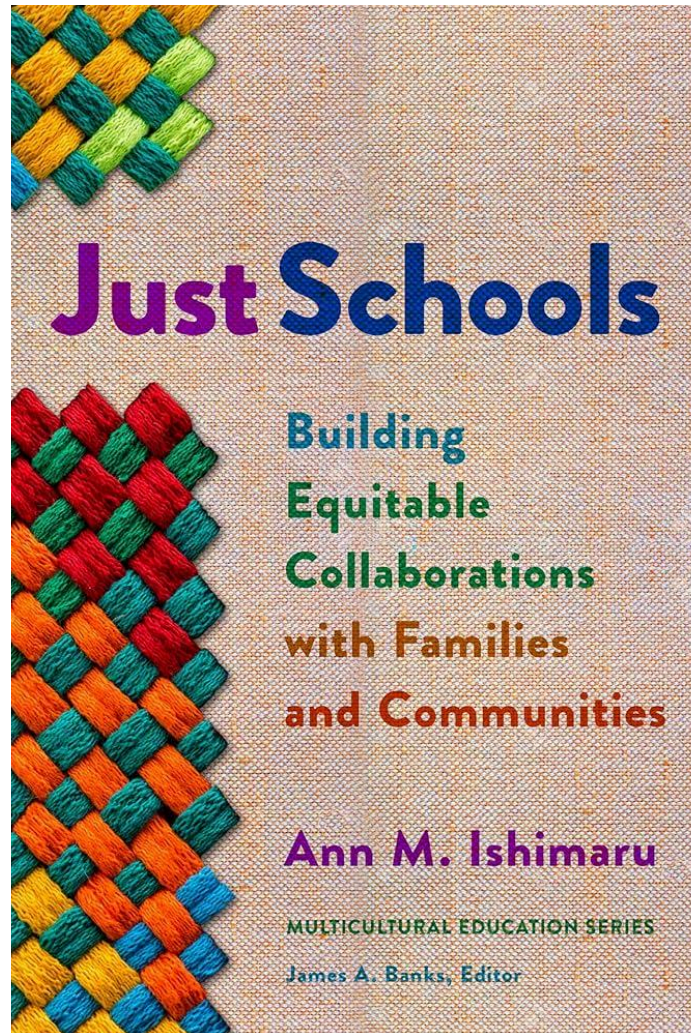




READING GUIDE FOR

Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities

by Ann M. Ishimaru



Reading guide written by Dr. Melia LaCour and John Lenssen

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NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR OF *JUST SCHOOLS*

I would like to express my gratitude to the authors of this guide, Dr. Melia LaCour and John Lenssen, both dear friends and brilliant colleagues in a decades-long journey to realize more just educational experiences for young people, families, and communities. Because they developed this guide by facilitating a professional book study, the product reflects their grounded, loving approach to learning with others on our collective journey toward educational justice. Thank you to Region 16 CC, especially Bernie Sorenson, for the support in producing a guide worthy of the educators, youth, families, and communities for whom I wrote the book.

–Dr. Ann M. Ishimaru

WELCOME

Thank you for beginning or continuing your journey toward building equitable collaborations with families and communities. *Just Schools* is an invitation to transform the racialized and institutionalized scripts and narratives inherent in current parent education and parent engagement practices by moving toward more equitable collaborations. Our hope is that by reading this rich research along with the powerful stories from educators, families, and communities, you will deepen your capacity and the capacity of those within your community to engage in equitable collaborations.

We encourage an approach to reading, inquiry, and reflection that connects Dr. Ishimaru's words and wisdom with your own community context and your practices. With this in mind, we encourage you to read and learn in community.

This guide is intended to support your ways of inquiry and critical reflection as you read each chapter. In this guide, you will find:

- Core themes for each chapter
- Foundational language from each chapter
- Selected quotations with probing questions to guide your reflections

If possible, we hope you will read this book in community. Your reading community may include: (1) others in the book study, (2) your work team, (3) families that you serve and have opportunities to collaborate with, and (4) community-based organizations.

As you design and co-design your learning community, consider:

- Developing community agreements to create conditions for an inclusive community
- Creating equitable opportunities for each person to engage in personal reflection, share their lived experience and context, and make connections to their practice and organizational and community change

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

The process of co-designing community agreements aligns with the focus of the book. When reading this book in community, agreements can facilitate the shift from the dominant discourse and rules of engagement to ways of communicating and engaging that reflect the reciprocal respect required to foster equitable collaborations.

Within dominant hierarchical structures, ground rules are often in place. Co-designing a community agreement allows for nondominant voices to bring new cultural norms into the dialogue and community of learning. These emerging agreements may address power dynamics, responsibility for impact, and the messiness that will emerge. When agreements are collectively developed and adopted, participants can support each other to uphold them in the process of forming the community.

For example, the professional book study that led to the creation of this reading guide included the following agreements:

- **Listen for Understanding:** Listen to each participant to understand their worldview.
- **Expect messy conversations:** Agree to experience messy conversations so that we can deal with issues of race in an honest way.
- **Speak your truth:** Be honest about your thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Say them in a way that is true for you.
- **Expect and Accept Non-closure:** Understanding race and race relations is an ongoing process. There are no such things as “quick fixes,” shortcuts, or simple strategies to eliminate inequity. Inequity is systemic. We accept that inequity is an adaptive challenge and therefore take the time and resources needed to eliminate it
- **Be Mindful of Power Dynamics:** We are never in a room without complex power dynamics. Be aware that they are operating at all times. Whose voice is being heard and whose voice is not? Engage in self-monitoring and collective monitoring to ensure all voices have equal airtime.
- **Own your Impact:** Acknowledge your impact when your words or behaviors convey conscious or unconscious bias

GOALS OF THE BOOK

1. “To problematize well-meaning but deficit-based approaches to marginalized parents and illuminate how even inclusive versions of the conventional model (which predominate in U.S. schools today) can still exacerbate existing education inequities in education;
2. To highlight the expertise, knowledge, cultural practices, and organized power of nondominant families and communities that constitute critical resources in building more equitable educational systems;
3. To provide empirical data from programs, schools, and systemic initiatives that constitute critical resources in building more equitable educational systems;
4. To offer theoretical frameworks and methods that may be useful for researchers engaging in work related to family engagement; and
5. To provide guiding principles and recommendations to educators at multiple levels of educational systems about how to engage families in systemic transformation toward equity” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 9).

The book is guided by a set of principles that help the readers see the bigger picture of the book:



CORE THEMES FOR EACH CHAPTER

The Introduction focuses on the need for equitable collaborations in working toward transformation.

Chapter One is about “taking stock of the constrained, normative structures, routines, and expectations of nondominant parents and families in schools and where they came from historically”(Ishimaru, 2018, p. 15).

Chapter Two draws from multidisciplinary theories and empirical studies that demonstrate that “nondominant families and communities have crucial expertise and potential leadership that formal educators need in order to meaningfully address injustices in schools”(Ishimaru, 2018, p. 35).

Chapter Three highlights the narratives of parents from different racial or ethnic communities and their children’s “experiences of inequity in schooling across intersections of language, race, culture, class, and power” (Ishimaru, 2018, p. 57).

Chapter Four examines efforts to transform complex educational systems and explores how districts, schools, community organizations, funders, and other agencies work together to address racial disparities in education.

Chapter Five brings forward the ways that families and communities are rarely situated to engage in making meaning of data and addresses how we might reconfigure the relationships between families, power, and data to foster more just schools and educational organizations.

Chapter Six “focuses on the granular-level daily practices and strategies that can catalyze or constrain familial agency and collaboration with educators in everyday interactions within schools” (Ishimaru, 2018, p. 120). The chapter also offers theory and practices for change.

Chapter Seven weaves the principles of equitable collaborations together “through an examination of systems-based co-design as a form of justice-focused leadership practice” (Ishimaru, 2018, p. 141).

INTRODUCTION

Core Theme

Equitable Collaborations in Striving For Transformation

Key Language and Concepts¹

- Survivance (Vizenor, 2008)
- Asymmetrical, normative approaches
- Nondominant families
- Good parent/bad parent dichotomies
- Color-evasion
- Community wealth families (Yosso, Bourdieu & Passeron)
- Racial equity

Review these definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “Although a growing body of scholarly work has taken up the term ‘nondominant,’ I often get pushback on this term from community members themselves and would greatly prefer a term that does not lump vastly different groups of people together and define us by what we are not” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 9).²
 - a. Why might it be meaningful to define families by their assets rather than focusing on their deficits?
 - b. In what ways can reframing through language begin a shift towards cultural wealth and away from deficit thinking?

¹ Note: Some of the language and terms are attributed to others by Ishimaru. While this guide refers to these authors by name, please see the Reference section of the book for the full citations.

² Authors referenced: Tara Yosso, 2005, and Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977.

2. “This book proposes building and enacting equitable collaborations as a process that seeks to move beyond the ‘good parent/bad parent’ dichotomy to foster solidarities amid difference toward community-determined educational justice and well-being” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 4).
 - a. How would you describe solidarities amid difference? What experience do you have with these?
 - b. List some examples of community-determined educational justice and well-being.

CHAPTER 1 | FUZZY FAMILIES, PRICKLY RACISM: FRAMING THE PROBLEM SPACE

Core Theme

“Taking stock of the constrained, normative structures, routine, and expectations of nondominant parents and families in schools and where they came from historically” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 15).

Key Language and Concepts

- Normative structures
- Radicalized institutional scripts (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017)
- Deficit-based assumptions
- Opportunity hoarding (Tilly, 1998)
- Blame the victim
- White normativity

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “Current educational policy and practice thus implicitly frame nondominant parents, families, and communities in terms of inherent deficiencies. These deficit-based structures and assumptions about families of color in schools didn’t materialize arbitrarily out of a vacuum. They are embedded in policies and practices that go back as far as the beginnings of formal school in this country” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 21).
 - a. What are examples of deficit-based policies and practices? What is the history behind these policies and practices?
 - b. What was the purpose of schooling established at the beginning of formal school in the United States? In what ways are the current purposes similar?

2. “Thus, a robust body of research suggests that families are critical to educational success both in terms of their role in their own children’s education in and out of schools and in terms of their advocacy and leadership in school change efforts. So, if the research is that compelling, why aren’t we involving parents and realizing education justice and success for all students?” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 16).³
 - a. In your experience, when schools “involve parents,” what is the purpose of this outreach? How does or doesn’t it aspire to educational justice and success for all students?
 - b. When families, especially nondominant families, advocate and lead for school change, in what ways are they perceived by teachers and school leaders?
3. Referencing a study by Stallworth (1984), Ishimaru writes, “Despite the existence of multiple barriers [...] parents in the study overwhelmingly pointed to two things: inauthentic opportunities for participation and a lack of influence over important decisions, including a partnership ‘that [does] not center around fault-finding conversations.’” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 25).⁴
 - a. What kinds of experiences might these parents have endured that led them to make these two points?
 - b. In what ways do the schools in your community prevent families from having authentic opportunities for participation and opportunities to influence important decisions?
4. “If we are merely working to include more families in the conventional paradigm of schooling, we have tinkered around the edges but not reshaped the fundamental assumptions, structures, or powered practices that underlie the existing system” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 31).⁵
 - a. Describe some current efforts to include families within conventional paradigms.

³ Researchers referenced: Bryk, 2010 and Sheldon & Jung, 2015.

⁴ Researcher referenced: Carréon et al., 2005.

⁵ Researcher referenced: Patel, 2016.

- b.** What are some of the fundamental assumptions, structures, or powered practices that underlie the existing system?
- 5.** “What happens if we shift from a dominant-culture, school-centric model of training or ‘fixing’ students and parents to an approach to young people and their families and communities that recognizes their expertise and prioritizes their collective well-being, self-determination, and dignity?” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 33).
 - a.** In what ways can you envision this approach to young people and their families?
 - b.** Do you have any examples or situations where the expertise of families and communities has been recognized?
 - c.** Do you have examples of schools, families, or communities prioritizing the collective well-being, self-determination, and dignity of families and communities?

CHAPTER 2 | NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: FROM CONVENTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO EQUITABLE COLLABORATIONS

Core Theme

This chapter draws from multidisciplinary theories and empirical studies that demonstrate that “nondominant families and communities have crucial expertise and potential leadership that formal educators need in order to meaningfully address injustices in schools” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 35).

Key Language and Concepts

- New rules of engagement
- Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995)
- Sociocultural learning theories
- Counternarratives
- Survivance (Vizenor, 2008)
- Conventional Partnerships
- Equitable Collaborations

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. Ishimaru talks about a “political and relational model of long-term, collective engagement characterized by: Roles, Goals, Strategies, and an Approach to Educational Change” (p. 35–36).
 - a. In what ways is this model radically different from the conventional rules of engagement (i.e., roles, goals, strategies) for families and communities in schools?
 - b. Why does Ishimaru write that these modes of collective engagement are both political and relational?

2. “After participating in the workshops and POP trainings over the course of several years, they [two Indigenous Mexican women] began facilitating workshops for other parents, and several POP parents talked about them as being among the most confident facilitators in the group, particularly skilled at encouraging other parents to find their voices” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 45).
 - a. Where have you seen examples of this kind of parent leadership in your work?
 - b. What conditions are necessary for parents, such as the two mentioned above, to emerge with skills, confidence, and the trust of other families?

CHAPTER 3 | NONDOMINANT FAMILIES ON THEIR OWN TERMS: LIVED THEORIES OF EDUCATIONAL INJUSTICE

Core Theme

This chapter highlights the narratives of parents from different racial and ethnic communities and their children’s “experiences of inequity in schooling across intersections of language, race, culture, class, and power” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 57).

Key Language and Concepts:

- They Just Want to Pass the Kids
- Meritocratic notions of individualistic social mobility
- Social dreaming
- Education
- Beginning from family and community priorities and knowledge
- Contextualizing education beyond the school walls

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions:

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “Lest principals or educational leaders be simplistically cast as ‘villains,’ it is important to note that not only principals but teachers, counselors, parent liaisons, community-based organizational partners, researchers, and even other parents themselves can enact and reinforce traditional scripts with regard to roles and power asymmetries, even as they are seeking to change them” (Ishimaru, 2019, p 66).
 - a. What are some of these traditional scripts concerning roles and power asymmetries? How do they show up in your context?
 - b. Are we all villains? Or can we engage with the complex dynamics of enacting these power dynamics while seeking to change them?

2. “As nondominant parents’ lived theories illuminate, schools are never neutral spaces. Even in processes designed to balance power between families and educators (such as the co-design process in this episode), powered differentials between families and schools often reassert themselves” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 66).
 - a. What are some examples in your school community where powered differentials between families and schools reassert themselves?
3. “The notion of *educación* in many Latinx families denotes a broader aim of cultivating the moral and character development of young people as members of a community” (Ishimaru, 2019, p 68).⁶
 - a. When it comes to Latinx families, what do you know or imagine to be the value of cultivating the moral and character development of young people within their communities?
4. “African American caretaking practices of ‘critical care’ emphasize cultural affirmation, concern, advocacy and activism toward seeking justice and community uplift for those disempowered or marginalized in the context of inequity” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 68).⁷
 - a. Why is activism around justice and community advancement an essential component of African American caretaking practices?
5. “Formal educational leaders must begin to recognize the ways in which their engagement practices can default to ‘symbolic gestures’ that merely reinforce their control and power, such as open-door policies, visibility at drop-off and pick-up, and allowing community access to the school. Starting from families and communities means leading by first learning and participating to support community priorities and contexts” (Ishimaru, p. 71).⁸
 - a. How do we move from “symbolic gestures” to “learning and participating to support community priorities and contexts”?

⁶ Authors referenced: Auerbach, 2007; Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitivanichcha, 2001; and Valdés, 2001 .

⁷ Authors referenced: Cooper, 2009 and Siddle Walker, 1996.

⁸ Authors referenced: Auerbach, 2011; Green, 2017; and Khalifa, 2018.

- b.** What is preventing us and school staff from taking this step to engage, partner, and learn with communities focusing on their priorities and contexts?

CHAPTER 4 | SYSTEMIC COLLABORATIONS: MULTIORGANIZATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EQUITY INITIATIVES

Core Theme

This chapter examines efforts to transform complex educational systems and explores how districts, schools, community organizations, funders, and other agencies work together to address racial disparities in education

Key Language and Concepts

- Collaberation
- Cultural Brokers (Jezewski, 1990)
- Politicized trust (Vakil et al., 2016)
- Culturally specific community-based organizations
- Build reciprocity and agency

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “Consolidating resources, attention, and decision-making in a single ‘hub’ controlled by a small group of policy elites can also consolidate hierarchical power and undercut the agency, funding, and decision-making by smaller CBOs and grassroots organizations and networks, especially those who work closest with families themselves” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 81).⁹
 - a. What is the impact on smaller CBOs and grassroots organizations when their voices are consolidated into a single hub controlled by a small group of policy elites?

⁹ Authors referenced: Oakes & Rogers, 2006 and Warren, 2014.

CHAPTER 5 | COLLABORATING IN ORGANIZATIONAL IMPROVEMENT: DATA INQUIRY WITH FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND EDUCATORS

Core Theme

This chapter brings forward the ways that families and communities are rarely situated to engage in making meaning of data and addresses how we might reconfigure the relationships between families, power, and data to foster more just schools and educational organizations.

Key Language and Concepts

- Participatory Design-Based Research (Bang & Voussoughi, 2016)
- Racialized Institutional Scripts (Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017; Powell & Dimaggio, 1991)
- Making sense of the data
- Ownership over data

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “With so much faith in the power of data to ‘drive’ us to better schools, we might wonder: ‘Where does equity come in?’ Brette Garner, Jennifer Thorne, and Hana Horn (2017) asked precisely that question as they observed teachers interpreting data to inform their instructional practice. Within a high-stake accountability policy context, they found that educators tended to interpret achievement data about students in ways that positioned individuals as deficient” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 97).
 - a. What are some of the ways that data collection positions students, especially students of color and low-income students, as deficient?
 - b. Who decides how to measure achievement? Are there other ways to assess learning and growth?

2. “When families are engaged in a data inquiry process, the focus shifts from individual students and parents to the children for whom they share collective responsibility” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 104).¹¹
 - a. What kinds of questions emerge as a result of the shift Ishimaru describes above?
 - b. How can the concept of “collective responsibility” for children move away from the dominant ways of viewing individual students through a lens of deficiency?
3. Examine Figure 5.1 on page 99.
 - a. How do we move from families as data sources to family agency and family leadership in data inquiry?
 - b. Where have you seen examples of family agency and family leadership in data inquiry?

¹¹ Researchers referenced: Rogers, Freelon & Terriquez, 2012.

CHAPTER 6 | REWRITING MOMENT-TO-MOMENT INTERACTIONS: FAMILIES AS CO-DESIGNERS

Core Theme

This chapter “focuses on the granular-level daily practices and strategies that can catalyze or constrain familial agency and collaboration with educators in everyday interactions within schools” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 120). The chapter also offers theory and practices for change.

Key Language and Concepts

- Families as Co-designers
- Family Agency in Data Inquiry
- Family Leadership in Data-Informed Transformation
- Critical Historicity
- Solidarity-driven Co-design

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “Teachers typically examine statistics and charts only with other teachers, on designated Data Days or during after-school meetings, but this conventional sense-making can often reinforce deficit narratives” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 114).¹²
 - a. What are some of the deficit narratives reinforced in these Data Days for teachers?
 - b. What are some new ways to partner and engage in inquiry with nondominant families? How will these ways encourage and support the agency and assets of these families and their children?

¹² Authors referenced include: Bertrand & Marsh, 2015, and Irby, 2018.

2. “Like schools themselves, these institutional scripts are not neutral and do not come out of a vacuum. Race and culture infuse the institutional scripts enacted by parents and teachers in contexts of systemic inequality. These scripts and identities in schools are fundamentally shaped by broader racial narratives and stereotypes in society” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 122).¹³
- a. What are some of the broader racial narratives and stereotypes in society?
 - b. What are some counter-stories to these racial narratives and stereotypes?

¹³ Researchers referenced: Cooper, 2009; Jepperson, 1991; Powell & Dimaggio, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 2006; and Scott, 2013.

CHAPTER 7 | CO-DESIGNING JUSTICE AND WELL-BEING WITH/IN SYSTEMS AND CONCLUSIONS

Key Theme

This chapter weaves the principles of equitable collaborations together “through an examination of systems-based co-design as a form of justice-focused leadership practice” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 141).

Key Language and Concepts

- Proleptic politic (Cole, 1998; Gutierrez, 2008; Vossoghi, 2018)
- Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engestrom & Sannino, 2010)
- Factory model (Trujillo, 2014)
- Politicized trust and solidarities (Vakil et al., 2016)
- Either/or (binary) vs. both/and
- Living ecosystem

Review the definitions and the ways that these words and concepts are meaningful in the text and in your practice.

Quotations and Probing Questions

Review the following quotations from the book and reflect on the probing questions for each quotation:

1. “Can you teach something like co-design—that’s so inclusive, so equity-focused—in a way that’s very not inclusive, in a non-codesign way? The delivery model is pretty much status quo, and we’re trying to get at something that’s very much not status quo” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 145).
 - a. What might teaching look like from the lens of co-design?
 - b. Whose voices, experience, and wisdom will be centered in this approach to teaching? What are the benefits?
2. “The group discussed how easily the expertise of leaders of color can come into question [and] how a deliberate departure from the

conventional, straight-line ‘input, throughput, output’ approach to leadership can be interpreted by the system and those with power as incompetence. ‘You can be messy and can get away with it,’ said a Latina principal to a white male district administrator in our discussion, ‘and I can get fired’” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 152).

- a.** What are the pressures and burdens that educators of color take on in their efforts to gain credibility and prove that they are, in fact, highly qualified?
 - b.** What is the lived experience of educators of color when they are viewed as incompetent?
 - 3.** “One of the core precepts of solidarity-driven co-design and our collectively designed principles of systems-based co-design relates to the use of tension to disrupt normative hierarchical dynamics or narratives” (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 153).
 - a.** Reflect upon the tensions you have experienced as normative hierarchical dynamics are questioned and disrupted. How did you navigate those tensions?
 - b.** One component of these dynamics is the expectation of “politeness” and the avoidance of conflict and tension. What are ways the disruptions of normative expectations can lead toward educational justice?

MOVING FORWARD

Thank you for engaging in the deep reflection necessary for building equitable collaborations with parents and communities. We hope the set of critical questions within this study guide will help you clarify the next steps in this important work.

As you move forward, please remember you are part of a growing number of educators, parents, and communities who are building equitable collaborations across the nation! This is a necessary movement in the transformational change towards the just schools of our dreams. As author Arundhati Roy (2003)¹⁴ reminds us, “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”



*To continue your learning journey and discover additional ways to engage in this work, check out the resources and sign up for the newsletter for more opportunities from the **Family Leadership Design Collaborative**.*

¹⁴ Roy, A. (2003). *War Talk*. Boston, MA: South End Press.



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