

Family and Community Engagement

This chapter addresses the roles of families and communities in the education of emergent bilinguals. The chapter focuses on:

- Theoretical constructs and empirical evidence for family and community engagement:
 - » Research on parental and family engagement,
 - » Building equitable collaborations, and
 - » The funds of knowledge construct.
- Inequitable practices:
 - » Stigmatization of language-minoritized families and communities,
 - » Exclusion of home language practices, and
 - » One-size-fits-all parental and family education programs.
- Alternative approaches:
 - » Parent and family engagement as a shared responsibility,
 - » Broadening the view of parental and family engagement, and
 - » Community organizing.

Both popular belief and research over the years have supported the value of parental and family¹ engagement in their children's schooling, maintaining that several caring adults (school personnel and family members), working together, can accelerate students' learning. It is "the mantra of every educational reform program" (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 42), including NCLB (2001) and the ESSA (2015) legislation, which, as we noted in Chapter 3, promotes "language instruction educational programs for the parents, families, and communities of English learners" (Section 3102, 129 STAT. 1954). In this chapter, we examine what the research tells us regarding the benefits of parental and family engagement overall and discuss specific benefits for families with emergent bilingual children. We take a critical look at what actually happens to many of these families and children when they reach the schoolhouse door—the discrimination and marginalization they experience. We argue for the implementation of alternative approaches—more promising ways in which families, schools, and communities can come together on a more equal footing to support an equitable education for emergent bilinguals.

RESEARCH AND THEORIES ON PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Involvement, Engagement, or Equitable Collaboration?

Historically, the role of parents and communities in relationship to schools has been characterized in the research literature as one of "involvement" (Jeynes, 2011). Joyce Epstein, the originator of a widely cited model of parental involvement (e.g., Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Dauber, 1991), later suggested that rather than the term *parental involvement*, the phrase "school, family, and community partnerships" is more appropriate because it describes the shared responsibility that the concerned parties should have for students' education (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Other researchers and educators also have moved away from the concept of involvement, which they say implies a partial, subservient role that parents and families have in their own children's education in general and in the workings of the school in particular.

Thus, in the past two decades, *engagement* is the term being used to conceptualize the relationship among parents, families, communities, and schools. This preference for the term *engagement* was advanced by Shirley (1997) in the context of a community's role in organizing school reform. In introducing the term, Shirley makes a distinction between "*accommodationist* forms of parental *involvement* and *transformational* forms of parental *engagement*" (1997, p. 73; emphasis in original). Goodall and Montgomery (2014), who focus on the family's relationship to the school, outline a continuum between parents' involvement with their children's schools and parents' engagement with their learning. The latter, they say, implies parents' commitment and their exercise of agency in choice and action. In the remainder of this chapter, we use the designation *engagement* except when the studies discussed specifically describe their work in terms of involvement. We show how, when engagement becomes more than a word and translates into action, parents, communities, and schools can work as partners to educate emergent bilinguals.

More recently, based on her study of strategies from three organizational initiatives aiming to enhance family engagement, Ishimaru (2019a, 2019b) has argued that we should move from notions of family engagement, which still prioritize school-centric ideas of individual student achievement, to equitable collaborations that bring together families and communities with schools and other educational agencies to prioritize systemic and institutional educational transformation. Ishimaru (2014) argues that although family engagement "best practices" call for a "shared vision," according to the U.S. Department of Education, family engagement initiatives are required to align with the achievement goals of schools and districts and connect families with the teaching and learning objectives for students. This implies that families need to abide by the goals and vision already established by educators for their children, perpetuating imbalanced power relations. In addition, scholars have long pointed out that this is particularly problematic for the families of racialized and emergent bilingual students, as school goals predominantly reflect white and middle-class values and expectations (Auerbach, 2009; Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Thus, Ishimaru's (2019a) research notes that even

when strategies for family engagement are implemented, such as parent capacity-building, relationship-building, and systemic capacity-building, these still tend to focus on changing parents without influencing teacher learning or instruction, and on relationship-building that reinforces school priorities and power dynamics, and on systemic change initiatives that lack integration for transformative outcomes.

Ishimaru's (2019a, 2019b) notion of *equitable collaboration* implies that federal family engagement frameworks should evolve from solely prioritizing individual student academic achievement to creating a comprehensive plan that places families and communities at the forefront of systemic and institutional educational reform for all students. This revised framework would explicitly tackle issues related to race, class, language, sexual orientation, citizenship status, and other power imbalances that significantly impact the involvement of families and communities as knowledgeable participants and leaders in education. Moreover, standards and evaluations for teacher and leadership preparation would need to adapt to reflect these changes. Similarly, state and local family engagement policies could transition away from implicit assumptions that focus solely on families conforming to school norms and agendas. Instead, these policies could emphasize efforts and measures aimed at fostering collective capacity and relationships among families, educators across various systems, and community partners to drive transformative change in educational systems. Furthermore, policies regarding place-based collaborative initiatives could emulate and deliberately align with equity-focused family engagement policies. This alignment would explicitly recognize the importance of involving nondominant parents and families as influential decision-makers at various levels of these initiatives.

Studies

There is general agreement that parental involvement in their children's education positively impacts children's academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Park & Holloway, 2017).

In particular, studies show that children from minoritized and low-income families gain the most from parent engagement (Epstein, 1990; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hidalgo, Siu, & Epstein, 2004; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001). However, nondominant populations, especially immigrant families, encounter language and cultural barriers, racism, poverty, and other challenges when navigating schools (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

Psychology researchers have also found what they describe as three overarching "determinants" of parental involvement. The first is parents' beliefs regarding the support roles they have in their children's education; the second is the extent to which they believe that they possess the knowledge and tools they need as educators of their children; the third relates to their perceptions regarding the schools' (or their children's) willingness to have them participate (see Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Researchers who focus on social theory examine sociocultural and socioeconomic factors of parent involvement. These scholars point out that parents who possess certain kinds of social and cultural capital—social connections, relationships, and shared understandings that provide support and access to institutional

resources (Bourdieu, 1985; Portes, 1998) are successful in helping their children do well academically.² Becoming involved in their children's schooling requires that parents understand how the school system functions, what curricular choices are available for their children, and whether they are aware of counseling and advice for accelerated learning and other college-preparatory options. Studies show that many language-minoritized parents do not have access to these understandings (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), yet they do have uniformly high aspirations for their children (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990, 1992; Steinberg, 1996). Parents often embrace the "opportunity narrative," a belief that with their sacrifices and hard work, their children can get ahead because school represents an opportunity for success (Bartlett, 2007).

Let us examine one such study on families' educative practices at home. Concha Delgado-Gaitán (1992) showed in an early study still cited today that school *does* matter to Mexican American parents. In her close ethnographic observation and interviews of six families, Delgado-Gaitán examined family social interaction in the home, where parents, within the broader context of their local community institutions, transmit their beliefs, values, and experiences to their children. She describes three categories of parental support for their children's education. The first she calls *the physical environment*, which addresses the economic and social resources in the home and surrounding community, such as arranging study spaces and materials in close-knit quarters at home and consulting people they know in the church and workplace about their children's schooling. The second category includes *emotional and motivational climates within the home*, such as encouraging their children to study so that they improve the weekly evaluations they bring home from school and ultimately grow up to be well educated. The third category includes the *interpersonal interactions among family members around literacy* in the home. Delgado-Gaitán found that these interactions, particularly families' approaches to homework activities, varied across the families and illustrated their incomplete knowledge about school literacy practices and expectations. She summarizes parents' dedication to their children's school success this way:

Parents share a great deal with their children in the areas of aspirations, motivations, physical resources, and face-to-face interactions, which organize the total learning environment. (Delgado-Gaitán, 1992, p. 512)

Mexican American parents' aspirations for their children are a critical factor in their academic achievement. But more is needed on the part of the school. Delgado-Gaitán (1992) concludes that schools need to "open lines of communication with families and whole communities in a systematic way in order to facilitate the families' access to necessary academic and social resources" (p. 513).

It is well documented that, while many parents of emergent bilinguals actively support their children's education at home, schools frequently fail to acknowledge their abilities or contributions (Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). This issue became particularly clear during and in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. As Ishimaru and Bang (2022) note, "discourses about 'learning loss' accompany calls for increased testing driven by deficit assumptions about the familial and communal life of children

of color and the failures to imagine what is being learned" (p. 383). They also contend that these responses of educational systems not only reveal but worsen inequalities, showing the limitations of small-scale efforts for change and individual professional expertise in addressing systemic racism and its related issues, producing significant schooling challenges that create additional concerns for nondominant families compared to white parents. Ishimaru and Bang emphasize that despite obstacles, these families draw on their histories of resilience to promote culturally relevant learning. As a result, the experiences of nondominant youth and families raise broader equity questions about what counts as learning and valuable knowledge, the purpose of education, and family roles in schooling, which schools and scholars have yet to address.

It is important to move away from dominant notions of family engagement by first recognizing and building on the ways in which emergent bilingual families are already generating valuable knowledge and skills that enable their children and future generations to learn, survive, and thrive despite challenging, inequitable, and unjust conditions. Second, it also behooves educators to identify the ways in which schooling systems create burdens, reproduce deficit thinking, and exacerbate inequities through their relationships with families. And third, educators must think creatively and expand our imagination to envision, design, and carry out equitable collaborations with the potential not only to support emergent bilinguals' linguistic and academic needs as defined by conventional notions of valuable knowledge but also to create empowering learning contexts where bilingual students can be knowledge creators and agents of change.

The Funds of Knowledge Construct

Delgado-Gaitán's (1992) research laid the foundation for the concept of *funds of knowledge*. A group of anthropologists from the University of Arizona developed a program of research, spanning nearly three decades, in Mexican American communities in the United States, and observed that households possessed valuable cultural and practical knowledge that was often overlooked by schools (e.g., Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Greenberg, 1989, 1990; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Funds of knowledge are a construct that refers to the rich and diverse knowledge resources that individuals and families possess based on their cultural backgrounds, histories, experiences, and everyday practices, including linguistic practices. The idea was to recognize that students' home lives are sites of valuable knowledge construction and to leverage these funds of knowledge by bringing them into the classroom.

This research has focused on teachers' visits to the homes of families of language minoritized students to learn about a variety of abilities that the families possess, such as carpentry, mechanics, music, knowledge about health and nutrition, household and ranch management, and extensive language and literacy practices. López (2001) describes parents' efforts at teaching their children the value of hard work, a value that is transferable into academic life. Other researchers have documented children's first exposures to print, known as local literacies: Bible reading, reading and writing family letters, record-keeping, and following recipes (Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991; Mercado, 2005b).

Mercado (2005a) describes funds of knowledge in two New York Puerto Rican homes as drawing from three resources: intellectual, social, and emotional. The families draw on both Spanish and English literacy to address their needs in health, nutrition, and legal matters and for spiritual development. As Mercado (2005a) says, the funds of knowledge approach "is an approach that begins with the study of households rather than the study of pedagogy . . . and transforms relationships between and among families, students, and teachers" (p. 251). Browning-Aiken (2005) and Tenery (2005) both describe how social networks are formed with extended family, friends, and the wider community. In short, parents of emergent bilinguals have a great deal to teach educators about knowledge and skills that originate in their households that can, and should, be translated into academic success in schools. By exploring their students' family and community practices, teachers can become learners when they reach out to families and communities to understand students' existing knowledge repertoires (McIntyre et al., 2001).

Research has demonstrated variation in funds of knowledge among families from different backgrounds (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2016; Rodriguez, 2013). To illustrate the significance and trajectory of the application of funds of knowledge in educational research and its potential to inform equitable family/community collaborations, we will discuss some relevant studies.

Whose Funds of Knowledge?

Philips's (1983) early work on the Warm Springs Reservation in Oregon showed that children learn participation structures at home that are different from the participation structures in the school, resulting in white teachers' misinterpreting the children's turn-taking behaviors and other ways of speaking. Heath (1983) demonstrated how practices in the home sometimes clash with school practices, in her research describing the home-school relationship of three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas: Maintown (representative of the middle class) and Trackton and Roadville, representing working-class Black and white mill communities, respectively. Literacy activities in the working-class communities differ from the literacy taught in schools, which represent middle-class "ways with words." Heath argues that literacy is practiced in all three communities in situations with rich mixtures of orality and literacy, but that teachers often fail to recognize and build upon the literacy practices of some communities, particularly those most marginalized in the larger society.

Other studies have shown how teachers can learn about communication patterns in the home, which can be adapted for improved learning opportunities in the classroom. For example, Rosebery, Warren, and Conant (1992) found that speakers of Haitian Creole use certain discursive practices that are culturally congruent with the discourse of argumentation in science, thus demonstrating how the home language can be a resource rather than an impediment for learning, as is often assumed. Case studies of other work on home language and culture in science classrooms have shown similar findings (e.g., Hudicourt-Barnes, 2003; Rosebery & Warren, 2008). In a similar vein, Au (1993) described efforts to meet the needs of native Hawaiian children, with particular attention to children's reading development,

demonstrating that these students' reading improves when the participation structure of reading lessons maintains a close fit with the discourse of talk-story, part of the Hawaiian storytelling practice (see also Au, 2005).

Funds of Knowledge for Teaching and Learning

Marshall and Toohey's (2010) research in Canada on Punjabi Sikh fourth- and fifth-grade children's multimedia project on intergenerational stories shows how funds of knowledge can be leveraged in classrooms. The project empowered the Punjabi students to raise questions regarding the absence of their home languages from the school. Taking the initiative to incorporate their home languages into their illustrated storybooks led them to question why, in their French-English dual-language bilingual school, Punjabi was not also included even though 73% of the children in the school were Punjabi speakers.

The authors point out that the stories the children heard and retold included more "difficult" funds of knowledge such as grandparents' traumatic memories of life in India—encounters with snakes, lightning strikes, beatings, and war. These depictions of struggle became a source of concern; the teacher was ambivalent about what would be appropriate to include in storybooks being created for the school. In the end, stories were published with the *difficult family funds of knowledge* intact. The authors conclude their research by emphasizing the need to recognize and support families' and students' agency in applying their funds of knowledge in the classroom. Marshall and Toohey (2010) state, "We speculate that such knowledge might become the impetus . . . for productive dialogues among community members, children, and teachers about how these matters might become resources for children and teachers and community" (p. 237). Pitt and Britzman (2003) also question how "difficult" knowledge might be used as a resource rather than a prohibition in schools, from a psychoanalytic perspective. They claim that such knowledge can be a source of dialogue and critical examination of what students' life experiences might bring to their learning experience in the classroom.

In a similar vein, Zipin's (2009) research draws attention to difficult knowledge by discussing what he calls the "darker" aspects of students' life worlds—crime, alcohol, drugs, bullying. In a challenge to the earlier scholarly work on funds of knowledge that circumvented difficult topics such as these, he argues that dark funds of knowledge are too often avoided in schools and should be included in the curriculum. He describes the process by which one teacher helped her students address problems of bullying and harassment through clay animation stories. This required a great deal of effort on the part of both teacher and students to take on activities that interrupt "usual institutional denial mechanisms that sustain boundaries between dark knowledge and school curriculum" (Zipin, 2009, p. 321).

Zipin, Sellar, and Hattam (2012) also call attention to the difficulty of defining funds of knowledge in today's world of migration and border crossings. These movements give rise to localities that are culturally and linguistically diverse, fluid, often poor, and without funds of knowledge in common. The researchers argue

that in diverse environments like these, local schools need to rethink their curriculum. The focus should be on working with families and students to reimagine "new possibilities for *becoming community*" (2012, p. 185; emphasis in the original). This new thinking compels schools to recognize the agency of learners, who can imagine recontextualizing work beyond existing funds of knowledge toward a more just future.

Transnational and Politicized Funds of Knowledge

Despite the challenges described by Zipin and colleagues (2012), more recent research has built on the concept of funds of knowledge by relating it to immigrant and racialized emergent bilingual students' lives, particularly by recognizing transnational and languaging experiences as sites of knowledge production (i.e., Alvarez, 2018; Cuero & Valdez, 2012; Dabach & Fones, 2016; Kwon et al., 2019; Lam & Warriner, 2012). Transnational funds of knowledge acknowledge the expertise gained by immigrant students over time and space, often passed down through generations as they navigate international borders as well as the multiple borders that many continue to experience living in between worlds (Esteban-Guitart, 2021; Gallo & Link, 2015; Hedges, 2015; Nuñez, 2023).

Some scholars have also explored youths' *politicized funds of knowledge*, which Gallo and Link (2015) define as "the real-world experiences, knowledges, and skills that young people deploy and develop across contexts of learning that are often positioned as taboo or unsafe to incorporate into classroom" (p. 361). Studies have examined the ways in which immigrant families used politicized funds of knowledge to navigate borders and citizenship status within a multiplicity of dangers (Bellino & Gluckman, 2024; Mangual Figueroa, 2011; Nuñez & Urrieta, 2021), challenge educational injustice (Campano et al., 2013; Rusoja, 2024), elicit the grim realities depicted in narcocorridos regarding drug violence along the border (De la Piedra & Araujo, 2012; de Los Ríos, 2018), or transgress sanctioned language practices through humor, profanity, and play (Martínez & Morales, 2014) and through translanguaging (Nuñez, 2021).

For instance, Gallo and Link's (2015) five-year ethnographic study with Mexican immigrant students in an elementary school investigates the complexities of learning amid heightened deportations in a Pennsylvania town. They focus on the experiences of a student named Ben from kindergarten to fifth grade, delving into the impact of his father's detention and potential deportation on his education across various settings like home, school, and alternative learning environments. Gallo and Link recognize Ben's and his peers' politicized funds of knowledge acquired from their experiences crossing the border, understanding the significance of having legal documentation, or acting as liaisons between law enforcement and their families. Gallo and Link note that while children actively sought opportunities to discuss and write about these significant experiences with supportive adults, teachers were often unaware of deportation-based practices or, even if they intended to help students, felt unsure about discussing topics concerning documentation status. Instead of avoiding discussions on differences such as

immigration, Gallo and Link advocate for educational approaches and policies that equip educators to acknowledge and engage with students' politicized funds of knowledge.

This body of work urges educators to treat racialized transnational and emergent bilingual students as authorities on their experiences, incorporating their knowledge to challenge curricular biases. It also emphasizes these youth's sociopolitical awareness, advocating for the acknowledgment of their critical literacy skills. Nonetheless, these forms of funds of knowledge among immigrant youth tend to be silenced in schools due to restrictive educational policies, top-down curricula, and other teaching practices that overlook their perspectives (Lima Baker & Oliveira, 2023). Recognizing and utilizing the funds of knowledge of transnational/immigrant, racialized, and emergent bilingual students offers pedagogical benefits, such as activating prior knowledge and fostering culturally sustaining learning. Integrating students' politicized funds of knowledge into classrooms could, for example, stimulate insightful discussions on topics like home countries' political systems, perceptions of U.S. affairs, and critical analyses of language and literacy practices that can help counter assimilationist discourses (Dabach & Fones, 2016).

Recent scholarship focusing on students' politicized funds of knowledge emphasizes that an important aspect of funds of knowledge is that they originate not only from immediate members of nuclear families but also from larger intergenerational and nonbiological kinships and community networks across borders, effectively redefining the meaning of family for emergent bilinguals (Rusoja, 2024). Moreover, Dorner and Kim (2024), for example, highlight the politicized funds of knowledge that emergent bilingual youth begin to develop when they serve as language brokers for their families, helping them navigate relationships and unfamiliar institutional systems. These initial experiences can later develop as *critical transliteracy practices* that youth enact to engage their own agency not as translators for their families but as advocates for their communities. Rusoja (2022, 2024) also demonstrates how the politicized funds of knowledge of students and their families are the foundation for community organizing and mobilization for human rights. In this way, politicized funds of knowledge involve not only information but also transformative action.

As will be clear now, the robust literature on the funds of knowledge approach shows its durability and value as a resource for strengthening and transforming school-community relationships by transgressing normative ideas of what families and communities look like; the role that they, including their children, should play; and the purposes of collaborations. Integrating students' politicized funds of knowledge into family/community engagement initiatives has the potential to decenter normative school-centric, deficit-oriented, and paternalistic ideas and expectations to cultivate equitable collaborations in which emergent bilingual students, families, and communities enact their own agency and build on their transgenerational, historicized, contextualized, border-crossing, and communal knowledge.

INEQUITIES IN SCHOOL AND FAMILY/COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Stigmatization of Language-Minoritized Families and Communities

As we have said, despite the promise of family, community, and school collaboration indicated in research findings, the "involvement" view still tends to dominate family-school relations. This view is defined in terms of parental presence at school or parents' assistance with students' academic work, for example. In general, it is the school that decides how parents can become involved with their children's education, which, according to Seeley (1993), is a "delegation" model.

In this approach, the parents of emergent bilinguals, who in many cases have limited formal schooling themselves and may not communicate well in English, continue to be disadvantaged, as they are stigmatized and considered incapable educational partners (Chappell & Faltis, 2013; Ramirez, 2003). In this way, rather than being viewed as meaningful contributors and experts in the lives of their own children, low-income minoritized parents tend to be framed in deficit ways and at fault for their children's poor academic performance because "(a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Parents of emergent bilinguals are thought to have substandard language skills, lack of education, "inferior" family organizational structures and values, and "lack of interest" in their children's education. Families' home language practices are devalued, and family members' "accented" English may become a marker of difference and exclusion (Lippi-Green, 1997), especially if families are newcomers to the United States (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). Thus, not only do parents feel marginalized (Chaparro, 2020; Warriner, 2009), but their children also often experience a sense of failure during school and may feel unwelcome or even excluded from extracurricular activities (Gándara, O'Hara, & Gutiérrez, 2004).

By and large, perceptions of parental involvement and even parental suitability are based on normative Western values that ignore the important knowledge and expertise that families already possess. For example, U.S. educators tend to hold negative views toward transnational Mexican and Central American families, particularly due to children's school absenteeism when families make return trips to their home countries (Urrieta & Martínez, 2011). However, Urrieta's (2016) ethnographic study of U.S.-Mexican Indigenous children's transnational experiences found that these trips were not only an essential way for U.S.-born children to sustain significant cultural, intellectual, and spiritual practices that carry ancestral knowledge in their lives but also that through these trips, the children learned and applied important border-crossing literacies that were essential for their survival and can only be acquired through lived experience. Urrieta also noted that U.S. educators often miss the importance of these trips because they judge their value based solely on what the children "might miss out on" during their absence—formalized Western knowledge—without considering the value that families place on sustaining their cultural heritage and local knowledge (2016, p.1).

Another predominant assumption is that parents should, at the very least, support their children's language, literacy, and academic development by helping them with daily homework and by engaging in bedtime book reading, which are practices typically displayed by dominant white families. Although research on homework help dispels the myth that it is essential for higher achievement and shows that in many cases it actually reproduces inequalities and contributes to high levels of stress and conflict at home, it continues to be ingrained in most American schooling (Calarco, 2020; Kohn, 2006).

Delegating school responsibilities to parents places additional burdens on families who may already be facing significant challenges (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011). Homework demands impose a greater burden on parents and children from lower socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds, as these parents often lack the necessary time, previous school experiences, English language proficiency, resources, and suitable space to complete assignments, unlike their counterparts from higher socioeconomic classes and English-dominant families (Hurtado-Vivas, 2011). The homework and book reading burdens tend to fall disproportionately on mothers, exacerbating gender inequalities and expectations of "intensive mothering" in which mothers not only bear greater responsibilities for their families but also face heightened scrutiny in doing so (Elliott & Bowen, 2018; Goodall, 2021). Because Western patriarchal and colonial ideologies have historically pathologized both mothers and racialized people, homework often becomes a colonizing tool that dehumanizes and deagenticizes immigrant parents, particularly mothers, as schools intrude into the home to tell them how to structure their family time.

Moreover, homework demands also reproduce inequities because, even when they are aware of structural inequalities faced by their students, teachers tend to perceive those who are not able to complete it to their standards as irresponsible and may tend to penalize them more harshly (Calarco, Horn, & Chen, 2022). Overall, these impositions devalue minoritized family practices by, for example, deeming storytelling inferior to bedtime book reading (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018), or prioritizing school work and goals over household chores, religious/spiritual practices, family leisure, community friendships, and other strong cultural practices that have been in fact essential to the survival (Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011) and sustenance of the family's ancestral knowledge (Urrieta, 2016).

Given the linguistic marginalization and the imposition of school-centric ideas of parental involvement at home, not only do parents feel marginalized (Warriner, 2009; Chaparro, 2020), but their children also often experience a sense of failure during school and may feel unwelcome or even excluded from extracurricular activities (Gándara, O'Hara, & Gutiérrez, 2004). Yet the research demonstrates that, in fact, it is the schools that are deficient—schools with the least funding and limited resources as well as teachers who have not been prepared to work with families for whom English is not part of their home language practices (Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2004). As Valenzuela (1999) noted, schooling is too often a subtractive process, which ignores students' ways of knowing and speaking. As family's unique literacies and ancestral knowledge systems are dismissed and pathologized in favor of school-centric practices, opportunities for building on these resources are lost

(Torres & Hurtado-Vivas, 2011; Urrieta, 2016), and schooling eventually becomes complicit in producing failure (see also Varenne & McDermott, 1998).

Exclusion of the Most Significant Resource: Home Language Practices

Many educators still consider family practices to be barriers to student achievement. The practice that most often comes under attack is the use of the home language. There is a kind of "exceptionalist" belief (DeGraff, 2005), a deficit view of home language practices as an inadequate vehicle for education. DeGraff (2009) presents a critical examination of this deficit view of the home language using the example of school and community attitudes toward his own Haitian Creole; he shows the fallacy of this belief and its social cost for Haitian American children's education. In his article, DeGraff shares a comment that readers once sent to *The Miami Herald* about the Haitian Creole language: "Creole is not even a language. It is slave lingo. . . . Why on earth are we spending public funds to teach kids in school the language of peasants?" (cited in DeGraff, 2009, p. 124). Such comments are not only demeaning but also racist and classist. Contrary to these false beliefs, DeGraff demonstrates through detailed comparative analysis of Creole, English, and French language structures that Haitian Creole is a powerful linguistic resource.

A great deal of research shows the value of home language practices as an educative tool. Research also shows that the erosion of the language other than English among the children of immigrants has negative repercussions for family life and for the well-being of children, particularly as they move into adolescence. The absence of a shared language creates communication challenges, resulting in heightened conflict between parents and children, diminished parental effectiveness, exacerbation of preexisting issues in parent-child relationships, and heightened susceptibility of adolescents to negative influences from peers (Cox et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, immigrant parents are often exhorted to "speak English at home" in the mistaken belief that this will improve their children's performance at school (Spolsky, 2012). This advice, though well intentioned, encourages inconsistent and often weak "linguistic input" from parents who themselves may speak little or no English and, above all, devalues home language practices (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). However, even without explicit discouragement from teachers, English-only schooling policies and practices indirectly also dissuade families from sustaining their home language practices (Kaveh & Sandoval, 2020; Kaveh, 2022). As Kaveh's (2022) research revealed, teachers' appreciation and "feel-good" expressions of "bilingualism as a resource" do not translate into actual pedagogical change or the decentering of English in the curriculum, instruction, and classroom management choices. Thus, the lack of access to bilingual education clearly plays a significant role in home language erosion (Cox et al., 2021).

As we have argued in earlier chapters, the erasure of the home language through English-only school practices reinforces the deficit view that families and their children need to be linguistically "fixed" or "repaired" before they can succeed academically in the United States. Nonetheless, bilingual education programs do not always eliminate deficit thinking or result in equitable collaborative relationships

with families from historically marginalized communities. As we have seen, this has been evident in the rise of dual-language bilingual programs' popularity among white, English-speaking middle/upper class families, and the lack of equitable access by minoritized families when these programs are established in affluent or gentrified neighborhoods (Dorner et al., 2021). Also, while these programs may be characterized by higher degrees of parental involvement, including that of racialized low-income families, it is intersectionally privileged families who display normative expectations of parental involvement who tend to dominate PTA participation and whose voices receive most attention (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017, 2021; Freire & Alemán, 2021; Palmer & García-Mateus, 2023).

Given this research, addressing issues of language, race, class, and immigration status in parent involvement is crucial for equity, requiring engagement at both local and broader societal levels.

Teachers themselves admit that their weakest skills are in the area of making effective connections with parents from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll, 2005). Gándara and her colleagues (2005) tell us that teachers they interviewed reported "their district's failure to devote resources to the training of teachers, aides, and other personnel to communicate with parents and/or to provide teachers the time to make useful contact with families" (p. 7). Gándara and Contreras (2009) give reasons why hiring qualified teachers from the students' own communities would be important to bridge the distance from minoritized families and communities:

Such teachers not only better understand the challenges that students face and the resources that exist in those communities; they are also more likely to speak the language of the students and be able to communicate with them and their parents. Moreover, teachers who come from the same community in which they work are more likely to stay in the job over time, developing valuable experience and expertise that has been shown to enhance the achievement of their students. (p. 148)

Work is still needed to encourage teacher positive engagement with parents (Maxwell-Jolly & Gándara, 2012). We argue that the schools have to revise their valuation of these parents' educative role and abundant family literacy practices within minoritized families by fostering an environment of parental involvement that necessitates reshaping the entire system in order to help pave the way for family-school equitable collaborations.

One-Size-Fits-All Parent Education Programs

Historically, U.S. education policies have regulated parent-school relationships based on national interests and in attempts to remedy "problem" minoritized populations. Baquedano-López and colleagues (2013) examine various tropes used in approaches to parental involvement. First, they highlight the portrayal of "Parents as Problems," which stems from government policies aimed at safeguarding students and empowering teachers with greater control over education. Conversely,

the concept of "Parents as First Teachers" acknowledges parental influence but often introduces pedagogical strategies that downplay parental roles. Additionally, the discourse of "Parents as Learners," which is particularly prevalent in discussions involving immigrant parents, undermines parental knowledge.

Under these tropes, one mainstream approach has been to develop "parent education" or "family literacy" programs to show parents how they can become involved in their children's education. The programs offer services such as providing information about the U.S. educational system; demonstrating ways to interact with teachers, school administrators, and other staff; and offering ways to help children at home—for example, by reading to them, talking with them, and encouraging them in their studies (Chrispeels & Gonz, 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

Although parent education programs are valuable, some focus almost exclusively on what parents do not know. Many of these programs have taken the "let us fix them" approach, assuming that parents lack the requisite motivations and skills to support their children's education. We have already shown the fallacies in any deficit model that claims there is one best way for parents to be involved in their children's education, and other scholars have concurred with this criticism (Auerbach, 1995; Taylor, 1997).

Amid educational reforms in the late 1990s, the notion of parents as partners gained traction, bolstered by Title I amendments that mandate schools to inform parents about school programs, academic standards, and assessments to foster knowledgeable partnerships (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). School-family compacts, mandated by Title I, outline shared responsibilities for academic improvement among families, school staff, and students. However, this practice still perceives a lack of parent involvement as a problem that schools must address to align parents with their agenda, especially regarding reform efforts. The partnership concept does not always clearly define meaningful interactions and shared responsibilities with families. Furthermore, a federal report revealed low compliance with school-family compacts and other Title I parent involvement components in most states. The law's language tends to limit parent responsibility to monitoring attendance, homework completion, and TV watching, reducing their role to that of a compliance officer rather than a partner in education. School compacts resemble parent-school contracts in charter schools, which often serve more as compliance mechanisms than tools for genuine inclusion and partnership.

Furthermore, Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernández (2013) highlight the trope of "Parents as Choosers and Consumers," which is linked to efforts promoting school choice. "School choice" encompasses policies allowing parents to select their children's educational institutions from options and to stimulate competition among schools in the hopes of enhancing educational quality. The idea of "parent choice" has become mainstream in educational reforms, including NCLB's "opt out" option, which allows parents to transfer children from low-performing schools.

School choice discourse emphasizes parents' ability to make market-based decisions, such as choosing between public and private schools, school locations, and various public school options. Parents also make choices regarding course placements, special education services, language use, and engagement activities. The parent-as-chooser discourse limits involvement to individual market-based

selections. Parent-choice ideologies can be neoconservative or neoliberal, focusing on parent or market control, respectively. Progressive choice programs aim to reduce school inequality but are often undermined by colorblind discourses, which overlook systemic inequities. Such discourses neglect power dynamics and constrain parent involvement. Despite potential changes in parent involvement policies, schools, teachers, and elite families maintain privileged knowledge.

Despite the implementation of policies aimed at integrating nondominant students and their families into our public school system through diverse mechanisms, significant inequities persist, as evidenced by educational achievement data among nondominant students. Johnson (2009) provides a critique of any unitary “best practices” approach in parent education programs that do not account for diversity in families’ ways of educating their children. In the section that follows, we provide alternative routes to family engagement in children’s education.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Counteracting Stigmatization Through Broader Views of Parent and Community Engagement

Ways of approaching parent and community engagement have evolved in attempts to create a more equal partnership between families/communities and schools. In recommending alternative approaches, we discuss efforts to ameliorate the chasm between parents of emergent bilinguals, their communities, and school personnel. We begin by signaling more culturally sensitive programs to support parents as educators and then discuss how families and communities, often in concert, have asserted more agency in calling for educational policies and practices that take into account their children’s linguistic and cultural resources for learning.

Scholars in the Global Family Research Project (formerly the Harvard Family Research Project from 1983 to 2017) have sponsored a number of initiatives and have provided tips, research reports, and policy briefs on family engagement in children’s education. Their overarching approach is to demonstrate that family engagement is a shared responsibility among parents, the school, and the community.

The Family, School, and Community National Working Group (Weiss & Lopez, 2009) has developed an expanded definition of family engagement that entails three principles, which we cite here:

- First, family engagement is a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development.
- Second, family engagement is continuous across a child’s life and entails enduring commitment but changing parent roles as children mature into young adulthood.

- Third, effective family engagement cuts across and reinforces learning in the multiple settings where children learn—at home, in prekindergarten programs, in school, in after school programs, in faith-based institutions, and in the community. (Weiss & Lopez, 2009, para. 6)

These more sensitive approaches to parent education programs also acknowledge that schools must move beyond a unidirectional undertaking: Schools must learn from families, too, and come to understand how student learning occurs at home and in the community. A more useful way to benefit emergent bilinguals’ success is to develop bidirectional school-community education programs.

As Rosenberg, Lopez, and Westmoreland (2009) argue, family engagement is a responsibility that must be shared by schools, parents, and communities. The first step that educators can take in taking responsibility is to counter pervasive deficit discourses about minoritized parents (Goodall, 2021) and to broaden definitions of what counts as parental involvement. That is why the funds of knowledge program of research we introduced earlier is so important (e.g., Browning-Aiken, 2005; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; López, 2001; Mercado, 2005a, 2005b; Moll et al., 1992; Tenery, 2005).

Broadening the View of Family and Community Engagement

A broader definition of parental engagement, which takes into account family and community practices, is that provided by Pérez Carreón, Drake, and Calabrese Barton (2005), who developed the concept of *ecologies of parental engagement* to refer to the participation of parents in a child’s schooling in a manner that goes beyond the physical space of the school and is rooted in the understanding of a family’s cultural practices. This approach takes into account the different styles of action taken by parents of diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds.

Two seminal studies of families’ styles of action, published in the 1990s and still read today, are good examples of parental actions that dispel deficit-oriented myths about lack of parental involvement among minoritized families. Ana Celia Zentella’s (1997, 2005) research in New York and Guadalupe Valdés’s (1996) research in California provide evidence that parents of various Spanish-speaking backgrounds are involved in their children’s education in a variety of ways, including rich linguistic exposure to storytelling and print in the home language. Zentella (1997) explores the lives and rich language practices of working-class Puerto Rican families with a focus on five girls, whom she follows from childhood until they become young adults. Her observations of family language practices lead her to emphasize the importance of teachers building on students’ home language practices for learning to support students’ self-worth and identity and to help children see connections with the standard Spanish taught in school and the one used at home. For Zentella (2005), becoming bilingual gives students a chance at economic advancement. She states that parental goals for their children also include becoming *bien educado* (well educated), a term that encompasses moral values and respect along with having book knowledge.

Valdés (1996) describes first-generation Mexican parents' beliefs about their role in their children's schooling. For these parents, teachers were to be entrusted with the children's academic skills. Mothers and fathers, who did not feel that they had the academic preparation to help with these skills, focused instead on giving advice, instilling respect, and fostering moral values (see also Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Valdés makes a strong argument in this research that school officials' and teachers' response to these parental beliefs has been that the parents are disinterested in the children's education. As we have seen in the research reported throughout this chapter, this notion is far from the truth; parents want to learn how to help their children at home (Epstein, 1990), yet they have felt disregarded and left powerless in their attempts to be engaged with the school (Pérez Carreón, Drake, & Calabrese Barton, 2005).

Community Organizing

Research shows that rather than being naive and needy clients, parents of emergent bilinguals often question the existing power relations in the home-school relationship and strive to enact more agentic participation in schools guided by their own critical consciousness (Baez & Hurie, 2023; Dyrness, 2011; Sun, 2023). Researchers have documented agentic forms of parental actions on behalf of their children, including those of immigrant parents, such as searching out a dialogic approach with school personnel (Olivos, 2006; Olivos, Jiménez-Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011) or approaching outside groups "such as employers, church authorities, or staff of nonprofit organizations about their rights as parents" (Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014, p. 132).

Some parents form grassroots organizations to address their schools about concerns they have regarding their children's education. According to a survey of 66 community-organizing groups by Mediratta, Fruchter, and Lewis (2002), most of these groups have been in existence since 1994. Though research on these groups' impact has been limited, we know about some of their efforts. Gold, Simon, and Brown (2002) interviewed 19 community-organizing groups and conducted a case study of five of them. The authors learned that members of the community make an impact on the quality of schools by, among other things, insisting on school-community connections and developing parents' leadership skills.

Other examples include Delgado-Gaitán's (2001) study of the Comité de Padres Latinxs/Committee of Latinx Parents (COPLA), where parents learned to make sense of the school system, build leadership, and become their children's advocates. Delgado-Gaitán (2001) explained: "Shaped by the lesson of their own pain, [the] parents placed their children's needs center stage, giving rise to and sustaining their activism in the community" (p. 8). Dyrness's (2011) participatory action research in Oakland, California, also documented the efforts of immigrant mothers, who united to voice their concerns and ideas in efforts to secure equitable education for their children as the district transitioned into a new small-schools model. Yet Dyrness reveals how educators, amid conflict, used their credentials to silence community voices and position themselves as experts in decision-making.

In some cities, bilingual families and communities are spearheading what Jaumont (2017) has called "a bilingual revolution," demanding that bilingual programs be

accessible for their children. These efforts are examples of the type of parental engagement that involves mobilizing to change or create new education structures that truly tap into the linguistic assets of communities. However, it is important to keep in mind that not all bilingual families have been given the same degree of consideration. While this movement has been recently received more favorably, it is often because many of those seeking these programs already possess a degree of intersectional privilege, such as English proficiency, high socioeconomic status, or characteristics of elite cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the current context of school choice has also facilitated more positive responses toward these parents' demands for dual-language bilingual programs because they are used as amenities to attract more "desirable" families (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2021; Chaparro, 2021; Dörnyei et al., 2021).

The reality is that racialized, low-income families' struggle for bilingual education has been historically faced with dismissal, repression, and the imposition of restrictive language policies. For example, Soto's (1996) ethnographic study in "Steel Town," Pennsylvania, documented emergent bilingual families' community organizing and advocacy to reinstate the community's nationally recognized bilingual education program after the local school board and superintendent decided to eliminate it. However, during the ensuing political struggle, decision-makers disregarded the voices of bilingual community leaders, educators, and children, perpetuating asymmetrical power relations.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) with strong connections to marginalized families and communities can add leverage to families' pursuit of more active roles in engaging with schools (Shirley, 1997). For example, a case study approach was used to examine three CBOs in Chicago, Illinois; Los Angeles, California; and Newark, New Jersey, which were working to engage parents more fully in schools (Warren et al., 2009). The three core elements that they found across these diverse urban settings included a focus on building relationships among parents as well as between parents and the school, the development of parent leaders who collaborate with schools in setting agendas, and a mutual exchange of relational power. The authors concluded by stating that not only parents but also schools can benefit from the expertise of CBOs to develop partnerships with parents in the education of children and youth.

An example of a successful partnership with community-based organizations is the Padres Comprometidos program that was developed originally by the National Council of La Raza (UnidosUS since 2017). The program continues to be implemented in many sites and states. The home language and cultural practices of Latine parents are seen as assets in the curriculum designed by Padres Comprometidos. In addition to working with families, the program also works with school personnel so that relationships between families and school personnel are built and strengthened, with all equal partners.

Decolonizing Parental Engagement

Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez (2013) adopt a decolonial stance in the dynamics between school administrators, teachers, and families. A decolonial approach challenges the Eurocentric foundations underpinning notions of progress and development, which often undermine the autonomy and sovereignty of nondominant

communities. It is evident that educational practices remain entrenched in dominant, white, Eurocentric paradigms, rooted in a historical legacy that glorifies colonial practices and perpetuates notions of success based on Western ideals of individual merit and supposed equality of opportunity. Moreover, our educational system reflects neoliberal principles, attributing the “crisis of education” disproportionately to communities of color. This perpetuates a narrative of education serving a “civilizing function,” dictating what is deemed best for nondominant students and their families while marginalizing alternative forms of knowledge and eroding their decision-making autonomy.

Therefore, a decolonial approach seeks to redefine these power dynamics by addressing imbalances and exclusions experienced by students and parents from nondominant backgrounds. It acknowledges the imperative of restructuring economic systems to enable meaningful parental participation and decision-making for their children’s education. Furthermore, decolonization efforts must confront and dismantle all forms of violence, whether epistemic, psychological, or physical, including silencing, linguistic domination, segregation, and tracking, which perpetuate the dehumanization and academic marginalization of racialized emergent bilinguals.

This transformative work requires that educators understand the complex intersections of race, class, language, immigration status, and other social structures that shape the educational experiences of nondominant students. It also necessitates deep-seated social change processes, creativity, and the fostering of families’ agency. Yet education policies aimed at enhancing parent/family–school relationships have proven to be limiting. Thus, rather than relying on school contexts and educational policies to allow communities to advance decolonizing goals, some grassroots efforts have taken place within liminal spaces where families, educators, and other community members can come together to cultivate the critical consciousness, sovereignty, and knowledge systems that are disregarded in schools.

As an example of this approach, Milk-Bonilla and Valenzuela (2023) describe *Academia Cuauhtli*, a community-based extracurricular program offering ethnic studies to economically disadvantaged third, fourth, and fifth graders. It also offers transformative professional development for bilingual teachers, focusing on culturally enriching curriculum development, student-centered teaching methods, and fostering asset-based partnerships between homes and schools. *Academia Cuauhtli*’s approach aims to enhance teacher awareness by challenging deficit orientations toward low-income Latine communities by prioritizing the cultivation of trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, community members, and students and fostering a social framework of genuine care. This approach, known as *relational pedagogies*, integrates various forms of care for students, with a particular focus on their well-being. Milk Bonilla and Valenzuela illustrate this approach through a lesson on *curanderismo*, the traditional holistic healing system in Latin America. They emphasize two relational strategies—*pláticas* and *convivios*, that is, conversations and living together—as examples of how a caring-based social framework harnesses collective knowledge to support a comprehensive approach to student education. These relational approaches, built on critical consciousness and genuine and mutual care, can open new possibilities for family–school relations despite the limits imposed by sanctioned school spaces and policies.

EDUCATING EMERGENT BILINGUALS: RE-CREATING THE SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

We can learn a great deal from research about more empowering school–family–community linkages. In addition, we have to recognize that parents are invested in their emergent bilingual children’s learning and want them to excel. Further, we should recognize that the education of emergent bilingual students is a partnership with parents and the community. By acknowledging and leveraging the knowledge and power that parents possess in their interactions with school staff, teachers can work toward redefining the dynamics between parents and schools and realizing equitable educational opportunities.

Schools can investigate the funds of knowledge that their students’ families and communities hold and then build on them. The most important resource that families possess is their home language and cultural practices, which should be celebrated as a source of knowledge. Teachers also need support: They must be provided with the tools they need to communicate better with these families. Assistance should be given to families to understand the workings of the school system, to build social networks, to seek out school and community services that support their educational efforts, and to proactively initiate alternative agendas for school change. In short, the literature we report here suggests that there needs to be a balance of power with school personnel, parents, and community working to achieve closer mutual engagement for the education of emergent bilinguals. Crucially, decolonization supports a humanizing project, fostering critical reflection on practices that contribute to ongoing stigma, deficit thinking, and colonization, challenging the imposition of dominant knowledge not only in curricula and pedagogical practices but also in relationships with families.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Distinguish between the concepts of family/community involvement, engagement, and equitable collaboration. Why does this matter?
2. Describe what research tells us regarding the benefits of family and community engagement for emergent bilingual children’s success in school.
3. What are funds of knowledge? Give some examples of these from the research; describe how the research has broadened to include difficult or dark funds of knowledge in the curriculum.
4. In what ways are families of emergent bilinguals sometimes stigmatized?
5. What are the problems and promises of parent education programs?
6. In what ways are parents showing leadership on behalf of their children’s education?
7. Describe what would be a promising program to develop partnerships between families of emergent bilinguals and schools.