Storying Multilingual Family School Involvement and Resistance To White-Centering and Monolingual Policies

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Abstract

This study uses storying and fiction-based research to uplift the voices and experiences of multilingual students and families marginalized and silenced in public schools. How do the experiences of multilingual parents and students in public schools affect their school involvement, and how do parental engagement challenge White-centering and monolingual policies and dominant discourses? To address these questions, I analyze data from the Youth Participatory Evaluation Program at Minneapolis Public Schools and the parent survey led by the Latino Youth Development Collaborative Minneapolis Public Schools parents. Next, I expand on school policies' implications on the experiences of multilingual families by creating a story using the data gathered from the surveys. Finally, I advocate for policy changes grounded in cultural equity and social justice.
Table of Contents

ABSTRACT..........................................................................................................................1

TABLE OF CONTENTS........................................................................................................II

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................1

METHOD .............................................................................................................................2

RACIAL STORYTELLING ....................................................................................................3

FICTION-BASED RESEARCH ............................................................................................4

POSITIONALITY ..................................................................................................................5

TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS ..............................................................................................15

VIGNETTE #2 ....................................................................................................................16

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT MISCONCEPTIONS ................................................................18

VIGNETTE #3 ....................................................................................................................19

IMBALANCE OF POWER ....................................................................................................24

VIGNETTE #4 ....................................................................................................................25

LANGUAGE ..........................................................................................................................26

VIGNETTE #5 ....................................................................................................................27

RESISTANCE .....................................................................................................................33

DISCUSSION ......................................................................................................................33

IMPLICATIONS ..................................................................................................................35

CONCLUSION ...................................................................................................................36

REFERENCES ....................................................................................................................38
Introduction

It is widely known that parental involvement can positively affect a child's educational outcome. On the other hand, inconsistent and insufficient parental involvement can be detrimental to a child and the school. What does parent involvement in schools look like? Parental involvement can look very different depending on the culture and language spoken at home (Maldonado Torres, 2022). A reciprocal partnership between parents, teachers, and administration promotes interculturality and benefits the children. However, schools commonly define parental involvement using White-centering, Western lenses, ignoring the diverse makeup of schools (Maldonado Torres, 2022), creating school practices and processes to conform to Western views that promote racism and uphold White supremacy. White-centering practices have led schools to institutionalize unequal distribution of resources, limit the agency of People of Color, and encourage practices that promote White supremacy (Alvarado, 2022). Oppressive and racist practices are evident when families of color are not invited and/or welcomed to participate in school and district decision-making processes.

The U.S. does not have an official language. However, English is the dominant language in the country, causing policymakers and schools to create policies centered around the English language and Whiteness that disproportionately hurt multilingual students and students of color (Kaveh & Lenz, 2022, Kibler, Valdes, & Walqui, 2014). In addition, monolingual policies are reinforced by ideologies that purposely subordinate other languages (Leeman, 2018). As a result, they are creating a significant need for multilingual students to be equitably represented in today's education policies.

This study aims to understand multilingual families' parental involvement and experiences in public schools. To do this, I will evaluate Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS)
Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE) program. The YPE program is a student-led evaluation where students choose a research topic important to their school climate (YPE IN MPS). Their findings highlight challenges and elevate students' voices, which are then used to take action and lead discussions in their school buildings. I will also analyze an MPS parent survey conducted by the Latino Youth Development Collaborative (LYDC) in 2018. LYDC is a Latine parent-led organization that advocates for family engagement in their children's school activities and empowers parents to stand up for their rights. They empower Latino families in MPS and surrounding districts through workshops and programming.

**Method**

Narrative inquiry is a research method that emphasizes the individual lived experiences of human beings. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue that narratives are central to life because human life is constructed by narrative fragments that are embedded in storied moments of time and space. “The term experience helps us think through such matters as in individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). This research method allows the researcher to look at all the narrative fragments to understand the connections and implications of their study. The storied moments shape how one makes sense of experiences and define our identities. In other words, narrative inquiry is a method to understand the contextual nature of experiences embedded within larger social, political, and cultural narratives. “Our guiding principle in an inquiry is to focus on experience and to follow where it leads” (Clandinin & Connelly, Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research, 2000). Focusing on the experiences allows the voices and experiences of individuals and communities
to be heard and become more accessible to the community, which can contribute to meaningful discussions.

**Racial Storytelling**

This analysis of publicly accessible data includes MPS Latine families' concerns and direct quotes from students' experiences in the district. The individual experiences are grim examples of institutionalized racism in the district. I created a story identifying multilingual families' obstacles using the public data on the YPE and Minneapolis Public Schools’ websites. To center the voices and experiences of multilingual families, I will use racial storytelling (Johnson, 2017) to analyze the survey responses. Racial storytelling is not identical to counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling exists in the gaze of the dominant, white narrative (Johnson, 2017). Racial storytelling allows People of Color to illustrate racialized experiences and intersectional identities as a praxis in education and self-actualization. It is a holistic approach to reflection and healing. It is a method of storytelling that aims to reimagine society and education that does not uphold White Supremacy. Goodson (1995) writes:

> Stories need to be interrogated and analyzed in their social context. Stories, in short, are most often carriers of dominant messages, themselves agencies of domination. Oppositional stories can be captured, but they are very much in the minority and are often themselves overlaid or reactive to dominant storylines (p. 95).

Racial storytelling is a method that allows a story to demonstrate a new perspective within its social construct. It does not exist in the shadow of dominant stories, nor is it reactive. The story intentionally avoids stereotypes associated with multilingual families. Christina is a parent that is actively learning English and can use technology. Additionally, Abril’s characterization builds on the issues she has with a teacher. However, she is not labeled as a troublemaker. Instead, she
is characterized as a student who wants to do her best but does not have support to address her problems in class.

The story I interpreted from the data gathered from the YPE and LYDC programs explores how multilingual families with children enrolled in MPS navigate the oppressive practices in public schools. The narrative also emphasizes how parents and students resisted the racist policies. I organized the vignettes of Abril and Christina's experiences at Hiawatha Middle School, a fictional school, along with the themes raised by the data I gathered from the surveys: trusting relationships with family liaisons, parent involvement misconceptions, imbalance of power, language, and parent-teacher communication, and resistance.

**Fiction-Based Research**

Goodson (1995) suggests that researchers must advocate genres of inquiry to empower the people we want to serve. For example, the experience of multilingual families in schools can be vulnerable, triggering, and intimate. Fiction-based research allows researchers and readers to observe complex issues by merging research and fiction to evoke empathy (Leavy, 2013). Abril and Christina’s story shares examples of vulnerability and frustration not often seen by educators or administration. This multivocal, fiction-based research allows the characters from the story and the experiences gathered from the survey data to merge to illustrate authentic human lived experiences. Goodson (1995) writes, “If we deal with stories as the starting point for collaboration, as the beginning of a process of coming to know, we will come to understand their meaning: to see them as social constructions which allow us to locate and interrogate the social world in which they are embedded” (p.98). We must first understand the lived experiences and focus on the realities of the people we are researching to make a meaningful and equitable policy change.
Positionality

I am a Mexican American Latina born in a rural town in central Florida. My first language is Spanish, and English is my second language. I was raised in a single-parent, undocumented immigrant, and migrant farm-working household with three sisters. My mother's legal status significantly impacted where we lived, our socioeconomic status, and our education. My family and I were migrant farmworkers for most of my elementary education. We traveled from Florida to Michigan, searching for agriculture farm work, and due to my family's high mobility, there were multiple interruptions in my education. As a result, schools labeled me as a migrant and an English as a second language (ESL) student.

As I continue my journey in education, I reflect on my experiences as a student and Mexican American Latina in the United States and how codeswitching has negatively impacted my native language. I was forced to suppress my cultural identity and conform to Western ideologies of what students should look and sound like in schools. As I work to reclaim my Spanish, I am simultaneously challenging the dominant language in academia. Johnson (2017) stated that (re)entering our personal racialized memories can evoke feelings of elation, frustration, and anger that show vulnerability. Our embodied vulnerability allows us to reflect on our racialized identities, which can lead to liberation.

Additionally, I have experience working as an Educational Support Professional (ESP) in elementary, middle, and high school. My experiences as an ESP in public schools have given a front-row seat to harmful policies that affect marginalized students and parents. My experiences and identities allow me to have an insider and outsider perspective. According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), it is imperative for researchers to be cognizant of their own experiences and the narratives of their lived experiences. It is also essential to remind us that when we are in the
field, we begin to “live and tell new stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). While gathering and analyzing data and creating the story, I developed an empathetic understanding between the story's characters, students and families in Minneapolis Public Schools, and my narrative.

I approached this study living in the midst of my own stories that are also set in the educational and political institutions alongside the stories of the YPE and LYDC survey participants and the characters of the story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Living in the midst allowed me to understand my stories and those of multilingual students and families. As I interpreted the data from the YPE and LYDC surveys and the tensions families experienced in schools, I also felt that tension closely related to my educational institution experiences.

**Framing the Narrative**

The narrative is a multivocal, fictional story about Christina and her daughter, Abril, navigating the unexpected changes at Hiawatha Middle School that reflect my data analysis. The story is broken into five vignettes that highlight themes reflecting the experiences illustrated by the YPE student and LYDC parent surveys. Every vignette is storied in the first-person perspective of the specified character. The vignettes do not include verbatim quotes, but the quotes and data from the survey results inspired them. Instead, I have chosen to highlight the participants' voices by placing verbatim quotes that inspired the story before the vignettes.

In addition, the vignettes go back and forth between Christina and Abril’s points of view. I have chosen to authentically express Christina’s character in Spanish, her native language, as an emotion-evoking element to the story. Christina is navigating the education system with limited English skills and language support. As a result, the voices of the characters she interacts with at Hiawatha Middle School are in English. The reader will have the opportunity to
experience Christina’s frustration while navigating the language barrier between her and the school employees. As a result, the vignettes written in Spanish are formatted using the grammatical rules of the Real Academia Española. The dialog in the vignettes is identified by a “trazo,” a long dash (—), to signify the beginning of a dialog and the dialog tag (Diccionario Panhispanico de Dudas, 2005). The English translation of Christina’s vignettes follows immediately after.

Storying across multilingualism has allowed me to relive and tell new stories about language (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I interpreted the story, I continued to reflect on my experiences with language in academia. The following tensions and questions that arose: How much Spanish do I need to know to be considered Mexican, and how much English do I need to know to be considered American? Do I even know enough Spanish or English? Why have I never written in Spanish? When did my inner thoughts switch from Spanish to English? Why is it hard to write and produce ideas in Spanish? How did I learn English? Maybe a better question is, why did I learn English? Did I learn because of my mother’s constant reminder, “Si no haces bien en la escuela, vas a terminar trabajando aqui (if you do not do well in school, you will end up working here),” referring to her low-paying field work job. Or did I learn English because I had to translate for her? It does not matter how old Latine children are. Our parents always demand, "Leeme esto, que dice (read this for me, what does it say)?” And if we do not know how to translate the information, they will say, “Entonces para que vas a la escuela (then why do you go to school if you do not learn).” The reality is that I learned English and the expense of my Spanish to survive.

When I began interpreting the story, my body automatically wrote and produced the story in English. However, as the story continued and I was living in the midst of the experiences of
the survey participants and my own, my body naturally began to transition from Christina’s voice and my writing to Spanish. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe this as working in a three-dimensional inquiry space where researchers find themselves walking alongside their participants backward and forward, inward and outward, and in a specific landscape. As I went inward, I began to feel frustrated and began to question my experiences. I embodied those emotions outward when Christina’s voice transitioned to Spanish. In addition, I was moving backward and forward in a temporal space of my past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research, 2000). I reflected on memories of my lived experiences from the past and my hopes and aspirations for the future. Christina’s voice gives space to research in Spanish in academia, where it has been traditionally excluded and silenced. Storying across multilingualism is critical in academia because it challenges the status quo by shifting the focus from monolingual and White dominant narratives to multilingual and diverse narratives.

Vignette #1

"Latino, then African American students, had the least number of adults that they could trust in the building."

South, YPE Presentation 2018

Christina - Español

Estamos a fines de agosto y nuestro departamento siempre se siente como un horno durante esta época del año. Así que, moví una silla de la cocina y la puse junto a la unidad de aire acondicionado de la ventana. Buscando rápidamente a través de mis contactos, me di cuenta de que había pasado el número de la Sra. Hernández y volví a buscar hacia arriba. Voy a marcar el teléfono de su oficina. Ella siempre contesta.

Sonó el timbre, pero no había respuesta. Qué raro, voy marcar el número de la oficina principal.

—Hello, this is Hiawatha Middle School —dijo la mujer al teléfono.

—Sorry, Mrs. Hernández does not work here anymore. Let me see if we can find someone to help you. I think we have a staff member that speaks Spanish. —dijo la mujer.

Espere unos minutos y luego escuche una voz.
—Hola, mi nombre es Sr. Steven. —¿Cómo puedo ayudarle?
—Hola, soy Cristina, la madre de Abril Solís. Llamo porque quiero saber cuándo la recogerá el autobús mañana.
—Está bien, le voy a a la secretaria. Un momento.
Pude escuchar al Sr. Steven hablando con la secretaria durante un par de minutos. Luego, finalmente, volvió al teléfono y dijo —El bus estará at the bus stop a las 7:34 am.
—Gracias por su ayuda —respondí.
Yo hablo español con fluidez y se un poco inglés para conversar. Con una pequeña cantidad de decodificación, entendí lo que Sr. Steven estaba tratando de decir. No estaba enojada por la interacción, pero estaba desconcertada. La Sra. Hernández fue su punto de contacto para todo lo relacionado con la escuela. Yo le confiaba problemas familiares personales, preguntas e inquietudes.
¿Podría encontrar a otro adulto que hable español en el edificio para brindarme el apoyo que yo necesito?
—¡Abril! El autobús te recogerá a las 7:34 am. Viajarás en el autobús por la mañana, pero te recogeré por la tarde. Quiero hablar con la directora Cohen.

Christina - English

It is late August, and our apartment always feels like an oven during this time of the year. So, I moved a chair from the kitchen and set it next to the window A/C unit. Quickly scrolling through my contacts, I realized that I had scrolled past Mrs. Hernández's number, and I scrolled back up. I am going to calling her office, she usually picks up.

Ring, ring, ring... no answer. Hmmm, this is weird. I dialed the front office.
"Hello, this is Hiawatha Middle School," the secretary answered.
"Spanish? Mrs. Hernández?" I asked.
"Sorry, Mrs. Hernández does not work here anymore. Let me see if we can find someone to help you. I think we have a staff member that speaks Spanish."
I waited a couple minutes and then heard a voice on the phone.
"Hello, my name is Mr. Steven. How can I help you?" he asked.
"Hello, I am Christina, Abril Solis' mother. I am calling because I want to know when the bus will pick her up tomorrow."
"Okay, I'm going to ask the secretary. One moment."
I could hear Mr. Steven talking with the secretary for a couple of minutes.
Then, finally, he returned to the phone and said, "The bus will be at the bus stop at 7:34 a.m."
Kindly I responded, "Thank you for your help."
I am fluent in Spanish, and I know enough English to have a small conversation. With a small amount of decoding, I understood what Mr. Steven was trying to say. I was not mad about the interaction, but I was taken aback. Mrs.
Hernández was my point of contact for everything that was school related. I trusted her with personal family problems, questions, and concerns.

I wondered if I could find another Spanish-speaking adult in the building to provide me with the support my daughter and I need?

"Abril! The bus is picking you up at 7:34 am. You are riding the bus in the morning, but I will pick you up in the afternoon. I want to talk to Principal Cohen." I shouted from the kitchen.

**Abril**

The following day I quickly put on the clothes I had laid out last night on the chair next to my bed. I decided to wear my old white sneakers from the previous school year. They are my favorite because my friends and I drew on them with a Sharpie. I looked at myself in the mirror and ran out the door towards the bus stop.

I got on the bus and immediately saw my bestie, Luciana, signaling me to sit by her. Luciana has been my bestie since fourth grade. We met when I enrolled in a new school in my neighborhood because it was closer to home. My mom could not drop and pick me up every day from my art school that was on the other side of town. I was sad when I found out I would not return to my favorite arts magnet school. On my first day at Hiawatha Middle School Luciana was the first student that spoke to me. During lunch, Luciana shared a bag of chips she had brought from home. Ever since we became friends, I call her Lu.

"Hi, girl! I missed you! Cute outfit," exclaimed Lu.

Leaning in for a hug, I said, "Hi, Lu! We literally see each other every Sunday at church."

"Yea, but we really can't hang out and have fun because our parents are there," said Lu.

Our families have attended the same church in their neighborhood since birth. However, they only met each other once Abril switched schools.

"I cannot wait to see our schedules; I hope we have Mrs. Simon. She is so nice, and I heard her math tests are so easy," said Luciana.

"I hope so too," said Abril.

The bus was six blocks away from the school. Luciana looked out the window towards the sunrise. She was feeling really hot, it was August, and it felt like 100 degrees. She looked around and reached over me to open the window.

"Dudeeee, close the window. My hair is getting messed up."

"Mine is too, but it's so hot in here, and aren't we going to do our hair in Mrs. Hernández's office like last year," Luciana asked as she sat back down.

"She's not working at our school anymore. My mom called the school yesterday, and they told her," I yelled over the gust of wind.

"What the heck! How will I do my hair in school? I do not have a hair straightener, and the bathrooms do not have outlets. What will I do If I run out of pads? You know she always saved the good pads for us, so we didn't have to use the ugly ones from the health office."
"Dude, I know. She was so nice. I'm going to miss her couch and our conversations," I said.

Mrs. Hernández was the Family Liaison for six years. She was empathetic, supportive, and an advocate for Latinx students and families at Hiawatha Middle School. At one point, the school predominately served Spanish-speaking students, but that slowly started shifting when the district redesigned school zones and required students to enroll in schools in their neighborhood. As a result, the Spanish-speaking and diverse populations are gradually decreasing while the White student populations are increasing. However, a significant presence of Spanish-speaking students remains, just not enough to justify a family liaison in the school budget.

Throughout the school day, Luciana and Abril found themselves breaking the news to other students and witnessing the sadness and confusion.

**Christina - Español**

A más tardar ese día, yo fui a la escuela para hablar con la directora Cohen. Me he reunido con ella muchas veces antes, pero esta vez será diferente. La Sra. Hernández no está allí para traducir.

Yo asisto a una clase de inglés con otros padres de la escuela cada dos semanas. Estamos aprendiendo rápidamente el idioma, pero necesito ayuda con la jerga de la escuela. Yo me sentí motivada a aprender inglés después de escuchar a otros padres de la ciudad hablar sobre sus preocupaciones sobre los procesos escolares. Yo me prometí aprender inglés para abogar por mis hijas; sin embargo, esperaba conservar el apoyo del enlace familiar de la escuela.

Fue útil tener a alguien en el edificio que pudiera abogar por ella, sus hijos y otras familias.

—Hello Mrs. Solís, how can I help you? —preguntó la secretaria

La secretaria de la escuela me reconoció inmediatamente; yo estoy muy involucrada en la Escuela Intermedia Hiawatha. Siempre ayudó a la Sra. Hernández a planificar eventos familiares Latine y siempre asistí a conferencias.

—¿Can I talk to directora Cohen? —yo dije con confianza.

La secretaria de la escuela llamó a la directora Cohen por radio y luego hizo una llamada telefónica.

—Regresó y dij: —Principal Cohen is finishing up a meeting, but she Will be here in five minutes. I also called Sr. Steven so he can help translate.

—Gracias.

Poco después, Sr. Steven y la directora Cohen llegaron a la sala de espera donde yo esperaba y caminamos juntos a su oficina.

Cuando se sentaron, la directora Cohen preguntó: —¿Mrs. Solís, how can I help you?

Sr. Steven comenzó a traducir: —El director preguntó.

Yo interrumpí a Sr. Steven y dije: —Entendí lo que preguntó.

Luego giré hacia la directora Cohen y pregunté: —¿What happened to la Señora Hernández?".
—Unfortunately, after the teacher strike last spring, we had to restructure our school budget, and we did not have enough funds to pay for a family liaison —admitted the director Cohen.

La directora Cohen necesitaba compartir lo que sucedió, pero era demasiado complejo para explicarlo. Entonces, en lugar de eso, dio una explicación que podría ser más fácil de entender. Sin embargo, lo que sucedió fue que la escuela perdió su financiación del Título I, que financiaba el puesto de la Sra. Hernández. Perder los fondos del Título I significó que no tenían suficientes familias inscritas en los programas de almuerzo gratis o a precio reducido, o que no tenían suficientes estudiantes de color en el edificio. Antes de la huelga, la Sra. Hernández y el director Cohen se sentaron a planificar cómo se financiaría su puesto, pero ese plan se disolvió después de la huelga.

Yo no pude descifrar todo lo que dijo la directora Cohen, así que giré hacia Sr. Steven para que pudiera traducir.

—Entendí la parte de la huelga, pero no pude entender el resto —yo dije.

—Después de la huelga de la primavera pasada, tuvimos recortes presupuestarios y no pudimos pagar el salario de la Sra. Hernández —Sr. Steven tradujo solo lo que pudo.

—¿Por qué la Sra. Hernández? ¿Por qué tuvo que ser ella la que se fuera? No es importante para la escuela tener un enlace familiar para apoyar a las familias latinas? La Sra. Hernández nos ayudó a navegar el sistema educativo y nos conectó con socios comunitarios. También mantuvo a todas las familias bien informadas sobre las actualizaciones escolares. Me apoyó con mi hija mayor cuando estuvo aquí y Abril. Como ella ya no está, quiero saber cuál es su plan para apoyar a las familias Latiné —yo pregunté.

—She is concerned that Mrs. Hernández is not here anymore and wants to know how you will support the Latine families —Sr. Steven tradujo.

—I know Mrs. Hernández worked closely with you. We are sad we had to let Mrs. Hernández go, and we understand that she had strong family and community connections. I plan to maintain those connections that Mrs. Hernández fostered. I want all our families to be involved and feel like they can trust our teachers and me — La directora Cohen respondió.

El Sr. Steven tradujo lo que me respondió la directora.

—¿Cómo mantendrán la confianza de las familias latine? Me acabo de enterar anoche que la Sra. Hernández fue despedida. ¿No crees que deberías haber avisado a las familias cuando sucedió? No recibí ninguna actualización durante el verano sobre el nuevo año escolar. Nada sobre horarios de clases, rutas de autobús o cambios de personal. Eso es todo lo que la Sra. Hernández hizo por nosotros —yo expliqué.

Otra vez el Sr. Steven tradujo lo mejor que pudo, pero al final omitió algunos detalles —yo expliqué.

—I was unaware Mrs. Hernández did all that for our families before school started. I understand that the district has been sharing all that information
with families. They post that information on the district website and social media
—La directora Cohen respondió.
  Pude entender lo que dijo y respondí.
  —Es difícil para mí encontrar esa información en el sitio web del distrito, incluso si está en español.
  La directora Cohen parecía frustrada.
  —I will try my best to maintain the same resources Mrs. Hernández provided you and other families. I will discuss this issue during our next staff meeting and create a plan with teachers. —miro a su reloj —I have another meeting starting in two minutes. Mr. Steven can help you sign out at the front office.
  —Gracias por tomar el tiempo para escucharme.
  Recogí a Abril ya que era el final del día escolar. Mientras esperaba en el auto a Abril, solo podía pensar en la reunión con la directora Cohen. No me fue de la reunión con la sensación de que la directora tenía un plan sólido para apoyar a las familias multilingües y Latine. No tenía a nadie en el edificio en quien pudiera confiar.

**Christina - English**

Later that day, I went to school to talk to Principal Cohen. I’ve met with her many times before, but it will be different this time. Mrs. Hernández is not there to translate. I attend an English class with other Hiawatha Middle School parents every two weeks. I am quickly picking up the language, but I need help with school lingo. I was motivated to learn English after hearing other parents in the city discuss their concerns over school processes. I vowed to learn English to advocate for my children; however, I did not expect to lose the support of the school’s family liaison.

Having someone in the building who could advocate for me, my children, and other families was important.

"Hello, Mrs. Solis, how can I help you?" asked the school secretary. She immediately recognized me. I am very involved at Hiawatha Middle School. I always helped Mrs. Hernández plan Latine family events and always came to conferences.

I confidently said, "Can I talk to Principal Cohen?"

The school secretary called Principal Cohen on the radio and then made a phone call.

She returned and said, "Principal Cohen is finishing a meeting, but she will come to get you in five minutes. I also called Mr. Steven, so he could help interpret the conversation."

I replied, "Thank you."

Shortly after, Mr. Steven and Principal Cohen arrived at the waiting area where I was waiting, and we walked together to her office. As we sat down, Principal Cohen asked, "Mrs. Solis, how can I help you?"

Steven began translating, "The principal asked. . ."
I interrupted Mr. Steven and said, "I understood what she asked." Then she turned to Principal Cohen and asked, "What happened to Mrs. Hernández?"

"Unfortunately, after the teacher strike last spring, we had to restructure our school budget, and we did not have enough funds to pay for a family liaison," stated Principal Cohen.

Principal Cohen needed to share what happened, but it was too complex to explain. So instead, she gave an explanation that might be easier to understand. However, what happened is that the school lost its Title I funding, which funded Mrs. Hernández's position. Losing Title I funding meant that they didn't have enough families enroll in free or reduced lunch programs, or they did not have enough students of color in the building. Before the strike, Mrs. Hernández and Principal Cohen sat down to plan how her position would be funded, but that plan dissolved after the strike.

I could not decipher everything that Principal Cohen said, so I looked at Mr. Steven so he could translate.

"I understood the part about the strike, but I was not able to understand the rest," I said.

Mr. Steven hesitantly translated, "After the strike from last spring, we had budget cuts and could not afford to pay Mrs. Hernández's salary."

"Why Mrs. Hernández? Why did she have to be the one to leave? Is it not important for the school to have a family liaison to support Latine families? Mrs. Hernández helped us navigate the educational system and connected us with community partners. She also kept all families well informed about school updates. She supported me with my oldest daughter when she was here and with Abril. Since she is no longer here, I want to know what your plan is to support Latine families?" I asked.

Mr. Steven translated, "She is concerned that Mrs. Hernández is not here anymore and wants to know how you will support the Latine families."

Principal Cohen responded, "I know Mrs. Hernández worked closely with you. We are sad we had to let Mrs. Hernández go, and we understand that she had strong family and community connections. I plan to maintain those connections that Mrs. Hernández fostered. I want all our families to be involved and feel like they can trust our teachers and me."

Mr. Steven translated Principal Cohen’s response.

"How will you maintain the trust of the Latine families? I just found out last night that Mrs. Hernández was let go. Don't you think you should have let families know when it happened? I did not get any updates during the summer about the new school year. Nothing about class schedules, bus routes, or staff changes. That is everything Mrs. Hernández did for us," I explained.

Mr. Steven translated as best as he could but ultimately left some details out.

Principal Cohen responded, "I was unaware Mrs. Hernández did all that for our families before school started. I understand that the district has been sharing all that information with families. They post that information on the district website and social media."
I could make out what was said and responded, "It is hard for me to find that information on the district website, even if it is in Spanish."

Principal Cohen looked frustrated, "I will try my best to maintain the same resources Mrs. Hernández provided you and other families. I will discuss this issue during our next staff meeting and create a plan with teachers. I have another meeting starting in two minutes. Steven can help you sign out at the front office."

Hesitantly, I said, "Thank you."

It was almost the end of the school day, so I waited for Abril in the parking lot. As I waited all I could think about was the meeting. I did not leave the meeting feeling like Principal Cohen had a solid plan to support multilingual and Latine families. I do not have anyone in the building that I can trust.

**Trustyng Relationships**

Family liaisons are usually responsible for expanding opportunities for families of color by leading outreach efforts and encouraging participation (Alvarado, 2022). It is not easy for family liaisons to juggle the needs of the families they support, and the responsibilities assigned by the district. Christina mentioned that Mrs. Hernández, the family liaison that was let go, always prepared families for the new school year by sending families information about bus routes, schedules, and building changes. Multilingual families often need additional resources besides those provided by the district. For example, phone calls after school hours, translations of school-specific processes, or facilitating connections between families and community organizations. The story shows that students also rely on family liaisons for support.

Family liaisons are most commonly found in Title I schools that primarily serve multilingual students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Often their jobs are contingent on the percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch and the school's classification as a Title I school. As family liaisons navigate the community's demands and their job security, they are also expected to abide by the racialized scrips of the district (Alvarado, 2022). According to Alvarado (2022), racialized scripts enforce racialized practices that determine the dispersal of social rights to community members or, in this case, the school. It aims to justify the
inequitable distribution of access and assimilation of families. Instead of helping families feel welcomed, they are given the task of assimilating families to White centered school practices.

Vignette #2

"Stop excluding minorities and making them feel like they're less than their white peers."
Washburn, YPE Presentation 2016

Abril

Almost a month had passed, and I was struggling in school. I felt like I was not welcomed into Mrs. Wright's English Language Arts class, and I was really struggling to understand what she was teaching. I often raised my hand for help, and when I was called on, Mrs. Wright always said, "You should at least try to do the work on your own first before raising your hand."

I felt discouraged to raise her hand after hearing the same thing over and over again. I began to turn in assignments that needed to be completed or copied the answers of other students.

Mrs. Wright realized that my grade in the class was low and decided to talk to call me out.

Mrs. Wright gestured to a chair beside her desk and said, "April come here! We need to talk."

The class looked at me as I walked to Mrs. Wright's desk. I even heard someone laughing. I had never been called out before. I gripped the pencil that was in my hand as I sat down.

"April, do you know why I called you?" Mrs. Wright asked.

Why does every teacher ask that question whenever they call a student over? We do not know why teachers call us, but it's never good.

"My name is Abril, not April, and no, I do not know."

She laid out four pieces of paper. Each paper had my name accompanied by a zero. I hoped she would ignore my unfinished assignments just like she ignored my questions and plea for help.

"I noticed that you have been submitting unfinished assignments. Why?"
"I don't get it, and you don't want to help me," I replied. "I always raise my hand for help, but you do not help me. Instead, you help other students."

"I want you to try before asking me for help, but if you don't understand the assignment after trying it. After you try it on your own and you come back and ask for help. You can also ask a friend for help. You can also come to my room during study hall. I am always available to help you."

The last bell of the day rang. I stood up and said, "It doesn't always feel like you want to help me."

The conversation made me so mad that I walked past my meeting spot with Lu. I just wanted to get on the bus and go home.

I heard Lu in the distance as I was about to get on the bus. Lu yelled, "Abril wait for me!"
Catching her breath, she asked, "Why didn't you wait for me? I forgot my water bottle in the gym, so I had to go get it after the last hour." Lu looked at my face, "What happened?"

"Mrs. Wright embarrassed me in front of the whole class. I will tell you what happened tomorrow. I want to go home."

On the way home, I debated on whether to tell my mom. If Mrs. Hernández was here, she would have already talked with Mrs. Wright and called my mom. Have they already called my mom? I guess I will find out when Mom gets out of work. I should probably clean and get dinner started as soon as I get home, but I won't clean so well. She might suspect something if she did not get the call and saw a clean apartment.

When I got home, I changed into comfortable clothes and turned the TV on. I am still feeling very embarrassed and mad. I was sad on the bus, but now that I've replayed in my head what happened, I think Mrs. Wright does not like me, and I'm mad.

Watching my favorite show helped me feel better. After an hour or so, I switched on the music and started cleaning. I washed the dishes, took out the trash, vacuumed, and almost wiped down the fridge, but that would have been going above and beyond, so I decided not to. Instead, I rinsed the beans and rice and took a nap after I was done.

About thirty minutes later, I heard my mom and sister walk in. Andrea was still wearing her cleats from soccer practice.

"Dude, what the heck! I just vacuumed. Take off your shoes!"
Andrea laughed, "Sure you did. You were sleeping."
"Take off your shoes, Andrea. You are going to get the carpet dirty." Mom shouted from the kitchen. "Abril, come help me get dinner ready. I have my English class today at 7 p.m., and I only have one hour to get dinner ready before class begins," Mom rushed me.

I walked to the kitchen slowly, trying to figure out if Mom was mad or stressed that she had only an hour to make dinner before class.
I cautiously asked, "What do you want me to help you with?"
"Wash the beans and put them in a pot with water so they can boil."
I didn't tell her they were already clean. Instead, I faked rinsing them one more time. If she has not yelled at me by now, no one from school has called her. I am relieved! If Mrs. Hernández were still at Hiawatha Middle School, she would have called my mom, and I would be in big trouble.
"How was school today?" Mom asked.
Should I tell Mom? She would be upset with Mrs. Wright for embarrassing me in front of the entire class. Plus, she would probably find out during conferences, then she would be the one embarrassing me in front of parents and students in the gym since that is where conferences are held. That would be worse than what happened today, but I don’t want to tell her.
I replied, "Good."
She stirred the vegetables and asked, "That's it? Tell me, how are your classes going?"
I looked into the sink where the water filled up the pot for the beans, "Good."
She replied, "I hope they are. I got the invitation for parent-teacher conferences in the mail today. We need to go on October 16 or 17. "I know," I replied.
My sister and I ate dinner while Mom attended class online in the living room. I could hear her reading dialog off her screen with a partner. I wish she didn't have class today. I wanted to keep watching my favorite show in the living room. But it's probably a good idea to go to my room and read the book I checked out this week.
I got halfway through the book when I fell asleep.

Parental Involvement Misconceptions

A common misconception that schools have about multilingual parents is that they are disengaged with their child's education, disregarding the socio-political circumstances that hinder their school engagement, such as immigration, economic instability, inaccessible transportation, and language (Maldonado Torres, 2022; Arellanes, Viramontez Anguaino, & Lohman, 2019). Latine parents view education as upward mobility and have high standards and educational aspirations for their children. The assumption of disengaged parents is based on perceptions created by Western ideologies perpetuating racism (Maldonado Torres, 2022). Research shows Latine families have more home-based parental engagement than their White counterparts (Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014). They are redefining what parent involvement looks like. Home-based parental involvement includes the teachings of respect and morals, encouraging siblings to care for each other, exposing children to low-paying jobs, and making financial sacrifices for their children (Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014).

In the narrative, Christina, a working mom, asks her daughter about school and taking English classes. These two acts show parental engagement and resistance. Christina is learning English to navigate school topics and issues with her daughters and teachers. These circumstances frustrate parents learning how to navigate the educational system without knowing
how it functions. Christina’s experiences at Hiawatha Middle School are motivating her to learn
a new language so she can be more present. This vignette demonstrates that Western logics
assume that multilingual families are disengaged based on “traditional” parental involvement.

Vignette #3

"Many students found that teacher’s words, especially when negative, were much more impactful." Anwatin, YPE Presentation 2018

Abril

I woke up feeling much better, although very sweaty because I do not have
an A/C in my room. However, I was ready to have a good day. On the way to
school, I told Lu what happened yesterday in Mrs. Wright's class.

"I cannot believe she embarrassed you in front of the class. I wish she
would've tried to do that to me. I would've said something."

"I know. At least she didn't call my mom. I do not care about it anymore,
so I am going to try to forget about it."

I was more quiet than usual in each class today. I wanted to lay low and
not get in trouble again. I sat with my friends during lunch but laid my head on
the table after eating. I usually walk up and down alongside the table, talking to
everyone.

A teacher poked my shoulder and asked, "Hey, are you okay?"
I looked up, and I didn't recognize her. She might be a substitute teacher. I
was uncomfortable talking to her and said, "Yes, I'm just really tired."

She walked away and kept patrolling the lunchroom. After talking to her, I
realized I did not know anyone I was comfortable talking to in the building. Last
year I could rely on Mrs. Hernández for everything. If I was not having a good
day, I knocked on her office door, and she welcomed me with a snack and a
listening ear. She always gave the best advice.

In sixth grade, we had a sub in English. I asked the sub permission to go to
the bathroom. When I returned to class, a bunch of other students were hanging
out by the classroom door, and when the sub opened the door, she blamed us all
for skipping class. She told us that she was writing our names on a note for Mrs.
Clark. I tried explaining that she had given me permission to go to the bathroom,
but she didn't remember.

After the bell rang, I ran to Mrs. Hernández's office and explained
everything to her. She advised me to talk to Mrs. Clark first thing in the morning
the next day. I didn't want to go alone because I didn't think Mrs. Clark would
believe me. I wanted her to talk to Mrs. Clark instead, but she refused. Mrs.
Hernández told me I had to do it independently, but she would be right outside the
classroom for support. She coached me on how I could advocate for myself.

The following day, I arrived at school super early and went straight to
Mrs. Hernández's office to walk over to Mrs. Clark's class together. Mrs.
Hernández helped me feel more confident! I talked to Mrs. Clark all by myself, and after the conversation, she thanked me for talking to her.

I wish I had someone in the building that I could trust. After lunch, I made my way to 5th and 6th hour. The day felt like it was never going to end.

On my way to 7th hour, Mrs. Wright's class, I took deep breaths. I looked at the clock in the hallway, I had plenty of time before the bell rings. I decided to take a slight detour to the nearest bathroom. It would be a lot easier to use the bathroom now than having to ask Mrs. Wright in class. What if she doesn't let me?

When I entered the bathroom, all the stalls were taken, and a few students waited in line for the next stall. I glanced at my phone; I have time to wait as long as they don't take too long. I waited for two minutes, and the line did not move so I walked out. I only had one minute before the late bell rang, so I speed-walked. I was about two feet away from the door when the bell rang.

As I was reaching the door handle, under my breath, I said to myself, "Shit! I bet she is going to say something to me."

I slowly opened the door, and Mrs. Wright looked straight at me.

"You turn in uncompleted assignments, and now you're coming late to my class?" she asked from across the room.

"I had to go to the bathroom, and there was a line."

She was walking towards me, "I don't want to hear it. If you don't want to come to class on time and ready to work, then I don't want you here." She pointed to the door and said, "Leave!"

I raised my hands and let them fall as a sign of giving up and said, "Where am I supposed to go?"

She did not respond. As I walked away, I heard her lock the door. I held back tears as my body instinctively walked through the hallway, taking me to Mrs. Hernández's old office. I knew she wasn't there, but I tried to open the door. It was locked.

I could feel tears running down my cheeks. I used my sweater to wipe my face and put my hood on so no one could see I was crying. I walked to the nearest bathroom and hid in a stall until the end of the day.

Christina – Español

Me senté en la mesa en la sala de descanso de mi trabajo y revisé mi registro de llamadas. El número de la llamada que perdí me resultó familiar. ¿Fue una llamada del médico?

Llamé al número e inmediatamente me enviaron al correo de voz, "This is Hiawatha Middle School; please call back during office hours Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m."

¿Por qué llamaron? ¿Me llamaron para recordarme sobre las conferencias que se llevarán a cabo en dos semanas? ¿O Abril se metió en problemas?
Volvió a la aplicación del teléfono e hice clic en los mensajes de voz. Tenía dos mensajes de voz sin abrir. Uno era de hace dos semanas que ignoré y el otro era de la llamada perdida de hoy. Escuché el correo de voz, pero no pude entender completamente lo que decía la persona. Sin embargo, pude distinguir que Abril se metió en problemas hoy en la escuela y la llamada era de la Sra. Wright.

Lo reproduje de nuevo en modo altavoz. Escuché algo sobre sus calificaciones. Creo que hay un sitio web en el que puedo iniciar sesión para buscar sus calificaciones. Desafortunadamente, no tenía más Internet en mi teléfono, así que decidí usar la computadora pública en la sala de descanso. Cuando la computadora se encendió, traté de recordar el nombre del sitio web.

Una vez que se cargaron todas las aplicaciones en la computadora, fui directamente al sitio web de la escuela intermediaria Hiawatha. Reconocí las palabras "student portal", estoy segura de que ese es el sitio web que me mostrará las calificaciones de Abril. Hice clic en el enlace, que me indicó que iniciara sesión, pero no tenía un nombre de usuario ni una contraseña. ¿Abril debe tener la información de inicio de sesión? Intenté hacer clic en otras páginas, pero eso no fue útil. Encontré varios portales de información para estudiantes, pero todo estaba en inglés, por lo que no fue útil.

De camino a casa, no podía dejar de pensar en el mensaje de voz y el portal de estudiantes. Le pediré a Andrea que me traduzca el mensaje de voz. Eran las 7:45 p.m. cuando llegué a casa.

Mientras cerraba la puerta principal, dije: —¡Abril! ¿Por qué me llamaron de tu escuela? Estaba en el trabajo y no podía contestar el teléfono, pero dejaron un mensaje de voz. ¿Es cierto que tus calificaciones son malas?
—¿Qué? Mis calificaciones no son malas —Abril respondió.
—Escucha el correo de voz —saqué el teléfono de mi bolso y se lo entregué a Andrea —¿Qué dijo la maestra?
Andrea tomó el teléfono y reprodujo el correo de voz en modo altavoz.

"Hello, Mrs. Solís, this is Mrs. Wright speaking, April's English teacher. I spoke to your daughter yesterday about unfinished assignments. Unfortunately, her grades in my class are not looking good, and she was late to my class today. Please have a conversation with her over the weekend. If this behavior persists, we will have to schedule a meeting. Thank you".

Andrea estaba traduciendo palabra por palabra cuando la interrumpió Abril y contó su versión de lo que sucedió. Explicó cómo la Sra. Wright no le ayudó cuando le pedía ayuda y cómo la echó de la clase. Abril se metió en un gran problema por no decirme antes sobre sus dificultades con las asignaciones.
—Trae tu mochila y tu computadora portátil —me senté en la mesa y le pidi.
Rápidamente agarro sus cosas y me las dio.
—¿Dónde están las tareas que no terminaste? —le exigí.
—Los dejé en la escuela.
—Muéstrame tu Google Classroom. Tu tarea también debería estar allí. Inicie sesión y esperé a que se cargaran las aplicaciones.
—Te digo que todo lo que no terminé está en la escuela.
Abrió Google Classroom para la clase de inglés y señalo que no tenía tareas atrasadas o sin terminar. Sin embargo, note que tenía dos asignaciones para entregar el lunes por la noche.

—¿Qué dice allí? ¿Esas asignaciones deben entregarse el lunes?
—Sí, pero ya casi he terminado con ellos.
—¡Tienen que estar listos para mañana, y tienes que mostrarme cuando termines! Ahora, muéstrame tus calificaciones en el portal para estudiantes o en el portal para padres. El sitio web que muestra tus calificaciones, no estoy muy seguro qué cuenta es.

Hizo clic en el sitio web de la escuela y fue al menú desplegable para seleccionar el portal del estudiante. Era la primera que iba a ver sus calificaciones desde que comenzó la escuela. Se inclinó más cerca de la computadora portátil y leyó sus calificaciones en voz alta.

—Una A en arte, una C en matemáticas, A en ciencias, D en inglés, B en gimnasia, C en estudios mundiales. Abril, ¿por qué tus calificaciones son tan malas?

Podíamos escuchar a Andrea riéndose en la sala.

—¡Cállate! Voy a decirle a mamá que revise tus calificaciones también —grito Abril.

Volví hacia mí y me dijo: —Tengo una D en inglés porque no le caigo bien a la Sra. Wright y no quiere ayudarme.

—Entonces, ¿por qué no le pides ayuda a tu hermana? También te he dado permiso para quedarte después de la escuela donde pueden ayudarte con tu tarea. Así que tienes muchas opciones. El lunes investigaré lo que está pasando en tus clases. Mientras tanto, muéstrame de nuevo cómo acceder al portal para ver tus calificaciones.

Christina - English

I sat at the table in the staff lounge at work and checked the call log on my phone. The number of the call I missed looked familiar. Was it a call from the doctor?

I called the number back and was immediately sent to voicemail, "This is Hiawatha Middle School; please call back during office hours Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m."

Why did they call? Did they call to remind me about the conferences happening in a few weeks? Or did Abril get in trouble?

I went back to the phone app and clicked on voicemails. I had two unopened voicemails. One was from two weeks ago that I ignored, and the other was from today's missed call. I listened to the voicemail but could not fully understand what the person was saying. However, I could make out that Abril got in trouble today in school, and the call was from Mrs. Wright.

I played it again on speaker mode. I heard something about her grades. I believe there is a website I can log in to look up her grades. Unfortunately, I do not have more internet on my phone, so I decided to use the public computer in the lounge. As the computer turned on, I tried remembering the website's name.
Once all the apps on the computer loaded, I went straight to the Hiawatha Middle School website. I recognized the words "student portal," that's the website that will show me Abril's grades. I clicked on the link, which directed me to log in, but I didn't have a username or password. Does Abril have the login info? I tried clicking other tabs, but it was not helpful. I came across several student portal information, but it was all in English, so it was not helpful.

On the way home, I could not stop thinking about the voicemail and the student portal. I will ask Andrea to translate the voicemail for me when I get home.

It was 7:45 p.m. by the time I got home. As I closed the front door behind me, I said, "Abril! Why did your school call me? I was at work and could not answer the phone, but they left a voicemail. Is it true that your grades are bad?"

"What? My grades are not bad."
I took the phone out of my purse and handed it to Andrea.
"Listen to the voicemail. What did the teacher say?"
Andrea took the phone and played the voicemail on speaker mode.
"Hello, Mrs. Solís, this is Mrs. Wright speaking, April's English teacher. I spoke to your daughter yesterday about unfinished assignments. Unfortunately, her grades in my class are not looking good, and she was late to my class today. Please have a conversation with her over the weekend. If this behavior persists, we will have to schedule a meeting. Thank you."

Andrea was translating word for word when Abril interrupted and gave her side of the story. She explained how Mrs. Wright didn't help her when she asked for help and how she kicked her out of class. She got in big trouble for not telling me earlier about her struggles with the assignment.

I sat at the dinner table and asked, "Bring your backpack and laptop."
She quickly grabbed it and gave it to me.
"Where are the assignments you didn't finish?"
"I left them at school."
"Show me your Google Classroom. Your homework should be there too."
She logged in and we waited for the apps to load, "I'm telling you that everything I didn't finish is at school."
She opened the Google Classroom for English class and pointed out that she had no late or unfinished assignments. However, I noticed that she had two assignments to turn in by Monday night.
"What does it say there? Those assignments are due on Monday?" I asked.
"Yes, but I am almost done with them."
"They need to be done by tomorrow, and you have to show me when you finish! Now, show me your grades on the student portal or parent portal. The website that shows your grades, I am not too sure which account it is."
She clicked on the school website and went to the drop-down menu to select the student portal. It was the first time since school started that I would see her grades. I leaned closer to the laptop and read her grades out loud. "An A in art, a C in math, A in science, D in English Language Arts, B in gym, C in world studies. Abril, why are your grades so bad."
We could hear Andrea laughing in the living room.
"Shut up! I'm going to tell Mom to check your grades too," Abril yelled.
She then turned to me and said, "I have a D in English Language Arts
because Mrs. Wright doesn't like me and doesn't want to help me."
"Then why don't you ask your sister for help? I've also given you
permission to stay after school where they can help you with your homework.
You have a lot of options. On Monday, I will investigate what is happening in
your classes. Meanwhile, show me again how to access the portal to see your
grades."

**Imbalance of Power**

Schools are institutions of unequal balance of power between the decision-makers and
underserved families. Parents are aware of this power imbalance and have begun to challenge
policies and practices and advocate for the needs of their children. However, their advocacy
takes work. A study led by Mortier and Arias (2023) analyzes how Latinx families who have
children with disabilities navigate stressors and barriers due to power imbalances in family-
school relationships. Parents in the study indicated that IEP (Individualized Educational Plan)
meetings caused stress, and the amount of information given to them by teachers they did not
recognize was challenging to understand without proper translations (Mortier & Arias, 2023). A
participant shared, "The Latino community is not accustomed to arguing for the rights of the
children, we are accustomed to receive what we are given. Because of that mentality, they miss
out on services and lots of rights" (Mortier & Arias, 2023). Parents may not want to challenge
school and district policies because of the value of *respeto* (respect). *Respeto* emphasizes
obedience and avoiding arguments with elders, professionals, and people with status (Calzada,
Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010). Latine families respect teachers and administrators, so they avoid
challenging policies.

The power imbalance between parents and schools has become more and more evident.
Although it may have taken a discriminatory incident, many parents, students, and local
grassroots have begun organizing for educational change (Jasis, 2021). Organizations like Latino Youth Development Collaborative started by converting parents' demands into a collective struggle (Jasis, 2021). They created a space to share stories of injustices and discriminatory practices in their local district. Together they challenge the institutionalized scripts that teachers and school staff follow.

**Vignette #4**

"40% of parents reported that the information provided by the school is not culturally appropriate and meaningful."

2018 Survey of Families with Children in the Minneapolis Public School District- Latino Youth Development Collaborative

**Abril**

Lu and I ran to the bathroom by the gym before the bell rang. The halls were still crowded, so we had to push through. Lu said it was better to do that because no one would suggest that we were skipping if we got in the bathroom before the bell. We went straight to the big stall, dropped our bags, and sat on the floor. Lu took out her nail polishes and her snacks and laid them out. Lu asked, "What color do you want?"

I answered, "I want the lavender color." She shook the nail polish as I asked, "Lu, are you sure we will not get caught?"

Lu started painting my nails. "If you regret this, you could go to class. However, that might not be any better. Mrs. Wright will probably yell at you and kick you out. You would be in just as much trouble."

I wanted to tell her that I regretted my decision to skip. But, instead, I said, "I want to be here."

Lu continued painting my nails on my other hand. "Good, now there's something very important that I should have mentioned at lunch. You will be marked absent for this hour. This means your mom will get a voicemail notifying her that you were absent. When your mom gets home, make sure that you delete the voicemail before she listens to it."

Hearing her say that did not make me feel any better. I was trying to pretend like I was having fun for Lu, but I was worried about the consequences. I was so stressed about getting caught that I didn't understand why Lu was excited about skipping.

"Lu, how often do you skip?"

She returned the nail polish brush to the bottle and said, "You know how much I hate my English Language Development class. It makes me so mad that I have to waste one of my elective classes to take that class, so I skip it whenever I feel like it. And guess what? The school cannot get ahold of my mom because she
doesn't have minutes on her cell phone. Mrs. Hernández used to text my mom, but
she is not here anymore, so no one has tried to do that yet."

I wanted to know more, "Why do you hate English Language Development so much?"
Lu moved next to me. "That class makes me feel so dumb. The teacher
always tells the whole class that we must pass the language test." Lu paused.
"There is so much pressure to pass the language test. It makes me feel like
something is wrong with me because I speak two languages. Is my English not
enough? I wish they would focus on helping us learn rather than being so focused
on passing a test."

I leaned in to hug her. "Lu, I never knew you felt this way."

Language

Language is a crucial part of one's identity and culture. Unfortunately, language is an
intersecting trait that is dismissed in education. Schools must create equitable, multilingual
spaces where multilingual students can comfortably and safely express themselves and learn.
The production of English-only knowledge and instruction in schools is a tool of oppression
against multilingual students. Skutnabb-Kangas & Cummins (1988) coined and defined the term
"linguicism" as:

. . . ideologies, structures, and practices that are used to legitimate effectuate,
regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material
and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (p.
13).

English Learner (EL) programs that teach multilingual students with a deficit mindset are just as
oppressive as the absence of multilingual spaces. Programs with deficit mindsets shun and
exclude multilingual students and create a power imbalance. In the vignette, we learn about Lu's
feelings about her English Language Development class. She feels like the class needs to honor
her language and culture.

Additionally, multilingual parents know that language barriers interfere with meaningful
and effective parent-teacher communication. To address language barriers, schools can provide
certified translators and hire multilingual teachers or liaisons to assist the community.
Unfortunately, language barriers and unwelcoming environments create tensions between families and teachers. Failure to provide effective communication strategies causes families to lose trust and a sense of belonging (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010). Epstein (1995) warns that even schools that want to create effective communication between teachers and parents may not know how to or may be scared to try. As a result, educators are stuck advocating for better communication policies and do not take the initiative to create better relationships with their multilingual families.

Many schools like Hiawatha Middle School do not have the resources to hire liaisons or certified translators. However, educators have resorted to free online resources such as Google Translate to bridge the language gap between them and parents (Terantino, 2022). However, using Google Translate to communicate with families can lead to miscommunication because of the lack of accuracy. For example, Terantino's (2022) study compared the teacher's script with the translations of a certified translator and Google Translate. Unsurprisingly he discovered that Google Translate's quality was not professional, nor did it translate culturally bounded concepts and tones (Terantino, 2022). Therefore, the translation machine should not be trusted but can be used as an aid to promote communication between schools and families as long as they proceed with caution and are aware of the inconsistencies.

**Vignette #5**

"Better understanding of who we are as people and our rights."
Washburn YPE 2016

"58% of parents reported that when they work with interpreters in the school system, the parents realize that the interpreters are not well prepared and are not professional."
2018 Survey of Families with Children in the Minneapolis Public School District- Latino Youth Development Collaborative

**Christina - Español**
El gimnasio estaba lleno de padres e hijos esperando hablar con sus maestros. Primero busqué al maestro de matemáticas de Abril, el Sr. Allen. Cuando encontré la mesa, también encontré una larga fila de padres esperando para hablar con él.

Así que me puse en línea con el resto de los padres. Mientras esperaba, noté que nadie me preguntó si necesitaba un traductor, y no vi a nadie con quien pudiera hablar que pudiera ayudarme a navegar las conferencias de hoy. Espero que el Sr. Allen sepa a quién pedir ayuda. Desafortunadamente, tendré que seguir esperando.

Casi era mi turno, y comencé a sentirme más nervioso. Busqué en el gimnasio a otras familias multilingües para ver si estaban recibiendo ayuda. Vi padres que no reconocí y el Sr. Steven estaba sentado con ellos durante la conferencia. Es obvio que el director le pidió que tradujera esta noche. Bueno, si esa es mi única opción, no tengo más remedio que pedirle ayuda.

Vi al Sr. Steven seguir a los padres a su próxima conferencia. Se pusieron en fila juntos.

La directora Cohen me dijo que estaba contratando a un intérprete certificado con experiencia en conferencias de padres y maestros. ¿No cree que las familias multilingües merecen un intérprete profesional?

Esto es una broma.
Esto es tan irrespetuoso.
El Sr. Steven es un empleado de la escuela que no habla español con fluidez y no está certificado.

Me giré para ver si había alguien en la fila detrás de mí. No había nadie allí, así que corrí hacia donde estaba esperando el Sr. Steven y pregunté.

—Hola, Sr. Steven. ¿Puedo hablar con usted un momento?
—Sí —respondió mientras caminaba hacia mí.
—Soy la mamá de Abril Solís. ¿Estás traduciendo las conferencias hoy?
—Sí, estoy traduciendo. ¿Necesitas que vaya contigo a conference
—Sí, por favor. Necesito hablar con el profesor de matemáticas de mi hija.
Le mostré la boleta de calificaciones de Abril y señalé la mesa del Sr. Allen.

—Oh, no veo a nadie in line. Ve a la mesa del Sr. Allen y estaré allí. Debo avisar a otro padre que regresaré después de ayudarte.

Regresé a la mesa del Sr. Allen en un buen momento. Todos los padres que estaban en la fila antes ya no están. El Sr. Allen me vio acercarme a él y me invitó a sentarme.

—Hello Mrs. Solis. ¿How are you?—preguntó el maestro.
—¿Bien, and you?
—Oh, I am okay, thanks for asking —respondió.

Unos momentos después, llegó el Sr. Steven. Se sentó a mi lado y saludó al maestro. El Sr. Allen comenzó la conferencia hablando de Abril, pero noté que en lugar de mirarme y hablarme de mi hija, estaba mirando al Sr. Steven. Siento que la conversación debe ser entre el Sr. Allen y yo. Una vez que terminó de hablar. El Sr. Steven comenzó a traducir.
El Sr. Steven se quedó momentáneamente en silencio como si estuviera pensando en lo que me diría.

—La maestra dice que Abril tiene una C en matemáticas. Por ahora, la calificación no es tan mala porque es la mitad del trimestre y podría sacar una mejor calificación si se esfuerza más. Sin embargo, tenía un examen la semana pasada y no sacó una calificación alta. Así que le sugiere que vaya a la clase de apoyo de matemáticas después de la escuela donde podría obtener más ayuda.

Tuve que repetir en mi cabeza lo que dijo. Luego una vez más, porque no entendí todo del todo.

—No entendi. ¿No está aprendiendo las unidades o no está entregando sus tareas?

—She doesn't understand what you mean.

El Sr. Allen abrió su computadora portátil y abrió Google Translate. Rápidamente escribió y luego me mostró.

Leí: “Abril tiene una C en mi clase, y no es donde me gustaría que estuviera. Es una estudiante inteligente, pero necesita concentrarse en lo que está haciendo la pregunta y prestar atención a los pequeños detalles. Por ejemplo, la semana pasada completó una guía de estudio y tomó un examen. Le fue bien en su guía de estudio, pero podría haberlo hecho mejor en el examen. Perdió muchos puntos por no etiquetar sus respuestas. Tenemos un excelente programa extracurricular que ofrece una clase de apoyo de matemáticas para estudiantes de 7.° grado. April podría beneficiarse de la práctica adicional”.

—Está bien, ¿puedes preguntarle si está entregando todo su trabajo? A menudo veo que no está trabajando en la tarea y le pregunto, pero siempre me dice que terminó todo su trabajo en la escuela.

Por lo que pude entender, el Sr. Steven tradujo mi pregunta.

El Sr. Allen dijo: —I can check the grade book for missing assignments.

El buscó la información en su computadora portátil durante aproximadamente un minuto.

—According to the grade book, she has been turning in all her assignments.

—Dijo que ella entrega todo su trabajo —el Sr. Steven tradujo.

—Está bien, no more questions —le dije.

Mientras esperaba la próxima conferencia con la Sra. Wright, busqué en mi bolso la nota que Abril había escrito sobre sus experiencias en su clase. Creo que documentar mis experiencias y conversaciones con su maestra y directora sería una buena idea. Podría usarlo como prueba de mis interacciones con ellos si presente una queja formal.

Pensé que el Sr. Steven iba a terminar un poco antes con la otra familia, así que decidí hacer fila para mi próxima conferencia con la Sra. Wright. Justo cuando llegué a la línea, el Sr. Steven caminó hacia mí. Esperamos un par de minutos en la fila mientras la Sra. Wright terminaba su conferencia con otros padres.

—¿Hello, are you April's mother? —ella me preguntó.

La escuché decir el nombre equivocado.
—Sí. Su nombre es Abril.
—Sorry, Abril —hizo hincapié en la “br” en su nombre.
—I am glad you were able to come today. I am really worried about your daughter. She has been struggling in my class for the past couple of weeks. She's turning in unfinished assignments, laughing at other students' mistakes, and skipping class. She has a D in my class, which is close to an F. Her grade reflects her behavior in my class.

Dirigí mi mirada al Sr. Steven para indicarle que necesitaba que él tradujera.
—Ella dice que está preocupada por su hija because no va a clase, se porta mal y no hace la tarea. Como resultado, tiene una D en la clase.
Me sentí tensa porque sabía que el Sr. Steven no podía darme todos los detalles.
—Quiero saber exactamente cómo se porta mal y por qué no asiste a clase. No sabía nada de eso. Nadie de la escuela me llamó. ¿Por qué recién ahora me enteró?

El Sr. Steven dijo: —She wants more details about the incidents. She did not know that Abril had been skipping class.

Aunque no pude entender muy bien, creo que se trataba del incidente en el que corrió April fuera de clase. April ya me lo había dicho, pero quería saber por qué no asistía a clase. Si no fue a clase, ¿adónde fue y con quién? Estaba furiosa porque April no me dijo sobre esto. Pero me va a escuchar cuando llegue a casa.

—La maestra dice que ella rischó at a student porque resolvió un problema wrong y le pidió a su hija que fuera a la oficina para llamarla usted allí. Y ella no fue a clase el jueves pasado. Mrs. Wright notó que ella estuvo presente en todas las clases excepto en la de ella. Tendrás que hablar con April para saber más detalles. Nadie sabe dónde estuvo.

Ahora estaba enojada. ¿Cómo es posible que no sepan dónde estaba mi hija? ¿Cómo se supone que debo creer que la escuela es un lugar seguro para los estudiantes?
—Por favor digale que me siento muy frustrada con todo esto. Mi hija nunca se había comportado así. Y nadie en esta escuela tiene la urgencia o el respeto de hablarme de lo que está pasando. Necesito una cita con la maestra, la directora, Abril, y un intérprete profesional. Necesito que sea esta semana sin excusas.

Christina - English

The gym was full of parents and children waiting to talk with their teachers. Every year the parent-teacher conferences are held in the gym. I first looked for Abril's math teacher Mr. Allen. When I found the table, I also found a long line of parents waiting to talk to him. I got in line with the rest of the parents.

As I waited, I noticed that no one asked me if I needed a translator, and I didn't see anyone I could speak to that could help me navigate today's conferences. I hope Mr. Allen knows who to ask for help. Unfortunately, I will have to keep waiting.
It was almost my turn, and I began feeling more nervous. I looked around the gym for other multilingual families to see if they were being helped. I saw parents I did not recognize, and Mr. Steven was sitting with them during the conference. It's obvious that the principal asked him to translate tonight. Well, if that is my only option, I have no choice but to ask him for help.

I saw Mr. Steven follow the parents to their next conference. They stood in line together.

Principal Cohen told me she was hiring a certified interpreter with experience with parent-teacher conferences. Does she not think that multilingual families deserve a professional interpreter?

This is a joke.
This is so disrespectful.

Mr. Steven is a school employee who is not fluent in Spanish, and he is not certified.

I turned to see if someone was in line behind me. No one was there, so I ran to where Mr. Steven was waiting and asked. "Hello, Mr. Steven. Can I talk to you for a moment?"

"Yes," he responded as he walked towards me.
"I am Abril Solis' mom. Are you translating the conferences today?"
"Yes, I am translating. ¿Do you need me to go to a conference with you?"
"Yes, please. I need to talk with my daughter's math teacher." I showed him Abril's report card and pointed to Mr. Allen's table.
"Oh, I see no one in line. Go to Mr. Allen's table, and I will be there. I must let another parent know I will return after helping you."

I got back to Mr. Allen's table at a good time. All the parents that were in line earlier are now gone. Mr. Allen saw me approaching him and invited me to sit down.

"Hello, Mrs. Solis. How are you doing?" he asked.
"Good, and you?"
"Oh, I am okay, thanks for asking," he responded.
A few moments later, Mr. Steven arrived. He sat next to me and greeted the teacher. Mr. Allen started the conference by talking about Abril, but I noticed that instead of looking at me and telling me about my daughter, he was looking at Mr. Steven. I feel like the conversation needs to be between Mr. Allen and me.

Once he was done talking, Mr. Steven began translating.

Mr. Steven was momentarily quiet as if he was thinking about what he would tell me. "The teacher says that Abril has a C in math. For now, the grade is not so bad because it is the middle of the quarter, and she could get a better grade if she puts in more effort. However, she had a test last week that did not go well. So, he suggests she go to the after-school math support class where she could get more help."

I had to repeat in my head what he said. Then one more time, because I did not fully grasp everything.

"I did not understand. Is she not learning the units, or is she not submitting her assignments?"
"She doesn't understand what you mean."

Mr. Allen opened his laptop and opened Google Translate. He quickly typed and then showed me.

I read: Abril has a C in my class, and it's not where I would like her to be. She is an intelligent student, but she needs to concentrate on what the question is asking and pay attention to the small details. For example, last week she completed a study guide and took a test. She did well on her study guide but could have done better on the test. She lost a lot of points for not labeling her answers. We have a great after-school program that offers a math support class for 7th-grade students. April could benefit from the extra practice.

"Okay, can you ask him if she is submitting all her work. I often see her not working on homework, and I ask her, but she always tells me she finished all her work at school."

From what I could understand, Mr. Steven translated my question.

Mr. Allen said, "I can check the grade book for missing assignments." Mr. Allen searched for the information on his laptop for about a minute. "According to the grade book, she has been turning in all her assignments."

"He said that she turns in all her work." Mr. Steven translated.

"Okay, no more questions," I said.

While I waited for the next conference with Mrs. Wright, I looked in my purse for the note that Abril had written about her experiences in her class. I think documenting my experiences and conversation with her teacher and principal would be a good idea. I could use it as proof of my interactions with them if I submit a formal complaint.

I thought Mr. Steven was going to finish a little earlier with the other family, so I decided to get in line for my next conference with Mrs. Wright. Just as I got to the line, Mr. Steven walked towards me. We waited a couple of minutes in line while Mrs. Wright finished her conference with other parents.

"Hello, are you April's mother? She asked me.

I heard her say the wrong name.

"Yes. Her name is Abril."

"Sorry, Abril." She emphasized the BR in her name, it almost felt aggressive. "I am glad you were able to come today. I am really worried about your daughter. She has been struggling in my class for the past couple of weeks. She's turning in unfinished assignments, laughing at other students' mistakes, and skipping class. She has a D in my class, which is close to an F. Her grade reflects her behavior in my class."

I turned my gaze to Mr. Steven to indicate that I needed him to translate.

"She says that she is worried about her daughter because she doesn't go to class, misbehaves, and doesn't do her homework. As a result, she has a D in the class."

I felt tense because I knew Mr. Steven could not give me all the details. "I want to know exactly how she misbehaves and why she's not attending class. I didn't know about that. No one from the school called me. Why am I only now finding out?"
Mr. Steven said, "She wants more details about the incidents. She did not know that Abril had been skipping class."

Although I couldn't understand very well, I think it was about the incident where she ran April out of class. Abril had already told me, but I wanted to know why she didn't attend class. If she didn't go to class, where did she go and with whom? I was furious that April did not tell me about this. But she's going to hear me when I get home.

"The teacher says that she made fun of a student who incorrectly solved a problem and asked her daughter to go to the office so she could talk to you there. And she didn't go to class last Thursday. Mrs. Wright noticed that she was present in all the classes except hers. You will have to talk to April to find out more details. No one knows where she was."

How is it possible that they do not know where my daughter was? How am I supposed to believe the school is a safe place for students? "Please tell him that I feel very frustrated with all this. My daughter had never behaved like this. And no one in this school has the urgency or the respect to talk to me about what is happening. I need an appointment with you, the principal, April, and a professional and experienced interpreter. I need it to be this week with no excuses."

**Resistance**

Christina knows that she deserves more than what the school offers but is forced to accept the information offered by the school about her daughter. At the end of the vignette, she is even more confused and frustrated and decides to schedule a meeting with the teacher, principal, and daughter and asks for a certified translator. Demanding an official meeting is an act of resistance towards the school and its oppressive policies. Educators may misinterpret these acts of resistance by parents as unwillingness to discipline or educate their children on how to behave in school. Acts of resistance by students could be seen as acting out or refusing to follow harmful school policies.

**Discussion**

In schools similar to Hiawatha Middle School, everyone suffers because of policies that lack empathy and knowledge about the people in the community. They especially hurt
multilingual families learning how to navigate the educational system in a language that is not their native language. More likely than not, language becomes a barrier for families to be involved in school practices and events. The parent survey piloted by the Latino Youth Development Collaborative reported that 40% of the participants reported that their schools do not offer professional and timely interpreting assistance, and 58% reported that the interpreters provided were not trained professionals (Alfonzo, 2019). Christina is a motivated parent learning English, but even that was insufficient to help her navigate Hiawatha Middle School. She often found herself relying on Mr. Steven to help her understand meetings. Unfortunately, Mr. Steven was a Hiawatha Middle School employee who was neither fluent in Spanish nor a certified translator. As a result, Christina was often discouraged and confused because the school did not provide her with appropriate and timely translations of the information she was given.

The Hiawatha Middle School community also lost their family liaison, who guided them through their educational experiences at the school. Christina, Abril, and other students lost the only person they trusted. Students reported on the Youth Participatory Evaluation that they felt more comfortable with staff members who looked like them, and had the least number of adults that they could trust in the building (YPE IN MPS, 2018). Abril’s experience at Hiawatha Middle School is very similar to the experiences of students in MPS. Mrs. Hernández was the only adult she trusted in the building. She did not have anyone to help her navigate her problems when she left, so she hid from them by skipping and ultimately hurting her grades and willingness to participate. Losing a trusting adult, especially a family liaison, negatively affects the motivation for students and parents to be involved.

Another connection between the fiction-based research story and the gathered data is the parental resistance to oppressive, White-centering school practices. Schools may define or
measure parental involvement based on dominant discourses. They fail to consider what parental involvement looks like for families from different cultures. Abril’s mother, Christina, resisted school policies by being involved. She asked Abril multiple times about her classes and her day at school. For multilingual families that work long hours and irregular shifts, it is hard to keep up with their children’s education through teacher-parent communication, so asking their children about their school day is how they demonstrate their involvement. Christina was also aware she deserved a trained translator. She advocated for herself and other parents. These types of resistance can be traced to collective resistance organizations similar to Latino Youth Development Collaborative program that was created to empower multilingual, Latine families in MPS. They attend board meetings, create parent trainings and professional development, and youth programming. These are acts of resistance to White-centering MPS policies.

**Implications**

Narrative inquiry in education research identifies the needs and lived experiences of students, parents, and teachers which can inform policy decisions that can make schools more inclusive and serve the needs of everyone in the school building. For example, Christina and Abril’s story stresses the need for staff members that reflect their identities and provide language support. In addition, stories like the one in this study can help policymakers evaluate harmful policies and shape policy decisions by evoking emotion, as the vulnerability and frustrations of the experiences of students and parents are illustrated in the story.

Multilingual communities may find it challenging to shift the dominant narratives by sharing personal stories with those who refuse to listen or advocate for change. Protecting their racial stories within the communities they belong to can empower and validate their experiences. By sharing their experiences of monolingual and White-centering educational policies, they may
discover that others in their community share the same experiences and realize they are not alone and empower each other, as seen with the Latino Youth Development Collaborative (LYDC) (Yosso, 2005). Organizations like LYDC empower families and students to dream of possibilities past their present experiences that nurture cultural wealth through aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). LYDC parents work together to develop skills that challenge monolingual policies, which aids their resistance capital (Yosso, 2005). Aspirational and resistance capitals expose racist and oppressive school policies giving multilingual families optimism for better possibilities for their children.

Narratives about educational experiences can promote public awareness and build support for policies because they are more accessible to community members affected by harmful policies. Christina and Abril’s story is multilingual, making it more accessible to Spanish-speaking communities. It is a method that can encourage marginalized communities to participate in research processes by sharing their experiences, values, beliefs, and language. As a result, they can help enhance educational policy for a better future.

**Conclusion**

Centering the educational experiences of multilingual families allows the community, policymakers, and educators to understand better the changes that must happen. The vignettes demonstrate the constant power imbalance and language barriers that multilingual families experience in schools, negatively affecting their school involvement. The characters’ experiences demonstrate how multilingual families’ engagement challenges White-centered policies and dominant discourses. Narratives can be empowering and transformative. As research progresses, the participants and readers start reflecting on the meaning of the story's experiences, envisioning change, and inviting a conversation for change. Students and families in Minneapolis Public
Schools shared experiences of distrust, resistance, and oppression. It is important to emphasize that the perspectives of teachers and administration should have been included in the surveys, thus missing from the data and story.

The storying of the data gathered makes it easier for community members to connect to this information and evokes emotions that lead to meaningful policy discussions. Everyone lives life narratively and comprehends experiences narratively, so unsurprisingly, everyone understands policies narratively based on their own experiences (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narratives of communities affected by a policy should be researched before it is implemented to learn more about the potential implications. Moyer, Warren, & King (2020) identify policy processes that can capitalize from narratives such as mobilizing communities, coalition support, public opinion, relationship building with policy actors, and research opportunities. Moyer, Warren, & King (2020) describe Narrative Policy Framework as working with marginalized communities to develop narratives that can support policy efforts to gain public influence and establish beneficial policies. Narratives provide urgency and validate the experiences of multilingual families and diverse communities. Naturally, communities may interpret or advocate for policies that reflect their living narratives beyond acknowledging that multilingual parents can participate in conversations with school leaders and policymakers. It is essential to recognize their insights and knowledge that can be used as a foundation for new policies or professional development opportunities for educators.
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