2. Eaveston School District promotes conversations and deconstruction of assumptions among staff related to perceived group identities and behaviors that follow (i.e., discipline, misunderstood language or behaviors, academics).
Diversity within cultures is important.
1. As a district on the journey to Cultural Proficiency, Eaveston leaders are acutely aware of their recognized diversity in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and language. Data to support knowledge regarding the diversity within those cultures is less apparent. 2. The district is focused on students' individual stories, building relationships, increasing communication, and providing services and support related to those stories is trending.
Each group has unique cultural needs that must be respected.
1. Educators in Eaveston use professional development and professional learning communities to learn about the unique cultural needs that individual students have (i.e.,

socioeconomic status, disability). These events are subconsciously used to teach members of the dominant group about differences.
2. "Wrap-around" services and support programs are available to help meet those unique cultural needs (i.e., tiered system, food, medical, dental, clothing, etc.).
The best of both worlds enhances capacity of all.
1. Diversity is an attribute to the district, a part of the district that is not looked at as an obstacle.
2. Eaveston provides avenues for continuous growth through reflection and dialogue, where multiple perspectives are included for the purpose of serving each and every child in the district.
The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
1. Eaveston School District leaders engage families by purposefully reaching out to increase diversity, perspective, and participation among various cultures on committees and events.
2. One of the core values related to family engagement is communication. The district keeps families informed and connected through multiple modalities of communication, including those who are translated and/or interpreted.
3. Eaveston School District connects with and engages families through "community-centric" events/activities that meet the basic needs of children and their family members (i.e., food, school supplies, clothing, glasses or dental care).

Relying on the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency as an avenue to organizational change provided Eaveston's stakeholders opportunities to study and embrace the asset-based core values that have led to many policies, practices, and behaviors implemented to meet the academic and social needs of Eaveston's students.

The Continuum of Cultural Proficiency: Eaveston's Awareness of 'Telling Stories' and Changing the Conversation

Over several months, administration, faculty, and staff engaged in processes to identify systemic barriers to students' access to equitable educational outcomes and rely on the Guiding Principles using Tool 3 of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, the Continuum. Pertinent to the conclusions of this study, leaders in Eaveston ensured parents and community members were involved in professional learning opportunities at the district level. Armed with awareness and understanding the function of core values among the Barriers and Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency, group participants, identified in Figure 2, immersed themselves in understanding policies and practices they posted along the six points of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum. Figure 4 includes examples on individual sticky notes that represent each point on the Continuum.

Whereas, illustrations along the Continuum provided vivid detail to the manner in which policy and practice examples of *Destructiveness*, *Incapacity*, and *Blindness* supported deficit-based core values; policy and practice examples of *Precompetence*, *Competence*, and *Proficiency* supported asset-based core values. Eaveston leaders' study of the Cultural Proficiency Framework proceeded to the fourth tool, the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. It is at this point that members were prepared to be intentional in devising actionable pathways derived from core values that embraced students' cultures as assets on which to build their educational experiences. For each of the six points, participants were asked to contribute at least one policy or practice of Eaveston School District or individual behavior, meaning something someone has said or done. An example from each point on The Continuum is included in Figure 4.

Culturally Destructive Policies Practices Behaviors	Culturally Incapacitating Policies Practices Behaviors	Culturally Blind Policies Practices Behaviors	Culturally Precompetent Policies Practices Behaviors	Culturally Competent Policies Practices Behaviors	Culturally Proficient Policies Practices Behaviors
Example "If they can't understand or read my homework or newsletter, that is their problem."	**Example** Giving nicknames to students with unfamiliar names, mocking the pronunciation of the name, or negatively commenting on the "uniqueness of the name."	**Example** "I don't see color; all students are treated fairly in my class."	**Example** Hosting Diversity Days, International Night, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, etc.	**Example** Choosing literature for the classroom and library that represents cultural differences and providing training on using it appropriately.	**Example** Disaggregating data and changing practice on recruiting and hiring a diverse workforce, and facilitating conversations with stakeholders about current and best practice.

Figure 4. The Continuum of Cultural Proficiency: Examples of practices, policies, and/or behaviors gathered on color-specific sticky notes during the data collection process, both negative and positive.

Using the most powerful themes from the data collected by the District Cultural Proficiency Committee, the members created action plans for the next school year related to: 1) Disparity in student discipline; 2) Diversity among Eaveston's workforce, and 3) Continued learning and growth using the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Although each group produced separate themes and action plans, these findings were gathered during the district's Cultural Proficiency events using observations and document analyses of the sticky notes collected during this learning strategy, as well as other documents related to the action plan themes listed above.

The Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency: Committing to Standards of Change through Improvement and Growth

The five Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency, Tool 4 of the framework, serve to guide policy development and implementation as well as intentional practices in support of all students achieving high levels through continuous school improvement. The Essential Elements are an overlapping and mutual reinforcing means to inclusive macro-policy making, as well as guidance for the everyday behaviors of school district members. Table 4 presents illustrations of how the Essential Elements are being used to inform policymaking and practice, as well as educator values and behaviors. The examples represent organizational change to increase equity and access for all students in Eaveston based upon asset-based core values.

Table 4

Essential Elements Inform Organizations' Policies and Practices, and Individuals' Values, and Behaviors

Examples from Case	Data Source(s)	Emergent Theme(s)
Assessing Culture		
Leaders and educators review, revise, and implement instructional practices based upon cultural knowledge to ensure high expectations	Observations Document Analysis	Professional Learning Communities Continuous School

and rigorous standards through personalized learning.		Improvement
Valuing Diversity		
Leaders examine how well the school is meeting students' and the community's needs and search for of new strategies to engage families. Eaveston involves students, parents, and community members' perspectives in planning special events and celebrations.	Interviews Observations Document Analysis	Family and Community Involvement Continuous School Improvement Professional Learning Communities
Managing the Dynamics of Difference		
The human resource department and administrators in Eaveston are committed to managing the difference in student demographics and teacher demographics by recruiting, hiring, and promoting people who think and act inclusively. Teachers of color are actively involved in the prospective teacher recruitment process.	Interviews Observations Document Analysis	Continuous School Improvement Family and Community Involvement
Adapting to Diversity		
Educators in Eaveston are committed to effective communication; particularly in learning new ways to effectively communicate to families who speak a native language other than English.	Interviews Observations Document Analysis	Family and Community Involvement
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge		
Eaveston is building capacity of individuals committed to sustainable equity-based diversity training using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to identify and overcome barriers to access, achievement, and success.	Interviews Observations	Continuous School Improvement Family and Community Involvement Professional Learning Communities

Assessing culture relates to the way Eaveston School District leaders are examining their core values and culture, as well as the cultural norms of the school district. This Essential Elements requires educators understand how the culture of the organization affects those with different cultures. An example of Eaveston's action toward organizational change is evidenced from data gathered in observations and document analyses. Table 4 includes the practice of leaders and educators reviewing, revising, and implementing instructional practices based upon cultural knowledge to ensure high expectations and rigorous standards through personalized learning. During a District Cultural Proficiency meeting, two district administrators presented a new personalized learning initiative including components such as learner profiles. Similarly, in a

document analysis, the personalized learning plan was described as, "a competency-based, personalized learning environment in preschool through 12th grades that leads students to be ready for high school course content, and ultimately, success after graduation." In this plan, Eaveston is preparing its employees through professional learning and input from family and the community to customize learning to meet student needs, which includes an in-depth look at student and family culture. Eaveston is committed to embedding Cultural Proficiency in all aspects of the district, especially those related to the personalized learning plan, to maximize efforts toward continuous school improvement.

Valuing diversity is another standard that intentionally guides Eaveston in their journey to become culturally proficient. In this area of organizational change, Eaveston School District leaders are celebrating and encouraging the presence of a wide variety of people in all activities, as well as accepting that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others. Data from interviews, observations, and document analyses indicated Eaveston's leaders examine how well the school is meeting students' and the community's needs and how leaders search for new strategies to engage families and include students, parents, and community members' perspectives in planning special events and celebrations.

The standard of Managing the Dynamics of Difference is about responding to conflict. Eaveston leaders are committed to responding appropriately and effectively when issues arise based upon cultural differences. One goal that developed from the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee work with the Continuum was the need to diversify the workforce. As indicated in Table 4, data from interviews, observations, and document analyses concluded the human resource department and administrators in Eaveston are committed to managing the difference in student and teacher demographics by recruiting, hiring, and promoting people who think and act inclusively. In an interview, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources commented on the district's recent changes to who accompanies him at career fairs. In order to manage the dynamics of difference in this situation, these administrators are now adapting to diversity by joining forces and taking teachers of color, both male and female, with them to recruitment fairs and ensuring diversity is represented in interview committees. A document produced by the human resources department from a meeting with the District Cultural Proficiency Committee demonstrated commitment to teachers' of color active involvement in the prospective teacher recruiting process. Ideas on recruitment and hiring were collected from the members on the District Cultural Proficiency Committee.

Adapting to Diversity is a standard that Eaveston leaders are using to change practices that acknowledge the differences among students, families, and staff. The data collected from interviews, observations, and document analyses related to this standard concluded some educators in Eaveston are committed to effective communication; particularly in learning new ways to communicate to families who speak a native language other than English. In an interview, a principal commented, "We have Family English Night here where families can come two nights a week to take a formal English class for free." Through observations, members of the District Cultural Proficiency Committee discussed ways in which documents such as handbooks and letters are translated to provide increased access for families who do not speak English.

Eaveston leaders have used the standard of Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge to drive changes into the organization. In the district committee's work with the Continuum, leaders created a goal for building capacity of individuals committed to sustainable equity-based diversity training. Both district and building-level leaders sponsored professional learning opportunities related to equity, diversity, and Cultural Proficiency to inform district members and the school as an

organization. In an interview a teacher commented, "I am part of the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee, and I feel like we're really digging deeper and doing it in a way that we want to make plans for growth with staff and students." At the building level, observations of planning meetings demonstrate the commitment to institutionalizing cultural knowledge by discussing and incorporating knowledge of how one's own culture, students' cultures, and the school or district's culture affect those with different cultures. A member of the Building Cultural Proficiency Committee commented, "I think that we're headed in the right direction because we have a great group on our committee that is willing to kind of take the reins and do this professional development training that we need with our staff. I think it's going to be much more meaningful coming from their colleagues and not from administrators." In a planning document for the district's Professional Development Committee, one goal is written as, "Exploring means to support and provide leadership for staff development initiatives at both the district level and building level." Overall, the work of Cultural Proficiency is being implemented by using the standards of the Essential Elements to inform action toward organizational change.

Case Study Research Questions and Findings

The case study focused on the implementation and experiences of Cultural Proficiency work in a suburban, public PK-12 school district in the Midwest United States. The two research questions used to guide part of a larger case study included: (1) In what ways do the school district's implementation plans and experiences influence changes regarding culturally-proficient practice to serve all students? (2) What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency? (Welborn, 2019). Table 5 includes the emergent themes related to the implementation experiences and challenges faced by Eaveston's leaders.

Table 5
Case Study Research Questions and Findings

Research Questions	Emergent Themes
In what ways do the school district's implementation and experiences influence changes regarding culturally-proficient practice to serve all students?	(1) professional development through professional learning communities (PLC) with sub themes of high expectations, individual students, student achievement and excellence; and (2) dialogue and action with family and community involvement.
What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?	(1) barriers to Cultural Proficiency; (2) availability of time and resources; and (3) building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district.

In what ways do the school district's implementation and experiences influence changes regarding culturally-proficient practice to serve all students?

This research question was used to investigate the ways in which educational leaders have implemented and experienced the work of Cultural Proficiency to influence change and serve all students. Behavior, practice, and policy changes result from using asset-based core values informed by the Guiding Principles to counter deficit-based core values informed by the Barriers of Cultural Proficiency. Out of the analyses of data from leader interviews, meeting and professional learning event observations, and related document reviews, two themes emerged from the data to support the answer to this research question. The themes include: (1) professional development through professional learning communities with sub-themes of high expectations, individual students, student achievement, and excellence; and (2) dialogue and action planning with family and community involvement.

Eaveston's leaders involved in implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework focus on increasing equity for all students by providing opportunities for staff members to examine core values and practices through collaboration in professional learning communities. For example, there are many opportunities for staff members to collaborate with others in the district around topics such as restorative practices, trauma-informed care, social-emotional learning, personalized learning, and Cultural Proficiency. This includes sessions for new teachers and support staff. District administrators increased their involvement in events related to implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework and utilized the tools in their discussions with the board members, families, and community members (Welborn, 2019).

Eaveston School District has experienced change in the organization through reflection and dialogue in using the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency. The utilization of the Continuum of Cultural Proficiency is instrumental in beginning work to address areas of needed improvement. One key to successful implementation of the framework is involving families and community members in discussions and work related to advancing the goals set out by the committee. District leaders engage community members by bringing in experts to help facilitate conversations about restorative practices and trauma. They also include parents in school improvement planning and as members of the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee. District leaders plan to build capacity among the district's committee by increasing opportunity for reflection and dialogue so that all school buildings in the district gain support in implementing the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to promote equity, access, and inclusion (Welborn, 2019).

What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?

This research question focused on the challenges educational leaders face as they implemented the work of Cultural Proficiency in Eaveston School District. From the data emerged three themes. The themes include barriers to Cultural Proficiency; availability of time and resources; and building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district. Eaveston School District's leaders acknowledge barriers such as the unawareness of the need to adapt, resistance to change, and mistrust impede the journey of becoming a culturally-proficient school district. The historical mistrust that was formed from a previous social justice training plays a role in building capacity for all district employees to engage in the work. Using the tool, Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency, and focusing on asset-based core values, district leaders work to build capacity and trust among those involved in the work through reflection, dialogue, and action (Welborn, 2019).

Some leaders in Eaveston feel insufficient time and resources are the greatest challenges in implementing the Cultural Proficiency work across the district. Professional learning sessions require both time and resources, which limits the number of sessions that can involve teachers, administrators, and support staff throughout the school year when students are present. Many school leaders have realized that this work is challenging, and it is a journey. School leaders implement this work by prioritizing the utilization of time and resources to build capacity and embed the work in all aspects of the Eaveston School District. They want to ensure that all who educate Eaveston's youth understand this work is here to stay. Building site-specific capacity to implement and sustain the equity work across the district is a challenge prompting school leaders to balance the urgency of spreading the equity work beyond the district's Cultural Proficiency Committee and throughout the district. School leaders want to ensure the Cultural Proficiency work is implemented with urgency, but not in a way that causes an increase in resistance, protest, and unrest within the larger system (Welborn, 2019).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Case study data reveal richness and depth of a single-bounded system. At present, Eaveston School District is on an ascendant trajectory in the manner in which it is addressing policies and practices that impede student access and achievement. Leaders determined it necessary to uncover issues of inequities as an important initial step in the journey to having inclusive policies and educator practices that result in increasing student academic and social success in the Eaveston School District. Eaveston's leaders know the importance of aligning what is expressed as core values with the policies and practices of the district and the behaviors of educators throughout the district. Being deliberate in unpacking and overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency served as an important initial link to being able to consider deeply the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency in shaping district core values. It was in this deep consideration of Barriers and Guiding Principles that district leaders were able to make the Essential Elements actionable in district policy and educator practices. In other words, 'aligning what they say with what they do,' Viewing students and their cultures as assets is an important step in building and selecting curricular, instructional, and assessment approaches. In doing so, educators view their role as being engaged in their own professional learning. The old deficit-based model of what is wrong with students and their cultures is relegated to the historical bin of our segregated history.

Findings from single case studies can be used to support generalizations for other school district leaders to consider (Yin, 2018). The conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency has been used and studied within a specific, bounded, contemporary setting. The important point to note is for district leaders to *study the study* as well as the conceptual framework and focus on the 'why' and 'how' for their context and conditions.

In addition to the examples included within the findings of the case study, three implications are provided for school-district and building administrators as a result of the conclusions of the research. Culturally-proficient educators can lead organizational change and may increase equity, access, and inclusion for all students by applying the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency, causing shifts in core value-related mindsets and actions from deficit-based to asset-based. The implications for practice include:

1. Developing a common language around the Cultural Proficiency Framework, intentionally embedding the work of reflection, dialogue, and change to promote access and equity for all students during professional learning through various professional learning communities;

2. Building the capacity of all stakeholders in the district community by inviting diverse family and community perspectives to help in identifying barriers, focusing on core values, and creating goals and action for changing inequitable practices, policies, and behaviors; and
3. Aligning the district's strategic plan, professional learning, and policy review with the mission and core values of the district. Embed Cultural Proficiency in every aspect of the district while focusing on continuous school improvement toward student achievement.

Thus far, Eaveston's story has revealed that some district leaders understand and appreciate that their journey to becoming a culturally-proficient School District has barely begun. They recognize the journey before them embraces the students and their families, along with their multiple cultures, as assets on which successful school programs will be constructed. Some district leaders understand and appreciate that they, just like the students in their classrooms, are learners as they continue to strive for ways to meet the academic and social needs of their diverse community.

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BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: MINORITIZED COMMUNITIES, URBAN SCHOOL REFORM, SCHOOL POLICIES, AND MAYORAL CONTROL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore a federal turnaround policy under a mayoral-controlled Northeastern school district that began in 2013. The study utilizes discourse and document analysis and interviews, as well as a life history methodology to explore the perspectives of educators, local politicians, and community activists from Black and Latinx communities, as well as other minoritized populations, within the jurisdiction of the school district. The framework for this study draws on a critical analysis of educational policy studies and utilizes Sandra Stein's (2004) Culture of Education Policy framework to highlight discourses and language used to *frame* individuals and groups. This study analyzes a forced leadership change and focuses on a particular elementary school as a result of the implementation of a turnaround policy, and offers some implications for educational policy, reform, and leadership practices.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, critical policy analysis, culture of educational policy, educational leadership, mayoral control, turnaround policy, integrated governance

Introduction

This study investigates the structural and systemic complexities occurring in the Sunnydale Everest[5] school district. Sunnydale is one of many cities in the Northeast whose marginalized populations and communities have continually been adversely affected by deindustrialization. During the height of the industrialization and manufacturing period, from the early to mid-nineteenth century, Sunnydale was a magnet for immigration (Brooke, 1985; Ryan, 1992). James Brooke (1985) of the *New York Times* recalled, Sunnydale "was the 19th-century version of today's Silicon Valley" (Brooke, 1985). Today, Sunnydale is an urban city ravaged by deindustrialization and economic divestment in the urban areas, in spite of some of the highest tax rates in Everest state—a state among the highest tax rates in the country. As a result, poverty and a debilitating drug epidemic have led to a sweeping mass incarceration phenomenon in Sunnydale

[5]Note: I refer to the Black and Latinx community members in this study as minoritized, a verb meaning an action that is happening to them. They are not *minor* or *minority*, a noun—as the noun suggests. Furthermore, they are the majority in the district, composing 85 percent of the students. Finally, they do not refer to themselves as minor or minority.

(Wright, 2019b). According to Reynolds and Murray (2008), Sunnydale became a host for politically corrupt systems and players, industrial sabotage, and various scandals.

Geographically, Sunnydale is about 50 miles outside of a major Northeastern city, and has a history of well-documented and widespread political and institutional investigations of city officials, notably within city hall (Associated Press, 2014; Leduff & Herszenhorn, 2001). The first author in this study was raised in Sunnydale and attended the local K-12 schools there as well. The second author has no relationship to the research site. This study is about an entanglement with the mayoral-led Sunnydale public schools and this relationship to minoritized communities, mostly Black and Latinx, who make up more than 85 percent of students in the Sunnydale school district (Naples, 2014; Wright, 2019b). This study centers on the perspectives of educators, local politicians, and community activists from Sunnydale's Black and Latinx communities as well as other minoritized perspectives. Educators and community members from Sunnydale's Black and Latinx communities are concerned with turnaround policy application and mayoral-led educational strategies and practices. The study presented here is an inquiry of school leadership and the implementation of the *turnaround* policy.

The turnaround policy is analyzed using critical policy analysis informed by concepts from Sandra Stein's (2004) Culture of Education Policy framework. The culture of education policy allows us to look beyond the surface of policy and examine ideological assumptions informing policy (Stein, 2004). In 2013 McLanster Elementary School in the Sunnydale school district was cited for turnaround. Turnaround is a federal policy funded through Title I. Schools in the lowest 5 percent on standardized test scores in math and reading meet the federal guidelines for turnaround. Implementation of turnaround in Sunnydale occurred through an integrated governance model: mayor control (State of Everest, 2010; Sunnydale Minority Teachers, 2015; Wright, 2019b).

Background of Sunnydale: A Life History

The following sections aim to provide both a historical context for Sunnydale and the lead authors' positionality for this study. Increasingly over the years, researchers have made an effort to explore and articulate their position in relation to their research. They have done so to acknowledge any personal relationships to the people and settings in the study and to discuss how these may have played a role in both data collection and analyses. Goodsoon and Sikes (2001) state:

> Indeed, since the 1980s, it has been common practice for qualitative researchers in general to 'write themselves' into their research, on the grounds that personal, background information will enhance the rigor of their work by making potential biases explicit. (p. 35)

Sunnydale is infamously known across the state and throughout the region by a derogatory nickname due to years of political and institutional corruption (Associated Press, 2014; Leduff & Herszenhorn, 2001; Reynolds & Murray, 2008). Local hip-hop artists originated the infamous nickname in one of the city's urban neighborhoods, where the focus school of this study, McLanster Elementary, is located. A local Sunnydale DJ on a popular radio station in the region began referencing Sunnydale by this derogatory nickname during live broadcasts (Wright, 2019b). Sunnydale's urban and minoritized communities appropriated the derogatory nickname, popularized it, and repackaged it as a term of endearment. As a result, many throughout the Northeast came to know of Sunnydale by this alternative name. The nickname is, in part, a reference to recurring, widespread political and institutional misconduct on the part of city officials. Within a decade, two Sunnydale mayors, Mayor Brian Pietri in 1992 and Mayor Randolf

Marino in 2002, were imprisoned following investigations during their tenures as mayor (Associated Press, 2014; Cowan, 2003; Hays, 1992). These arrests and convictions were followed by the investigation and eventual imprisonment of Everest's governor Joseph Likert in 2004, also a Sunnydale native (Cowan, 2017; Zielbauer, 2004). Also, many of Sunnydale's inner-city and minoritized residents have, for decades, lamented about police brutality and misconduct as rampant federal investigations haunted many rank-and-file city officials (Leduff & Herszenhorn, 2001; Mahony, 2016; Press, 2012).

In 2013 McLanster Elementary was cited for turnaround. Turnaround is a federal policy funded through Title I and implemented under the auspices of the Sunnydale mayor (State of Everest, 2010; Sunnydale Minority Teachers, 2015; Wright, 2019b). As will be explored in greater detail throughout the study, the process in which officials responded to educational policy, in light of the populations whom the policy affected, is of great interest. As indicated in Sunnydale's history, many of the voices and people that were deemed fit to make decisions for others were valued over those from the Latinx and Black communities.

Literature Review

Throughout the history of the educational system in the United States, locally elected school boards have been, and still are, the most common model of educational governance. However, centralized structures are increasingly replacing locally elected school boards (Davis, 2013; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Manna & McGuinn, 2013; Morel, 2018; Wong, 2007; Wong & Shen, 2013). Aside from the most common school governance structure, the elected school boards, others include appointed school boards, school boards with both elected and appointed members, state-control, and city/mayoral control, which is the focus of this study. City/mayoral control is part of a reform model that centralizes school governance, shifting control of individual schools and school districts to the state and city administration, using large infusions of federal dollars. Morel (2018) found that integrated governance and centralization models, such as state and city takeovers, negatively impact Black and Latinx representation, stifle democracy, and exacerbate community conflicts, especially in minoritized and urban communities.

Takeover Laws and Race

Takeover laws "permit the state to assume direct operational control of a school district or individual school, thereby bypassing locally elected officials" (McGuinn & Manna, 2013, p. 6). School takeovers are enacted, it is argued, to remedy low-academic performance. However, over three decades of evidence suggest that race is a common factor in takeover implementation (Arsen, Deluca, Ni, & Bates, 2016; Bowman, 2013; Morel, 2018; Trujillo et al., 2014; Wright, Whitaker, Khalifa, & Briscoe, 2018). Conversely, research links academic improvement to parental and community engagement (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2018). Yet, "low academic performance does not explain why Black communities are more likely to experience the most punitive form of state takeover" (Morel, 2018, p. 73). Additionally, in Black, Latinx, and other urban and minoritized school districts, takeovers stifle and undermine parental and community engagement (Morel, 2018; Wong, 2007).

Mayoral Control in Education

As previously mentioned, integrated governance means the centralization of school governance, wherein school districts are integrated under federal, state, or city control (Henig, 2013; Wong, 2007). Large urban schools and districts with large populations of minoritized students are those most likely to be cited for takeover or mayoral control (Morel, 2018; Wright et al., 2018). Wong and Shen (2013) reported a strong correlation between mayoral governance and enhanced student achievement (test scores) in many large urban districts and cities. Thus, business

leaders, politicians, and school unions are leading the charge for mayoral control of schools (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; McDermott, 2013; Wong, 2007). Henig (2013) rightly acknowledged that there are "proponents arguing that it [mayoral control] catalyzes reform and opponents complaining that it marginalizes parent and community groups" (p. 178). Thus, mayoral control is perhaps most noted for the hard lines which it draws between its proponents and opponents.

Outcomes of Mayoral Control

Evidence is inconclusive regarding mayoral control as an effective strategy toward improved student performance. Although some large, mayoral-controlled urban districts showed academic improvement (i.e., test scores), such progress could be attributed to an array of other factors impacting urban education reform, such as curriculum changes (Kirst and Wirt, 2009; Warren, 2011; Wong & Shen, 2013). Thus, in cases where test scores had improved, "it remains unclear how much of this increase reflects real learning" (Warren, 2011, p. 484-485). Kirst and Wirt (2009) argue that there is overwhelming evidence suggesting that mayoral control's effectiveness is inconclusive. This argument is contrary to Wong's (2007) claim that statistically significant, positive gains in reading and math will result from mayoral control.

Critiques of Mayoral Control

Arguments for successful outcomes of mayoral control are vague and blurry (Morel, 2018). Davis (2013) argued that "governance structures too often allow politics to play an overwhelming role in education, some- times blocking innovation" (p. 74). Lipman (2011) posits that "mayoral control is a critical tool to restructure school systems from the top with minimal public 'interference'" (p. 47). Kirst and Wirt (2009) described the integrated governance strategy of mayoral control as an under-examined "bully pulpit" (p. 287). Hess (2008) noted that those who study the idea of mayoral control are generally equivocal about it. Kirst and Wirt (2009) noted that, "the overwhelming evidence is inconclusive" that mayoral control is as effective as it is branded (p. 163). Much research on mayoral control cites the potential for success in mayoral-led school districts; however, successful outcomes are scant and mostly idealistic (Morel, 2018).

Conceptual Framework and Policy Culture

This study is guided by a critical discourse analysis of policy and documents. Conventional policy analysis is rooted in the belief that policy serves as a mechanism to solve problems and produce better outcomes (Ng, Stull, & Martinez, 2019). For example, policy analysis in education is typically focused on inputs such as school leadership initiatives, like training, evaluation, resource allocation and on outputs like the quality of school leadership, and student achievement (Gates, Baird, Master, & Chavez-Herrerias, 2019; Herman et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2018). However, recent scholarly engagements with policy studies are challenging conventional methods. These challenges encourage critical analyses of discourses, narratives, and symbols that undergird and define policy (e.g., Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014; López, 2003; Stein, 2004; Wright et al., 2018). Thus, critical policy analysis suggests that policy and policy reform should be understood for their potential to reproduce and replicate much of the inequity it seeks to dispel. Such critical approaches allow researchers to highlight power dynamics and control mechanisms embedded in education policies at all levels of governance (Levinson, 2005).

In accord with this critical perspective on policy, the concept of culture of education policy (or culture of policy) frames this study. Culture is recognized as the epistemologies: norms, values, practices, and ways of knowing specific to particular groups (e.g., Curry, 2017; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Mignolo, 2012). Stein's (2004) culture of policy framework identifies 60-plus years of failed equity-oriented educational policies in the US. The culture of education policy helps identify and examine "the ways in which policies shape institutional and individual

perceptions and treatments of those they aim to serve" (Stein 2004, p. 12). Together, critical discourse analysis, critical policy analysis, and culture of policy assist with the analysis of the policy's decision-making process for Sunnydale, by considering the reality of those who chose and implemented the policy in comparison to the community affected, and the repercussions for Sunnydale's students and families (Abraham et al. 2019; Gillborn 2010; Radd et al. 2019; Smyth and Robinson 2015; Stein, 2004; Wright et al., 2018). This conceptual framework emerged because it brings to light the voices of the Latinx and Black community members and officials by analyzing their pleas and arguments to reinstate the former principal and their experiences with systemic injustice. By doing so, this framework exposes the power dynamics influencing the decision-making process by the government, district, and educational board.

Methodology

In this inquiry, the lead researcher conducted interviews and critically analyzed discourses across a range of documents. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that discourse analysis is one way to analyze documents and narratives and is a way to explore and analyze how language itself is structured. According to Davies and Harré (1990) *discourse* is described as when "one speaker is said to position themselves and another in their talk" (p. 49). Thus, a critical discourse analysis helps interpret and understand the positionality informing documents as well as ideologies that may be informing educational policies and leadership practices. In this study, we also utilize discourse analysis as a strategy to better understand the inequality occurring from the turnaround policy under the mayoral control for the Sunnydale Everest school district between 2013-2018.

Insights from the People

School leaders and prominent voices from Sunnydale's minoritized communities were interviewed and documents referencing schools in the district were analyzed in this study. Documents reviewed included federal, state and local policy documents and reports, board of education meeting minutes, local media publications, court records, and social media content. Specifically, the board of education meeting minutes propelled the lead researcher to various other school leaders, board members, community members, parents, students, and activists impacted or otherwise concerned with turnaround school policies and mayoral-controlled educational strategies and practices in Sunnydale. Data collection and document analysis coincide with the time turnaround was implemented at McLanster Elementary in 2013. Content analysis and interviews were collected and conducted between 2015 and 2018. Participants all self-identified as Black or African American. This purposive sampling selection (Palys, 2008) was intentional in that the perspectives that shaped the policies of the district and its schools—which in turn affected students and their communities—were of White administrators and other White stakeholders, which were generally in conflict or opposition with the perspectives and values of Black and Latinx residents.

Deficit Discourses and Minoritized Communities

The blowback from turnaround in the Sunnydale school district garnered much attention regionally and to a lesser extent nationally. However, Sunnydale's Black and Latinx communities and students, and their respective cultures, were "deficitized"—which is to say, framed negatively and depicted as problems in much of the media content. These deficitized frames are indicative of what was found in the *Everest State Law Tribune*. This popular, influential legal publication framed McLanster Elementary School as situated in a "rough part" of the city, full of "blighted homes" and poor families whose students struggled to speak English and in need of special education (Spicer, 2016, para.,1). Thus, communities and perspectives that were largely marginalized in dominant discourse platforms are centered in this paper. This study entails a

critical, comparative analysis of discourses and practices of Sunnydale's mostly-White educational leadership and the perspectives of Black/Latinx and minoritized community members.

Life History Methodology as a Counterculture

This inquiry is conducted using a life history methodology. The focus years of this life history runs from 2013 through 2018. The life history methodology is utilized as an antithesis to traditional educational research methods. Some scholars call life history methodology a counterculture (Dhunpath, 2000; Wright, 2019a). The term is meant to signal a radical divergence from the epistemological foundations of traditional educational research methods: the ways we come to know including the strategies, paradigms, research models, grammar, and theories in educational research (Dhunpath, 2000; Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

Positionality

A life history methodology was selected to conduct this inquiry because it facilitates making explicit the first author's positionality in the study. The lead author was born and raised in Sunnydale and attended public and parochial schools there. His long relationship to Sunnydale corresponds to his knowledge of, and ties to, the sociopolitical discourses and practices in the city, particularly from the perspective of minoritized communities. The second author brought to this study the perspective of an outsider to Sunnydale, and she offered a different but complementary reading on the city and the data. This study is framed by a critical policy analysis of educational policy studies, specifically Sandra Stein's (2004) Culture of Education Policy; these concepts inform our analysis of discourses and language used to frame individuals and groups as part of this study.

Countering Deficit Discourses

The particular epistemological position of the life history methodology values the subjective, emic, and ideographic, wherein objective generalizations are not the goal (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). "Life history data disrupts the normal assumptions" and "forces a confrontation" with subjective perceptions and claims of objectivity (Goodson & Sikes, 2001, p. 7). Thus, this inquiry centered and amplified, oftentimes contrasting, perspectives and insights from minoritized communities and students, their culture, educational leadership, and district personnel. The approach to the life history method is to humanize the experiences of African Americans, Latinx, and other minoritized communities and groups in Sunnydale by chronicling a sample of their experiences and their insights. Such experiences and insights contrast with powerful discourses and practices driving public schooling in Sunnydale, led by a powerful mayor. Moreover, this approach works to fill gaps in educational history and in research on Black and Latinx/urban education in the United States, specifically Everest.

Centering those on the Margins

Everest is the state which is home to the Sunnydale school district and is often thought of for its affluence and wealth. Rarely do people associate this state's Everest cities and neighborhoods with Black and Brown families and their impoverished, failing schools (Wright, 2019b). Life history studies are designed to not only add shape to some feature of life experience but to bring to the front marginalized identities and perspectives (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Munro, 1998; Wright, 2019a). This life history study centers and amplifies voices of people living in the shadows of Everest's affluence. This study highlights how the Sunnydale school district implemented the turnaround policy, and how the minoritized community members responded.

Talking Back to the Center

As noted, most of the participants from the interviews self-identified as African American or Black, which contrasts the predominantly White educational leadership in the district. The

documents and interviews are analyzed primarily through two areas: first, the way the sentiments are expressed, such as tone and language, and second, the focus of the topic being conveyed.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, followed by identifying portions of the transcripts which expressed the sentiments and perspectives of the marginalized community toward the turnaround policy and the impact it had on them. Patterns were sought in order to identify sentiments around the actions toward the principal and school, and any historical institutional and/or systemic relationships between the community, educational structure, and government which carried over to the decision-making process. This data was then compared to the literature around takeover laws and mayoral control. Similar efforts were made when analyzing the documents from board meetings to seek patterns of what was expressed by Latinx and Black community members and officials and contrasting them with the decisions made by their White counterparts. Board meeting minutes were analyzed given that such meetings reflected one major space in which exchanges took place between decision makers and implementers of the policy and community members who were affected by their policies. Documents were used as supportive data along with our interview data; documents varied, and some additional context is provided.

Analysis

In 2013, a school in the Sunnydale school district was cited for turnaround. Turnaround is a federal policy and is funded through Title I. Implementation of turnaround occurred through an integrated governance model: mayor control (State of Everest, 2010; Sunnydale Minority Teachers, 2015; Wright, 2019b). Our data and findings were analyzed using critical policy analysis and culture of education policy concepts.

Turnaround in Sunnydale

During the years of this inquiry, 60 percent of the City of Sunnydale's budget was allocated for education. Additionally, millions more poured into the district as a result of turnaround (State of Everest, 2010). Turnaround criterion indicated that schools be in the lowest 5 percent on standardized test scores in math and reading. Thus, in 2013, two schools met these criteria, and the district moved to implement turnaround. One of the schools, McLanster Elementary School, is the focus of this inquiry. Bradley Smith, an African American male, was the principal at McLanster at the time of turnaround. 95 percent of the students at McLanster were Puerto Rican and African American, respectively and nearly 90 percent received free and reduced lunch (Wright, 2019b).

What Mayoral Control Means for Sunnydale

Lipman (2011) reminds us that mayoral control is designed for minimal interference and can silence concerns and inquiries raised by individuals and groups. Per Everest's 2017 state budget, Sunnydale was one of 52 cities cited for an education budget increase (Rabe Thomas, 2017). Sunnydale was to receive a $38 million increase, raising its total educational budget to a staggering $174 million, one of the state's highest (Rabe Thomas, 2017). The state issued total autonomy to local municipalities on how to spend that money. This autonomy caused alarm for some in the state because as Susan Altman, the deputy director of the Everest Association of Boards of Education warned, "it will be up to the municipalities to determine whether to actually spend it on their schools—or use it to close their own local budget shortfalls or make up for other state budget cuts" (Rabe Thomas, 2017). Furthermore, Altman noted that if "it's not going to go to support student needs in most communities… It's important that people understand that education grants might not be being spent on education" (Rabe Thomas, 2017). Altman was concerned that federal funds designated for urban schools could be diverted elsewhere.

Ex Officio as Mayoral Control

The City of Sunnydale's charter grants the mayor ex officio status, which means the mayor is a board of education member. Although a board member (ex officio), the mayor is not allowed to vote, but in the event of a tie, the mayor breaks the tie (Wright, 2019b). Ex officio status was not a new development that emerged with turnaround. Ex officio dates back at least to the 1902 City of Sunnydale charter (Electors of the City of Sunnydale, 1902, 2002). We found that since 2013, Sunnydale mayor Brandon O'Hare used the legislative language in the city's charter in order to control the board of education and influence educational decisions throughout the school district. In spite of the city charter, historically, mayors in Sunnydale left matters of education to the district's educational leaders, the board of education, the superintendent, and the central office or the local education administration. O'Hare, a White male member of the Democratic Party, was born in Sunnydale and is the former chief of police, but stepped down in 2011 when he was elected as mayor (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). During his tenure as police chief, O'Hare was also a member of the board of education.

Bradley Smith versus the Sunnydale Board of Education

By multiple accounts coming from the Latinx and Black communities, including many educators who were interviewed or quoted from archived documents, Bradley Smith, the Blackamerican principal at McLanster at the time of turnaround, was beloved by students and parents and the broader minoritized communities in Sunnydale (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013; Wright, 2019b). The lead researcher interviewed Mina Gardner, an unapologetic Blackamerican community advocate, activist, member of the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, and the president of the School Governance Council (SGC) at McLanster during Bradley Smith's tenure as principal. SGC was a bridge organization between parents and school administrators during the time of turnaround. When asked about her perception of Mr. Smith as a principal and as a school leader, Gardner described him as "fair" and "culturally competent" and as someone whom parents came to love because they knew that he loved and understood the community where the students in his school came from.

When turnaround was implemented in 2013, the Sunnydale school superintendent Kristen Mirund addressed community members' concerns at a board of education meeting regarding what would happen to Bradley Smith once turnaround was implemented. Superintendent Kristen Mirund was quoted as saying that "this principal [Bradley Smith] will stay in place, I will make sure of it" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 16). However, in 2013, McLanster Elementary School principal Bradley Smith was removed from McLanster and demoted to vice principal at another school within the district. Smith appealed his demotion, and was eventually vindicated by an arbiter who determined that Smith's demotion occurred without due process. Smith was reinstated as a head principal in the Sunnydale school district, but not at McLanster (Puffer, 2015).

Silencing Minoritized Voices and Perspectives in Sunnydale

At the board of education meeting on July 31, 2013, a significant amount of time was dominated by parents and community members addressing their displeasure at the removal of Bradley Smith from McLanster and at the new mayoral-led leadership (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). At that board of education meeting, Mina Gardner presented to the board of education a petition of 60 signatures from McLanster School parents that wanted Smith reinstated as principal at McLanster (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). In addition to Gardner, James, a McLanster third-grader, addressed the Sunnydale Board of Education at the July 31, 2013 board of education meeting. James proclaimed, "I want Mr.

Smith back at McLanster School" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 17). Eva Gonzales, a Latina (Puerto Rican) parent, addressed the board, stating that the removal of Bradley Smith from McLanster was like a "punishment" to the kids and parents—who were never asked their perceptions of Bradley Smith by turnaround auditors or school leadership (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 18). The only Black board of education member, Christine James, said in an interview with the lead author that, overwhelmingly, parents and students wanted Smith at McLanster. She identified herself as, "a big fan of Bradley (Smith)," and advocated listening to the pleas of students and parents in the district. James believed Bradley Smith was wrongly removed from his principalship at McLanster Elementary School. She noted the psychological complexity of being deeply involved in Sunnydale's minoritized communities, contrasting her loyalty to the urban community with the uncaring attitude of the other commissioners (nine of ten who were White). As the only Blackamerican on the board of education when Bradley Smith was removed from McLanster, Christine James offered insight and a unique perspective. When policymakers remain removed from the reality of the students, their families, and the community, and fail to diligently and humbly learn the reality of those who are impacted by the decision, the repercussions can halt the advancement of those purportedly being served by policy decisions.

Centering Minoritized Voices and Perspectives in Sunnydale

After the demotion of Bradley Smith, members of the community and organizations that had a direct relationship to the school, emphasized the role that he played as a principal with the students, families, and his understanding and connection to the community. Mina Gardner's comment in particular highlights his skills, abilities, qualities, understanding of the school and populations it serves, as well as the trust he had garnered during his time as principal. The statements from the parents and students at a board of education meeting confirmed Mina Gardner's comments; they shared that they wanted Mr. Smith back at their school and stressed the impact his removal had on students. Their statements also stressed that the process of demoting him never drew on their firsthand and intimate knowledge of his ability to lead the school. The school board only had one Black member, who expressed that it was a mistake to remove Bradley Smith. They also expressed that 90 percent of the commissioners on the board were White and did not care about listening to the community. We argue here that the voices calling for Bradley Smith's removal came from a different understanding and lived experience than those individuals expressing the need to keep him as principal—differences largely based on race and socioeconomic standing. Our data and analysis indicated that discourses emanating from City Hall and the Mayor amplified a small but powerful collective of voices in favor of Smith's removal.

An Infamous Trinity: City Hall, Ex Officio, and Turnaround

Jeffrey Newcomb, Sr., a retired Everest state legislator and respected African American politician, community organizer, and political science professor at a local community college in Sunnydale was interviewed for this study. Newcomb's political assessment of what was occurring in the Sunnydale school district was found insightful. He said:

I will put it this way: all politics [are] local and all local politics [are] about one thing—money. And the bottom line here is... McLanster as a turnaround school... you had the purse strings coming from the State [Everest] with special grants of which principals had autonomy to hire, and to implement what they felt their schools needed in order to succeed. There's no way, in the City of Sunnydale, with all that kind of money coming in, they [City Hall/Sunnydale's mayor] were [going to] allow non-political players [Bradley Smith-McLanster school principal] and those who look like 'us' [Black/minoritized community members] to control those purse strings. That's from a

political standpoint.

Mr. Newcomb was alluding to the concept that turnaround would have given the principal, Bradley Smith, autonomy to make decisions about his school. Newcomb, with all of his insight and experience with Sunnydale politics, felt strongly that it was politically improbable that Bradley Smith, an African American, would be allowed to control federal funds designated for McLanster. Furthermore, Newcomb's statement, as a retired state legislator, respected politician, and professor, highlighted the lack of community input in the process. He emphasized that politically, the demotion of Mr. Smith was connected *to the flow of funds as a result of the turnaround* and most importantly, the desire of the mayor and the city to ensure that key political players were in certain positions in order to control those funds. Newcomb's suggestion that Smith's demotion was laden with race and discrimination resonated with earlier comments from the only Black member of the school board. In making clear his identification with Sunnydale's Black and minoritized community members, Newcomb draws a strong distinction between those who dictate or oversee school leadership and those who suffer the effects of such rule.

Past Fiscal Mistakes

Veanne McDaniel, a White-female community activist and parent of a special-needs student in the Sunnydale school district, raised concerns about corruption at the board of education meeting on July 31, 2013 (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). McDaniel indicated that Nicholas Lawrence, the State of Everest Board of Education commissioner at that time, informed her that "the Sunnydale educational system is on [his] educational radar because he saw past fiscal mistakes" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 4). Christine James, the longest-tenured Sunnydale Board of Education member, described the complexities of being on the board, stating, "Yea, I'm on the board, but it's very difficult being a Black [person] on the board." Again, the issues of race emerged in the conversation around life in the community and dealing with the needs of the school district,[6] Christine James was asked about mayoral control respective to the scandalous history of Sunnydale's City Hall, and its connection to what was happening in education. After a long pause and a deep breath, she stated:

I think as long as you keep the mayor's position as ex officio; that [corruption] will always exist in the education system. 60 percent of our [City of Sunnydale] budget is in education. Which means we control a lot of money. And with a mayor like this mayor that has his hands in everything, I mean he has done some good, but some things he needs to keep his hands out of... and let the school system, those that have been educated and trained to run the school system, run it. So as long as that ex officio position is in place the political part of it; that corruption will always exist until we remove that.

The heavy-handed, top-down, leadership of the mayor was found to have violated democratic principles and exacerbated tensions across lines of race and class.

Words from the Bully Pulpit

The accusations by members of various communities in the Sunnydale school district often stand in stark contrast to those of the mayor. At the Sunnydale Board of Education meeting on July 31, 2013, Mayor Brandon O'Hare, arguably the most powerful White male in Sunnydale, offered a much different assessment of what was occurring in the district (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). According to meeting minutes, the mayor described himself as being "sea-sick" by all of the back and forth and "cynical comments" being made by community

[6] Sunnydale mayors have been involved in political corruption, including graft, which led to the indictment and convictions of two Sunnydale mayors in 1992 and 2002.

members who came to speak in defense of Bradley Smith (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013). The conflicting discourses and interests evident in board minutes is reflective of policymaking made without the community in mind, and in negation of the many testimonials made that expressed the community's confidence in Bradley Smith's leadership. Indeed, the mayor's rude commentary was directed at those coming to the defense of Bradley Smith, rather than on the issues and concerns that they had raised. The fact that there is a conflict and a dialogue taking place between the two sides is reflective of such a decision made without the community in mind, and inconsideration of the many testimonials on the impact that Bradley Smith had in the school and throughout the community.

Furthermore, the mayor that from his "numerous meetings and conversations" with the State of Everest Board of Education commissioner Nicholas Lawrence and the State of Everest governor Henry Brekten, he was acting dutifully; "they both have enormous respect for what's happening in this district" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 31). Though a member of the state board of education and the governor were cited as having "respect for what's happening" (Sunnydale Board of Education Meeting Minutes, 2013, p. 31), this can also be understood as an acknowledgment of changes occurring due to turnaround, which does not invalidate the communities claims of injustice. True respect on the part of the mayor would have been to include the community in the decision-making and policymaking process, drawing on their insights and keen understanding of their reality. The mayor's perspective speaks volumes about divides along lines of race, class, and culture, along with much broader and deeper systemic disconnects related to democracy and policy application.

Racial Tension and Its Day in Court

Between 2013 and 2017, Bradley Smith was battling a racial discrimination suit against the Sunnydale Board of Education and its superintendent after being demoted for alleged misconduct. In 2013 Smith, pending investigation, was transferred to vice-principal at another school within the district. In 2015, an arbiter overturned Smith's demotion citing due process violations (Puffer, 2015). Smith later filed a federal racial discrimination suit against the superintendent of Sunnydale and the board of education (Spicer, 2016; United States District Court & District of Everest, 2016). On March 11, 2016, a district court judge in Everest found merit in Smith's racial discrimination claim and allowed the case to proceed to trial (Puffer, 2015; Spicer, 2016; United States District Court & District of Everest, 2016). In late 2017, an undisclosed financial settlement was reached in Smith's racial discrimination suit against the Sunnydale Board of Education and its superintendent; Smith presently (2019) holds a head-principal position in Sunnydale (Gagne, 2017). To some extent, these key court rulings lend credibility to many of the minoritized community members' claims that Brown was an effective, beloved principal who was treated unfairly by the Sunnydale school district and its leadership.

Conclusion and Implications

The Sunnydale, Everest school district was found enmeshed in structural and systemic complexities. In 2013, the turnaround policy was implemented in McLanster Elementary School, the focus school in this inquiry. 60 percent of the entire City of Sunnydale's budget is designated to the Sunnydale school district, which consists of more than 85 percent Black and Latinx students, along with additional federal and state funding incentivized by low academic performing students. This study found that mayoral control of the Sunnydale school district coincided with the implementation of turnaround. Sunnydale's infamous mayoral history raised credible concerns and exacerbated racial tensions. Mayoral control, however, occurred not due to new legislation but

through a reinterpretation of the city's charter. The mayor's position as ex officio board member was utilized to strategically determine the trajectory of schooling in Sunnydale to the dismay of educators' parents, community members, and students. The removal of McLanster Elementary School's beloved Black principal, Bradley Smith, outraged many throughout Sunnydale's minoritized communities. Community members and parents were concerned that funds, designated for the district's most needy schools, were being diverted elsewhere. By imposing undemocratic leadership discourses and practices, the mayor, board of education members, and the superintendent intensified racial and cultural divides already adversely affecting the majority-minority school district.

The culture of education policy calls into account a history of discourses and practices which has shaped educational policy by crafting deficit depictions of policy beneficiaries. The present case study, concordant with other studies, has shown that racialized deficit depictions of policy beneficiaries are common in takeover implementation (Arsen, Deluca, Ni, & Bates, 2016; Bowman, 2013; Morel, 2018; Trujillo et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2018). An analysis by Wright et al. (2018) of a policy implementation and school takeover in Detroit bore out claims of systemic and racialized patterns of implementation, while strongly suggesting that "White children, cities, teachers, and educational leaders are unlikely to bear the disenfranchising and marginalizing brunt of neoliberal policy" (p. 16). In Sunnydale's mayoral-led district, parents and minoritized community members were not only unwelcomed, the district was also hostile toward the Black, Latinx, and minoritized communities and its educators who disagreed with its educational agenda.

Perhaps the most unfortunate outcome in this study was the removal of a principal whom Black and Latinx community members admired and respected and whom students were drawn to trust. As we see in this case study, district leadership decisions, which were overwhelmingly handed down by Whites, were adversarial toward the concerns and needs of the majority Black and Latinx community members. The leadership in the district ignored the urban community's capacity to contribute to student growth and success. Such an undemocratic form of decision-making and policy implementation removes those stakeholders most knowledgeable about the needs, concerns, and assets of the community—indeed, those stakeholders most impacted by policy decisions (Wright et al., 2018). As Wright et al. (2018) argue, "Although racialized laws are often drafted in ways that do not explicitly mention race, they are applied in the same ways that explicitly racist laws were once used" (pg. 19). We end here by arguing that to advance effective educational reform in urban or minoritized communities, we need to address deficit discourses embedded in educational policy and practices. Such discourses emerge from political actors in the educational arena who are condescending toward the culture, epistemologies, values, and norms inherited by students from their broader communities.

Future research might include more of the student voice and experience in these processes, to compliment the adult community members and officials who try to have their perspectives and voices heard. This is an important consideration given that educational policy directly impacts the student and their educational experiences. While the emphasis in this case study is on the systemic forces of race and class and how they play out in the educational policy arena, incorporating the voices and concerns of students would certainly deepen our understanding of these systemic forces.

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BOOK REVIEW

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The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail.
Jason De Leon
University of California Press
Pages: 384
Published: October 2015
Price: $18.53 (Paperback)

Citation:
De Leon, J. (2015). *The land of open graves: Living and dying on the migrant trail.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

In *The Land of Open Graves,* Jason De Leon engages in a multidisciplinary study of the lives and deaths of Latinx migrants who cross the Mexico-U.S. border to enter the United States. Grounded in an ethnographic approach that combines anthropology, archaeology, and forensic science, De Leon's multifaceted perspective presents the migration experience in its complex and unforgiving totality.

In Part One, "This Hard Land," De Leon describes how the American state became a lethal apparatus in terms of migration through the adoption of the Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD) policy. As De Leon explains, PTD was premised on the understanding that pushing migrants off population centers and into remote areas along the border that would be difficult to traverse would make apprehending those migrants easier for law enforcement while shielding their trials and tribulations from the American public. He also expands upon the notion of the state-deployed "hybrid collectif," which combines the human force of border patrol agents with the lethal force of nonhuman elements to annihilate migrants and erase all signs of their existence.

Part Two, "El Camino," focuses on the perilous journeys of immigrants who De Leon encounters through the unforgiving terrain of the Sonoran Desert. The account predominantly centers around two migrants known as Memo and Lucho, who are initially apprehended by Border Patrol, but on their second attempt cross the border successfully and settle in Arizona. Memo and Lucho's journey exemplifies the trials and tribulations border-crossing migrants experience, but also puts on display migrants' agency, ingenuity, and unrelenting hope even in the face of seemingly impossible odds.

In Part Three, "Perilous Terrain," De Leon examines the effect of border crossing on the lives and psyche of immigrants who remain scarred by the dangerous journeys they have undertaken even if successful. De Leon also describes discovering the body of a migrant, Marcela,

and how this encounter forces him into self-reflection and developing a sense of inadequacy and guilt for looking helplessly on as migrants' worlds fall apart around him.

State-sponsored violence is a recurring theme in this book. The American state is exposed as a violent "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005, p. 27) manufacturing protracted emergency crises to prey on the vulnerable and solidify its power. The most shocking and heart-wrenching part of the book focuses on the violence visited on migrant bodies post mortem, what De Leon (2015) terms "necroviolence" (p. 68). Through the use of forensics, which De Leon employs to complement his anthropological approach, the book exposes how the punishing terrain enables the state to not only annihilate migrants but to also erase any physical proof that they ever existed. Accompanying the physical violence is a dehumanization rhetoric manifesting in discourses of illegality (De Genova, 2002) which convert human beings into unclassifiable entities, or 'aliens.' The border zone represents this no man's land, a space where humans cease being human and become the prey of the hybrid collectif. The state operates as a killing machine exercising the "right to kill or let live" (p. 66)

De Leon does not just relate the stories of the migrants he encounters; he takes the reader on these journeys and strips them to their raw reality. The stories of the immigrants who perished in the Sonoran Desert are a reminder of the fragility of human life, particularly of the lives of those who do not matter to the state and whose deaths, according to immigration officials referenced in the book, are just collateral damage. De Leon's use of forensics, in particular, sheds light on the material reality of the dangers, human and nonhuman, that immigrants face, a part that is often left out of accounts detailing the immigrant experience.

Yet De Leon's book is not without optimism; even in the hardest moments, the migrants display an unrelenting faith in the future and deploy agency ingeniously. De Leon describes how Memo and Lucho meticulously prepare for their journeys, equipping themselves with food containing high quantities of salt to help them survive the trail, as well as vitamins and electrolytes. Crucially, after their initial apprehension, the two decide to cross again by following an obscure mountainous terrain where they know Border Patrol agents will have a hard time locating them and where water is accessible.

What really sets this book apart is how the author immerses himself in the narrative instead of assuming the role of a detached social scientist. De Leon oscillates between the role of ethnographer and that of friend and human being rendered vulnerable and torn by occupying the role of insider and outsider both at once (Anzaldúa, 1987). The author is an insider by virtue of his Mexicanness and playful masculinity that allows him to establish close relationships with migrants. However, he soon realizes that his position as a university researcher and, more importantly, as a citizen, renders him a figure apart from the world he is trying to insert himself into. This ability to detach engenders feelings of guilt as some of his subjects are confronted with extraordinarily difficult circumstances:

> I listen to my own voice stumble out of my mouth. It sounds hollow and empty. It's like the moment when I watched Lucho and Memo enter the tunnel. I was with them as much as I could be, but I wasn't really there. I saw them leave from behind the safety of some invisible glass window (De Leon, 2015, p. 258).

In contrast to other accounts, De Leon does not embellish or shy away from the ugly reality of a merciless immigration apparatus intent on dehumanizing and annihilating the "strangers at the gate" (Bauman, 2016, p.106)—*The Land of Open Graves* points toward our failings as a society. In providing a holistic account of the migrant crossing experience, De Leon includes some disturbing photographic evidence depicting animals being ravaged and annihilated by vultures to

demonstrate the concept of necroviolence. While the photographs are evocative and match the intensity of an ethnographic account that refuses to sanitize reality, they also seem to reduce the immigrant experience to a sensationalistic series of images designed to shock rather than cause the reader to reflect.

The Land of Open Graves provides an account of the migration experience that is refreshing in its honesty and in its ability to generate hope amidst all the tragedy and chaos it depicts. Through the stories of Memo and Lucho and his other migrant companions, De Leon captures the human aspiration for a life beyond mere survival, an aspiration we all share yet few experience with the kind of intensity, raw emotion and passion for living that these migrants exhibit. By exposing their humanity, De Leon forces us to confront our own at a time when a shared sense and belief in humanity is profoundly lacking.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiblackness and Schooling in San Francisco
Savannah Shange
Duke University Press
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Citation:
Shange, S. (2019). *Progressive dystopia: Abolition, antiblackness, and schooling in San Francisco.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

As you drive up the oft-congested US Highway 101 North freeway toward the downtown San Francisco skyline, one cannot help but fix your eyes on the 325-meter-high phallic structure that punctures the city's perpetual foggy layers. Erected between 2013 through 2018, the shimmering chromatic façade of the Salesforce Tower refracts not only light, but also the story of racial capitalism (Robinson, 1983/2000) in the city during the past decade: the congealing of the state, finance, real estate speculation and the rapacious tech economy. This reconfiguration has been intertwined with the intense velocities of gentrification, and the decades-long displacement of poor and working-class Black and Latinx families in neighborhoods such as Bayview/Hunters Point and the Mission. Concurrently, this period has also brought victories for racial liberalism and the politics of recognition (Coulthard, 2014) as the city elected its first Asian American mayor Ed Lee in 2011. After his unexpected passing in 2017, the city welcomed the appointment (and the eventual election) of its current and first Black mayor London Breed in 2018. This current iteration of San Francisco—located on unceded Yelamu Ohlone land—is defined through the heightening contradictions between the city's imagined "progressive" bonafides and the unyielding burdens foisted upon poor and working-class Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

In Progressive Dystopia, anthropologist Savannah Shange offers a meditation on the afterlives of slavery (Hartman, 2008) and the climates of antiblackness (Sharpe, 2016) in San Francisco. Shange crafts her theoretical insights based on her time as an educator and later as a researcher and volunteer over the span of six years at the city's most radical social justice-oriented high school—"Robeson Justice Academy." The book's ethnographic vignettes are crafted from quotidian moments in the classroom, during faculty meetings, and school-wide assemblies. Shange

situates her theoretical project in close relation to the traditions of critical Black studies through soigné engagements with abolitionist theorists including Katherine McKittrick, Joy James and Fred Moten, as well as theorists associated with the tendencies of afropessimism such as Saidiya Hartman, Christina Sharpe, Hortense Spillers, and Frank Wilderson.

Through this project, Shange aims to craft an abolitionist anthropology, which she describes as an "ethic and scholarly mode that attends to the interface between the multisided anti-Black state and those who seek to survive it […] its practice is a mode of reparative caring that seeks to be accountable to what is unaccounted for in social reform schemes" (p. 10). Unlike the dominant projects of liberal reformism, abolitionist methodologies are not only skeptical of the state, but are premised on its end. As such, an abolitionist anthropology also demands that we refuse the reformist grammar of conventional social sciences—especially within educational research—and the artificial boundaries of conventional policy analyses that conflate what is possible with what is practical. In this way, Shange's methodology echoes the works of Octavia Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin and the traditions of science and speculative fictions that aim to imagine and craft futures of collective liberation beyond the confines of the state.

The text is palpably contentious as Shange produces generative frictions that stretch equity, social justice, and antiracism discourses to their breaking points. The existence of Robeson—a high school founded upon a decolonial ethos, a commitment to critical pedagogy, and a legacy of social justice activism—represents a triumph for the community. Yet, Shange asks us to recognize how even this victory is unable to dissolve the climate of captivity for the Black youth who coarse through the arteries of the school. She deploys the concept of carceral progressivism to articulate how well-intentioned educational equity efforts at Roberson reproduce and retrench antiblackness within the school. As such, Roberson is a microcosm of San Francisco style progressivism. For example, Shange situates herself within this paradox as she recognizes that Robeson is the best high school for a Black parent in San Francisco to send their child to receive a dignified education, while also acknowledging that Robeson suspended Black youth at the highest rate of any high school in the district. These contradictions underline the limitations of even the most avant-garde reformist efforts within state institutions that are rooted in the soil of settler colonialism and the meteorological phenomena of antiblackness.

Progressive Dystopia also critically engages with the (im)possibilities of multiracial coalitions in Robeson through the complex racial politics between Black and non-Black students, teachers, counselors, and administrators. More specifically, Shange unsettles the amalgamating terms of racial solidarity credos such as "Black and Brown," echoing what Jared Sexon has described as "people-of-color-blindness" (Sexton, 2010). Adapting Frantz Fanon's theoretical interventions, Shange employs "Black Skin, Brown Masks" as a technology of carceral progressivism at Robeson to underline how Black students, especially Black girls at the school, were encouraged to "approximate Latinx modes of belonging in order to secure their citizenship in the benevolent state […]" (p. 133). Moreover, the fallout from a fight between Black and Latinx students further cemented how the burdens of discipline and accountability for the conflict was most heavily shouldered by Black youth.

Another theoretical intervention offered by Shange is that of willful defiance, which she reconfigures from its original grounding within discourses of school discipline reform. The transmogrification of the concept reframes Black youths' "uncivil" comportment at Robeson not as resistance, but more in line with what Kahnawà:ke Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson (2014) has described as refusal. Shange's portrait frames Black youth's rejections and divestments in "progressivism" and the terms of its political project as part of a counterdiscourse of freedom

(Hartman, 1997). Drawing from the theorization of the undercommons (Moten & Harney, 2004), these refusals are also examples of Black youth enacting a praxis of fugitivity as their loud behavior in "hallways and classrooms provide a hint of what a revolutionary future could look, sound and feel like […]" (p. 106). These quotidian, embodied practices conjure sparks of imagined futures and perhaps the elements of a utopia.

Readers familiar with the genre of school-based ethnographies might presuppose that the story of Robeson Justice Academy is that of "another failing school." On the contrary, Shange's analyses and assessments are not driven by neoliberal discourses of "education reform". The text highlights how Robeson is in many aspects successful in providing the relatively best high school environment for Black students within the racio-political-economic landscapes of current day San Francisco. This achievement can be attributed to the school's steadfast resistance to testing regimes, standardized curriculum and banking pedagogies. The school is the apotheosis of what can be realized through state schooling projects founded upon equity and antiracism. Conversely, the story of Robeson is also an uncomfortable lesson about contemporary social justice projects and their tendency to inadequately reckon with antiblackness and the afterlife of slavery.

One might critique Shange for not offering more tangible interventions to address anti-Black racism within schools. It is true that Progressive Dystopia offers no easily actionable solutions for equity-oriented teachers, administrators and other educators who are seeking a resource for "best practices." Moreover, some teacher education programs, and education researchers might find the premises of the text to be excessively unsetting and despondent. At the same time, the perceived limitations of Progressive Dystopia also contain much of its generative potential. More broadly, the text's arguments point to the conceptual dead ends of many of our questions as education researchers. Still, too much of what makes education research (il)legible is premised upon technocratic grammar as well as the conflation of education and schooling (Abad et al., 2019). Shange reminds us how conventional equity frameworks—multiculturalism, culturally relevant or sustaining pedagogies and so on—can grow sour, impotent and unequipped to pose the unsettling, yet necessary questions that we may be unwilling or afraid to ask. What would it mean to take on the project of decoupling education from schooling? What would it mean for education scholars—especially those whose careers are contingent upon studying schooling—to take up what David Stovall (2018) has described a politics of school abolition? Can schooling as it has existed throughout the history of United States—a technology imbricated with the specters of settler colonialism, antiblackness and racial capitalism —be redeemed? Ultimately, Progressive Dystopia responds with the unsettling coda, "What if it can't?"

Resonant with the relative impacts of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's (2012) seminal articulation of decolonization, as well as Damien M. Sojoyner's (2016) deconstruction of the school-to-prison-pipeline framework, Progressive Dystopia offers another forceful paradigmatic shift for critical education discourse. Shange's portrait offers a provocative case for educators and researchers to take up antiblackness on its own terms as a theoretical and practical matter within critical interrogations of education. In his essay on contemporary urban architecture, Marxist theorist Frederic Jameson (2003) evoked the axiom "that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism" (p. 76). Shange reminds us that the end of the world has already come for many Black, Indigenous, and nonwhite peoples across the globe. The project of abolition is to bring about the apocalypse of this dystopia, so that something new can be born. Still, even under the most ideal of circumstances, futurity (apocalypse or not) offers no guarantees.

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DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR COMMENTARY

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It is my distinct pleasure to comment on the special issue of the *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research* entitled "Emancipatory Methodology for Social Justice in Education." The contributors to this special issue admirably represent a large and influential cadre of scholars who continue to push the boundaries of social justice research and scholarship in the field of education. The work of this larger community of scholars is both ontologically and epistemologically diverse; that is, notable variations exist in theoretical perspective, research methodology, the role of research participants and the nature of their knowledge.

We also find divergence in how race, class, and gender, as sociological units of analysis, are positioned vis-à-vis the other; while some scholars articulate the racialized construction of power as predicated upon the political economic imperatives of capitalism, other scholars position race as the necessary and central unit of analysis across legal, educational, and social policy studies. No doubt, however, that most scholars within the realm of social justice research in education share a common interest in how race, class, and gender amalgamate in complex ways to produce the distinct experiences and actions of students, parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

I propose here that this diverse community of scholars finds further cohesion in the shared paradigm of scholar-activism, which challenges the false binary between the academy and political activism, or in different terms and more specifically, the perceived incompatibility of *research and scholarship* with active engagement with those working to radically alter the schooling experiences of students from oppressed communities. Scholar-activism begins with the premise that all research is imbued with political interests and power struggles set within the context of racialized, patriarchal, and class-based forms of domination.

While research, including educational research, is charged with pursuing valid and reliable truths as well as testing distinct knowledge claims, it can certainly do so with full transparency regarding its political investments. Can any form of educational research be deemed admissible if it masks its commitment to neoliberal economic values and to a White, hegemonic worldview, including the portrayal of the "deficitized other"? No matter the insights we may gain from new research endeavors and stimulating policy debates, scholar-activism warns us that reform-oriented research come to naught if we stir clear of how the school system perpetuates forms of organization that leave class, racial, and gender hierarchies in society more entrenched than ever.

In the realm of educational research, scholar-activism makes explicit its unmasking function. Whereas the dominant ideology asserts that public schooling embodies the inherent function to advance the promise of greater equal opportunity, the paradigm of scholar-activism strives to unmask the many ways that public schooling is put at the service of social inequality and continued coloniality. In the realm of research that examines the educational experiences of students of color from working-class and poor communities, scholar-activism asserts its capacity to be an important contributing force for social change in society. While attentive to their diverse

methodologies, scholar-activists in the area of public education embrace their integral role in understanding, critiquing, and, ultimately, changing the multiple axes of oppression as they operate within the public school system.

True, many education researchers desire that their scholarship contributes in some meaningful way to change in schools that serve the dispossessed. Indeed, many such researchers are quite eloquent in their advocacy on public forums. Scholar-activists, however, envision an even bolder role, even in the face of the academy's hegemony. Gramsci (1971) proposed that "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor [and] organizer, as "permanent persuader," not just simple orator. Gilmore (1993) refers to the work of scholar-activism as "organic Praxis" (p. 73), or more simply, "talk-plus-walk." Tilley and Taylor (2014) paraphrase Gilmore's challenge in this way:

> [The 'talk' refers to] the organization and promotion of ideas and bargaining in the political arena. The 'walk' refers to the ways that academics are able to politically advocate for others as they work to transform oppressive structures, support those in marginalized positions, and identify subjugated knowledge.

How scholar-activists actually do the 'walk' varies considerably, with their activities often determined by the restrictions placed on them by the niche they occupy in the academy.

Scholar-activists ply their trade within an academic environment that creates an artificial divide between intellectualism and action; intellectualism and theory-building get rewarded, *praxis* does not. However, as Katz-Fishman and Scott (2005) argue, "theory and practice are two aspects of a powerful, dialectical unity born out of and continuously tested in our social struggle to end all forms of exploitation and oppression. Neither can exist without the other." Echoing the philosophy of Paulo Freire, Katz-Fishman and Scott go on to state that social transformation must recognize that "the analytical and methodological tools of social analysis are not the 'private property' of academics and the academy" (2005, p. 373).

Scholar-activism it certainly not for the faint of heart, for it requires satisfying the dictates of the academy while wrestling against its stranglehold on emancipatory methodologies, particularly those that require a partnership approach to research. In the realm of education research, such an approach strives to equitably involve research participants in all aspects of the research process, from contributing expertise and local knowledge to sharing in the decision-making. Research participants, whether they be students or community members, are recognized for their ability to engage in social analyses of the world's injustices through stories of their "truths, trials, triumphs, and life lessons" (Mireles-Rios, Rios, Auldridge-Reveles, Monroy, and Castro, this issue). The goal is the generation of new knowledge that benefits and empowers students and community members, and that ultimately, enables students to seize their education as a vehicle to become social change agents in society.

The articles, each in its own way, mirror the values and the vision inherent in scholar-activism and in emancipatory methodologies. James S. Wright and Roya Tabrizi explore a federally-funded *turnaround* project initiated in 2013 in a Northeastern school district, a policy-implementation that relied on near-comprehensive mayoral control. The study utilized discourse and document analysis, interviews, and a life history methodology to capture the perspectives of educators, local politicians, and Black and Latinx community activists during the turnaround implementation. Their careful analysis suggests that reformist policies--intended to ameliorate the effects of institutionalized racism--can reproduce much of the inequity when implementation

excludes the active political participation of parents, community members, and even school board members invested in the community.

Jaime E. Welborn and Randall B. Lindsey present another case study of a school district's intervention efforts, though here we see an intentional and enlightened journey by the district to become anti-racist and culturally proficient. Welborn and Lindsey stress, as do Wright and Tabrizi, that attempts at school restructuring likely fail when the curriculum and classroom pedagogy continue to reflect values and behavioral norms of the dominant, racialized classes in society, particularly those entrenched cultural perspectives that view the language and culture of minoritized communities in deficit terms. Using the Framework for Cultural Proficiency, educators and other stakeholders in the district developed a common language and theoretical lens for advancing authentic student empowerment. Such a framework enabled educators to better understand how race and class can converge to create alienating learning environments; it also guided them in developing forms of pedagogy that seize upon the culture and language of students and their families as assets and as essential constituents of academic success.

The article by Mireles-Rios, Rios, Auldridge-Reveles, Monroy, and Castro provides another inspiring account of an intervention that replaces the focus on what students lack with a focused appreciation of the wealth of knowledge and experiences students bring to school. In the spirit of scholar-activism, the article describes the authors' interactive roles as scholars of color, activists, and researchers. The employment of these dynamic roles began with the development and implementation of an experimental six-week intervention program designed for youth "pushed out" of school, followed by a study and analysis of the program and its outcomes. Essential to the intervention, entitled *Project Grit,* was the facilitation of students' "counter-stories of self," or the sharing of personal stories of struggle, self-affirmation, and survival in the face of oppressive circumstances.

Shared in the context of relations of trust with facilitators and peers, students take their turns in retelling stories that reveal not only feelings of marginalization and despair, but also a keen awareness of the world's injustices, and an ability to accentuate their own courage, dignity, and hope for the future. Mireles-Rios and her colleagues stress that such storytelling can serve to activate a collective energy that leads to "positive feelings of belonging, purpose, [shared] accountability," as well as the possibility of civic engagement and leadership within their community.

The article by Yuliana Kenfield corresponds well with the work of Mireles-Rios and colleagues, mainly by highlighting the preparatory *cultural work* scholars-activists of color might consider as they reenter their own native community, either for purposes of research, intervention, or both. Kenfield, a native-Quechua scholar trained in the United States, describes her fieldwork with Andean college students in Peru and the implementation of a Photovoice project. Photovoice (PV), a methodology associated with Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), was developed to assist marginalized peoples to document their life experiences and to comment on the social and political forces that influence those experiences.

Kenfield's interest was about how Quechua-college students in the city navigate across two cultural-linguistic, sometimes conflictive worlds, and amidst the intersection of city identities and the rural Quechuan world. She describes how these students came to understand the necessity of building trust and solidarity among themselves *via* Quechuan-based ceremonies and practices—before PV-picture-taking sessions could take place. However, the use of Quechuan-based ceremonies and practices had to include, even guided by, rural [mountain] Quechan people and elders. This meant deference to Quechuan elders and a deep valorization of their culture. It also

included being subjected to the elders' criticism for their assimilation, including how "professionals in the city" often treated rural indigenous people.

Finally, the four articles that make us this special issue is rounded off by two provocative book reviews. The first by Miguel N. Abad of the book, *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, Antiblackness and Schooling in San Francisco,* authored by Savannah Shange (2019) and the second by Marina Lambrinou of the book, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail,* authored by Jason De Leon (2015).

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