The Family Writing Workshop: Latinx Families Cultivando Comunidad through Stories

Weaving together culturally sustaining pedagogy and community cultural wealth, this article describes the family writing workshop created for my third- and fourth-grade students and their families.

Las memorias más lindas de mi corazón son . . . cuando tuve a Yadira y Vicente y mis recuerdos de cuando vivía en Zacatecas con mis hermanos cuando crecí . . . es el recuerdo que esta dentro de mi corazón.

My most beautiful memories of my heart are . . . when I had Yadira and Vicente and my memories of when I lived in Zacatecas with my brothers when I grew up . . . it is the memory that is inside my heart.

—Señora Rivera, la mamá de Yadira/Yadira’s mother

Standing from her chair, Señora Rivera (a pseudonym, like all the names here), reads these words, her sweetest memories, to a group of parents and children in her daughter Yadira’s classroom. After she reads her words, the group, all seated in a circle, clap and ask questions about this memory. She answers their questions while sharing more memories evoked by the conversation. One by one, we continue sharing and discussing our memories through drawing, writing, and oral storytelling.

Señora Rivera was one of the parents participating alongside their children in a family writing workshop that I designed and organized for my third- and fourth-grade students and families. For seven weeks, eight of my students and their parents and siblings gathered after school in our classroom to draw and write stories from their lives. Students and families drew upon lived experiences to share dreams, challenges, childhood memories, and family traditions with one another. These stories illuminated the wealth of cultural, linguistic and familial resources (Yosso, 2005) and funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) present in their lives.

Students and families drew upon lived experiences to share dreams, challenges, childhood memories, and family traditions with one another.

My third- and fourth-grade students and their families live, work, and attend school in Arizona, a state situated in the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999) region of the United States. Arizona has a long history of anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx policies (Abrego & Menjívar, 2011), including an ethnic studies ban (Cammarota & Aguilera, 2012) and mandated English-only policies (García, Lawton, & Diniz de Figueiredo, 2012) that placed fear and uncertainty in their daily lives. Collectively, these policies and mandates worked to control and silence my students and families at the intersections of language, race, and immigration status.

Arizona’s English-only mandates required that my students, none of whom were native English speakers, be placed in an English language development (ELD) classroom and receive four hours of...
discrete skill instruction in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. This demand limited their access to other curricular opportunities, such as science classes, that were open to their English-speaking peers (Lillie, Markos, Arias, & Wiley, 2012). Furthermore, the language and literacy instruction they did receive was often based on an autonomous view of literacy (Street, 1995) in which instruction was decontextualized from their lived experiences and the linguistic practices of their homes and communities. At the core, these mandates positioned my students and families as deficient or in need of (re)mediation (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009).

For a majority of my students, the ELD classroom was the only place they had received instruction since kindergarten.

As a second-generation Chicana born and raised in Arizona, I know firsthand the implications of English-only mandates on generations of children. My mother, Vivian, has shared stories from her childhood of the pain she endured in school from a teacher who punished her for speaking Spanish with her friends on the playground. As a result of this trauma, my mother made the decision not to teach me and my sisters Spanish, thinking she was protecting us from this type of ridicule. Entering my own classroom, I worked to ensure that my students never endured this same pain, either. But I also saw how the mandates led students to police each other’s language by calling attention to one another for speaking Spanish in the classroom. Bearing witness to the my students’ restrictive learning conditions led me to envision the family writing workshop.

Theoretical Framework

As noted above, I used the theories of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2012) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a framework through which to imagine a family writing workshop that could revitalize and sustain family language and literacy practices within a restrictive state and educational context.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) builds upon the groundbreaking work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), who outlined tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Expanding upon those tenets, Paris (2012) developed CSP to highlight the fluidity, hybridity, and dynamic nature of cultures, languages, and identities. This approach “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation” (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). The CSP view rejects the “single story” (Adichie, 2009) that serves to eradicate the pluralism of our people by controlling and silencing our individual and collective stories and histories.

Yosso’s (2005) theory of community cultural wealth (CCW) helped me to further conceptualize my work alongside students and families in the family writing workshop. Like CSP, the CCW view begins from an asset-based perspective of communities of color. Yosso identifies CCW as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (p. 77). Community cultural wealth theory holds that communities of color nurture and sustain both community and wealth through six types of capital:

1. **Aspirational capital**, which relates to the ways communities maintain hope despite challenges and obstacles, both real and imagined;
2. **Linguistic capital**, which refers to languages and communication styles;
3. **Familial capital**, which consists of the cultural knowledges drawn from our families near and far;
4. **Social capital**, which is gained through community, familial, and other networks of people;
5. **Navigational capital**, which speaks to how communities of color draw upon and utilize skills to navigate institutions; and
6. **Resistant capital**, which includes lessons, knowledges, and skills gained through inequitable challenges.

These resources, shared between and within families and communities, serve as tools of resistance for sustaining dignity and creating pathways while working to dismantle structures of oppression.
The Research Base

In designing and implementing the family writing workshop, I drew upon the work of teachers and scholars who have advocated for writing instruction centered on the cultivation of young writers (e.g., Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983/2003). A workshop approach is focused on providing a consistent time and space (Fletcher, 1992) each day for young writers to engage in real writing for real audiences on topics of their choice. Drawing from this approach, families engaged in the routines, rituals, and practices of living a “writerly life” (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001) through intentionally designed writing invitations to explore their personal lives, languages, and experiences.

Many classroom studies illuminate the possibilities of implementing a workshop approach for teaching young writers. For example, Lewison and Heffernan (2008) examine a critical writing pedagogy in which third-grade students write “social narratives” as a means to “analyze and critique their social worlds” (p. 436). Similarly, Ghiso (2011) discusses a writer’s workshop approach in a first grade classroom where the teacher structured writing time to allow young writers to author and share stories that mattered to them. In this class, writing was collaborative and used as a tool to critically inquire into students’ lives and worlds. In their research, Dutro and Haberl (2018) describe the design of writing units that explicitly invited second-grade Latinx students to draw upon their experiences living within, between, and among the borderlands. Students wrote about their deep connections to people and places across borders, time, and space and their desire to maintain them. Dutro and Haberl found that students’ writing “blurred borders,” both speaking back to and challenging the racist and xenophobic discourse present in their lives.

Other studies have considered how a writing workshop approach can include family members writing alongside one another in intentionally designed spaces. For example, Ada (1988) writes about the Pajaro Valley Project, which invited Spanish-speaking parents and children to read and discuss children’s books in addition to writing and sharing their own original poems and stories. In a 2005 study, Perez describes how teacher consultants from the Sabal Palms Writing Project, a site of the National Writing Project, organized family literacy nights that centered the voices, experiences, and resources of the community through carefully designed activities. At workshops, families shared with their children stories about their histories, traditions, and ancestors. Similarly, I invited my second-grade students, majority Latinx and from immigrant homes and communities, to participate in a bilingual after-school writing project focused on writing about change-makers (Flores & Early, 2017).

Collectively, these studies point to the importance of creating spaces with and for students and families where they can write and share as they also critique, challenge, and grow. They point to the importance of entering spaces as listeners and learners alongside students and families in order to cultivate relationships and transform classroom practices (Delgado-Gaitan, 2005; Franquiz & Reyes, 1998; Murillo, 2012). In these spaces, writing was not viewed as a solitary act, but rather as collective and relational. These studies highlight approaches to writing that disrupt the kind of skill-based instruction often dictated by districts and states. In addition, they provide concrete examples of workshops where writing is viewed as a social practice (Street, 1995), where writing is embedded within a larger sociopolitical context, and where students’ and families’ literacies are centered.

The Families

I invited eighteen students and their families from my third- and fourth-grade ELD class to participate in the family writing workshop. To ensure that I connected with all families, I contacted them in a variety of ways, including through bilingual flyers, phone calls, and conversations at dismissal. After connecting with each family, eight students (seven girls and one boy) and their families signed up to attend the workshops.

All eight families identified as Mexican or Mexican American and spoke mostly Spanish at home. Parents read, wrote, and spoke Spanish as their first language and were learning English. Students spoke
Spanish at home and English at school. Students brought siblings, parents, and friends to work with them at workshops. Two sibling pairs consisting of an older and younger sister participated. One student signed up to participate by himself because “he loved writing workshop.”

**The Context**

Desert Vista is a Title I, K–8 school that serves 738 culturally and linguistically diverse students and families. While the school serves students from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, 72 percent of the student population identifies as Latinx, 13 percent as White, 10 percent as Black, 3 percent as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2 percent as American Indian/Alaskan. A total of 94 percent of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch (NCES, 2012).

Prior to this year, Desert Vista served as the middle school (grades 6–8) for students and families throughout the school district. The year I implemented the family writing workshop was the first year Desert Vista operated as a K–8 neighborhood school. Because my students had previously attended K–5 schools scattered around the district, most were meeting and learning from one another for the first time.

**The Family Writing Workshops**

The central goal in organizing the family writing workshop was to co-construct a space with and for my students and their families that could work to help them sustain “the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95) in transformative ways. I designed workshops to center the cultural and linguistic resources (Yosso, 2005) of families by intentionally selecting culturally relevant texts (Freeman & Freeman, 2004), facilitating workshops in English and Spanish, taking an expansive approach to writing and sharing, and modeling how to draw, write, and tell stories orally. I also drew from previous work with my second-grade students and their families in after-school workshops (Flores & Early, 2017) and asset-based approaches to family engagement (Ada, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). The format of the workshops, based on the work of Calkins (1984) and Graves (1983/2003), consisted of mini-lessons and modeling, writing time, and writer’s share time. We discussed and explored topics related to our personal experiences including our dreams, name stories, neighborhood stories, and family memories and traditions.

At the start of each session, families gathered their chairs in a circle and we read and discussed a poem and/or short story. To guide our discussion, I asked families questions like: “What did you notice?” and “What did this remind you of?” in both English and Spanish. The majority of poems and short stories that we read were written in both languages by Latinx authors. These served as mentor texts (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007) and were chosen to inspire the drawing, writing, and sharing of our own experiences.

Following our discussion of the mentor texts, I stood in front of families, marker in hand and paper pad on an easel next to me, sharing my own stories related to our discussion and topic of the mentor text (e.g., dreams). As I orally told my story in both Spanish and English, I illustrated key aspects on the paper pad, labeling and elaborating on them with drawings and words. While I wrote and drew, students and parents would comment, make connections, and ask me clarifying questions.

Next, we moved into individual writing time. During this time, students and their families found a place in the room—on the carpet or at a table—to draw and write their own stories. They had the choice to draw with markers or crayons or to paint using watercolors to craft individual pieces to share with the group and supported one another as they wrote. Finally, we sat in a circle for writer’s share time, during which students and parents shared their work with the entire group.

For our final workshop, we had a celebration of writing for which families invited guests to hear them share their writing. To prepare for the event, everyone selected one story to revise and edit for publication. At the celebration, families prepared a potluck dinner of enchiladas, pizza, salad, and
various desserts. As we enjoyed food and conversation, students and parents took their turns sitting in the author’s chair and read their final piece in front of the group.

Learning Alongside Families

I took a practitioner research stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) working alongside families in the workshops. I facilitated all workshops, intentionally drawing on and sharing my own stories and experiences with families to build relationships rooted in confianza, or mutual trust (Alvarez, 2017; Valdés, 1996).

During all workshops, I kept a journal of ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) around mentor texts, stories, and experiences families shared and the ways families responded to each other’s stories and experiences. I also collected all drawing and writing that students and parents created during workshops, including heart maps, stories, poetry, closing reflections, and final pieces. Following the workshops, I met individually with students and parents for thirty minutes to discuss their participation. We talked about how they felt sharing their stories, what they liked about workshops, and what they would change. These data sources provided me with a rich holistic view of the family writing workshop and each family that participated. In the next section, I share portraits of the ways families used drawing, writing, and oral storytelling to share their stories, practice language, and create a comunidad of writers.

Envisioning the Future

Mariana, a fourth grader in my class, often talked about becoming and being a writer. She wrote stories for me and her friends, spending lunchtime in the shade writing and drawing up new ideas. “I have

<p>| Table 1. Family Writing Workshop Overview |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Workshop Title</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Texts</th>
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| Week 1: Dreams: What is your dream? | Draw your dream. Write about your dream and share it. | The Dream on Blanca’s Wall/El Sueño Pegado en la Pared de Blanca  
By: Jane Medina  
Poems to Dream Together/Poemas Para Soñar Juntos  
By: Francisco X. Alarcón |
| Week 2: Heart Maps: What resides in your heart? | Draw and design a Heart Map filled with the memories, people, and places that are in your heart. Write and share one of these stories. | My Map Book  
By: Sara Fanelli |
| Week 3: Childhood Memories: What are fondest memories from your childhood? | Draw a childhood memory with details. Write about this memory and share it. | Calling the Doves/El Canto de Las Palomas  
By: Juan Felipe Herrera |
| Weeks 4 & 5: Family Stories: What are your memorable family stories and traditions? | Using watercolor, paint your family story, memory, or tradition. Write about your memory and share it. | In My Family/En Mi Familia  
By: Carmen Lomas Garza |
| Week 6: Families as Writers: Preparing for Publication | Each writer picks one piece to revise/edit for the celebration of writing. Each writer is given a blank spiral bound book to write his or her polished piece and include illustrations. | Love Poem for My People/Poema de Amor para Mi Gente  
By: Pedro Pietri |
| Week 7: Celebration of Writing | Each writer sits in the author’s chair and shares his or her writing. |
a dream that I give all my stories to people and ask them if they like my stories,” she told me. “‘YES!’ they say. I would be so proud to hear those words from people.”

At our first workshop, we discussed the dreams that we held close to our hearts. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes, “Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (1999, p. 87). Therefore, opening the family writing workshop with an exploration of our dreams was foundational in co-creating a space where we could dream together and envision our futures as a comunidad.

To begin our conversation, we read two poems, *The Dream on Blanca’s Wall/El Sueño en la Pared de Blanca* (Medina, 2004) and *Dreaming Up the Future/Para Soñar el Futuro* (Alarcón, 2005). Both poems are about dreams and dreaming of the future. We discussed the poems and I shared and modeled my drawing and writing of my own dreams. After, I invited families to draw and write their dreams and share with one another.

Students shared dreams of moving to new places and what they wanted to be when they grow up. Lidia, a third grader, drew and wrote about her dream to be a high school teacher. She drew herself standing in front of a group of “big kids” teaching them math, reading, and writing. She wrote, “First, I grew and grew being [a] high school teacher . . . the big kids sit down at their desks . . . we do math, writing, and reading because they have to learn hard and work hard.” She continued her story, drawing and writing about all the things that she would teach her future students.

Parents shared the dreams they had for their children’s futures. Through drawing and writing, they focused on the ways they envisioned their children being successful and happy. For example, Natalie’s mother, Mariluz, shared her dreams for her two children to “ser alguien en esta vida dura” [to be somebody in this hard life]. She wrote:

> Otro sueño mío es que mis hijos ser alguien en esta vida dura. Que estudien una carrera y que sean independientes y no dependen de nadie. Siempre les digo que luchen por sus sueños, para lo que quieren y en lo que desean y que luchen sin renunciar.

Another dream of mine is that my children become somebody in this hard life. That they study in a career and are independent and don’t depend on anyone. I always tell them to fight for their dreams, for what they want, and what they desire that they fight without giving up.

Mariluz’s writing speaks to the advice and wisdom she instills in her children to “fight without giving up” for what they want in life. Her words reveal her “aspirational capital” or “ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). She shares this hope and these dreams with her children through her words and actions, and now in her writing.

Like Mariluz, Armando’s mother, Carolina, shared her dreams for her children to “have a future.” In her writing, she describes this dream as follows:

> Mi historia, mi sueño es que mis hijos tengan un futuro. Que tengan el título de Doctor, Licenciado, arquitecto lo que ellos decidan. Mi esposo y yo Podemos apoyarlos tanto como podemos.

My story, my dream is that my children have a future. That they have the title of Doctor, a degree, Architect whatever they want. My husband and I can support them as much as possible.
The dreams that Mariluz and Carolina have for their children were echoed by all parents who participated with their children in the workshops and illustrate how communities of color sustain their cultural ways of knowing and being by drawing upon their available resources and networks to support their children in accomplishing their goals.

Through drawing, writing, and sharing, both students and parents “dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). All families envision bright and happy futures. Their collective dreaming and envisioning for the future is a form of resistance and a culturally sustaining practice for surviving and thriving within institutions and a world that works to continuously marginalize and silence their cultural ways of knowing and being.

Honoring Our Familia

Nina, a seventeen-year-old high school student, attended workshops with her younger sister, my fourth-grade student Mariana. She participated with Mariana because their mother worked and was unable to attend workshops. Nina was committed to ensuring that her younger sister was able to participate in this opportunity to write and share her stories. “My little sister, when she was born she was so tiny,” she said. “She was a quiet baby. She is older and now is shy and quiet. But she will not be when she grows up.” This is a rich illustration of the deep familial capital (Yosso, 2005) shared within this family and the family writing workshop.

The oldest sister of four siblings, Nina wrote several stories about her memories watching her siblings grow from babies to young children and into teenagers. Many families wrote and shared stories based upon family memories. Through drawing and writing, families remembered, honored, and celebrated their ancestors, family traditions, and memories—using their words to stay connected to these moments across time and space (Dutro & Haberl, 2018). During the fourth and fifth workshop, we explored illustrations and vignettes from In My Family/En Mi Familia (Lomas Garza, 2000). In this book, Lomas Garza shares detailed illustrations from her childhood growing up in South Texas. Each illustration is accompanied by a short vignette, written in English and Spanish, that describes the tender memories of times spent with her family and community. This book served as inspiration for crafting our own family stories.

I gave each family a copy of the book and invited them to read and discuss the memories shared by Lomas Garza in each illustration and vignette. As a group, we discussed our connections to the vignettes and created a list of our own family memories. Our list included memorable birthdays, trips to different countries, playing sports, and family traditions. We each selected one memory and used watercolors to paint and then write about it.

Osvaldo, a third-grade student, drew upon his familial capital (Yosso, 2005) to paint his family tradition of celebrating El Día de La Virgén de Guadalupe. First, he drew, in pencil, his father and older brother carrying a large picture of La Virgén through his neighborhood to the church. Then, he drew himself carrying a crucifix and his mother, little brother, and grandfather carrying small candles in the procession behind them. After he finished drawing this memory, he painted it. Finally, he wrote about his family tradition:

In December, we celebrate the day of “La Virgén.” This is a special time in my family. We each carry a vela and march behind our neighbors carrying a beautiful painting of La Virgencita. We walk through the streets all the way to the church. At la iglesia there is una misa and a big celebration for La Virgéncita. It is a very special [day] that I love celebrating with my family.

Osvaldo’s drawing and painting of his family tradition provided him the opportunity to use all his “composing resources” (Ranker, 2012), including art, writing, and language, to plan and organize his story into pictures first and then words (see
Figure 2. El Día de La Virgén De Guadalupe

In his writing, Osvaldo uses some Spanish words that highlight the way he draws upon his full linguistic repertoire to not only show this moment, but also help us to feel the love and sacredness of it.

Within the family writing workshop, I worked to engage students and families in culturally sustaining ways by privileging their home and community practices while at the same time centering the evolving repertories (Paris, 2012) of each writer. For example, Señora Rivera, Yadiras’s mom, chose to draw and write about her childhood memories growing up on a rancho with her family in Zacatecas, México, titling her work *Recuerdos de Zacatecas*. On her paper, she drew a detailed picture of the rancho that included the various animals they raised, the school she attended, and fields where they played. She wrote:

*Yo recuerdo cuando mis hermanos y yo íbamos a trabajar, éramos muy felices. Cuando nos regresábamos a casa después de un largo día de trabajo, nuestra madre tendría la cena preparada para nosotros. Después de cenar íbamos afuera para asegurar nuestro animales para que los animales malos no los comieron.*

I remember when my brothers and I would go to work, we were happy. When we would return home after a long day at work, our mother would have dinner ready for us. Afterwards, we would go outside and make sure that our animals were safe so that the bad animals would not eat them.

As Señora Rivera shared her story with the group, her children, Yadira and Vicente, smiled and nodded and occasionally reminded their mother of parts that she had left out, indicating that she had shared these memories with them many times before (see Figure 3). Señora Rivera’s writing and sharing of her childhood memory points to the storytelling tradition, a valuable form of linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005) that she shared with her children as a way to remember and to love.

Many parents shared similar stories of special family memories from their childhood. Mariluz drew a picture of her home in México, where she was born and raised. She used a bright red marker to draw and color her house to illustrate how her family had carefully selected the brightest red. Then, above the door, she drew, with green, brown, and red markers, the “Virgéncita” that blessed them.
siblings the knowledge and strength rooted in their family stories and traditions (Delgado-Gaitan, 2005; Hurtig, 2005). Their stories served as powerful cultural resources (Yosso, 2005) to “share life knowledge” (Riojas-Cortez, Flores, Smith, & Clark, 2003) that honored and celebrated their ancestors and histories.

Analysis

“It was the time when it was my birthday and all of my family was there . . . I was happy because I had a wonderful life.” These are the words my fourth-grade student Alejandra used to describe a special birthday celebration—words that make visible the love, hope, and happiness that was at the center of my students’ and their families’ stories. In the family writing workshop, students and families were encouraged to author the stories that mattered most in their lives (Ghiso, 2011). Through art and writing, families explored their dreams, reflected on their childhoods, and celebrated family traditions. Families crafted their memories into stories by drawing upon their full “repertoires of practices”
through the freedom to use different modes as tools for expression and communication (Zapata, Valdez-Gainer, & Haworth, 2015).

My conceptualization of the family writing workshop extends what we know about a traditional writing workshop approach (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983/2003) to teaching young writers and engaging with families. Foundational to the work of the family writing workshop was the importance of cultivating community and the value of intergenerational voices and knowledges in all aspects of our work (Flores, 2018). Collectively, we worked as writers and storytellers to make sense of our lives and to honor each other’s voices and histories while building confianza or mutual trust (Alvarez, 2017; Valdés, 1996) through the sharing of personal stories.

**Foundational to the work of the family writing workshop was the importance of cultivating community and the value of intergenerational voices and knowledges in all aspects of our work.**

In our family writing workshop, families were provided with different entry points into writing. I understood that many of my students and their families had different relationships with writing based on formal education experiences or expectations surrounding language use within the classroom and school space (Allen, 2010; Edwards, 2016). Throughout each workshop, we intentionally used drawing, painting, writing, and oral storytelling to explore our worlds and craft our stories. This expansive view of what counts as writing and the focus on families’ cultural and linguistic resources (Yosso, 2005) opened space for families to build confidence as writers and storytellers.

Through our collective sharing of stories, we built a comunidad that extended beyond the classroom and manifested in powerful ways. For instance, some parents held conversations questioning curricular differences between the ELD and general education classrooms. I answered their questions and provided them resources to educate them on the different instructional programs offered at the school, including their rights as parents. One mother, Victoria, concerned with what she was learning about the varied curriculum, asked me to support her in a meeting with the assistant principal so that she could advocate for her daughter to be moved out of the ELD classroom. As parents built relationships with me and with one another, they stepped into their full power, advocating for their children in transformative ways. They shared their wealth of experiences and resources (Yosso, 2005) with one another, looking beyond the classroom for the answers they could not find.

Weaving together culturally sustaining pedagogy and community cultural wealth is a way of acknowledging the complex realities of students and families’ lives while illuminating the resistance in these same experiences as tools of strength and hope. We see how their histories cross borders, real and imagined, and exist across time and space as valuable sources of cultural and familial knowledge (Delgado-Gaitan, 2005; Yosso, 2005). Drawing, writing, and sharing their stories worked to support students and families in “sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Now, I return to Señora Rivera’s words that I shared at the beginning of this article. Señora Rivera shared the sweetest memories: the birth of her children and her childhood in Zacatecas. Seated in a circle alongside Señora Rivera and my students and families, I had the privilege of listening to and learning from their stories and histories. Their collective stories disrupted what Eve Tuck (2009) refers to as “stories of damage” to illuminate strength, courage, and love, highlighting the ways that families are thriving and sobreviviendo (surviving).

**Conclusion**

As the classroom teacher in the family writing workshop, and now as a teacher educator, I continue to advocate for culturally sustaining approaches to engaging and building solidarity with families and
communities. The family writing workshop is one approach to working alongside students and families in which they are invited to participate as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 105), thus positioning them as experts of their lived realities. Historically, communities of color have written and performed their stories as a form of resistance and to create pathways of success for future generations. Within the stories shared in the family writing workshop, we bear witness to Latinx families continuing in this lifeway, in this tradition, as a collective comunidad of writers and storytellers.

Under the current presidential administration, anti-Latinx and anti-immigrant policies and mandates are no longer localized, but are part of the larger political landscape affecting communities of color throughout the entire country. These policies and mandates replicate deficit views of children and families by privileging “a single monolingual and monocultural standard” (McCarthy & Lee, 2014, p. 119) and continue to silence and oppress our communities. The conversation on teaching and learning needs to turn toward working with families and communities to create inclusive classroom practices and policies that prepare children to lead their communities through a deep understanding of local knowledge and literacies (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009) and to critically “read the word and world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

References

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**Children’s Literature Cited**


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**INTO THE CLASSROOM**

Lisa Storm Fink

In “Creating Family Timelines: Graphing Family Memories and Significant Events” students interview family members, and then create graphic family timelines based on important and memorable family events.

http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/creating-family-timelines-graphing-870.html

“Involving Students and Families in Ongoing Reflection and Assessment“ describes how students begin by writing a sentence or two each week and progress to daily reflections and records of their school activity. Families respond to these student reflections, which become the basis for discussion among family, teacher, and students.

http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/involving-students-families-ongoing-973.html

In this lesson plan, after analyzing a bilingual book, students create a class book with artwork and information about their ancestry, traditions, and recipes, followed by a potluck lunch.