How the Funds of Knowledge Theory Shifted Teachers' Dominant Narratives of Family Involvement

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers reproduce and eventually resist middle-class, White, dominant narratives of family involvement so they can better engage with all students and families. This study occurred in an elementary school setting during a semester-long afterschool professional development course with nine elementary school teachers. The study employed a basic qualitative design with data sources such as field notes, discussion transcriptions, and participant journals. Results showed that teachers initially reinforced and reproduced middle-class, White, normative expectations of family involvement through their means of communication, the values they expressed, and the physical expectations placed on families. Results also showed that explicit work in this area, especially using the theory of funds of knowledge, led to change and opportunities for new, more culturally sustaining practices.

Key Words: family involvement, literacy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, professional development, funds of knowledge, teachers, practices

Introduction

Often, classroom teachers describe "involved" families as those who attend parent–teacher conferences or whose children turn in homework assignments.

However, this manner of parent involvement reflects the norms of the dominant middle-class White culture in North America (Antony-Newman, 2019). In order to make space and find their own purpose for engaging in a more culturally sustaining pedagogical approach to families, classroom teachers must first learn to recognize the ways in which they produce, reproduce, and reinforce dominant middle-class White norms and narratives in order to begin to disrupt them.

One area where teachers can embrace more culturally sustaining practices pertains to family involvement. As reflected by the teachers in this study, family involvement is commonly measured by normalized behaviors such as attendance at parent–teacher conferences, volunteering in the classroom, and helping with homework (Antony-Newman, 2019). Over 30 years ago, Annette Lareau posited that "schools have standardized views of the *proper* role of parents in schooling" (emphasis not in original, Lareau, 1987, p. 73). Although decades of research on how to engage more families and disrupt these dominant narratives exist (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Lareau, 1987; Leo et al., 2019; Powell, 1995; Souto-Manning, 2006; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), these practices and feelings of *proper* roles remain.

The present study seeks to understand how teachers specifically reinforced dominant values and practices and to understand how the teachers eventually pushed back on those values to become more in line with current, culturally sustaining research. To consider this, I asked the question, *"How do teachers conceptualize family involvement in their classrooms?"* and as a result of the findings, I then asked, *"What information, if any, led to changing views?"* for purposes of discussion and learning.

Findings from this research allow the naming of concrete practices that teachers can recognize in their own pedagogy in order to begin to push back. Without change, families from traditionally marginalized populations will continue to be pushed further from the elementary classroom. With change, teachers can move toward more culturally sustaining practices and engagements. Findings show that the theory of the funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) was important in shifting the teachers' concepts of involvement and engaging with new and different classroom practices.

Literature Review

Perceptions of Involvement

Earlier research on families by Shockley et al. (1995) theorized that family partnerships and engagements in schools often followed a "one-way model" in which the school directed the family on the manner of involvement;

these engagements were "limited by their underlying belief that parents should change or should give something to the school" (p. 92). Although many teachers and schools currently refer to families as "partners" (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), many teachers' definitions of family involvement and their expectations for families continue to place the onus on the family to adapt their home life to match school (Christianakis, 2011) thus reinforcing this one-way model. Families are expected to read at home, complete what the teacher assigns, volunteer in the classroom to meet the teachers' needs, and contact the teacher if there are questions; in other words, do as the school and teacher directed (Stitt & Brooks, 2014). As Trumbull et al. (2003) described, the dominant U.S. culture emphasizes individualism over collectivism. From an individualistic perspective, a parent's role is to parent *and* teach, whereas a collectivist perspective sees parents in the role of simply parenting. When teachers come from an individualistic perspective, as those in this study likely did, they often view parents' roles as those who are expected to teach to reinforce school learning at home.

A true family partnership, and one that involves culturally sustaining practices, must provide a space for families to give input, engage in dialogue, and build from family expertise (Souto-Manning, 2010). Trumbull et al. (2003) encouraged schools to negotiate what parent involvement looks like *with* the parents. I aim to show with this study that, in order to shift perceptions toward this type of true partnership, teachers must first recognize their current dominant practices and expectations in order to address and eventually change them.

Past research has shown that what has been deemed "proper levels" of family involvement (Lareau, 1987, p. 73; see also Heath, 1983/1999) in the classroom often mirror middle-class, White, dominant norms and expectations of school (Dudley-Marling, 2009; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Lareau (1987) found that families from lower income homes felt uncomfortable communicating with the teacher, and they felt that education should be left to the school. Heath (1982) reinforced how dominant literacy practices go unquestioned as normal, as opposed to cultural or preferential, such as when "the 'bedtime story' is widely accepted as a given—a natural way for parents to interact with their child at bedtime" (p. 51). Heath (1983/1999) also showed how a White community she studied accumulated reading materials, surrounded themselves with print, and focused attention on the text in stories. These practices mirror school practices today. The families in a Black community that Heath followed showed the ways that children found and used print in the context of their daily lives and how the interpretation of texts was often found within the speaker and listener, such as a preacher and his audience, as opposed to interpreting solely the printed text. These types of literacy practices are not as commonly found in schools today. Muhammed (2020) pushed for

expanded definitions of literacy involvement to include the literate histories of Black Americans. She argued that literacy has not always been used for enjoyment, as classroom teachers often describe, but more so as a means "to further shape, define, and navigate their [Black American's] lives" (p. 22). For teachers to see a strengths-based perspective on all families, these notions of *proper interactions* and *values* must be first recognized, then challenged.

Strengths-Based Involvement

The strengths-based theory of the funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) broadens the notion of parental involvement and what counts in the classroom. When using a funds of knowledge lens on children and families, teachers see them as having a wealth of knowledge to share and build from, especially if family practices are not currently represented by the traditional curriculum. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and González (2005) explained that examples of families' funds of knowledge included construction, plumbing, or gardening. González (2005) explained that when teachers see families through this lens, "student experience is legitimated as valid, and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning in mathematics, social students, language arts, and other content areas" (p. 43). Moll et al. (2005) explained that through this lens, teachers can know the whole child, not just the school-based part of their life.

Language and Power

Examining the ways that teachers use language, not only in the classroom, but also about their students' families outside of the classroom, is an important way to examine existing power structures. Foucault (1975/1995) conceptualized that "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (p. 194). Those in power, such as teachers and the institutions of school, use language to generate ideas and statements that are accepted and taken as normal or fact, which Foucault conceptualized as *truths*. These truths then continue to reinforce and sustain the power structures that created them. As Foucault (1972/1980) explained, "'truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it, a 'regime' of truth" (p. 133).

In schools, teachers' language in the classroom creates these truths through vocabulary choices that index power and assimilation expectations. For example, school systems and teachers perpetuate deficit-based truths about students as "unsatisfactory" based on their state standardized test scores or deficit-based truths around labeling parents who do not show up for events at school as "uncaring." If teachers view students and families as coming from a deficit, they

may also view them as *less than* their middle-class peers. As McCarty (2015) explained, "[the] gap discourse ineluctably reproduces the very social, linguistic, and education disparities it calls into question" (p. 72). This discourse creates a powerful *truth* in the way teachers interact with, perceive, and therefore teach (or do not teach) their students. The same concept applies to families who are labeled as "uninvolved" and "not caring;" they are placed at a disadvantage by the "truth" the labeling itself creates.

How Dominant Norms Continue

From the earliest days, U.S. public schools were designed to be an institution for training the workforce (Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2011) and assimilating immigrants into a fictionalized image of what an American is (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Today, this assimilationist perspective can be seen in the expectations placed on family involvement. Tyack and Cuban (1995) described the underlying organization and structures that exist in today's institutions as the "grammar of schooling" (p. 9). This grammar structure metaphor lays the foundation for school practices. Instead of questioning these structures, teachers "learned these [structures] as students, and as they moved to the other side of the desk, they often took traditional patterns of organization for granted as *just the way things were*" (italics mine, p. 9).

Gee's (2014) concept of capital D "Discourse" provides a lens to examine the way our larger society conceptualizes "just the way schools are," as Tyack and Cuban (1995) described. Gee used a capital D to distinguish a discourse as a well-known, larger, shared, cultural identity and activity. Gee stated, "the key to Discourses is 'recognition'" (p. 52). He explained that Discourses must involve recognized identities, ways of enacting identities, and characteristics of behaving, speaking, and more. In elementary schools, the Discourse, or shared recognition, is encompassed by structures such as age-based grade levels, identities of teachers and principals as ones who instruct and control students, and characteristics of instruction and homework that are understood and shared by the teachers, students, and the public. These practices are seen as just the way schools are (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) and thus go unquestioned by teachers. As Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) stated, lived experiences "generate culturally appropriate behavior and particular identities to meet the requirements of the situation" (p. 34). The teachers' lived experiences in schools have determined what the normative behavior is. When expectations of family involvement are applied to this idea and considered *just the way it is*, teachers may reproduce dominant narratives when expecting families to be involved in particular ways.

Gee's (2014) concept of "figured worlds" (p. 95) helps to understand how teachers recreate dominant narratives. Gee described figured worlds as "ways in

which people picture or construe aspects of the world in their heads" (p. 95). Gee explained that these figured worlds are based in experiences but are edited, more as typical "simulations we run in our minds" (p. 97). According to Gee, we run these simulations to better understand the world and to prepare for the future of a similar situation. When many teachers share these similar figured worlds about family involvement, Gee refers to this as "prototypical simulations" (p. 99). Prototypical simulations exist when many people see this figured world as typical and take it for granted as normal—for example, ways families should be involved in school. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) captured this in a simpler statement, "our own childhood experiences impact the schemes we develop about parent/family involvement" (p. 187).

The danger here lies in what is seen as *different* from the figured world. As Gee (2014) pointed out, "'typical' differs across social and cultural groups of people" (p. 99). He described that it is dangerous when we use these prototypical simulations to interpret when someone or something is different. When a child or family does not involve themselves in school in the ways that teachers expect, they may be seen as "deviant" (p. 100). Gee (2014) pointed out that "we can too often thereby translate 'difference' into 'deviance' by moving from 'typical' (which we too often take to mean 'normal,' 'acceptable,' and 'right') to 'less typical' (which we then take to mean 'non-normal,' 'not acceptable,' and 'not right')" (parentheses and quotations in original, p. 100). If teachers see families as atypical from their figured worlds of what family involvement looks like, they may be treated differently or with a deficit perspective such as being labeled as not involved, not caring, or not valuing school.

In this study, I was interested in examining how teachers conceptualized family involvement and what they did with that information. Using qualitative coding, I examined their language use, as well as the implied perceptions and power within that language. I also noted the shift from a deficit outlook on families to that of a strengths-based one. Rogers (2002) reiterated that from a societal frame, "cultural models…are both constructed and reflected in discourse" (p. 257). Through their discourse, I considered this constructive and reflective frame to examine the implications and how the teachers might have adapted with new information.

Methods

Participants and Setting

This study took place at a public K–6 elementary school in a midwestern town of 20,000 people, adjacent to a larger university town of about 75,000. Mainwood* was one of the smallest schools in the district and proud of its 94% average daily attendance rates. The District Snapshot at the time of the

study showed Mainwood students were almost 50% Black, 25% White, and 25% comprised of other groups such as Hispanic, multiracial, and Asian (the statistics were reported in a pie chart format without specific percentages labeled). Of the 300+ students, over 20% were English Language Learners, and just over 75% were considered to have low socioeconomic status. Mainwood's state assessment scores in reading proficiency were at 46% at the time of the study, well below the state and district averages of 74% and 77%, respectively.

The nine participants were all elementary teachers at Mainwood who chose to enroll in an optional afterschool professional development course on family literacy. I, the researcher, was the instructor of record. We met five times for two hours each time over the course of a semester. In Table 1 below, the teacher–participants are identified by their chosen pseudonym and the optional information they provided upon request. I asked them to write in how they identified racially/ethnically so that I would not place a category on them. The group represented a wide range of teaching levels, years, and education. There were three teachers of color and six White teachers. They are presented below in order of years of teaching at the time of the study. Laelia and Esperanza were first-year teachers. As you can see, the majority of the teachers were veteran teachers, having more than 10 years of teaching each.

Table 1. Teacher Participants

Teacher	Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity	Grade	Years Taught
Laelia	Mexican American	5	0
Esperanza	Hispanic	5	0
Jordan	Caucasian	K	8
Maiah	Black	6	14
Lizzie	White "76% British acc to ancestry"	Library	14
Amira	White	4	21
Pam	Caucasian	2	21
Rachel	White	K	22
Rebecca	Caucasian	2	24

Role of the Researcher

I identify as a middle-class, White, heterosexual, cisgender woman; identities that all provide me various positions of power. As a former elementary teacher, I now recognize that I was one of the "multicultural educators" that Rogers and Mosely (2006) described who never had "to interrogate the ways

that White people are the beneficiaries of inequality in society" (p. 465). When I was an elementary teacher, I reiterated many of the same dominant practices with my classroom's families over many years. However, working with families in a two-year home visit project changed the way I viewed my role as an elementary teacher which prompted my decision to pursue my doctoral studies. I saw the way families were excluded from my classroom. I continually work to deepen my awareness of the power and privilege I carry with me in my daily life and my research. In this study, I considered myself a facilitator of the course although I am aware that my educational status likely carried more weight. I provided the teachers with readings and a few activities but generally tried to allow them space to discuss.

Data Collection

The teachers' stories, reflections, and discussions about how they conceptualized family practices in the classroom comprised the data of this study. I asked the teachers to write and reflect, as well as sometimes answer specific questions in their in-class journals. At the beginning and the end of the course, teachers filled out a written interview questionnaire to see if their thinking had evolved. I asked questions such as "What is literacy to you?" and "Tell me about your experiences with literacy as a child." Regularly throughout each class period, I would ask the teachers to pause to respond or reflect in their in-class journals regarding something we discussed or read during that class. At the end, each teacher wrote up a family-centered lesson plan or unit using new information from the course that they could teach to their students. Whenever I visited the school throughout the course, I took pictures of evidence of new learning in their classrooms such as bulletin boards, anchor charts, and new books on display. After each class, I also took detailed analytic memos and field notes. The analysis of each of these data sources provided a roadmap to understand the power and discourses of school that were within them. I used my detailed field notes, my own observations and reflections, as well as the analytic memos that I took throughout the course to add to the complexity of the participants' stories and perceptions. (See Table 2 for data sources.)

Data Analysis

This qualitative study documented the stories teachers told, the practices they questioned, the perceptions they shared about families, and the literacy practices they implemented within the context of a course about sustaining culture through pedagogy. The methods for this research drew from the qualitative traditions of Glesne (2016) and Miles et al. (2014) and used critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) as a theoretical and analytic tool. A qualitative

study was necessary to examine the way teachers interacted, talked, and practiced literacy in this course and their teaching lives.

Table 2. Data Sources

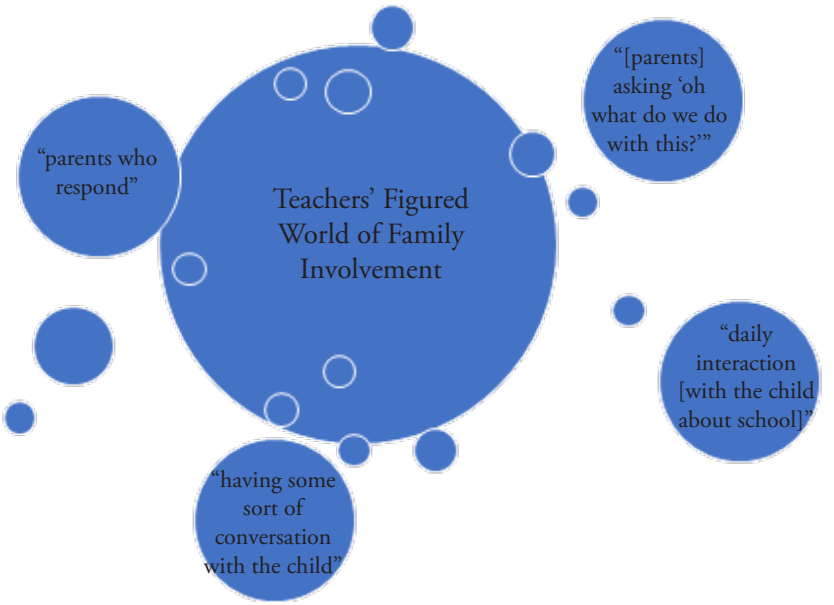
Data	Time Collected
Demographics Survey	Class 1
Written Interview Questionnaire (preliminary)	Class 1
Course Discussion Transcriptions	Class 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Analytic Memos, Field Notes, Observations, Photos	Class 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Written Teacher Reflective In-Class Journals	Class 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Final Family Literacy Project Ideas	Class 5
Written Interview Questionnaire (final)	Class 5

Using Saldaña's (2016) open-coding as a preliminary step, I identified topics, content, and issues that occurred in the discussions of the teachers (from transcriptions) and from their journal writing, such as communication, love/feelings, knowledge, relationships, assumptions, and literacy practices. I used "In-Vivo" coding (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74) for specific quotes that I wanted to keep for the analysis, for example, "instilling that they [books] are expensive," "willing to share and learn with me," and "they just don't respond." This coding occurred in piecemeal after each class period. Next, I performed second round coding to group codes into themes related to my research questions (Saldaña, 2016) such as values, roles, time, diversity/race, experiences, blame/fault, and priorities. To triangulate these data sources, I compared their discussions (via the transcripts) to their in-class journal reflections to see similarities and differences. I also compared these same ideas to their preliminary interview questions. Using all three sources, I was able to determine a broader picture of the themes.

In certain segments of discussion and in the journal entries, critical discourse analysis offered me tools to carefully examine the inequity and power structures within and behind their discourses (Fairclough, 2015; Gee, 2014). I used critical discourse analysis to determine underlying power structures embedded in the teachers' speech, especially during times that they discussed perceptions of families. Rogers (2002) described that, within a critical discourse analysis framework, "language is ideological, both shaped by and shaping social life" (p. 257). This notion guided the circular way in which I coded and recoded the teachers' discussions. Gee's (2014) examination of figured worlds guided my analysis. Using the In-Vivo codes, I began to physically map out this idea of the world that the teachers deemed as "normal." Again, with this analysis, I

used multiple data sources from their journals and their discussions to consider a broader picture of these figured worlds. See Figure 1 below for an example.

Figure 1. In-Vivo Codes of Family Involvement



As a form of member checking, I asked the teachers to write about what they learned in their in-class journals at the end of our time together. I used their descriptions and words to contrast with or confirm what my coding and themes had shown.

Results and Discussion

Results of this study show that these teachers, oftentimes unknowingly, produced, reproduced, and reinforced dominant middle-class norms through their concepts of family involvement, even when the teachers identified themselves as growing up outside of the dominant class. To answer my first research question, "How do teachers conceptualize family involvement in their classrooms?", I categorized their expectations under three groups of findings. First, teachers used and expected dominant, middle-class methods of communication for parents to express their involvement. Second, teachers instilled that a love for reading is the way to be literate and that parents should reinforce this. Third, teachers expected that parents give time and money toward school and education. Each of the nine teachers in the study expressed one or more of these expectations, many in multiple discussions and reflections. To be clear, none of these expectations reinforce negative outcomes for the children on

their own; however, they are showing patterns of one-way models where families are expected to assimilate to the teachers' dominant norms.

To answer my second question for purposes of discussion and learning, "What information, if any, led to changing views?", I analyzed their final lesson plan projects and final questionnaire responses to determine what stuck with them. The theory of the funds of knowledge was a common thread.

In the sections below, I will first outline the discussions with the teachers in a narrative style so the reader can sense the flow of our interaction patterns and read the data that was collected. After providing the data, I will consider their responses using critical discourse analysis to show how their conversations implied shared ideas of what is "common" and "normal" for family involvement. I will also show ways in which they began to push back and change practices.

I do not use critical discourse analysis here to condemn the teachers but instead to explicitly show how many common teacher practices reinforce norms and, as a result, may exclude some families' practices. As DiAngelo (2018) described the problem of being "colorblind" to race, "if we pretend not to notice race, then there can be no racism" (p. 41). She continued to describe that we must identify our racist patterns to interrupt them. I connect this view to pointing out problems with teachers' dominant practices so that we can recognize and change them. Without shining a light on specific dominant practices and labeling them as problematic, it can be hard, if not impossible, to address them.

Narrative Description: Initial Expectations of Family Involvement

Conversation

As I initially posed the question aloud to the group, "What do you think of when you think of family involvement?" there was silence and blank stares in my direction. I knew that many teachers defined family involvement by examples of turning in physical evidence, like a parent signature on a form (Shockley et al., 1995), so I said, "For example, I think of how it is really common to ask parents to read 20 minutes a night at home, then sign the log."

Amira shyly chimed in, as if she was not sure she was answering the right question, and said, "Um, texts [messages]? I rely a lot on texts, texting parents throughout the day. So, I consider that…"

I overlapped her speech with "Ok, so parents who respond to you?"

Amira continued, "I have some parents who are very involved, who are always asking 'oh what do we do with this?' and then, you know, you have the parents who are *not* involved…they just don't respond."

Maiah replied with the expectation that parents need to talk about school each day:

> I think I expect some sort of daily interaction with the kid with their family about school, so not necessarily doing homework together, but checking in or having some sort of conversation about what's going on, like, "are you being bullied?" or whatever it is. I would feel like, "oh, a family is not involved if there's a day that goes by that no one at home talked to you about what happened at school or did something with you school related."

Two other teachers added in comments that texting back and forth with the families would be ideal.

After that I asked, "What do you want it [family involvement] to look like? If it was your dream classroom environment, with your dream families, what would it be?"

Amira responded quickly and dramatically in staccato, "Read. Every. Night. And discuss reading."

Rebecca added, "Bringing in books that they found that they *love*."

Rachel added enthusiastically, "parent volunteers!" as the group laughed in agreement.

Lizzie, the librarian added dramatically, "keeping their library books in their backpack so they don't lose them…instilling that they're expensive."

Lastly, Pam shared a story about a cartoon she saw on social media about parents buying school supplies and how she felt that parents who buy school supplies demonstrate a different value toward school than those who do not. She described the cartoon and its context:

> It wasn't as if [the cartoon was saying] "we want you to go broke buying things" but, the teacher's perspective [in the cartoon] was, "think of what that child is thinking about the importance of school just from those two different viewpoints, you know that [viewpoint of] 'I feel it's important so we're going to go above and beyond and make sure you have all of the things,' versus 'this is just stupid kind of wasted money, we're not going to do this.'"

Pam switched into her own voice (no longer describing the cartoon) and said, "Some families just really save and plan for that, and I know it was really hard for some families, but it's just that attitude towards, 'these are expensive, we're going to take good care of them.'"

Written Responses

I prompted a similar question in their preliminary written interview questionnaire: "Tell me about your expectations for families about literacy at their home." Teachers responded with similar ideas such as parents should "make it an enjoyable habit of reading for fun and learning every night," the desire for

"families to model and talk about reading/writing to show the importance of both," to "see reading in a positive light," and make sure "students are reading every day and are communicating with me what their families are reading every day."

Later, I asked the teachers to write about what they wanted from parent volunteers in the classroom, a different form of family involvement. The teachers wanted volunteers to reinforce school behaviors and practices; for example, Amira stated, "Read to children, discuss books. Write or edit with students." Pam said, "Read with students or listen to students read, revise/edit stories with students, play math games with students." These answers indicated teachers wanted parents to recreate the literacy that is occurring in the classroom, as opposed to bringing in their own practices or strengths. Two teachers indicated they saw the family volunteers as ones who could *add* to the learning environment of the class: Jordan wanted volunteers to speak "about their experiences," and Maiah wanted volunteers to "engage our school curriculum with real life." Overall, however, the majority responded that they wanted families to volunteer by reading with/to the class, listening to students read, and chaperoning field trips. Parents would read, write, and listen along with the children in an effort to help the teachers with what they assigned.

Analysis of Normative Practices

Communication Expectations

During my time in the course, I noticed a poster on the wall behind Amira that said, "SLANT." SLANT is an acronym for "Sit Up, Listen, Ask Questions, Nod your Head, Track the Speaker." Teachers use this common "reminder" to the students as a way of attending to the speaker and being involved in class. When, during our above conversation, Amira defined lack of involvement as the parents who "just don't respond" and Maiah defined it as "no one talked to you about what happened at school," it reminded me of the SLANT classroom expectations. The parents were expected to (L) listen, (A) ask questions, and (N) nod their heads (or in a text message, respond to the teacher). As Gee (2014) stated, "we can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged" (p. 35). SLANT privileges a dominant cultural form of communication channels, as not every culture is expected to "nod your head," nor "ask questions" to show attention (Philips, 1983). In some cultures, it is not a parent's role to be involved in education at all, so as to "not interfere with the teacher's role and responsibilities" (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 189). Other families may avoid asking questions of the teacher so they are not seen as "talking back" (Dudley-Marling, 2009, p. 1742). Although Delpit (2006) would argue it is important to

teach parents and children these codes of power, it is equally important to legitimize and value diverse forms of cultural communication as well. Here, Maiah and Amira's responses about what it means to be involved privileged dominant communication norms.

In order to understand how the teachers conceptualized involvement in the scenarios above, I used Gee's (2014) concept of figured worlds to examine their responses. The teachers construed a world where parents and teachers communicated openly and had a working, positive relationship (such as in Maiah's response of a "daily interaction" and comments about texting with the parents). These teachers pictured a world where parents were comfortable asking questions of the teacher and reaching out to them (Amira's response "[parents] asking 'oh what do we do with this?'"). However, as Dudley-Marling (2009) pointed out, this, too, can be cultural. More than half of the Black and ESL (English as a Second Language) parents he spoke with did not want to ask teachers questions for fear of being perceived as talking back to a person of authority. The teachers also pictured a world where parents implemented the school-like communication expectations when at home, specifically talking to their children about school each day (Maiah's response "having some sort of conversation with the child"). In her written questionnaire response, Pam wrote, "I want families to model and talk about reading/writing to show the importance of both." Although home conversations about school may cross many cultures and teachers may simply not be privy to these conversations, the expectation that these conversations would happen daily and that the teachers expect them to mimic the values of the school reflect dominant patterns.

Based on the teachers' nods of agreement, similar responses, and lack of pushback, the teachers seemed to share these similar figured worlds about family involvement. Gee (2014) refers to this shared world as "prototypical" (p. 99) where many people see this figured world as a prototype and take it for granted as normal. As described in the literature review, the danger is that what is seen as typical here actually implies the dominant cultural ways of being. When a family does not involve themselves in the ways that teachers expect (i.e., not communicating, not asking questions, not providing evidence of school expectations at home), they may be seen as different or even "deviant" (Gee, 2014, p. 100). If teachers see families as abnormal (or deviant), they may be treated differently or with a deficit perspective such as being labeled as "not involved," "not caring" or "not valuing school," as described above.

What is "Normal"? Loving Books and Spending Money

To analyze their responses to the question, "What do you want [family] involvement to look like?" I coded many middle-class normalized expectations of families. When Rebecca stated that she wanted families to bring in books "that

they found and that they *love*" she implied that a *love* of reading is a "normal" path to literacy and involvement. As Muhammed (2020) showed, literacy historically has not always been about enjoyment for Black Americans.

Using Gee's (2014) ideas about the politics communicated in language, I asked myself of their responses, "What is being communicated as to what is taken to be 'normal,' 'right,' 'good,' 'correct?'" (p. 34–35). Findings imply that "normal/right/good/correct" families would meet the school's standards and expectations such as responding promptly to the teachers, talking about school at home, reading every night, and spending money.

In the teachers' ideal worlds, parents would feel the same passion as many teachers do towards literacy ("love," "value," "importance"), although it should be noted that only 19% of literate adults read for leisure (Ingraham, 2018), and socioeconomic status is correlated to leisure reading with higher income adults reading more than lower income earners (Perrin, 2019). These teachers wanted the parents to love literacy and share that love with their children, when the population of adults who might love reading is quite small and likely to be of a higher income bracket. These ideas reinforce what Heath (1982; 1983/1999) showed, that privileging and enjoying reading as its own activity is a cultural practice, not a universal one (1983/1999).

These "goods" (Gee, 2014, p. 34–35) also include monetary value, as shown when Lizzie wanted parents "instilling [the] value" of books and Pam equated saving up and buying school supplies to mean that the parents were "thinking about the importance of school." In Pam's figured world, buying school supplies was communicated to be the right thing to do. Not only should parents make reading fun, but teachers also expected that parents will provide access to books and teach their children to take care of them, indicated by Lizzie's response about books being valued and Pam wanting the parents to "show the importance." These responses directly connect to Heath's findings that the White community she studied valued physically owning books, whereas the Black community valued recreating and performing from written texts but not necessarily collecting them (1983/1999). When a family does not involve themselves in the ways of this figured world regarding valuing books and enjoying reading, once again they may be seen as "deviant" or from a deficit perspective in the teacher's eyes, as Pam showed.

Shifts in Perceptions

Questioning Practices

Throughout the course, we read about and discussed many concepts that specifically labeled and pushed back on these normalized expectations and practices, such as the codes of power, Whiteness, linguistic diversity, and the funds

of knowledge (Allen, 2010; Delpit, 2006; DiAngelo, 2018, Dudley-Marling, 2009; González et al., 2005; Majors, 2014; for a complete reading list or course syllabus, contact the author). As the course continued, the teachers began to recognize, challenge, and change their viewpoints on some of these concepts.

For example, our course homework one night was to read a choice of four different articles. Amira read Dudley-Marling (2009) who questioned how African American and immigrant ESL parents experienced various school-to-home literacy initiatives. In the article, Dudley-Marling found that many parents did not think that reading at night was as important as the worksheets that come home because there was not something to turn in; they thought it was "just reading" (p. 1737).

Amira shared her thoughts on the article, "the idea of 'just reading' really got me thinking…." She continued with exasperation in her voice, pointing around her room, "Look at my bulletin boards, 'read 20 minutes, read 20 minutes!'" She then shared how she interpreted from the article that reading 20 minutes a night "was not part of *their* culture, it was part of *our* culture." It was unclear if by "our" culture she meant middle-class, White, or school culture, but either way, this was an important step towards questioning her own practices. She closed her summary of the article by saying that she thought it was important to remember that Dudley-Marling's research showed how "ALL the parents work with their kids and thought that school was important." She was directly pushing back on previously expressed deficit views that some parents do not work with their kids or value school. Allowing a relatively small time for the teachers to read relevant information, digest, and discuss it—then be provided with alternatives—led to new, inclusive, and more sustaining literacy practices as described below.

New Practices

Using Gee's (2014) same ideas about privileging knowledge as above, I analyzed the participants' responses at the end of the course to my same question of how families could help in their classrooms. As shown below in Table 3, the knowledges of the families, cultures, and stories were beginning to be privileged over reinforcing existing classroom knowledge (as was evident in the initial response to the same question). Some teachers stated that they would like families to come in and share about themselves, not necessarily to come in to help the teacher as shown in their initial responses. Note: three teachers were absent and did not respond later.

Table 3. Ways Families Can Help, Final Response

Participant	What Are Some Ways That Families Can Help in the Classroom?
Jordan	Come read with the class. **Share stories about their family.**
Rachel	Send in favorite books, **come in and share activities, books, etc. about their culture,** prepare materials for us, read with kids, attend field trips
Esperanza	Families can come and see what we are doing in the classroom or make some time to meet with me so that I can show them. Families can also **let teachers know if they have any other ideas or ways that they get their children involved in reading and writing at home.** That way teachers can **incorporate what they do at home into the classroom**. Families can also continue to help at home by reading and writing with their children.
Amira	I want them to feel welcome and **come in to share about themselves.**
Lizzie	Help students learn to be responsible for books. Have routine.
Pam	Because our students do not have independent rotations during literacy, it is harder for families to volunteer.

Using Gee's (2014) ideas about how language can privilege knowledge or beliefs, I asked of their responses, *"How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems or languages or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?"* (italics in original, p. 35). Findings imply Gee's concept of "claims to knowledge and belief" were expanded here. For example, some of the teachers' responses included new input on what counts as knowledge and beliefs to include the families' stories, practices, and cultures. When the teachers valued that families would help in the classroom to share stories "about their family" and "about themselves," share activities "about their culture," and that the teacher would "incorporate what they do at home into the classroom," these teachers expressed that they wanted to invite more ways of knowing and different beliefs into their classrooms.

The Impact of the Funds of Knowledge

In response to these changes, I asked my second research question, "What information, if any, led to changing views?" I coded and analyzed their final lesson plan projects and final questionnaire responses to determine what stuck with them—things like experiences, stories, traditions, and picture books came up repeatedly. Many of the themes from coding this question pertained to families being more present in the classroom, the idea of teachers changing (instead of families), values shifting, and teachers thinking deeper. Most responses fell under the broader theory of the funds of knowledge. Although some of the

codes still implied that teachers viewed culture as concrete or visible (such as the common code "traditions"), the underlying shift in valuing the "lived experiences" of the families was present (Moll, 2010).

As a final project, the teachers were asked to design a new lesson or unit that involved something they had learned or thought about over the course. The teachers seemed to grasp the idea of incorporating family funds of knowledge, even though no one used the term. The teachers described lessons for which the students are bringing traditions, stories, food, toys, dreams, and physical representations of family diversity into the classroom. Pam wanted her students to interview parents about their favorite toys as children and write about it. Esperanza wanted families to document favorite foods and possibly bring them in to share with the class. Amira wanted students to write about their dreams and inspirations and share them with their families. Jordan and Rachel wanted to create their own family books of the class to represent the diversity that existed in the family structures. None of these examples of knowledge were previously prominent in their classrooms.

When I asked the teachers to write in their journals about what they learned, many directly mentioned the funds of knowledge. Rachel wrote, "Stopping to learn about families' funds of knowledge was a big eye opener for me. I think a lot of our families don't necessarily feel they have anything to offer to their kid's education and to our classroom. They are more likely to be involved when they see that they do have something to offer and that their participation in their child's education is important." Here, Rachel is privileging what the families know and value.

Esperanza wrote about how curriculum should build upon what *students bring* to the classroom:

> I have learned that it is even more critical to involve families within reading and writing so that students not only get more exposure to it at home, but so that teachers can learn the literacy practices that go on within students' families. This way, teachers can build upon what students already know and use it to build upon in the classroom. Teachers need to value the types of reading and writing that may not be usually seen within current curriculum.

Esperanza made the connection that students have multiple funds of knowledge and her job is to build upon them in the classroom.

Lastly, Jordan reflected about her own knowledge and how this applied to school:

> This class has really made me think about my funds of knowledge and to really get to know what my students are bringing with them to school.

> Literacy comes in so many more forms than I think about regularly with curriculum.

Here, Jordan has expanded her concept of what literacy is to include what students bring to the classroom.

Each of these written responses show the impact this theory had on their ideas about families and what counts in the classroom. Their new ideas range from feeling that families have something to offer to understanding that home literacy practices are a strength and that each teacher and family has funds of knowledge that can add to the curriculum.

As shown by these wrap-up activities, changes stemmed from reading, discussing, and applying research. Although we discussed many theories over the length of the course, it appears that the funds of knowledge theory shifted their thinking about parental involvement from a one-way model toward more of a partnership. This theory stuck with the teachers and allowed them to see how involving the families differently might value their students' home practices and cultures more than they had previously.

Conclusion

When middle-class teachers expect families to involve themselves in school in the ways that they did as parents or their own parents did, they may be reproducing dominant, White, middle-class behaviors. As shown here, even teachers who do not identify as White, nor grew up in the middle-class, may be reproducing and reinforcing these norms. The institution of school (and likely teacher preparation programs) creates these beliefs around what counts as involvement, and teachers follow suit.

Before assuming that a family is uninvolved, teachers could benefit from stopping to question what expectations they are communicating and asking families what their needs or values are. Teachers might also benefit from an awareness of how viewing and discussing ideas as *normal* or *typical* might blur their understandings of cultural practices. Schools might offer more professional development to understand how language and practices carry and reinforce power and privilege.

Expectations around family involvement that come from a dominant middle-class perspective may disengage many diverse cultural practices with which families and children come to school. By labeling those families who engage differently as "uninvolved," teachers may perceive or treat them differently. Although clearly most teachers wish to engage families in the best ways possible, an awareness of their own cultural expectations may be necessary before they can expand toward new ideas. The results of this research show that many

teachers do unknowingly reinforce normative practices and that with space for new learning, especially through the theory of the funds of knowledge, they are able to shift their expectations toward new, culturally sustaining practices.

Moll (2010) called for schools to commit to "accommodate to the children's realities as much as the children are asked to accommodate to the realities of their schooling" (p. 457). Results of this study imply that teachers could benefit from explicitly understanding and questioning the realities they are expecting of families in terms of involvement. When teachers expect families to communicate with them on the teachers' terms, when they expect families to instill values of reading in their children, and when they expect families to spend their time and money on school, teachers reinforce dominant, White, middle-class ways of involvement. Teachers first need to become aware of this before they can change to better accommodate to the children's realities (Moll, 2010).

By acting to disrupt these normative practices through strengths-based theories such as the funds of knowledge, teachers can begin to change toward a more inclusive environment, one that involves more families, more cultures, and more diverse practices. Recommendations include providing reflective, discussion-based, professional development on critical topics such as codes of power (Delpit, 2006), multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), culturally sustaining literacy practices (Paris, 2012), and the funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). Teacher time and reflection can lead to better family connections when built into a teacher's schedule and not seen as an add-on (Kyle et al., 2005). This space and time for reflection and learning can give a new purpose for culturally sustaining practices.

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