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JLER is focused on providing a multidisciplinary forum to provide a broad range of education professionals an avenue to share scholarly knowledge in the area of Equity and Leadership in K-20 education.

JLER aims to publish peer-reviewed manuscripts that add to the body of knowledge and focus on research and practical applications to practitioners of K-20 education and affiliated institutions. To achieve this goal, the journal seeks to promote research in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions through articles on advocacy, equity, mentoring, cultural proficiency, diversity, community engagement, and the academic, personal, and social experiences of students; professional issues focused on equity for faculty and staff; and the regulatory policies impacting such institutions.

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FOREWORD: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Mahmoud Suleiman
Editorial Director

The Center for Leadership, Equity and Research (CLEAR) was established on the premise and promise for joining the fight towards equity and social justice through action-oriented leadership and scholarship. As such, it promotes a culture of activism through engaging participants in difficult and courageous conversations especially during the era of dominant cycles of ignorance, noisy empty rhetoric, and grotesque passive silence. One of the key aspects of CLEAR's mission is to amplify the voices that need to be heard, despite those desperately seeking to silence them. It also serves as a tool for disenfranchised minority scholars and social justice leaders whose counter-stories do not fit the narrative of the mainstream "elite" professional organizations as they seek to disseminate their empirical accounts and research. Consequently, the Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research (JLER) has attracted novice and veteran social justice pioneers to share their research efforts and authentic accounts in an attempt to help us understand and face the challenges in society's educational and social institutions.

This regular 2022 edition includes contributions from young and seasoned researchers and social justice advocates who share their insights and findings that have direct implications for educational issues in and out-of-the school settings. Despite the varying foci within each article, readers will find common threads that are keenly linked to their institutions and realities around them. While the context of each discussion is unique, the consensus can be built around the embedded stance and call for action made by every author whose appeal to readers is undoubtedly far-reaching beyond provincialism mindsets. Readers are challenged to revisit their roles to become local-global agents for desired change and are left grappling with the question: When is enough, enough?

Tala Khanmalek, Gina Waneis, Seleena Mukbel, and Mary Chammas provide an authentic and conceptual account about their experiences and plight to belong and fit in institutions traditionally deigned for the privileged mainstream audiences. Their voices are echoed by many across educational and social institutions. Their article underscores the need to narrow the acknowledgement gap that has detrimental consequences on participants in the diverse pluralistic society. Focusing on the Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) groups, the authors illustrated how the benign culture of nihilism in educational institutions contributes to the denial

of their identity, heritage, tradition, and humanity. Despite the fiery declarations and empty rhetoric to embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion, the authentic examples provided by the authors underscore the need to shift from rhetoric to action. Having become sick of getting sick, the authors use activism to defy the current inequities that perpetuate racism, bigotry and discrimination against SWANA populations. Implications of this article are far-reaching for those who are serious and honest about the pronouncements they make about cultivating diversity and promoting an equitable environment for all.

Allison Briceño and **Rebecca Bergey** draw implications for implementing basic principles and domains of California's English Learner (EL) Roadmap designed to respond to the unique needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students in schools. Their account underscores the need for educators and policy planners at all levels to ensure sustained linguistically and culturally-responsive pedagogical practices based on students' assets, funds of knowledge as well as their unique needs and expectations. As such, they remind us that the failed reactive and remedial approaches have never stood the test of time simply because such systems were designed for the "best" privileged mainstream populations while leaving out the "rest". Thus, sound instructional practices should be carefully driven without wasting the wealth of cultures, experiences, perspectives and rich universal repertoires ELs bring to their peers, teachers, and learning communities around them. Unless educators build on the world experiences of all learners, the linguistically and culturally diverse continue to fall between the cracks because of the lack of genuine reform efforts to retrofit and revamp the entire education system with keen and relevant connections to the world of reality around them.

In his qualitative study, **Jaime L. Del Razo** explores the experiences of undocumented students in American schools. Drawing upon the Critical Legal Studies frameworks, the author highlights the pressures and challenges facing college-bound immigrant students in an attempt to unveil systems of oppression that put them at a great disadvantage in the country they aspire to make home. Del Razo's research reflects a case of legal oppression as he argues that "by identifying the ways that undocumented youth face both *de jure* and *de facto* detrimental consequences, this study demonstrates how a double layer of legal oppression is formed that is omnipresent in the minds and lives of undocumented students (p. 34, this volume)." The article has direct implications for keeping the hope alive by fostering respect for students regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, nationality or immigration status.

Clara Burgo tackles the challenges in teaching Spanish to college students during the pandemic over the past two years. She examines the abrupt transition into virtual delivery modes dictated by the COVID-19 global health crisis. Focusing on teaching Spanish virtually and online, Burgo shares some of the obstacles that must be overcome including the potential compromise in achieving educational, social, and emotional goals throughout the remote instructional delivery. Her article echoes observations and findings of countless numbers of experiences across the globe. One of these involves the sudden adaptations that had to be made during the past two years to turn turmoil into triumph. She offers several suggestions based on the lessons learned over the past two years all of which revolve around implementing confluent approaches and compassionate

pedagogies that are keenly linked to the academic and affective needs of learners.

Similarly, **Tracy Reimer** and **Jennifer Hill** shed light on the ever-widening digital gap that has been amplified by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The authors used the Equity Literacy Framework to examine how schools attempted to cross the digital divide and overcome challenges dictated by the global health crisis. They conducted a district level survey by asking technology directors about how schools responded to and addressed inequities within the context of remote learning and alternative modalities. The authors argue that "... districts' efforts to provide students technology devices were efficient and successful," while acknowledging the need for further research around "advocacy for the expansion of broadband service, the pandemic's impact on the mental health of students, and efforts to sustain access to technology for all learners after the COVID-19 pandemic concludes (p. 71, this volume)."

Mica Pollock, Reed Kendall, Erika Reece, Dolores Lopez, and Mariko Yoshisato base their article on "data from a national pilot of #USvsHate (usvshate.org), an educator- and student-led "anti-hate" messaging project, (p. 87, this volume)" to examine resistance to pushbacks against Critical Race Theory and its core tenets to combat racism and cultivate diversity while promoting equity and inclusion. Their study's participants revealed that "careers of 'pushback' against even their basic efforts to include (mention or empathize with) marginalized populations, (p. 87, this volume)" in light of key forms of "Backup" strategies. They also shared five key forms of "backup" they had learned to marshalling support and keeping the anti-hate themes and topics alive on the education agendas, albeit how difficult the conversations and discourse might be. Recognizing the fierce battles and pressures equity-minded teachers face, the authors affirm the need for collective efforts to marshal local and global support to "backup" the march towards the basic inclusion efforts.

Consistent with the main premise within each article of this edition, **Shaylyn Marks**, a proud and brilliant Black female educator herself, provides a profound and critical analysis and review of April Baker-Bell's book, *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*. Marks provides a synopsis of the main thrust of the book and its foci that have direct implications for all educators. This review underscores the importance of combating the Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogy and linguisticism given the power language exerts on learning and teaching outcomes in diverse schools.

The timely themes and discussions throughout this edition should spark resilience and commitment to the cause of diversity, equity and inclusion. Readers will again find a rich collection of authentic voices and powerful arguments compiled by the authors whose insights should promote hope for a more just and equitable society. Like the JLER's continued tradition, the current volume has many immediate implications for *acting* rather than *reacting* to the basic tenets of frameworks and constructs that help all of us to understand and achieve the minimum requirements for equity and social justice in schools and elsewhere.

Finally, on behalf of the JLER team, we are grateful to all partners for preparing this regular issue as well as the contributors, reviewers, and everyone who assisted in the production of the edition. Happy Reading!!

KHALAS!: INSTITUTIONALIZED SWANA ERASURE, RESILIENCE, AND RESISTANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Tala Khanmalek, Gina Waneis, Seleena Mukbel, and Mary Chammas

California State University, Fullerton

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tala Khanmalek , California State University, Fullerton. Email: tkhanmalek@fullerton.edu.

ABSTRACT

The question of SWANA (Southwest Asian and North African) diasporic identity formation has been widely debated in area studies, ethnic studies, and the burgeoning field of Arab American Studies with scholars such as Sarah Gualtieri (2009), Nadine Naber (2012), and Neda Maghbouleh (2017) arguing that people of SWANA descent are racial minorities even though the U.S. government classifies them as white. However, these works have not adequately addressed SWANA racialization in the context of higher education following 9/11. This co-authored paper closely examines institutionalized SWANA erasure from the shared intersectional perspective of one faculty member, one graduate student, and two undergraduate students at a California State University campus in Southern California. Specifically, in this co-authored paper, we draw on our individual and collective co-organizing experiences to illustrate (a) the persistence of specific structural inequities that SWANA heritage people face in the academy, (b) the multilayered impact of these educational barriers, and (c) our wide range of ongoing activist responses to them. We say “khalas!” (enough!) to systemic oppression and argue that the ultimate antidote to institutionalized SWANA erasure is solidarity within and between marginalized subjects at every level of academia in the service of anti-racist and anti-colonial education. This co-authored paper uplifts SWANA resilience and resistance in California’s most diverse public university system to shed new light on the understudied issue of how higher education perpetuates SWANA racialization.

Keywords: SWANA, racialization, erasure, academia, student activism

We are four individual Southwest Asian North African (SWANA)-identified women in higher education. More specifically, we are all affiliated with California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) in Southern California; two of us are undergraduate students, one is a graduate student, and one is a faculty member. The four of us first met in the fall of 2019 following SWANA Week, a series of events initiated and organized by various SWANA student organizations to educate the campus community about SWANA peoples. In March of 2020, we began to co-author this essay, which examines the structural inequities that shape our commonalities as women of color from what is commonly referred to as the “Middle East” and how we have responded to said inequities at every level of higher education. Through our personal stories, we illustrate (a) the persistence of specific structural inequities that SWANA heritage people face in the academy, (b) the multilayered impact of these educational barriers, and (c) our wide range of activist responses to them.

Overview

While our personal stories differ in significant ways, they are connected by institutionalized SWANA erasure at every level of higher education. The challenges we have faced throughout our careers in academia reflect the ongoing racism that many SWANA individuals and communities face in U.S. society. From struggling to find a sense of belonging on campus to racial profiling in our Southern California neighborhoods, people of SWANA descent continue to face the consequences of institutionalized SWANA erasure in everyday life. We have identified three specific ways this erasure manifests in higher education: (a) the categorization of SWANA people as white in U.S. Census as well as university demographic reporting; (b) the simultaneous tokenization of SWANA peoples to perform a false sense of diversity, equity, and inclusion in academic and other settings; and (c) the invisibility of SWANA studies in college curriculum. Here, we highlight several consequences of institutionalized SWANA erasure, namely how it leads to a lack of administrative support—particularly student support services—and racial and cultural awareness. We are thus faced with ignorance, misrepresentation, and lack of representation, all of which silence our identities while widening systematic gaps.

In addition to silencing, institutionalized SWANA erasure results in other impacts that are often overlooked and understudied. First, the burden of educating others falls on SWANA individuals within the university. Educating others manifests in a wide range of ways, from correcting peers in the classroom to planning educational programs and creating safe spaces. Second, the “emotional exhaustion,” or state of being “overwhelmed by the emotional demands imposed by other people,” felt by SWANA people to fill these gaps negatively impacts our mental health and further distracts us from our duties as students, staff, and faculty members (Maslach, 1982). For example, student activists plan events, attend meetings with administrators, lead demonstrations, facilitate student organization programs to build unity among SWANA students, in addition to their roles as full-time students and employees. While educating our campus community is important, it is necessary to recognize the “cultural taxation” that our community faces in order to fully represent the SWANA region and the intersectionalities that exist within the

SWANA identity (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). Lastly, as we continue to navigate these institutions, we have taken the responsibility to build our own community to further enhance our collegiate experiences.

In order to begin to and further support our own community, SWANA members have responded to institutionalized SWANA erasure in three unique strategies. At CSUF, there has been an increase in SWANA student activism across campus. For instance, SWANA students have formed a SWANA student organization; passed resolutions (“A Resolution in Support of the Southwest Asian North Africa Community” and “Resolution in Support of SWANA Students”) in student government; organized protests and other campaigns; and served as informal cultural educators in classrooms and campus-related events. Due to the clear gap in knowledge when discussing the SWANA regions and diasporas, students have felt obligated to share their personal experiences and knowledge to the campus community. This has also inspired the students to collect their own qualitative and quantitative data on topics such as demographics, satisfaction with community organized events, and overall sense of belonging to the university. At CSUF, SWANA students used this data to pass “A Resolution in Support of the Southwest Asian North Africa Community” through their student government, Associated Students Inc., to advocate for a student resource center, culturally competent staff, and accurate demographic data of the university’s SWANA population. Additionally, faculty have taken initiative to embed the SWANA regions and diasporas into their curriculum by intentionally including works written by SWANA scholars, and by serving as advisors to SWANA organizations in support of this activism. These responses have transformed how students and faculty view their personal SWANA identity and have prompted universities across the country to consider and advocate for the SWANA community.

We uplift our acts of resistance to affirm our resilience. However, the root cause of this cycle is systemic oppression; the cycle will repeat itself until there is change at an institutional level. Therefore, our paper is a call to action—not for SWANA campus community members to “fix” the university (or for the university to hire more SWANA people who can take on these burdens), but for all institutions of higher education to include SWANA communities. In order for this to happen, we must begin with the premise that the university is a historically and fundamentally exclusionary system entangled with other local and global systems of oppression, from settler colonialism to gentrification to the military and prison industrial complex. We call for a total transformation of higher education so that we may rebuild a truly diverse, inclusive, and equitable place of learning.

Our Lived Experiences

Seleena Mukbel, Undergraduate

I live a life built on grounds made up of eggshells. To start off with a clear picture of what this looks like, I figured out I was Palestinian and not Jordanian at the age of 10. I was accustomed to believe academic school and Saturday Islamic school were two separate worlds that shouldn’t ever be mentioned in the same sentence, under the same breath. When I did speak of these two

worlds under the same breath, I explained to my academic school peers in a way where they can relate. “I go to the masjid once a week the same way you go to church.” This prevents their eyes from widening too much, and proves I am like them more than actually talking about myself. This led me to think I was so similar to them, simply because I didn’t get the chance to know myself. If the picture isn’t clear yet, let me fast-forward to my senior year of high school—it is January 2017, when President Donald Trump issued the executive order featuring the Muslim Ban. I am in my video production class when an academic peer asks our table, “Did everyone hear about the Muslim Ban?” Before I get the chance to respond, another peer adds to in the conversation, “My dad said kicking out Muslims was the best thing to happen to this country.” I had no emotion at the moment. Was it my body reacting to an emotional shock? Did I not know how to respond? Was I so angry that I turned numb? Then, after minutes of the conversation continuing, I hop in and say, “So I am Muslim, what does that mean for me exactly?” The students are in shock and have a sense of guilt on their face. And this next line from a classmate—“But I am not talking about you, I am talking about the other Muslims”—sparked the beginning to my own beautiful path of acknowledging my roots and identity.

I went home, but without processing what was happening. I found myself pushing the record button on my phone. Without even writing, I started speaking to the camera about my frustration at the time. Rather than yelling at the camera, I expressed my frustration to the camera in a spoken word poetry style. By the time I stopped recording, this became my first and one of my best spoken word poems ever. The words came to me so easily. Most people didn’t believe me when I said I just started recording and speaking. Later that night, I posted the video of me saying the spoken word poem about Islamophobia on Twitter. I got more views and attention than expected. People felt my frustration. Some people felt empathy. And others felt offended. Prior to this moment, I didn’t know I was poetic. I didn’t know I was capable of having these emotions. I didn’t know what package deal the Arab Muslim American identity came with. The package deal of being angered and othered. The package deal that my parents spent my entire life for me not to deal with. I cannot thank my academic peers enough. I finally walked on these eggshells, but this time, I broke them. However, this is not to say my parents ever tried to assimilate to American culture and American culture only. It was never a matter of hiding my identity, but a matter to not care to prove who I was, and my parents taught me that well. My mom was the first person to teach me the lack of cultural awareness this country has. My mom would tell me how she was shocked to see how there was a mindset of thinking the world ended at America’s borders. When my mom was judged and asked why she has an accent, she said with full confidence that it wasn’t because she spoke poor English, but because it is a result of a language mechanism for speaking two languages. My mom would give my academic peers Eid holiday presents. You could say my mom was an informal cultural educator.

Mary Chammas, Undergraduate

California State University at Fullerton (CSUF) was not my first choice. It was tough to find a connection with the campus when there was no representation of my identity. I remember my first

semester I would go to class, drive home. I would have 30-minute breaks and I would go drive home and drive back to campus. I did not like to be on campus at all. It was really hard to make friends because it was a commuter school. So my first semester was hard for me, and I was going to transfer out. Within my first semester, I attended a University of Southern California (USC) Transfer Day program, where I spent the whole day at USC to get to know the campus life and see what opportunities USC had to offer for me. They had a Lebanese Club at USC, and they had a cedar tree—which is what Lebanon is known for—on campus for the Lebanese people. The environment felt more welcoming as well. I used to go home and cry every night to my parents how I wanted to transfer to a different Cal State University or a UC or private institution, just somewhere where I can build a connection to campus. My parents always told me you're not going to campus to socialize you're going to campus to get an education. So they never really understood the struggle. For me, I'm a community person. I'm a social butterfly. I love making friends and meeting new people. I love connecting with my community. At CSUF, there was no representation of any of this on campus. Coming from a happy place out of high school, I was now in a completely different world where I just wanted to get my degree and leave. One day, my friend encouraged me to make the most out of my college experience. He had wanted to start his own organization, but did not want to do it alone. A lot of other colleges had Lebanese Clubs on campus, and he told me to start one here at CSUF. We decided to work together and start up our separate organizations.

During my second semester at CSUF, the Lebanese social club was up and running. It started with just me and my treasurer. We would have five people attend our meetings, and around ten people attend our social events. Even with this club, I didn't feel a connection to campus there are not many members. The members seemed uninterested, and it was just a way for me to cope with the lack of representation that the South West Asian North African (SWANA)/Middle Eastern North African (MENA) community had on campus. Midway through my second semester, I was contacted by a member of Students for Justice in Palestine to go to a place called Asian Pacific American Resource Center (APARC) in the library and meet them for a meeting to discuss having a SWANA week on campus. Confused, I agreed and decided to have the Lebanese Social Club co-plan the first-ever CSU wide SWANA week. This was a week-long representation of the SWANA heritage and culture by showcasing dances, music events, and debunking any stereotypes and myths within the SWANA community. This was the first time I have felt at home at CSUF. Seeing everyone come together and having a sense of unity with one another created a place of welcoming for our culture. Although this was student-led, I got to bond with many of my peers and have formed lifetime friendships. From this, we held the second annual SWANA week, which consisted of new workshops, new presenters, and new environments. During this process, many people have come up to me and my peers and thanked us for planning SWANA week. They thanked us for turning a place where they had felt unwelcomed into a place of community and friendship. While there remains much work to be done on our campus, I am optimistic for the future of SWANA as the built-up anger has been released, and the SWANA/MENA community on campus is finally getting the recognition it deserves.

Gina Waneis, Graduate

I will never forget June 17, 2019. My professor starts a graduate class, “Okay, let’s begin our activity.” I get so excited because I love this class and enjoy participating in discussions about diversity, access, and equity. She instructs, “Alright, go ahead and sit with your affinity group members in regards to race.”

The activity begins. As I watch my classmates lock eyes and smile, I notice a pit in my stomach. The Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) students confidently migrate to the back of the classroom, while the Black students walk to the front. As I look to the left, I see my Latinx cohort mates making jokes as they move towards the center of the room. I notice the white students to my right, but knew that even if I could pass as White, I truly did not belong in that group. I look around the classroom hoping to meet a cohort mate’s gaze. Eventually, I lock eyes with a friend. As she invites me to join this group, I instantly know I did not belong. This affinity group was filled with students who share a multiracial identity, but maybe I could make it work. “So, what is your group?” asks the professor. As my eyes fill with tears and my hands start to shake, I know I can no longer control my emotions. “Well, we are an ambiguous group,” explains one student. The professor looks at me with confused eyes—of course I did not belong with these students based on this activity. As the class acknowledges the situation, the professor gives me a choice: I could leave the group to share their experiences of being multiracial students, but I would then be alone, or I could stay in the group to discuss the different ways we are perceived as racially ambiguous, but then I would not be giving myself or my cohort a chance to hear about my true racial identity. I did not want to be alone. I did not want to be the only one sharing about my culture. I did not want to feel all the pressure of speaking on behalf of the whole race. Although I did not want to, I challenged myself to leave the group and start a solo group.

The true reflection occurred on my drive home after class. As I thought about the activity, I tried to figure out why I was crying. After ten months of being in the Master of Science in Higher Education (MSHE) program, I have been aware that I am the only South West Asian North African student in my cohort. Why did this activity still catch me by surprise? Why was I crying? I have a new awareness of the amount of work that still needs to be done for my people. I study higher education and student affairs—I can tell you all about the student development theory and research conducted on the student experiences of Black, Brown, white, Latinx, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Plus (LGBTQ+), adult learner, parent, International, APIDA, Native American, undocumented, and so many others, but I cannot tell you about my own people. Ultimately, I ask, where are *we* in this research?

Tala Khanmalek, Faculty

I’m sitting at the feet of Asian American scholar and activist Ronald Takaki at the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Berkeley, California. He’s there for a book club event with the staff, who read *Strangers from a Different Shore*. I was invited because I was an undergraduate volunteer at the YWCA and a student in the Ethnic Studies Department at UC Berkeley (UCB). Takaki was legendary even though he was a faculty member on campus and a

mentor to my friends. I had yet to meet him though I had learned about him in my classes and read his work. I was delighted to encounter an unbelievably friendly person and passionate scholar-activist at the YWCA. So, I decided to take a risk and ask him the question that had been weighing on me since my first ethnic studies class in my first semester of college: Why weren't Middle Eastern people included in Ethnic Studies curriculum? It doesn't make sense, I explained. As a person of Middle Eastern descent, I can assure you that we faced many of the same and also different experiences as other marginalized people in the U.S. Sometimes, I confessed with a bit of shame, it makes me want to drop out of the major. Takaki listened with great care. His answer was immediate and simple: "You're right, and that's why ethnic studies needs you. You should stay in the major—and movement—and in doing so, transform it." I took his words to heart and went straight into UCB's Ethnic Studies PhD program after graduating, then on to becoming a scholar of ethnic studies. The problem was that throughout my long career in the field, both inside and outside of the university context, one of two things always happened: either people assumed that I studied Muslim/Middle Eastern racial formation because I myself was a person of Muslim/Middle Eastern descent, or I encountered a total erasure of Muslim/Middle Eastern diasporic experiences.

There was rarely any in-between with the exception of San Francisco State University's Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas (AMED) program and scholars like Hatem Bazian, Rabab Abdulhadi, and Keith Feldman (2015) doing the work of bringing issues like post-9/11 Islamophobia, anti-Arab racism, and Palestine solidarity into the mix of ethnic studies. Part of what makes me especially sad about the erasure of SWANA people, history, and counter-knowledges from ethnic studies is that in fact, we're part of the past and present ethnic studies movement. My own uncle was an international student at UCB during the Free Speech Movement and involved in local organizing efforts, which coincided with movements for decolonization across the globe. And he was not the only Iranian in the U.S. at the time; many others experienced racialization and joined Third World social movements as a means of fighting back and building bridges across borders (Yalzadeh, 2020).

Building Coalitions to Reimagine the University

We draw from our own lived experiences following feminist methodological approaches to research, autoethnography, and the "narrative" or "reflexive" turn in humanities scholarship. We begin with anecdotes that illustrate the challenges we have each faced as women of SWANA descent within institutions of higher education that do not acknowledge our intersectional identities. Our anecdotes highlight both the differences and significant similarities across our lived experiences. Importantly, we occupy different positions within the same university and have different racial, ethnic, and religious identities (e.g., Iranian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Syrian, Muslim, Christian, etc.). What unites our experiences is precisely the fact that these differences continue to be erased on a structural level. For this reason, we write the body of our article in one voice. The way we write reflects the function of the SWANA student group, which serves as a

common ground for students of diverse backgrounds and is the organization that initially brought us together.

In this article, the undergraduate students, Seleena Mukbel and Mary Chammas, are the founders of the SWANA student group and student activists on campus working to build a more welcoming and inclusive community for those who identify as SWANA. These students were taking a course on gender and sexuality studies which was taught by SWANA faculty member, Dr. Tala Khanmalek, who became the advisor for SWANA. In the process, Gina Waneis was a SWANA graduate student in Higher Education and assistant for Student Life and Leadership which oversees and guides the registered student organizations on campus. As a mentor and unofficial SWANA advisor, Gina Waneis worked alongside SWANA to advocate for systematic changes, such as the creation of surveys with a SWANA demographic, and mentored the SWANA student activists. We came together to share our experiences and inform others about the stigma towards and simultaneous erasure of the SWANA community. We met each Friday from March 2020 to December 2021 to co-write an article that was designed to educate others on the broader experiences of SWANA students, staff, and faculty in higher education as a whole. Our democratic and non-hierarchical approach to collaborative writing has meant that we wrote almost every sentence together and made project decisions as a group. In this way, we transformed writing and producing knowledge into a relational practice that strengthened our connections to each other and allowed us to continue our activist efforts during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Through collaborative writing, we narrated and archived the history of our work together, contributed to research about SWANA experiences, and co-created an equitable form of learning within but-not-of the university. We experienced learning as “a place where paradise can be created,” in the words of bell hooks (1994), while navigating a world-wide crisis. This, we believe, is “education as the practice of freedom” (p. 207).

Historically and still today (despite numerous attempts to change this), the United States Census Bureau categorizes “Middle Eastern” people as “White.” According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), the racial “White” category is for “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.” Not only is this terminology inaccurate as it stems from a Eurocentric perspective, but it also prevents accurate data collection. As Loubna Qutami (2020) writes, misclassification on the census is dangerous because it “afflicts MENA [Middle Eastern and North African] communities by limiting them from acquiring public monies and resources, restricting the ability of CBOs to know and respond to the needs of their own communities, and impeding communities from organizing to engage civically and to establish strong political mobilization campaigns.” Qutami elaborates, “without proper data, quantitative and qualitative needs assessment research for affected communities must be self-organized, self-funded, and self-implemented,” which was the case for the SWANA community at CSUF. Since universities are not properly collecting data on SWANA in tools such as college applications, campus climate focus groups, or simply post-event surveys, the SWANA students at CSUF organized to create their own surveys to assess their community needs. Similar to the community-based organizations in the U.S. that must create their own data collection, which takes away “focus

on strategic planning, programming, service implementation, and political advocacy in accordance with their community's needs," the CSUF SWANA community also spent energy, time, and effort on creating and distributing our own assessment tools which is part of why it is necessary for all universities to collect and disaggregate data in a way that serves our communities.

SWANA stands for Southwest Asian and North African. Originally introduced by University of California students, the term SWANA—in comparison to "Middle Eastern"—is more inclusive of the complex identities of the region, including the Black community (Yoder, 2013). Importantly, for SWANA people, whiteness has been "probationary and imposed on them the burden of proving their eligibility through assimilation and performances of loyalty, as well as ongoing distance from Blackness" (Erakat, 2020, p. 477). Using the SWANA term intentionally challenges the anti-Black racism of the region and in the diaspora. This allows our readers to shift focus from the Eurocentric colonial perspective that the original term holds. As we aim to provide SWANA people with the proper recognition and education they deserve, utilizing the new term debunks the previous stereotypes and misconceptions that people hold towards the SWANA identity. The term additionally encompasses a geographically accurate definition by specifically including "North Africa" in the acronym rather than excluding the region. For instance, when many people think of the Middle Eastern identity, people may view being Muslim and being Middle Eastern to be interchangeable. Through the surveys we have created, the resolutions we have written, and throughout this article, we explicitly use the SWANA term. At the same time, we recognize there are great gaps in research and data collection on SWANA identity, especially as it pertains to intersectional identities outside of race and ethnicity such as queer Muslims, as explained by Ahmadi and Shah (2020). We hope that future data collection and research consider the vast diversity of the SWANA identity and the multiple and intersecting identities of our community members.

As students, faculty, and student affairs professionals in higher education institutions, we provide our experiences to educate members inside and outside of our community. We share potential solutions that may work on different campuses and invite readers to initiate and continue this dialogue to support the SWANA community further. Our article is essential because it validates SWANA students, staff, and faculty members' experiences. It serves as a reminder that higher education institutions were not initially created for us, but instead have become spaces we must intentionally create for ourselves.

The lack of a sense of belonging for the SWANA community impacts their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Due to the lack of visibility and hypervisibility experienced by our community, SWANA students may feel discouraged and not listened to, and therefore go under the radar. This makes it difficult for a university to assess their admission rates, and, therefore their retention rates. Colleges and universities that do not consider the SWANA population in their academic and student affairs will likely see increases in anti-SWANA and anti-Muslim discrimination, as already reported by several institutions since the 9/11 attacks and 2017 Muslim ban (Executive Order No. 13,769, 2017 and Executive Order No. 13,780, 2017). Ahmadi and Cole (2020) describe how immigration law and policies impact Muslim students as the FBI reports that

during the 2016 presidential election season there was an increase in the number of hate crimes, hate speech, and incidents of bias and discrimination against Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities. Rather than reacting to acts of discrimination that occur on college campuses, universities need to take proactive and preventative measures against racism and other forms of discrimination. Furthermore, building coalitions across social differences will lead to structural change because when an institution fails to account for and address the needs of a particular group, in actuality it fails everyone, including those who are in privileged positions.

SWANA Diasporic Activist Legacies in Higher Education

Despite their racial classification in the census, SWANA people have long understood themselves as a racialized minority in the U.S. and other diasporic contexts. What's more, they have worked to raise awareness about their positionality as such, both in affinity groups and in solidarity with other minorities. Contemporary SWANA activism has a long legacy, particularly the activism of SWANA students against the erasure of their lived experiences as marginalized people of color. Current students have precedents to follow, including in local and transnational leftist organizing during the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S. and throughout the SWANA region.

Scholars often turn to the post-9/11 context as evidence of the racialization of SWANA people as non-white Others due to the sharp rise of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism and backlash in particular. However, the articulation of SWANA identity formation dates further back. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, for example, many students from Iran were studying abroad and active in these diasporic contexts against the policies of the Shah of Iran and the U.S. support of the Shah's regime as well as their rights as students in the U.S. Radical leftist Arab-American organizing during this same time period—what scholar Pamela Pennock (2017) identifies as the origins of the “Arab civil rights movement”—focused on the Palestinian struggle. Throughout the late twentieth-century, we can also locate articulations of solidarity between SWANA people in the U.S. and other oppressed people across the globe. These articulations of solidarity shed light on the relationship between white supremacist violence against communities of color and U.S. imperial projects in the SWANA region and beyond. Most notably, these articulations included the internationalism of the Black Panther Party as well as Black feminists such as June Jordan, all of which had a focus on Palestine solidarity that also extended to other parts of the SWANA region such as Algeria. Furthermore, as Noura Erakat (2020) argues, the 2014 “Ferguson-Gaza moment” (the concurrent bombardment of Gaza and the police and national guard occupation of Ferguson, Missouri in 2014) catalyzed a new wave of Black-Palestinian solidarity that emerged from simultaneous and intersecting struggle outside the 1960s context of a Third World movement.

Our Work, Their Benefit: Stigmatization, (mis)Representation, and Tokenization

There are two main issues pertaining to the stigmatization of the SWANA identity that must be addressed and distinguished. These two issues are the lack of representation which can result in misrepresentation, and tokenization in the SWANA community. The lack of representation stems from the failure to provide any institutional demographic data to categorize the SWANA ethnicity.

The absence of implementing a specific categorization leads to the larger absence of SWANA inclusion. In simpler terms, when the SWANA category is not visible on paper, the SWANA people go unnoticed as well. Implementing a specific documented category for the SWANA population is the stepping stone to receiving the proper forms of inclusion and representation that institutions are lacking. Disregarding the SWANA population is a major factor of not having a physical SWANA resource center, a funding outlet for the SWANA-affiliated organizations on college campuses, and lack of resources and supportive staff. When data and proper documentation is nonexistent, the need for these resources are not prioritized. “Individuals of Arab/MENA descent have occupied a precarious position in the U.S. racial landscape given that they are simultaneously invisible due to lack of recognition as an ethnic minority by the federal government while also being hypervisible due to experiences of discrimination” (Awad, Hashem, & Nguyen, 2019). One consequence of this lack of representation is being forced to stay in the shadows. Since the proper representation is not being shown to the overall population, it is more than likely that the whole SWANA region will be seen as one single identity rather than a mix of intersecting cultures, countries, and languages. The other issue that stems from these failures in representation is tokenization, or when SWANA people themselves are suffering from not receiving equitable resources. In other words, their existence enhances an image to be capitalized from, even as the SWANA people are not receiving the same benefits.

The issue of tokenization represents a form of stigmatization towards the SWANA community. This tokenization can be manipulated by false acceptance and visibility as well as cooptation. For instance, at CSUF, the university pointed to having taken basic steps in acknowledging the SWANA community as evidence of the success of their own Strategic Plan and new diversity and inclusion program. In 2020, the Associated Students also implemented a strategic plan intended to support student organizations and events that drew on SWANA student activist efforts. At the time, SWANA students were hosting large-scale events, voicing concerns at public forums, and consistently being mentioned in the school newspaper. While the SWANA student community has been applauded for their own advocacy, they have received little to no material or administrative support.

The problem of tokenization should be resolved by implementing a system designed specifically to protect communities like SWANA. Research has proven that students choose college campuses based on the convenience and acceptance of their own community. This can only be done with the help of systematic support rather than relying on students coming in and out of college every four years to celebrate their own community while balancing their academics. As mentioned in an *Inside Higher Ed* article, “Students do not receive adequate attention to fulfill the requirements of mattering as implemented by the four factors of attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence and appreciation will present an increase in students’ academic performance correlated to a sense of belonging on campus.” The concept of mattering research has proven that the potential short-term and long-term success of students stem from their college experiences equally outside the classroom as they do inside the classroom. Although normalizing

the acceptance of diversity can be progressive, a gap remains since SWANA (and Muslim) students are still the ones advocating for their own belonging, safety, and campus needs.

Taking Matters Into Our Own Hands

Representation is especially important for SWANA students in Southern California because Orange County and Los Angeles County account for 40% of the Arab population in California, combined (Arab American Institute, 1). In addition, “The State of California has the largest number of Arab Americans in any state, with the Los Angeles area constituting the largest cluster in the state” (Arab American Institute, 1). Yet there was no option to classify as SWANA/MENA on any CSU campus-related survey, no resource center, no professional staff, no programming, and no president's reception in April for Arab Heritage Month. While CSUF does not recognize Arab Heritage month, it is recognized by Orange County, “While Anaheim and Fullerton have designated a month for Arab Americans, this is a first for the county government” (Shadia, 2019). SWANA soon became a stepping stone for MENA/SWANA students as the fight for representation and resources prevailed. We fell under the Asian Pacific Islander Desi-American (APIDA) community and the Asian Pacific American Resource Center (APARC) resource center welcomed us. APARC is one of the five identity-based resource centers on campus that are a part of the Diversity Inclusion Resource Centers (DIRC). DIRC and its resource centers allow for students to come together in community by providing professional staff member(s), job opportunities, safe spaces for students, events, and equips students with the necessary resources to succeed in school. Due to cultural differences as well as the center being small in size, however, we were left with no option but to continue fighting for our own. SWANA soon began to serve as an umbrella organization for SWANA-related organizations, and has created history on campus through all the programming and events. At APARC, student leaders from SWANA and Students for Justice in Palestine discussed having a SWANA Week on campus to celebrate Middle Eastern Heritage.

After months of planning what each day would consist of and logistics, organizing tasks, presenting to the board of directors twice for funding, and advertising such a large scale event, our first SWANA Week was April 22 to April 25, 2019. Our second SWANA Week was October 21 to October 24, 2019. This event was the first time any CSU represented SWANA/MENA culture, and it was all student-led. We are students, who have jobs, take care of our families, are overwhelmed with school yet still find a way to give our community what it deserves. We were not going to spend another year watching SWANA students overlooked and forgotten about by institutions of higher education. We had a survey at the end, and it is stated that 93% of students agreed this was the first time they have felt connected to campus. We had created an atmosphere of friendship, support, and allyship that was crucial for forming a closely-knit community on campus.

The students who planned this week started voicing their concerns not only to the student government but to the university administration as well. We sat in numerous meetings, created PowerPoints, sent out surveys, researched, and presented our findings to administrators and our

student government. This led us to co-create a resolution with our student government (ASI). Since ASI is the voice of the 40,000+ students on campus, it was important to include them in these discussions when writing the resolution so we can figure out ways to have more resources for the SWANA/MENA community. The resolution's list of demands spanned a resource center and our own funding council to allow us to have our own line of money to allocate to SWANA-affiliated organizations, making it easier and more convenient to request money to put on our student-led events in a timely manner. Each demand is important in amplifying a SWANA student's basic needs of support, and resources to ensure a valuable college experience. We have gotten several of the board of directors in ASI to sponsor and support our resolution. The student leaders have taken a crucial part in this process and have built a bridge between the students and administration. These SWANA/MENA events are seen as a light and a home for many students on campus. Due to this, we started a SWANA Organization which was officially recognized in January 2020. It acts like an overarching branch embodying all SWANA identified clubs on campus. Within less than a year, the SWANA Organization has managed to triple our mailing list, membership, and turnout to events. We have built a bridge between us and the broader SWANA/MENA students, and we were nominated for Program of the Year in 2019, and won Best Emergent Organization and Best Collaborative Program in 2020.

By doing the job of the student government, student affairs, and other stakeholders, though, students disproportionately carry the burden of maintaining a sense of community. It is culturally taxing to have to constantly advocate for ourselves and to develop programming for our community without adequate support (Shammas, 2016). As we continue to debunk stereotypes and myths through SWANA Week and by showcasing our culture and traditions, we are continuously sacrificing time and energy. While we are put under the pressure of cultural taxation, we have faced many challenges and bureaucratic roadblocks in our search for answers. With no culturally competent professional staff to help us, we are often forced to run in circles in search of advice and responses while holding ourselves accountable for tasks needed to be accomplished during this process of gaining acknowledgement. Many times, we find ourselves facing the same dead ends. Having a dedicated professional staff member to help us advocate for us, support us, and lead us one step closer towards our goal of inclusion would have helped us avoid our long nights and reduced some stress placed on students (Griffin, 2019).

Despite our advocacy work, SWANA students have not yet received a resource center. Due to APARC now covering the Asian Pacific American and Desi Islander regions, as well as the SWANA/MENA community, it is basically accommodating half of the world. Due to the high volume of SWANA students seeking refuge in APARC, it has led to our community blocking the doorway, causing accessibility and fire hazard issues. Many times, we are left to sit on the floor in the center, yet still block the doorway. In addition to this, there have been some tensions between the different communities APARC is serving due to cultural differences. Since we do not have our own safe space, we receive neither the same resources nor support as other student communities. By having a resource center where the SWANA community can unite and come

together, it will lead to (a) allyship for those who do not identify, (b) job opportunities, (c) scholarship opportunities, and (d) professional staff to help us with our endeavors.

The Impact: Serving SWANA and Educating Everyone

We refer to inclusion as “the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued to fully participate” (IAC, 2021). For the SWANA population, inclusion can look like being accurately represented in data collection, having cultural centers or safe spaces, or seeing staff members that look like and understand you. It can mean entering a club fair and recognizing a familiar flag, religious symbol, or music. On campus, restaurants will have dietary options. The campus will give you access to prayer rooms/washing stations and having living-learning housing communities. When students feel represented and valued, they will feel a higher sense of belonging on campus and therefore do better academically and emotionally (Schlossberg, 1989). Our data from the second annual SWANA Week supports this. For example, 79.41% strongly agree that SWANA Week increased their sense of belonging at CSUF. Additionally, 76.47% strongly agree they feel more connected to CSUF after SWANA Week. Lastly, 82.35% strongly agree that SWANA Week positively contributed to my overall Titan Experience. Intentional programming for the SWANA community can increase engagement with the overall university. Unfortunately, for many SWANA students, institutions of higher education in the diaspora have failed to provide inclusive spaces and practices that ensure a sense of belonging.

The effect of this misrepresentation or lack of representation results in cultural taxation on the SWANA community. Cultural taxation, as defined by Amado Padilla (1994), “is the expectation placed on faculty of colour that they should address diversity-related departmental and institutional affairs...cultural taxation also refers to extra burdens that faculty experience due to their commitment to departmental and campus diversity issues or their race/ethnicity” (as cited in Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). While cultural taxation is often discussed from the faculty perspective, we need to expand this to staff and, most surprisingly, students. Often members of the SWANA community will think to themselves, “If I do not educate them, then who will?” Ahmadi and Cole (2020) write about a similar case with Muslim students who often participate in many diversity-related activities as the “educators and information providers rather than the recipients of information.” Once again, this places responsibility on students to educate their peers without structural support. While it is essential to use your voice to educate others, especially if they are intentionally misrepresenting your identity, this task can become overwhelming and eventually may lead to feeling like a burden. For example, in academia, a lot of this type of work falls on ethnic studies, but this work usually depends upon diversity initiatives and cultural centers in student affairs. However, student affairs professionals may unintentionally perpetuate racism because of their lack of cultural understanding of the SWANA identity. If people working within universities do not first understand the SWANA student experience, they will not serve them properly.

On the other hand, a SWANA-identified student affairs professional may feel like they must serve their population because no one else is willing to do so. One may think, “If not me, who?” While studying student development theory, you will find little research to help you understand and support your own community. When you attend conferences, you find no workshops addressing issues our SWANA students face every day. The purpose of these conferences is to be educational hotspots where student affairs professionals and administrators share trends, innovative ideas, and best practices. Why are we not being included? Let’s start with trends. What about the shift from invisibility to hypervisibility in the post-9/11 era (Shoman-Dajani, 2016). Innovative idea? How about all the student-initiated celebrations and workshops by the SWANA students? Best practices? We can start with the importance of accurate data collection and disaggregation to better understand SWANA enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. There is a clear need for institutions to serve the SWANA population better, but this work seems to fall on one or just a few professionals who identify as SWANA.

So here you are, a SWANA student affairs professional serving SWANA students. You hold the privilege of hearing your students’ anecdotes—their experiences, similar to your own as a college student, fuels your anger. You work for the institution that perpetuates the very things that marginalize your community. You believe students come first and are willing to be their essential advocate, but are met with compassion fatigue. Serving SWANA students may or may not be in your job description, let alone your job title, but here you are. At times, SWANA student affairs professionals doing this work may feel tokenized. You are one of a few, or so you think, because faculty/staff demographic data collection also needs improvement. How do you prevent burnout while making sure your students are empowered?

The Aftermath of Our Activism

The momentum continued even during a global online transition with the pandemic. As SWANA became a popular topic, in 2020 a philanthropist donated money to the SWANA student organization in order to continue creating educational outlets across campus. As the advocacy for institutional efforts continued, the SWANA-identified donor provided funding to hire a SWANA graduate assistant position that formally supports the SWANA population on campus. In 2022, this same donor made an endowment to SWANA programming in order to help students continue create these unique events, such as SWANA Week, that unites and advocates for the community and its needs. As SWANA leaders held student government positions during the pandemic, an Interclub Council was created in order to fund all SWANA-related student organizations by the university. The creation of an Interclub Council not only funded SWANA student organizations, but also served as a proper institutionalized space for all SWANA umbrella student organizations to collaborate in. The SWANA ICC serves as a place for representative students under the SWANA umbrella to discuss future events and ways to allocate their funds, as well as unite all regions and diverse members of the community in one room. These SWANA efforts resulted in being part of inclusive conversations on campus and pushing for the proper recognition. However, one of the main issues we had while creating the first resolution was the lack of proper

demographic data collection of SWANA students on campus. In psychological research, preferences in ethnic/racial labeling have been linked to self-esteem in Asian Americans (Kiang, 2008), racial socialization in African Americans (Anglin & Whaley, 2006), and ethnic identity exploration in Latinos and Asian American ethnic groups (Cheon et al., 2018; Malott, 2009).

The CSU system currently categorizes SWANA students under “white” or “other” which undermines SWANA/MENA students’ racial identity by whitewashing their ethnic roots. A few SWANA students from different CSUs thus came together to change the system and write a resolution to add a SWANA demographic option on the Cal State Apply application. After months of writing, presenting to the California State Student Association (CSSA), and working with the chancellor’s office, the resolution passed and will be implemented in Fall 2022. This progress resulted from the immeasurable hard work, time, and dedication of student activists.

Having SWANA in a demographic form is important to institutions worldwide as it pushes the normalization of SWANA inclusion while accurately identifying the population and its needs. “Scholars have suggested that racial/ethnic self-labeling among ethnic minorities often holds meaning that reflects how these individuals understand themselves and their perception of how others see them” (e.g., Anglin & Whaley, 2006; Ghee, 1990; Malott, 2009). SWANA continues to be in conversations on campus as Seleena Mukbel and Mary Chammas pursued student government positions to further voice concerns on campus, in addition to bringing SWANA students to the conversation. While slow progress has been made, SWANA students still experience gaps in justice and equality. For instance, in recent years Palestinian students across several campuses have been doxxed—negatively profiled on a website with a series of personal information—simply for their involvement in Palestinian organizations registered under the university. This affects the SWANA community as a whole as it underscores the need for safe spaces such as a resource center, especially because SWANA folks from different backgrounds intersect and participate in each other’s organizations.

Conclusion

As SWANA women, we have provided our narratives, experiences, research, and responses to SWANA erasure in higher education. We also acknowledge and validate the feelings of other SWANA community members. We know what it feels like to have your identity misrepresented or misunderstood. We know what it feels like to be the only SWANA person in the room. We know how heavy the weight is of carrying the whole community on your back, as you try to represent yourself as an individual while dispelling the myths people have of the community from the media and their own biases. We aim to overcome these underlying injustices in our education system by educating the readers and suggesting solutions that institutions can abide by. We urge all universities to relieve the burden of representation that SWANA students have carried for so long. We envision a future where SWANA in higher education are not forced to repeat the cycle, but instead reap the benefits of our work by picking up the pieces, moving forward, and carrying on the legacy of our activism.

Our major takeaway for readers is not the inclusion of SWANA students into the institutions of higher education as they stand today. In order to transform the university into an equitable place of learning, SWANA students must transform, too. Rather than aspire to whiteness, we urge SWANA communities to divest from the false promise of liberal inclusion. By shifting our self-consciousness (meaning, how we understand ourselves) and articulating our identities in new terms, we can build solidarity across difference among and beyond SWANA communities. This involves working within but-not-of the university and in solidarity with minority groups to challenge institutionalized SWANA erasure, which stems from interlocking structures of domination that also oppress others. Only by joining forces with other marginalized communities and engaging in a joint struggle for liberation that targets supremacist and imperialist institutions, including but not limited to universities, can SWANA students contribute to making ourselves, academia, and the world anew.

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IMPLEMENTING POLICY: NAVIGATING THE ENGLISH LEARNER ROADMAP FOR EQUITY

Allison Briceño

San José State University

Rebecca Bergey

American Institutes for Research

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to Dr. Allison Briceño, San José State University, email: allison.briceno@sjsu.edu.

ABSTRACT

This essay explores a variety of ways California's English Learner (EL) Roadmap can be used as a tool to make significant and transformative changes to provide meaningful learning opportunities for students classified as English Learners. The EL Roadmap contains 4 principles: (1) Asset-oriented and needs-responsive schools; (2) Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access; (3) System Conditions that Support Effectiveness; and (4) Alignment and Articulation Within and Across Systems. We explore each of the Roadmap's four principles and provide suggestions for ways to capitalize on the policy to improve educational opportunities for English Learners, including a focus on English *and* other languages, using research-based principles to guide local planning and continuous improvement for EL instruction and assessment, aligning resources and systems to accelerate ELs' learning, and valuing and building upon the linguistic and cultural assets students bring to school.

Keywords: english learners, multilingual students, leadership, english learner roadmap

Implementing Policy: Navigating the English Learner¹ Roadmap for Equity

California has a long and complex history of educating students classified as English Learners (ELs). With over 18 percent of students identified as ELs and 81% of ELs speaking Spanish

(California Department of Education, 2019), the racialized nature of language policies cannot be ignored (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Although most ELs are U.S. citizens, the U.S. Latinx population feels significant discrimination regardless of citizenship (Almeida et al., 2016).

California's educators face the complex task of interpreting and enacting language related policies to implement best practices for ELs. This article is an urgent call to action for education faculty to enable our graduates to capitalize on the English Learner Roadmap to make significant, systemic, transformative changes for ELs. We explore how the Roadmap's four principles can be enacted to promote educational equity and multilingualism.

The EL Roadmap

As with any policy, implementation will determine whether or not the EL Roadmap achieves its stated mission: "California schools affirm, welcome, and respond to a diverse range of EL strengths, needs, and identities" (California Department of Education, 2017). As such, it is critical that educators at all levels are knowledgeable about how the Roadmap can be a tool to make and defend decisions that improve schooling for California's ELs, their families, and the educators who serve them. The Roadmap includes the [policy](#) itself and practical [online resources](#) to support implementation, including the [research](#) employed, and several [examples](#) from the field for each principle. The EL Roadmap also aligns with many of the key goals of California's Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) priorities related to teaching, learning, and parent involvement. A [crosswalk](#) of this alignment shows the overlap of EL Roadmap principles and LCAP priorities. The Roadmap consists of four principles; within each principle various "elements" clarify the principle's intent. In March of 2020 the California Department of Education showed its continued support of the policy by awarding ten million dollars in implementation grants (CDE, 2020). The EL Roadmap delineates expected outcomes but gives freedom to individual schools and districts regarding how they choose to implement the policy. Below we address research-based ways each principle can support equity for ELs.

Principle One: Assets-oriented and Needs-responsive Schools

Building on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth and Moll's (1992) funds of knowledge models, Principle One explicitly states that ELs' languages and cultures are assets, contradicting the traditional deficit perspective regarding ELs that pervades schools (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006). It notes the positive effects of bilingualism and the wide diversity among the EL population. Savvy educators can refer to Principle One as policy that requires schools to acknowledge and build on the linguistic and cultural wealth students bring to school.

Element 1.B's statement that "no single program or instructional approach works for all EL students" can be used to resist boxed curricula or literacy practices that are intended to be used with fidelity but without attention students' strengths and needs. Instead, we can educate teachers to differentiate and be responsive to students' needs. Culturally responsive curricula and instruction are required in Element 1.A, which is an opportunity for administrators to encourage the use of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP, Paris & Alim, 2017) and multilingual teaching

practices such as *translanguaging* (García & Li, 2014). Supporting teachers to collaborate with diverse families and communities will also be critical, as educators are typically underprepared to achieve these partnerships effectively (García, 2004). Increasing multilingualism can also assist in the development of safe and inclusive school environments and partnerships with families and communities. Key questions education faculty can ask themselves include:

Does our program prepare graduates to...

- a. Develop multilingual schools that are dedicated to sustaining students' cultures?
- b. Ensure that programs, curricula, and instruction are culturally responsive and tailored toward individuals rather than groups?
- c. Create school climates that are culturally sustaining, safe and inviting for all students and families?

These questions may help a program consider how to move toward a deeper equity-orientation at the program level and rely less on individual faculty members' initiatives.

Principle Two: Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access

Principle Two of the EL Roadmap provides specificity regarding expectations for instruction for ELs, with an emphasis on intellectual quality of instruction and meaningful access. Intellectual quality involves instruction, curriculum, and materials that are rigorous, standards-based, and integrated with content (Element 2.F). Meaningful access to the curriculum (Element 2.D) refers to students having the opportunity to engage with content through supports such as integrated and designated ELD (Element 2.A), scaffolds (Element 2.F), home language support (Element 2.E) and choice of instructional programs (Element 2.G). In essence, Principle Two enables administrators to defend decisions that support trauma-informed pedagogy, home language instruction, translanguaging, and bilingual programs. Educators who want to provide a culturally and linguistically responsive education for their students now have the policy backing to do so.

Principle Two also suggests that to ensure meaningful access, schools should carefully consider and analyze their programmatic and placement policies in light of current research as well as their school's data and student outcomes. For example, when discussing new bilingual programs, administrators can point to research suggesting that middle grade EL students in two-way language programs are reclassified as English proficient at higher rates than EL students who are in English only programs (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Key questions education faculty can ask themselves include:

Does our program prepare graduates to...

- a. Understand what meaningful instruction for ELs looks like?
- b. Provide equitable learning opportunities for ELs and all students?
- c. Examine and reflect on implications of school programmatic and placement policies for student outcomes?

In summary, Principle Two provides administrators with a legal backing for culturally and linguistically relevant instruction that provides equitable learning opportunities for ELs.

Principle Three: System Conditions that Support Effectiveness

Principle Three speaks to systems that need to be in place for effective teaching and meaningful learning for ELs to occur. It provides the reasoning for leadership to consider how resource allocation, professional development, and goal setting can be utilized to support ELs and their needs. It also provides explicit guidance toward directing “adequate resources” to serve ELs (Element 3.B), enabling leaders to go beyond Titles I and III funds. Ensuring that EL families’ voices are heard in the school budgeting process, as is required in the LCAP, can help determine the best use of funds. This is particularly important in California, where the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provides differentiated funding to schools based on student populations served, their achievement, and needs.

Principle Three suggests that systems utilize culturally and linguistically valid and reliable assessments to understand ELs as individuals and to evaluate how well the schools are meeting ELs’ needs (Element 3.C). Although there is a dearth of assessments that are adequate for measuring the strengths of ELs in every context, educators may begin with existing assessments and complement them with continuous formative assessment (Bailey & Carroll, 2015).

Element 3.D suggests that systems are responsible for the capacity building of educators, including professional development, leadership development, and collaboration time for in-service teachers, as well as efforts to create a pipeline of qualified teachers, including bilingual teachers. This element opens opportunities for professional development that specifically addresses ELs’ needs, such as trauma-informed (Morgan et al., 2015), culturally sustaining (Paris & Alim, 2017), holistic bilingual (Escamilla et al., 2014), and translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) pedagogies. Finally, school and district leaders should develop system-wide capacity for understanding and using data about ELs to inform programmatic and instructional choices. Key questions education faculty can ask themselves include:

Does our program prepare graduates to...

- a. Create clear goals, systems, and structures for EL access, language development and academic achievement?
- b. Invest sufficient resources appropriately to support EL learning?
- c. Support teacher capacity to provide meaningful, relevant instruction and build staff capacity to understand data about EL learning outcomes and address EL learning needs?
- d. Appropriately utilize culturally and linguistically valid and reliable assessments to guide programmatic and instructional decisions?

These questions, along with the other three principles, should be considered within the context of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and LCAP.

Principle Four: Alignment and Articulation Within and Across Systems

Principle Four emphasizes the need for better alignment across educational segments to create a more cohesive, articulated schooling experience for ELs. Currently, early education programs are distinct entities from the elementary and middle schools that students attend, and high schools may

be in a different district entirely, although [recent efforts](#) seek to align early childhood and early elementary. Community colleges and universities are additional systems. Communication among schools, both within and between systems, is typically weak or even non-existent, allowing students to fall through the cracks. This can result in loss of achievement, lower self-esteem, and higher drop-out rates (Alspaugh, 1998). For migrant and highly mobile students, the disjuncture they experience between schools can be particularly problematic (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). Different requirements, data systems, and general bureaucracy can impede transfer of academic records, delaying reclassification and other academic services. In addition, other community-based programs that provide key services to students often have little interaction with teachers and schools. Creating coherency across educational systems (Element 4.C) is central to Principle Four.

Principle Four also charges schools with providing college-readiness pathways for ELs. When students are tracked into English as a Second Language courses, they can receive limited access to rigorous content and often lack the ‘a through g’ courses required for college (Callahan et al., 2010). Moreover, students who matriculate in community colleges or universities often require non-credit remedial coursework, as expectations between high school and higher education are nebulous (Kanno & Cromley, 2013).

Principle 4 asks administrators to reallocate funds to support ELs and their teachers (Element 4.B). For example, funds could be applied toward professional development for research-based language development practices, such as the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) program (Manship et al., 2016), Guided Language Acquisition Design (Deussen et al., 2014), or Paired Literacy (Escamilla et al., 2014). Funds could be reallocated to address creative scheduling, coursework that better integrates language with rigorous content, and increased alignment between schooling systems. Partnerships and communication with after school organizations that enrich, rather than remediate, could also provide ELs with the extra academic supports that would advance their language and academic skills. Key questions education faculty can ask themselves include:

Does our program prepare graduates to...

- a. Design approaches and programs for continuity, alignment and articulation across systems that specifically address ELs’ strengths and challenges?
- b. Implement schedules and resources to build partnerships with afterschool and community entities to provide additional support and time for ELs?
- c. Design EL approaches and programs to be coherent across schools, districts, initiatives, and across the state?

Principle Four provides administrators with opportunities to create structures that ensure ELs’ success both within individual schools and across educational settings.

Conclusion

The actions suggested in this article will require brave, out-of-the-box thinking and creative resource allocation. If implemented well, the EL Roadmap could foster a student-centered, asset-based approach that elevates EL students’ heritage, recognizes their contribution to a multilingual society, and shifts schooling toward a dignity frame, which would, “Enable the cultivation of one’s

full personhood and thus preclude overly narrow reforms that reduce students' rich humanity to their English proficiency" (Poza, 2021, p. 484). Intended to replace a pervasive deficit-orientation (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006), the Roadmap acknowledges the wide diversity of ELs and moves away from a monolithic, monolingual orientation toward the need for instructional solutions that are responsive to individual students' needs. The Roadmap is not a silver bullet. Instead, it is an opportunity for educators to transform education for ELs. Table One summarizes some of the important policy shifts represented by the Roadmap. The prior policy column includes examples of both the general characteristics as well as specific legislation. Note that some of these policies remain in existence and as such, this shift should be considered along a continuum as policies are revised rather than a specific timeline.

Table 1*Important Policy Shifts in the EL Roadmap*

Prior policies	EL Roadmap
Prescriptive, mandate-driven compliance (e.g., NCLB)	Setting a vision and mission for California schools with research-based principles to guide local planning and continuous improvement
K-12 focus (e.g., NCLB, California Common Core State Standards and ELD Standards, ELA/ELD Framework)	Explicit recognition of early childhood education and community colleges and universities as crucial parts of the education system; need for alignment across educational settings
Focus on English proficiency (e.g., NCLB, ESSA assessment requirements)	Focus on English plus other languages
One-size fits all approaches (e.g., NCLB, Prop 227)	Responsive to the needs of diverse EL students
Deficit-orientation (e.g., NCLB, Proposition 227)	Assets-orientation; value and build upon the linguistic and cultural assets students bring
Limited focus on providing the professional learning and support teachers need to respond to needs of ELs (e.g., NCLB, Proposition 227)	LEAs required to provide teachers with the learning opportunities and resources needed to ensure ELs have equitable access to the full curriculum
Literacy and English taught for the sake of English literacy (e.g., NCLB, Proposition 227)	Literacy, English and other languages taught to provide voice to EL students and prepare all students for civic participation in a global community

Research will be critically important to support ongoing implementation of the types of educational changes addressed above. Studies that explore replicable, equitable family

participation structures would help ensure that minoritized voices are heard. Also needed are studies that identify efficient, productive resource allocation strategies that are truly responsive to EL students' needs. Since Dual Language schools are increasing in popularity and there is a current dearth of bilingual educators across the state and country (Sutcher et al., 2016), studies that identify ways to effectively recruit and train bilinguals to become educators is needed. A critical piece of the puzzle will be the development of more valid, reliable measures that are culturally and linguistically relevant. Large scale, longitudinal research is needed to understand how assessment and placement policies influence EL learning opportunities. Studies that document and replicate alignment across school systems and productive, inclusive school-family and school-community partnerships would be particularly helpful. In short, research on any aspect of the implementation of the EL Roadmap would be a significant contribution to the field.

After two decades of Proposition 227 repressing bilingual education, the trifecta of Proposition 58, Global California 2030, and the EL Roadmap represent possibilities in moving toward greater equity within California if educators are willing to make brave, and possibly unpopular, decisions. However, we must not forget history; it is important to make systematic changes that do not ebb and flow with the tide. Despite significant gains for ELs in California, national anti-immigrant sentiment continues to threaten progress. Future educators should be prepared to support the development of equitable, multilingual schools and simultaneously combat linguistic and cultural hegemony during both supportive and contrarian political environments.

Note: The first author participated in the EL Roadmap working group.

NOTES

¹ Although we resist the deficit orientation of the term English Learner, we use it in this paper because it is the legal term in the EL Roadmap and other California education policies.

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LOSING HOPE...BUT NOT LOST HOPE: PERSISTENCE OF UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Jaime L. Del Razo

Vassar College

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jaime L. Del Razo, Vassar College, 124 Raymond Avenue, Box 132, Poughkeepsie, NY 12604. Email: jdelrazo@vassar.edu

ABSTRACT

This article presents a qualitative study of how undocumented students experience a unique dimension of legal oppression in the U.S. that results in diminishing their hope in a country that they consider their home. Throughout this study and with the use of a Critical Legal Studies perspective, the author interrogates the role that U.S. immigration law plays in creating hostile and, many times, hopeless scenarios for undocumented youth trying to receive an education. By identifying the ways that undocumented youth face both *de jure* and *de facto* detrimental consequences, this study demonstrates how a double layer of legal oppression is formed that is omnipresent in the minds and lives of undocumented students. It is argued that, as educators, it is important to comprehend that undocumented students live under the constant threat of legal enforcement as they traverse the U.S. educational system from K-12 through college. As classroom instructors, this unique dimension is not always apparent because we either do not know that someone is undocumented, or, unless we are undocumented, we do not sufficiently understand what it means to be undocumented. This article attempts to help better understand this experience through the voices of college-bound, undocumented youth from California and Arizona.

Keywords: undocumented students, critical legal studies, de jure & de facto oppression, hope

Introduction

“There is no such thing as throw-away kids.” As a long-time educator, I have always held this to be true, and I teach it as well. This concept may be something that many educators believe but,

unfortunately, not all educators practice. Students in K-12 schools across the U.S. are still sent out of classrooms, expelled, and regulated as being the “bad kids” (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2014). When it comes to undocumented youth, they, too, are often disposed of. However, the portrayal of undocumented students is often two-sided. On the one hand, they are seen as resilient, even superhuman kids who, despite all their challenges, manage to achieve academically at the highest levels. On the other hand, they are referred to as lawbreakers because of their undocumented status; they are too-often treated and reminded that their presence is “illegal,” so they should be happy for whatever this country provides for them. In both views, they are considered different. In such an environment, it is not uncommon for anyone to begin losing hope. This article looks at undocumented students who have begun to lose hope -- but have not given up and are not lost to hope. The research question guiding this study was “How do the challenges of being undocumented affect undocumented students’ hopes and dreams?”

Undocumented students in the U.S. continue to experience a unique dimension of legal oppression. To classroom instructors, this unique dimension is not always apparent because we either do not know that someone is undocumented, or, unless we ourselves are undocumented, we lack sufficient understanding of what it means to be undocumented. For example, we may not understand why a high-achieving student who never has been in trouble with the law would fear seeing a police car or why a college-bound, low-income student would skip out on a FAFSA (Free Application for Student Aid) workshop that their friends are attending. Yet these are realities for undocumented students, which you will find in this article.

One of the unique challenges facing undocumented students in U.S. public schools is the persistent stigma of “illegality” that surfaces through various legal and public means (Abrego, 2011; Del Real, 2019; Yasuike, 2019). This form of legal oppression makes it difficult to hope and dream of a future. Yet many undocumented students continue to dream of a better tomorrow. Many have even taken on the identity of DREAMer -- A nod to the DREAM Act¹ but also a symbol of a group of people who still dare to dream for a better tomorrow despite their challenges. The idea that undocumented students still dream is good evidence of a resilient population. However, resilience is not enough. Educators can play a crucial role in supporting undocumented students’ transition from high school to college (Murillo, 2017). Educators can also knowingly, and unknowingly, deter those students from pursuing college.

The challenges of undocumented students are reduced (for some) by federal programs that show some compassion for these students’ plight, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)². According to the Migration Policy Institute, there were 652,880 DACA recipients as of September 2019 (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals [DACA] Data Tools, 2019). However, many are left out because they are ineligible, or others chose not to apply because they simply did not trust that this program would continue. Furthermore, DACA is not a permanent solution. However, federal programs, even good ones, can shift depending on who is in the White House. For example, during the Obama administration and after considerable pressure from immigrant rights activists, DACA was implemented at the end of President Obama’s first term (Preston & Cushman, 2012). However, within one year of succeeding President Obama, President

Trump tried to eliminate the DACA program (Shear & Davis, 2017). Fortunately, the courts kept the program alive for current DACA recipients (Shear & Davis, 2017), but it was a stark reminder that without Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR), any protections for undocumented students will be temporary and dependent on the mood of the White House. Even students who benefited from DACA still encountered, and continue to encounter, scary, traumatic events in their daily lives and are limited in the careers they are legally eligible for, despite being DACA holders.

Lastly, the unity of police and ICE (referred to herein as “law enforcement”) working together intensifies a panopticon state of surveillance that undocumented students experience in spaces in and out of school. This unity or partnership is protected under INA section 287(g), which authorizes states to carry out immigration enforcement (Aleinikoff et al., 2020). Their experience of heightened suspicion and surveillance can lead undocumented students to leave school. The nexus of law enforcement surveillance and negative interactions with teachers can result in either losing hope or finding new resilience in determining whether to attend college. More importantly, undocumented students bring with them to school their experiences with law enforcement -- especially the fear and anxiety they experience. Hence, regardless of whether undocumented students have been held by police or immigration enforcement, there are constant reminders that legal enforcement is always waiting around the corner (so to speak) as many undocumented students move through the U.S. educational system. The result, at times, is a sense of losing hope but never losing it entirely. The purpose of this study is to examine how the discovery of interactions with law enforcement (perceived and actual) intersect with undocumented students’ hopes and dreams of getting a full education.

Review of relevant literature

Material Challenges

The law is an important part of the social mindset and a large part of our social order. This is most evident when discussing undocumented students. One court case, *Plyler v. Doe*, perhaps more than any other, has made the biggest impact in defining the relationship between undocumented students and U.S. schools.

In 1977, a city ordinance governing several Texas school districts, specifically the Tyler Independent School District, claimed that undocumented students were placing an extreme financial burden on the state of Texas and that U.S. citizen and legal resident students were receiving a substandard education due to the costs of educating undocumented students (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

The class action lawsuit that was filed eventually was argued at the U.S. Supreme Court. In a close 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court struck down this ordinance as being unconstitutional by citing the Equal Protection Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Clause states, “...nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws” (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). Litigants arguing on behalf of *Plyler* claimed that undocumented students could not be considered “persons within its jurisdiction,” since undocumented students were in the

United States without authorization. The majority of the Court disagreed with this premise by stating that undocumented students were persons in the general sense and that the Fourteenth Amendment did not distinguish between authorized and unauthorized persons in any jurisdiction. The majority opinion of the Court also stated that undocumented students had no control of their current unauthorized status nor had any power to rectify it since they were minors brought here by their parents (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982). Hence, *Plyler v. Doe* provided all students, including undocumented students, a public K-12 education in the United States. The *Plyler* decision was huge in its impact and reach since it provided a very powerful precedent that deterred any state from denying public education to undocumented students. But at the same time, given the close 5-4 decision, the case also reminded everyone in the country about the divisive issue of immigration in the United States. This divisiveness continues today.

Psychological Challenges

Scholars have researched many aspects of the lives of undocumented youth in the United States, who are considered some of the most vulnerable and marginalized students on school campuses (Chavez, et al., 2007; Covarrubias & Lara, 2014; Green, 2003; Motomura, 2008; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Patler et al., 2021; Perry, 2006; Valadez et al., 2021, Velarde Pierce et al., 2021). Research has shown, through the voices of undocumented students themselves, that these students not only endure the same conditions as impoverished communities but face an added social barrier of “illegality” on their road to college (González, Plata, Garcia, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003; Green, 2003; Perez Huber & Malagon, 2007; Perez, 2009). It is this “illegality” that often imposes on these students what Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) call, “negative social-mirroring,” described in more detail below.

Immigration scholars Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), remind us that immigrant children enter the U.S. with positive attitudes toward education, but these positive attitudes cannot be maintained under repeated layers of hostility. These hostilities are repeatedly shown through what the authors call “negative social mirroring.” They (2001) write, “when these reflections are received in a number of mirrors including the media, the classroom, and the street, the outcome can be psychological devastation.” (p. 99) This psychological devastation shows up repeatedly for those of us who work with undocumented students; in my own research, the devastation is evident as many undocumented students have reported feelings of isolation and despair. Furthermore, this negative psychology can work against the motivation one needs to pursue an education because it attacks the individual’s self-worth, which is essential for self-motivation. Too often, this multiple crisis of mind results in students giving up their investment in education.

Legal Challenges

Isolation can be both social and legal. A key component of social or legal isolation is when a person has been placed (or places oneself) outside a particular space -- including their schools, home, and communities -- due to the threat of punishment or as a form of punishment. Foucault (1995) discussed how even the threat of punishment was enough to be considered punishment:

The suspect, as such, always deserved a certain punishment; one could not be the object of suspicion and be completely innocent. Suspicion implied an element of demonstration as regards the judge, the mark of a certain degree of guilt as regards the suspect, and a limited form of penalty as regards the punishment. (p. 42)

Foucault reminds us of two things in the quote above. First, that becoming a suspect is sufficient to impose a layer of guilt and removal of innocence. Second, that the threat of punishment is a form of punishment. The impact of trying to teach and learn with a threat hanging over one's head due to immigration enforcement has general detrimental effects on all children, undocumented or not (Ee & Gándara, 2020). In the media and through immigration enforcement, undocumented people have been stigmatized as a suspect class and removal has been introduced as a form of punishment despite the state's denial that deportation is a form of punishment (López et al., 2019). Once aware of the dangers of being removed because of their immigration status, undocumented students recognize the importance of avoiding the authorities despite committing no crime.

A state of surveillance that Foucault describes above is evident in today's experience of undocumented students at the schools they attend. The "School-to-Deportation" pipeline is something that undocumented students must deal with, threatened by those who use it as a caution or a deterrent (Maloney et al., 2021). Maloney et al. explain how this establishes a continued sense of surveillance that undocumented students face at school. Further, the authors' findings describe how even the threat of law enforcement can have negative effects on undocumented students. This negative effect was especially true with cities with 287(g) partnerships that increase immigration enforcement because they have a negative effect on college-going rates for undocumented students (Bellows, 2021). The idea that sanctuary communities can counter these negative effects is not well supported, for even in communities classified as sanctuary cities or sanctuary states, the effect of this classification (sanctuary) makes small changes to higher education attainment by undocumented students (Corral, 2021). Corral discusses how sanctuary is insufficient and limiting because "sanctuary policies do not provide federal legal protections like DACA or lead states to subsidize tuition at public colleges and universities" (Corral, 2021, p. 11). Hence, the state of suspicion that undocumented students live under is threatening and detrimental to any hope that exists.

This brief review of key literature demonstrates that the challenges for undocumented students are legal, material, and psychological. Together, they undermine undocumented students' ability to receive a K-12 education and reach for a college education. Immigration enforcement, the threat of that enforcement (whether real or not) is sufficient to challenge and, in some cases, for undocumented students to lose hope to achieve a college education and a legitimate space in our society.

Theoretical Framework

This work is informed, in part, by Critical Legal Studies (CLS). This field of study may be considered "dead as a doornail" (Stewart, 2020) by some of its founders, but it remains relevant to

this author. Critical Legal Studies presents the dialectic of indeterminacy about the virtue of law that it bestows on itself. CLS asks us to consider the larger context of the political landscape it resides in (Nesiah, 2021). This is certainly the case when examining U.S. immigration laws.

A nation-state will take as its right, the ability to regulate its own immigration policy -- who it allows in and who it doesn't. However, national immigration policy should be set within a broader international context that the nation-state has historically participated in. CLS complicates notions of rights, not against rights themselves, but rather

Grounds the assessment of any particular invocation and deployment of rights talk in strategic and politically anchored analysis of the particular legal terrain on which a struggle will be fought (Nesiah, 2021, p. 18).

This is the case of the United States. For example, if a country has a right to enforce its borders and make it impossible (and dangerous) to cross them, does it have any responsibility to those who die at the border? Further, for those who make it across the border and provide services to the host nation, does the criminal implications it bestows on those who crossed its border extend to those who have made a home here, often the only home they know? Last, how is this situated when we examine the historical and problematic nature of establishing borders especially through war and conquest? I have found Critical Legal Studies to be a useful lens in examining "the law as a political terrain" that it is.

Using CLS to theoretically ground my work and distinguish between *de jure* and *de facto* forms of oppression, gives me much help in analyzing my data. Having spent several decades working to helping students from marginalized communities go to college, I wanted to understand why the oppression that undocumented students felt differed from the oppression I saw other students from marginalized communities go through. I came to realize that, though students who are not undocumented but came from marginalized communities experienced real oppression, the law itself could be "taken to trial." That is, marginalized but not undocumented students had a chance to defend themselves using the legal system, while recognizing that institutional bias continues to persist against people of color, especially Brown and Black communities. Nonetheless, the opportunity to access legal aid, troubled as it is, was there. However, undocumented students had significantly fewer opportunities due to their unauthorized status in the United States; the law was explicitly *not* on their side. The law that makes it permissible to break up families by entering homes and removing hardworking parents from their children or removing children from their parents, is a law from which the undocumented had no recourse because it often operated within the letter of the law (*de jure*). This difference allows the adults in the lives of undocumented students -- including some of their teachers and counselors -- to maintain the *de jure* oppression these students live under.

Distinguishing between *de jure* and *de facto* is important because of the different ways that oppression operates within our legal system. According to the legal definitions, *de jure* is defined as "by right; by justice; lawful; legitimate" (Gifis, 1996, p. 134) while *de facto* is defined as "in fact; by virtue of the deed or accomplishment; in reality; actually" (Gifis, 1996, p. 131). Generally

speaking, *de facto* oppression exists today in various forms, but *de jure* oppression seems to be less visible in U.S. society. This is not the case when we examine the lives of undocumented people in the U.S. because immigration law requires the removal of those who are in the country without authorization, which means undocumented students face the constant, legal threat of removal. This is an example of *de jure* oppression. The law is also very much a part of the *de facto* oppression of undocumented students. For example, Arizona's SB1070 did not explicitly state that it would promote racial discrimination, but the effect of this bill resulted in racial discrimination against People of Color, especially Latinos, in the state of Arizona (Campbell, 2011). This effect became a policy of suspicion and doubt of those who were "suspected" of being in the country without authorization. Although *de facto* discrimination is not something explicitly written in the law, it is nonetheless related in its interpretation and eventual implementation, which is how unwritten policy is constructed and delivered. This combination of *de facto* oppression and the *de jure* oppression of removal creates a double layer of oppression for undocumented students. Both are systemic, both are harmful, and both derive from existing immigration law.

The suspicious environment that many undocumented immigrants live under is a product of our immigration legal structure that results in a caste system. Kevin Johnson (2007) wrote that

Lawful immigrants have fewer rights than citizens and undocumented immigrants even fewer. The denial of even more rights to undocumented immigrants relegates them to exploitation in the secondary labor market, with low wages and few legal protections. This operates to create a sort of racial caste system that cannot be reconciled with modern conceptions of liberty and equality (p. 92).

Though not written in the law, the exploitation of undocumented people that Johnson describes in the previous quote is produced by a *de facto* form of oppression, while the "denial of even more rights to undocumented immigrants" is effectively a form of *de jure* oppression given the limited opportunities of undocumented people to work with authorization and to attend U.S. colleges.

Unger (1983) discusses the importance of groups and individuals having the means to represent themselves in a democratic society regardless of their place in society. He cautions about the danger of removing these means:

Social oppression contributes to political isolation and defeat, which in turn reinforce oppression. A segment of the population then finds itself denied the substance of citizenship and right holding. This deprivation jeopardizes the legitimacy of the entire constitutional and social order (p. 606).

Unger's description of the recursive relationship between social oppression and political isolation depicts the cruel cycle experienced by disenfranchised, oppressed communities. This article focuses on how this oppression occurs based on immigration status -- specifically how this occurs as both *de facto* and *de jure*, and how this affects the treatment of undocumented students.

Lastly, this theoretical framework is also influenced by my own lived experience as a Chicano, son of Mexican immigrants, growing up in a predominantly immigrant community of Mexicanos and Chicanos in the barrio (neighborhood) of Boyle Heights in Los Angeles, California. Further, I am thoroughly committed to the college recruitment (outreach) of people of color given the structural racial inequality that has existed for too long. My involvement in outreach began in my first year in college, speaking at high schools and other colleges. I had just finished four years of service in the U.S. Army and my college experience seemed worlds away from the life I had lived as a soldier. This inspired me to work on trying to provide options other than the military, since my own experience in the Gulf War made me rethink my views of military service.

Taken together, CLS and my own positionality provided a lens through which I conducted my study. It combined experiential knowledge, not as an undocumented student but as a person with close ties to the undocumented community, and a theory (CLS) that provided a language for the unique situations of the undocumented.

Methods

The data for this study comes from a larger mixed-methods study that examines the college matriculation of undocumented students (Del Razo, 2012). During the analysis of the larger study, findings were surfaced about the way law and law enforcement (local and federal) significantly influences undocumented students' daily lives. Hence, this study looks in depth at these phenomena. More important, it probes how law enforcement affected their ability to both be students and exist in a society with a constant legal threat.

Research Design

The research design involved multiple steps. First step was to identify student data that mentions law enforcement (local or federal) and its effects (usually detrimental) on their college matriculation. This data mostly arose when the subjects were asked if safety was an issue for them and other undocumented students. Secondly, within that subset of data, it was further examined what of the law and/or law enforcement created a hostile environment for them as they pursued the possibility of going to college. Most students in that subset indicated that immigration enforcement was the primary concern for their safety and the safety of their families. Last, I chose exemplary profiles of students that address many fears of continuing their education and the persistent challenge of staying hopeful in the face of those fears, whether or not they ever became real.

Recruitment and Participant Demographics

Participants were undocumented youth from California and Arizona. The site from which I recruited eight California subjects was from a community organization that I will call Opening the Gates of College (OGC)³, located in a southern city of Los Angeles County; the organization offers information and support to college-bound, undocumented students. The mission of OGC

was to provide a “safe space” that delivered academic and legal advice to undocumented students every semester (twice a year). The term “safe space” was used intentionally to highlight the importance that safety plays in the students’ lives. Through my own work with undocumented students, and through my preliminary findings in small pilot studies conducted before this study, I found that the issue of safety from immigration authorities due to their unauthorized presence was paramount in the lives of undocumented students and their families. The findings in this study confirmed as much.

Recruitment of Arizona students came from an email solicitation that utilized snowball methodology to place me in contact with these students. An ally and advocate in the state of Arizona forwarded my request to five of her students, who then agreed to be interviewed. I traveled to Arizona to conduct the interviews with these five students and remained in contact with them, via email, for follow-up interviews. Recruitment for the remaining California students needed for this study used the same recruitment strategy, and I traveled around Southern California collecting the interviews.

Table 1, below and from the larger study, provides general descriptions of the subjects. It gives their pseudonym (Name), gender, country of origin, the age at which they were brought to the United States (*no unaccompanied youth were included in this study*), the state they considered their state of residence, and their household size and income.

<i>CMUS (College Matriculation of Undocumented Students) Study</i> <i>General Descriptives of Subjects</i> <i>Table 1</i>						
Name	Gender	Country of Origin	Age brought to the U.S.	State of Residence	Household Size	~Household Income
Agusto	Male	Mexico	1 year old	California	6	\$20,000
Carmen	Female	Mexico	3 years old	Arizona	5	\$12,000
Susana	Female	Mexico	8 years old	Arizona	6	\$30,000
Sylvia	Female	Mexico	11 years old	California	5	\$10,000

Interviews

My interviews were semi-structured and conducted according to Brinkmann & Kvale’s definition of interviews as conversations “where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014, p. 4). The conversation was allowed to develop, guided by the questions in my interview protocol. After interviewees gave oral consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interview was often emotional and personal disclosures were shared.

Because this study is part of my bigger study, the interview protocol I developed and used asked many questions, such as “*Tell me what it’s like to be an AB540 student and attending*

college.” and “*What are some of the biggest challenges?*” However, the interview questions that generated the most data for this study were: “*Is safety an issue for you and other AB540 students? How would you define a “safe space”? Do you have a place like that at your school? Do you have a place like this outside of school?*” This question appears midway in my interviews with the undocumented students when, I assumed, a stronger sense of rapport had developed between the interviewee and myself.

I chose this interview data for this study because references to immigration enforcement surfaced across most of my data. The interview space that can be created between interviewer and interviewee can be a space of trust and vulnerability, where sharing of personal emotions and thoughts occur. I was fortunate to have experienced this space with my interviewees. This was partly because of my own positionality, described above in the theoretical framework section.

Analysis

Coding, memo writing, and journal reflections were my main form of analysis, along with writing groups with peers and senior scholars in my department. The analysis was iterative, in that one form of analysis informed and guided other forms of analysis. For example, my freest form of written expression occurred when I wrote in my field journal. After spending a day or two away from my journal entry, I would return to it to determine whether that entry deserved closer analysis. If it did, I would expand it into an analytical memo that served as a bridge between my journal entries and the written findings that appear in the findings section below. Further, my memos generated codes for the study, and through the coding process, new memos arose. As Saldaña writes, “coding and analytical memo writing are concurrent qualitative data analytical activities” (Saldaña, 2015, p. 44); I confirmed this throughout the analysis portion of my study. I also employed first-cycle and second-cycle coding techniques as defined by Saldaña (2015); they are further described below.

I coded only my interview data and I used “initial coding” as first-cycle coding because it “creates a starting point to provide the researcher analytic leads for further exploration” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 149). Some of the codes I generated were “surveillance,” “fear,” “legal threats,” and “not fair,” which described how many undocumented students in my study felt about their current state of existence (and that of their families) in the United States. This “initial coding” was followed by second-cycle coding and categorization as a means of “reorganizing and condensing the vast array of initial analytic details” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 298). The categories formed from my codes were “losing hope,” “dehumanization,” and “legal oppression,” which led to some themes embedded in the following findings.

The themes constructed from my categories were normalized states of fear, fear of breaking up the family, dehumanizing school experiences, and losing hope. The job of generating meaning from these data was facilitated by mapping my codes, categories and themes on a table to see how each was composed by the prior. An example of this can be seen in Table 2 below.

Theme Development for “Losing Hope” Table 2		
Key Codes	Categories	Themes
Not Fair	Developing hopelessness	Losing Hope that laws will ever change to help me be part of my society – <i>As constituted by its categories</i>
Want to give up		
Not changing for me		
Law is different for us	Legal Oppression	
Legal threats		
More bad laws		
Scared of police & ICE		
What’s the point?	Do right but bad things don’t change	
We’re good students		
Did what was told		

Table 2 above demonstrates my thought process of clustering key codes into categories, and subsequently clustering categories to develop the themes mentioned above that will be exemplified in the findings below.

Findings

To humanize my four subjects’ stories, I chose to use their stories below to exemplify themes generated during the data analysis. These four subjects represent the key findings surfaced across 16 subjects. A discussion section follows the findings.

Susana: A normalized state of fear

Susana is originally from Sonora, Mexico, where she lived until the age of eight. It was then that her father, whom she had never met, sent for her and her mother to join him in the United States. Susana’s migration occurred during the cold winter month of January as she traveled across the Sonora/Arizona desert. Susana found it too difficult to talk about her journey but mentioned that it was scary for her. At the time of our interview, Susana was a graduating high school senior and lived with her parents, two cousins, and her aunt in the Phoenix area. Susana had decided to take off the first semester of college, while she worked to raise money to pay her college tuition, and the university where she was admitted agreed to deferred enrollment. Susana planned to major in early education and aspired to be a preschool teacher.

Despite these important ambitions to educate young children, Susana did not feel safe in this country. Susana described how safety feels for her as an undocumented student, and her reaction whenever she sees a police car:

There is always a thing that if I get caught by the police then I am going to get deported like that (she snaps her finger). If you are documented, then the idea of driving next to a cop, you don't even worry about being deported. But for me, there is always this fear that the cop may do something to me. Oh my God, what if this car is not working? What if they stop me? It happens to me every single time, every time I see a cop. My heart stops! I know I don't look it, but I feel so scared. There is still that feeling that I know I am undocumented. My whole life could end with us being stopped by the cops. This thought always freaks me out. Instead of being safe when I see a cop, I feel scared. And I feel scared for my parents, as well. If they got deported, it would be hard. It's very difficult. You can't even go out to the store without feeling like this. It's hard.

Above, Susana describes living under this fear of constant criminal vigilance, as did so many other interviewees. Susana tries to continue focusing on school and developing into an adult, but this legal surveillance or threat of apprehension can be torturous. In this case, "law enforcement" is a more appropriate term to use than just "the law," because it involves an interpretation of the law by the police. However, these same police officers are knowledgeable about the law and represent the law through their job as law enforcers.

The fear reflected in the quote above is informed by a life of living under *de jure* oppression that is empowered by our immigration legal system, which makes Susana feel like she is the broken one, not the system. This example shows how difficult and isolating living while undocumented can be, especially when one considers that Susana did not feel that she could receive legal help -- since it was the legal system that she feared (an example of sustained *de jure* oppression). Susana identifies the emotion of fear linked to a police officer when she said, "But for me, there is always this fear that the cop may do something to me. Oh my God, what if this car is not working? What if they stop me?" This heightened sense of fear is linked to the real possibility that she can be deported if any of the two scenarios above occurs (i.e., car not working or getting stopped) because of law enforcement's strong connections with immigration authorities in her home state of Arizona. For example, in the case of Arizona's SB1070, this law mandated that state law enforcement officials check the immigration status of any person one comes into legal contact with (such as at police checkpoints or being pulled over), if they have reasonable suspicion that the person is in the U.S. without authorization (State of Arizona, 2010). So, when Susana says, "the cop may do something to me," she refers directly to this law and how it can lead to her or her parents' deportation, which is very traumatic for undocumented youth (Rojas-Flores, Clements, Hwang Koo, & London, 2017).

I remind the reader that this event happened while she was attending school, as do many millions of other students, who are not undocumented and feel no fear. Susana was not stopped by the police, but just being near them was sufficient to arouse this terrifying emotional response (or punishment, as Foucault suggested), which is not irrational but a natural reaction to living in a state of *de jure* oppression.

The constant reminder of possible removal (deportation) from their U.S. homeland was unique to this population, a fear that was shared by all students in this study. Another example is Augusto's story.

Agusto: Fear of breaking up the family

Agusto is from Jalisco, Mexico, and at 1 ½ years of age he came by plane to the U.S. on travel visas with his mother and older sister. His father met the family in Los Angeles, where they eventually settled in a southern part of Los Angeles County. The family eventually grew to six with the arrival of Agusto's little sister and brother. Like many other undocumented students with a mixed-status family (Taylor et al., 2011), Agusto lives with siblings who are citizens, while he remains undocumented due to no eligible pathways to citizenship for him.

At the time of the interview, Agusto planned to attend a local community college and major in Engineering or Business. Agusto recollects the real threat that the immigration legal system had on him: "With the situation that I am in, knowing immigration can pop into my house and they can take me and my parents away and leave my little brother and sister all alone and I won't know what will happen to them. That is what we live with." Like other subjects in my study who lived in mixed-status families, Agusto exemplifies multiple layers of fear that undocumented students experience as they not only fear the removal of themselves and their parents, but fear what will happen to other family members (usually young ones) who are citizens. Agusto describes the real threat of removal by immigration authorities in this quote. This unique, real threat reminds us that the police are not just misinterpreting the law because of bias they may harbor (though this happens, as well), but many are operating within the legal parameters of their job as law enforcers whose jobs, when cooperating with immigration authorities, is to report people such as Agusto to immigration and customs enforcement. It is important to note that this threat of removal and splitting up a mixed-status family is real and legal. Under current U.S. immigration law, it becomes legal to remove undocumented people and split up their families despite, in many cases, the longevity of their time in the U.S. and contributions (economic and otherwise) to the country. The threat of deportation for undocumented people is legal and done on behalf of the U.S. citizenry. Here again, in Agusto's story, is an example of how an undocumented student experiences *de jure* oppression not as an imaginary fear, but a reasonable response to the legal threat of having his family broken apart if immigration authorities enter his home with removal orders.

In Sylvia's story below, the persistent battle of dehumanization undocumented students must deal with appears not just in the media, but in the classroom itself.

Sylvia: Dehumanizing school experiences

Sylvia is originally from Oaxaca, Mexico, where she lived with her grandmother and brother because her parents had decided to come to the United States in search of work. Sylvia's journey of migration began at age 11 and consisted of a treacherous walk across the desert with her parents and older brother, where she almost lost her parents and her own life due to exhaustion and dehydration. After a seven-day journey, Sylvia and her family settled in the Los Angeles area, where she excelled in high school and finished her senior year with straight A's. Although eligible to apply to the most prestigious schools in the United States, Sylvia decided to attend a community college, then transfer to a four-year institution so she could continue helping her family with the money she earned working at a shoe store in "the underground economy," where income is not recorded or reported. At the time of her participation in the study, she had just graduated from high school and was attending a community college in the greater Los Angeles area. She was interested in becoming a physician.

Sylvia was very proud of her accomplishments and always sought to help others even if it came at a personal cost. In the story that follows, Sylvia had been explaining how a group of teachers created a college-going program at her high school but that they excluded all undocumented students from participating. Having experienced such exclusion before, Sylvia formed and led an AB 540⁴ student group on her campus to help excluded students. Sylvia shared that when these teachers found out about Sylvia's efforts, they ridiculed her and refused to allow her to post flyers or make announcements in their classrooms. Sylvia also told that one teacher threw the flyer back in her face after she had handed her the announcement. When asked how this experience made her feel, Sylvia said she had entered a bad depression:

They made me feel like if I wasn't a human. They made me feel like an animal that couldn't be with humans. At first it did hurt me. But then most of us, like the AB540 students, we just decided to forget about it and do our own thing. We started doing the group. And most of us, we were like AB540 but also some of the other kids were people who had papers and they were helping us all. And they would sell things with us and everything. And it was really good having people that were from here in the group. But it was just that group [the teacher's group] that made me feel really bad like if I was an animal that was going to do something really, really bad to them so that is why they didn't want me to be there.

The quote above alludes to the dehumanization that too many undocumented students must endure, not just in the media, but in their schools. Such dehumanization suggests how many undocumented students are being treated across the country with terms like "illegal alien" or "illegal," which place undocumented migrants as being less human (Hing, 2006). This dehumanization is something that the students in this study endured and fought. What made things worse for Sylvia, she later explained, was that she had been close to two of the rejecting teachers, until they learned she was undocumented. After the teachers found out about her immigration status, these same teachers

avoided and no longer spoke to her outside of regular instruction time. Sylvia described this as “being betrayed by people I thought cared about me.” Our current immigration laws and policies that threaten removal (i.e., deportation) embeds these oppressive conditions deeper into a legal structure that makes it more permissible to mistreat and exclude undocumented people. This does not mean that outright racist attacks do not exist. They do, but most laws have been moved or are moving away from de jure implications that are outright racist (e.g., Jim Crow laws). This is not the case with immigration law where de jure aspects of this portion of the law are very xenophobic. The population of undocumented students thus must deal both with the stigma of being undocumented and its severe legal implications.

Parallel and comparable to this situation were the travel bans by the Trump administration and their effects on the U.S. Muslim community (Whitehead et al., 2019). The results of those bans and traumatic events like those experienced by Sylvia and other students in this study, send messages (especially to young people) that they are neither wanted nor needed. Such psychological trauma can severely affect immigrant children, when adults who were meant to help them become the source of pain and distress (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Despite this difficult situation, Sylvia did not lose hope. She fought back by helping create her (and other undocumented students’) own space at the school, even when it meant outing herself and enduring painful treatment. Sylvia formed her own group because she was being excluded from the group the teachers had formed. Similar student organizations became spaces of safety and empowerment that students develop not just for themselves, but for those like them. This communal act of helping others reciprocally helped themselves. Community service is empowering, as was evident for the students in my study, but I also saw that it was difficult to remain hopeful when they still were powerless to change their status -- not because they did not want to but because there was no pathway to doing so, as Carmen’s story will illustrate.

Carmen: Losing hope

Carmen was born in Tijuana, Mexico, but grew up in Sonora, Mexico. Carmen crossed the Sonora/Arizona desert twice. The first time she and her family tried to cross the border, the U.S. Border Patrol caught them; her father was imprisoned and she, her mother, and her 6-month-old baby brother, whom her mother carried on her back, were deported to Mexico. The second time, they crossed the border unapprehended and settled in the Phoenix, Arizona, area. Carmen began working at a young age to support her family while still attending high school and passing all her classes. At the time of this study, Carmen was a single, working mother who had her baby while still in high school. Despite this, she managed to graduate from high school on time and planned to attend college to study business. Below she discusses the difficulty of being part of the U.S. while struggling to see the purpose of even trying to be part of it:

Carmen: As a person, I do feel part of this country because I follow all the rules of the United States. I obey all the rules. I would go to school every day. I would take college courses at night. I had the right to just stop going to school and drop out, but I chose not to. I

chose what the country wanted me to do. I have never been arrested. I have never committed a crime. I have been respectful and loyal to this country. Yet this is what I get for it. I don't get the opportunities that a person has that actually exists here.

Jaime: How does that make you feel?

Carmen: Well, it just makes me feel that it should be equal. That it shouldn't be so discriminative against us (*Carmen begins to weep but continues talking*). Like, we have the right, too. Like if we are good citizens and if we have never committed a crime. We followed the rules of the United States. We never hurt anybody here. We tried our hardest to be part of it and yet we don't get that right to be part of the U.S. Then, what's the point of actually trying?

A reader who holds that our immigration legal system is not broken may contend that Carmen's experience is justified because our immigration legal system is justified. However, seen through a CLS lens that is critical to systems that oppress, including the law, that interrogates the justification of the law itself and recognizes that some laws are unjust, shows that Carmen herself is questioning the justice of a legal system that denies "that right to be part of the U.S." when she is trying so hard to be part of it. Carmen struggled to make her point about the tension that exists between wanting to live the "American Dream" by following all that the U.S. (which she considers her home) expects of her, but then being made to feel that she is not part of this nation.

Carmen later discussed how she was concerned about returning to Mexico because it is a country she no longer knows, since she was brought to the U.S. at the age of three -- along with the fear of not knowing what would happen to her baby in the U.S. if she were removed to Mexico. This anxiety is similar to Augusto's concern of what would happen to his younger siblings, who are U.S. citizens. Carmen, Augusto, and other undocumented students like them "find themselves in a labyrinth of liminality not of their own making and with virtually all exits blocked" (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011, p. 461). The metaphor of a labyrinth suggests what many of my subjects described as exhausting and possibly hopeless. In addition to fighting to make a place for themselves in their school, there was an internal fight about whether they belong in their homeland. This can result in a loss of hope that this *de jure* oppression will ever be lifted or that they will find a way to escape their status by finding a path to citizenship, which is rare for many undocumented students. Here again, the loss of hope evident in Carmen's story can be understood in light of the legal or *de jure* oppression under which all undocumented students live.

Discussion

Susana's story demonstrates that the normalized state of fear many undocumented students experience does not stop at police apprehension or harassment but adds a layer of fear, a fear of removal. If removed (i.e., deported), they are banished from the only country many of them have ever known. Given the close relationship that some police have with ICE, many undocumented

students are twice as scared when they see an officer of either. Even police checkpoints undocumented communities must guard against for fear of being removed.

Agusto's story continues Susana's story by describing the fear of his family being broken up. He points out that he lives with "knowing (that) Immigration can pop into my house and they can take me and my parents away and leave my little brother and sister all alone and I won't know what will happen to them." Agusto, though undocumented as well, describes not just fear of his own removal but removal of his parents and its possible effects on his younger siblings. Thus, fear extends beyond the self into fear for the whole family despite their mixed immigration status.

Together, Susana and Agusto's stories of fear are rooted in an omnipresent fear of the authorities because of the persistent message of suspicion of illegality or wrongdoing that undocumented students endure. The suspicion, as Foucault (1995) reminds us, is enough for punishment to be felt and experienced. And the law in the generative sense touches all aspects of society including the media (López et al., 2019), which, taken together, influence the beliefs and behaviors of society including educators, as Sylvia's story shows. She describes a story of dehumanization by those she trusted, her teachers. After they found out she was undocumented, she experienced a dehumanization that is allowed too often to exist without retribution or correction. It is important to note that such rejecting behavior by trusted figures does not include all teachers or counselors (my data suggest otherwise), but it does occur and occurs in detrimental ways toward undocumented students. Sylvia, however, resisted this portrayal of her and other undocumented students at her school by creating her own student organization to advocate for undocumented students. This act of resistance happens at the school and national level (see *United We Dream* and *Immigrants Rising* for national examples). These student organizations develop a sense of empowerment for undocumented students; they can then see examples of how to combat dehumanizing portrayals.

The doors of legal redress appear shut to undocumented people and, by default, undocumented students. This was a common theme in my study across all my subjects. Further, given the students' immigration status and fear of being removed, undocumented students may not go to law enforcement to protect them. As Olivas (2012) points out, "the undocumented are forced deeper into the shadows as they are hunted down, harmed, or deported -- in the contexts of employment, civic life, and the larger social community" (p. 4). This makes it harder for undocumented students to ask for legal assistance when they are victims of crimes against both their legal rights and human rights. Here, *de jure* oppression takes on a terrible twist: the legal authorities, like law enforcement, becomes the thing to be feared instead of the shield needed for protection. Despite living under these circumstance, undocumented students try to belong to the only country they have ever known even when it seems they are fighting a losing battle. Despite losing hope, at times, they do not consider themselves nor their plight as lost hope. These students assimilate and identify with U.S. customs and practices, and many identify themselves as "American" (Perez, 2009) -- often affiliating themselves more with the country they live in than the one they were born in.

Despite wanting to belong to the U.S., these students constantly struggle to be recognized by the United States while also maintaining their sense of humanity when confronted with the perils they must endure. Research has shown that the immigration industrial complex benefits from exploiting the labor of these students and their parents, while dehumanizing them via the media (Golash-Boza, 2009). A theme that surfaced among the student interviewees, focuses on how they cope and fight against dehumanization and seek to be recognized as belonging to the U.S., which they consider to be their home.

Lastly, Carmen's story describes a frustration and sadness not unique to her but to countless undocumented students who see no hope for themselves in this country or in their schools. People like the author spend our time trying to keep them motivated and lift them up, and we will continue doing so, as will they. But we must do better. As Carmen notes, "That it shouldn't be so discriminative against us." The "it" in Carmen's story is the legal system that this article has addressed, showing its effects on the daily lives of undocumented students.

Life can be difficult and challenging, of course. But the question educators must ask ourselves is should it be this severe for the undocumented student? Furthermore, educators should ask if children brought here at a young age should be subjected to a second-class or even third-class citizenship with no hope of adjusting immigration status through our immigration system. Aside from their parents and guardians, teachers are the people most involved in children's lives. They not only teach content but socialize kids about many aspects of life -- while also being a significant part of their lives. More understanding of undocumented students' plight is important for teachers because they, too, are part of the classroom. People have moved (or been moved) since human beings walked this earth. They will continue moving (or being moved). We should ask ourselves; how will we treat people when they do move?

Conclusion

As educators, we are responsible to teach all who enter our classrooms regardless of race, class, gender, immigration status or many other characteristics that make each of us unique. Losing hope for the students studied here is not about losing hope in oneself, but in a system that has given up on them. This article set out to raise educators' awareness of this very important issue -- the fear of deportation in the lives of undocumented students, and how it affects their hopes and dreams. For without hopes and dreams, anyone's future can appear bleak and perhaps not worth pursuing. As Carmen describes in her interview, "We tried our hardest to be part of it [the U.S.] and yet we don't get that right to be part of the U.S. Then, what's the point of actually trying?" In this example, it is important for educators and researchers to understand that the disenfranchisement of undocumented students is not of their own choosing, but one imposed on them by a system that does not see them as full members of U.S. society. To lose hope is detrimental for many reasons, but one particularly difficult for anyone who has ever taught in a classroom is that it is incredibly difficult to teach a student who has lost hope in school -- because they feel school has lost hope in them. As educators, let's not let them lose hope by ensuring that we have not lost hope in them.

Resist normative frames that restrict the extent to which we see undocumented people generally, and undocumented students specifically, as full members of our society.

Many undocumented students have been in this country since they were young children. They are here as children in our grade school classrooms and in our schools. They play and study alongside all our children and form friendships with them and with this country. For example, as discussed above, Augusto and Carmen arrived in the U.S. at the ages of one and three, respectively. All their formal schooling has occurred in the U.S. Susana and Sylvia arrived at ages eight and eleven, respectively, and thus entered the U.S. school system in elementary school. Each of their stories show how undocumented students go to school and/or work with us. More importantly, their lives demonstrate how they are part of the fabric that makes up the families, friends, and society of the U.S. Unfortunately, their lives are too often lived under duress, as this study shows. Only when we face these problems honestly, will we see a school system and a society that is truly equitable, one where all can enter to learn, teach, imagine, and dream.

NOTES

¹ The DREAM Act is a proposed federal act that if passed would provide a pathway to citizenship from some undocumented students who meet certain criteria. The bill was originally introduced in 2001 and was re-introduced several times for the next 20 years.

² For those who qualify and are accepted into the program, DACA provides a 2-year working permit and deprioritization for removal <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-of-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca>

³ Pseudonyms are used for all proper names in this study.

⁴ AB 540 was a California bill that passed into law that permits undocumented students who fit certain requirements to pay in-state tuition in its public colleges. This law provided a legitimacy and identity for many undocumented students in California, and many called themselves “AB540 students” (Abrego, 2008).

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BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING SPANISH IN HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

Clara Burgo

Loyola University Chicago

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Clara Burgo, Loyola University Chicago, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Chicago, IL, 60660. E-mail: cburgo@luc.edu

ABSTRACT

One of the main challenges for educators during the pandemic has been successfully transitioning to online teaching, in some cases without adequate training. This article will address these issues and suggest effective practices for teaching Spanish online, especially in emergency remote teaching situations. Given these circumstances, instructors should conduct self-assessments through self-reflections and portfolios. In order to carry out these activities, universities should invest in professional development on teaching synchronous and asynchronously, the advantages and challenges of both types of sessions, and the role of the instructor in an online setting. Finally, suggestions for instructors are offered to improve effective online instruction.

Keywords: synchronous learning, asynchronous learning, emergency remote teaching.

Introduction

Due to the pandemic, both educators and students have been forced into an emergency remote situation. As Kozimor (2020) explains, emergency remote teaching is not the same as online teaching. The former is a temporary shift to an online modality, basically moving face-to-face courses to a digital format. However, the latter is much more than that. That is why it is now time to look back and learn from our mistakes in order to teach effective online language courses.

First and foremost, instructors should select measurable learning objectives and foster collaborative learning for the sake of interaction and community building. After the emergency experience, we have learned about the importance of being flexible due to all the unpredictable factors that may have an impact on our online setting, and we should be able to move from emergency online teaching to informed online teaching through intensive faculty training. Since these are exceptional circumstances, expectations may differ, and a pedagogy of compassion and care must have a central role in these courses (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). If students feel the need to express themselves about the personal and academic challenges that this pandemic has put them through, as instructors, we should leave some room for this either during the synchronous or asynchronous sessions. Learning is social, so the instructor has to make sure to be present online so that online learning is successful. Beyond synchronous live sessions, instructors can be present through timely individualized feedback (Rapanta et al., 2020). According to these researchers, a continuous assessment model should be adopted. Given the emergency remote situation, instructors should conduct self-regulations through self-reflections and portfolios, and in order to develop these tasks, universities should invest in professional development.

One of the main issues for educators during the pandemic has been successfully transitioning to online teaching, in some cases without adequate training. Thus, we have needed to attempt to find a balance between synchronous and asynchronous sessions, taking into account that many students spend too many hours on platforms such as Zoom, or they are just unable to be online if they or their families fall ill.

This article will address how we can facilitate self-access learning, how we can make our class communicative on Zoom, and we will suggest effective practices for teaching Spanish online, especially in these emergency remote teaching situations. Additionally, this research will consider students' perspectives on this transition. We must be able to conduct a class that has the same rigor as face-to-face instruction, and we should be able to guarantee opportunities for interaction so that acquisition can take place. Additionally, we cannot forget about students' feelings during this transition, how they are adapting and how we can help them to overcome their frustration and anxiety about this new learning setting, and, in general, the challenges we are facing as educators. It is also time to rethink our academic policies after listening to our students and giving them a voice (Alvarez, 2020), since we are trying to adapt to this new situation in record time.

On the other hand, it is important to benefit from the advantages of both synchronous and asynchronous sessions. Most online classes are preferred to be taught synchronously via platforms such as Zoom, since it is more similar to in-class instruction. Among the advantages, we could include the fact that students get instant feedback from instructors and peers, they can have a fixed schedule

and interact directly with the class, and as instructors, it is easier to engage the students than in asynchronous sessions. Furthermore, these classes can be recorded for students who were not able to attend class or even for those who would need to re-watch them later. Asynchronous classes are prepared ahead of time (e.g., recorded lectures, videos), and students can access them when needed. They work better for faculty who are creative and also for larger classes. Both instructors and students can view and respond at any time. The asynchronous format allows time for reflection and discussion by participants (Andriessen, 2006). It is also more focused and task-directed than face-to-face instruction (Jonassen & Kwon, 2001). While asynchronous sessions allow instructors to record videos that students can re-watch as many times as they need for their convenience, they can also alter the pace of learning. Synchronous sessions may be more effective for group discussion or office hours. Additionally, this is an exceptional time where most universities around the world are teaching online to encourage virtual exchanges between native speakers of Spanish from Spanish-speaking countries and second language learners of Spanish from the United States. In order to deliver efficient live streaming, instructors must be well-informed regarding technology, how to create digital materials, and coaching students during these sessions (Feyen, 2020).

With regard to the mental health issues related to the effect of the pandemic, as instructors, we should support and facilitate some type of orientation to our students. Stress management programs could help them cope with this difficult situation. Some institutions offer webinars and psychological support that could be of much help. The stress that they experience can be the consequence of difficulties dealing with technology, lack of face-to-face interaction with their peers and their instructors, but also perhaps due to the uncertainties derived from the pandemic (Salimi et al., 2021).

One cannot forget that faculty is also mentally and emotionally affected by the pandemic, and they have been struggling to cope with the emergency remote teaching situation as well as with their family responsibilities. Unfortunately, faculty may have felt alienated due to the lack of consideration of the trauma they experience (Kozimor, 2020). Despite all these issues, there are many advantages related to online learning if we have the appropriate resources and training to give these courses efficiently.

Advantages of online learning

Online courses can increase attendance and participation because students do not need to be in a specific physical location (Kim, 2020); they may feel more comfortable speaking in public. Online classes are more student-centered; students have more control of what they learn (Didenko, Filatova, & Anisimova, 2021). On top of this, the emergency remote instruction caused by COVID-19 accelerated the use of digital technologies and of institutional Learning Management Systems. Therefore, diversity is another benefit of online learning. This opportunity allows students to be open and think outside the box, which may even present them with more career options (Al-Odeh, 2020).

It is logical to think then that the use of technology is the basis of online learning. One of the main benefits is that it can be used to customize student learning, adapting instructor's lesson plans. Besides, it saves a lot of time and provides students with access to a tremendous amount of information. However, it may present some drawbacks such as loss of human connection or distraction (Singh, 2020).

Additionally, there are multiple benefits for faculty as well. The flexibility provided by online teaching can help the instructor to conduct research and use technology more efficiently. It is also important to highlight that there are many challenges as well, as we have mentioned earlier.

Challenges of online teaching

It is obvious that emergency remote teaching has been challenging for both instructors and students. What are the main student complaints? According to Rosario-Rodríguez et al. (2020), students criticize instructors' lack of expertise in online teaching, problems with internet connection, stressors caused by the pandemic, difficulty staying focused, and lack of social interaction, among others. Some students may have limited experience with technology, and need support, such as online tutorials (Akhter, 2020). If they develop negative feelings towards technology, there is a risk of a detrimental impact on their learning, and this can affect their performance due to low motivation. Furthermore, the privation of social interaction may lead to feelings of loneliness because of the lack of physical presence of both their instructor and peers.

What are the main teacher complaints? Technical issues, student participation, and the online teaching experience itself (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). We cannot forget the concern for the digital divide that has affected many families in the online setting (Vijil, 2020). Since the transition has been so sudden due to the pandemic, instructors have felt under pressure to adapt their courses, and they have sometimes felt that they lack training and support to conduct effective online courses; all this has led to a lack of communication between instructors and students that inevitably has had an impact on their attitudes towards remote courses (Tsai, et al., 2020). In fact, faculty who have pursued professional development have changed their teaching practices (McQuiggan, 2012).

One of the problems of online learning is understanding the content of the course. Due to the emergency remote teaching situation provoked by the pandemic, instructors have been obligated to adapt their courses in record time. Unfortunately, this is no guarantee that students are able to learn (Moser et al., 2021). Students were also obligated to adapt to a format that they did not choose. Therefore, they may require more explanations and accountability. Also, we cannot ignore the fact that they may miss the interaction with their instructors and peers (Parker et al., 2021). In general, the lack of engagement and interaction can be considered the main drawbacks of online learning, especially in the case of language courses. What if we implement mobile learning? It can encourage learning, but it may overwhelm the students' cognitive load if the learning strategies are not adequate (Suartama, 2020). Beyond all of this, online collaborative learning activities can also be challenging due to lack of time, a different work pace, and even lack of interest (Cotán Fernández et al., 2020).

In order to combat all of these challenges, instructors should redefine their role as the leaders of socialization (Suoranta, 2020). Opportunities for meaningful interaction and discussion should be granted. In fact, students who are not ready for digital learning may suffer from isolation and stress. While technology can foster socialization, social interactions are what students need to feel at ease, not technology itself (Händel et al., 2020). Furthermore, institutions could provide students with a hotline for technology issues and regular check-ins by instructors (Kumar & Pande, 2021).

On the other hand, instructors have difficulty monitoring students' progress. Thus, students need to rely more on autonomous learning (Iswati, 2021). Assessment becomes an issue, and instructors struggle with online correction, especially with informal assessment. Along these lines, concerns about academic integrity are also apparent (Tyagi & Malik, 2020). Online courses can combine both synchronous and asynchronous sessions. In the next sections, both formats will be thoroughly described.

Synchronous sessions

Synchronous sessions are live classes, so instructors need to learn about online class management. They could consider chatting with students regarding connecting to Zoom, asking students to turn on the camera to facilitate interaction, sharing the lesson plan or class structure, asking questions to get students' attention, conducting surveys, managing class time, and maintaining an active pace (García, 2020). One of the main challenges of synchronous sessions is combating the lack of interaction. This is sometimes increased when students do not turn their camera on. Instead of imposing it, we should encourage students to turn it on by explaining why that is important to foster an inclusive, engaging, and interactive environment. Furthermore, there are additional features to increase interaction such the use of the chat or discussion boards as an alternative.

One of the main advantages of synchronous sessions is the immediacy of support and help provided for the students. Zoom can aid in creating a community and reducing feelings of isolation (Lowenthal et al., 2020). One way of doing so is through the effective use of breakout rooms. This is important because Loughheed et al. (2012) found that students with a higher GPA did not benefit as much from breakout rooms as those with lower GPAs. An interactive digital and synchronous portfolio could be implemented as an innovative strategy for self-assessment. There are multiple benefits of this, especially facilitating the analysis of and reflection on the learning process (Tipán Renjifo, 2021).

Asynchronous sessions

There are two main advantages of asynchronous sessions (self-control and self-directed learning) and four main challenges (isolation, lack of interaction, course load, and technology issues), according to Lin and Gao (2020). Students must be ready to be responsible for their own learning. Asynchronous sessions adapt better to students' personal needs such as time flexibility and internet issues, and they are more conducive to reflection and deep learning, since students can take as much time as they need (within certain limits) to complete the course assignments. In Engaging

students in these sessions is more challenging than in synchronous sessions. Therefore, it is recommended to use tandem projects as exchange activities, such as language exchanges, to enhance students' communicative skills (Ross & DiSlavo, 2020).

Asynchronous sessions are particularly challenging in second language courses because of the importance of instant interaction among students. This scenario may lead to a negative attitude or conflict with peers (Azer, 2001). Nevertheless, asynchronous sessions help combat Zoom fatigue. Online discussion boards, for example, have multiple benefits such as promoting student engagement and collaborative work (Gonzalez & Moore, 2020). Social networks such as Twitter can also be used as an instructional tool to disseminate information and to summarize readings using authentic materials (Vázquez Cano, 2012) as well as to follow experts in the field (Nicholson & Galguera, 2013). Twitter not only helps with improving academic skills, but also with the interaction between instructor and students. It seems to be an effective tool to create an educational community in the online classroom and beyond it (Jerónimo & Martin, 2021).

The role of the instructor

The role of the instructor is key in overcoming the challenges of online teaching. First, the instructor must be present virtually to compensate for the lack of physical presence. Second, the instructor must be authentic and vulnerable. Finally, how the instructor interacts with the classroom is paramount (Lomicka, 2020). They must be encouraging and inspiring throughout. In order to do so, the instructor has to be not only the curriculum designer, but also the facilitator and the mentor.

The roles that the instructor undertakes are evolving during the pandemic. Teaching can be considered a form of social influence, increasing students' knowledge, and therefore, having an impact on students' learning. Instructors can design their teaching practices considering all this, and they can even become mentors to facilitate social change (Butera et al., 2021).

Beyond this, we cannot ignore how the pandemic is affecting students' and instructors' mental health. Smoyer et al. (2020) found that when the instructor engaged in understanding student concerns about their experience dealing with the coronavirus, students were more satisfied. Being more available, flexible, and guiding them through assignments as well as offering online resources and support with time management and independent learning can really make a difference (Mollenkopf et al., 2020).

How can the instructor facilitate online interaction? Hsiao (2012) argued that providing clear guidelines and rubrics and monitoring student discussions can facilitate online interaction. Discussion boards are their space. Additionally, instructors should find a way to be present without disempowering students like by acknowledging their contributions to value their participation and to boost their confidence (Payne, 2020).

Assessment is particularly important in remote teaching. According to Freedman and Voelker-Morris (2020), instructors should be crystal clear about the way students will be evaluated. Bringing written assignments to the online discussion can create a bridge between

synchronous and asynchronous learning. Additionally, these assignments should be available to students well in advance so that they can plan accordingly.

Finally, collecting student feedback is crucial in connecting with students. In the following section, suggestions are offered to improve our online teaching experience.

Suggestions to improve online teaching

The first aspect to consider is how to compensate for the lack of physical presence of the instructor through student engagement. In order to engage students, we need to create an environment with successful communication, a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous sessions, and to offer continuous assessment and feedback so that students do not feel alienated or frustrated. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous sessions allows students and teachers to take advantage of the benefits of both. While synchronous sessions simulate in-person classes by promoting social support, asynchronous sessions stimulate reflective thinking (McMullen, et al., 2020). Asynchronous sessions should have a clear structure: an introduction, connection with the previous material, and an explanation of how objectives will be met (Kimmel et al., 2020). In general, instead of just transferring our in-person class into an online setting, educators should take advantage of this opportunity to make students more autonomous and responsible for their own learning, to make classes more flexible, to make more programs more attractive and adapted to students' needs, and to update the instructor's role (Area-Moreira et al., 2021). Considering that this new scenario forces us to gain some command of technology in the classroom, educators may make use of certain strategies, such as being open to learning and using technology as a means, not an end; the end should be pedagogy and engagement regardless the form of instruction (Bloomberg, 2020).

Online classes should be accessible to students. Thus, we need to make sure that students are ready to communicate and interact with both their peers and instructor (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). One way of doing so is by using the chat feature. If we do, we should avoid correcting errors explicitly to prevent students from feeling inhibited to use it to communicate with the class. We should treat it as informal writing (Payne, 2020). Additionally, we should provide students with additional materials to supplement their learning. Even in online learning, it is crucial to establish guidelines of effective instruction.

To engage students, instructors must create a community and support the students along the learning process. The objectives have to be very apparent and aligned with a clear assessment through which the instructor can track progress. Active learning activities for interaction with integrated technology should be accessible to all students (Khan & Abid, 2021). Instructors must facilitate connection beyond interaction both academically and non-academically, and they must incorporate collaborative work where the instructor takes a role by leading discussions or guiding students. Additionally, it is crucial to provide opportunities to check the course progress, opening a line of communication (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2021).

Online teaching only works if students have access to internet and technology and instructors receive good training and support on how to deliver an online course (García & Weiss,

2020). Administrators should make sure that high-speed internet is accessible to all students, that e-learning platforms are user friendly, and that they provide technical support to students and faculty (Maphalala & Adigun, 2021).

In sum, the administration should invest in online education and provide instructors with adequate training, introducing instructors to resources to be able to blend pedagogy, technology, and content. At the same time, both synchronous and asynchronous should be implemented. Support communities are needed for emotional help. Instructors should avoid overwhelming students and focus on their wellbeing (Hussein et al., 2020). Therefore, responsive instruction is strongly recommended so that there is a social presence in the classroom. A responsive instructor is a facilitator of the interaction among students, one who fosters engagement and gives the feedback that the student needs (Evans, 2021).

Conclusions

Emergency remote learning has become the norm during COVID-19. Consequently, both instructors and students have been forced to adapt to this format in record time, and countless challenges have arisen, such as the need for intensive training to teach online and to use technology efficiently and the need to keep students engaged. There are advantages and disadvantages to both online learning itself and in synchronous and asynchronous sessions. Ideally, both types of sessions should be used in online courses. Nevertheless, the role of the instructor as a facilitator is key to engaging students and being present for them so that they do not fall behind, as well as helping with language anxiety and providing support with mental health issues derived from online teaching. Finally, suggestions have been offered so that instructors can improve their teaching strategies to promote effective instruction in a successful environment, to combat Zoom fatigue, to assess students fairly, to implement a pedagogy of compassion and care, and to make online classes accessible to all students. In short, the administration must provide resources for adequate training for instructors to implement the best practices in online teaching and emotional support.

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**CROSSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE AND THE EQUITY EXPANSE:
REACHING AND TEACHING ALL STUDENTS DURING THE
PANDEMIC**

Tracy Reimer

Bethel University

Jennifer C. Hill

St. Cloud State University

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tracy Reimer, Bethel University 3900 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN 55112. E-mail: t-reimer@bethel.edu.

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the digital divide revealing an expanse of inequity among students who had access to the internet, personal devices, and parental support during remote learning and those who did not. Framed with the theoretical lens of equity literacy, this paper details the results of a survey completed by 56 Minnesota district level technology directors. The survey asked how school districts were addressing the technology inequities experienced by students and families while in hybrid and distance learning models. Results reflected that districts' efforts to provide students technology devices were efficient and successful. Of greatest concern for respondents was the lack of students' attendance and engagement in learning. Recommendations for further research are provided including advocacy for the expansion of broadband service, the pandemic's impact on the mental health of students, and efforts to sustain access to technology for all learners after the COVID-19 pandemic concludes.

Keywords: covid-19, distance learning, digital divide, emergency remote learning, equity literacy, structural ideology, pandemic, students, technology, technology director

Introduction

The term “digital divide” became common vernacular following the publication of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s (NTIA) 1995 report titled *Falling Through the Net: A Survey of the “Have Nots” in Rural and Urban America*. The national survey included questions asking United States citizens about their access to computers and modems, finding that “the rural poor had the lowest computer penetration (4.5 percent),” (NTIA, 1995, p. 1). Decades later, the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated that the gap in access to computers and the internet still exists. The advent of remote learning revealed that the digital divide laid across an expanse of inequity where only some students had access to educational resources and technologies while learning from home, while others, many of whom experience poverty, did not.

The need for students to access the Internet from home to succeed academically and the reality that not all students have equitable access to information is not a new dynamic (Cantu, 2021). Anderson and Auxier (2020) reviewed data from 2018 and found that 60% of eighth grade students were dependent upon the Internet to complete their homework (para. 3). They also found that one-third of homes, (35%) with children ages 7-16, making less than \$30,000 annually, lack home Internet access (para. 5). This, in turn, impacts approximately 20% of teenagers who reported not being able to do their homework because of lack of access to the Internet at home (para. 6). Consequently, the digital divide has been exacerbated by the pandemic’s instantaneous and enduring dependency on technology for teaching and learning and is now a crisis (Cruz, 2021). Teenagers are not the only ones concerned by their lack of technology access. The educational software company Promethean (2020-2021), surveyed 1,200 K-12 teachers asking, “What is your biggest professional challenge in a remote learning scenario?” The largest challenge reported at 31% was the digital divide across the student population. Other challenges included the impact of the summer slide (26%), budget cuts (25%), lack of teacher training on technology (13%), and lack of technology resources at the district level (6%). The concern over the digital divide was supported by data from the Federal Communications Commission regarding access to the Internet in the United States. The FCC reported, “rural communities lag behind urban areas, as do tribal lands, where about 1/3 don’t have high speed Internet” (Reilly, 2020, p. 40).

This paper details a mixed-method study that included surveying technology directors in the state of Minnesota to discover how their districts structurally addressed the digital inequities experienced by students and families as learning models transitioned to hybrid and distance during the COVID-19 pandemic. It explores the equity literacy framework and integrates the framework within study findings and implications for further research.

Literature Review

Historically, there have been several supreme court cases and legislation in the United States supporting equal access to education, including *Brown v Board of Education* (1954), *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (1965), *American with Disabilities Act* (1990), *No Child Left Behind* (2001), and *Race to the Top* (2009). While these efforts have helped students access education,

both the opportunity gap, disparities in access to resources, and the achievement gap, a disparity in academic achievement, still exist (Cruz, 2021).

Technology has often been lauded as a tool to close both the achievement and opportunity gaps by first closing the digital divide. In 2005, Nicholas Negroponte introduced a hand-cranked computer device at the World Summit on the Information Society that would later become the genesis of the non-profit organization *One Laptop Per Child*. The vision was to place cost-effective (\$100) devices into the hands of children facing poverty around the world in order to address and close the digital divide. However, this initiative failed when many devices broke, infrastructure received limited funding, and children were left unsupervised in their use of technology. Without the guidance of a teacher, the device became a distraction and the need for in-person, social learning became evident (Ames, 2021).

When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, students around the nation and world found themselves in a similar situation when they were issued devices to learn from home. Though learning online can be effective when carefully planned and implemented (Means et al., 2014), what students received during the pandemic was, in contrast, emergency remote teaching (ERT), a temporary delivery of instruction used until a crisis is resolved. Hodges et al. (2020, para. 13) explain, “The primary objective in these circumstances is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional support.”

Admittedly, ERT does not provide a rich educational experience, resulting in students, parents, and families relying upon tools such as Google searching to find additional educational resources to supplement their learning. A study by Bacher-Hicks et al. (2020) found that access to digital resources during ERT was not equitable. The researchers found that those of higher socioeconomic status had a higher rate of searching for educational resources online; those who had greater access to resources tended to make more progress in math. This suggests both opportunity and achievement gaps not only during the 2019 - 2020 and 2020 - 2021 school years, but points to a disparity that will continue in years to come.

Yale economists Agostinelli et al. (2020) utilized quantitative research methods to understand the impact of the pandemic not only on students' current academic achievement but to build a model predicting the impact of the pandemic on their future incomes. The researchers developed a model which showed, “School closures will cost ninth graders in the poorest communities a 25% decrease in their post-educational earning potential, even if it is followed by three years of normal schooling. By contrast, their model shows no substantial losses for students from the richest 20% of neighborhoods” Cummings (2021, para. 2).

To address these problems, Cruz (2021, p. 47) suggests, “In order to avoid these extreme predictions and best prepare the nation for the next disruption to traditional in-person instruction, policymakers must analyze expanding opportunity and achievement gaps at their causal roots.” This study aims to do just that.

Theoretical Framework

Equity literacy is a comprehensive framework for creating and sustaining equitable schools (Equity Literacy Institute, 2021). The framework encompasses bias, inequity, and oppression related to race, language, immigration status, religion, class, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, and (dis)ability. Equity literacy is founded on commitments to deepening understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies and developing knowledge, skills, and will to identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivate equity. The framework contends that the capacity to understand and identify disparities is a prerequisite to responding effectively to inequity. Equity is defined as a process through which educators ensure that policies, practices, institutional cultures, and ideologies are actively equitable. A structural approach contends that effective equity initiatives do not focus on fixing marginalized students and families, but rather on fixing the conditions within education that perpetuate marginalization (Gorski, 2018).

The equity literacy framework promulgates that educational outcome disparities are not the result of deficiencies in marginalized populations but rather inequities in the system (Thomas, 2018). Educational leaders have a significant responsibility to not allow deficit narratives and assumptions to invade their school or district cultures but, instead, invite stakeholders to view equity through a more structural lens. Structural ideology postulates that traditional early childhood - grade 12 schooling is set up in a way that only some groups of people will experience success and prosperity and that regardless of the amount of effort members of other groups exert, they may continue to experience diminished outcomes. Educators with a structural ideology understand that achievement gaps are the result of structural barriers in and out of school rather than moral deficiencies or grit shortages in families experiencing poverty (Gorski, 2018).

The equity literacy framework rejects deficit narratives, such as the view that students from low-income backgrounds are “at-risk” because they live in an imagined “culture of poverty” (Equity Literacy Institute, 2021, para. 15). In response to research that has found that socioeconomic status is a main contributor to academic achievement disparities (Byrd, 2020), the equity literacy framework identifies class-based inequities within schools such as disproportioned access to experienced teachers, honors or advanced curriculum, engagement with authentic learning, arts education, and co-curricular programs (Dudley-Marling, 2015). Family involvement opportunities are rarely organized in ways that are responsive to the challenges economically marginalized families may face, such as a lack of paid leave, difficulty securing transportation, the inability to afford childcare, and the necessity of working multiple jobs. Families experiencing poverty often have less access to Internet technology, books, tutoring, and other resources that support school achievement (Lineburg & Ratliff, 2015).

Structural ideology contends that as long as systemic barriers exist, education outcome disparities will exist (Berliner, 2013). Educators must position themselves to become a threat to the existence of structural inequities in schools and districts. This audacious calling will require a disruption to past traditions, values, and beliefs as educators seek new solutions and practices.

Research Methodology

The purpose of the study was to learn how Minnesota school districts addressed the digital inequities experienced by staff members, students, and families as the COVID-19 pandemic required learning models to pivot to hybrid and distance learning. Technology directors serving traditional public schools, public charter schools, and cooperatives were emailed a 10-question survey asking them to identify barriers that inhibited equitable learning experiences and share how their districts responded to the challenges that impacted student learning. Technology director contact information was acquired from the Minnesota Department of Education.

Technology directors in the state of Minnesota do not require a specific license, however, many hold an administrative license similar to that of a building principal. The educational role of technology director is identified with different titles around the nation including “Chief Technology Officer, Chief Information Officer, Director of Information Systems, Director of Instructional Technology, Director of Education Technology, and Network and Systems Administrator” (Cannistraci, 2020, para. 3). For the purposes of this study, a technology director is defined as those on the district leadership team in charge of purchasing and implementing the use of technology for both teachers and students.

The survey was distributed to approximately 505 district technology directors; the estimate reflects districts having multiple technology directors, districts sharing technology directors, and districts not having a technology director. Fifty-six district level technology directors completed the survey, which reflected an 11% response rate. Likert scale responses were analyzed, and descriptive statistics were displayed in pie chart format. Open-ended responses were analyzed and organized by theme. Study findings may provide guidance to schools as online learning models continue to be a viable option for students and families. A list of survey questions is listed below in Table 1.

Table 1*Addressing Technology Inequities (2020)*

Item	Response Scale
Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of technology devices in the home for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.	1 = not a concern for district students
Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of access to internet/wifi for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.	2 = minimal concern for district students
Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of adult academic support/supervision in the home for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.	3 = moderate concern for district students
Rate the level of concern regarding a lack of technology savviness/knowledge in the home for your district's students learning in a hybrid or distance learning model.	4 = significant concern for district students
Open Ended Questions	
How has your district responded when students do not have devices to complete hybrid or distance learning school work?	
How has your district assisted students and families in accessing the Internet or hot spots?	
How has absenteeism/truancy been addressed by your district?	
Within homes, there is a range of support and instruction adult caregivers provide to their child(ren) in distance or hybrid learning models. How has your district attempted to identify and address these differences?	
During distance or hybrid learning, how does your district provide assistance to adults/caregivers who do not have the technology skills to support their child(ren)?	
As your district pivoted to hybrid or distance learning, are there other inequities you have discovered that are not included in this survey? How are these inequities being addressed?	

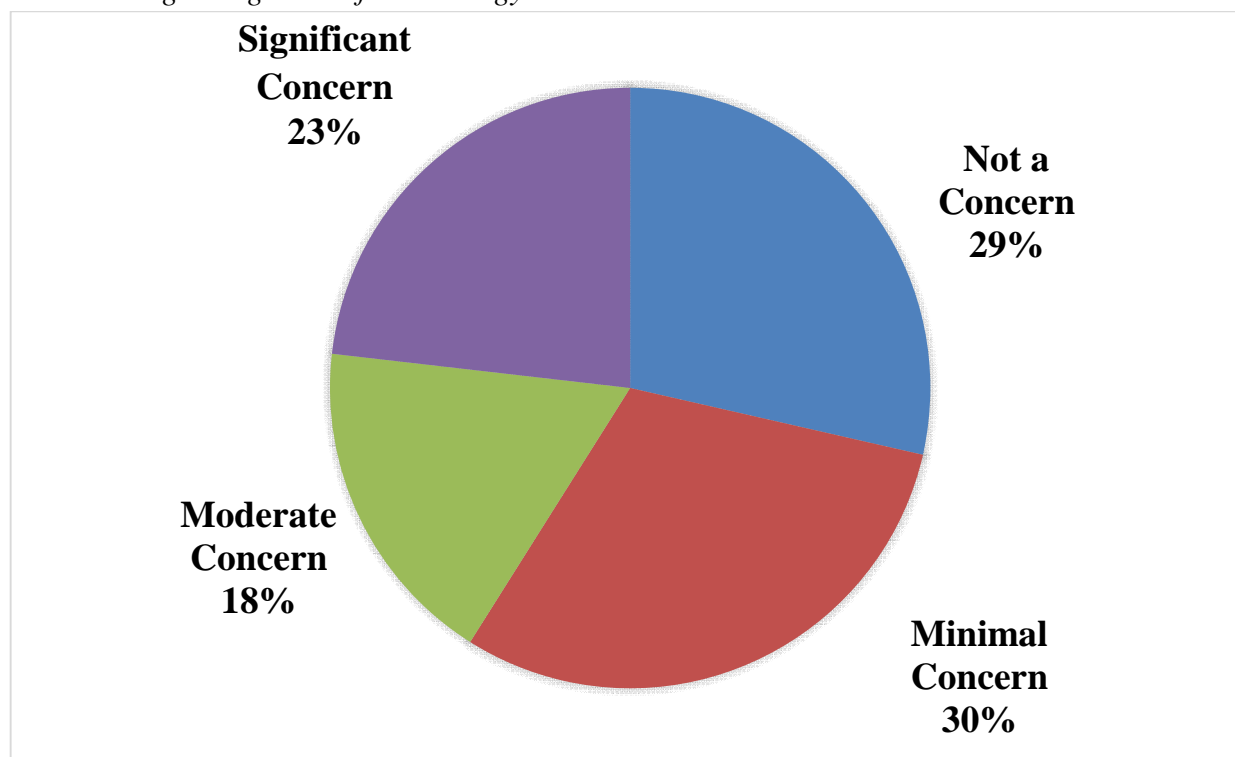
Research Questions

1. What digital inequities do school districts identify as student learning pivoted to hybrid and distance learning models?
2. What level of concern do school districts report for the digital inequities experienced by students and families as student learning pivoted to hybrid and distance learning models?
3. How are school districts addressing the digital inequities experienced by students and families as student learning pivoted to hybrid and distance learning models?

Findings and Discussion

Figure 1

Concern Regarding Lack of Technology Devices in the Home



Addressing Lack of Devices in the Home

Figure 1 illustrates that school districts have provided devices such as iPads and Chromebooks to students to use outside of the school building. There were 54 responses to the open-ended question and 53 responded that the district provided a device while one respondent stated that the district mailed paper packets to students without a device. There were a variety of approaches that districts carried out when providing devices. The most popular approach was 1:1 - providing one device for each student. A typical participant response, “We are K-8 and have been able to go 1:1 for all but K-1. Our K-1 1:1 devices ordered in midsummer still have not arrived. We do have enough spare devices to cover K-1 needs.” Districts reported having a 1:1 initiative in place prior to the pandemic while other districts transitioned to 1:1 due to the pandemic through the use of stimulus

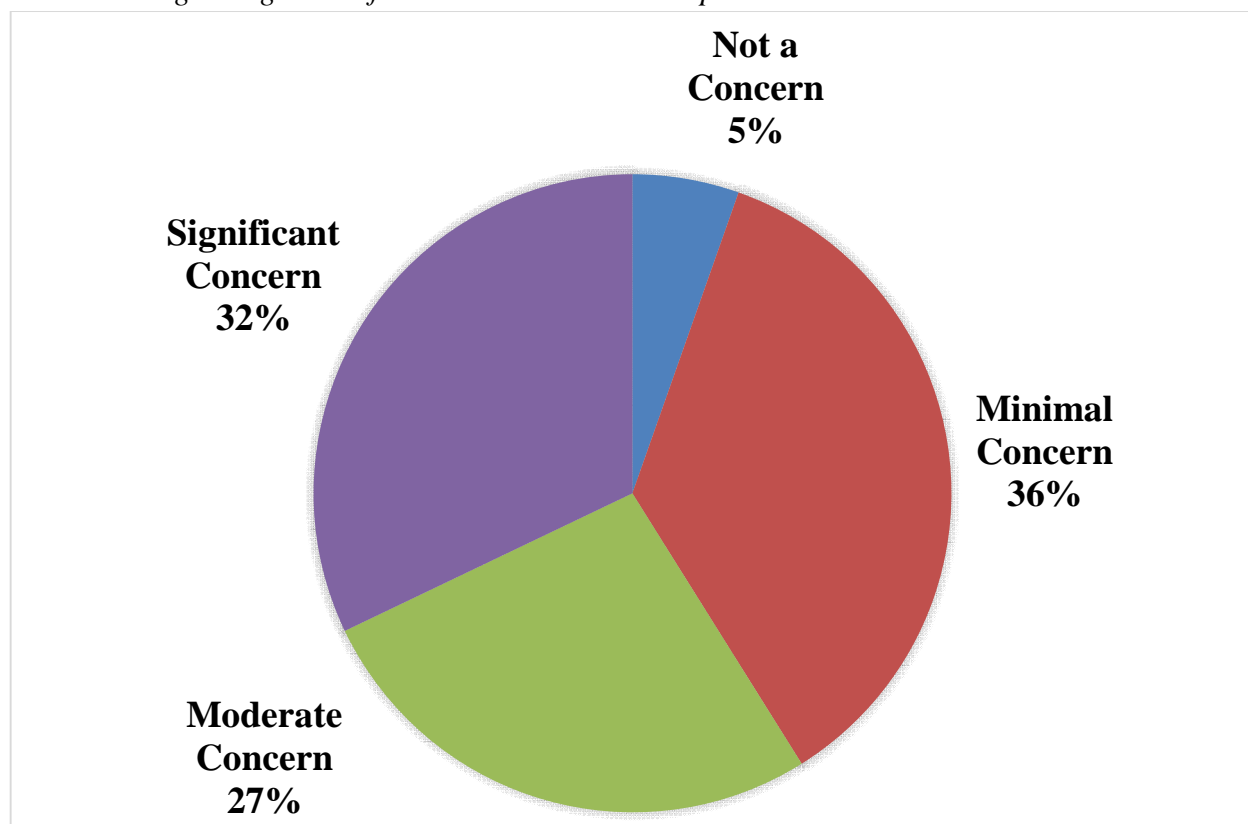
funds or dismantled carts of devices previously used as classroom sets. Districts without 1:1 platforms provided devices for students who expressed the need, allowed students to rent devices, or provided one device per family. When necessary, devices were delivered directly to the students' homes. Of the 53 districts providing devices, 28 stated their district was 1:1, 15 stated their district was not 1:1, and 10 did not specify if they were 1:1.

Lack of Internet access, especially in rural areas, was reported by district technology directors as a continued concern for students in hybrid or distance learning. One participant shared, "The other issue that is a little more difficult is the access to a quality internet connection in our area which has both city and rural areas." School districts attempted to address the concern by reaching students by phone when they were unavailable via email, paying family Internet bills, and purchasing hot spots for students without Internet access.

COVID relief funds, or stimulus funds, were used to address the digital divide. Districts stated that they did not have the funding available to meet all of the existing needs. Funding concerns were shared regarding device repair, device replacement, and the sustainability of 1:1 programming.

Figure 2

Concerns Regarding Lack of Internet Access or Hot Spots Within Homes



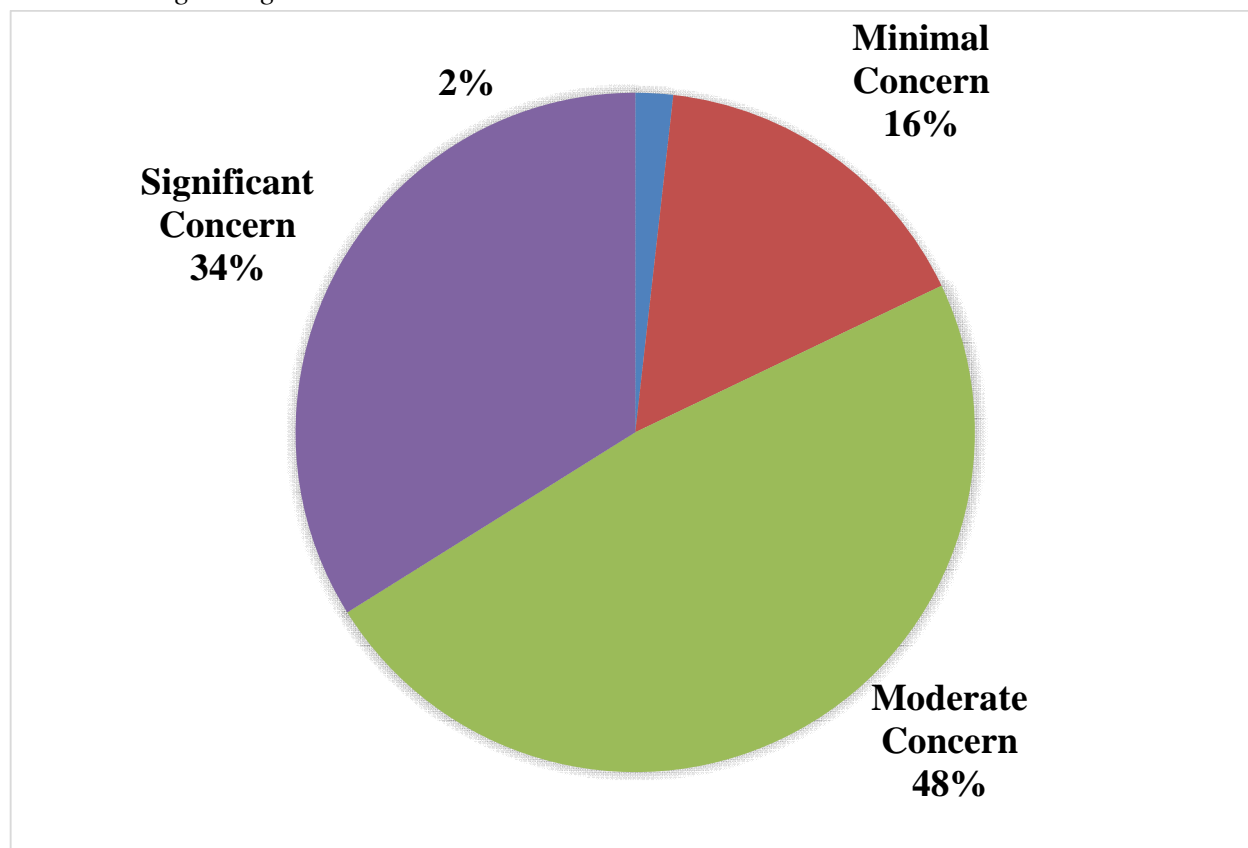
Addressing Lack of Internet or Hot Spots at Home

Districts assisted students and families, and in some cases, staff members, in gaining access to the Internet during the pandemic. This was primarily achieved through providing them with hotspots

or working with their local Internet service providers (ISP) to negotiate a free or reduced price. A technology director explained, “We were able to purchase 20 hotspots with unlimited data. This has closed a big gap for us, ensuring we could get access to those with the highest need.”

Districts were able to secure funds: donations, grant monies, and COVID relief funds to cover the cost of hotspots and Internet access. One district reported that they provided information about Internet options in the area but did not provide direct access.

Even when funds were available for devices and Internet access, there were still reported challenges. Distribution to families was sometimes slow. Rural locations, lack of cellular service, and inclement weather were all factors that impeded the reliability and adequacy of Internet access. A participant shared, “We have done hot spots - but in our area even that does not help because cell data coverage is VERY bad. Rural internet/broadband is a HUGE issue in this rural area... Our local phone companies are not blameless in this mess either.” In some cases, more than one hotspot per family had to be issued to address the demand for reliable Internet access. In other cases, no Internet access could be achieved even when a hotspot was provided for home use; this was particularly an issue with Chromebooks, which dropped Internet signal for unknown reasons. One district reported the use of transferring information onto flash drives for students or providing paper copies of homework assignments. When Internet access could not be achieved in a home location, one school reported opening its doors to allow hybrid learning for students on site.

Figure 3*Concerns Regarding Absenteeism***Addressing Absenteeism**

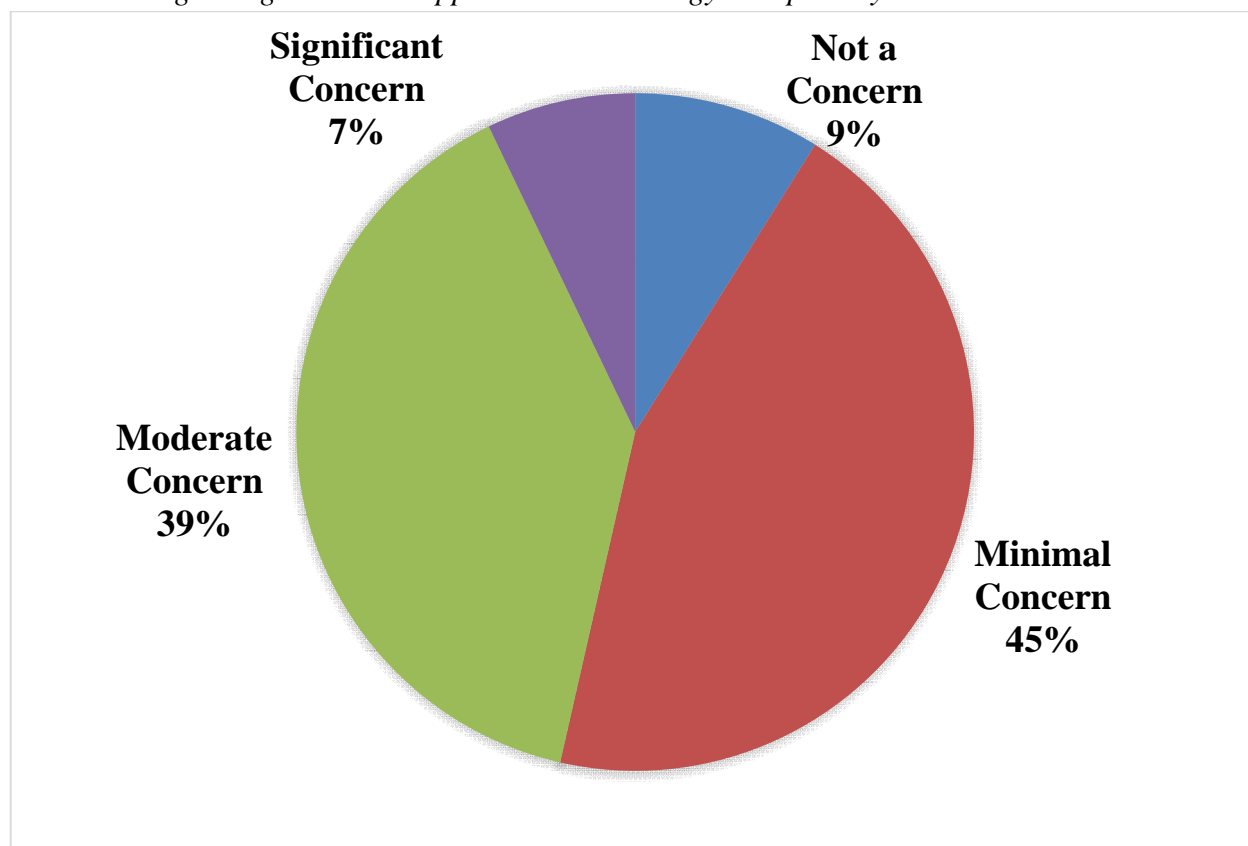
Concerns regarding absenteeism are represented in Figure 3. Absenteeism was mainly addressed by school districts through contact with parents and students. Communication between home and school occurred through a variety of methods including home visits, conferences, phone calls, and software alerts. Home visits could include the delivery of both food and school assignments. A range of staff members were called upon to make these connections, including deans, counselors, social workers, principals, advisors, distance learning liaisons, student success coordinators, student care teams, family literacy specialists, and classroom teachers. Districts noted the need to exercise compassion, prioritize relationships, and problem-solve when working with families during the pandemic. One respondent shared, “We have specific guidelines in place for students we would call academically disengaged. This can occur when we do not see them attending or when schoolwork seems to be slipping. This involves outreach from the building support team to re-engage with students and/or family.”

Some districts maintained the same attendance policies that they had for in-person learning, while others adjusted their attendance policies when instruction was delivered remotely. A principal affirmed, “This problem existed even with in-person learning. Administration works with the family as much as possible to get the child(ren) to school.” For example, one district

implemented a policy where students were contacted after they had not been seen online for three days. However, evidence of a student signing into a class was not necessarily a sign of engagement. There were scenarios when students signed into class but failed to fully engage with their online instruction. In some districts, paraprofessionals were hired as additional support for students during online learning. Students who were not participating online were offered the option to come to school to learn. Despite districts' best efforts, sometimes families were unresponsive to districts' attempts to engage with them. This was repeatedly reported as a struggle. If needed, the county stepped in to assist with truancy cases.

Figure 4

Concerns Regarding Parental Support and Technology Competency



Addressing Parental Support and Technology Competency

The vast majority (52/56) of respondents corroborated that providing adult caregivers technology assistance and training was a necessity during hybrid and fully online learning models as reported in the graph in Figure 4. One school leader remarked, “We have increased the number of staff reaching out to families and students with classroom connection issues (staying connected to the class and teacher and following along/staying caught up). Additionally, we have allowed students with limited home support to come into schools to get help when possible.” Two of the four schools that did not report a concern relied on students to be self-sufficient technology users. Districts

responded to needs by providing an array of responses to address the range of support and instruction caregivers provided their child(ren) in distance and hybrid learning models. Districts implemented proactive, conventional, and innovative strategies to support adult caregivers with technology questions.

Proactive efforts were identified by polling families and acting based on findings. These actions included disseminating information about the districts' distance learning models with the goal of fostering independent learning. The aim was to help caregivers use digital tools, troubleshoot devices, and operate software applications. A variety of media were distributed to support this aim, including *how to* documents, short videos, and online resources. Instructions were made available in multiple languages in order to be accessible for everyone in the community. In addition, districts limited the number of apps and platforms teachers used to help alleviate "parent paralysis." When needed, students were offered the opportunity to come to school in-person to work on their homework.

These efforts faced some challenges. A technology director observed, "We have worked to make sure staff are available to help students with schoolwork and have designed assignments to not require parent assistance. Unfortunately, we cannot help students who refuse to login at all."

Conventional approaches included caregivers contacting the teacher, calling the school, and emailing the school office. Districts created a physical help desk, a support phone line, and an online portal specifically to provide students and families with technology assistance. One district created paper packets of student work for families with technology concerns. When further communication was needed, teachers and other available staff, including administrators, were utilized to answer questions that arose from parents. Virtual office hours were conducted, and support was offered online and in-person. Personalized Zoom, Google Meets, and phone calls were offered and extended beyond the school day to help with homework in the evening. Synchronous online learning was offered to students in real time to encourage engagement. Advisors met with students to develop success plans and students were given additional support if needed through the formation of small groups and paraprofessional assistance. Many of these efforts were enacted to try to alleviate parental burdens. As one respondent said, "This year for distance learning and for hybrid, we are using a combination of instructional practices from school to the students directly, hopefully leaving none of the responsibilities to the parents."

Innovative strategies often involved using financial and human resources in new ways. In some districts, new staff members were hired to bridge family-technology concerns. While in other districts staff members were redesignated with titles and responsibilities such as Tech Team Digital Navigators. Districts organized technology information sessions and invited families to the school campus, met with families individually to provide assistance, and made home visits. School districts attempted to serve the larger community by offering technology related virtual community education classes. Family Literacy nights were utilized to help connect with families. In some scenarios, parents were encouraged to attend class with their children when able.

Inequities Emerging During Hybrid and Distance learning

District technology coordinators were asked if there were additional inequities discovered that were not included in the survey and how the inequities were addressed. Six inequities emerged from their responses.

Poverty Inequities Beyond the Digital Divide

Poverty was a factor that impacted students and families during COVID either due to pre-pandemic socioeconomic status or caregivers losing their jobs during the pandemic. The loss of school meals (breakfast, lunch, snacks) had a more significant impact on students experiencing poverty. It was difficult, logistically, for schools to provide food for kids. There were scenarios when drivers had COVID, so only the students who could self-transport received meals. Finally, poverty was frequently compounded by intersecting factors such as challenges associated with providing special education services and poor broadband.

Inadequate Broadband Service for Rural Communities and Large Families

Geographical inequities were significant. An issue was broadband availability to rural students in certain counties that have not had fiber Internet to the home installed. Districts reported as much as half the district boundary did not have connectivity. In some districts, there were many homes where the best form of Internet that the home could access was a hard-line dialup. There were affluent families that could not access reliable Internet for their homes. Districts shared that families live in communities where the Internet Service Providers do not reach them, or they cannot get a strong enough signal to support distance learning.

During the pandemic, it was realized that big families did not have adequate broadband to support distance learning. Districts reported that in distance learning even a 25MB Internet connection was not enough when there were three or four kids in a home attempting to participate in video conferences at one time.

Students' Mental Health Concerns

The need to adapt and keep students home, depending on childcare and job status, was challenging for most families. Districts reported that students' mental health was affected during the pandemic due to lack of interaction with peers, new competing responsibilities, and academic performance decline. Respondents felt that children in a single-child home were more significantly impacted due to not having other siblings in the home. It was noted that older siblings were often providing daycare for younger siblings as well as trying to learn themselves. Younger siblings in the home made it more difficult to concentrate. The stress and fatigue experienced by older siblings acting as the primary instructional support caregiver in the home during the school day caused some older students' academic progress to slip. Students shared that there was added pressure to work additional hours placed on them by their employers. The notion of remote school resulted in employers of students not respecting students' school hours. Post-pandemic, schools shared that they have a focus on social emotional learning (SEL) and the distribution of skills for learners and

families. An increased emphasis on relationships and keeping learners and teachers connected was prioritized.

Resource Implications to Sustain Technology Initiatives

Districts expressed concern regarding the long-term financial implications of distance and hybrid learning models. It was acknowledged that funds would be required to replace devices and the software costs for additional management and monitoring. Respondents were aware that student use would result in natural wear and tear on school issued devices. Human resource inequities were noted. Districts shared that inequities exist in staff because there are employees who do the minimum to get by and there are those who are early adopters who are eager to improve.

Systemic Cultural Inequities Affecting Marginalized Populations

Districts reported cultural barriers to using technology. For example, in northern Minnesota, the Native American population entrusted distance learning oversight to tribe elders. Yet, elders were often the least technologically savvy tribe members. Districts stated that students of color and high needs students struggled more than their peers in hybrid and distance learning models. Districts noted that an inequity that needed to be addressed was language concerns and educational services for students and families who are multilingual, specifically those qualifying for EL services.

Respondents contended that the school system is inequitable by design. The type of learning created in school does favor those who will persist through the work. When in-person, that persistence can be seen and encouraged if it is diminishing. Once learning models transitioned to distance learning, the compliance model became more challenging. It was noted that students learn differently, and some excelled with distance learning while others struggled and fell behind.

Conclusion

This study provides a glimpse of the inequity expanse that existed across the digital divide during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis required school districts to identify and address historical inequities that inhibited student academic success. To reach and teach all students, a structural approach needs to be taken to identify the inequities that exist within the educational system itself. School leaders need to be trained in equity literacy, and further research needs to be conducted. Additional insight can be gained from surveying technology directors beyond Minnesota to learn how they addressed their district's needs, especially those who lack home Internet access, are experiencing poverty, and speak a language other than English. Such information will guide educators and administrators to better address structural inequities within their school systems.

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KEEPING THE FREEDOM TO INCLUDE: TEACHERS NAVIGATING “PUSHBACK” AND MARSHALLING “BACKUP” TO KEEP INCLUSION ON THE AGENDA

Mica Pollock, Reed Kendall, Erika Reece, Dolores Lopez, and Mariko Yoshisato
University of California, San Diego

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mica Pollock, University of California, San Diego. Email: micapollock@ucsd.edu.

ABSTRACT

This paper shares K12 educators’ efforts to marshal local support for the act of basic inclusion: welcoming all communities as equally valuable. We share data from a national pilot of #USvsHate (usvshate.org), an educator- and student-led “anti-hate” messaging project. In interviews, participating educators revealed careers of “pushback” against even their basic efforts to include (mention or empathize with) marginalized populations. They also shared five key forms of “backup” they had learned to marshal to keep such topics on the agenda. Building on scholarship positioning basic and deeper inclusion work as the unarguable task of schools, we explore how keeping the freedom to undertake even basic inclusion efforts requires teachers to preserve agency through assembling local backup -- supports from other people.

Keywords: inclusion, pushback, backup, teacher agency, diversity

Introduction

In fall 2020, after a summer of nationwide protests for racial justice and a spring pandemic, many K12 educators began the year with explicit efforts to invite students of all identities to feel welcome and valued. Some ordered new books for classroom exploration; others created Zoom “backgrounds” or posted wall art to signal that all were welcome. And immediately, educators across the country reported local “pushback” against such efforts. In Texas, an educator was placed on probation after parents and community members complained that her Zoom background included a Black Lives Matter poster and rainbow flag; only after more than 23,000 parents,

students, and community members signed a public statement in her defense was she eventually reinstated (Fernández, 2020). In Oklahoma, as discussed in Author 1's Facebook group, a principal demanded that a teacher remove a "Your Life Matters" sign and posters of diverse faces painted by Shepard Fairey, posted on a physical wall. After debate, she was allowed to keep only the sign. And in Missouri, parents challenged a teacher for reading a book about the only Black astronaut aboard the Challenger Space Shuttle (Harris, 2021). The principal supported the teacher and decided to read the book to the entire school on Zoom.

In each case, educators were forced to navigate local "pushback" against their basic efforts to include--that is, simply mention, or teach empathetically about, the experiences of specific U.S. populations. In each case, teachers either marshalled or failed to marshal local *backup*--support to maintain their inclusion efforts. Their efforts magnified a basic dilemma in U.S. teaching. If critics try to censor a teacher's inclusion effort, who actually decides what gets discussed?

This paper shares K12 U.S. educators' efforts to navigate these core confusions by marshalling local support for inclusive teaching welcoming all communities. We explore how in a country with rising "pushback" against even basic inclusion efforts,¹ keeping the freedom to include students and topics in even basic ways requires teachers to preserve agency through assembling local *backup*. We came to define *backup* as local actors arranging supports to keep an empathetic discussion of human experience on the agenda.

We share data from a national pilot of #USvsHate ("us versus hate"), an educator- and student-led "anti-hate" messaging project co-designed by the authors and educators/youth in our region and across the country from 2017-2020. Piloted first in San Diego, #USvsHate was designed originally to address a "hate spike" era of emboldened bigotry and harassment on K12 campuses after the 2016 election (Rogers et al., 2017, 2019; Human Rights Campaign, 2017; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019). By publicly refusing "hate" and insisting on safe and welcoming classrooms and schools, #USvsHate also sought to provide an "onramp" to deeper investigation of longstanding experiences of bias, exclusion, and inequality in U.S. life (Pollock & Yoshisato, 2022). In its most basic form, #USvsHate invites students to insist publicly that "all people are equally valuable."

#USvsHate offers educators an open-ended invitation to design "anti-hate" learning experiences and encourages students to create "anti-hate" messages in any medium for their school communities and the broader public, through local sharing and a now-national biannual "challenge" or contest designed to amplify students' messages to a broader audience. Educators first teach "anti-hate" material of their own design, building off their existing curriculum or tapping lessons curated from national partner organizations; such lessons include lessons for Building an Inclusive School Community (e.g., issues of inclusion, identity, relationship-building, harassment, bullying, empathy, and "words that hurt") and lessons on Specific Forms of Hate, Bias, and Injustice (e.g., "racism," "xenophobia," "homophobia," "transphobia," "Islamophobia," "antisemitism," and "sexism."). #USvsHate defines "hate" as "any time people denigrate, disrespect or harm an individual or group as if their identity makes them an inferior or less valuable type of person." The project website invites students to make "anti-hate" messages that:

- communicate that people across lines of difference contribute to our communities, regions, and nation, are equally valuable, and deserve access to opportunity and well-being;
- explicitly address, explore, and refuse racism, xenophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism, sexism, or other forms of hate, bias and injustice in schools and society;
- celebrate our actual diversity and similarity, busting myths (challenging stereotypes) about any “type of” person too often misrepresented;
- ask people to treat each other kindly, fairly and respectfully, so schools stay safe for learning and society includes us all.

Educators and students share #USvsHate messages locally, then submit entries to a national “challenge” (contest); participating youth and teachers are invited to vote via Google Form on finalists. Winners are then posted on the usvshate.org project website, shared via @usvshate social media, and produced as posters and stickers sent back to participating classrooms to shape school climate. The website summarizes that “#USvsHate embraces inclusion and justice for all in our diverse schools and society,” and emphasizes that “Every school community can help spread the message that all community members are part of ‘US!’”

The project was an opportunity to explore, with educators, their basic and deeper inclusion work both in #USvsHate and throughout their careers (we have also explored #USvsHate with its youth participants; see, e.g., Pollock & Yoshisato, 2021). After piloting, expansion, and ongoing ethnographic study in San Diego (2017-2019; see Pollock & Yoshisato, 2021, 2022), #USvsHate was piloted nationally in 2019-20 through a challenge hosted by Teaching Tolerance (now Learning for Justice), the education arm of the Southern Poverty Law Center. We studied this national “scaleup” through interviews and focus groups with participating educators and students, again with the intention of feeding suggestions back into the project’s design (Barab, 2006; Dede, 2005). This paper focuses on 2019-20 national data.

While our overarching research on #USvsHate has explored more general questions (e.g., *How are educators and students in various contexts experiencing the dialogue and messaging efforts of #USvsHate, and what adjustments do they recommend? What can we learn about implementing such efforts in polarized contexts?*), here, we grapple publicly with a more specific inquiry: how did participating teachers react to efforts to stop their inclusion teaching? This paper taps stories participants told us about their careers long before #USvsHate, which clarified how “pushback” to inclusion teaching is nothing new -- even as educators need strategies for handling newly heightened versions of such pushback today, now more than ever (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022; see footnote 1). This paper analyzes core “backup” strategies named by educators as successful for keeping inclusion on the agenda over their careers.

In interviews, educators routinely described prior careers of experiencing “pushback” from parents, colleagues, students, and community critics against extremely basic efforts to include (mention or discuss empathetically) marginalized populations in specific communities (an act we theorize elsewhere as “basic inclusion”; Authors, in preparation). Indeed, as we listened to teachers, we noted that many participating educators’ stories were actually about pushback against *extremely basic* initial inclusion efforts from earlier in their careers: teachers had simply argued

that a marginalized population existed, was equally valuable, mattered, should not be harmed, and deserved to be welcomed or learned about in school settings. Whether teachers were mentioning LGBTQ people's very existence or saying simply that "humanity is bigger than borders," teachers essentially were just making clear that a population existed and deserved human respect.

Teachers also shared how over their careers, they had learned to marshal local support proactively to continue such inclusion efforts in their classrooms and schools -- the act we here analyze as "backup." In our data analysis phase, we thus came to ask this paper's specified research question about teachers' inclusion efforts: *If critics tried to censor a teacher's inclusion effort, who actually decided what got discussed?* We came to define *pushback* as the moments when local critics called for taking empathetic treatment of a community or its experiences *off* of the agenda in a classroom or school (e.g., saying that books featuring Black astronauts or mentioning LGBTQ families should not be read in school). We came to define *backup* as local actors arranging supports to keep an empathetic discussion of human experience on the agenda.

Teachers described battles over inclusion essentially as battles among local people over whether a given topic of human experience would be discussed empathetically (or at all) at school. The situation required teachers to preserve their agency *to* pursue even basic inclusion through assembling supports from other people--proactively in case they got pushback, and reactively when they did.

While much research has made the case for both basic and deeper inclusion work (see Literature, below), less research has offered concrete, empirically-based suggestions for teachers encountering pushback against even basic inclusion efforts. We thus offer a taxonomy of educators' own strategies for marshalling local support for welcoming all communities. We explore five key forms of "backup" that teachers had learned to seek and arrange in order to persist in basic inclusion efforts.

We first briefly discuss related literature positioning both basic and deeper "inclusion" as a core responsibility of schools in a democratic and diverse society, then delve more deeply into literature that hints that teachers must develop their own agency to keep the freedom *to* include in a society where many find such basic inclusion threatening. Including and supporting all students is actually educators' legal responsibility, but teachers seem to keep the freedom *to* include populations in discussion and programming only if supporters and employers insist they can.

Prior Literature and Theoretical Frameworks

Much education scholarship expects educators to teach for "inclusion" both basic and deep. Multicultural education (e.g., Nieto, 1999), anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Howard, 2010) call for affirming students' identities in schools (Cohn-Vargas & Steele, 2013) while also developing students' ability to critique hierarchies and "fight against the many isms and phobias that they encounter" (Milner, 2011, p 69). Teachers nationwide come across such methods as foundational tools for supporting youth success -- that is, as their job. In its invitation for students and school communities to "call for inclusion and opportunity for all 'types of people' across our society" and "reject any situation

or action that treats some ‘types of people’ as inherently more valuable than others,” (usvsbate.org/about), #USvsHate hopes to ignite such inclusion effort. Yet many participating educators described prior careers of encountering “pushback” when attempting to simply mention, empathetically, often-excluded communities as equally valid.

Indeed, scholarship describes a key murkiness for K12 teachers if local parents, community members, students, or colleagues “push back” against their efforts at inclusion: educators seem both free and not necessarily free to treat marginalized populations empathetically. While tenured university professors expect “academic freedom,” K12 teachers’ speech and pedagogical choices are not so clearly protected (Levinson & Fay, 2019; Uerling, 2000). Courts often privilege the power of school boards and administrators to exercise control over curriculum and instruction, following the principle that teachers speak for the state as employees when teaching (Patterson & Chandler, 2008). Teachers also are expected to teach to “standards” as interpreted by local leaders. Thus, K12 teachers’ decisions to explore specific topics in specific ways within their classrooms are highly dependent on the school system and community in which they teach. In particular, educators wading into issues deemed controversial by their systems often seem at the mercy of employers, who could deem issues “too political” and off limits to educators expected to remain publicly “neutral” (Hess & MacAvoy, 2014). Fearing critics (if leaders do not explicitly protect teachers’ work), many teachers in a nation ostensibly committed to “free speech” fear they are not to mention any controversial issue (Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017). Today, lawyers are increasingly working with teachers to clarify their own speech rights (Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center, 2022).

At the same time, U.S. free speech law protects *students’* right to discuss their views and identities in school (Eidelman & Hinger, 2018). Current laws in specific states, such as California’s Education Code Section 51204.5, say explicitly that the historical “roles and contributions” of various marginalized groups “shall be included” in “instruction” (California Legislative Information, 2020). School climate research has insisted that activities that “promote social inclusion” support student success and should be core to educators’ work (Coulston & Smith, 2013; Cardillo, 2013; Way & Nelson, 2018). Further, scholarship on schools’ role in fostering inclusive democracy argues bluntly that even as educators invite debate and deliberation over divergent ideas, educators can and must assert the equal worth of human populations (Rogers, forthcoming). And finally, U.S. civil rights laws *expect* educators to protect students’ right to learn free from harassment or other discrimination (ACLU, 2020; Pollock, 2008). Thus, as explicit bigotry escalated across the nation’s campuses after the 2016 election and the Authors began designing #USvsHate in response, national organizations reminded educators that the basic work of welcoming all communities was simply educators’ job (SPLC, 2018).

As noted below, teachers’ basic efforts to “include” each played out in a unique ecological context, such that inclusion work made “off limits” in one community was “on limits” in another. In each community, that is, an educator had to navigate *toward* the ability to teach for inclusion in specific ways. So, to analyze the many stories of such navigation in the data shared below, we tapped scholarship on teacher agency and *ecological agency*.

Scholarship argues that teachers' actions are shaped by given environments with rewards and punishments (Priestley et al., 2015). More specifically, work on ecological agency suggests that teachers' ability to shape their daily work is forged in specific settings through "the interplay of individuals' efforts, available resources and contextual and structural factors" (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 137). Teachers' stories of handling resistance to their inclusion efforts typically shared how teachers navigated local ecologies and specific actors in them to be able to include specific populations, both proactively in case of pushback and reactively in response to it. As seen below, teachers leaned on resources beyond their localities (e.g., national organizations, state standards, laws) to "back up" and justify their inclusion work. But the most important factor was whether local *people* would "back up" the inclusion work critiqued.

Researchers call overall for "more contextualized treatment" of inclusion efforts, including "attention to larger context(s)" of hostility to inclusion (Poteat et al., p. 511-12). Yet researchers exploring pushback against inclusion efforts often call more generally for building alliances (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018), or offer hypothetical case studies (Levinson & Fay, 2019; Howell et al., 2019) or philosophical arguments (Bialystok, 2015). Our work, instead, seeks to support educators more concretely in navigating such "pushback." This paper thus attempts to contribute empirical examples of such *backup* work from across the country, at a moment when "pushback" increasingly threatens teachers' efforts at even basic inclusion (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022). While some have used the term "pushback" to describe antiracist countermoves through which people of color counter harm (e.g., Ore, 2016), we define it as our teacher participants used it: to describe critics insisting that specific populations should not be included or validated, nor their experiences discussed. We focus here on how educators, as agents, created the local conditions for basic inclusion to occur -- what we came to call "backup."

We turn now to our methods and findings.

Methods

In 2019-2020, during a year of national scale-up of #USvsHate, we invited teachers and students participating to comment on #USvsHate experiences via interviews, focus groups, support gatherings, and open-ended anonymous surveys that educators received when submitting entries to our national challenges or expressing interest on the usvshate.org website.

We contacted all who submitted to our contests and also contacted all educators we saw posting on the project on social media, inviting participants to share how educators and students were experiencing the project, supports they needed to persist in or improve the work, and how their efforts were received in their local contexts. In this year, 44 educators submitted student anti-hate messages to the #USvsHate national contest and reported almost 4000 students participating in #USvsHate at their schools. Through analyzing our public submission form, we determined that of the 44 submitting educators (almost all teachers, with two school leaders), 65% were from suburban areas, 20% from urban, 10% from rural, and 5% from a mixed area. The majority came from public schools, with a smaller percentage from charter and private schools. Of the teachers who submitted, 55% self-described their race as white, 7% as Black, 7% Latinx, 4% Asian, and

2% as Native American; 25% did not select a “race” (e.g., “Other” or “Prefer Not To Say”). 30% of submissions came from elementary grades, 35% from middle school, 25% from high school, and 10% from multi-grade schools (e.g., K-8; 6-12). Of the 44 submitting educators that we invited, we secured interviews with 27 via phone, Zoom video calls, and at support gatherings. Of those interviewed, 91% were female, 6% male, and one self-described as nonbinary. (We include such gender and race self-descriptors below when they will not make participants findable.) 25% taught English Language Arts, 25% multiple subjects, 30% integrated subjects (e.g., freshman seminar, school counseling, etc.), 7% art, 3% various STEM subjects, and 10% advising school clubs. As it happened, none of the teachers we interviewed were first-year teachers; experience ranged from several years to many.

We interviewed educators from the East, South, Midwest, and West, in suburban, urban, and rural communities. We share some location details to convey the diversity of ecosystems navigated. As described by those interviewed, settings ranged from “a low economic school with...around 80-85% free and reduced lunch” (Southern California), to a low-income neighborhood “almost like a little small town in the middle of [a city]” (Oklahoma), to a school for “at-risk” youth in “the hill country” of rural Texas with a majority “non-Hispanic Caucasian [sic]” demographic and also a “growing Hispanic population, [and] a very small African American population.” One teacher said her school in New Jersey had a “very diverse, multicultural ethnic background,” with a large and diverse “Asian population” and “very few low-income families.” Another teacher in Oklahoma said she taught at “an alternative school where we’re 100% free and reduced lunch” and a “10% white population.” A teacher east of San Diego taught at a high-poverty school with eight different home languages and “a lot” of “refugees from countries like Iraq or Syria or Afghanistan or the Republic of Congo.” An art teacher in St. Louis taught in two predominantly Black schools surrounded by factories and “abandoned buildings.” Another teacher from suburban New Jersey noted her community was “90% Hispanic,” including people from “South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean.” A Black teacher from Iowa (the only non-white educator mentioned in this paragraph), described teaching at a predominantly white IB school where “there’s about 700 students, and I don’t know if even 100 would be minorities.”

Without prompting, teachers described working in a range of *ideological* contexts. Several described schools wholly committed to inclusion and diversity, particularly charter, private, or religious schools--such as a Waldorf school in Vermont devoted to “a pedagogy that recognizes humans as spiritual beings,” or an Illinois large city school an educator described as being “one of the few faith schools...rooted in Catholicism that actually actively celebrate and recognize the faith traditions of other students and families that are represented.” One teacher described their public school in Madison, WI, as a “super liberal place.” These educators described experiencing local ecosystems that felt explicitly committed to supporting inclusion work.

Others described participating in #USvsHate under very different ideological circumstances, such as “an incredibly conservative community, especially with LGBTQ” (Southern California) or “a very well off predominantly higher socioeconomic bracket,” with “more white/Asian groups” and “more conservative parents” (San Diego, CA). One teacher

described her “university town” as its “own diverse, pretty liberal bubble in this more conservative space” (Virginia), while another described doing the work in a “majority Caucasian [sic] school” in “a very, um [slight pause], evangelical area” (rural South), where parents would complain to administrators about any mention of LGBTQ issues and “many parents object to certain books that deal with race.” While we were particularly primed for stories of local “white” resistance to #USvsHate effort, a standard research finding re K12 “antiracist” efforts (Pollock & Matschiner, forthcoming), teachers also described more complex demographic dynamics undergirding local “objections” to inclusive teaching. A Southern California teacher, for example, described immigrant and refugee parents making both anti-Black and anti-Mexican comments on group discussion boards, and anxiously asking “are the gays coming?” regarding an LGBTQ guest speaker invited to the school. Each situation provided a specific context for #USvsHate’s inclusion efforts.

In interviews, which ranged from 30-60 minutes, we asked educators about instructional resources used in #USvsHate experiences, successful and difficult moments, and supports needed to discuss these issues at school. We asked questions like “How did you incorporate #USvsHate into your teaching or your school community?” and “How would you describe [students’, parents’, colleagues’, administrators’] reactions to #USvsHate?” We found that much of our data was metapragmatic (Silverstein, 1993), as teachers talked about their ability to talk: Teachers described a battle over communicating publicly and inside classrooms about the experiences of U.S. populations, often literally using the term “pushback” to describe how different local actors called key discussions unacceptable. Educators also often named topics that were particularly off-limits in their community, what we came to call “third rail topics,” as discussed below. We probed these stories for ethnographic detail when they arose in our interviews, even as we worked hard not to insert the literal term “pushback” ourselves (Mischler, 1991; Briggs, 1986).

We used discourse analysis techniques piloted in studies on race/diversity talk (e.g., Pollock, 2004, 2008, 2015) to analyze themes in our fieldnotes and interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2006). We first coded our data for moments when local critics argued that basic inclusion should *not* occur (what we and participants called “pushback”). We then began to notice both that teachers’ stories reached back into their prior careers, and that teachers’ stories described educators and others creating the local conditions for basic inclusion to occur (what we came to call “backup”). In our more focused coding and analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995), we then began to code both for versions of “pushback” and strategies for countering it that arose in participants’ responses and across individuals (Boyatzis, 1998), noting a variety of educators’ efforts to secure, from and with other local people, the ability to teach for inclusion locally--what we named “backup.” We discussed repeated versions of “pushback” and “backup” weekly with our project team, then organized backup examples into the five “buckets” below. As member checks (Richards, 2005), we increasingly asked interviewees about local reception of their inclusion work as we realized the prevalence of “pushback” stories. As we continued to see national examples of state-level legislation and even national organizations and politicians countering basic inclusive teaching (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022; see Footnote 1), we decided to produce an ethnographically

based analysis of “pushback” experiences and taxonomy of “backup” strategies that teachers themselves articulated. Our findings section shares overarching patterns and then our more specific taxonomy of five “backup” forms.

Findings

In interviews, some educators described experiencing “pushback” from critics about the most basic form of “inclusion”: including “identity” discussions in school. As one teacher from Chula Vista, CA, noted, “I think when we do important lessons like this that deal with social issues and identity, we are not going to please everyone.” Teachers using the term “pushback” also described local resistance to teaching *specific groups’* experiences (e.g., the existence of LGBTQ families) and to discussing overall topics like race or immigration. Educators also described critics’ resistance to specific *ways of* teaching a given subject, often hinging on how empathetically specific populations were discussed. In one San Diego school where the principal had herself once taught units on immigration history and refugees today, for example, the same principal agreed with a complaining parent that a teacher mentioning empathetically the struggles of today’s undocumented immigrants was “inappropriate.”

Educators told us that throughout their careers, such local “pushback” had come from parents particularly, as well as from administrators, colleagues, and students. One Midwestern teacher who described herself as Black shared how her principal had once critiqued her for adding discussion of racism to a lesson about “bullying”: he didn’t care about his students becoming “woke,” he’d said, just “on grade level.” Sometimes, it was students who pushed back on the inclusion of particular topics, citing their own religious beliefs or parents’ opinions. In Washington state, a teacher who identified as a woman of color recalled that a student had once opposed discussing LGBTQ topics because “my parents say that trans is bad and I shouldn’t learn about it.” One teacher said colleagues, too, historically had complained about feeling “forced” to teach about specific inclusion topics. Pushback from various actors in local ecosystems therefore focused both on teaching a given subject at all and on engaging in conversations empathetic to populations oppressed or marginalized. Teachers described both muting their own conversations about specific topics and learning to assemble support in order to talk.

As we analyzed these stories, we came to call “pushback” to specific topics (or to empathizing with specific groups) *third rail* pushback: in each ecological context, teachers noted that particular topics or populations were deemed “too controversial” to discuss. The phrase “third rail” refers originally to an electrified subway rail fatal to touch; in common usage, it denotes topics avoided by politicians fearing defeat. Each education community had its own third rail(s). Just within San Diego County, for example, a white teacher from an elementary charter school serving Latinx families said he typically felt comfortable discussing immigration but recently experienced “lines of parents” angry after he had read a book that included an image of a same-sex family on one page among other family images. In her predominantly white, upper-class San Diego community, a white elementary teacher said, educators had long “tread in really safe waters, where it’s less about skin color and religion, and we tend to be more about disabilities.” A woman

of color in a racially diverse charter elementary (with a mission committed to “diversity and equity”) said her administration and some “families” had resisted her prior efforts to teach lessons on gender identity to support a transgender student in her class; in contrast, she added, “I can teach about Black History Month and things.” One white K-8 teacher in a white/Latinx middle-class school deemed her students too “sheltered” to understand a “Being Mexican Isn’t a Crime” #USvsHate poster by a local student, even as she noted the community’s easy acceptance of a Gay-Straight Alliance club (“it’s just not stigmatized here”). And a white principal in a charter school focused on “social justice” (serving Latinx families near the border) said parents offered pushback only if teachers discussed *certain* marginalized identities. “You’ll talk about things like racism and feminism and you’ll hear nothing,” he said, but “[t]he second you start talking about homosexuality or LGBTQ it’s a firestorm.”

Different ecosystems made some third rails particularly hot during the years studied.² In San Diego communities in 2018-19 and 2019-20, some educators described particular pushback against empathetic discussions of immigrants because of the current administration’s overt targeting of undocumented immigrants and because of communities’ location relatively near the border. As a high school English/History teacher referencing the border wall and detention centers put it, “Immigration is a hot button issue, particularly in San Diego...I just try to not talk as much about it.” She described fearing “emails from the parents, and my Principal telling me what I can and cannot do in my classroom.” A high school humanities teacher from suburban Southern California noted that in her month-long unit about the national debate on immigration, she anticipated local critics might deem “us versus hate” as aligning with “a particular political agenda or... anti-Trump, or anti a particular policy.” As one middle school ELA teacher from a Philadelphia suburb put it, students repeated “things they were hearing on the news” and were “saying to other kids, ‘You know, we’re going to build a wall and you’re going to have to leave.’” The teacher added that for local teachers, though, expressing any take on immigration or immigrants felt like an off-limits “political opinion”: “you could get yourself into huge amounts of trouble if you express a political opinion related to some of those beliefs...and it’s hard. It’s hard to find where the line is.” Notably, she added that during the 2016 election, even basic efforts “to make sure that our kids of color have equal access to programming” had met local resistance.

Unexpectedly, in fall through early spring 2019-20, just before pandemic shutdowns and before the Black Lives Matter protests of summer 2020, our interviewees less commonly described race and racism as third rail topics prompting local “pushback,” other than racialized pushback in San Diego about supporting “undocumented immigrants” framed as non-white. One teacher in the rural South did note that “there were a lot of parents really upset” about a colleague’s recent teaching of the young adult novel *Dear Martin*, about a Black student shot by an off-duty White police officer: “Typically that has happened when it deals with books dealing with race,” she explained. Several teachers mentioned anti-Asian racism spiking in their communities during the COVID pandemic, but none of these teachers described “pushback” for discussing such realities with students. As researchers, we found ourselves wondering if our 2019-20 national sample of teachers (who were willing to be highlighted by a national organization they deeply respected,

Teaching Tolerance) was skewed toward more experienced teachers, perhaps leading to fewer stories of “pushback” when teachers discussed issues of race. We also emphasize now that this study took place before a national campaign targeted a caricatured “Critical Race Theory” that critics imagined in K12 schools in 2020-2021, after more educators nationwide attempted to explore issues of race and racism after the protests of summer 2020 (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022).

But we also saw that teachers had learned from navigating a particular inclusion effort throughout their careers. In 2019-20, basic LGBTQ inclusion was the topic that teachers most described having experienced as a third rail throughout their professional lives. Educators noted that over their careers, students’ own demand to discuss LGBTQ communities and experiences empathetically had forced the issue onto the school agenda particularly often; local critics had pushed for outright censorship of LGBTQ experiences as well as policed any empathetic tone. And crucially, throughout our data, educators offered thoughts on how they and colleagues had come to strategically marshal backup to navigate local calls for censorship. Most had successfully participated in #USvsHate without problems, supporting students to voice their messages of inclusion.

We focus now on five forms of “backup” teachers had *learned* to marshal to enable basic inclusion efforts in their ecosystems. Educators either proactively lined up or reactively leaned on one or multiple forms of backup to keep inclusion on the agenda:

Five forms of backup

1. **Stealth backup:** educator makes a quiet, sometimes hidden effort to enable discussions of marginalized communities’ experiences.
2. **Subspace backup:** educator creates a subspace to afford an empathetic conversation about a community in a safe space, like a specific classroom or club.
3. **Student-led backup:** educator follows a student-led effort to teach about a community experience, then explains that students initiated and led the conversation there.
4. **School leader backup:** educator gets a powerful school player to vouch for the inclusion effort (e.g., a principal).
5. **System backup:** educator taps into systemic support (beyond the school) to protect inclusion effort (laws, standards, district-sponsored trainings, union, district staff).

Stealth backup

One 7th grade ELA teacher in the rural South noted that colleagues anticipating critics attempting to censor teaching on specific topics, like “race,” had learned to sometimes openly preview with families what they planned to teach, then provide “opt out” options that let students skip texts. This had happened with a book discussing race and police brutality:

There’s a teacher at our school who was teaching the book *Dear Martin*, there were a lot of parents really upset with him teaching that book... so what a lot of teachers will do at my school before they assign a book, [is that] they’ll send a note out to parents letting them

know and they'll go ahead and give an opt-out. Now this teacher did that, 'here's another book if you're not as comfortable,' you know?

The effort kept inclusion on the agenda only partially, but it was perhaps more inclusive of content for most students than other teacher actions in her community. This teacher noted that teachers also had learned to "adapt" books to delete sections for everyone that might trigger local complaints. Her colleague had done that with *Dear Martin*:

He explained some of the themes in it and that there was stronger language in it, even though he went in and took the stronger language out, he adapted the book himself, there were a lot of parents who were still uncomfortable and so the kids read a different book that dealt with similar topics.

She noted further that locally, literature on characters who were "proudly LGBTQ" would particularly prompt parents to approach "our administration" with "complaints about books":

We have read literature that involves students that are either questioning or who are proudly LGBTQ. But, I still worry. And I also have to be very careful with how I present it in this community because we have parents that have often come up to classes and to our administration with complaints about books, with complaints about any type of topic that veers into that. So, that's been something that I've always been cognizant of because I'm from [state] and I feel like it's been that way since I was young.

In this Southern community, "upset" parents often succeeded in censoring books and "language" for specific children, even as educators managed to keep a community's lived experience on the agenda overall. So, educators who knew parents waited to critique discussions that even "veered into" third rail topics also sometimes made fully *stealth* efforts to include populations and support students' freedom to learn without potential critics knowing. This teacher described how a quiet partnership with the school's librarians was key to heading off parent "complaints": they determined which books would be "put out" in public and which instead would be shared more quietly from inside her classroom as a personally funded mini-library. "I also have to, I guess just be cognizant of where I'm at, with what I say," she said:

So our library, actually, at the school, will not put certain books out that they feel might garner some of those complaints. So what we'll do--the librarians and I kind of work together. I will go out and buy said book, and I will have it in my classroom so if there is a kid who is interested in that type of book, will get sent to my classroom and will be able to get that type of book. And I've had to pretty much tell a girl, you know "take this home, but don't show your mom," which probably isn't the best thing to say, but, she really wanted to read a book that she could connect with.

Of course, such stealth efforts left books about specific populations' lives read only by individuals. The "advance permission" efforts above left the "adapted" books read only in part; "opt out" efforts left books read only by some. Still, as agents in their communities, teachers quietly helped students read books and passages they "could connect with." Even as such efforts deleted overt discussions of topics, that is, teachers had learned to keep basic inclusion minimally on the agenda even in ecologies leaning toward outright censorship.

The instinct to proceed stealthily depended on teachers' individual reactions to local ecologies. In our San Diego pilot in 2018-19, one elementary teacher, a woman of color serving low-income families of color, had described her very different process of openly inviting parents into back-to-school-night dialogue to build "buy in" on her planned #USvsHate exploration of children's experiences of "hate" on school grounds. Another, a white teacher in a more "sheltered," mostly-white community, said she refused to "ask permission" from parents for basic inclusive teaching but actually called #USvsHate work "anti-hate messaging" or "welcome messaging" because parents might find the project title too "political." In our national sample of different ecosystems, we met teachers who had learned to pursue a combination of proactive family "permission" for describing community experiences, and strategies instead leaning quietly on less triggering language.

Teachers also had learned to shelter students from knowledge or experience *of* such controversies, by creating specific subspaces to enable foundationally inclusive dialogue.

Subspace backup

In one San Diego area elementary school, teachers who felt they had "built a huge sense of safety in [their] classrooms" described purposefully keeping students unaware of tensions brewing between the principal and a parent complaining about a child's poster saying it was "OK to love any gender." The teachers described continuing in their own classrooms, staying committed to a subspace where they sheltered students from the larger controversy. One teacher noted:

We never communicated to our class the roadblocks that we were facing with the principal or parents...not only did we just build a huge sense of safety in our classroom, we never brought back some of the challenges we were facing, so they continued to feel that sense of freedom to speak and freedom to be in our class. That didn't change.

In other ecosystems, teachers proactively created safe spaces outside classrooms for inclusive discussion of community experiences. At a Chicago Catholic school, a school leader advised a "Student of Color/Multicultural Experience" club as a space for students to have open, trusting conversations about experiences of race, gender, sexuality, and identity:

So I feel like it's brought out the best in so many of our students. It's also really allowed them to have very honest and real and raw conversations and reflections, because we're only meeting once a month, even just developing that sense of trust in the group.

In Kansas, a middle school librarian led a "diversity leadership club" that met outside of students' class time to learn about unconscious bias related to race, sexuality, and gender through field trips, dinner events, and small group discussions. After completing a training, club members taught lessons on these topics to peers during the school's flex time, taking inclusion efforts more directly into classrooms.

Teachers also indicated that sometimes key staff members were safe subspaces unto themselves by simply existing *as* themselves. As the educator from the Illinois religious school put it, a trans staff member "within our school community" was a "tremendous resource" for

schoolwide welcoming of students “that are considering, or questioning, or are in the LGBTQ community,” simply by broadcasting that “he's comfortable in himself with who he is.”

Educators who themselves shared identities marginalized in many ecosystems also shared how they proactively created subspaces welcoming students' discussion of often-marginalized experiences. One Wisconsin non-binary, queer teacher described publicly in a large national Facebook group how in a prior community where they had taught, administrators and families had celebrated only straight colleagues' engagements and weddings. In contrast, in the teacher's present school in a university town, being openly LGBTQ felt possible. Still, students requested safe subspaces for such discussion. The teacher noted in our interview how students had actively requested an LGBTQ group subspace affording basic dialogue about inclusion:

A couple of fifth graders came up to me and asked if we could have an LGBTQ group. I was like, “Oh, sure.” That's called a GSA and I'd be happy to have one.

The teacher described further how students led LGBTQ-focused dialogue in their subspace: So we meet once a week, um, for their recess time and just, they kind of come up with the agenda...They've done some institutes where they research a topic like Stonewall even or LGBTQ around the world. And then they come with information on a poster or a presentation, on Google slides or something and present to the group about that topic.

The students eventually made a video calling for LGBTQ+ and diversity-inclusive schools, which the teacher posted on the Facebook group with “likes” by many thousands. Thus, student requests to create a sub-space to discuss the topic in this teacher's “liberal” school had catalyzed both the teacher's agency in creating that space, and then amplification of the topic nationally.

Other educators described similarly following *student-led* efforts that enabled local teaching on a community experience. After students demanded a basic conversation, teachers could more comfortably have it.

Student-led backup

In our interviews of 27 teachers, seven teachers spontaneously mentioned students pressing to talk about LGBTQ issues or do #USvsHate projects around LGBTQ topics -- and the teachers noted how such student desires made these basic conversations more possible where they worked. A white high school teacher in New Jersey expressed happiness that a lot of her students voluntarily did projects on LGBTQ+ issues for the #USvsHate contest, as their choices allowed her to have related discussions in class. She felt this was especially important to balance out complaints from some students from local “religious” and “very conservative” families. Despite “[recognizing] that there's prejudice and discrimination in their own community,” she noted, such students had in her experience contested even basic LGBTQ inclusion efforts, declaring “well, my religion tells me that it's wrong.” Yet with local student peers pushing the issue, classroom conversations then often seemed to engage such students who had initially resisted third rail topics. The teacher was increasingly hopeful about inclusion efforts in her community: “I see them more and more comfortable talking about those issues like every single year.”

Many teachers noted that local student comfort with a given third rail topic made it infinitely easier to discuss in their schools. A teacher in a “progressive leaning” Pennsylvania suburb noted that while “middle school kids are unkind in the way they speak to each other in general,” students raising the topic of LGBTQ experience themselves enabled peer dialogue on the subject where she worked. She noted being impressed that her students were so “compassionate and open-minded,” not “bat[ting] an eyelash” as a student described transitioning from a “she” to a “he.” The Kansas librarian noted seeing “a lot more students also talking about LGBTQ+,” a form of backup she framed as enabling inclusion efforts in her school community.

Teachers saw student comfort with a “third rail” issue often exceed adults’, leading adults to “push themselves” into new conversations in the local environment. A Washington teacher noted that her student teacher, anxious about teaching LGBTQ topics in #USvsHate, gained comfort as students led the discussion. “There were quite a few students who were like, ‘Oh yeah, well I identify as trans,’ or [some] identify as pansexual... It was funny cause they were more comfortable with that kind of direct topic”:

I saw a lot of interest in transgender issues and transphobia. I feel like more and more, every year, I have students identify as trans at a younger and younger age. Um, and they are feeling more comfortable sharing that with the class, sharing that with teachers, which has pushed us to really push ourselves as a staff. We’ve been looking at how we can make these students comfortable.

As teachers followed the lead of students who were “more comfortable” than themselves in basic conversations about previously third rail topics, teachers started seeking new “training” and professional development resources as additional backup for local work:

We started some training, or we started looking into the resources that GLSEN makes [Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network]. We [also] hope to use this resource, I think it’s called Safe Space Kit, soon. And we were actually looking at doing the professional development on it before, you know, COVID.

Students demanding a community’s experience be discussed in this ecosystem thus supported not just one teacher’s agency in teaching the topic, but development of more backup schoolwide.

Other educators went to school leaders directly to proactively seek support for inclusion efforts -- particularly, their principals.

School leader backup

Teachers most often approached school leaders for backup for basic inclusion, according to our interviews. Some teachers noted that principals actually “supported” at times by essentially ignoring teachers’ efforts, or at least never intervening in them. As the Wisconsin teacher put it, “My principal supports me so much...he trusted me to like do it on my own.” Yet many educators spoke of learning to proactively seek support in case local critics complained. For example, “Jane,” a white elementary teacher east of San Diego, noted that prior to a lesson on “family diversity” (acknowledging the existence of diverse family configurations, including LGBTQ parents), “I

actually always made sure I had the support of the administration. I say, hey, I'm going to do this lesson about family diversity and this is what it looks like":

I came to [the principal] and I said, this is what I am doing, and I just wanted to make sure in case parents came to you that you knew that this is what I've done and this is the conversation. I also wanted to make sure I had your blessing. She said, "you know what?

That's great. I'm glad you're doing that. Of course you have my support."

Teachers noted that local principals "supporting" specific inclusive "conversations" as allies often encouraged teachers to take next steps in inclusive teaching. Jane's principal, for example, had shared #USvsHate with her proactively.

School leader support felt particularly necessary for basic inclusion in some ecosystems. Even as Jane described having support from her administrator, she described experiencing consistent pushback from parents on "sexual orientation conversations" since she'd moved from the Bay Area to her more "conservative" community in San Diego County. Jane said she did not initially feel comfortable being open at school about being gay herself; her plan thus was stealth at first, "to make all the families love me and to get to know me within the district and then be more open about it." Still, her plan did not protect her from painful parent pushback against simply valuing LGBTQ people's existence. In reaction to a new sex education program, a parent asked, "Are the gays coming? Do I need to pull my kids out of school today?" Jane reflected:

I walked into the staff room totally shaking and crying because...I know this parent knows me as a teacher and loved me as a teacher and respects me as a teacher. But it just made realize, like she has no idea that I'm gay. And it just felt really hurtful.

Warning her principal about specific lessons also did not fully protect Jane from more aggressive parent pushback. After one "family diversity" lesson, parents contacted Jane saying, "my kids said that you said it's okay to be gay. And I'm wondering why you're saying this to them. We don't say that's okay." One parent even searched for Jane online and discovered from social media that she was gay, then went to Jane's principal saying Jane was "kissing a woman in front of the children" and "telling the kids that when they grow up, they have to be gay." Prepped to offer backup, the principal supported Jane by checking in with her before responding to the parents. Still, the parents contacted the school district and had their child removed from Jane's class, essentially going "above" the school-level backup Jane had arranged. Jane's backup effort allowed the issue to stay on the agenda for her other students.

Other educators said their school leaders offered backup through publicly stating their commitment to basic inclusion work. The Kansas librarian noted that her principal needed little goading to back her up, as she was "very committed to concepts of diversity," let "[the diversity group] meet once a month" ("[giving them] a leg up"), and supported more extended inclusion efforts when asked:

When we're working on things, if I need more than once a month, I can go in and say I really need more time, and she'll just say, take it. We're a strong academic school, but she really believes in the social emotional development and is very committed to that.

Educators also noted the importance of convincing peer colleagues in their schools to back them up in basic inclusion efforts. One white high school English teacher from Oklahoma described her proactive efforts to engage other teachers in #USvsHate by visiting “professional learning communities.” Inviting colleagues’ participation in the project created “overlapping” efforts that would then further protect efforts to let students “express” their anti-hate ideas:

We have professional learning communities here, so I was able to go and visit their [art] professional learning community and present what we were doing, and how some students may want to express it this way. And how did they feel, what did they think about what I was doing? That turned into them volunteering to be a part of it and to help facilitate it. I think one of them was like, “I need to present this next semester myself. That's something we can just do on our own.” I was like, “that's brilliant. Let me know when you need to do it and we can co-do it. I can do it at the same time you're doing it, so any overlapping kids can hear it twice and really delve in and expand our conversation.”

“Overlapping” efforts were particularly powerful backup: teachers pursued inclusion efforts collaboratively. To seek such “community” support for basic inclusion work, teachers also described leaning on system supports beyond their individual schools.

System backup

Some teachers noted how they privately readied arguments that broader district initiatives justified their basic inclusion lessons, for example by arguing that examining implicit bias with students fit district goals for “social emotional learning” (as did the Kansas librarian regarding her diversity club). The librarian spoke of how work “at the district level” laid a foundation for her school’s teaching on basic experiences of sexuality and gender:

We have modules on any diversity issue that we can think of, from what is the modern family to issues of equity to transgender, specifically because we've had a lot of transgender teens making the transition like transitioning. And we try to look at possible needs. So we've always done a lot of LGBTQ work, but we made a specific module just about things, like how to approach school bathrooms and language people need to use. And [we're] even getting into things -- [like] that it does not matter what you think about the student, it is how the student desires to be identified. And that's not your decision to make. And so we do a lot of that at the district level.

Educators also noted that unions provided backup when teachers wanted to include discussion of specific experiences. For example, the Washington teacher said her “role in union leadership” as well as her knowledge of “district curriculum” gave her confidence in the possibilities for her lessons, such as how to engage in conversations about stereotypes, bullying, and empathy when teaching a district-approved novel, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*:

So, I can point to that and say...“What I'm doing is the district curriculum. The [#USvsHate] project, that's just my academic freedom.” ... And when I say, ‘academic freedom,’ that's specifically in our contracts, in our bargaining agreement. And so, because

I do all the union stuff, I know that. But if someone weren't involved with the union, they probably wouldn't be able to push down like that.

An arts and humanities teacher from Philadelphia pointed to a “safety in numbers” approach to marshalling union backup for basic inclusion efforts:

Any teacher who experiences [pushback] should talk to their union rep, and get the support of other teachers so they're not alone. I suppose there's always a risk in speaking up, but the union should help mitigate this risk. In a private conversation, a good union rep should also be able to help the teacher assess the level of risk and how to guard against any possibilities of non-renewal. And again, there's always safety in numbers!

A Latina “veteran principal of 17 years” with experience on two coasts offered similar advice in a public Facebook group regarding the controversy over the “Your Life Matters” wall sign in Oklahoma (discussed in our introduction). She emphasized factoring in one's ecological context when seeking backup for posting such basic support for students, but also leaning ultimately on “your union”: “How you handle it depends on your context, your number of years in the district and community, your union, etc.”

Outside organizations and their local trainers also provided backup for basic inclusion work. The Wisconsin teacher noted that an outside organization, Welcoming Schools (WS), partnered with both the district and the school to provide lessons and “training” on welcoming LGBTQ people and students alongside all populations in schools. “I brought it up to my school, everybody was supportive and then we now have the training annually,” the teacher explained. Such shared “training” involving “everybody” in a school was particularly powerful systemic backup: students could go from one class to the next with shared vocabulary and understanding, such that the inclusion responsibility did not fall solely on this particular teacher and students received a unified basic message across classrooms. Referring to how every teacher in the school did a WS lesson on accepting students' preferred gender pronouns at the beginning of the year, the teacher summed up, “Everybody's on board with that.” The teacher further explained that “paid” district backup made this possible: “We have an LGBTQ lead for the district, which is really helpful. And the Welcoming Schools lead, so they are paid as district people to help.”

Other educators pointed to state-level policy (at times referred to as “standards”) outlining their “rights” and freedom to pursue basic inclusion efforts. As one white male principal said of California's Ed Code, these laws afforded backup for teaching about LGBTQ people's experiences and contributions alongside other groups':

I think being well versed in what the standards actually say in terms of LGBTQ is really good for teachers. I don't want to cause rebellion, but you have your rights as a teacher. Knowing that is really important.

At a small support gathering for the project, this principal told local teachers experiencing pushback about LGBTQ positive messaging (in another school) that California law itself could have been cited to protect these basic inclusion messages. The principal pointed the teachers to language in the “California Ed Code” *requiring* that “instruction in the social sciences” include diverse communities' contributions, including “lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

Americans” (California Legislative Information, 2020). Recounting the discussion later in his own 1-1 interview, this principal noted that “Running into these issues of not being able to put up a sentence that has to do with gender or gender roles or LGBTQ?!...that’s where I would tell the teachers they should be more well versed in Ed Code.” Because “at the end of the day,” he said, “we are bound by law to present some of these topics.”

Teachers also described explicitly referencing state and national “standards” to justify their basic inclusion work when challenged. As a teacher from the South summed up, “if you can pull it back to standards then, you know, you kind of mute whatever argument [as] irrelevant.” A white elementary teacher from the San Diego area described being ready to cite Common Core “standards” to “back up” efforts like #USvsHate and calm a worried principal if needed:

When you’re trying to say why you’re teaching something, a lot of times you have to say ‘Oh, well, Principal, I’m teaching this and it is standard ELA blah-bitty-blah.’ Because they’re going to ask you, ‘...why are you using academic time to do this?’ ‘Oh, well I’m supporting the so-and-so standards of reading and listening. . .you have to make sure that you can back it up.”

The teacher from the South actually urged even more emphasis of “standards” on the #USvsHate project website, to “[have it] readily available for anybody that does have to defend themselves.” After a critic attacked her on Twitter for a petition her students sent to state legislators (about a policy that would affect them if passed), an organization of middle school educators had mobilized to clarify publicly how her work aligned with state standards (and “social justice standards” created by Teaching Tolerance), plus students’ First Amendment rights:

They got together a response for me, basically, that outlined all of the standards I’m covering and all of the things that middle school teachers want to see. They also linked the Teaching Tolerance standards to that response.

Other educators spoke of printing *Teaching Tolerance* magazine articles to stealthily place in colleagues’ mailboxes as backup for initial inclusion conversations. Educators also noted how their participation in such national organizations’ trainings could scale to more systemic local backup. For example, one San Diego K-8 school had funded a small group of teachers and students to participate in the Anti-Defamation League’s “No Place for Hate” regional workshops. Peer leaders then led lessons and invited #USvsHate messaging from “the whole school”:

We decided to have the kids who did the No Place for Hate training help us with the #USvsHate lessons and teach all the other students because we wanted the whole school to be involved. So we actually had the No Place for Hate students go into other classrooms and give almost like a little mini lesson and then ask the kids to do the posters for the contest and that went really well.

The combination of a local “training,” student “excitement,” and then students’ “anti-hate” messages themselves had helped convince parents to back up this initial inclusion effort financially:

The PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] actually paid for the training for the No Place For Hate. So, I know they were really excited about that. And then, once we did the #USvsHate

lessons, parents were also excited about that. And I reached out to parents, you know, who had kids that submitted some really nice posters and stuff, and the parents were really excited about it and the kids were excited about it, too. They thought it was a really good project and good things that they were learning. So they were all in for it, too.

In this case, a cascade of “excitement” led to systemic backup for basic inclusion efforts. Such excitement also could move district leaders to take basic steps. A teacher from the Northwest relayed that #USvsHate’s “national” amplification of her student’s winning message (calling for LGBTQ+ inclusion among other topics) catalyzed the district to begin to support LGBTQ inclusion events. We learned later that the superintendent had reproduced the message for his own office wall as a signal of support for basic inclusion.

District leaders could also offer system-wide backup directly from above. In one district in Southern California, leaders told us they were planning on training all principals to be ready to respond to parent critiques of any inclusion efforts, as principals had previously experienced vociferous homophobic pushback related to a basic health curriculum offering “sex ed.” A teacher said she felt the superintendent “spearheaded” and strongly “modeled” a commitment to foundational inclusion work “from top down” because she personally was “more aware of what prejudices or things people might experience”:

[I] think she’s lesbian herself and I think she’s bringing a new perspective that they didn’t have before, because she’s coming at it “I’ve had this prejudice.”...I think that’s why it’s coming from top down, because she’s modeling it.

Across #USvsHate in 2019-20, then, participating teachers shared stories of learning to wield a combination of these five forms of backup to keep basic inclusion efforts on the agenda locally. Each was a story of getting some key local supporters -- parents, students, the librarian, the principal, an organization, the superintendent -- to help keep empathetic treatment of a population’s experience on the agenda even if some local critics stood opposed. In discussing how “pushback” had been neutralized, many educators referred to a communication sequence in which a type of actor in a school or broader community disagreed about teachers’ discussion of some community and then went to some other actor to complain about it. As in the game “rock/paper/scissors,” an actor ready to provide backup could trump other actors’ critique and insist on respecting and empathetically recognizing a marginalized population.

In just a few situations we learned of, however, the reverse occurred: Local pushback, unsuccessfully countered, resulted in censorship triumphing over basic inclusive teaching (Authors, in preparation). In both cases, a single local parent cowed a school leader who chose *not* to provide backup for basic inclusion efforts. And in both cases, as no local actor backed up teachers’ freedom to include, young voices emphasizing basic “humanity” and “feeling OK about yourself and your identity” were physically ripped from school walls.

Discussion

Pushback by local critics in the cases described throughout this article was an effort to restrict and censor both teaching empathetic to specific populations, and students’ own desires to learn and

speak. Just some critics insisted explicitly that messages be removed altogether from books or walls (the type of pushback to “ban” increasingly heard in 2020-2021 and beyond; Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022). Other pushback asked to temper basic inclusive teaching, like a student saying “I’m uncomfortable,” a parent complaining about *specific* language in a book, or a parent complaining that a teacher was saying “it was *OK* to be gay.” In the end, though, all pushback demanded censorship in some form – that a “third rail” topic or marginalized population not be discussed empathetically or at all.

Still, most teachers we met in #USvsHate had *learned to keep* the freedom to include, through accumulated experience with getting key local actors to allow it. Educators leveraged laws, organizations, standards, unions, and most importantly, perhaps, *local relationships: other people* in each local context who determined whether inclusion effort was possible or “too risky to enact” (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 7). Those successfully marshalling backup got to continue basic inclusion work. Others’ experiences of censorship made plain a fraught reality: teachers can include all only if local supporters say they can.

We conclude that educators need to *know* their agency to keep inclusion on the agenda in their local context. Stated bluntly, whether a teacher could keep a basic topic of inclusion explored in their ecological context depended on whether educators could get somebody local to agree that empathizing with a group of people was an acceptable part of their work. Some ecosystems afforded public celebration of inclusion validated by system leaders; in others, teachers proceeded in stealth or in subspaces. Often, key actors, particularly school leaders, made or broke inclusion efforts by standing up or not standing up to critics demanding censorship.

Priestley et al. (2015) argue that “agency” is something a teacher “achieves” through building “capacity” in specific ecological contexts (pp. 3-4). #USvsHate teachers’ past experiences of navigating pushback had indeed built teachers’ skills in enabling inclusion effort. In their current ecologies, teachers assembled “backup” from key local supporters who supported their work proactively or through trusting allowance. Some teachers proactively arranged parent permission for basic inclusion efforts and sponsorship from influential school leaders. Other teachers proactively informed administrators about planned teaching efforts until administrators “trusted” them and “left them alone.” Still other teachers sought backup outside their schools, from district initiatives, teacher organizations, PTAs, unions, or local actors who could clue them in to state or national standards.

Crucially, teachers also leaned particularly on often-underestimated powerful actors: *students* demanding the freedom to include. The power of students--whose First Amendment rights are less questioned--to move systems toward both basic and deeper inclusion is one focus of our next research. Emphasizing such student voice as well as supportive parent and community voice is also increasingly a focus of national organizations, as caricature-fueled pushback against race- and diversity-related teaching has spawned both “educational gag orders” in the form of partisan state legislation (PEN America, 2021), and a newly inflamed context of hostility toward such teaching in many localities nationwide (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022).

Other forms of backup currently prioritized by advocates of inclusion were not mentioned as much by 2019-2020 #USvsHate teachers, who spoke to us before an explosion of coordinated pushback targeted K12 work on diversity and race in 2020-2021 (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022). The National Education Association (NEA) now provides a model resolution to present to school boards for consideration, which “contains a commitment to affirming inclusion of all students” (National Education Association, 2021); such orgs also now seek to strengthen system backup through promoting participation in district level school board elections. As some state politicians propose and pass laws seeking explicitly to restrict and ban many discussions of race, gender, inequality, and inclusion in schools (PEN America, 2021), and as some local critics seek to muscle districts into passing similarly restrictive local policies (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022), K12 educators are also learning to seek supports from local community organizations and to lift their own voices more collectively to express how teaching to include and value all populations fits longstanding educator responsibilities in a democracy. Other educators are learning to lean even more on organized student backup, as students themselves join organized actions to stand up for inclusive and accurate education at their school boards and in local press (Gibbs, 2021; Miller, 2021; Apodaca, 2021). Such efforts -- and intergenerational efforts involving local parents supportive of inclusion efforts, as well -- will likely increasingly be essential for sustaining both school- and district-level “DEI” (diversity, equity, and inclusion) efforts going forward. And of course, building educator capacity for doing such basic inclusion teaching well (and handling potential local pushback to it) is also increasingly acknowledged as essential: researchers call for proactively equipping teachers in pedagogies for discussing locally controversial issues (“risk mitigation techniques”: Pace, 2021) and urge education leaders to more proactively “back up” inclusion teaching (Pollock, Rogers et al, 2022).

In most of the cases discussed here, “backup” was provided by others sharing *local* ecosystems. In one case, however, social media brought in backup from larger networks of non-local supporters, such as the Southern teacher protected from a Twitter critic by an organization she belonged to. The stories with which we started this paper also point to a dynamic of national “social media backup” as a necessary focus for next research. This form of backup may become crucial as broad state laws target teachers in specific states. But in the data reported here, most often local actors providing backup still proved the final determinant.

We note too that not *all* teachers we met in #USvsHate described doing preparatory backup work to avoid pushback. Multiple teachers told us they “proceeded until apprehended,” as one put it. Indeed, in examples throughout our data, educators self-assuredly taught for both basic and deeper inclusion until somebody complained. Yet when pushback loomed, successful “backup” required some local actor insisting that a teacher’s inclusion effort was acceptable.

Crucially, all such stories demonstrate that potentially supportive actors in local ecosystems need support themselves. In particular, *school leaders* needed to know they had the support of districts, laws, “standards,” and colleagues (Pollock, Rogers et al, 2022). Teachers’ stories showed *teachers*, too, could support colleagues’ inclusion efforts by joining work and sharing backup strategies--and that *students*, too, could put issues on the local agenda and support

teachers to go further. The role of *parents* to support educators through challenges from other parents also requires far more attention. The stories here indicate that all such stakeholders could perhaps be buoyed in both basic and deeper inclusion efforts by remembering that inclusion stays on the agenda *if local people insist it does*.

Conclusion

We conclude that teachers cannot sustain the basic freedom to include alone. Others in shared ecosystems must back up that freedom, including school/system leaders. We found five ways that educators worked to assemble backup to keep basic inclusion topics on the agenda and to teach specific groups' experiences empathetically.

Educators we met in #USvsHate made clear that for years, actors in their schools and broader communities (sometimes, even vocal individuals) had attempted to keep specific "third rail" human experiences off the agenda entirely. And for years, accordingly, educators had worked to secure backup strategically to teach such topics as a basic educator responsibility. From *stealth* efforts to subtly include populations to creating *subspaces* for safe dialogue, and by leaning on *student-led* demands to validate inclusive teaching, educators attempted to support students' rights to discuss real human experiences. Educators also got key *school leaders* to approve their efforts and tapped *system* supports as backup, hooking their efforts to laws, standards, or district-wide training. Notably, teachers who found particular ecosystems too constraining to their agency also described transferring to ecosystems where they could discuss third rail topics more comfortably—or at all.

Marshalling backup included seeking supports reactively when pushback occurred, and arranging supports preventatively. Each experience with pushback further equipped teachers to navigate their local ecosystem of complaints and power struggles. As next students "went home to tell" parents what teachers had "talked about" or parents "marched into" principals' offices to complain about it, teachers were more ready to come through such moments with both curriculum and careers intact.

U.S. teachers seem only as "free to include" as local supporters say they are. Depending on their ecological contexts, teachers *are* at risk of employers deciding that a topic of human experience "cannot" be discussed, or discussed in a particular way; teachers *are* at risk of critics starting a wave of "pushback" that might make an employer censor a topic. Each instance of local censorship deletes an opportunity for *students* to learn. Thus, educators at all levels in systems remain in a position of continually marshalling ongoing local support against censorship, and constantly shouldering the responsibility of keeping inclusion efforts and the basic experiences of U.S. populations on the agenda. While teachers can accomplish a lot in subspaces or stealthily, no teacher can be an island unto themselves: educators together with supporters keep the freedom to include. Educators' stories demonstrate, however, that marshalling such support is possible. We have shared teachers' tales of arranging "backup" to handle "pushback" to help other educators weather those pressures.

NOTES

^{1.} Over the 2020-2021 school year *after* this article's data were gathered (2019-2020), as we discuss in Pollock, Rogers, et al. (2022), "CRT" ["Critical Race Theory"] would become a caricatured catchall term powerful opponents used to inflame, foment, and nationally scale such localized opposition to inclusion effort. In what we call a "conflict campaign," a media-fueled, often deeply partisanized effort to "ban 'CRT'" was incited and fueled locally by powerful opponents ranging from national and state politicians to conservative media and conservative organizations, inflaming newly organized anti-"CRT" parents. Targets have included state law (with literal "bans" passed to restrict teaching and learning about race and diversity; PEN, 2021) and district policy, in addition to educators themselves. In our "Conflict Campaign" report (2022), we note that the fate of inclusion efforts going forward *still* lies with local education leaders and requires local-level backup from local people. Here, then, we explore "pushback" and "backup" efforts at the school level, of the kind predating the 2020-21 anti "CRT" conflict campaign. We believe our forms of "backup" continue to hold.

^{2.} We note that in 2020-2021, after this 2019-2020 study period ended, "CRT" became a caricatured catch-all term opponents used to try to restrict teaching on a wide swath of topics related to race, gender, sexuality, and diversity (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022). In a sense, "CRT" became a field-wide concocted "third rail" covering many localized third rail topics.

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BOOK REVIEW

Shaylyn Marks

California State University, Bakersfield

Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy

April Baker-Bell

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AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Shaylyn Marks, California State University, Bakersfield, CA 93311. Email: smarks2@csub.edu

As a Black educator, I am all too aware of the ways in which Black culture and excellence is absent in classroom spaces as well as the harm caused to Black youth due to these glaring omissions. Black youth experience symbolic, systemic, physical, curricular, and instructional violence in traditional educational spaces (Boutte et al., 2020). As Bettina Love (2019) asserts, Black children are *spirit murdered* daily when they enter school doors. At the heart of the many ways Black youth are harmed in traditional educational spaces lies Anti-Black linguistic racism, a term used to describe the ways in which systems of oppression work to prioritize White Mainstream English in lieu of Black English. Recognizing the ways in which white linguistic hegemony is embedded in educational spaces and society at large, Baker-Bell (2020) advocates for Black youth experiencing Anti-Black linguistic racism within educational institutions. Within educational spaces, Black Language is often viewed as a “symbol of linguistic and intellectual inferiority” rather than being

acknowledged as a valuable part of students' cultural identities (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 15). From the time Black youth enter the educational system, their culture is stripped from them—their ways of talking and being are stifled as they are often asked to conform to norms and standards that predominantly reflect White culture. One of the many ways in which Black youth are required to assimilate to the dominant culture is through language. Deemed *the language of schools*, White Mainstream English is often a barrier or obstacle to gaining access and achieving success for Black youth across the country. Consequently, Black Language speakers struggle with a sense of identity as they are forced to strip elements of their cultural identity to gain access to education and opportunities for success. Within *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, April Baker-Bell (2020) confronts issues related to Anti-Black Linguistic racism and the consequential harm Black youth encounter in educational spaces.

In an attempt to problematize the ways in which language is weaponized against Black youth in educational spaces, Baker-Bell (2020) strategically challenges readers by linking racial classifications to language as a means to demonstrate how linguistic and racial hierarchies are interconnected. Within traditional classroom spaces, Black youth are “unconsciously trained to correlate blackness with wrongness and whiteness with rightness” (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 24). While “Black language reflects their ways of knowing, interpreting, surviving, and being in the world,” the institution of education and society at large rarely acknowledge Black language as an asset (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 2). “The way a Black child’s language is devalued in school reflects how Black lives are devalued in the world. Similarly, the way a white child’s language is privileged and deemed the norm in schools is directly connected to the invisible ways that white culture is deemed normal, neutral, and superior in the world” (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 2). Baker-Bell (2020) asserts that we are killing Black youth softly through Anti-Black language pedagogies. She states, “Without analyzing language through the lens of race and racism, we ignore how linguistic violence and racial violence go hand in hand” (p. 16). While problematizing the ways in which Black English is devalued in classroom spaces by linking racial classifications to language, Baker-Bell (2020) explores the ways in which linguistic oppression is reinforced in classroom settings. Asserting that “Children of color’s experiences navigating and negotiating language will be impacted by interlocking systems and structures of linguisticism, racism, and classism, which are interrelated and continuous shaping one another,” the author urges educators to move away from literacy pedagogies that work to reinforce white linguistic hegemony (p. 16).

Illuminating the ways in which linguistic racism occurs and is normalized in classroom spaces, Baker-Bell (2020) develops a strong argument for a counter approach. Championing racial and linguistic justice for Black Language speakers, the author provides the Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogical framework to counter language respectability practices. Within this suggested framework, Baker-Bell (2020) urges educators to prioritize literacy pedagogies that directly address and affirm Black Language and explore the relationship between race and language. She argues that Black youth need to be exposed to inquiry-based learning experiences that center Black Language and experiences. To strengthen her argument, the author provides insight into the praxis of Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogy by sharing her work with the Leadership Academy public

charter school located in Detroit, Michigan. The author strengthens her argument for Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogies by moving from theory to practice, sharing her firsthand accounts of engaging in Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogies with Black youth. Highlighting the counter stories of Black youth, Baker-Bell (2020) explores the emotional harm Black youth experience in traditional classroom spaces and offers insight as to how to implement Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogies as a means of empowerment.

Recommendations

Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy is a timely and necessary addition to the scholarship on supporting and empowering Black youth and is a crucial resource for educators. Offering both theoretical and pedagogical principles, *Linguistic Justice* fills the void found within the scholarship on Critical Race Theory. Baker-Bell asserts that language, culture, and identity cannot be separated and, therefore, Black Language deserves space in classroom spaces to uplift and empower Black youth. The book starts off strong with an in-depth analysis of the inherent power dynamics between Black Language and White Mainstream English and slowly builds up a strong argument for Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogy. Baker-Bell (2020) strategically navigates from theory to practice by illuminating her experiences working with Black youth in a Detroit charter school. Baker-Bell creates a compelling argument for creating inquiry-based learning opportunities that center on the experiences of Black culture, language, and literacies. Arguing that Black youth need to be given the tools to liberate themselves from oppression, the author argues that “African American literature can provide a rich foundation for students to explore how identity is conceived through language expression and how African American literature is an important vehicle to work towards dismantling Anti-Black Linguistic Racism (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 9). Using literature that captures Black language and identity creates rich opportunities for students to investigate and examine the ways in which language and race inform identity and experience (Baker-Bell, 2020).

As a standalone, the book is a necessary read and resource for educators. Providing insightful pedagogical practices to begin dismantling the status quo in classrooms, Baker-Bell provides a compelling argument for Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogy along with practical strategies to support this work. For those looking for more direction to dismantling the status quo in traditional educational spaces with the intent to uplift and empower Black youth, I recommend pairing this book with *Cultivating Genius* by Gholdy Muhammad. While *Linguistic Justice* offers insight into the ways in which Black youth are harmed in educational spaces largely due to linguistic oppression and racism, *Cultivating Genius* provides a historically responsive literacy pedagogical framework that pairs nicely with Baker-Bell’s (2020) Anti-Black Linguistic Pedagogical framework. The two books in tandem provide the blueprint for beginning to dismantle oppressive systems regarding pedagogical practices and curriculum development.

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