Nos sugieren que vengamos a la escuela. La maestra me dijo (pues en inglés verdad, porque no habla español), “Esta noche es el grupo de PTA, debe venir para ver cómo puede compartir en la escuela.” Pues, yo quiero ayudarles a mis niños y por eso yo vine. Pero, les digo, la verdad es que me sentí tan mal. No me sentí parte de la escuela y más que nada me sentí que estaba molestando. Jamás he regresado al PTA.

They suggest that we come to school. The teacher told me (in English right, because she does not speak Spanish), “Tonight is the PTA, you should come and see what you can do in school.” Well, I want to help my children and that is why I came. But, I will tell you, the truth is that I felt so bad. I did not feel a part of the school and more than anything, I felt like I was intruding. I have never returned to the PTA.

These words are spoken by Patricia [all names of people and places are pseudonyms], a Latina mother of three school-aged children, during one of our mothers’ group meetings. Sadly, the sentiment she expressed is not uncommon for some Latino families attempting to become a part of their children’s schooling. In fact, as Villenas and Deyhle (1999) note, “Despite the school rhetoric of parent involvement, parents are really ‘kept out’ of schools by the negative ways in which they are treated . . . and by the ways in which school-conceived parent involvement programs disregard Latino knowledge and cultural bases” (p. 415). I attended a small Catholic school and clearly recall that no adults at my school were bilingual (Spanish/English). As a result, nothing was translated for the Spanish-speaking families, thus preventing communication between school and home. As a young English learner, I remember feelings of exclusion when it came to family participation in school. Notes were sent home announcing school events and PTA meetings, but they were in English. I had no idea what the PTA meant and was unable to explain this to my parents. Consequently, my family, along with the other Spanish-speaking families, felt excluded from many school events.

Because of my personal schooling experiences, I do not want any child or family to feel the oversight that I did. Through my work with families, I advocate for their rights to be informed and respected members of the school community regardless of their linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, or immigration status. To help families from non-mainstream cultures navigate the American school system, it is important to engage students and their families in schooling, specifically by viewing their funds of knowledge (González, Moll,
Guided by a sociocultural perspective where literacy is viewed as a set of social and cultural practices that comprise specific ways of using language and interacting with people (Street, 1995), my work with Latina mamás is also built upon the principle that we should view these women’s daily language practices as a means by which they create and convey knowledge to/for their children. Furthermore, supporting Andrade, Denmat, and Moll’s (2000) stance that regards working-class families as sources of knowledge from which there is much to learn, through my work I “reject the deficit model ascribed to language-minority and working-class families that suggest that their households are at the root of educational problems” (p. 272). Instead, I work from a strengths-based perspective (Durand, 2011) that views Latino families’ pedagogies of the home, or “the communication, practices, and learning that occur in the home” (Bernal, 2006, p. 113), as a starting place for teaching and learning.

Research Context and Methods

My role as a Latina researcher is to represent the complexity of life in schools, highlighting the capabilities of students and families from linguistically, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse backgrounds, and to honor their stories. Writing this research allows me to “cultivate rich, multifaceted representations of human experiences that might

The Study

Conceptual Framework

Community Cultural Wealth, Yosso’s (2005) notion that Communities of Color are filled with strong resources, guided my thinking conceptually. Community Cultural Wealth aims to identify the networks, capabilities, ways of knowing, and meaning making possessed by Communities of Color in order to “transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities” (p. 82). Rather than view the ways of meaning making that families share with their children in their homes and communities as deficits, a Community Cultural Wealth framework requires an examination of these forms of knowledge through an assets-based lens.

To help families from non-mainstream cultures navigate the American school system, it is important to engage students and their families in schooling.

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begin to serve as a basis for teachers to understand diverse students” (Carger, 2005, p. 241) and their families. However, similar to González (2006), I am conflicted about how to share their stories in a respectful manner. I want the mamás to be viewed as strong, intelligent, and hard-working women who remain steadfast to their beliefs and to their children’s education and welfare, despite the fact that they often confront tremendous adversity.

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that knowledge is constructed socially. Specifically, his research led him to consider that individuals have the ability to share their understandings and interpretations of shared experiences with members of their social group. Vygotsky emphasized these “shared experiences” as being co-constructed in homes, communities, and under various and ongoing circumstances of change, leading to the maintenance and sustainability of cultures and languages. González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) built upon that notion, adding that as social groups, classrooms “activate the funds of knowledge within a social network as it becomes part of that social network” (p. 26). This process is likely to happen in the context of conversations about shared experiences. Specific to this study, the social group was comprised of Latina mamás living in the southern United States.

Las mamás came together twice monthly for meetings during which we engaged in pláticas literarias where we read and talked about Latino children’s literature. They were able to identify with this literature and make personal connections because it reflects their language, culture, and, in some cases, their lived realities. The goals of this project were to find ways to engage the mamás in the school and to uncover their everyday literacies in order to “capitalize on household and other community knowledge bases to provide strategic resources for school practices” (Andrade et al., 2000, p. 272).

Participants and Site

Sunnyside Elementary is located in a suburban area in a midsized city in the southern United States. School demographics indicate there are 516 children from Pre-Kindergarten through grade five; 71% of the children are African American, 20% are White, and 9% are “Other.” Four Latina mamás participated in this study: Patricia, Marta, Elvia, and Luisa. The mamás were all learning English, and most of them could understand more than they could speak. All of the mamás were of Mexican origin; Patricia and Elvia were homemakers, and Marta and Luisa worked as housekeepers for families they had met through a friend from their church community. Marta and Luisa expressed the need to earn extra income in order to help support their families in Mexico, particularly because several of their family members were in the process of obtaining visas to come to the United States.

They were able to identify with this literature and make personal connections because it reflects their language, culture, and, in some cases, their lived realities.

The four mamás were familiar with each other and had greeted one another in their community, but it was not until they were registering their children for school that they actually began to develop friendships. At the time of the study, they had been friends for about five years. I have known the mothers for about three years. I met them during various school-sponsored events, such as family literacy and science events, or by casually talking when they saw me in the building on the days I taught university courses on site. Noticing their reluctance to actively participate in school events, the principal asked me to work with the mamás and create a space where they would feel welcomed as active members of the school community.

Knowing the power that multicultural literature has to enhance a reader’s sense of identity and self-empowerment (Bishop, 1997; Cai & Bishop, 1994), I immediately thought of engaging the mamás with Latino children’s literature. I felt that using literature with which they could identify would help them feel at ease and aid them in seeing potential connections between their life experiences and their children’s schooling. I invited them to join me in...
All of our pláticas were conducted in Spanish, and the books selected represented the language and cultures of the children and their families. They were written in Spanish and/or contained text in both Spanish and English. Because some of the books depicted critical social issues (e.g., racism, poverty, immigration) that had directly affected the families, I was careful to have their confianza (González et al., 1993), a mutual trust that “is re-established or confirmed with each exchange and leads to the development of long-term relationships” (p. 3), before delving into these deep discussions. In the span of our three-year acquaintance, I had come to know the mamás; we had established confianza and were engaged in a two-way relationship where we were learning about our respective Community Cultural Wealth while also learning how to navigate the American public school.

Data Collection and Analysis

Various forms of data were collected during bimonthly meetings lasting approximately two hours. I kept a journal that included field notes, anecdotal notes, reflections about our meetings, and plans for future meetings; audiotapes and transcripts of the pláticas; and photographs from our meetings. During our meetings, we read Latino children’s literature and had discussions during which we shared connections made to the books. The mamás also participated in engagements that helped them make the necessary links between lived and school experiences. One such engagement was creating a bilingual counting book modeled after Just a Minute: A Trickster Tale and Counting Book by Yuyi Morales (2003).

Data analysis focused on the discussion transcripts and field notes from my journal. Constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) allowed me to identify patterns and connections across the discussions and field notes and helped me see relationships among the data. Data analysis was constant as the study progressed (in order to have a better grasp of the discussions, I listened to each twice before I completely transcribed them, all within a week of the meeting), and triangulation of data occurred through consistent reviews of the audiotapes, field notes, and member checks with the mamás.

In the midst of the data analysis, the relationships to the Community Cultural Wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) became apparent. According to Yosso (2005), Communities of Color cultivate Community Cultural Wealth through six forms of capital: aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, social, and resistant capital. Yosso (2005) explains further that the forms of capital are “not mutually exclusive or static,” but they are “dynamic processes that build on one another” (p. 77). The excerpts that follow provide instances of when the mamás’ discussions reflected aspects of Community Cultural Wealth and represent the types of discussions in which we engaged overall. In order to demonstrate respect for the mamás, the Spanish spoken by them is honored throughout the sections that follow. I present the Spanish [the actual language used] first, and then the English translation.

Las Pláticas

The data presented is from pláticas about the following books: My Diary from Here to There/Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá (Pérez, 2002), Pepita Talks Twice/Pepita Habla Dos Veces (Lachtman, 1995) and Viva Frida (Morales, 2014). In what follows, I present each of the six forms of Community Cultural Wealth and connections made by las mamás during the pláticas as we explore how it is possible for Latino families to be invited into the schools.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Viva Frida (Morales, 2014) is a beautiful book about Frida Kahlo, the famous Mexican artist who the mamás adored. A lot of the talk about this book centered on the illustrations; Morales created dolls, toys, puppets, and the scenery to accompany them in order to convey the life of the artist. Patricia shared how much she enjoyed the book and especially “las fotos tan bellas”/the beautiful illustrations. Elvia
then made a connection to the skeleton in the illustration, calling the group’s attention to the fact that this illustration also appeared in the book *Just a Minute* (Morales, 2003). Marta then spoke:

*Marta:* Se lo enseñé a Evi, y se quedó completamente enamorada. Ella a dicho siempre que quiere ser artista cuando es grande. Cuanto no quisiéra yo poder llevarla a clases de arte. Sé que aquí tiene clases, pero quisiéra que fuesen más largas y con más enseñanza. Soy como Frida, “dueño.”

*Patricia:* Mandaron una hoja que están ofreciendo clases en el Museo de Arte allá en el centro. A ver si la encuentro y te la doy.

*Marta:* Pues, no hay dinero para eso.

*Elvia:* Marta, no dejes vencerte por el dinero. Hay que ver si tienen becas, se acuerdan que el niño quería tomar clases de guitarra—la maestra le encontró un dinerito. A ver si le hablamos a la maestra de arte.

*Marta:* I showed Evi the book and fell totally in love with it. She has always said that she wants to be an artist when she grows up. How I would love to be able to send her to art classes. I know they have art here [in school], but I would like something longer and with more teaching. I am like Frida, I dream.

*Patricia:* They [school] sent a note about art classes being offered at the Museum of Art downtown. I will look for it and give it to you.

*Marta:* Well, there is no money for that.

*Elvia:* Marta, don’t let yourself be defeated because of the money. We have to see if there are scholarships, remember when my son wanted to play guitar—the teacher found some money for him. Let’s talk with the art teacher.

Delgado-Gaitan (2001) writes of the distress that adjusting to a new country, way of life, and school brings to immigrants. Marta’s aspirations to send her daughter to art classes, to “dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78), reminds us that all families have similar desires for their children. Although financial resources are limited for the families, Elvia’s encouragement not to let the money be a deterrent and to keep an eye out for scholarships demonstrates that “rather than folding under the pressure and threat of a new system, the self turns out to be quite resilient” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, p. 7).

**Familial Capital**

Familial capital refers to those “cultural knowledges nurtured among familia [kin]” that “engage a commitment to community well-being” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). *My Diary from Here to There/Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá* (Pérez, 2002) describes the story of the Pérez family’s immigration to the United States. The mamás referred to the page in the book where the family was waiting for papá at the bus stop and shared a story of a time when they encountered an uncooperative bus driver and a new mother who did not know how to fold her stroller in order to get on the bus:

*Luisa:* Llegó el bus y el chofer fue muy feo con ella y no la quiso esperar porque andaba tardándose con el auto, parece que no lo sabía cerrar.

*Patricia:* Hay sí, me acuerdo. La pobre, no podía y es que no sabía cómo cerrarlo. Se puso a gritarle que se tenía que ir, que la iba dejar allí porque iba hacer que llegara tarde. No sé ni qué más le decía.

*Luisa:* Sí, pero me acuerdo que tú le dijiste al hombre que tenía que esperarla y tener paciencia. Tú te paraste allí enfrente del bus hasta que yo le ayude a la señora cerrar el coche y subirse al bus con su bebé.

*Patricia:* Pues, no, eso no se hace. ¡La pobre, ya andaba nerviosa y el allí, solo gritándole! Y que, se demoró unos cinco minutos.

*Luisa:* Tienes razón. Me dio pesar por ella. Imagínate, si no la ayudamos.

*Patricia:* ¡Sí, pero aprendió a cerrar su coche con prisa! Es nuestro deber ayudarnos unos a los otros.

*Luisa:* The bus got there and the driver was so mean to her and he did not want to wait for her to figure out how to close the stroller.
tired of speaking twice—once in Spanish and then in English. One day she decides that she will speak only English and will no longer speak Spanish.

The excerpt below demonstrates linguistic and social capital as Marta tells the group that her daughter, Chela, is feeling like Pepita in the book. She is tired of speaking “dos veces”/twice, but regardless, Chela needs to help her because Patricia is still learning English. Elvia is very supportive and reminds Marta that it takes time and patience to learn and be able to speak English and that she is doing fine. I then shared that when I was younger, I also became tired of always having to translate; however, my mother reminded me that it was “nuestro deber de ayudar a los quien no pueden”/“our responsibility to help those who cannot help themselves.” The discussion continued with Patricia expressing agreement with my mother:

Patricia: Yes, I remember. Poor thing, she did not know how to close it [stroller]. He started yelling at her that he had to leave and that he was going to leave her there because she was making him late. I don’t even know what else he was saying.

Luisa: Yes, but I do remember that you told him that he had to wait and have patience. You stood in front of the bus while I helped her close the stroller and get on the bus with her baby.

Patricia: Well, no, you [bus driver] don’t do that. Poor thing, she was so nervous and he just kept yelling at her. And for what, a five-minute delay!

Luisa: You are right, I felt sorry for her. Imagine if we had not helped her?

Patricia: Yes, but she learned how to close her stroller quickly! It is our responsibility to help each other out.

Durand (2011) explains, “As immigrant and transnational Latina mothers strive to mother their children in the United States, they must do so in the context of a capitalistic, patriarchal, and increasingly racialized, anti-immigrant society and [they] might be considered one of the most marginalized groups in the U.S.” (p. 258). Within this context also exist community members like Patricia and Luisa who, regardless of blood relations, feel a sense of responsibility to each other and provide a sense of unity that helps others feel that they are “not alone in dealing with their problems” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). There is strength in numbers, and this new mother was fortunate to have Patricia and Luisa present and that they feel it is their responsibility to help each other out.

**Linguistic and Social Capital**

Yosso (2005) explains that linguistic capital includes the “intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language” (p. 78), while social capital is community resources and networks of people. *Pepita Talks Twice/Pepita Habla Dos Veces* (Lachtman, 1995) is about a little girl, Pepita, who becomes...
Marta: Well, Chela helped me, and you too, Luisa, remember the other day at the cellular store?

Luisa: Do I remember! They wanted to charge us $50 more per month because they said that our plan had changed. If not for Chela, we would have to pay it.

Marta: Yes, she read the brochure and saw that nothing had changed.

Luisa: And when she brought that up to them [clerks], they simply said “Oh, sorry.”

Marta: Yes, my little girl saved us that day! Now, we have to go tell the others.

In the discussion excerpt, the mamás provided a clear example of the power of language and community: Chela, Marta’s daughter, used her bilingual abilities to help her mother and Luisa not get scammed out of $50 a month on their cell phone bills. Their next step is to let their community network know what the company is attempting to do with their bills. Delgado-Gaitan (2001) reminds us that “families transcend the adversity in their daily lives by uniting with supportive social networks” (p. 105).

Navigational and Resistant Capital

Yosso (2005) defines navigational capital as “maneuvering through social institutions” (p. 80) and offers that resilience plays a key role in successful steering through social institutions. Resistant capital “refers to the knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (p. 80). The excerpt below is from the discussion of My Diary from Here to There/Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá (Pérez, 2002). Luisa connects Amada’s [main character] fear of not knowing English to the time her son was excluded from joining an after-school computer and science club because he “hablaba español más que inglés”/“spoke more Spanish than English.”

Patricia: No, eso no se puede hacer. No. Él debe hablar los dos idiomas.

Luisa: Sí, eso yo lo sé. Bueno me acorde que eso mismo le había pasado a otra familia con la misma maestra. Yo fui a donde Cristina, y ella me dijo lo que tenía que hacer para arreglar esa situación. Y así fue, al día siguiente, yo con mi poquito de inglés hable con la directora. Le explique todo y quedamos que el niño sí podía estar en el club y no tenía importancia de su habilidad en inglés porque estaban para ayudar. Ella me pidió perdón por lo que paso. Además, me dijo que estaba orgullosa de mí porque yo le hable y porque estaba criando a mis niños que fueran bilingües.

Patricia: No, that cannot be done. No. He should speak both languages.

Luisa: Yes, I know that. Well, I remembered that something similar with the same teacher happened to another family. I went to Cristina’s, and she told me what I needed to do to fix the situation. And that’s how it was. The next day, me and my little English spoke with the principal. I explained everything and we agreed that my son should join the club, and it did not matter what his abilities were in English because they were there to help him. She apologized for what happened. Also, she said that she was very proud of me for speaking with her and for raising my children to be bilingual.

Luisa recalled a similar situation happening to a friend; her friend counseled her on how to deal with the situation. Durand (2011) writes that in Mexican origin families, mothers are “the primary socialization agent responsible for maintaining cultural beliefs and values, and structuring the family environment to support and maintain those values” (p. 257). Luisa, Patricia, and the other mamás are teaching their children to use their networks to navigate through problematic situations and to “engage in behaviors that challenge the status quo” (Yosso, 2005, p. 81); in this case, to maintain their linguistic heritage regardless of the messages they are receiving.

Discussion

Learning about families’ Community Cultural Wealth is one way that schools can honor how diverse families make sense of the world. The
pláticas showed that by engaging the mamás through their own sources of Community Cultural Wealth, they can develop stronger ties to the school community as well as their own community. The discussions served as a means to build links from the mamás’ personal experiences to school learning. It is only through understanding their life experiences and highlighting the benefits of their membership in the school community that educators can begin to create respectful family–school relationships.

Through the pláticas, the mamás demonstrated that by drawing on their Community Cultural Wealth, they can successfully maneuver through life in an English-speaking society that can at times be hostile. The mamás, for example, helped other mothers whom they did not know but for whom they felt a sense of responsibility, and they encouraged each other to maintain aspirations for their children, even when finances threatened to get in the way. They also leaned on each other for moral support and for language brokering when it appeared that a cellular company was being dishonest with them.

It is only through understanding their life experiences and highlighting the benefits of their membership in the school community that educators can begin to create respectful family–school relationships.

Family involvement in school improves students’ self-esteem, enhances academic performance, and helps parents develop positive attitudes toward school (Marschall, 2006). However, as evident by Patricia’s comments in the opening, this is not the case with all families. In fact, as Villenas and Deyhle (1999) noted, sometimes diverse families are “kept out” of schools—either overtly or covertly. As school populations continue to diversify linguistically, socioeconomically, and culturally, it is necessary that we work to include diverse voices in all aspects of our schools. We should make the necessary links between home and school, and should do so in ways that invite, respect, and represent the families in the schools and communities. But how?

The inquiry was guided by wondering how it is possible for Latino families to be invited into schools. Intentionally creating a space at the school for the sole purpose of engaging in discussions and learning about the families’ Community Cultural Wealth provided the mamás a sense of community and belonging in the school that they had not previously felt. The very act of respectfully listening to the ways in which their families make sense of and maneuver through the world around them signaled to the mamás that they mattered.

Participating in these pláticas gave the mamás the confidence to actively participate in school-wide events and not just classroom events. They volunteered at the Book Fair, Career Day, and they also engaged their children’s classmates in read-alouds during the Celebration of Reading. Patricia ran for the position of member at large on the PTA—the very PTA that once made her feel so excluded—and won. She took on this role because she felt she had something to contribute to the school, and it was her responsibility to communicate what she knows and has learned to others.

Closing Thoughts

Through my work with families, I advocate for their rights to be informed and respected members of the school community. When the mamás were given an opportunity to engage with the school culture, they saw themselves as effective advocates for their children as well as members of the larger school community. By sharing their lived experiences during the pláticas, the mamás were able to demonstrate and act on how to “disrupt the boundary between the public classroom discourse and the more private stories of families and communities” (Campano, 2007, p. 60). Latina mamás are not often viewed as resources from which to learn (Bernal, 2006; González, 2005; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). This is far from the truth, however; in fact, as evidenced by their participation in the pláticas, they possess the strength to not only create a place for themselves and their children in a new and alien home, but also to become, when invited, strong advocates for the community, as well as for their children.
This article explored how a group of Latina mamás drew on Latinx children’s literature for storytelling and advocacy. Here are some ways the mamás and Latinx children’s literature might inspire inquiries within your own classroom.

Students explore the idea of “crossing boundaries” in this lesson plan through bilingual, spoken-word poetry, culminating in a poetry slam at school or in the community.

http://bit.ly/1laiBMR

After reading the book ¡Si, Se Puede!/Yes, We Can!: Janitor Strike in L.A., students learn about labor unions, strikes, and organizing for change. Students interview staff members in their school to learn about their daily work life, and write persuasive advocacy letters.


In this bilingual lesson, students complete a family survey and plan a website to share the responses, increasing their understanding and appreciation of their own families and cultures, and their classmates as well.

http://bit.ly/1P8g6AA

All readers want to see themselves reflected in the pages of books. Works of Latino literature for students focus on the experiences of young people from Spanish-speaking countries and cultures.

In honor of El Día de los Niños, tune in to hear about a variety of books that celebrate the Latino cultural experience in literature.


References


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**Children’s Literature Cited**


**2017 NCTE Election Results**

In NCTE’s 2017 elections, College Section member **Leah Zuidema**, Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa, was chosen vice president. Zuidema will take office during the NCTE Annual Convention in November. Elected to a two-year term as Elementary Representative-at-Large was **Jessica Martell**, Central Park East 2, New York, New York.

The Elementary Section also elected new committee members. Elected to the 2017–18 Nominating Committee were **Nancy Valdez-Gainer**, Blazier Elementary School, Austin, Texas, chair; **Chinyere Harris**, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, New York; and **Kindel Nash**, University of Missouri, Kansas City.

For additional 2017 election results and details on submitting nominations for the 2018 elections, go to the NCTE website—http://www.ncte.org/volunteer/elections.

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